



Parkway Fellowship

1 Corinthians: Practical Advice to a Divided Church •

The Necessity of Spiritual Gifts in the Local Church • 1 Corinthians 12:1-27 • 04/14/2019

Main Point

Like a human body, each church member is a necessary part of the whole.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is the most common body ache or pain that you deal with?

How does this affect your day-to-day life? What do you do to compensate for it?

Isn't it amazing how something like a headache or toothache can alter your attitude and change your behavior? Our bodies work best, of course, when every part functions correctly. Paul used the body as a metaphor for the church in 1 Corinthians 12. In order for the church to be an optimal body, it must have every part doing its job.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-11.

God has given every Christian at least one spiritual gift to use in the church, and God expects us to recognize, develop, and employ the gifts He has given us, in order that we might fulfill our role in the body. These verses set out a basic rule for consideration of all spiritual gifts—namely, that all Christians share the common profession of faith: Jesus is Lord. On this foundation, Paul listed various gifts and explained their source.

Where do a person's spiritual gifts come from, according to verses 4-6? Why does God give His children spiritual gifts?

What do you make of the diversity of gifts in verses 8-10? Is this list exhaustive?

Paul's purpose in verses 8-10 was not to detail a complete list of all possible spiritual gifts, but rather to emphasize the unity of the Spirit amid the marvelous variety of gifts. The one Holy Spirit is active in many ways through the devoted service of God's people.

Why is it important for believers to know which spiritual gifts they have? What roles do studying Scripture and prayer play in determining our spiritual gifts?

How does understanding your gifts help you understand and embrace the role the Spirit has equipped you to fulfill?

When you reflect on your spiritual gifts, what impact does it have on your relationship with God?

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-20.

Why do you think Paul chose the "body" imagery to describe the church? Do you think this is an effective metaphor? Why or why not?

It's easy to identify how different parts of the body function differently. What are some unique and different gifts you have recognized among our group or our church body as a whole?

How can these different functions in a church create unity?

Where might our church be if each individual member had the same gift or tried to function in the same role?

Paul's metaphor of the body is effective because it is a clear picture that anyone can understand. Having all legs or all ears would make a body virtually useless. The gifts that God gives believers are meant to be unifying because together all the gifts make up a complete body. We are exhorted to know our gifts so we can use them to serve the church, and the diversity of gifts God has given is a great strength. However, as we will see in the following verses, these different roles can lead to disunity as well.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:21-27.

Why do you think we are so tempted to compare our gifts or roles in the church to those of others? Why might we consider some to be "weaker" or "less honorable"?

According to these verses, how is God’s view of these roles different? How might we embrace this mind-set at our church and in our group?

How does Paul emphasize the importance of community by describing the church as a body?

Why is it important to suffer with someone in the body who suffers and to rejoice with those who are honored? What makes this difficult in our setting?

Every Christian is important to fellow believers individually as well as to the church as a whole. Because of this interdependency of believers who make up the body of Christ, what happens to the strongest or the weakest happens to the whole of the community. As the body of Christ, we show that our community cares for its own as we take care of and uplift the weakest member of our congregation. A vibrant and vital community is one that cares for its members who otherwise might be overlooked.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Given what you’ve learned about how crucial each member of our church is, are there any roles you feel you could do a better job of fulfilling as a part of the church body?

What are some practical ways that we can better embrace those who are suffering as well as those who are being honored within our church body?

What can you do to more consistently serve at our church and join in serving the community?

What are some specific things we can ask God to accomplish through our church body and our group?

Pray

Close in prayer, asking God for the courage to be a body of truly functioning members. Thank Him for His many blessings and gifts, and pray that He will help each of you live with a fresh commitment to not waste a single opportunity He has given you. Pray that you will honor God by serving the church with the gifts He has given you.

Commentary

| 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-27

12:1-3. Among the many problems the Corinthian church faced, one thorny issue concerned the nature and purpose of spiritual gifts. Some church members viewed the type of gift a believer possessed as a measuring stick for that believer's level of spirituality.

12:4. Apparently the Corinthians were bickering over the relative value of gifts, whether all Christians had gifts, and whether all spiritual gifts were from God. Paul affirmed a wide variety of different gifts. However, his main point in the first three verses of this section was that all spiritual gifts come from the same Spirit.

12:5-6. Paul altered his terminology slightly in verse 5 from the previous verse. Instead of "different gifts," he described these manifestations of the Spirit as different ministries. Instead of "the same Spirit," he wrote that these ministries came from the same Lord.

12:7. A spiritual gift and a manifestation of the spirit refer to the same reality, but Paul's continued use of the word Spirit is significant. As the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is fully God. The Spirit is portrayed in Scripture as active, whether participating in creation (see Gen. 1:2), giving eternal life (see John 3:8), comforting believers (see John 16:7), or interceding for us (see Rom. 8:26). The Spirit's actions are many; therefore, so are there a variety of spiritual gifts. But the number and diversity of gifts must not become an excuse for members to stir up disunity in the church. All spiritual gifts are to be received and used to produce what is beneficial to the church and its unity. This unity amid diversity is consistent with the triune nature of God, who through the Spirit grants spiritual gifts to each person.

12:8. The phrase message of wisdom recalls an issue Paul addressed earlier in the letter. Some church members viewed wisdom as a means of discerning secret truths not accessible to most Christians. Those who claimed this wisdom thought they were more spiritual than members who demonstrated other gifts. Paul rejected that view and its attendant arrogance. However, he affirmed there was indeed a spiritual gift of delivering a message characterized by godly wisdom. Such a message, if genuine, would unify and build up the church, not divide it. The gift of a message of knowledge would follow the same pattern. These first two spiritual gifts highlight the value of a Christian's speaking wisely, graciously, and correctly to bring unity to the church.

12:9. The gift of faith may come as a surprise to some people. However, Paul wasn't referring to saving faith that is expressed when someone receives Christ as Savior. The spiritual gift of faith is a God-given capacity for a believer to trust God boldly in extraordinary circumstances. Such a gifted believer often spurs a congregation facing challenges to move forward together in their ministry. Gifts of healing reflected the ministries of Jesus, Peter, Paul, and some other early disciples. Miracles of healing served to affirm that Jesus was the Messiah.

12:10. The gift described as performing of miracles covers various kinds of miracles other than healing. The gift of prophecy refers not only to foretelling but also to "forth-telling." It is a speech gift given by the Spirit

for instructing the church and proclaiming the gospel. Paul later indicated that all Christians would do well to desire this gift above any other. The gift of distinguishing between spirits probably refers to an ability to discern whether a spiritual activity is genuinely divine or demonic. In the New Testament, we find two possible understandings of the phrase different kinds of languages. One is that of using a language known to the hearer but unknown to the speaker to declare the gospel message. The other understanding is that of uttering ecstatic speech unknown to both the speaker and hearer.

12:11. This verse summarizes the main point of the previous section and is a bridge to Paul's analogy of the church as a body. All gifts come from the same source, the Spirit. Thus all spiritual gifts need to be respected and appreciated by the church. Additionally, each member's Christian service is not merely a matter of personal effort or individual acquisition of a gift. The Holy Spirit is the One who distributes gifts to each as He wills. We are to receive the Spirit's gifts gratefully, not scramble for ones we judge to be more impressive than others.

12:12-13. Paul used the Greek word for one five times in verses 11-13 because of the continued disunity in the Corinthian church. The Source of our unity is the one Spirit through whom we were baptized into the one body, that is, the church. Paul cited two of the great spiritual dividers in the world of his day: Jews or Greeks—a racial-religious division—and slaves or free—a social barrier.

12:14-17. The dispute of the Corinthian church appears to have been directed towards individuals who were seen as less gifted members of the church. In order to address the importance of proper regard for all parts of Christ's body Paul turned to the human body for his illustration. Encouragement is given to those who might have thought that their gifts were not as needed as the spectacular, public, attention-garnering gifts. The respective functions of the differing body parts (foot, hand, eyes, and ears) are detailed by Paul in such a way as to show the needed contrasts. Functions of hands, feet, eyes, and ears each play an assigned role in the human body. Indeed, the human body would collapse into dysfunction without coordination of the body parts. The eye needs the hands to accomplish its objective, and the head needs the feet to reach its destination. Each part of the body is integral to the whole, for a human body cannot fully function as God originally designed without even the weakest member.

12:18. That God placed the parts of the body where He wanted them emphasizes why all believers are important to the church, whatever their spiritual gifts. To elevate one Christian over another because of gifts is to call into question God's design and decision. This verse reflects the same emphasis as in verse 11.

12:19-20. Paul's final application calls attention to the importance of the diversity of gifts. The body needs all its different parts to function at maximum effectiveness. Therefore, each part is important. The same applies to the church and its members. All are needed. It is a sign of spiritual maturity in a church when it honors all contributions and does not seek to spotlight certain members who manifest particular gifts.

12:21-24. Paul moved from the inescapable diversity of members within the body (12:12-20) to the inescapable interdependence of members of the body (12:21-26). Stating the obvious, Paul asserted that those parts of the body which are considered weaker are necessary. The weaker members of the body, whether they be external parts we generally cover or inward organs (heart, lungs, kidneys, stomach, etc.), are regarded here as unpresentable but yet are shown a special modesty and greater honor. Although the weaker parts are not visible they are intimately vital for the human body. Likewise, those in the body of Christ who may be deceptively ordinary or unimpressive in their giftedness are as necessary as the most prestigiously gifted member in the congregation. Within the church all members are crucially important to God no matter what others may think, and should be to one another as well. The Christian community at Corinth was charged to care for its own individuals within the body..

12:25-27. In contrast to the Corinthian behavior of exclusivity, Paul noted that God has put the body together. Here Paul used the language of combining or blending of elements, colors, hues, or composing a musical melody in order to create a harmonious whole. Clearly divisions such as jealousy, scorn, or strife have no place within the community of Christ. Paul was clear that God has structured the body in such a way that the members have the same attentiveness for one another as for themselves. Naturally, members would have the same concern for each other, so that if one part of the body hurts every member suffers with the stricken one. However, the converse is also true of the body of believers, if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. The gift which God has given to the church is a mutual dependence on Him as well as on our fellow congregants. When we honor those members of body with the weaker or unpresentable gifts, we have the opportunity to practice the love of Christ!

Reading Assignment for Next Week:

1 Corinthians 15:1-19