

Chapter 12

Seeking Of Spiritual Excellence

“... as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts,
seek that ye may excel ...”

– 1st Corinthians 14:12

In 1st Corinthians 14:12, *“Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.”* Paul is writing to the local body at Corinth. This was a church that, as we all know, had many problems, struggles, divisions, and contentions; and problems were caused by these divisions. There were errors on many fronts in the church. Paul wrote 1st and 2nd Corinthians to address some of these issues.

The letters of 1st and 2nd Corinthians really reveal the sad state and condition that all the churches of the Lord can slide into simply by regarding the wisdom and philosophy of the world rather than the council of the Lord. All you have to do is heed to the council and philosophy of the world, and you have problems. That's true in our individual lives and in our church lives as well.

In these letters, specifically in 1st Corinthians 12, Paul addresses each member has a vital connection to Christ, the head. This connection, this relationship between the members of the church, individually and between them and Christ, is vital and essential to the health of the church. A church can only be spiritually healthy if there is a proper relationship between members and Jesus Christ. Congregating together is no magic formula for a healthy relationship with the Lord if the members are living a life that's not in a close relationship with the Lord. If we, as a church, as an assembly, do not have a proper relationship with the Lord when we congregate, we can not possibly be spiritually healthy. If we're going to be the church that people need, then it is crucial that each and every member must have a proper relationship to the Lord.

If a church is going to be what people need, then the members must be spiritually right. You can preach truth, the church can preach truth, the church can write up a statement of faith, and they can be as sound as can be, but if the members are not spiritually right, the church isn't right. That has to be. It doesn't matter, you can have a statement of faith, and that can be sound, but that doesn't make you right.

The only way you can be right is for each member to be right.

We as individual members must have a right attitude toward the spiritual, if we're going to be the church that people need. We, of course, live in very wicked times. We all know this. We live in times where sin, defiance of God and God's authority is rampant. There's an openness about sin that we have never seen in our lifetime. It's a time when people are seeking to force their sinful lifestyles, rebellious, ungodly lifestyles, not only on society, but they try to force these things upon the Lords churches as well. You can find a church, an assembly that will let you do just about anything you want to do. You don't have to bring it here, because we're not going to allow you to do that. You might as well go somewhere else. But they don't want to do that because they're enemies to the truth and the Lord's house. In spite of all of that, we can still be the church that people need.

We live in times when wrong is defended and right is mocked and ridiculed and made fun of. But, we can still be the church that people need in spite of all those things. In order to do that, we must not become the world. If we become the world, we cease to be what people need. If we become the world we can no longer help people. We can no longer be what they need.

We live in a day where the term great churches, "that's a great church", is thrown around very often. But a church can not be great if it's not what people need. If it's not what the ungodly need, I don't care whatever else they may offer, they can not possibly be great. A church can not be what people need if the members of the church are not what people need. If our individual lives are not what people need, if our individual lives are what people want rather than what people need, when we congregate, it doesn't just magically happen that we then become the church that people need. Everything depends on our own personal relationship with the Lord. A church can only be great if it is what an ungodly, humanistic society needs. A church can

not be the church that people need if the members are not spiritually right.

1st Corinthians 14:12, contains an exhortation that is applicable to members of the Lord's churches everywhere. It is an exhortation that if we would give heed to, that if we would simply obey, we would prevent a lot of problems and we would be and will continue to be the church that people need.

There are five key words that we want to notice here in 1st Corinthians 14:12; zealous, spiritual, seek, excel, and edify. These key words reveal our responsibility and duty. In these words we see what should be the desire of every single member of Home Baptist Church desire and any of the Lord's churches.

This message is on the seeking of spiritual excellence. If we're going to be the church that people need, we have to always be progressing spiritually. We can not cease to progress spiritually, because if we do, and it goes on for a period of time, you will cease to be the church that people need. I don't care how many new members you may add, and how many things you may do and how many visitors you may have, when a church ceases to progress spiritually, they are in serious, serious trouble. They are in danger of having the candlestick removed.

The "principle" stated in 1st Corinthians 14:12 is also stated in the second paragraph of the church covenant. That is, is stated in the second paragraph of the church covenant, which says, "We engage therefore by the aid of the Holy Spirit to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge", that is each one of us needs to be growing, or progressing in knowledge, "in holiness", this is each one of us has a responsibility to progress in holiness; if we're going backward in these things, we're on the road to ceasing to be the church that people need; "to advance the church in comfort, to promote it's prosperity, and spirituality."

This is a promise, this is a pledge of taking an active interest in the church of which we are a member. It is a

pledge to be actively interested in the spiritual well being of the church. The only way to be interested in the spiritual well being of the church is for you and I to be interested in our own spiritual well being. We have a pledge here of participation in the spiritual progress and well being of this church. We each pledge that each one will do everything we can for the spiritual well being of Home Baptist Church, and as members we are responsible to and obligated to the church for that. The church is to hold us accountable. If you do not want accountability, then you should not be a member of one of the Lord's churches. The church has the right and authority to make you accountable, to cause you to give an account. It does matter how we live.

It should be our commitment to put forth whatever labor, exertion, and time that is needed to cause this church to be always moving forward in the spiritual realm, and never moving backward spiritually, but always moving forward spiritually. The danger of moving backward spiritually is, where does it stop? When are you going to stop it? You can't just stop it any time you please. Before long it gets out of control and then the church ceases to be what people need.

Each member has a responsibility to cause the church to increase, be developing, and advancing spiritually. In other words, we're to be a true addition to the church, not just a numerical addition. When we truly add to the spirituality of Home Baptist Church, that's a true addition. We must never get so interested in numerical progression that spiritual progression takes a back seat. Spiritual progression is always to come first.

First of all, in 1st Corinthians 14:12, there is such a thing as spiritual excellency. Notice the word "excel" in that verse. To excel is to exceed beyond, surpass, to be better than what we are, to shine forth. What it says here is, "*that ye may excel*". That phrase is indicative that there is more out there because we can excel. There is more out there for us to obtain, to grasp spiritually, to lay hold of spiritually.

Those words, “*that ye may excel*”, are indicative of a possibility, an opportunity. We have the possibility and the possibility exists, that you and I can excel spiritually. We have the opportunity for each one of us to exceed wherever we are spiritually, right now. There is and we have a possibility to surpass wherever we might be spiritually, right now. Therefore it becomes our responsibility, it becomes our duty.

There is the possibility to advance beyond where we are spiritually, to be better, to shine forth spiritually. This should be our desire, aspiration, and longing, to surpass, to go beyond, to go further than wherever we are spiritually right now. That's true of each and every member. Such is necessary if we're going to continue to be the church that people need.

There is an attitude necessary to excel. We see that in the words “zealous” and “seek”. There is a spiritual excellency and we are to zealously seek that which is spiritual. We are to be zealous of the spiritual, which means the spiritual is to have the priority, be foremost, be primary, and be supreme. Being the church that people need is not about being numerically or financially progressive. It's all about being spiritually progressive, about advancing spiritually. It's not about advancing in numbers, it's not about advancing in dollars, because we could have one or two million dollars in the bank and that still will not make us the church that we need to be, or the church that people need. We can fill the building to the point where we have to enlarge it, but that will not make you the church that people need. There has to be a spiritual advancement. We have to be spiritually healthy. That is the only way we can possibly be the church that people need. It's all about being spiritually progressive.

We're to be zealous to excel spiritually. That means each one of us is to have a passion to go beyond where we are. We are to be devoted, dedicated to excelling spiritually. Each one of us needs to personally take on the responsibility

that we are going to be devoted and dedicated to excelling spiritually.

To zealously seek means that we are enthusiastic about this. People can get very enthusiastic about a building program or when they see the treasury is growing. We ought to be enthusiastic about progressing spiritually. That's what ought to enthuse and excite us, that the church is progressing spiritually. It means that we're going to be eager, vigorous, and committed in this thing of excelling spiritually.

To excel spiritually, to zealously seek to excel spiritually is the opposite of indifference and apathy. You talk to almost any pastor of any denomination today, and ask them what the most discouraging thing is and almost all will say indifference and apathy. It's a discouraging thing. When I talk about indifference and apathy, I'm talking about it in the realm of the spiritual. There is a great indifference and apathy about spiritual things. We are to zealously seek, to go in search of spiritual excellence. We're to seek it, to go looking for spiritual excellence. We're to work toward it. Each one of us, as an individual member, has a responsibility to work toward spiritual excellence, to seek, to achieve, and obtain spiritual excellence. It's to be our goal, aim, and focus to excel spiritually. No matter where you are spiritually, there is a higher plain of spiritual living, a higher level to advance to. We ought to always be seeking that, and we ought to do so with great zeal.

The world and our culture continues to grow worse and worse. Unless we seek earnestly to excel spiritually, there is no way you can continue to be the church that people need. You can't sit still and be the church that people need. As the world is getting worse and worse, we need to be getting stronger and stronger spiritually to the same degree that the world is getting worse and worse.

What is happening today? Churches are being weakened spiritually by our culture, our society, and the world. If that trend continues, they will cease to be the church that people need. And once those trends are allowed

to continue, there are very few exceptions where they stop. Those are trends that you do not get out of. It's just like when a church starts surrendering things, you're not getting them back. Once you give it up, they're gone. We better be careful what we give away. I'm not talking about money. I'm talking about spiritual things. I'm talking about truth. We better be careful what we compromise on because what we give away, we're not going to get back.

We have to get out of the mindset of contentment when it comes to spiritual things. We can't be content where we are spiritually, as individuals or as a church. We have to get out of the mindset of mediocrity. We can't settle for the norm, for the ordinary, for the typical, because those things are pitiful in the spiritual realm. We can't settle for the usual, but instead, we have to have passion, devotion, dedication, commitment, enthusiasm, and with great eagerness, great energy, we as individuals must work toward and pursue spiritual excellence. That's the only way that a church can continue to be what people need.

To "*seek that we may excel*" means that we, with great passion and great energy, expend ourselves to a higher plane of spiritual living. It means that we have a greater desire, greater longing, that we're reaching for a higher ground, that we're pressing toward higher ground spiritually. We're willing to launch out in that direction, all in order to excel in the spiritual realm. That should be the desire for every single one of us. It's absolutely necessary if we're going to be the church that people need, to excel spiritually, to always be progressing in the spiritual realm, to be a spiritually progressive church.

The result of obtaining and always striving for spiritual excellency that we are to seek, "*that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.*" Seek to surpass where you are spiritually, seek to be better than whatever we are spiritually, in order to edify the church. If we seek zealously to reach spiritual excellency, this will have a positive, favorable, constructive, useful, beneficial, productive, effect upon the

church of which we are a member. That's really the only way that you and I can have a positive and favorable effect upon the church in which we are a member. We, ourselves, have to be progressing spiritually.

The word *edifying* means to build. “*Seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church*”, to the building of the church. *Edifying* means to fashion, model, shape, increase, establish, confirm. Our spiritual condition, individually, goes toward either the building or the demolishing of Home Baptist Church. We need to take this seriously. Our own spiritual condition either goes toward the building of the church, or it goes toward the tearing of it down. It either goes toward the building of being the church that people need, or it causes us to cease to be the church that people need.

Our spiritual condition goes toward fashioning and shaping the church of which we are a member. We fashion it either favorable or unfavorably, by our own spiritual condition. Each one of us is either a favorable addition or an unfavorable addition. We are either adding to the spirituality of the church or we are taking away from the spirituality of the church. Our spiritual condition either contributes to the spiritual increase or it contributes to the demise of the church.

If you do not pray, read the scriptures, and take care of your heart as an individual, what happens if others are doing the same thing? What happens if a majority are doing the same thing? You're in serious trouble. You can come out with the greatest statement of faith that man has ever seen. That won't make you the church that people need. We have to individually be progressive spiritually.

Our spiritual condition is to go towards the spiritual support, the health of the church. Our spiritual condition is to assist the church spiritually of which we are a member. Our spiritual condition is to go toward the spiritual nourishment, continuance, and improvement of the church and our own spiritual conditions. “Oh we're strong, we

believe in such and such.” Are you right with God? How can a church be right if the members aren't right with God? We have to be right with the Lord, each one of us. Don't say, “Well, I'm just backslidden”, as if it's not a big deal. That's a big deal, because it has quite an effect, more than you and I realize. It has quite an effect upon the body of which we are a member.

Therefore we ought to, “*seek that ye may excel*”. Our spiritual condition determines whether or not we have a positive and favorable impression upon the church. Our spiritual condition determines whether you contribute to the strengthening of the church or to the weakening of the church. At churches I've pastored in the past, individuals, on different occasions, came to me and said, “You perhaps aren't aware of how much money I give to this church.” I don't care. That's not what it's about. I realize that we are to tithe and to give an offering, but how much you give isn't what makes a church what it ought to be. It's our spiritual condition.

We need to seek to excel. We ought to strive to excel. We ought to dedicate ourselves to excel spiritually. We ought to commit ourselves to excelling spiritually. It ought to show in our attitudes and behavior that we are committed to spiritual excellence. We're committed to that individually, we're committed to that collectively, as an assembly. We're committed to spiritual excellence.

Every time we assemble, it ought to be to this end to excel spiritually. That we might excel spiritually, that we might surpass where we are, that we might go beyond where we are. The truth is every week we ought to be stronger. The next time we meet, we ought to be a stronger church than we are today, and by next time we ought to be even stronger. We ought to be continually progressing, continually getting stronger and stronger and stronger. That does away with all the suggestions like, “Brother Dan, do you think we ought to do this to get more people in?” NO! That's not our focus. Our focus is to advance spiritually, and

that's not against inviting people to church at all. Invite as many as you can. But, no matter how many come, that's not what is going to make you to be the church that people need. What makes us the church that people need is to be spiritually right with God. We have to be spiritually right with the Lord, and we must continually progress spiritually. Everything we do, the preaching, teaching, and singing is to all to work to that end to progress spiritually. It's not about preaching messages that people are going like so they will come back. It's not about inventing a Sunday school system that will cause people to be more interested, or singing songs that will cause people to feel good. It's about progressing spiritually, going beyond where we are spiritually.

What a shame, when churches concentrate on everything but the spiritual. They concentrate on every other aspect, and there are many aspects in a church. There are financial aspects, you can't avoid it. There are maintenance aspects and on and on we can go. All of these things matter, but none of them ever take precedent over spiritual well being. That is always to be our priority.

This is why it is so important that we never lose sight of doing the Lord's business His way, not our way, for His honor and His glory, not our business for our honor and our glory. When that is our focus, the spiritual aspect is where it belongs. Seek ye first the kingdom of God. We can not lose sight of what it's all about.

As individuals, we need to be dedicated. There isn't a person here that is where we could be spiritually. We could all go further, we could all go beyond where we are, and we all hopefully realize that. What is our attitude? Are we going to just keep reaching forth for more and more and more spiritually? That ought to be our attitude, our spirit. "I'm not what I ought to be, but I'm going to continue to strive to be what I ought to be. I'm not where I ought to be spiritually, but I'm going to strive to be there, and I'm not going to stop striving to be there."

Then we ought to encourage one another to advance further spiritually. Don't ever bring someone down spiritually. Don't ever discourage someone who wants to advance spiritually. Don't ever do that. Don't ever be a hindrance to someone who wants to grow spiritually. Don't get in their way. If you can't encourage them, get out of the way. We need to strive to advance spiritually. When we do that, the church advances spiritually, and then we are what people need. That's what we want to be. We care nothing about being the church that people want, because what people want has absolutely nothing to do with God. We want to be the church that people need, and therefore we must be spiritually healthy.