

Desire Gifts but Pursue Love

by Anton Bosch

This sermon delves into 1 Corinthians 12, emphasizing the unity and diversity within the body of Christ. It highlights the importance of each member playing their unique role, the significance of love as the most excellent gift, and the dangers of selfish ambition within the church. The speaker urges the congregation to actively pursue spiritual gifts while prioritizing love above all else, as it is what builds and strengthens the church.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:18, 1 Corinthians 12:27, 1 Corinthians 12:31, 1 Corinthians 14:1

Topics: "Unity in Diversity", "The Primacy of Love"

Description

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Transcript

1 Corinthians Chapter 12 as we continue our comments on 1 Corinthians 12, this will be hopefully the last session in this chapter. 1 Corinthians 12 and let's read from verse 18. 1 Corinthians 12 reading from verse 18.

But now God has set the members, each one of them in the body, just as he pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you, nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

No much rather those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary, and those members of the body which we think to be less honourable, on these we bestow greater honour. And our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having even greater honour to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.

And if one member suffers, all of the members suffer with it. Or if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ and members individually.

And God has appointed these in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers. After that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts, and yet I show you a more excellent way.

I want to just go back to verse 12, because I neglected to make a comment on verse 12, which I think is important. And that is, he says, for as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. I want you to notice that he is not saying, so is the church, but he is saying, so is Christ.

In other words, he is saying the church is Christ. Can you see that? So as the body is one and has many members, all the members of that one being many are one body, so also is Christ. In other words, the point that he is making is that the church is what we normally say the body of Christ.

We say, well, it's the body of Christ, it's not him. But in fact, we are so much part of him, we ought to be so much part of him, that this is him. He used to be, for the time of his incarnation, in the flesh on the earth.

So if you wanted to hear, Jesus said, if you want to hear what God has to say, listen to me. If you want to see the Father, look at me. But he has gone away, and he has now left us as his body on earth, as the representative of himself and of the Father.

And so he is no longer here physically, but we're here. And so the same way as you could look at Jesus and see the Father, you should, unfortunately you can't, but you should be looking at the church and see God. You should be listening to the church and be hearing God.

That's who we are. You see, he speaks about the fact that he is the head, we are the body. There is no separation between the head and the body.

I mean, we know exactly what happens if you lived in France a long time ago, and maybe some country still, and they have that guillotine. And when the head and the body are separated, it's dead. I mean, I think it's probably the surest form of—I'm not speaking about what is humane or not, that's not—but that's probably the surest form of death.

You know, you can shoot someone with a bullet and he can still survive. We know many stories of people who've been hung on the gallows and somehow still survive. But once the head is cut off, that's it, there is no life whatsoever.

If we are separated from him, we have no life. We have no life individually, we have no life corporately. And unfortunately, the reality is that many times the church is separated from the head.

The church does its own thing, has its own structure, has its own doctrines, its own ideas, and while almost every church confirms in their statement of faith that Christ is the head of the church, the reality is he is not. The reality is that some man, somewhere, is the head of that church. And if it's a congregational type of church, then the congregation is its own head.

No, he is the head, but we are the body. And as we're going to see, as we saw in reading the passage, we have different functions. The hand and the head have two totally different jobs, and yet both are necessary.

The head cannot survive unless the hand puts the food in the mouth, and the mouth chews the food, and the digestive system digests the food, and the blood. All of these are necessary, and they support the head. Now, we don't support Christ.

He is self-sufficient, he doesn't need us, but we need him. And without him, we have nothing. We cannot exist.

And so, but at the same time, if my body begins to operate independently of my head, I need to be politically correct here, so I'm not going to get into, but we know what happens when the body doesn't do what the head wants it to do. We have major dysfunction. It's not healthy.

And so, I think sometimes we have that problem, that the head wants the body, that Christ wants the church to do certain things, but the church is disconnected. And somehow, either it's disconnected or the signal gets scrambled between the head and the body, and the body ends up doing exactly what it wants. And that's what we're seeing in many, many churches today, as churches just do their own thing.

And you say, well, where do you see this in the Bible? Where do you see this in the plan of God? Oh, no, no, but we think this is a good idea. No, the body cannot operate independently of the church, but the church is Christ, Christ here on earth. And, folk, if we are not showing Jesus to the world, we have no right to exist, individually and corporately.

All right, now let's move on to verse 18, and I'm just recapping on this verse, but now God has set the members, each one of them in the body just as he pleased. I wanted to just emphasize that. We spoke about that last week.

We don't get to choose what we want to do. We don't get to choose what ministry we fulfill. I can't say, well, you know, I want to be something.

I want to be that. I want to be an apostle. I want to be a prophet.

I want to be an elder. No, God sets the members in the church. He gives the gifts.

All we can do is figure out what it is that God wants me to do. All right, verse 20, but now, indeed, there are many members, yet one body. So we emphasized this last week.

So while we are diverse, we are different, each one has a different gift, each one has a different education, has a different ethnic background, has a different cultural background. We've spoken about some of these things in the preliminaries. We are different, but we are one.

We cannot all be the same, and that's the whole point of the passage. If the whole body was the ear, then where would be the seeing? How can you see if everything is just the ear? We need these differences, but we are one, even though we are different. Even though we have different emphases, different gifts, different ministries, we are one, and we need to be one in the same way as Christ and the Father are one.

Jesus prayed that in John chapter 17. Father, I pray that they may be one, even as we are one. All right, now let's move on to new territory.

The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you, nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. We've touched on some of these, so I'm not going to get into, to emphasize that more. No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.

The members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. Verse 23, and those members of the body which we think to be less honorable are those we bestow greater honor, and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty. In other words, there are parts of my body which are hidden, and not only are they hidden, but they're covered.

And we say, well, they're not important. But in fact they are important, because we refer to them as the vital organs. The vital organs.

Why are they vital organs? Well, because you can't do without them. You can't do without a heart. You can't do without a liver.

You can't do without a kidney. I suppose you get dialysis or whatever stuff they have these days, but you can't really live a healthy life without those things. We don't see them.

They're hidden. They're covered under skin, and in my case, fat. But they're there, and so we close them.

We put a suit on, and we're honoring them in the sense of covering them up. And yet we say, well, you know, no, they're not important. No, they are absolutely essential.

They may be more important in some ways than some parts of my face. And while it's grotesque, we can live. We don't look very good, but we can live without a nose.

We know those veterans who've been burnt or been in bombs and who've lost their faces. They don't look very good, but they can live. But I can't live without a heart or without the vital organs.

And so God puts some things out in front. The preacher is out in front. Everybody can see him.

He's like the face. Everybody can hear him. And we say, okay, you know, that's the most important part.

No, he's not the most important part. Every—and that's the point he's making—every member is necessary. Every member is important.

And it's not—and we need to be—while we spoke earlier about the fact about not dishonoring those who are in leadership, at the same time, we don't want to get into a situation where we worship the leadership and where the leaders become everything. No, we are all part of the body of Christ, and we need to give honor to every member of the body of Christ. But our presentable parts have no need.

But God composed the body, having given great honor to that part which lacks it. And I'm really just going through this very, very quickly. But there should be—that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.

Now, just talking—going back to the fact that there are lesser parts, there are parts that we say, well, are not that important. Folks, there is—as we said last week, there is no—there are no spare parts. Every part is important.

And it's important for me to fulfill my function in order—and I'm not saying me as a preacher, but each one of us to fulfill our function so that everybody is blessed by that, and that I, in return, am blessed. Just think about the human body. The hand shovels the food down the hatch.

And we say, no, the hand is important. But no, what keeps the hand going? Well, that food which he put down there gets, you know, converted, and the blood comes and feeds the hand. And so the hand is part of a cycle.

Every part of my body is part of a cycle. When you interrupt that and you take one part out, the circle doesn't work. The machine breaks down.

And the same with the two of the body. We can say, well, you know, here's just a small little part. It's not that important.

No, it's important because that little cog, that little part, is necessary to make the whole thing work. Never look at your gifts or your abilities and say, well, it's just something small. Somebody else can do it.

Yes, maybe somebody else can do it. But in the process, you're robbing yourself of a blessing, and you're putting a greater burden on somebody else who has a different gift, and so they have to shortchange their true gift in order to pick up your slack. It's not about what I want.

When we first came to this church, 14, to this building 14 years ago, there was a lady who used to come. She came from the area. She lived down the street.

And she sat in the back there somewhere, and Ian and I used to sit here in the front. That time, we sang a cappella. We didn't have the recorded music, so we sang a cappella.

As you know well, I have a loud voice, but I don't sing too well. But this lady had a beautiful voice, and I could hear her from here. And it helped me tremendously.

And so, I was the amplifier, but she was at the music. And it worked. And then one day, she just disappeared.

And then it bumped into her at Ralph's, when Ralph's was still here, the grocery store. Oh, what's happened? Oh, no. I'm going to a church down in Burbank, two buses, to a church in Burbank, because they have a choir, and I enjoy listening to the choir.

Now, I'm not telling you this to shame her, but I trust you get the message. She may have said to herself, well, you know, it's all about me. I just want to hear... No, she had a vital role to play, absolutely helpful in our worship.

And yet, she's about, you know, what I want to do. And so, each member needs to find that part and play that role, doesn't matter how small it is, even if it is just singing. We had an example this morning of singing a hymn that we're not familiar with, and we all know the chorus, but we don't know the rest of the hymn.

And I don't know it, and so we struggle. But when everybody is able to sing, then it's great. But we need everybody.

All right. Now, he says then, the purpose is that there should be no schism or division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. A house divided against itself cannot stand.

We need each member to play its role so that there is no division. It's not... And remember, Paul is writing to the Corinthians. What were the Corinthians saying? Right in the beginning of the book, I'm of Paul, I'm

with Apollos, I'm with Peter.

Oh, no, no, I'm super spiritual, I'm with Christ, I'm not with anyone. Division. No, there should be no division because the members have the same care for one another.

Again, in our clergy laity setup, we say, well, it's the pastor's job to care for everybody. No, it's not his job to care for everybody. It's everybody's job to care for everybody else.

And the moment my body begins to attack itself, which is possible in some kinds of diseases, when the body turns on itself, we know that that is a very, very dangerous situation to be in. And yet many times, churches turn in on themselves. Instead of the various members supporting and encouraging and helping one another, they're breaking down one another.

But here's the problem. When the body turns on itself, it's self-destructive. You cannot withhold your gift and think it's not going to affect you.

Because what you put in is what you're going to get out. And when one part of my body doesn't fulfill its function, the whole body begins to die. And so every member is necessary to fulfill their particular part.

So that all are blessed and that I am blessed as a result. Not I as a preacher, but individually. Where a body is healthy, every part is working, doing what it's supposed to do.

When one part of my body begins to become dysfunctional, because I have some kind of disease, kidney disease or whatever it may be, it begins to affect the whole of the body. The whole body begins to break down. Every member feels that problem.

And the same with the body of Christ. The only way, and here's the problem, the only way that can be fixed in the human body is by cutting that part out. Because it's now poisoning the rest of the body.

And of course that's the problem we have in the church, that sometimes we get to a place where there is no other solution but that that person has to be put out of the church because their presence is toxic and is causing division, is causing the body to turn in on itself. And so that the members should have the same care for one another. You see, we're concerned about others caring for us.

But if each one of us is caring for each other, then we are being cared for by however many people there are here. You see, if each one is looking out for himself, how many people are looking out for you? Just you? Just one? But each of 50 is looking out for everybody else. How many people are looking out for you? 49.

Now, I'm not good at math, but I think 49 is a little bit more than one. I'd rather have 49 caring for me than just one caring for me. And so if each one of us cares for one another, we are enriched, we are blessed, we grow, we are strengthened, we're encouraged, and when one falls in the ditch, the scripture says, the other one is there to pick him up.

All right, let's move on. Verse 26, we've run out of time. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it.

We've touched on that. Or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. This does not just mean when somebody gets a promotion or somebody gets, you know, some physical blessing.

This means spiritually. If one member is suffering spiritually, it brings everybody else down. There's nothing that brings the preacher down more than coming to church and people don't want to greet him because they have an issue.

They have a problem. It may not be with him, but they've got a problem. But as each one is connected to the other, you can't hurt one part of my body and the rest of my body does not feel it.

I mean, sometimes you just need to hit your thumb with a hammer, and that goes right through the whole body. In fact, that should be the body of Christ. Now, we don't want to be hitting each other with hammers.

We want to be blessing one another. And as we help and encourage and bless one another, everybody is blessed. And as others are blessed, they bless back in return.

And what you have is a multiplication effect. And everyone is just going great because each one is blessing each other. But when we start on the downward slide, well, it's almost irreversible sometimes because what you have is a, what do you call those things, downward spiral.

You know, you have a vicious cycle. And sometimes it's so serious. I've seen this in churches where it gets so serious that the church is totally destroyed.

For no good reason. But because something got in and one thing leads to the other, one thing leads to the other, and at the same time, churches can be wonderful blessings when everyone participates in blessing one another. Verse 27.

Now, you are the body of Christ and members individually. So, maybe sums up everything that he has been saying. This does not do away with our individuality.

But at the same time, it does not make us individualists so that I just do my own thing. That's the point that he is making. Verse 28.

Now, the next section I'm not going to go into detail because there's a lot of theological arguments and debates about this. Let me just say before we read these verses that I don't believe that when he says that God has appointed these in the church, first apostles, second prophets, that this is a hierarchy of importance. And I'll explain to you why I don't believe that there is such a thing.

I believe that this has to do with the way that new churches are planted, but that's another story. Let's move on. God has appointed these in the church.

So, God has appointed. We don't get to elect. We don't get to form our own structure.

That's why we have so much division between different denominations and different churches these days. It's because everybody has their own ideas. Oh no, we need to have a bishop.

No, we need to have this. We need to have that. We need to have that.

No, God appoints. And he has appointed these in the church. First apostles, prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles and gifts of healings, helps administrations, varieties of tongues.

Are all apostles, are all prophets, are all teachers, are all workers of miracles? So he's getting back to the point. We're not all the same. It's not all an ear, it's not all an eye.

We have different ministries and there are different functions. Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? The answer is obviously no. But earnestly desire the best gifts.

And I want to stop here for a while and then there's one more verse I think. Earnestly desire the best gifts. Now I've said this before and I'm going to say this again because it's one of the most important things we must get.

And that is that selfish ambition is the most destructive force in any church. It is more destructive than sin. It is sin, but it is more destructive than immorality.

We say, well, what can be worse than immorality? Immorality is easy to deal with. The person is corrected, they don't receive the correction, they're put out. You know, just the short way of dealing with that.

But selfish ambition is insidious. It's under the surface. We're in election season right now.

We kiss the babies. We shake the hands. Not because you like babies, but you want the mother to vote for you.

This is what selfish ambition is. Selfish ambition is politics. And when politics comes into the church, I'm not talking about Republican and Democrat politics.

I'm talking about selfish ambition, self-promotion, trying to get myself somewhere, trying to play the game so that I can be popular and so people can accept me and people can think I'm great and I'm wonderful is the most dangerous thing that can come into the church. Because it denies the fact that God puts the various members in the church. And people rise to some position because they have worked themselves into some kind of position, not because God has put them there.

Many pulpits are filled with preachers who God has not put there. They've gone to seminary, they've learned a few things, they learned how to preach, they preach. But God never called them, God never gifted them.

Many elders are on elder boards, many people are on church councils and church boards, many deacons serve as deacons, but God never called them and gifted them. They worked themselves into some kind of position. By the way, that's why we don't believe in elections in this church.

But earnestly desire the best gifts. So is that not contradicting everything I've just said? No, it's not. He's not saying, I've got this little light, I'm going to put it under a basket.

No, he says, let your light shine. This doesn't mean false humility. If God has given you a gift, then use that gift.

Develop that gift. And say, I want to be the best that I can be. Now the question then is, what is the best gift? And that's where the selfish ambition and this human reasoning comes in, because people go to the previous section, and they say, well, God said apostles, apostles must be the best gift.

Because Paul was an apostle, Peter was an apostle, they were the great men of the beginning of the church. So I must desire, and every Tom, Dick, and Harry in the world today wants to be an apostle. I think every pastor in Africa calls himself an apostle.

I'm serious. No, what is the best gift? The best gift is number one, the most necessary gift at that moment. If I need to change the battery in my watch, I need a small screwdriver.

It doesn't matter if I've got a whole workshop full of hammers and wrenches and stuff. All of that is useless. I need a small screwdriver.

And it's the same in the body of Christ. When we need a particular need in the body of Christ, I mentioned the lady who could sing. That was the best gift.

Because it was something that really made a difference. So the best gift is not the biggest, it's not the most visible, it's not the most influential, it's the most necessary at the time. If there's a need for something, when we come to church, and if Inna and I are not here, what is the best gift? Somebody who comes with a key.

It's as simple as that. If nobody comes with a key, we know what happens. You say, well, that's no big deal, I don't have to bring my key.

No, your key is important. Because without the key, we won't get into the building. Yeah, we can meet in the parking lot like we did last summer, but that's not so good.

So desire is the best gift. But the best gift is also the gift that God has given you. So you say, well, I want to be an apostle.

No, but God made you a toilet cleaner. No, but I want to be that. The best gift for you is the gift that God has called you to.

Nothing else is any good. You can desire anything else you like, but that is not, in fact, it's not even not the best gift. It's the wrong gift.

It's no good. Then he says, and I show you a more excellent way. In other words, each one must desire to be what God has called them to be.

But there's something better. And you know what that is. Love.

It's more important than all the other gifts. I'm serious. And yet that is the one that is often most lacking.

Now I want to go to chapter 14, verse 1, because now we, verse 31 of chapter 12 is the end of that chapter. Then we have the chapter on love, and we spoke about that a few weeks ago. Now we get to the first verse in the next chapter.

And I want you just to see this and I'm done. Pursue love and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy, and now he's going to talk about prophecy and tongues and those things. But just look at the first part of the verse.

Is there a difference between pursuing and desiring? Yes, there's a huge difference. In a sense, desiring is passive. It's something I want.

Pursuing is active. When you're in pursuit of something, whether it be a deer if you're hunting, or the enemy when you're in the military, or chasing something in your career, you're actively pursuing, chasing down something. So the one is, I sit there and I say, I'd really like to have that.

The other says, no, I'm going to actually chase after it. And I want you to see, we must desire spiritual gifts, but we must actively pursue love, chase after it, hunt it down. And it's not love in the sense of others loving me.

It's in the sense of me loving others. And as we said earlier, in our self-centered world, it's all about everybody must love me. No, if you love others, others will love you, and if they don't, that's the love of God.

Jesus loved the world. The world didn't love him, and they crucified him, but he still loved. Can I challenge you to desire spiritual gifts? Don't say, well, I'm happy just, you know, my gift is to warm the pew, or my gift is to keep the pastor humble, or my gift is to put five bucks in the plate every week.

No, those desire spiritual gifts. As we've said last week, as we spoke in the preliminaries this morning in the announcements, what can I do to make this church better? What can I do to help others to fulfill their ministries? Remember, the first deacons were appointed for the express purpose that those who were preachers could get on with preaching and not have to serve tables. Not everybody can preach, but everybody can serve tables.

And if you can't preach, well then serve tables, because that takes the burden off the preacher so that he can get on with his particular gift. So desire spiritual gifts, but above all these things, chase after love. Come here on a Sunday and on a Thursday with the express intent to love.

Come with the intent to make a contribution, especially on Thursdays when there's opportunities to pray and to testify and to share a short word. Come prepared to do something, but more importantly, come just to love, because that is what builds the church. And as the church is built, I am built and I am fed.

As the church becomes stronger, each one of us becomes stronger. Father, we pray that you'd help us to grasp these things, Lord, because we live in a world of individualism and the emphasis is on me and I and my rights. But Lord, that we may come to understand that we are part of a whole, that we are part of the body of Christ.

Lord, that we have a function and a job to do. And Lord, that above all, our function is to love one another. And Lord, that we may show the world who you are through our love for one another, as Jesus said, by this we all may know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

But Lord, that we may be mutually encouraged and strengthened and built up and exhorted by our mutual love for one another, our care for one another. Lord, that you may be glorified. At the end of the day, Lord, it's not about us having a comfortable, cozy situation.

It's not about us being able to say, look how healthy we are. But it's, Lord, that you might be blessed, that you might be honored, because you are the head. And Lord, everything that happens to us happens to you.

As you said to Paul, you are persecuting me. As Jesus said, if you've done this to the least of these, my brethren, you've done it to me. And Lord, as we bless one another, as we help one another, as we encourage one another, we're doing it to you.

And Lord, you've promised that there's a reward. And so Lord, help us to set our individual desires and goals and ambitions aside. And we might just focus on caring for others.

We ask that you'd help us, Lord, because we are naturally self-centered. And the world in which we're living is increasingly isolationist and self-centered and individualistic. But Lord, help us to understand that we are not in the church individuals.

But Lord, we are part of the body of Christ. Help us to understand, but above all, Lord, help us to do, help us to find that love of God which is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Help us, Lord, to find that one little thing maybe that we can do to make the whole better.

We ask this in Jesus' name. I pray that you'd go with us now, keep us and protect us. Lord, we pray for John, Ray and Kelly as they travel this week, that you'd bring them here safely, Lord, and that their flight would not be too uncomfortable.

Lord, as we prepare our hearts to receive them, we pray that you would prepare their hearts. And Lord, that there may be a melding of hearts, that there may be a coming together of minds. And Lord, that it may be something of you, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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