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Lord's Day Morning
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“Relationships in the Church”

I Corinthians 12

Introduction

Today marks the third in our four week series called *Sharpening Our Vision*. We have been trying to emphasize this month the things that make us who we are. Things have been changing over the last five years or so and we have come to realize that time can erode vision and purpose if we are not careful to continually evaluate, define and articulate the reasons God has called us into existence.

And so we started two weeks ago with the grand purpose and the end to which all of our activities and ministries should lead, that is, the glory of God. We glorify God best when we worship Him. So we purpose as a church to be a worshiping people. We also glorify God when we obey Him. When we sin, we fall short of His glory. When we walk in the Spirit and live for Him, His name is magnified. So we purpose to strive to live in obedience to Him.

Last week we explored how ministry flows from our desire to worship and glorify God. Remember the John Piper quote? *Ministry exists because worship doesn't . . . Worship is the goal and fuel of missions*. We do evangelism because we long for people to glorify God. And so last week we talked about loving our neighbor and developing eyes of compassion. And we saw how our living for His glory (holiness) sounds forth from us to make our witness strong and vibrant. And so we purpose to pray for and love and reach out to the lost.

Today now we want to consider the crucial aspect of our relationships with one another. How we relate to one another in the body of Christ is critical if we are going to fulfill the purposes God has for us.

[I Corinthians 12]

Do you ever wonder how this congregation is viewed by others in the community? It's really hard to get an accurate grasp of that. I think, depending on the subject, the testimony could vary widely. Perhaps a more important question might be how people view us who have come near to us - those who have visited and been in our fellowship. The history of this congregation has always been one of warmth and intimacy. For years I have received reports of our church's friendliness and hospitality. But as we have grown larger, occasional word filters back to the contrary. I'm sure there have been times when we have missed and failed to reach out to someone when we should have. Certainly as our numbers have grown, the challenges of connecting with everyone has grown as well. Have the changes that have occurred dulled our love for one another? Part of sharpening our vision involves revisiting and reaffirming the importance of living together as a family of God.

I Corinthians 12 gives us some important instruction on the kind of relationships we ought to have with one another. God shows us here what we ought to think about each other and how we can live, worship and minister together to best bring glory to Christ.

As we begin this morning, I want us to affirm the importance of several things that will provide the

foundation for healthy growing relationships in the church.

1. We must affirm what gives true value in relationships.

Last week we talked generally about loving people. We can readily understand that our call to love is not rooted in the loveliness of others. The value of people comes not from them, but from God. This is true whether we are talking about the lost or those who are in the church.

This, of course, is not how we naturally think. Isn't it easy to value someone based on their strength – maybe not physical strength, but strength of personality or character or will? Or to think someone who is more productive – in the world or in the church – is more valuable. Certainly we are tempted to think that if a person has it all together – a good marriage, good kids, no evident struggles – that they are more valuable or important. Look at verses 21-23. *"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, "*

True value is measured differently in the eyes of God. True value comes from what He has done not what we have done. (Lyrics from Christian song *The Old Violin*) True value in people in the church comes from four things.

1. We are created in His image. This sets us apart from every other created thing.

2. We have been redeemed. *You have been bought with a price.* I Cor. 6:20

3. We are part of the family of God. We belong to Him. You are His son or His daughter. The fact that God is your Father gives you value.

4. We have something to offer that family. God has put you in this family for a reason. God values your contribution in the family of God.

So we want to affirm the value of every person in this church.

II. We must affirm our commitment to Honor one another. (Read verse 24)

To honor means to think about others and to treat others according to their value. If people in the church have value that comes from God and not from their actions, then we have no choice but to acknowledge that value in the way we think about others.

Here's the place for deep soul searching and attitude checks. Is there some one or some ones in the church who really annoy you? At the heart of our relationships must be a commitment to treat people with dignity and respect. Now, that doesn't mean a soft position on sin. It doesn't mean we don't care about another's character or actions or relationship with God. But it means that we will strive to treat a person with love and compassion even if we must confront them with sin. There is no place for haughtiness and pride in the church. Honoring others begins with how we think about them.

III. We must affirm our commitment to care for one another. (Read verse 25)

One of the marks of a healthy church is that they think about each other and they look for ways to serve. I love the commitment you make to each other to serve meals when babies are born or

sickness sets in. Do you have any idea how many meals have been served in the last two months? (70) Maybe you noticed how nice the church yard looks. Here were the Fishers (Jim and Helen) and the Rhodas working in the yard this week, serving us all. Late Friday afternoon Jenny and I heard a power engine running out in our driveway. There was Jon Held noticing the mildew growing on the siding of the north side of the house. He just stopped by to wash it off for us. You could no doubt add to the list. The family of God looks for ways to serve one another. And just because we are not as small and intimate with everyone as we used to be (it use to be that if someone in the church had the flu everyone knew it – you couldn't sneeze without it making news!) doesn't mean you have license to hide from others and not serve. You have been charged by God to take the initiative in observing and meeting needs. Don't' wait to be asked or given an assignment – that's part of being in the family of God.

So these three things provide a foundation for our relationships in the church – and they build upon each other. It starts by recognizing the value of every person in the church. That should molds our attitudes so that we seek to honor others in the way we think about them. And then we will be poised to serve each other in times of need.

Now that may well lead you to a question. How can we take these affirmations and really live them out? Where do we get the energy, the ability, the desire to live like that? I know that sometimes you feel like your just barely hanging on to life. Where is the power supposed to come from? To discover the answer to these questions you have to go back to the beginning of this chapter. Verse 1

says, *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.*

The word gift in this chapter is *charisma* which means *to give*. It comes from another Greek word *charis* which means *grace*. The idea is that these things are a *gift of God's grace*. We cannot go into lots of details about spiritual gifts this morning, but we can make some important observations.

1. These gifts come from God. Verse 1 uses a word that simply means *of or from the Spirit*. So we are not just talking about strengths and talents inherited from parents or learned from our environment.

2. These gifts are supernatural. They are gifts of grace. That means they are the out workings of the power and holy influence of the Spirit upon our actions. The gifts of the Spirit are not powered or motivated by our abilities or innate goodness. They are the supernatural working of God to build up His body.

By the way, that doesn't mean when you exercise your gifts that you won't get tired or struggle with attitudes or always do the right thing. (We are not superman.) But it does mean God will give you the desire and ability to do things that as a non-Christian you would not be inclined to do or able to do. And you will do these things for His glory not your own.

3. These gifts are given to the church – to believers. Verse 7 – *to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit*. Every Christian has a gift of the Holy Spirit to use to serve Christ and His church in a special way.

So here is the thing. God has given you gifts for a purpose. And the purpose is not to make you a more buff or attractive Christian. I work out at the sports club. One of the things I have observed is

that there are all kinds of reasons people work out. Some, like me, do it so that we won't fall over dead from sitting behind a desk all the time. Others do it for the relationships. You can tell because they talk more than they exercise. But some do it because they want to look better. They want big bulging muscles and finely sculptured bodies because of what it does for their appearance and attractiveness to others.

The reason God has given us spiritual gifts is not so that we will look good to others. It's not so we can brag about being macho Christians. The reason he has given us gifts is so that others will benefit from their use. Gifts equip us to serve each other. And when we serve each other the body of Christ is built up and matured. Everybody profits. Christians in the church get encouraged. Young Christians begin to mature in their faith. Real needs are met. The name of God is magnified.

And consider this. When the gifts of the spirit are exercised in the church wonderful things begin to happen.

- God brings unity out of diversity. How can so many different kinds of people dwell together in harmony? The Spirit of God helps us to deny ourselves and live for others.
- God brings interdependence not independence. We begin to trust each other and lean on each other. God has designed us build each other up in the faith.
- God multiplies our laborers because he has gifted us with differing strengths and perspectives. As we use our gifts the gospel goes forth with power.

So I want to call you today to a renewed commitment to the body of Christ. (Begins with a call to faith and repentance if you are outside of Christ.) I call you to love your brothers and sister in the church. Will you honor one another and serve one another? If you have been distant from the people in the church, I invite you back into the intimate fellowship of the family of God. This summer would be a good time to renew relationships or build new ones. Things slow down in the summer ministry – so it's a great time to fire up the grill, dust off the ice cream maker and get to know the heart of your brothers and sisters in Christ.

I leave you with I Peter 4:10, 11. *"As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."*