



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1 Corinthians 12: 12-31

1 Corinthians

"All for One"

TRANSCRIPT

Thanks Mark, and it's very good to be back. Our text this morning is 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verses 12 through 31. It's a lengthy text. It's the rest of the chapter, but one in which I think we can cover well in the time we have. Paul is speaking about spiritual gifts. He's speaking about the church and how it functions. And then we read in verse 12: "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

"For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot says, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,' it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, 'Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,' it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; or again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so

that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

"Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way." May the Lord bless this reading of His word and our time of study together. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we do thank You for this time that we have together, this opportunity we have to continue our studies in 1 Corinthians. It's a blessing and it gives us Your revelation on the church and how we are to function within it. We are to function. We each have a part to play. Each one of us is as vital to this body of Christ, the church, as a member of our physical body is vital to it. And every part is vital. You created every part of the physical body to have a function. And it's necessary. And so, it is with us, we may consider ourselves insignificant. We may consider our part to be small, but it's the part You have designed for us, and it's not insignificant, it's not unimportant. If this church is to function to Your honor and glory and to the benefit of itself, to its members and those outside of it, the community around us, we're to be lights in the midst of this world. And we can only do that effectively if we are obedient to You and carrying out the service that You've given to us. And You have given a service to each one of us. Our service as Christians is not simply to show up on a Sunday morning and hear a sermon and go home and perhaps forget it. No, it is to draw close to You, to grow in our love for You, and express that to our brethren, to those around us. So, may we be the kind of people that do that. We're at the beginning of a new year. 2011. And so Father, I pray that we'll resolve to be the kind of people that Paul is teaching the Corinthians to be in this text, and that we'll be a people that look out for one another, that take care of one another, that serve one another, that use the gifts and the means that You've given us to do that. We are well-equipped, each one of us. Paul teaches that in this text. We have the Spirit of God and we have a gift, and You give us opportunities. Help us to see those

opportunities and to seize them. So, bless us spiritually, Lord, and I pray that You'd galvanize within us a desire to do that from our time of study this morning. And I pray, Lord, that You take care of us physically. Bless us physically. We have material needs. We have bodily needs, physical needs. Some are sick. Some are in the hospital. Some are struggling with bugs that are going around at this time of year. Give them strength. Give them encouragement. Some are discouraged because of the pressures of life. Some are discouraged 'cause they're without employment. Give them employment. Help them all to trust You. Help them to realize that our lives are not governed by chance, but by providence, and it's a kind providence, and we sing about that in a moment. We may not understand it. We don't see Your hand in our lives. It's an invisible hand, but it is there, and it is upon us, and it's guiding us. So, we give You thanks for that and pray that You bless us and encourage us with that, and I pray for those that are discouraged that You would give them the encouragement they need. Bless us as we look to You, and look to Your word, and are instructed by You. Open our hearts to receive what You give to us, and respond to it in obedience. [End of Prayer] We give You thanks for all that we have in Christ, and it's in His name we pray. Amen.

[Message] About a year ago, I did something that some of you men probably did when you were 12, but I didn't and so I'm kind of making up for some lost time. I read Alexander Dumas' classic "The Three Musketeers," and I was interested in it because the story takes place during King Louis the XIII's war against the Huguenots, the French protestants. But of course, it's more an adventure than it is a history, and mainly about the adventures and the camaraderie of three members of the king's bodyguard: Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, who early on are joined by a fourth young swordsman, D'Artagnan. They frequently face overwhelming odds, but they're always victorious because they fight as one, and always protect each other. Their famous slogan is: "All for one, one for all." I thought of that when I started studying our passage because that could easily be Paul's slogan for the church. It really sums up the lesson that he gives here in the last half of 1 Corinthians 12.

He's been teaching that the church has a variety of spiritual gifts. Every Christian has one. We are to use those gifts, but we don't use them for our own personal benefit. They have been given to us, Paul has stated in verse 7 of this chapter, for the common good.

Now, to illustrate the importance of that and why the church should function in unity as one, Paul now compares the church to the human body. Just as the human body has many parts that must function together in order for it to function in a correct or healthy way, so too the church has many members that must work together for a spiritually good effect. Now, that's Paul's lesson here. The church has been greatly blessed. We have all kinds of people in the church. And we have all kinds of gifts and graces. And we must use all of them to work for the common good.

And so, Paul begins to explain that in verse 12. He writes, "even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is the church." Now, if you're looking at your texts and you're following along as I'm reading, you know that it doesn't say that. You expect Paul to say, "so also is the church." But instead, he says, "so also is Christ." But he means the church, which is Christ's body. But he was using the language here of the Damascus road where he was converted, and he heard Christ say, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Well, Paul wasn't persecuting Christ. At least, he didn't think he was doing that. Christ was gone. He was persecuting the church on the earth.

But the Lord was saying to Paul, in that epiphany, that appearance to him, when you touch the church, you touch Me. It's my body. And so, here Paul uses that language to refer to the church. It is the Body of Christ. It's dear to Him. We are many members, but we are all in Him, and important to Him. Infinitely important to Him. So important to him that He died for us.

And in verse 13, Paul explains how it is that we came to be in Him, how we came to be the one Body of Christ. And here, he explains this through baptism in the Holy Spirit. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." There are all kinds of people in the church, and Paul shows that by referring to the racial and the social differences between us. But in Christ, in the church, those distinctions disappear. The Lord doesn't value the Jew over the Gentile, or the free man over the slave. And we aren't to consider one more valuable than another. We are all in Christ. We are all valuable to Him. We are His body, and we are to love one another as He loves us. And we're equally under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The statement, "by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body," and I'm reading from

the New American Standard Bible, that can also be translated, "in one's Spirit, we were all baptized." In other words, we were all baptized into the Holy Spirit, and that probably is better.

I don't know that the end, there's really a great deal of difference between the two explanations of the verse, but I think the second is better because it's more consistent with the statements of the New Testament where Christ is described as the One who baptizes us spiritually, rather than the Holy Spirit.

I'll give you an example. I should say there are, to support that point, there are some six instances in which this baptism is referred to, and it is Christ who does that baptizing, not the Holy Spirit. And the example that I can give is Matthew chapter 3 and verse 11. It's where John the Baptist prophesied that one would come after him who was greater than he was, and, he says, He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. Of course, he's referring to Christ. And that happened, historically, on the day of Pentecost when Christ poured out the Holy Spirit on His people and the church was born.

So here, the Spirit is probably, rather, not the one who does the baptizing, but the one in whom we are baptized. He is the spiritual element into which we are submerged. So, by grace, Christ puts us in the Spirit. We are united in Him in order to be joined together in a body. He is our spiritual environment. We move and exist spiritually in Him.

But we're also indwelt by the Spirit. Paul says, "we were made to drink of the one Spirit." We are in Him, and He is in us. We are sustained and refreshed by the Holy Spirit. I was thinking about that and trying to find an analogy, and I think the analogy that Paul is using here for the church would be a good one, the body. We are in an environment. Our bodies are. We live in air. We live in oxygen. It is all around us. But it's also in us. It fills our lungs. It's in our blood. It's around us. We're in it, and it's in us.

Now, the problem with that analogy is air and oxygen are inanimate, and the environment that Paul is describing here of the Spirit is animate. It's a person. He is the eternal third person of the Trinity. We live and exist within the environment of the person of God, and He lives within us. And He enlivens the church. He gives it strength. He gives it life. He gives it wisdom, direction, and protection. That's our condition. Really, the idea here is something like: we are all saturated with the Holy

Spirit. That's a good position to be in. That's a position of privilege and blessing beyond our comprehension. We are enveloped and indwelt with the third person of the Trinity. God is our environment.

That's true of every believer. Every single believer. The Lord doesn't play favorites with us. He doesn't give more of the Spirit to one than another. He doesn't give more of an environment to one than another. We were all baptized. We were all made to drink, He said. Some Pentecostals and charismatics today have used this verse to support their doctrine of the second blessing, which is a second work of grace and empowerment that enables people to really live a victorious life without that second blessing. Even if you're saved, you can't live victoriously. You need the second blessing. And the evidence of it is speaking in tongues.

But this has nothing to do with a second blessing. This is not a blessing for just some. This is how every believer enters the Body of Christ. It's how we're made members of the invisible church. It is for all, he says. He says that twice. So this is not something that some have and others don't; this is what we all have. We have it at the moment of regeneration and faith, when we're born again, when we're placed in Christ. We have this. The Spirit is ours. That's what Paul is saying in effect. And in Ephesians chapter 1 verse 13, "You're sealed with the Spirit at the moment of faith."

Well, that's a blessing. We are in Him. He enlivens us. He directs us. He gives us His life. Well now, Paul applies the one-ness of the church in the Spirit to show how the church is to function, because He's the one who enables us to function, but here's how we do it. We function in much the same way that the body, the human body, functions. Verse 14: "For the body is not one member, but many." There's not one part of the body that does all of the work of the body. There are many parts, and each part has a special function. They're all important.

Paul goes into some detail on this in the next verses. He writes in verse 15, "If the foot says, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,' it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, 'Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,' it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?"

This is a conversation that Paul is imagining the body having within itself, and it's deliberately absurd. Of course, the body, it goes without saying, can't carry on

such a conversation among itself. But if it could, if this were possible, this conversation would never take place because each member of the body has a vital function. The body would understand that. A body cannot function well and be healthy if all the parts are not functioning as God designed them to function in complete coordination with each other. And the church cannot function effectively and be healthy if all of its members do not carry out their individual duties in concert with one another.

Evidently, though, that was a problem in Corinth. They were not doing that. There were people that felt intimidated by those who had more prominent ministries and more spectacular gifts like the gifts of prophecy and tongues, speaking languages. That's pretty impressive. And so, these people who felt less gifted, who had less prominent gifts and positions in the church, they didn't exercise those gifts that they had. They didn't serve and minister. And what happened was, what one writer, Don Carson, called a kind of "inner ring syndrome." There was a small circle of gifted men. They were the insiders. The inner ring with very prominent, spectacular gifts, and they felt very secure about themselves. In fact, they were rather inflated about their own importance.

The outsiders, those who didn't have such spectacular gifts or ministries felt insecure and insufficient. And then, they may have begun to feel some self-pity and some envy, and they just stopped using their gift. They just went off to the sideline and then left the ministry to these more gifted, or what they considered more gifted, more prominent individuals. They'd say the equivalent of, "I'm just a foot trampling through the dust while the hand does noble things." Let's look at the hand and all that the hand can do. It can write books, and pen poetry. It can build buildings. It can fashion art. The hand does so many wonderful things. The foot doesn't do anything like that. Who needs a foot?

Well, I need a foot. I need both feet. So do you. We all do. It's not as visible, perhaps, or as attractive, but it is vital for the stability and the movement of the body. God designed it to function precisely as it does, and the body is weakened without it. The eye can see beautiful sunsets, but it can't hear a symphony. We need ears to hear. We need eyes to see. They have different specialized functions. We need them together. That's the way God made the body: with lots of diversity.

That's the wonder of the body. It has a wide variety of vital organs and limbs

and parts. Can you imagine a body composed of one eyeball, or just a hand? That's the picture Paul presents here. And as you begin to reflect upon it, it gets grossly surrealistic, like a Salvador Dali painting or almost kind of humorous. It really, I'd have to say, my mind goes back to my youth and I think of some of those B-movies in the 1950s like "The Crawling Eye." It's an actual movie. I missed that blockbuster, but this kind of thinking within the church, this attitude is almost as bizarre as that. When people elevate a few members to minister and carry everyone else along. God didn't make the body like that, and He didn't make the church like that. He created it with lots of different people and gave it lots of various gifts. It's all according to His very careful and wise design. That's what Paul says in verse 18.

But now, God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. God placed them in there. He put you in the body. He put you in Christ. He saved you. He chose you from the foundation of the world. He redeemed you at Calvary. And at a point in time, the Spirit quickened you, drew you, and put faith in you and you were joined to Christ. That was God's doing; the Triune God did that, and gifted you, just as He desired. In other words, you are what you are supposed to be. God made you what He wanted you to be. That's Paul's meaning here. That's what he says.

So, don't be discouraged by what you are. Function. Serve. Use what you have to His glory. I can say this: it will give you the greatest fulfillment in life if you do that.

The church was never intended to function with a few gifted people pulling everyone else along. We all need to be engaged, doing what God appointed us to do. We all need each other. That's what Paul says in the next verses where he speaks to the elites within the church; that is those people who felt themselves special and others were kind of looking at them as being special. And he rebukes them. He rebukes those who felt very good about their gift and about themselves. He begins with a question that shows the foolishness of an exaggerated reverence for one's gift and one's own person.

Where would the body be if there were just one member? The physical body? Where would it be if there was just one member and that was it? It doesn't matter how important that member might be, where it's an eye, or it's the heart, or the brain. You can't make a body from that. No, he says, there are many members. And we all

depend on each other. To emphasize that, Paul examines those with the more prominent gifts, the greater gifts, and examines their attitude toward the more humble members of the church. He focuses on the proud, inner ring of the church, probably the charismatics, the tongues speakers. I think as you read over these three chapters, chapters 12, 13, and 14, that's clearly the problem that brought this discussion out. He's dealing with that issue, that particular gift of speaking in tongues. These people had an inflated view of their gift. So much so that they were looking down on others.

He sticks with the analogy of body parts and says: "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; or the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'" That's a terrible thing to say. There are few things more devastating to a person than a comment like that, telling someone: you're worthless. We really don't need you. You have no real function, no importance to us. That's a terrible thing to say, but it's not only cruel; it's incorrect. And that's what Paul explains in verse 22. Every member of the body is necessary, even those who seem to be the weaker. Everything in the body serves a purpose.

The ancients understood that very well. There's an old Roman fable that is similar to what Paul says here. It's much older than Paul, so it may be that Paul knew this story and perhaps even incorporated it here. I don't know that that's the case, but the story was given by a Roman consul named Agrippa who told his soldiers about a rebellion that happened in the physical body when its more active members rebelled against the stomach. They thought the stomach was getting a free ride. They did all the work just to feed it and it did nothing in return. So, they decided to starve it. They'd teach it a lesson. But very soon, they began to feel the effects. They became weak, unable to function, and soon realized that the stomach served a purpose, and they were nothing without it. Agrippa was telling the story about the aristocrats. Many of them seemed worthless, wealthy men of some leisure, but he was saying they have an important function for the state. I guess we could make the application in our own date to the wealthy, the super-rich. Well, they have a function. They bring money into the economy. They give to charities. They build businesses. They have a function.

But Paul here is sort of taking this story and, whether he was using the story or not I don't know, but the way he tells it, it's turned around. He's telling the elites, the so-called aristocrats, those who felt very highly of themselves, that they need

those people that they considered to be small, insignificant, the people they dismiss as weak. There are no unimportant members of the church, he tells them. God has chosen every one of us. Every one of us is of infinite importance to Him. He's chosen us, and He has equipped each one of us as He willed and desired.

So what you consider to be weak, Paul is telling them, is what God designed to be. You're dismissing His work. We all have an essential function. So, Paul explains in verses 23 and 24 that we need to give those less prominent members proper respect and special care. Again, he illustrates this from the human body. There are parts of the body, he says, that are not publically presentable. So, we cover them up. We give them that attention. We don't go outside exposed. We dress. We cover our feet. We wear shoes. But while we don't cover those parts that are presentable: the head, the hands for example. The parts that are covered are not less important because they're hidden. In other words, something that's hidden is not unimportant because you don't see it in the body. Something that's visible may seem to be important, but it may not be nearly as important as what is hidden. All of them, whether they seem important or not, they're all in vital union. The external limbs and the hidden organs. That's how God made us, Paul says in verse 25, so that there may be no division in the body. He's made it so that the parts of the body are interrelated and interdependent. Some are unsightly and hidden, like the stomach, but there are no unimportant parts of the body. We're far more aware of our eyes and our nose than we are of, say, our pituitary gland. Some people are more concerned about their facial features than they are about the fitness of their glands. They probably give no thought about that. Or they're constantly thinking about how they look, if their hair's in place.

But no one who understands health, you don't have to be a doctor to have some understanding of health. No one who has any understanding of that would say that any gland is unimportant. It's unobserved, it's hidden, but it affects us all. Everything has importance. That's what Paul is saying. That's what he says in verse 26. "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." No, we've all had the experience, I suppose, at least I've had the experience where I'm using a hammer and a nail. Maybe you've mounted a picture on a wall and there's the tack, and you put it to the wall. Instead of hitting the tack, you hit your thumb. You could say, "I hurt my

thumb." You could say equally, "I hurt myself." Because both are true. Both are equally true. The whole body reacts, doesn't it? The whole body, in concert, responds instantaneously. The mouth yells, the eyes water, the hands clench, the body may jump. We respond. You don't say, you know, gee, I'm glad it's localized at the end of my finger. Everything hurts. When the body hurts, the whole, when one part hurts, the whole body hurts. Even when it's those less vital parts. Everything has a function, and it's all interrelated in the human body.

And of course, all of this is true of the church. When one part hurts, the whole body hurts. When one part is treated with disdain, dismissed as insignificant, I don't need you, that affects the whole body. So just as some of the important parts of the human body are hidden, so too important members of the church are not always prominent. The fact that someone is not prominent in the church doesn't mean that he or she is unimportant any more than the heart is unimportant because you don't see it.

So, we need to give due respect to everyone. We need to honor them and not look down on them. We need to care for all the members. All are important. Truly, it is all for one, one for all. Paul's analogy between the body and the church is obvious enough, at least so it would seem. But he's not content to leave it at that. He wants to make sure that this is very clear, so he spells it out further in the last verses of the chapter, beginning with verse 27. "Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it." So, to remove any doubt, all he has been saying applies to them and to us. It's what he's saying. Whenever the church is, whether it's in Corinth 2,000 years ago, or in Dallas today in modern times, that group of believers is the Body of Christ, and each person in it has a contribution to make. Each individually, members of Christ's body. Every one of us.

In verse 28, Paul illustrates the different ways we contribute with another list of gifts which overlap slightly with the previous list. He writes: "And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues." Paul gives the list here of eight gifts in a descending order of importance. From the most important with apostles, to the least important with tongues. The first three gifts are set apart here. They had prominence in the church. Apostles and prophets are the foundation of the church according to Ephesians chapter 2 verse 20. The apostles

were Christ's emissaries, His representatives. They preached the gospel. They established and maintained churches. Prophets gave inspired revelation at a time when the New Testament was in formation. The canon was incomplete through much of those early decades of the church. So, the church needed the authority of the apostles and prophets during that time. They spoke authoritatively, definitively until the canon was complete. We have the canon now. We have all 66 books of the Bible; the canon is closed. God's finished giving us revelation.

So, there are no apostles today. Acts can say that for a couple of reasons. one reason is the requirement for being an apostle. According to Acts chapter 1 verse 22, it was stipulated that in order to be an apostle, one had to be a witness of Christ's resurrection. The fact that one witnessed it didn't mean that he could be an apostle, but that was fundamental. No one could be an apostle who had not witnessed the Lord's resurrection. And Paul defended his apostleship on that basis back in chapter 9 of 1 Corinthians. In verse 1, he said, "Am I not an apostle had I not seen Jesus?" Well, he did see Jesus. He saw Jesus on the Damascus road. That wasn't a vision of Jesus; he saw Him in that blinding light. No one today can say that. That could only be true of people in the 1st century.

Now, people do, of course, make such claims, but they're not credible. People claim to be apostles. People claim today to be prophets, but they're not doing the things that apostles and prophets did. They're not doing the mighty works of the apostles. Read through the Book of Acts. People were getting in the shadow of the apostles to get healed. They were taking the handkerchief of the apostle to get healed. There were great, miraculous healings, raisings of the dead, of the blind, of the lame. That's not happening today. Are people giving new infallible revelation today? No. There are no apostles and prophets today. The fact that they call themselves that does not make them so.

But there's another reason here. The fact that the apostles and prophets are called the foundation of the church by the apostle Paul suggests that they were for a specific purpose in a limited age. We don't continually build a new foundation. There's a foundation that was established, established there with the apostles and prophets in the 1st century, and each generation builds on that one foundation.

These are things we'll discuss and examine more carefully when we come to chapter 14. But teaching is a gift for today, as is the gift of distinguishing spirits,

mentioned earlier in verse 10. And they're very similar, those two gifts. The one is explaining the truth, teaching, and distinguishing spirits is another, and it's exposing error. But the point here is: there are lots of gifts, and lots of ways to serve God, and serve God's people. In fact, there are not only lots of gifts, but even within the gifts, there are lots of variations of how those gifts were used. Lots of different personalities that use the gifts in different and helpful ways. There's not just one gift, and that's the point that Paul is getting to here. We are not to elevate one gift or one person, or just a few. All important.

Paul brings that out in a series of questions in the next verses, verses 29 and 30. "All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?" And each of those questions, as you can sense, I think, expects a negative answer. All are not prophets, are they? No. And so on. The application then, is stop elevating one gift above the other. Stop elevating one person or a small elite group of people over the others. Some gifts are more prominent than others. Some more important. But all are valid, and all are vital. So use them all.

Then he adds, or rather, he ends with the exhortation: "Earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I will show you a more excellent way." That more excellent way is the way of love. He enlarges on that in the next chapter. But when he says "a more excellent way," he doesn't mean a way that should replace the way of gifts, but one that is superior to the gifts, and one that's possible for all Christians. We may wonder: what's my gift? And puzzle over that. But here's something we don't need to puzzle over, and that is love. That's possible for every one of us. We can all love. We need to. Who wants a good teacher who doesn't love, who is logical but cold, and doesn't care? That's destructive of the gifts. Love enriches the gifts and enriches the body. Where there is love, rivalries and elitism disappear. Obviously, the problem in Corinth and the reason there was not a healthy church in many ways was because they were lacking love, and that becomes prominent focus in the next chapter. But where there is love, those things disappear. Those problems, those rivalries disappear. Christians look out for each other. They serve one another, and they use their gifts properly for the common good, not for some issue of self-esteem, but to build up the Body of Christ.

We need each other, just as the human body needs all of its parts and needs all of them to function in harmony. A healthy church can only function in that way. So, love the brethren. Get to know the brethren so that you can be a help when there's an opportunity to do that. That's a basic point. We're to seek the common good. We are to be seeking to be a blessing to one another, but we can't do that if we don't know each other.

We've got two services: 8:30 and 11:00. It's almost like two churches, so it was nice last week to have everybody together. I've been told, I've never seen this, but that some churches will have a moment at the beginning of the service where they say, "Greet the person next to you on either side. Greet the person in front of you and behind you." And you hear about those things where you see them and you think, "Oh, it's a little artificial." Well, maybe so, but it's really not a bad thing to do every once in a while because we can sit here and not know who we are. That's a shame. We shouldn't be that way. We should know who we are, and be in touch with one another. And when the opportunities come to serve and meet a need, we're able to do that. So, maybe we'll do that sometime. We'll take a moment and have everyone introduce themselves to the person next to them.

And as we do that, as we begin to serve in that way, then I think, well, we find out what our gift is. We can analyze the gifts, and I think we should do that. We've done that, and I think it's important to define them and ask ourselves: is this something I have? And test it a bit, and seek to find what your gift is, but maybe we can get lost in that and really not get anywhere when what we could do and perhaps should do is simply serve, fill in the gap where there's one, and serve the Lord, and He'll bless that.

One of the gentlemen here teaches a Bible study with some co-workers. He saw a need, and he, I think it's on Monday, teaches a Bible study. He tells me, "I'm not a teacher, but I take your notes," or he listens to the tapes from the chapel and he puts it together, and he teaches. Well, I think he's probably more of a teacher than he thinks, but that's how we do things. I think that's an excellent way to just serve. You see the need. You see a gap. You fill it. You take the opportunity. That's what we should be doing. And as we do that, we may find what our gift is. We learn what it is, and then we use it. Even if it's a seemingly small gift, a seemingly unimportant gift, not a gift of teaching, not a gift where it's you're prominent, but something much

more hidden. Paul is telling us: those gifts are not insignificant. Don't despise that.

It's what the prophet tells us. He says: do not despise the day of small things, because small things lead to big things. And so too your service, which you may think is small, and the use of your gift which you think is small will lead to something big.

And someday, we will all give an accounting of our lives and our service. Everything will be tested. We learned that back in chapter 3. Everything will be put through the fire, and that which is wood has stubble will burn up, but that which is gold, silver, and precious stones will last. And God will reward that greatly. Your life is going to be examined. And we can't say in that day, "Oh Lord, I didn't know what my gift was." The Lord will say, "But I gave you lots of opportunities to do something to serve. Why didn't you meet that guy sitting next to you, or that person behind you?"

That's what we're to do. We're a body. We're to know each other. We're to serve each other. We're to minister. And of course there's one thing we can all do. That's pray. We all know to do that. We may not know what our gift is. We may be searching for what that is, trying to understand what that is, but we do know to pray. Whether it's in the quietness of our home, or just in the quietness of our heart, we need to pray for one another. You and I need to be praying for one another. The ministry of this church will not succeed apart from you and me praying. I'm convinced that the prayers of the saints have been effective in this church from its beginning, and we will only enjoy spiritual success and protection as you and I continue to pray. To pray for protection from error, which is all around us, pray for protection from party spirit, which the Corinthians were experiencing, pray for the propagation of the truth. Pray that this ministry will be effective among ourselves and elsewhere. We need to pray for God's blessing upon this assembly. So do that. That is loving the brethren, praying for them. It's service to the Lord. It's service to the Lord. It's service to one another. So, we are to be diligent in all of that.

But, maybe there are some here who do not know the Lord. You're serving, but you're serving yourself, and you're serving your own interests, and that's how you're living your life. Let me tell you something. Your greatest interest is your eternal soul. You're lost if you don't know Christ, and you need Him. So look to Christ and be found. The moment you look to Him, the moment you trust in Him, you're saved. The moment you put your faith in Jesus Christ, you're forgiven for all

eternity, you're made a child of God, you're put in the Spirit, you're put in the Body of Christ. You're given a gift, you're given a mission, you're given an opportunity to serve, you're given an opportunity to live a life that has infinite and eternal value. What a privilege that is, to know that at the end of it all, it comes to nothing. You built a business, then you go to the grave, and it all goes to someone else. That's it.

The Christian has a life that is invested in eternity. You build for eternity, and God will bless you forever for the things you do in His service. What a privilege that is. So come to Christ, come to a meaningful life, come to eternal life in Him, and may God help all of us to appreciate what He has given us, and serve Him by serving each other. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your gifts to us and Your many blessings. Paul has reminded us of that. By Your grace, You chose us from the foundation of the world. Not because there's anything good in us, but because it pleased You to do that. And then in time, Christ redeemed us at Calvary, and then in each generation, You have applied the works of the cross through the Spirit to each individual, and they've been placed in the Body of Christ forgiven, and gifted. I thank you, Father –