

# Don't Grow Envious

## 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



In our study of 1 Corinthians, we have heard from Paul about the toxic realities of pride, comparison, and preferential treatment in the Corinthian church. By the time we got to chapter 12, you could feel how toxic comparison and preferential treatment had become in Corinth. Remember these statements? “I follow Paul.” “I follow Apollos.” “I follow Cephas” (1 Cor. 1:12). What looked like loyalty was actually rivalry and divisions. They were turning spiritual leaders into status symbols. Paul cuts through it: “What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants” (3:5). The point isn’t who looks more impressive; the point is who is faithful in what God assigned.

Comparison fractures the body. In chapter 12, Paul confronts the quieter form of it: “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body” (12:15). That’s insecurity talking. The eye can’t say to the hand, “I have no need of you” (12:21). That’s superiority talking. Both distortions come from measuring worth by visibility or perceived importance. Paul’s metaphor is remarkably simple: the body only works when each part embraces its own role. Envy and pride both weaken it. When one member suffers, all suffer; when one is honored, all rejoice (12:26). Comparison makes celebration feel threatening instead of communal. In 1 Corinthians 4:7, Paul asks, “What do you have that you did not receive?” If everything is a gift, comparison becomes absurd. The Christian life is not a competition for applause but a stewardship of grace. Faithfulness, not ranking, is what endures. These truths and temptations are just as real for you and me as they were for them. That is why we need to remember that **comparison is a thief of joy.**

### 1. Spiritual Gifts – Recap

- a. Definition of spiritual gifts.
  - i. **Specific gifts (grace abilities) that are given to believers by the Holy Spirit.**
  - ii. **They are expressly given for the building up and maturity of the church.**
    1. **Discipleship & Evangelism – Think about Matt. 28:18-20 (The Great Commission).**
    2. So often, when we think of the “church,” we think of the institution of the church. That is the building and the programs of the modern church. The Gifts of the Spirit were not given so that the institution of the church could move forward. The Gifts of the Spirit were given for the movement of the church, that is, the forward expansion and maturity of God’s people. When we talk about the church in this context, we must think about people, not buildings. We also must think of movement, not programs.
- b. **Spiritual Gift v Natural Talent**
  - i. **Essentials of spiritual gifts:**

1. **Given by the Spirit.** – Not earned, achieved, or manifested.
  2. **Empowered by the Spirit.** – Not done in your own strength.
  3. **Grace abilities for Christians.** – They are only given to Christians.
  4. **Jesus is central.** – When you use your gift(s), they are always oriented toward glorifying Jesus.
- ii. **Essentials of natural talents:**
1. **Given from God at conception.** – These are for all people.
  2. **Can be used without the Spirit.** – You can use them under your own strength.
  3. **For all people.** – Has nothing to do with your salvation, and can be used for glorifying self.
- c. **Gift lists:**
- i. There is no one exhaustive gift list in the NT.
  - ii. Paul was not attempting to construct exhaustive lists of gifts when he specified the ones he did. Although there is sometimes an indication of some order (he puts apostles first, prophets second, and teachers third, but tongues last in 1 Cor. 12:28), it seems that in general Paul was almost randomly listing a series of different examples of gifts as they came to mind.
    1. **1 Corinthians 12:28**
      - a. Apostle, Prophet, Teacher, Miracles, kinds of healings, Helps Administration, tongues
    2. **1 Corinthians 12:8–10**
      - a. word of wisdom, word of knowledge, Faith, gifts of healing, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, tongues, Interpretation of tongues
    3. **Ephesians 4:11**
      - a. Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor-teacher
    4. **Romans 12:6–8**
      - a. Prophecy, Serving, Teaching, Encouraging, Contributing, Leadership, mercy
    5. **1 Corinthians 7:7**
      - a. Marriage, Celibacy
    6. **1 Peter 4:11**
      - a. Whoever speaks (covering several gifts), whoever renders service (covering several gifts)<sup>1</sup>
- d. **Remember** – There is no one exhaustive list in the NT of the gifts of the Spirit.
- i. **Eph. 4:11-15** - <sup>11</sup> **And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,** <sup>12</sup> **to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,** <sup>13</sup> **until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,** <sup>14</sup> **so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.**
  - ii. The church may appoint people to different work and functions, but unless they have the gifts of the Spirit, and therefore are themselves the gifts of Christ to his church, their appointment is valueless. The expression also ‘serves well to remind ministers that the

<sup>1</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 1019–1020.

gifts of the Spirit are not for the enrichment of oneself but for the enrichment of the Church<sup>2</sup>

e. Serving purposefully. → APEST<sup>3</sup>

i. **Apostle** – Pioneer, entrepreneur, visionary – (*Peter, Paul, John, Priscilla & Aquilla*)

1. **Description:** Apostles extend the gospel and plant churches. They ensure that the faith is transmitted from one context to another and from one generation to the next. They are always pushing into new territory, thinking about the future, bridging barriers, establishing the church in new contexts, developing leaders, networking trans-locally, and coming up with new and innovative means to do kingdom work.

ii. **Prophet** – Preaching, gives clarity to truth, calls to obedience – (*Isaiah, Jeremiah, Anna*)

1. **Description:** Prophets know God's will. They prioritize listening to God. They are particularly attuned to God and his truth for today and are zealous for the holiness of God. They question and question the status quo, bringing correction and challenging the dominant assumptions we inherit from the culture, insisting the community obey what God has commanded.

iii. **Evangelist** – Sharing the gospel & conversations with non-Christians – (*Philip*)

1. **Description:** These infectious communicators of the gospel message recruit others to the cause. They call for a personal response to God's redemption in Christ and also draw believers to engage the wider mission, growing the church. They have insight into how to articulate and relate the gospel to unbelievers, and enjoy spending time with non-Christians, often reminding other Christians that there are non-Christians still out there in the world. They may be people-gatherers, and wherever they go they seem to draw others into discussion about Jesus. They are not timid about their faith and seem to easily share with others regularly.

iv. **Shepherd** – Care, counsel, empathy, and concern – (*Barnabas, James*)

1. **Description:** Shepherds nurture and protect with a tender heart. As caregivers of the community, they focus on the protection and spiritual maturity of God's flock. They cultivate a loving and spiritually mature network of relationships while making and developing disciples. They tend to spend most of their time with other Christians and can easily empathize with others, often exhibiting lots of patience with those in need. They see needs, provide comfort, and encourage others. They get burdened by others' problems and have a knack for speaking the truth in love. They are good listeners and are easy to talk to and share deep feelings with.

v. **Teacher** – Those who explain tough concepts – (*Apollos, Philip*)

1. **Description:** They enjoy spending time studying and reflecting on the Scriptures seeking understanding so they can pass on their insights to others. They get excited about discovering hidden treasures within the text taking others into a deeper understanding. As communicators of God's truth and wisdom, they help others remain biblically grounded to better discern God's will. They encourage the community to remain faithful to Christ's Word and help others transition

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<sup>2</sup> Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 123–124.

<sup>3</sup> <https://senttotheworld.org/blog/f/apest-descriptions--5-fold-ministry-eph-411>

from having head knowledge to application. They are passionate about taking difficult passages and explaining them in a clear and understandable fashion.

- f. **The goal of the Christian life is to glorify God. We glorify God when we grow into maturity.**
  - i. What is done for the saints, and by the saints, is *for building up the body of Christ*. The word *oikodomē* has been used in 2:21, but here it has a broader meaning. The church is increased and built up, and its members edified, as each member uses his or her particular gifts as the Lord of the church ordains, and thus gives spiritual service to fellow members and to the head. Because of its applied meaning, the use of *oikodomē* with *the body* does not necessarily involve confusion of metaphors, but because of what he wishes to say now about the growth and unity of the church, the apostle finds the metaphor of the body more adequate than any other.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. The Body

- a. **Their pride problem.**
  - i. We have heard from Paul over the first four chapters of this letter that arrogance, boasting, and pride were the primary issues and sins for the believers in Corinth.
  - ii. They had an overly developed sense of pride and arrogance that was rooted in the culturally Greek tradition of wisdom.
    - 1. In many ways, they had thought that they had transcended their early steps of faith. Their pride even resulted in their arguing and dividing over their favorite pastor.
    - 2. Their pride resulted in significant dysfunction, and Paul needed to address it.
  - iii. Ultimately, humility was the only long-term cure for their pride.
    - 1. In this letter, Paul gives them a healthy dose of humility.
- b. **The body analogy** - In antiquity quite a number of thinkers used the analogy of the human body, as in the Stoic idea of the world or of the state in which each citizen is a member (cf. Seneca, 'we are the parts of one great body' [*Epistles* 95:52]). **Many commentators cite the fable of Menenius Agrippa used in a plebs revolt in Rome: the stomach appeared to the other members of the body to be doing nothing but enjoy the food they put into it; so they agreed to starve it, only to find that they thereby enfeebled themselves** (Livy, ii. 32). All the members of a body work for the common good.<sup>5</sup>
  - i. The main point of the section is stated simply at the start: "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ" (**v 12**). Bodies are a magnificent metaphor for the church because they express unity-in-diversity like nothing else on earth. The body is one, not in spite of the fact that it has many different parts which all have different functions but because of it. Oneness is only possible because of many-ness. Unity is only possible with diversity. So it is not surprising that the same is true of the body of Christ, the church. The next two sentences provide the rationale for our unity-in-diversity, in a pair of neatly matched opposites: many have become one (**v 13**), but the one remains many (**v 14**). The grounds for knowing that many have become one, for Paul, are our shared experience of the Spirit. All of us, whatever our ethnicity (Jew or Gentile) or station in life (slave or free), were baptized in

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<sup>4</sup> Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 127.

<sup>5</sup> Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 168.

one Spirit into one body. All of us were given one Spirit to drink (v 13). That shared experience of the Holy Spirit—Paul expresses it with strikingly experiential language, using the words *baptizo* (drench, plunge, immerse) and *potizo* (water, give to drink)—has turned many into one. The modern idea that some Christians have drunk from and been drenched in the Spirit and others have not is not just foreign to Paul’s argument here; it is in direct opposition to it.<sup>6</sup>

**c. Unity and diversity are to be values for the church.**

i. V. 14ff – Makes it very clear that both diversity and unity are to be values for the church. The church cannot function without the diversity of members. And, it cannot be healthy without the members being unified.

**ii. Unity – Unity is not the same thing as uniformity.**

**1. We are one in Christ and mission.**

- a. It has been an important point for Paul to stress in this letter that no one has come to Christ except through means of grace. That is, every member of the church is positionally on the same level with God as any other. We are one in Christ.
- b. Next, we are all called to the same mission of making disciples and evangelism. The big goal of the church is the same for all believers.

**2. We need each other.**

- a. There is no one person who can carry the whole mission on their shoulders. The body doesn’t function without its members.

**iii. Diversity – It takes hard work, but makes us so much stronger and healthier.**

**1. We are not all the same.**

- a. While we are positionally the same in Christ, we are not the same in a whole number of areas. Our ethnic, social, economic, political, and even theological differences don’t have to be points of division, but that aren’t erased into a myopic culture in Christ. This is actually a strength in Paul’s mind. The body couldn’t function with missional effectiveness without the diversity of its members. Too many churches confuse uniformity for unity, they not the same. Unity willingly does the hard work of working through differences. Uniformity demands conformity.

**2. We need each other.**

- a. Again, no one person has all of the gifts and can do all of the things. We need one another. And we need one another to sharpen, challenge, and help each other grow to become like Christ.

iv. What is the outcome of the unity and diversity of the body? → That care is extended for one another.

- 1. Or, in other words, that is how we know that unity and diversity are genuine.

### **3. “The same care for one another.”**

- a. V. 25 → The contrast between “division” and “equal concern<sup>24</sup> for one another” is especially appropriate to the situation of the Lord’s Table described in 11:17–34, where the “division” is precisely in terms of some abusing others by not caring for their needs.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew Wilson, *1 Corinthians for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God’s Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2021), 137–138.

<sup>7</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 615.

- i. Paul's concern is for diversity, on the one hand, and for mutual concern in the body, on the other. According to the analogies themselves, that means (1) that there must be a greater acceptance of a variety of gifts in the church. The singular focus on one gift, be it tongues, prophecy, or healing in charismatic churches or strictly cerebral gifts in others, destroys the diversity God intended for the body. But it also means (2) that, in terms of people, we must stop negating others as less important than ourselves. That is to destroy unity.<sup>8</sup>
- b. **A pertinent question** → In 1 Cor. 4:7, Paul has reminded them of a crucial truth in Christianity, everything that we have, we have received. – Salvation, hope, love, and eternal life, were all gifts of grace from God to us by his will and choice.
  - i. This is to be a needed antiseptic for pride. As God's people, we have nothing to be proud about because we have earned nothing. Everything we have is a gift of grace. That very fact is to drive our humility and our willingness to serve.
- c. In verse 9, Paul begins a series of contrasts to both remind the Corinthians of their lofty place (because of Christ) and to remind them (in a tongue-in-cheek) way that they shouldn't expect anything different than what they have seen the apostles experience.
  - i. This brings us to the actual plight of the apostles. Paul thinks of God as having set them where they were. He is not railing at some cross fate, but calmly accepting what God has done. The repeated references to the present (down to v. 13) shed light on the hardships Paul had to endure at Ephesus (cf. 16:8; Acts 19:23ff.). The verb *has put* (*apedeixen*) conveys the thought that it is owing to divine action that they are in the place where they are; God has appointed them to this position. The imagery is derived from the arena, as Moffatt's rendering brings out, 'God means us apostles to come in at the very end, like doomed gladiators in the arena!' *Epithanatiou, condemned to die*, is a rare word, and apparently refers to condemned criminals who were often paraded before the public gaze as objects of derision. They are *a spectacle* (*theatron* means 'theatre', and thus 'what one sees at a theatre'). The apostles are exhibited on a vast stage, for they are a spectacle *to the whole universe (kosmos), to angels as well as to men* (for the angels as spectators of human happenings cf. 11:10; John 1:51; 1 Tim. 3:16; 5:21; 1 Pet. 1:12, etc.). The combination *angels* and *men* embraces the totality of personal existence.<sup>9</sup>
  - ii. **The normal Christian perspective – Others first.**
    - 1. If I am aligned with Christ, do I expect anything different than what Christ experienced in his earthly life and ministry?
      - a. This is almost the subtext question for the Corinthians in Paul's words.

#### 4. The power of gratitude.

##### a. Gratitude changes the trajectory of our relationships with God and each other.

- i. If humility was the cure for their pride, then gratitude is the natural response that flows from a renewed sense of humility. This is true in every area of our lives. When we go from a distorted view because of pride, all of a sudden we are hit with a renewed sense of appreciation and gratitude.
  - 1. Maybe this was a time when you realized just how far someone went out of their way to serve you when you first thought that it wasn't all that much.

<sup>8</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 616.

<sup>9</sup> Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 80.

2. This could be when you look back as an adult and realize for the first time how hard your parents worked or the things that they sacrificed for your good.
  3. We all should have experiences like this that we can relate to.
- ii. Gratitude changes our interpersonal relationships.**
1. When we have a posture of thankfulness, we are far more patient and engaged with people in my life. This has so many positive impacts from lower stress and anxiety levels to reframed and healthier expectations for one another.
- iii. Gratitude changes our relationship with God.**
1. When we realize that the core of the Christian experience is grace received from God, our whole relationship with God changes.
  2. He no longer is a cosmic tyrant that needs to be appeased so that he would relent his torment. Instead, he is rightly seen as a loving a patient father.
  3. It especially impacts my relationship with God when I am in the tough things of life and suffering. If I am grateful for the grace that I've received, then when I am suffering, I see God as a refuge and strong tower in my life. He hasn't abandoned me, instead, he is with me and supplying the grace that I need for today.
- b. Here's a simple way for us to understand and see the power of gratitude.**
- i. Protects us from the corrosion of pride.**
1. Pride, as we can see in the Corinthian experience, is corrosive and destructive. It is like acid that drips on our hearts and minds. Slowly and over time it eats away at us and leaves our relationships distorted and in tatters.
  2. Gratitude on the other hand, does the opposite. It protects us by neutralizing the corrosive nature of pride, it does this by helping us to lift our eyes and see the best things first.
- ii. Positions us to see the best in others first.**
1. Pride is a very inward-looking reality and causes us to focus on ourselves as the primary point of engagement. This results in an over-focusing on both our positive and negative emotions and reactions. Other become a means to our emotional regulation.
  2. Gratitude on the other hand, looks at another person and sees them as an individual who positively (not perfectly) contributes your life. This doesn't excuse negative or wrong behaviors, but it also doesn't require another person to be the source or your emotional stability.
  3. When we are able to have a healthy view of ourselves and others, we are propelled to loving service.
- iii. Propels us to loving service.**
1. Pride is always demanding; there is no way around it. It constantly looks inward and selfishly demands more. While pride can appear to be focused on excess, it is really dominated by a scarcity mindset.
  2. Gratitude on the other hand, is rooted in generosity and something that has been received instead of what is demanded because of a perceived lack. This results in a willingness to serve and be generous to others in our lives.
    - a. The key in Christianity is that all of this begins with and is sustained by God. We have received lavishly and so we are to operate out of a position of gratitude. This is actually an adventurous calling in our world.