

Christianity, A Team Sport 2022
1 Corinthians 12:1, 4-15, 27

1 Corinthians 12:1, 4-15, 27 (New Revised Standard Version)

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. 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. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would 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.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Other than another chapter to study in my physiology textbook,
for the first 60 or so years of my life, seemingly insignificant,
I never paid any attention or thought much about my kidneys...
... until I got kidney-stones, which then got my undivided attention.

Yes, various parts of the body we do sometimes take for granted,
and the truth is, sometimes the church does that as well,
when we perceive some as more significant than others.

It seems that Christians in ancient Corinth were having difficulty
understanding that we are all equally **parts of the body of Christ**.

To clarify, Paul explains in his letter, vs. 12, 27, 14-15

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. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would 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.

By grace and faith we have all been grafted into the body of Christ,
a metaphor representing the church, our faith community & family...

... where we develop and live out our faith as we participate
actively and usefully in the life and mission of the Church
as an expression of **our shared faith and commitments**.

The Church of Jesus Christ is uniquely where we grow in God’s grace,

which equips us each to serve the Church's mission and purpose,
so that together, we can make a difference in this world.

So one of our primary tasks then,
is to discover our own gifts and help others discern their gifts,
so to use them for the blessing and building up of the whole body,
for that is an important way we as Christians grow in our faith.

The Apostle Paul had started the church in Corinth,
but after he moved on some, problems had developed.

One of the significant issues they were struggling with in Corinth
was divisive conflict over misunderstanding spiritual gifts, vs. 1

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.
(or, don't take this lightly, it's important)

The problem in Corinth was that some parts of the body, some people
believed and professed that they were better, **more** useful & needed,
than those they chose to perceive as less worthy
and contributing little to the body of Christ.

But as Paul explains, vs. 4-6

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the
same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in
everyone.

So it's really about God and not us or the judgments we decide.
God provides the appropriate skills, understanding and resources,
all that is needed to fulfill the Church's mission well,
and all are indispensable in accomplishing that mission...

... for the truth is, no one has all the gifts needed,
and no one has none of the gifts that are needed.

And all of it comes **as a gift** in wonderful abundance from God
so, there really is no place for human pride, ego or arrogance,
as if some particular gifts made them better disciples,
or more necessary than what anyone else has to offer.

**And since all gifts are equally dependent upon God's grace alone,
that truth serves to unify all believers into the body of Christ...**

... which means that God's grace is far more important and critical
than anything else about us or whatever we might accomplish,
for by God's grace alone we are all equally loved, worthy & precious.

What God chooses to give is always appropriate and fits perfectly.
And though some may be more publicly visible than others,
all are equally a reflection of God's grace and purpose,
and all are needed for the church to fulfill its mission.

And God intends by our unique gifts to show that we need each other,

and that we each one fit together **like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.**

And since no one person possesses all of the necessary gifts we need
it really doesn't matter which piece of the puzzle we are,
for if any piece is missing,
the picture will be incomplete and flawed.

Each piece, each and every person is loved, necessary & significant.

Then Paul explains why we're given these gifts, vs. 7

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

It is all about God's purpose and will, the Church's call and mission
for building up the body of Christ to serve & make a real difference.

So each is given at least one gift as a reflection of God's grace,
which is true evidence that our God is faithful, kind and good,
and that ours is a God of wonderful diversity and intention.

**So it's not about you or me, but it's all about the common good,
for God's purpose of building up the Church for its mission.**

Yes, a single soloist can sound lovely and carry a tune,
but how much better and how much more inspiring when many voices
blend together so they can sing and merge into a rich harmony.

So too the Church, the people of God are called to serve together.
In faithful humility, as we are called to combine and blend
our individual and particular gifts, skills and offerings,
all of us to serve together joyfully for the glory of God,
much like the joyful laughter of happy children playing together.

That is the shared and meaningful life together that our Lord
intends and desires for all his beloved and blessed people.

And Paul's message to the Corinthians and to us is that,
any emphasis on an individual or their gift is out of balance,
for God blesses us **through our diversity and interdependence,**
which leaves no room for harsh judgement, superiority or division.

All of us are each entrusted with blessings **for the whole body.**
God bestows wonderful gifts for benefit of the whole church,
giving to us as grace and blessing beyond our salvation,
equipping us to do something extraordinary - to do ministry.

So each person's gifts are uniquely & equally important & necessary,
but too often we allow our own agenda and sinful pride to divide us.

Some Christians withhold their gifts, or are unwilling to commit,
and never get around to using the gifts God entrusted to them,

and thereby miss out on the best part of serving usefully
which is the way we build more meaningful relationships
and experience the satisfaction of pleasing the Lord.

That's tragic, for there is no greater joy or fulfillment possible,
than when we freely and appropriately offer and use of our gifts.
Nothing is more satisfying or rewarding than doing
that which we are equipped and gifted to do well.

By Grace God has called and equipped each one of us, and has
also uniquely and specifically fitted every one of us
to complement each other with our individual gifts,
so that together we can accomplish God's mission & purpose.

**The Church like a stained glass window, an amazing luminous artwork
that's gathered and called to display and proclaim the glory of God.**

And each one of us is a tiny shard of glass in that window
uniquely refracting the light of God passing through.

Each uniquely participating in making the whole picture
depicting wonder and beauty, and proclaiming the glory of God.
Each piece is necessary and chosen with care by the Artist.

Though any one shard is tiny, insignificant on its own,
the Artist combines them to produce amazing wonder.

Our individual piece is to shine gloriously within God's masterwork.

The ideal as it's described in Scripture is that each one of us
lives out the full blessing and abundant satisfaction
of freely serving joyfully with our particular gifts,
as a tangible effect and true evidence of our faith.

Friends, let us never forget **that God loves all of us infinitely,
and has given us all wonderful things that we can accomplish,
wonderful opportunities to serve joyfully for the common good,
and to live out a meaningful and fulfilling Christian life...**

**... for as long as we live,
there is always some way that we can make a difference...**

**... which is a most critical truth for us to live and trust in hope now,
especially during these stressful, difficult and uncertain times.**

Today we are going to ordain and install church officers,
servant leaders who have been called and equipped by the Lord
at this particular time to serve here in a particular way for
building up this body of Christ toward mission & outreach.

Elders, those who serve to rule, dream and govern this church,
and **deacons**,
who serve to guide and carry out our ministries of compassion.

We are all, each one of us, abundantly gifted in many wonderful ways,
and we are all a necessary part of this body, this church,
and it's through the faithful exercise of our gifts,
that our faith grows and matures, and stays alive.

I urge you, that as we celebrate **their call** to serve faithfully,

please reflect on your own blessings, gifts and call to serve.
Remember to you too are called and gifted by God to make a difference,
therefore, in your heart and mind, apply the vows you hear
to whatever service and ministry God has entrusted to you.

Consider God's word and truth in Ephesians, 1st and 2nd Timothy:

The gifts he gave were ... to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you. Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them, ... For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you... (Ephesians 4:11~15, 1 Timothy 4:14-15 & 2 Timothy 1:6)