

A church that values diversity

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[0 : 00] Now, I want to ask you a question about diversity.

Diversity. Does anyone know what diversity means? What is diversity? Difference, yes.

It seems like the average age over this side is a lot lower than the average age over this side. What's the gravity of the kids over here? But anyway, yes, difference. Diversity is difference.

Kids, anything to add? Diversity, what does it mean? Nobody knows. A group?

It is a group. It's a dance group, isn't it? Is that right, yeah? Yeah, that's exactly what I was thinking of, Jane, as well. Diversity, the idea that we're all different, yeah? We're all different.

[0 : 57] There is difference between us. Now, with the person next to you, ask this question. Who invented diversity? Cameron said it so loud that we all heard him.

Who invented diversity, Cameron? God invented diversity. Okay, that was an easy question. Ask this one to the person next to you. It might make you think a bit more. God invented diversity for what reason?

For what reason did God invent diversity? Talk to the person next to you about that for a second. Okay, sorry to interrupt your conversations. But turn in your Bibles to Revelation chapter 7, verses 9 and 10, and we will answer the question, why did God invent diversity?

God invented diversity for what reason? Let's have a look. Revelation chapter 7, verses 9 and 10. Let me read it to you. After this...

Hi, guys. Welcome. No, don't worry. It's fine. Oh, they're going to run out of chairs. You're going to have to sit on this side. There you go. Don't worry. So we've just been chatting and thinking about the answer to this question.

[2 : 13] God invented diversity for what reason? Revelation chapter 7, verses 9 and 10 says this. After this, I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, which is the Lord Jesus on the throne.

They were wearing white robes, and they were holding palm branches in their hands, and they cried out in a loud voice, Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

Why did God invent diversity? He invented diversity for his glory. Because God is glorified by people of all languages and nations and tribes gathering together and worshipping and praising him.

If we were all the same, God would not be as glorious, because we wouldn't see the glory that God has made in the diversity of different people and different gifts and different cultures and different backgrounds.

Now, one last question. I wonder this morning how many different languages there are in the room that we could say, praise the Lord, in a different language.

- [3 : 24] You want to have a guess at how many languages you think you've got in the room? How many different languages? Have a guess. What do you reckon?
- Kerry-J, have you got a number in your head? What do you think? Alice thinks five. Okay. You think just four different languages. Okay. Well, let's start. We can say, praise the Lord in English.
- Yeah? Anyone? Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Okay. Any other languages in the room that want to say praise the Lord? Can we do it in French? Alice, can you give us praise the Lord in French?
- You can say it. Can you do it in two? Lordi. Lordi. Lordi. Lordi. Lordi. Dieu. My French is not very good.
- But thank you, Dan. That's brilliant. Alice, let's give you another. Go on, say it in your language. Soma Yorba. We're up to three now. Dan, have you got another one?
- [4 : 24] Yeah. Go on. Kumisun Zambi. Kumisun Zambi. That's four. We're up to four languages. Okay. So, any other languages? Mortessa, you've got another language for us.
- Just wait. It's hard to say. It's hard to say, so I will not repeat it. I'm not going to say that. I'm not going to say that. Would you? Mortessa's got no confidence in me.
- Go on. Okay. So, we've got a fifth language. Well done, Mortessa. Just wait a second.
- Vicky. There we go. We're up to six now, yeah? I'm going to stop saying these because of fear of offending people with my... Yes, where were we up to? Do we have another one?
- Oh, yes. In Chinese. In Chinese. That's great. We're up to seven. Yeah, Google Translate doesn't count, right? Nick?
- [5 : 27] Nick? Doxa? Doceo. Doceo. Doceo. Doceo. There we go. So, we're up to eight. Eight.
- So, curry... Is that right?
- Yeah. Well done. So, we're up to nine. Come on. Have you got another one? I think Nigeria is like... Okay.
- Okay. So, we've got some Nigerian down the front as well. So, we're up to... We're too shy to say it too loud. So, we're up to ten. We're up to ten. Get off your phone, Cameron.
- That's not... Mike? Okay. So, we're up to eleven. So, we're... There was a bit of Hebrew, I think, over there. Eleven languages.
- [6 : 23] Isn't that amazing? That in this room... Are we... Have we got any more? That's great.
- That's twelve. That's twelve. That's great. Any... Any more? You must have... Yes. Yes.
- Great. We're up to twelve. We're up to twelve. More... Come on. You can say it in Turkish as well. So, where are we up to now?
- Thirteen. Thirteen. So, that's Turkish as well. Lucia? Who's...
- Lucia? Neva's going to say it for you. Don't worry. How do you say praise the Lord? Come on, Lucia. Don't be shy.
- [7 : 24] Don't be shy. It's the same as the French. She doesn't know. Don't worry. Great.
- Listen. Listen. Okay. I'll try. I'll try to get it all back together. That's great, isn't it? The Lord, even in this room, has given lots of different languages so that in our difference, we can say the same thing, which is praise the Lord, because God in his greatness has made us all different.
- And we're going to be thinking some more about that together in our sermon. But let me pray for us. I'm going to pray for us as we read God's word and then listen to it taught. Kids, I'm going to pray for you and for your Sunday school teachers this morning as you go out to Sunday school.

So, let me pray for you before you go. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, thank you that you made us all different for your glory, that you are such a great God that you couldn't just make one kind of person in one way, but you made all sorts of different people and different languages and cultures.

And we thank you especially that as a church here, we get a taste of that with so many different languages in the room. And we want to say together, praise your name. Praise the Lord in Jesus' name.

[8 : 41] Amen. Kids, go out to Sunday school. Sunday school teachers, go well. Right, we're going to read God's word together. So, if you have a Bible, turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 12, 1 Corinthians chapter 12, verses 12 to 31, and Liz is going to come and read God's word for us.

Liz. The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts. And though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.

For we are all baptized by one spirit into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free. And we were all given the one spirit to drink.

Now the body is not made up of one part, but of many. If the foot should say, because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body, it would not, it would not for that reason, cease to be part of the body.

If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be?

[9 : 56] If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact, God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

If there were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, I don't need you.

And the head cannot say to the feet, I don't need you. On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.

And the parts that we think are less honorable, we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty. While our presentable parts need no special treatment, but God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ.

[11 : 13] And each one of you is a part of it. And in the church, God has appointed, first of all, apostles, second, prophets, third, teachers, then workers of miracles.

Also those having gifts of healing, those able to help with others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles, are all prophets, are all teachers, do all work miracles, do all have gifts of healing, do all speak in tongues, do all interpret, but eagerly desire the greater gifts.

And now I will show you the most excellent way. Great, thank you, Liz, that's great.

Well, keep the passage open, because we're going to be looking at it together for the next few moments. And I want to start, if I can, by telling you what my goal is for the next, I don't know, 20 minutes or so, 25 minutes maybe.

Here's my goal. You can tell me then, after lunch, whether we hit the goal or not. Here it is. I want, if I can, through this passage, the word of God and by the help of the Spirit of God, I want us to be excited together as a church, that here at West Kilburn Baptist Church, we are the local expression of the body of Christ.

[12 : 37] So much so that when we gather as a church, when you walk in those doors at the back, when you come together and sit with one another, that you and I get to glimpse the Lord Jesus.

Not just each other. And we get to glimpse him in a way that just wouldn't be possible if we stayed at home and didn't come. Now, I want to suggest that we see that, we see the body of Christ, not because we're all the same, but because we're all different.

And as we gather together, we see, don't we, that God hasn't in church created, I don't know whether this works, but like a sausage machine, where basically he just churns out the same kind of person each time, and everyone's exactly the same.

But rather the body of Christ, rather than a sausage machine, is more like a mosaic, as God knits together different people from different cultural backgrounds with different gifts, to make something in the combination of it, which is wonderful and glorious and beautiful, and so wonderful that it carries the label, the body of Christ.

Now, I want to show you from 1 Corinthians 12 that we see that in at least four different ways. So let's get on with it and see how we see the glory of the Lord Jesus.

[13 : 56] So here's the first one. We see Jesus in how we join the church. We see Jesus in how we join the church. Now, this is super important, and in a way it's assumed by the rest of the passage.

So we need to get this clear in our minds as we start. We join the body of Christ by what Paul calls baptism by one spirit, or later on, being given the one spirit to drink.

So look down at verse 13. I'll read it to you again. For we were all baptized by one spirit so as to form one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free, and we were all given the one spirit to drink.

Now, I grant you that Paul's language is not immediately clear here. 1 Corinthians is actually the reply to a letter that the Corinthian church wrote to Paul.

So as you read 1 Corinthians, it's like you're listening to just one half of a telephone call. And so sometimes it's a little bit obscure what's going on. But actually we do know bits, and you can put it together as you read both Acts and 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians.

[14 : 59] And it seems as though the church have a particular problem that they are rating one another's spirituality on the basis of what people are able or not able to do. It seems that they're especially excited by people who can speak in tongues.

And they assume that if you could speak in tongues, that's because you were a mega Christian. You had a mega dose of the spirit. And Paul is saying here, no, that's not right. That's not right.

Why? Well, because every member of the church, every part of the body has been baptized into the spirit and has drunk of the spirit. All of us.

Because here's the important thing. That's what conversion is about, says Paul. In other words, Paul's point is that regardless of who you are, we join Christ, we join the one body in the same way.

It doesn't matter who you are or where you're from or what language you speak or what clothes you like or what food you eat or even how esteemed you are by others in the church. You all join church in exactly the same way.

[16 : 02] And what is that way? Well, it's by recognizing that before a holy God who made us, we need to be washed clean from the things that we've done wrong. Or to use his language here, we need to be baptized, washed, dipped, dumped in one spirit.

And we need to admit, don't we, that we need his help to live for the Lord Jesus because we cannot do that in our own strength. We need to drink of one spirit. Now, stand back from this for a moment and you can see why church gives us a unique glimpse of the Lord Jesus.

You are getting to see something this morning by being here with one another that you would not be able to see on your own at home because the truth is that every individual here, regardless of who they are, they're a Christian this morning, they belong to the churches because they've had the same transforming experience of the Spirit where we realize that living life for ourselves, going our own way, pursuing our own goals, is not taking us to glory but is dragging us to hell because we're not the gods we thought we were.

And so instead we come to Christ, we turn from our sin, as the Bible calls it, and we turn to him. And by faith in him, we reach out and receive the forgiveness and mercy of the cross. He exchanges our sin for his rightness, doesn't he?

So Paul says we've all been baptized into the one Spirit, drunk of the one Spirit. Now let me tell you, I think that has two very big practical implications for church life. If we see Jesus by all joining church the same way, it has two really big implications.

[17 : 39] The first one is this. It doesn't matter how many West Kilburn Baptist Church services that you have been to or how long your association with the church.

It doesn't matter if you've been on the cleaning road to the welcome team, the Sunday school team. It doesn't matter even if you've preached here before. If you have not trusted Christ for yourself, if you have not experienced this new life by the Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ, then in a profound sense, you are not a member of the church.

At least not in the way that Paul is thinking about here. You're not part of the body. Now I say that not because I'm trying to exclude you. I'm not trying to slam the door in your face. Quite the opposite. I say that because I want to invite you not only to attend here, but to belong here, to join here.

Not by asking you to join a rota or give money or even let alone dressing the same as everybody else who comes through the door. I'd be like trying to join a school by starting to do the homework.

You need actually to join the register, don't you, first? So perhaps you've been coming here for years, but still I want to invite you to join West Kilburn Baptist Church by what?

[18 : 51] Putting your faith in Jesus Christ and experiencing new life by the Spirit because the door is wide open and there's no other door to membership. There's no other door. The other implication, which I think is just as serious, is that you can't become a Christian without joining the body.

Not because joining a local church makes you a Christian, does it? Joining a local church doesn't make you a Christian in the sense of like coming along or signing up for membership doesn't make you a Christian.

Just like if you walk down the middle of the road, it wouldn't make you a car, would it? It would like to get you run over. Rather, the point is that actually as the Spirit makes us Christians, we want to join a local church.

Just like a car when it has been made drives down the road. So a Christian, when they have been made, join a local church. So let me say to you this morning, if COVID or maybe historic difficulties at church or relational struggles have made you cold on attending church, made you withdraw a bit, let me say to you, I understand that, but can I encourage you to come?

Not because all of those things will immediately disappear, but because if you're a Christian, you need to be in church. Cars that don't drive on the road cause a mess.

[20 : 13] So too that Christians who try to live their lives outside of any local church also end in disaster, don't they? So here's point one, you see Jesus in the body of Christ here because of the way that we get here.

We all join in the same way. Secondly, you see Jesus in my difference from others. You see Jesus in my difference from others, not just me, my as in everybody's difference from others.

In the context of the passage, Paul is talking about gifts. If you glance down at chapter 12, you'll notice in verses 7 to 11 and again in verses 27 to 31, he is talking about gifts.

So part of the differences between us in viewing the passage is this idea that we've all been given gifts by God to use for the good of one another and for the growth of his kingdom. We are all good at different things.

God has made us and gifted us that way for the good of others. One body, many parts, as he puts it. Now that's certainly what's going on here, but I want to start somewhere else because I think Paul has something else in view as well as our gifts.

[21 : 17] Look at verse 13 and notice the differences there. Notice in verse 13, he says, Jews and Gentiles, or Jews and Greeks, slaves and free. Here they are made into one body through the work of the Spirit in conversion.

And the differences here are not to do with what we are good at, but rather to do with where I'm from, my cultural background. Now some of the church are Jews by birth, says Paul.

They've been raised in the synagogue. They've been taught the law of God, but probably not taught the gospel. Some of them are literally Greeks, synonym there for Gentiles, but with an emphasis on the Greek cultural background, taught to think and reason in a slightly different way, eating different foods, considering all days the same.

And those people, Jews, Gentiles, slaves, free, are, verse 14, many parts of the one body. Now I warn you this morning, I'm going to labor this because I think this is super, super important for us.

You can't miss this all the way through the scriptures, that God's people are made up of all kinds of people. Revelation chapter 7 that we were looking at with the kids earlier, this great final gathering of God's people is people from every tribe, language, and nation.

[22 : 31] And it's not that those cultural and historic differences are obliterated by membership of the local church, but rather they are an important aspect of membership of the local church, where languages and people groups are visible within the body of Christ so that we can praise God because in a way that only he can, he has brought together a diverse group of people without obliterating their difference, but by sanctifying their difference.

The Greeks aren't pagans in glory, they're worshipping Jesus, not the pantheon of gods that they used to worship. The Jews are no longer trusting in their own righteousness and glory either, they're trusting in Christ alone, but still in a refined and glorified and sanctified ways, those differences remain visible, but united in Christ.

Why? Well, because part of the way the church represents Christ as his body is by its diversity and not its uniformity. Let me try and put it like this if I can.

The goal of Islam is to make all of its worshippers look the same. Yeah? To pray in row upon row of uniformed men bowing down at the same time.

I think the little kid there in the middle didn't get the memo, did he? Why? Well, because Allah, the God of Islam, cannot handle cultural difference. So he obliterates it, bans it even.

[23 : 56] But instead, as we gather as a church on a Sunday, what we long for is not row upon row upon row of people who look exactly the same and are doing exactly the same thing. We're looking for row upon row upon row of people who look different to one another.

Men and women, boys and girls, some in suits, some in shorts, some with tattoos at their arms, others with knots, faces from all over the world. And when they sing, you know, some people stand and sing and they're hardly moving.

Wonder whether they died standing up. That's me. Others are dancing around with their arms in the air. Why? Well, because our God, the true God, is the God who made the whole world and all of its languages and cultures and all of its difference.

You see, our God, the God of the Bible, the God who is really there, the God who made us, is the God who put rhythm in reggae music. Yeah?

He put spice in chicken. Incredible. He's the God who put the twang in the Scouse accent that you'll notice some of my children have. He's the one who put the rhyming in Cockney rhyming slang.

[25 : 09] Our God is the God who made some people to dance and other people like me who can't dance. He's glorified in the excitement of a child because he made that excitement.

He's glorified in the steadiness of a grandparent because he made that too. And the point is that coming to God in Christ doesn't obliterate those differences. It sanctifies them.

It rives them of lust and pride and self-obsession. But the spice is still there. The rhythm is still there because God, the true God, is worshipped by all languages, tribes, peoples, and nations.

I used to have this vague hope when I was at school because I was so bad at French. I thought maybe we'll all speak the same language in heaven and maybe there won't be French in heaven anymore.

I won't have to learn it. But that's not right, is it? In eternity, God is glorified by a plethora of languages and we have thousands of years to learn them.

[26 : 14] What a great, diverse bunch of people worshipping God for his praise and his glory. Now, if you come back to the passage, you can see that Paul's point with this body image in verse 15 to 20 is firstly to help us understand ourselves.

Look down at verse 15. Let me just read it to you again. Now, if the foot should say, because I'm not a hand, I don't belong to the body, it wouldn't for that reason stop being part of the body.

And if the ear should say, oh, because I'm not an eye, I don't belong to the body, it wouldn't for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be?

If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be?

As it is, there are many parts but one body. Notice this. This is so important. In this first part of the passage, the voice, the person speaking is not the hand speaking to the foot to exclude it or the eye talking to the ear to exclude the ear.

[27 : 23] Rather, this is the foot saying to itself, I'm not a hand so I don't belong. The ear saying to itself that it's not an eye so it doesn't belong. In other words, the first thing the passage is addressing is personal insecurity.

How do I understand my own difference to everybody else in the room? Why? Well, I think because Paul thinks the first person who has to come to terms with their difference from everybody else at church is not everybody else but you, me.

I have to come to terms with the fact that I'm different to everybody else in the room. I have to come to terms with the fact that by belonging to church is by definition belonging to a group of people who are not like me.

In other words, I don't walk into church and go, brilliant, that's a church for old people and I'm an old person or brilliant, that's a church for rich people and I'm a rich person or even the opposite or that's a church for rich people and I'm a poor person and I don't belong or that's a church for Caribbean people and I'm from Nigeria so I don't belong or that's a church for suit wearers and I don't have a suit so I don't belong.

That's not true. Why? Look at verse 18. What's the true story of diversity in the local church? It's that God is placing people exactly where they're supposed to be. This is fantastic, isn't it?

[28 : 41] Through the door of faith in Christ, through God's sovereignty over where you live, who you know, the twists and turns of your life, God has brought you to this fellowship with your cultural difference and background and your particular gifts, your particular wounds and needs, your insights and perspectives because this is exactly where he wants you and without you and without your difference to everyone here, well, we'd all be worse off like a body with no sense of smell or no feet or no eyes for seeing and just because you think you don't fit doesn't mean you don't belong because actually the fact that you don't fit means you do belong.

See, this is it. When you and I walk into church, we say, brilliant, this is where I belong. Not because everybody looks like me, not because everybody sounds like me, not because everyone dresses like me.

That's a terrible church. If you find yourself in that church, run away. Instead, you walk into church and you see, what do you see? You see the Lord Jesus.

How do you see the Lord Jesus? Because you see that everybody is different to you but that you belong to them through the Lord Jesus Christ. That you are part of this mosaic that Jesus is putting together to his glory.

Jesus and the power of his cross is the only one who can bring together all of these cultural differences and hold them for his glory. Thirdly, see Jesus seeing others difference from me.

[30 : 16] This then, I think, is the focus in the next part of chapter 12 and verses 21 down to verse 26. The temptation here, I think, is slightly different. And I don't think the temptation is so much to say to others, oh, you don't belong here.

I think perhaps we all know that's wrong. Rather, the temptation is, I think, to say that other people aren't so valuable here. Do you notice that? The temptation is that we look at others who are different in the church and we don't say, oh, you don't belong because we know that's too rude.

Rather, we say, oh, no, you're not as honourable or as important as everybody else to use the language of the passage. Let me give you a concrete example so that we can work out what we're talking about.

Turn back, just if you will, to chapter 11 of 1 Corinthians. You see a practical outworking of this in verse 17. The Corinthian church, you should, if you've never read 1 Corinthians, read 1 Corinthians because it will fill you full of joy because the Corinthian church was such a mess and yet Paul still thinks they're full of saints and they're worshipping for the glory of God.

If you thought, if you think our church is messy, you should read 1 Corinthians. It's really, really, really great. They come together to celebrate the Lord's Supper. This is how chaotic their church life is.

[31 : 29] They come together to celebrate the Lord's Supper. They're gathering on a Sunday, and so some people are having to work on a Sunday and they celebrate the Lord's Supper but they don't wait for one another until the slaves in the church come late to church because they've been working all day.

They've been working late and they don't get there as quickly as everybody else is able to get there. By the time they arrive in church, all of the Lord's Supper has been eaten and people are even drunk in church because they've drunk so much of the wine.

The slaves don't get to have any of the Lord's Supper. It was totally, totally chaotic. He says that there's nothing to commend the way they do the Lord's Supper.

In fact, it's doing more harm than good. He's saying to them, listen, your church gathering is so bad. Close the doors and don't do it because it would be better if you didn't do it than the way you are doing it. Crazy, isn't it?

But what does he say in verse 20 about what that means for everybody in the church? Listen to how he puts it. Verse 20, so then when you come together it's not the Lord's Supper you eat.

[32 : 34] For when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry, that's a person coming late, and another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing?

What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter. Now notice what he says. Because of the way they are doing it, this ceases to be the Lord's Supper even for the rich people who get to eat it all and drink it all.

Do you notice that? Because the rich aren't valuing the poor in the sharing of the Lord's Supper, then not even the rich are celebrating the Lord's Supper. You know, they're eating and drinking but it's not the Lord's Supper they're celebrating.

In other words, the lack of honoring of the weak in the church means that church is no longer church for the rich. Now bring that back to chapter 12 and it seems that this tendency of the church to overlook or not value certain people from certain backgrounds or not to esteem their gifts as much as other people's particularly if people can't speak in tongues it seems.

They treat those people as second class citizens and Paul says using the body metaphor listen, that's the opposite of what church should be like. When it comes to a body the parts that we are most embarrassed about work out which parts those are yourself we don't want to show them in public those are the parts over which we take the most care verse 23 whereas the parts that we don't worry about that we think are great and attractive well we don't need to worry about them at all do we verse 24 and so it should be in the gathering of the local church that the weak the vulnerable those whose contribution might be small those are the people we should take extra care over those we should make sure we are honoring in the gatherings of the church again let me say to you this is unique in the church of Jesus Christ now if we said before that the God of Islam obliterates cultural difference then notice that the God of Western materialism runs over all the weak and the vulnerable you've noticed that haven't you yeah at work who is it that gets esteemed at work is it the person whose health means that they've had to drop to part time because they can't any longer work full time no it's not is it everyone's sort of scowling about them or talking about them behind their back is it the cleaner who nobody notices who empties the bin down the row of desks and no one even stops to say thank you of course they don't honor that who's the person who's honored at work it's the person who makes the most money isn't it the person who produces the most it's the person whose name is at the top of the headed paper whenever we used to have that of course that's how the world works not in the church in the body of christ it's different because listen your value here is not a function of your productivity your value here is not about the glamour of your gifting your value here is in what you're attached to christ jesus the head and the weaker and the more vulnerable you are the greater discretion and care we should treat you with see this is it when you walk into church you see jesus how well you see jesus because that's how everybody joined the church you see jesus because you see that you are belonging to a mosaic of people that he is gathering in his name and you see jesus because you see weak and vulnerable people being cared for and loved in a way that cannot be explained other than the work of christ jesus loves the weak and the broken gathers them into his church a bruised reed he doesn't break and a smouldering wick he won't put out finally then we see jesus in our shared priority our shared priority i want you to notice as we finish that the passage comes on to say one more important thing in these closing verses see if church displays jesus by being one body in many parts then it also shows jesus in what it does together let me reread these closing verses to you verse 27 now you are the body of christ and each one of you is a part of it and god has placed in the church first of all apostles second prophets third teachers then miracles then gifts of healing of helping of guidance and of different kinds of tongues are all apostles are all prophets are all teachers do all work miracles do all have gifts of healing do all speak in tongues do all interpret now eagerly desire the greater gifts and yet i will show you the most excellent way now as you first read that it sounds like a contradiction of everything else we've just been saying surely the whole point that we've been noticing is that there's not supposed to be a hierarchy in church but now it seems as if paul is giving one but look carefully with me at the verses and let's see the point together there's a theme running through these chapters which we notice in chapter 11 and it's carrying on all the way through into chapter 14 it's all about their gatherings as a local church what they do when they come together and the point is that a diverse company

[37 : 44] of people the body of christ should have a particular focus when they gather together and what is that purpose well it's the purpose of building one another up in the lord he calls it edifying one another if you glance over to chapter 14 and verse 12 you'll see paul spell it out there let me read chapter 14 verse 12 to you so it is with you since you are eager for gifts of the spirit you really want these exciting gifts of the spirit if you're eager for those try to excel in what those that build up the church now those gifts that edify the church or build up the church are listed in an order at the end of chapter 12 and the point is not that this is a complete list it's not supposed to be a complete list instead the point is that the list is in the opposite order to which the corinthian church would have put them right because right at the bottom of the list the least valuable thing to do when you're gathered together is what speaking tongues he says it's right at the bottom and it starts instead with the apostles and prophets and then teaching and then the signs that in the first century particularly accompanied the apostles ministry miracles and healing then helping and guidance or administration and last of all tongues now at the end of a long sermon I am not going to get into a debate about charismatic gifts you can ask me that after lunch as we gather again rather the point seems to be here the big point is that the church is to have a particular focus when it gathers together and the focus is not showing off your gift not on impressing others but on building one another up and how is the church built up well it's done by prioritizing the teaching and proclamation of the apostles message you notice that that's why they're at the top of the list a message testified to by the miracles and healings that accompany their work it means that the gathering of the local church is not primarily about self-expression you might be good at many things that you don't get to show off in the gatherings of the local church that's okay because the gatherings of the local church are not meant to be the occasion for us to show off all the different things we're good at rather gatherings of the local church are to be about building one another up and we do that don't we as the message of the apostles and prophets is made clear as the gospel is made clear we are built up and that doesn't make the teacher a more important person it doesn't even make the apostles and prophets more important than us you know they're

Christians just like we are they're standing before God is exactly the same as ours they have been baptized by the same spirit and they drink the same spirit but it does give their work an important place in the gatherings of the church even as we all use our gifts to make those times useful even as we guide and encourage one another in the body of Christ and we do that verse 31 in the most excellent way what is the most excellent way love chapter 13 so here it is let me finish now when you walk into West Kilburn Baptist Church you see Jesus because you are seeing his body a body of people you have been uniquely joined to him by faith where everyone is different in a way that reflects the glorious diversity of our triune God Father Son and Spirit a place where we value the weak and the needy just like the Lord Jesus did and a place where you find his message of salvation is sung about is read is prayed and is preached that together we might see the Lord Jesus in his beauty and his glory let me pray for us heavenly father thank you that you have made us all different and that we gather and come to church in the same way by faith in the

Lord Jesus Christ thank you that that means that nobody here is a better Christian than anybody else because we have all been made right by Jesus and not by our actions thank you that you've made us all different to one another and that that difference doesn't mean that we don't belong but that means we have a unique opportunity to bring you glory as we gather together in Jesus name and we pray that our church and our gatherings together would build one another up in faith as we make the gospel clear in the words that we sing in our conversations with one another in the things that are prayed in your word as it's opened and taught bring yourself glory we pray in Jesus name amen amen