

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 1/4/12 Wednesday Evening
1 Corinthians 12:12ff.

[Special thanks to Jack Branon for leading the study last week]

I'd like to describe a common church phenomenon. Many churches are filled with people who have been coming for years. They know Christ. They know His Word fairly well. They know they are going to heaven when they die because of God's amazing work in Christ. They love to hear a good sermon. Yet...

Yet they have the attitude (some may say it), "I don't have anything to offer. I can't do anything significant for God." Let's discuss two questions:

1. What contributes to that kind of thinking?
2. How can we overcome it ourselves, and how can we help others overcome it?

Be practical in your answers.

A great key to helping believers realize their potential is understanding the subject of *spiritual gifts*.

Q: What biblical texts discuss spiritual gifts?

A key text is 1 Corinthians 12. 1 Corinthians 12-14 offers both great help and, unfortunately, great controversy to the church. The controversy has to do with the subject of tongues and sign gifts. The larger subject at hand is that of *spiritual gifts*.

Review from last time...

In 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 Paul gives three things to introduce the subject of spiritual gifts...

I. The Need for Understanding Spiritual Gifts (1-3)

A. We must not be ignorant (1).

B. We used to be confused (2-3).

1. *When we were pagans we were led astray (2).*
2. *The Holy Spirit enables us to make a true confession of Jesus (3).*

II. Some General Principles regarding Spiritual Gifts (4-6).

A. There is one Spirit, but there are different kinds of gifts (4).

B. There is one Lord, but different kinds of service (5).

C. There is one God, but different kinds of working (6).

III. Some Specific Principles regarding Spiritual Gifts (7-11)

A. The Spirit gives each Christian a gift (7a).

B. Spiritual gifts are for the common good of the church (7b).

1. *We must not use our gifts to bring glory to ourselves.*
2. *We must use our gifts to benefit the rest of the Body.*

C. The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts (8a).

D. There are a variety of spiritual gifts (8-10).

1. *The Spirit gives one person the message of wisdom (8a).*
2. *The Spirit gives another person the message of knowledge (8b).*

3. *The Spirit gives another person faith (9a).*
 4. *The Spirit gives another person gifts of healing (9b).*
 5. *The Spirit gives another person miraculous powers (10a).*
 6. *The Spirit gives another person the gift of prophecy (10b).*
 7. *The Spirit gives another person the gift of distinguishing spirits (10c).*
 8. *The Spirit gives another person the gift of speaking in different kinds of tongues (10d).*
 9. *The Spirit gives another person the gift of the interpretation of tongues (10e).*
- E. Though the gifts differ, the Giver is the same (11a).**
- F. The Holy Spirit determines who receives what gifts (11b).**

New Material...

In the next section Paul illustrates for us how spiritual gifts work by giving us a picture. He uses the illustration of the body.

IV. A Picture of How Spiritual Gifts Work—The Body (12-31)

Notice three parts to this section. First Paul gives some general truths about the body. Then he invites us to think about the physical body. Finally, he makes application by talking about the spiritual body, the body of Christ.

A. Think about the body in general terms (12-14).

Read verses 12-14.

There are three things that are true of the body...

1. *It is a unit (12).*
2. *It functions with differing parts.*

How many body parts does the body have? Literally, there are dozens of noticeable ones (hands, eyes, feet, nose) and hundreds and hundreds of not-so-noticeable ones (internal organs, tendons, ligaments, tissues, cells). The body is truly an amazing thing. It is highly complex in its organization, yet it is wonderfully efficient in its operation.

Just think of all that goes into a simple action such as combing your hair. You use your eyes to look in the mirror, your hand to grab the comb, your fingers to pinch the comb and hold it in the proper position, your arm to raise the comb to your head, your feet to hold you upright while you stand at the mirror, the nerves in your scalp to warn you if you are pulling a hair out by the root, and so on.

Dr. Paul Brand wrote the book *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*. The title surely says it well. The human body is amazing. In addition...

3. *It illustrates what Christ did (13).*

Paul mentions two accomplishments of Christ in v 13.

*Christ baptized different kinds of people into one body.

Q: When did that event occur? In historical terms, it took place on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. That's when Christ sent His Spirit. In our experience, we received the benefit of that historical event at our conversion.

*Christ gave different kinds of people the same Spirit.

Q: What kinds of people does Paul mention here? Why?

B. Think of a physical body (14-26).

Read verses 14-26.

Paul mentions about 8 things that are true of our physical body in this section.

1. *It has many parts (14).*

2. *Though each part is different, each is important to the body (15-17).*

Notice his hypothetical conversation in v 15, where the foot demeans itself because it is not a hand...

What's the point of this "conversation?" We are so prone to make comparisons. We evaluate ourselves by looking at each other. How should we evaluate ourselves? By considering *God's* evaluation and assessment.

3. *God arranges the parts as it pleases Him (18).*

He didn't want the body to look like one big nose. So He put together a whole bunch of different parts, some big, some small.

4. *Each part contributes to the good of the whole (19-20).*

If all were the same, that wouldn't happen in your body.

5. *No part can deny its need for the other parts (21).*

Oh, I suppose it could try but it wouldn't be true. My hand needs my eye and my toe and every other part if the body is going to operate at maximum potential. We'll make application in a moment...

6. *Even parts that seem less important deserve honor (22-24).*

Not all parts of the body are equally attractive. Last week my daughter Katie and I were talking and she said, "Feet are pretty ugly, aren't they?" And we had a conversation about the attractiveness of feet!

A foot may not be as winsome as sparkling eyes, but what would life be like without it? The foot may not be attractive, so we spend \$75 and more for shoes to protect and dress it up.

7. *There should be no division in the body (25).*

That's what makes cancer so bad. Cancer creates a division in the body. Good cells are deprived because cancer cells demand attention.

8. *What one part experiences affects the whole (26).*

If I have a headache, it affects my whole body's ability to function. Now, what do these lessons from the body have to do with the church? That's what Paul explains next...

C. Think of the Body of Christ (27-31).

Read verses 27-31.

Notice what is true of our identity...

1. *Every Christian is part of Christ's Body (27).*

Q: Who does the “you” in v 27 refer to?

Q: What is significant about the words “each one of you” in v 27?

2. *Every Christian is gifted differently, by God’s design (28).*

God “appointed” [KJV “hath set”] the gifted individuals mentioned in verse 28. This is critical to see. We are different by design. No one Christian has all the gifts. God distributed the gifts to the whole body.

Key: We have all we need as a body, but we do *not* have all we need as individuals. What are some implications of this statement?

3. *God placed people with different gifts in His church (28).*

Notice the terms first, second, and third...

*First, He appointed apostles.

*Second, He appointed prophets.

*Third, He appointed teachers.

*Then He appointed workers of miracles,
people with gifts of healing,
people with gifts of helps,
people with gifts of administration,
and people with gifts of speaking in different kinds of tongues.

Note: The Corinthians were placing great importance on the latter gifts mentioned here, so Paul puts them in order of importance to correct this error.

The *B.K.C.* says, “The fact that Paul assigned ordinal numbers (**first . . . second . . . third**) to the first three gifts suggests that these may have been relegated to a lesser role by the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor. 12:21-24). Those three kinds of gifted members—**apostles . . . prophets . . . teachers**—probably were rated lower than those who had the more spectacular gift of tongues. But the first three gifts may have been **greater** (v. 31) because of their extensive value to the whole body of Christ. This may be why he listed them first and then said that the church should **eagerly desire** (v. 31) the exercise of those **gifts** in the assembly (cf. 14:1-5). Gifted apostles, prophets, and teachers characteristically ministered to a *whole* church, and so would engender unity and mutual edification. The gift of **tongues**, on the other hand, suited the Corinthian penchant for self-expression and the pursuit of personal freedom. This self-centeredness also afflicted the church in other areas (e.g., eating sacrificial foods, women in worship, celebration of the Lord’s Supper). Love for others was an essential need in the Corinthian church, and to that fundamental attribute Paul then turned to pay eloquent tribute.”¹

4. *No one has all the gifts (29-30).*

That includes tongues.

5. *We should desire the gifts that bring the most benefit to the Body (31a).*

6. *We should exercise our gift in love (31b).*

¹Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.