

Last week we examined the purpose of spiritual gifts. St. Paul wrote, **“no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except in the Holy Spirit.”** The whole point of the spiritual gifts is the glorification of Jesus, that is our **“common good,”** that is the **“will”** of our Father in Heaven. **“Jesus is Lord.”** Please say it with me. (**“Jesus is Lord.”**) This week we’re going to continue our study, examining how the spiritual gifts are administered for the sake of our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

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 unrepresentable 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 of the passage have to do with where spiritual gifts come from, how we receive them, and how they're used. 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 uses the analogy of the human body to illustrate that while we are many members, we are just one body, which is to say, we use the gifts God has bestowed on us with a singleness of heart and mind.

Second, Paul speaks about the power of Baptism, that is, we did not become members of the Christian church by filling out a applications or by taking an oath of loyalty. Rather, our membership in the church rests solely on Baptism, and through this miracle we received the spiritual gifts.

And third, Paul wrote that there is complete equality among the members of the church when he noted "**Jews or Greeks, slaves or free.**" 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 for the sake of God's Kingdom. And in this Kingdom there is no hierarchy.

So this is the foundation of Paul's teaching here: The spiritual gifts are used with a singleness of heart by the church, they're a gift received through Baptism, and one member of the Body of Christ is not more important than another member because of the gift he possesses.

Paul continued with, **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 cannot 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 anyone who’s told you they’re a Christian, but they don’t believe in the church? I have. When I’ve had these kinds of conversations, what I’m usually hearing is that something went wrong with the person’s relationships in the church. Something was 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 and the police. There was never any resolution. There was a leadership vacuum. I was angry, sad, and I was depressed. I felt abandoned by God. I felt like my heart had been stomped on.

It took me awhile, but eventually I found another church. After worship one Sunday, a man approached me, and 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.

It was then that 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 on that day was that the church, which God created through Baptism and the Holy Spirit, is a gathering of people who know **“Jesus is Lord.”**

St. Paul wrote, **1st Corinthians 12:21-27**, **“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 a good example of how God’s Kingdom works, that is, God always works with his least likely subjects to accomplish his goals in order to demonstrate his love and power.

Paul wrote that we are the “**body of Christ**,” which is to say we are the institutional representation of Jesus, that the members “**have the same care for one another**.”

We should be encouraged by this. The world values power, fame, and money, but these things have no bearing on the work God is doing among his people for his people.

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 personal responsibility for our place in the church as individuals.

So what’s your gift? Paul wrote, **1st Corinthians 12:28-31a**, “**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 identification of gifts here and in other places leads me to believe this list is not exhaustive. For example, he mentions preaching but not music, administration but not building, and healing but not care-giving.

What Paul was doing was providing a broad outline, a snapshot, of how the spiritual gifts are administered 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 oneself what am I good at, what do I love doing, and how can I serve my brothers and sisters at Faith with this gift? Is it teaching or helping others? Is it visitations or doing handyman work? Is it singing, bookkeeping, or organizing stuff? Is it praying, or caring for children, or ministry to the down trodden? Brothers and sisters, in your heart you already know what your gift is.

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