

Get ready to cover a lot of material today church family. The passage we just heard is usually covered in 2 sermons. I'll try to keep this one to an hour.

Today in our series, Do Unto Others, we will be looking at Respect through the lens of the Golden Rule. Again, let's remind ourselves of what that rule says?

Do Unto Others as You Would have them do unto you.

Today in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul is going to provide guidance in respecting everyone's gifts and differences. But first. Pretend for a moment that you are getting ready to fly to visit a friend in (Pick your town). You couldn't believe the great deal you got on the tickets! Almost half of what it cost the last time you visited your town. You've buckled your seat belt. The stewards have gone through the safety routine. It's almost time for take-off. Then you hear the pilot on the intercom: "Folks, this is your captain speaking. I hope you are happy with the cheaper ticket price you paid for this flight. We realized that there are so many people you never see. Our maintenance crews that service our airplane, the navigators, we only need them on a foggy night like tonight, and the air-traffic controllers up in the tower. Not visible here. The security people checking for dangerous items? You don't see them here on this plane, do you? Yep, we decided to do away with all those faceless people. We've been cleared for take-off, so sit back and enjoy the flight."

Like this potentially ill-fated flight, the Corinthians had a problem. They just couldn't give up finding ways to be divided. They were quick to dismiss anyone's value on appearance alone. It's a recurring theme throughout this whole letter.

Let's talk about who these Corinthians were. The city of Corinth was located in Greece in the southern province known as Acacia. It sat west of Athens between the gulf of Corinth and the gulf of Saronica. This was prime real estate. If you were planning a destination wedding, Corinth would be a top consideration. It was a city of commerce, connecting many parts of the known world. It was a convergence of different religions. In one city you could worship Greek

gods, Roman gods, and Oriental gods. There would of course be some Jewish residents. We know this because according to Acts Paul first went to their synagogue.

Corinth was a convergence of cultures and social strata. Greek and Roman culture. Slaves and free men. Roman citizens and non-Roman citizens. Plenty of reasons for divisions.

Paul arrives in Corinth on his second missionary journey and he establishes a church there. It's not long after this that they receive this letter. It's actually his second letter to them according to this letter. The purpose of this second letter is to address questions contained in a letter from the Corinthians to Paul.

The types of questions they were asking reveal the divisiveness they were struggling against. They were fighting over who was the best teacher of Christ. They were trying to justify sexual immorality, saying "I have the right to do anything." They were seeking Paul's permission to take each other to public court. They were flaunting their "knowledge" to justify being able to eat meat sacrificed to idols in their respective temples. They're excuse? We don't believe that these idols are the one God anyway. Slippery, slimy. They were also being selfish in fellowship after sharing the lord's supper.

This brings us to today's issue. Paul is again addressing their sense of superiority. For the fourth time in this letter, Paul says "now concerning". Although we don't know the specific question being addressed, it doesn't take long to figure out the general idea. In the Corinthian church people were making spiritual gifts a contest. They were making some spiritual gifts more important, more elite than others. This allowed the bearer of the "more important gifts" to be elevated in the church.

These Corinthians were reducing Spiritual Gifts to mere spiritual things. When we talk about a thing, we're referring to something that is unspecific, abstract, non-descript. These spiritual gifts are from a very specific, and very descript source. The Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit only that is the giver of spiritual gifts.

The Holy Spirit does not give the exact same gifts to every single person and these gifts are not like the 3 wishes you get from the genie of the lamp. There is no set limit for determining how each person with a particular gift is able to use it.

These gifts are not some kind of magical manipulation. It is God's spirit that determines to what degree a gift is useful in any given circumstance. For example, even though people with gifts of healing were around, according to 1 Timothy, Timothy was not healed of his illness.

We should not consider these spiritual gifts merely natural skills or talents. Yes, the Holy Spirit can enhance natural abilities, but this shouldn't be considered the same as spiritual gifts.

So, what are these spiritual gifts? Paul mentions nine specifically here. There's the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge. Some commentaries want to combine these. But you'll see the differences here. Wisdom, as Paul references, would refer to understanding the divine revelations and mysteries of God. Knowledge would refer to the supernatural awareness of thoughts and activities. We might call this intuition.

Next is the gift of faith. Don't confuse this gift with saving faith. The spiritual gift of faith refers to that Mountain moving faith that Jesus talked about.

Gifts of healing were not unfamiliar in the pagan world. But the healings that took place among the early Christians confirmed the arrival of the Messiah. Of Jesus. That the plural form of gift is used, hints that healing can be more than just physical. Amen?

Paul calls out the gift of the workings of powers. How would this differ from healing? Paul will explain more in chapter 15. But this refers to authority over malicious powers. All throughout the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Gospels, we find different ways to measure the testimony of a prophet, a messenger. Paul believed that the Holy Spirit could give someone a supernatural ability to test what was being taught to ensure that it was of the Lord.

Workings of powers plays into the next gift, prophecy. The gift of prophecy is more than just a prediction of the future. This is a revelation of divine origin, not human. Workings of powers seems like a pretty good gift to pair with someone who has the gift of prophecy doesn't it?

Finally, we have the gifts of tongues and interpretation of tongues. The official term for tongues is glossolalia or the ability to speak some kind of language unknown to the speaker. This was one gift that was highly prized among the Corinthians. They saw it as the ability to speak the language of angels and gods.

This made interpretation of tongues important. Interpretation doesn't mean a verbatim of what is uttered in tongues, but there should be a disclosure of what was said or expected by the utterance. Without interpretation using the gifts of tongues publicly was just show. How much you want to bet that this is exactly what the Corinthians were doing?

Ok, whew! I know that was a lot to take in. And we haven't said one thing about respect yet. Let's get to that, shall we?

Respect. As a verb, it means to actively consider someone or something worthy of high regard, to refrain from interfering with. The word occurs in the New Testament 29 times.

To speak about respect for one another. Paul uses an example that is, well, as plain as the nose on your face.

Paul uses our own human bodies to illustrate the importance of respect for all members of the body of Christ. Our spiritual gifts are like body parts. Every single part of our body has a job. Not every single part of our body looks the same or acts the same way. And Paul makes some outlandish statements to prove the importance of every single part, every single gift in Vs 21-24

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." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are

indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect, whereas our more respectable members do not need this.

Church family we need each other. We need you if you're married, we need you if you're single. Widow, widower, divorced, young, old, guys, gals. All races, all orientations, all creeds. All are worthy of honor; all are worthy of respect.

I'm going to make a genius statement right now. Ready? We have a lot of division in our country right now. Very different opinions about right, wrong, left, right, good, bad. There is nothing wrong with different opinions. But can we have them and still maintain respect for one another. Our founder, John Wesley had something to say about disagreeing with others. And believe me he had plenty of people he disagreed with. "If we cannot think alike, may we at least love alike"?

So, if you're a democrat... I love you. This country, this church, it needs you. If you're a republican...I love you. This country, this church, it needs you. If you're a libertarian...I love you. This country, this church, it needs you.. If you vote Green Party...I love you. This country, this church, it needs you. If you're independent...I love you. This country, this church, it needs you. If you're fed up with it all...I love you. This country, this church, it needs you.

Refuse, Church Family. Refuse to be drawn into hate.

As hard as it may be, let's live the Golden Rule in this election season. Respect is a key component. It might, just might give us a safe flight. Let us pray.

Our sermon song is by someone who wrote the book on respect. Aretha Franklin.