

All are One and One is All: Unity in Diversity

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul discusses spiritual gifts. The church of Corinth was divided. Some people were jealous of others gifts. Paul writes this chapter then to combat the division in the church. To try and reconcile the divisions Paul calls for the church to be united. From this chapter we will learn what it means for the church of God to be united. We will discover that in the church God is the giver of diversity and that the diversity which God gives us means that we all have different gifts and are to use our gifts for the edification of the body of Christ.

All are one and one is all. There is unity in diversity. I looked on as two of my friends made the decision to get married. They had met each other at my home church in Oklahoma where both they and I attended. My friend was interested in the woman who is now his wife though he was not sure of pursuing her at first because of their differences. However, he decided to pursue her and they eventually decided to get married. The wedding was held at beautiful Presbyterian church on the north side of Oklahoma City. At the wedding our pastor gave a speech on love mentioned the two being united into one flesh. Rings were exchanged, the unity candle lit, and the bride and groom pronounced husband and wife. The reception was then held at our home church. Like my two friends when people get married they bring diversity to the marriage though they are united into one. Like marriage all the member of the body are united into one body and the one body is made up of diverse members. As Christians we all know what it is like to be part of the church of God. However, often times we fail to be the church God calls us to be. Here in 1 Corinthians 12 we see that God's church needs to be united.

In this chapter we see that there are three things that we must do because God's church is to be united. We must: not be ignorant of spiritual gifts, we must recognize the diversity of spiritual gifts, and we must recognize God's agency in giving spiritual gifts.

First, we see that we must not be ignorant of spiritual gifts. The church at Corinth was a divided church. They were ignorant of certain truths which they should not have been. For Paul says in verse 1 "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant." In verse 2 Paul points out to the Corinthians that as unbelievers they were ignorant of these matters since they were carried away by idols, therefore, in verse 3 Paul says I am making known to you these things that you need to understand. What they need to understand is that no one can confess Jesus is Lord without the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Those who confess Jesus is part of the church.

Affections ran wild in the ministry of Jonathan Edwards. People would wail and cry in response to sermons preached. This kind of response was experienced in the life when Edwards was preaching on Justification by Faith. As a result of Edwards preaching Justification by Faith a great revival broke out. During this time more than 300 of Edward's people made professions of faith. He reported this revival in the book entitled "Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God." The revival was criticized by people who were ignorant of how to discern the work of the Holy Spirit. Edwards took it upon himself to defend it as a genuine work of God. One such defense was the writing of the "Religious Affections." In this book Edwards lays out a criteria for discerning a genuine work of God which he insisted is love. In this work we see that Edwards was not ignorant of the fact that those who confess Jesus as Lord is part of the church, for characteristic of them is that they possess love.

We should not be ignorant of central Christian truths. We all have a tendency to want to neglect reading and studying our Bible at times. However, We need to take it upon ourselves to study the Bible in order to know the truths of which we should not be ignorant. We must be careful to give our time to studying the Bible. This maybe especially hard for us at times here at seminary. All of our classes are Bible related and we may at times want to substitute class lectures or readings for time spent in the Bible. However, we must resist this tendency. We must know the Bible in order to be able to tell a genuine work of God from a false one.

The second thing we see in this chapter is that we must recognize the diversity of spiritual gifts. In verses 4-11 and especially in verses 4-6 Paul stresses diversity. The Corinthians were ignorant of the need for diversity in the church. In these verses we see that this diversity is God given. He apportions each gift as he wills as verse 11 points out and in verses 4-6 we see that there is a diversity of gifts, activities, and services, but all come from the same God. As we see in verses 8-10 God does not desire all people's gifts to be the same, but gives to some what He does not give to others. He gives some people the gift of wisdom, some faith, and some prophecy. Diversity is essential to the church to function as the way in which God intends it as verse 7 points out that this diversity is given to each person for the common good. Paul's concern in stressing this diversity here is not to systematically explain spiritual gifts. Instead, Paul is confronting the factions which were in the church. Some of the Corinthians were threatened by the gifts of others. Here the gift some was threatened over was speaking of tongues and possibly prophecy.

The need for diversity can be seen vividly in the movie “Amadeus.” Envy, jealousy, and lustful ambition characterizes the story. The composer Salieri was envious of Mozart’s gift. Salieri from the beginning is envious of Mozart’s gift. He wants Mozart’s gift for himself. He describes the gift which he was jealous of. In Mozart’s music was “Just a pulse. bassoons, basset horns, like a rusty squeeze box, and then suddenly, high above it, an oboe, a single note hanging there unwavering until a clarinet took it over and sweetened it into a phrase of such delight. This was no composition by a performing monkey. This was a music I’ve never heard. Filled with such longing, such unfulfilible longing, it seemed to me that I was hearing the voice of God.” Such an extraordinary gift led Salieri to take Mozart’s life. Salieri failed to see that there is a need for a diversity of gifts given by God.

Like Salieri we all tend to be envious of some people’s gifts. However, God’s church is a church of diversity. Diversity is needed in the church. We must realize that the diversity of gifts in the church is good and not to be envied. We need to realize that this diversity exists for the good of all of the body of Christ. Since, our gifts are for the edification of the body we all have need of each other. To one of us is given a gift for the edification of another. We must not say to some one I do not need you. We need all the members of the body of Christ. God has given a diversity in the body so that all might be edified. As Christians we must realize that God does not want all of the member of the church to have the same gifts as the other member. Therefore, if someone does not have a gift we do, we do not have the right to look down on them. Their giftings are just different because they are fulfilling a different function in the body for the good of all.

The third thing we see in this passage is that we must recognize the sovereignty of God in giving spiritual gifts. In verses 1-11 we see the sovereignty of God stressed. In light of the division in the Church Paul is confronting we can see why the sovereignty of God is stressed. People are jealous of each others gifts and so there was very much likely an egotism which accompanied that. Paul therefore stresses the sovereignty of God. So how is the sovereignty of God stressed?

We see it stressed by the words Paul uses. The two most important words to this passage is *χαρίσματα* and *πνευματικά*. Paul uses these words in verses 1 and 4. Both of these words are used of spiritual gifts. *πνευματικά* stresses the source of the gift, which is God while *χαρίσματα* stresses the unmerited character of these gifts. *χαρίσματα* is Paul's own term which meant to humble to Corinthians and leave no room for boasting. The *χαρίσματα* are gifts of God's grace.

The sovereignty of God is stressed within the verses of 1-11. In verses 1-3 Paul puts the problem which he is dealing with into a Christ-centered perspective. Verses 4-6 gives a God-centered solution to the Corinthians pride, God is the source of all things as verse 6 especially makes clear in saying that "there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone." Notice that there is nothing here in verse 6 stressing the of the person or emphasis on people's abilities, rather it is God because He is the one who is said to empower all of the varieties of activities. In verse 11 we are clearly told that the source of all the gifts mentioned in verses 8-10 is the Spirit who is sovereignly giving the gifts to whomever he wills at His own discretion.

Suppose there a certain seminary professor is giving a final for a Greek class. The class was very tough and the students worked hard all semester. The professor gives out the study guide to the

final to the students. The students then studied the parable of the generous landowner which stresses God's sovereignty as that would be on the test.. Among these students are some that worked harder and had better skills at handling the Greek text than others. The students went in and took the test and then got back the results to the test. The students who worked harder and had better skills at handling the Greek were confident in their abilities and proud of the success that they have always achieved in receiving A's. However, once the test came back some of the hard working students recieved C's, and some A's. Some of the students who did not work hard and had little skill in handling the Greek text received A's, while other received C's and B's. What happened is that the professor sovereignly gave out grades according to his own will.

Like the hard working A students we tend to want to take pride in our achievements and abilities. Yet God like the professor acts sovereignly according to his own will all merits are nullified. Our gifts like the students grades are given by God sovereignly at his own discretion. We forget that our gifts and abilities are given by God according to His will and that there is therefore no room for boasting in our gifts so long as God is the source. We must realize that our gifts are acts of God's sovereignty and given at his will. Like all the students were responsible to study for the test, we must realize that there is a responsibility on our part for our gifts though boasting in our gifts is excluded.

God sets before us now the need to put away ignorance about spiritual gifts, recognize the diversity of gifts, and recognize God's sovereignty in giving gifts because His church is to be united. The sovereignty of God is stressed in this passage throughout by the words Paul uses and in the verses of the passage. God's sovereignty in giving his gifts nullifies our boasting in our own gifts. The need to live the way God calls us to here is portrayed well in the life of Tim

Tebow. As a quarterback for the Florida Gators Tebow must recognize the diversity of gifts on the team. He must not be ignorant of which gifts is each players strong point. Because there was unity on the team Tebow was able to led the Gators to victory in the 2007 National Championship against Ohio State. Tebow is a very skilled quarterback, yet he recognizes God's sovereignty in giving him his skill as he gives praise to God for his gift. Let us follow after Tebow's example. Let us not exalt our selves. Let us recognize that there is unity in diversity. Let us understand what it means that God's church is to be united!