

Far Greater than the Ingredients 2024
1 Cor. 12:1, 12-14, 18-20, 27 1 Cor 3:5-10

1 Corinthians 12:1, 12-14, 18-20, 27 (New Revised Standard Version)

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

1 Corinthians 3:5-10 (New Revised Standard Version)

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it.

When Kathy bakes, something remarkable happens in our kitchen.
The eggs, the butter, flour and other ingredients,
each of which seem to have nothing in common, yet somehow
they **combine and transform** into delicious cakes, scones & breads,
that are far more tasty than any of the ingredients she uses.
Thus the whole becomes much greater than the individual ingredients.

And yes, no doubt any of our chemistry professors
could probably describe the molecular processes
of how all the ingredients **interact & transform**,
but the way the different ingredients **connect and combine**
also demonstrates things working together as God intends.

That is how God set things up to function, especially the Church,
in which each individual church member **connects & combines**
as a unique gift from God with something to contribute,
to serve according to the purpose and pleasure of God...

... just as Paul explained to the Christians in Corinth, vs. 12, 14, 27

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

The Apostle Paul had started the church in Corinth, but after he left
issues arose that led to divisive and destructive conflict
because of their self-focused misunderstanding of God's gifts,
which distracted them from the true mission of the Church.

As a group, the church in Corinth had been blessed abundantly
with a vast array of spiritual gifts, resources and abilities,
and as a faith community, they had it all going for them.

The problem was, those with the more visible and prominent gifts
assumed and promoted the idea of **a hierarchy of spiritual gifts,**
in which they saw themselves as superior to all the others.

But since all our gifts and talents are all entirely unearned,
and even life itself is a gracious gift and blessing **from God,**
there really is no cause, room or place for human pride.

The point is, that all of the spiritual gifts we have and receive
are freely-given as **expressions of God's gracious love for us,**
to build up the church to serve its mission out into the world.

The movie "Chariots of Fire" is about the life of Eric Liddell,
who won in the 1924 Olympics, then served in China as a missionary
until he was killed in a Japanese internment camp during WWII.

In one scene of the movie, his sister complains,
that his love for running and athletics is delaying him
from faithfully serving God as a missionary in China.

In answer to her criticism, he responds,

**"I believe God made me for a purpose,
but he also made me fast, and when I run, I feel God's pleasure."**

Eric believed that his athletic ability was truly **a gift from God,**
meant to be used well according to the purpose and pleasure of God,
which was the way he was trying to live out his whole life,
as a witness to the reality & presence of God in this world.

Each one of us are created special and unique – we are like no other.

Every single person created by God throughout all human history
has always been special & unique, and lovingly irreplaceable.

**And nothing is ever more satisfying, fulfilling or rewarding than
doing that for which we are well-equipped & gifted by God to do well.**

As Paul goes on to explain it, by God's deliberate choosing,
every-one of us has been given exactly the right spiritual gifts,
and they are all necessary in accord with God's will & purpose,
which connects all of us as **the blessed children of God,**
which also calls for mutual respect and appreciation.

And though some may be more publicly-visible than others,
all are equally **a reflection of God's grace and wisdom,**
and **all are necessary for the church to fulfill its mission.**

What God chooses and gives is always appropriate and fits perfectly.

The Church can be compared to a beautiful stained glass window --
where each of us are just one tiny shard of colored glass
that has been cut to fit into a particular ideal spot.

Each piece equally contributes to the overall picture
by each uniquely refracting & reflecting the glory of God's light,
each helping depict the full beauty, wonder and delight
as God's love shines through us, each one of us
all shining outward toward a darkened troubled world,
that's so very much hurting, anxious and in need...

... so that our gifts can fit together like pieces of stained glass
that combine to reveal a true picture of God's love and purpose,
so that together we produce the picture that God intends.

And since no one person possesses all of the gifts that are needed,
it really doesn't matter which piece of God's artwork we are,
for if any of the pieces are missing from the picture
it will be incomplete and flawed, **which means that**
each piece, each and every person is necessary and significant.

By grace and faith we have all been grafted into the body of Christ,
where we develop depth and live out our faith as we participate
actively and usefully in the life and mission of the Church
as an expression of our shared faith and commitments.

The Church of Jesus Christ is uniquely where we grow in God's grace,
which equips us to serve the Church's ongoing mission and purpose,
so that together, **we can make a difference in this world.**

And the way we understand and exercise our individual spiritual gifts
is of tremendous importance
to the spiritual health and effectiveness of our church...

...for it's through the faithful & appropriate application of our gifts
that our faith stays alive, that our faith expands and grows deeper,
as together, we accomplish our true mission, the Kingdom of God.

Paul's point is that we are all individual parts of Christ's body,
and we have all been gathered into the Church to serve together...

... as the apostle explains, vs. 18, 20, 27

But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. As it is, there are many members, yet one body. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

It's also important to recognize that
the body unity that Paul was describing should not and must not
obliterate our individuality, diversity or our uniqueness.

No, each is called as part of the one body of Christ

to love and serve together all for the common good,
much like individual ingredients becoming a delicious cake,

or like the parts of the one body, we belong and cooperate together
each one gifted **to help distribute God's love, grace & blessings,**
since it's really God's grace flowing through us to serve others.

But sometimes our painful experiences in life can crush our spirits.

In life our defeats and disasters, our failures, fears and flaws
can accumulate and damage our sense of self-worth and value
concealing the priceless-ness and unique giftedness
that we each receive from our gracious and loving God,

and so in crushed fear we may use far less than our full giftedness,
we may choose to sit back and wait for others to accomplish the work,
and so settle for less than the full blessings God intends for us,
and worst of all,
accept the terrible lie that our lives don't matter.

Our loving God has never once made the same person twice,
and each one of us is different, uniquely special, gifted and loved,
and so we are each called to our unique and God-given purpose,
toward accomplishing the mission and ministry of the Church...

... as Paul explains and describes it, *vs. 5-7,9*

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. For we are God's servants, working together.

Since it is *only God who gives the growth*, and not by our human effort,
and since it is God who brings about the success and accomplishment,
no one has cause to boast or feel more important than anyone else.

As servants, Paul and Apollos or whoever the Lord calls and equips,
are loved and blessed to do the bidding and building for the master,
always as cooperative fellow workers in the service of God. *vs. 10, 8*

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose.

Therefore, all are needed, fundamentally equal as Christian workers,
each under God, each in obedience called to God's mission and plan.

Our task, as a community of faith, of grace, of unity & discipleship
is to discover our gifts and to help others discover their gifts,
so that we can all be a blessing for building-up the body,
for that is how we as Christians grow deeper in our faith.

This world has rarely seen what such a congregation could achieve,
if all our lives and gifts were fully dedicated to Christ,
and to showing love to others, as the Lord has loved us,
if every member were fully committed to using their gifts,
just as Paul describes and urges in his letter to Corinth.

We are all blessed by God with some way that we can serve usefully
to build relationships and deepen our faith by serving together.
**Every one of us can make a real difference to further God's Kingdom,
by serving as conduits through which the grace & love of God can flow**

The ideal as it's described in Scripture is that each one of us
lives out the full blessing that God intends and wants to enable,
by freely serving joyfully & eagerly with our particular gifts.

Friends, let us never forget that God loves all of us infinitely,
and has given us all wonderful & satisfying things that we can do
meaningful ways to serve joyfully for the common good,
to live out a meaningful and fulfilling Christian life...

... for as long as we live in this world,
there will always be some way that we can make a difference,
for at the very least we are able to pray,
to encourage and affirm the efforts of others.

Today we are going to ordain and install new church officers,
elders, who serve to envision, lead & oversee our ministries,
and deacons,
who serve to guide and carry out our ministries of compassion.

I urge you, that as we celebrate God's call for them to serve,
please reflect on your own calling and your gifts from God.
**Remember that you too are called and gifted by the Lord to serve
in what whatever service and mission God has entrusted to you.**

God has chosen to use each one of us in countless & wonderful ways
to accomplish various tasks at various times & in various places.
And we will either be faithful to God's call, or we will choose not.

Consider God's word and call (Ephesians 4:11~15, 1 Peter 4:3)

The gifts he gave were ... to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

Whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ.