

Last week we examined the purpose of spiritual gifts. St. Paul wrote, “no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except in the Holy Spirit.” To say Jesus is Lord is to say I believe Jesus died for my sins and that He rose from the dead on the 3rd day to gift me with eternal life. All the spiritual gifts come together to encourage this one message: Jesus is Lord. Thus the purpose of the spiritual gifts is to glorify the name of Jesus. Jesus is Lord. Please say it with me. (Jesus is Lord.)

This week we’re going to continue our study of 1st Corinthians 12, examining how the spiritual gifts are organized and how this applies to our walk with God and with one another.

PRAYER

READ 1st Corinthians 12:12-31a: 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. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴ For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. ²¹ 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.” ²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice

together. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸ And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

The first couple of verses explain where the spiritual gifts came from and how we should see them. St. Paul wrote, **1st Corinthians 12:12-13, 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. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.**

First, Paul began with the analogy of the human body, which is to say, the body has many members but it functions as a single unit. So it is with the Christian church. We are many members but we are one body which functions as a single unit.

Second, Paul said, “in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body... and all were made to drink of one Spirit,” which is to say, you didn’t become a member of the Christian church by filling out an application or by making a pledge of loyalty. Rather, your membership in the church rests solely on your baptism.

God gave us His Son, Jesus, on the Cross for our sins, and then He gave us His Spirit individually through baptism.

The important thing about this is to understand that baptism is a spiritual event. It literally creates a spiritual union between you and God and between you and other Christians.

Finally, Paul spoke of the complete equality between members of the church when he included “Jews or Greeks, slaves or free,” describing how we are one body. The church is the opposite of any other human institution, which is because it’s not a human institution! It’s an organization created by God, and God’s Kingdom-values are always upside-down compared to mankind’s values, including hierarchies.

St. Paul wrote, **1st Corinthians 12:14-20, For the body does not consist of one member but of many.** ¹⁵ If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

Paul was saying we can't not be a part of the body of Christ any more than my pinky finger can say that it is not a part of my hand. Have you ever talked to a person who said they were a Christian but they were not a part of the church, that they didn't believe in the church? I have. When I have had these kinds of conversations I think what I'm usually hearing is that for that person something went wrong with their relationships in the church. Something was broken. It may have had nothing to do with anything that person did. But the church itself may have been broken.

When I was a layman I once found myself on the losing side of a very hostile confrontation among fellow church members. In the end it involved physical violence, police, gossip, and a leadership vacuum. And I felt alone. The whole thing made me angry, sad, and depressed, all at once. I felt abandoned by God. I felt like my heart had been stomped on.

It took me awhile but eventually I went to another church. There was a member there who approached me after the worship service. He asked me what was wrong. He didn't know me from Adam, but he could tell from the way I carried myself that I was hurting inside. So I told him my story and he prayed for me.

That was when I understood what the church really is. It's not an institution neatly organized in order to do a whole bunch of fancy programming, though it may do that. It's not a fundraising organization for local charities, though it may do that too. What I learned that day was that the church which God created

through baptism and the Holy Spirit is a gathering of people who know Jesus in their hearts, and they help each other.

This brings us to the next part of the lesson. St. Paul wrote, **1st Corinthians 12:21-27**, **21 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."** **22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,** **23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty,** **24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it,** **25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.** **26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.** **27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.**

Paul said that which is "less honorable" is honored; that which is "weaker" is made "indispensable." This is another good example of how God's upside-down, counter-cultural, Kingdom-values work. God always works with the least likely subjects to accomplish His goals in order to demonstrate His love and power. Paul also wrote that we are the "body of Christ," which is to say we are the institutional representation of Jesus, spiritually united through baptism.

We should be encouraged by this: While the world values money, fame, and glory, these things have no bearing on the work God is doing among His people through His people. Paul wrote that God did these things "**that the members may have the same care for one another.**" When one member fails we all suffer, and when another member succeeds, together we all rejoice, he said.

Paul wrote, "**you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.**" He drew a picture of the church as a body, but he also made a point of saying we're "INDIVIDUALLY members of it." Paul wanted us to take responsibility for our place in the body of Christ as individuals.

So what's your gift? St. Paul wrote in the last section of this passage, **1st Corinthians 12:28-31a**, **And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.** **29 Are all**

apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

Paul's list of gifts were things which were immediately relevant in Corinth at the time of his writing, such as tongues over which there was much controversy. Paul's list of gifts here and in other places leads me to believe they are not exhaustive. For example, he mentions teaching but not evangelism, preaching but not music, administration but not building, and healing but not care-giving.

What Paul was doing was providing a broad brush outline of how the church was put together with baptism with an illustration of how the spiritual gifts are distributed in the body of Christ.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this week let us give thanks for how the Lord has united us in heart and spirit through baptism. It was a miracle, it is a blessing, and we may consider it one of the many benefits of our walk with God and each other. We are spiritually bound to each other in the name of the Triune God.

This week let us consider how the Lord has gifted us. The best way I know for identifying spiritual gifts is to ask myself what am I good at, what do I love doing, and how can I serve my brothers and sisters at Messiah with this gift? Is it teaching or is it helping others? Is it visiting the sick or helping with maintenance? Is it singing or bookkeeping or organizing stuff? Is it encouraging others or praying? You already know in your heart what your gift is. Now let me encourage you to pray that God will show you how to use it.

And this week may you be filled with courage and confidence to use your spiritual gift to make a difference in the life of another person who really needs it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.