

## Spiritual Gifts and the Body of Christ

1 Corinthians 12:12-31 (CGS#27)

**INTRODUCTION:** This week, we're leaning even further into the analogy of the church as a body because Paul seems to introduce some tension toward the end of chapter 12. After addressing the pride of the Corinthians by pointing out the equal value and dignity of the different members, it almost sounds like he goes back on that idea by ranking the importance of the gifts. In verse 20 he says, "As it is, there are many parts, yet one body," and in verses 24-25 he says, "God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another." But then in verse 28 he says, "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," and in verse 31 he tells the Corinthians to "earnestly desire the *higher* gifts." So which is it? Are all gifts equal, or are some more important than others? Paul's answer, as hard as it might be for us to understand, is "yes." Let's dive into the fruitful tension of what his answer implies.

Like every analogy, the analogy of the church as a body has a limit. You can press it too far and come to some very strange conclusions. For example, should we try to find a 1 to 1 correlation between every person and every body part? Absolutely not. It's just a helpful illustration for pointing out that as a human body is made to operate with lots of different parts working in harmony, so our churches should operate in the same way. Everyone has a role, everyone is different, and everyone is important. In other words, we need each other. We're all made stronger when we bring our differences into each other's lives and worship God together, united around the gospel. That's his main point. The nuanced view we need to take of this analogy is understanding that this can all be true—every part is important—and yet some parts of the body are essential. The body can live without a finger or a toe, but it cannot live without a brain or a heart.

The danger here is taking the analogy too far and saying that some *people* are toes and some people are brains. That would be unfaithful to the text. Remember, Paul is talking about spiritual gifts here, not individual people. There are no higher *people*, only higher *gifts*. The first gift he lists is apostle because apostle means "sent one." Romans 10:13–15 says,

For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach *unless they are sent*?

How do churches get started? Someone first has to be sent. Those are, ideally, people with the spiritual gift of apostle. They aren't more important than people with other gifts, but their gift is the most important in that season. Then the new church needs prophets and teachers to speak God's Word and explain it so people can believe and be saved. These are the gifts needed to start a church, and the Holy Spirit will give them when and where he wills. Paul balances the fruitful tension by reminding us that, while all members are equally a part of the body of Christ (v. 27), the Spirit gives diverse gifts to those members as he sees fit (v. 11), and some of those gifts are more useful for building up the church than others in certain seasons. But in the end, gifting doesn't matter if it's not wrapped up in love, which is explained in chapter 13 as "a still more excellent way." So the highest gift, and the one we're all given, is love.

**GETTING STARTED** – As a group, take time to answer this question: What examples have you seen of God using a person's (yours or someone else's) gifts/skills/passions/resources to build up the church?

**IN THE WORD** – Let's dig back into the passage(s). It is important to strengthen our muscles in reading God's Word. On Sunday, we walked through the passage in the sermon. Hopefully, that helped you to see the landmarks of the passage with fresh eyes. Now, with your group, go back through it and see what God is saying to you specifically.

First, before you read the passage, take a moment to ask God's Spirit to quiet your mind and heart and to illuminate the text to you. Second, read the passage aloud to the group. Then, follow the simple method below. (O.P.A)

**Observe:** Make 8-10 observations from the passage. Pay close attention to observe and note repeated words and phrases, names, places, and themes.

**Principles:** From your list of observations, what patterns or big ideas do you see emerging? Can you distill it down into 2-4 big idea truths?

**Apply:** Moving from your list of principles, it is time to apply God's Word. Remember, we believe that God's Word is living and active and that it can change the way we live Monday- Friday. What is one tangible way to apply a truth from your list above?

**Note:** Another way to approach your time together is to talk through the following questions:

1. What did you hear God's Spirit say to you through the passage this week? How does it encourage you? How does it sharpen you?
2. How have you seen God at work in your life this week? Have you enjoyed him? Have you heard his voice and the leading of his Spirit? Big ways or small ways.
3. What's the best gift you've ever been given? What made it so great?
4. Have you ever felt unneeded by the church? Have you ever felt necessary?
5. How are you using your spiritual gifts and natural talents to invest in God's kingdom?
6. Why is love "more excellent" than all the other gifts?