

The Cross and Christian Community

The Cross and Christian Gifts: The Body

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The Cross and Christian Gifts: The Body 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Let me ask you to open to 1 Corinthians 12 in your Bible. Isn't it absolutely awesome how God gifts different individuals—He wires them differently—to strengthen the body and encourage the body? All of us have not been called to what I would describe as ministry leadership by virtue of a staff role. Nonetheless, every single one of us has been wired by God through His Spirit to contribute to the strengthening of faith.

We started here last week in 1 Corinthians 12, and we discovered that this chapter is really divided into two parts, the first of which deals with Christ's Spirit working in and through us through spiritual gifts and the second half of which deals with Christ's body. This is the product, the outworking of the Spirit in our lives. All of this is tied together by the issue of spiritual gifts.

We spent some time in verses 12 and 13 last week because it serves as what I described as a hinge verse for these two sides: The work of the Spirit and the work of the body. Verses 12 and 13 say, *"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."* This is Jesus being manifested, he says. *"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."*

Those two verses speak of both sides of this, the work of the Spirit and the work of the body, coming together. Out of those verses, we drew this simple working definition of spiritual gifts:

Spiritual gifts are the supernatural ways that God's Spirit works through God's children to make God's Son look right.

The big deal with that is that God has trusted to us how Jesus looks in this world. We are His body, made such through the work of His Spirit in our lives by virtue of spiritual gifts that are given to every believer in Jesus Christ.

We talked about the work of God's Spirit. Now I want us to come to the second half—on the other side of verses 12 and 13—this week. Prior to verses 12 and 13, the word "Spirit" is used nine times; in verses 3-11, the word "body" is not used a single time. On the other side of verses 12 and 13, the word "body" is used 15 times; the word "Spirit" is not used one time. But the connecting point is the work of the Spirit through spiritual gifts makes us the body of Christ, so that Jesus looks and acts the way Jesus is supposed to look and act in this world. Put an asterisk by that.

Don't begin to assume that means there's something lacking in Jesus that we have to make up for and help Him out with. We must look at it this way: God has trusted us. That's just

mind-boggling to me. He has trusted us with how Jesus looks and acts in this world. That is why spiritual gifts are so huge. That's why we have to come to this study prayerfully and seriously and diligently. This is why the Apostle Paul, in verse 1, says, "Brothers, I don't want you to be uninformed. I don't want you to miss this because the stakes are high on this deal."

So, we come to the back side of the chapter and look to see how the Spirit fleshes out, if you will, the body of Christ in and through us through this thing of spiritual gifts. And I think what the Apostle Paul is doing here, if I could just set this up for you, is helping us understand that the work of God's Spirit plays out in an analogy of the physical, human body. All the way through the second half of this chapter, these ideas are woven. There's a back and forth kind of deal in which he's talking about the physical human body, but then he's paralleling it to the physical spiritual body of Christ, if I could use that. That's not an oxymoron.

Let me read this over you, beginning with verse 14. Follow along and see if you can track with Paul's picture here:

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 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. 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. 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? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

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." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 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, which our more presentable parts do not require. But 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. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 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. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

And I will show you a still more excellent way. (1 Corinthians 12:14-31)

Now, Paul underscores one big picture issue in this second half and that is the issue that a body, whether it's a physical body or a body of an organization—the body of Christ, if you will—a body is one, a unified whole, made up of many parts. That's kind of his running emphasis all the way through that.

He mentions it three times. You see it in verse 14: "*For the body does not consist of one member but of many.*" Then, you see it in verse 20: "*As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.*" Then, he repeats it another way in verse 27: "*Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*" One body, many members all the way through this.

The tension of desiring, discovering and developing spiritual gifts:

What Paul is doing is calling our attention to a tension that we live in in the middle of that. Every single believer in Jesus Christ—every one of us that make up the body of Christ—lives in this tension of desiring, discovering and developing spiritual gifts that are identified in that truth of the body being one but made up of many parts.

And here's Paul's concern: Us being, by nature, a people of extremes—having a difficult time maintaining balance—we have a tendency to gravitate to one side or the other. One of those extremes is putting too much emphasis on the whole, the body. The other extreme is putting too much emphasis on the individual parts. This is why he keeps repeating it and calling attention to it. We live in the midst of that tension, in which if—listen to me, now, come in here real close—if we are going to make Jesus act and look right through the physical expression of the body in this world, we must meet.

Now another way to describe that tension is to describe it as the difference between what we're going to call "self-deprecation" and then, on the other extreme, "self-exaltation." These two extremes are dealt with, or addressed, by the Apostle Paul in this passage. This is big-picture-fly-by. Before we come back and break them down, let me show it to you.

Self-deprecation, or being critical of yourself—denigrating yourself—is what we're going to find in verses 15-20. You see it beginning in verse 15: "*If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body...'*" Do you see what he's doing? Do you see what the foot gift is doing? He's comparing himself to someone else, something else—in this case, a person with hand gifts and hand graces—and saying, "I'm not like that person. I don't have to anything offer because I'm not like them. I shouldn't even be part of the body." Self-deprecation.

But then, Paul will come to the other extreme, self-exaltation, in verse 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.'*" Do you see the difference? Before—back up there in verse 15—there was one that was comparing itself to another and concluding, "I don't have anything to offer. I'm no good." Here, there is a body part that's looking at another body part and saying, "I don't need you! We can get along without you."

So Paul brings us into the middle of this tension, and it's a tension in which every believer in Jesus Christ lives. Let's break them down and let's start with self-deprecation. Let's make sure that we understand what Paul is saying. Jesus' body will work right when it's members avoid self-deprecation. I want to show you a connection that I don't want us to miss as we come to verses 15 and following, and we think about this idea of putting oneself down, reducing the import that each person has—eliminating, if you will, the value that you, as an individual, play in the body of Christ.

If you go back up to verse 3, do you remember when he was talking about testing of whether or not spiritual gifts or a manifestation comes from the Spirit or not? Do you remember what he said? Look at it: "*Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus is accursed!'*" Paul said nobody could ever denigrate Jesus and mean it, and that come from the Spirit. It's not happening.

Well, you know what he says here in verse 15? Neither can a member of the body of Christ do that to the body of Christ, of which you are a part. If we were to look at verse 3 and say, "Well, I get that. Nobody can say, 'Jesus is accursed' and really be led by the Spirit." The Apostle Paul is going to come back with the same weightiness, and he's going to say, "Neither can you do that with yourself as a member of the body of Christ."

Let's make sure we process who this extreme is most tempting to. Bottom line is that self-deprecation—criticizing self—is most tempting for people who have gifts that wouldn't be categorized as the sensational gifts, like prophecy and tongues. In these three chapters, these are the two biggies the Apostle Paul is dealing with. There are gifts in the body that don't get as much airtime as those, if you will. They're not platform gifts. They're more behind-the-scenes. They are less visible.

The Apostle Paul knows there is a great temptation for those of us who have gifts that fit into that category of that nature to gravitate to this extreme and begin to look at ourselves as being useless in the body. So he gives us some help with that in this first paragraph. I want us to look at that.

Jeff Foxworthy became famous a number of years ago by telling a series of jokes that all began with "You might be a redneck if..." Well, you might be a self-deprecator—you might be guilty of self-deprecation—if your answer to any of the questions I'm about to put on the table is "yes"—if you find yourself at this particular place.

Here's the first one. Ask yourself this question: Do I think they don't need me? Does that ever cross your mind? You come into this place or you go to your small group or you interact with members of the body of Christ known as Brook Hills, or, if you're a guest of ours and are involved in another local congregation, do you ever look at the members of that congregation and this crosses your mind? "They don't need me."

That's what Paul's doing when he makes this connection in verse 15 and says, "The guy with the foot gift and foot graces looks at the guy with the hand gift and hand graces, and the girl with the ear gifts and ear graces (in verse 16) looks at the girl with the eye gift and eye graces." And both personifications come to the same conclusion and that is, "I'm not like that person, so I really don't bring anything to the table. I'm not even sure that I'm a part of this thing."

You know what? If you've never had that thought cross your mind, let's look at it from another standpoint—the logical conclusion that follows from that, which is, "I think that I'll just kind of watch in the shadows. I think I'll watch from the grandstands. I need the sermons; I love the music, but I really don't have anything to bring to the table, so I'm going to stay connected and be a part of this, but I'm really not part of the body." And you know this. Churches are filled with Christians who have drawn that conclusion. Likely in a crowd this size, there are a number in this place that have drawn that conclusion. When you put your head on your pillow at night, this is the way you feel: "I'm useless because I'm not like this person or that person." Oftentimes, there is a zeroing in on individuals that do have sensational gifts or more public gifts—gifts that get more airtime or are more often on the platform or whatever the case may be out in front of people. The Apostle Paul rejects that completely with the analogy of the body.

Look at what he said in verse 15: "...that would not make it any less a part of the body," because that body part came to that conclusion. Same thing in verse 16. He repeats it:

"...that would not make it any less a part of the body..." In other words, the very nature of the body dispels that and says it is not true. It can't happen if, in fact, this is the body.

So, you might come to the place where you compare yourself to someone else and draw this conclusion. And you say, "I'm useless. I just really don't have anything to offer, so I'm not part of the body." But the Word of God emphatically would tell you you're wrong. You're wrong by nature of the body itself. Do you ever think that? Do I think they don't need me?

Here's another one: Do I think the sovereignty of God is actually an error? Now, we're in a congregation that makes much—and I trust we always will because the Bible makes much—of the sovereignty of God. We love to preach about it. We love to teach about it. We love to sing about it. We believe God's sovereign. But notice what the Apostle Paul says in verse 18 to these Corinthians, some of which were gravitating to the extreme of self-deprecation, when he said, "*But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.*" And that's not the first time he said it.

We saw it first back in verse 11, at the end: "*...he apportions to each one individually as he will.*" We'll see it again in verse 28, that God has appointed in the church these spiritual gifts. We referenced Romans 12, where Paul says God dishes out different measures of faith regarding spiritual gifts. In Ephesians 4, he will say that God gives different measures of grace for the exercising of these spiritual gifts. You can't come to the issue of spiritual gifts and not see the sovereignty of God.

But you can accuse the sovereignty of God of being in error if you compare yourself to someone else and draw the conclusion that you have nothing to offer. And I would venture to say there are probably very few of us in The Church at Brook Hills who would ever say - we'd ever verbalize, or maybe even allow our minds to wander to the place to say, "I don't believe in the sovereignty of God. It's got to be an error. It couldn't be correct." But when we drift into the shadows, when we take up a seat as a spectator, when we say, "I need the sermons and I love the songs," but we draw the conclusion practically and functionally that we have nothing to offer and, essentially, that we're not part of the body, we come to the conclusion in which we say, "God is not sovereign."

You see, what Paul was doing was saying to the Corinthians, "Some of you think God made a mistake, don't you? Some of you think God blew it. You think He was taking a nap when it was your turn to stand in line. You think He overlooked you. He missed something." Or maybe what happens most of all—listen to me—is you think, "God really can't overlook the way I've messed up." I think that is probably the thing that paralyzes so many Christians and leads them to self-deprecation. They look at their life before Christ and say, "Man, I know I'm saved and I understand forgiveness. I want that, but I'm not sure God can completely get past that. So I go into the kingdom of God limping. I've got this limp I bring into the church."

And I want to tell you it happens on the other side of the cross, too, doesn't it? Especially for those of us who were saved at an early age—maybe we were raised like Pastor David in a Christian home—we look at our lives since coming to Christ many times and look at the ways we've messed up. We look at the ways we've dishonored Christ. We look at the ways we've dropped the ball and sinned. Sometimes, when our mess-ups are on this side of the cross, it's even more paralyzing because Satan leads us to think, "Man, if you were really saved—if you were really a Christian—you wouldn't have done that. You wouldn't have committed that sin. You wouldn't have gone there. You wouldn't have done that."

So there's this idea that, "I wish all my sins were on the other side of the cross because then I have this testimony of 'God saved me.' But man, I've got sin on this side of the cross and that makes me useless. There's no way I could make a contribution to this deal." When we do that, we look at the sovereignty of God and say, "God, you blew it with me. You may have got it right with everybody else, but you blew it with me." We never use those words but we're still saying it with our lives. "You blew it with me." And we even suggest that, not only has God made a mistake, but He's capable of doing it more and He's even evil because of how this thing is messed up. The Apostle Paul says, "No! He chose how the members are wired and how they're connected. He apportioned them. He wills. He made the assignment. He gives faith. He gives grace for the exercising of these gifts."

So if you find yourself of entertaining that idea—whether you ever use the word "sovereignty" in it or not—this is where you may find yourself: Guilty of self-deprecation because you really, really scoff at the sovereignty of God. But, on the other end of the spectrum, if we are comfortable in our skin with regard to how God has wired us—how He's put us together and how He has made us part of the body—then, together, we can make Jesus look right and act right in this world as the body of Christ.

Question number three in this category of self-deprecation: Do I think that unity and diversity are mutually exclusive? Do I ever wrestle with the assertion that differentness can actually contribute to unity? Or am I one of those people that just can't get my arms around it otherwise? Do I think sameness is the only way for unity?

Look at what Paul says in verse 19: "*If all were a single member, where would the body be?*" A rhetorical question demands the answer, "It wouldn't be." In other words, it wouldn't be the body. "*As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.*" (1 Corinthians 12:20) He comes back to the analogy and says, "You actually really do believe that unity can lead to diversity. Look in the mirror. Your physical body actually tells you that unity and diversity are friends. And if unity and diversity are friends, in their friendship it is there where we make the body of Christ actually look like a body is supposed to. Otherwise, it just becomes this distorted mutant thing. The whole body is a hand or it's a foot or it's a nose. It looks like some mutant that you see on a low budget film on the Sy-fy channel late at night. It's not a body; it's a monster." Paul says, "No! That's not the way bodies are."

I want to show you something in verse 20. Actually in the language of the New Testament, there's no verb in the sentence. It might literally be translated: "As it is, many parts, one body." It's almost like to add punch to this, the Apostle Paul says, "Hello? Body. Many parts. One body. Duh!" And he wants to drive that home to us when we come to the place of thinking, "You know what? If we're really going to be a body, or if I'm really going to make a contribution, I have to be like someone else. I have to be like Pastor David or Pastor Matt. Or I have to be like my small group leader. I have to be like that person that just is an incredible organizer. Because I'm not like them, I'm just not worth much."

Do you ever think any of those things? If you do, you may find yourself butting up against this temptation of self-deprecation. And Paul says, "That is an extreme in this one-body-many-parts deal that we can't afford to go to because when we do, it distorts what Jesus looks like. And we don't make Him look right and act right in this world."

So then he comes to the other extreme. He goes to the other side, and he says, beginning in verse 21, "Jesus' body will look and act like it's supposed to when its members avoid self-exaltation." So we come to the other side, and it's here that I think the Apostle Paul would assume that this one is a greater temptation to maybe those who do have the more

sensational gifts. They have the gifts that get more airtime and are more visible, and they're out front. By nature, the Apostle Paul would suggest this is a greater temptation.

I think that he names a number of those. The weight of verses 28 and 29 and 30 are given to those—not entirely, not exhaustively—but just glance down there. First, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers. Then miracles; then gifts of healing; and then he'll mention a little bit later tongues and the interpretation of tongues. It seems the weight of his emphasis is given there because he's coming out of a train of thought related to a temptation that is probably greater for those individuals that have those more sensational gifts. It's always going to pull at our pride.

So he gives us some help with looking at that. He gives us some help with paying attention to that to see that you might be a self-exalter, or you might be a person guilty of self-exaltation, if your answer to any of these questions is a "yes."

Let's start with a similar one from last time: Do I think they can't do without me? That's what the self-exalter is thinking. The self-deprecator is thinking, "They don't need me." The self-exalter is thinking, "They can't do without me." And so he says in verse 21, "The person with the eye gift and the eye graces cannot say to the person with hand gifts and hand graces, 'I don't need you.' Or the head to the feet, 'I don't need you.'" He says, "The body doesn't make sense like that. It doesn't work like that."

So from the very outset, the Apostle Paul would say, "Has this ever crossed your mind? Do you ever have a tendency to see the way God has graced you and gifted you and look at other people as if their role is not only less important but maybe dispensable, where you are thinking, 'We could do without this.'" The Apostle Paul says, "Based on the body, a person with sensational gifts has absolutely no right to look at another individual who has a lower-key gift—a gift with less 'wow' factor, if you will—and say, 'We don't need you. We're glad you're here and we don't want you to leave but we really don't need your involvement in this deal.'"

Question number two: Do I desire to be sensational or beneficial? Now, even before I show you this in the text, let me clarify something, okay? I want you to understand. Both sensational and lower-wow-factor gifts are necessary in the body of Christ. Both are beneficial when they are exercised correctly, okay? So don't hear me say in this, "Oh, sensational gifts are not important; the others are. This group is important; this one is not." Both are needful. The issue here is motive. What is your heart desiring? And that's why Paul fleshes out something we might conclude is a question of desire. "When I put my head on my pillow at night, what do I want? Do I desire to be sensational, or is the desire of my heart to be beneficial?"

Let me show it to you. Paul goes into the picture of the body, and he makes the parallel that there are some parts of our body that are described in verse 22 as weaker and described in verse 23 as less honorable and unrepresentable. Do you see them? The temptation is that, in the body of Christ, we would mistakenly look around and conclude that there are some individuals who have giftedness that is not as important or needful in the body of Christ. So Paul's paralleling this step.

But I want you to notice something. Look at the way he words this in verse 22: "*...the parts of the body that seem to be weaker...*" Verse 23: "*...parts of the body that we think less honorable...*" And in the context of pointing out the fact that these are the impressions we get sometimes and the conclusion that we draw, Paul says, "On the contrary, Beloved, it's

just the opposite." And he describes them—notice in verse 22—as indispensable. In verse 23, he describes them as ones on which we bestow greater honor and treat with greater modesty.

When you read this all the way through verse 24, you get the impression that what Paul is doing here is calling attention to the difference of what we might call "visible parts of our body", and then "parts of our body that are not visible," often referred to as vital organs. I know there are more than just vital organs that are not visible, but this is his point here. Have you ever thought about that? The organs in our body that you have to have in order to stay alive—the brain, the heart, the lungs, the liver—those kinds of organs of the body a person has to have in order to maintain life. You can lose a hand and lose a limb and still have life.

The Apostle Paul is making a comparison here. He's not trying to deal with better/best or good/bad or anything like this. He's simply saying, "If you think about how the human body is wired—how it's put together—you will understand that those things that are absolutely necessary for life are not visible. They're not platform. They're not 'wow' factor. They're behind-the-scenes."

And what the Apostle Paul is doing is trying to call attention - he's not trying to downplay the sensational gifts. He is trying to lift up the value. He's trying to lift up in the minds of those who have sensational gifts the value of those parts of the body, consequently, that giftedness that is not always visible. He says in verse 24, "*But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it...*" And you know what? If you come down to verse 31, the Apostle Paul is kind of bringing this to a close, and he says, "*But earnestly desire the higher gifts.*"

In the flow of thought here, when he says "higher gifts," he's not talking about the sensational gifts. He's talking about all the gifts which can be all of them that are directly connected to the building up of the body and the common good of the family of faith. And he says, "That's what you want to desire. That's what your motive needs to be."

The question is not whether you are useful or not to the body. The issue is do you ever think offline behind the scenes, "Gosh, I want to be a platform person. I want to be a visible person. I want to have the wow-factor gift." The Apostle Paul says, "If that's the desire of your heart, as opposed to helpfulness or benefit to the body, then you are butting up against the temptation of self-exaltation." And he wants to pull us back from there. Do you want to be sensational or do you want to be beneficial?

And then a third question: Do I foster faction more than fellowship? There's a purpose clause in verse 25. Don't miss this, now. I want to show you something. I really honestly had just overlooked this through most of my study. I was sitting on the front porch of my house yesterday, and I started mulling over this and about had a spell. Do you all know what a spell is? Have you ever had a spell? I'm not sure exactly what it is, but it was kind of like a personal worship service there.

There's a purpose clause in verse 25 that is also a transition from. Remember I told you how he's weaving in and out of the analogy of the physical human body with the physical body of Christ and the church, and he's kind of been there in the last few verses and in the physical body analogy, you know, these vital organs and everything. And then, verses 25-26 of the purpose clause, he kind of takes it to the end of the physical church body, the members of the body of Christ, "...that there may be no division in the body, but that the

members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." And the reason we know he's talking here about us—he's talking about the body of Christ—is because, look, the physical hand doesn't care about the finger. It doesn't have the ability to do that. It doesn't have those emotions. So he's talking about us.

But he moves from the description of the physical human body into this to say, "This is why God [notice it there in verse 24] so composed the human body, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it. Why? "That there be no division in this physical—Christ's body called the church—and that you would have mutual care for one another. And when one member suffers, you would all suffer; when one member rejoices, you would all rejoice."

Beloved, listen to me. Think about the timeline here. Which comes first? The chicken or the egg? Isn't it easy to come to this chapter right here—this half of the chapter—and draw the conclusion that Paul is trying to get the Corinthians straight. He doesn't want them to be arguing over spiritual gifts or divided. He wants to bring them together, so he's thinking, "What can I use? How can I help them do this? Oh, look at the human body. That's a great illustration. So I'm going to take that and use it to help the Corinthians get back up on the road and get on track." Paul says, "No, that's not the way it happened. The way it happened is that God designed this body in eternity past, before the pages of recorded history."

Paul said in Romans 8:29, "*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...*" Why? "*...in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*" He ordained there to be a fellowship, a family, a body. Then, He stepped on the pages of recorded history in the Bible and said, "Let's make man in our image. I think I'm going to put that human body together in such a way to depict what's been in my mind in all of eternity."

So God takes some dust and He shapes the human body, and He puts it together, not as an afterthought or an illustration for a spiritual body, but as a picture of what He envisioned all along for us to be. Do you know what that means? That means there are millions of dollars being poured into anatomy departments in universities every year with people who are helping us think about how our body parts work together and how we can stay healthy, but completely missing why the body is put together like that. People that are involved in health science fields (that we're so thankful for) that help us think about how we're to stay well and get well but never fathom why the body's put together like that.

What a treasure to be a Christian serving one of those fields that you get to do both. You get to help people stay well and get well. But every time you look at the human body, you know why it was designed that way. That is so the body of Christ would be pictured. And every time we look in the mirror, every time we look at one another, do you know what we're seeing first and foremost? A reminder of what we're supposed to be as a fellowship that is doing life together in such a way that, when one hurts, all hurt; when one rejoices, all rejoice, and that we are developing mutual care in doing life together.

Let me tell you a greater tragedy. A greater tragedy than an unbeliever in an anatomy department in a university or a person working in health science—doing all that good stuff but never really seeing why the body's designed - let me tell you a greater tragedy. That is when people who are part of the body of Christ who get it and understand why our physical bodies were put together like this, exercise spiritual gifts in such a way that it creates division and disunity and completely undermines what the body is supposed to be.

This is who we are, Beloved, and we have a constant reminder in these physical bodies. It wasn't an afterthought to be used as an illustration; it was the forethought of you being in the mind of God—us being in the mind of God—in eternity past, and then God coming into creation and saying, "You know what? I think I'm going to design this body in such a way that, if they lose a limb, they'll still be able to rejoice in life because they have vital organs. But I also think that I'm going to design it in such a way that, when they stub their toe, their whole body will hurt. And that will be a really good reminder of how the fellowship is supposed to be."

Do you ever find yourself exercising your spiritual gifts, and when you do, it creates more argument, more confusion and more division in the body? Or do you find yourself exercising your spiritual gift in such a way that it spurs people on to love one another more and to care for one another more and to do life with one another more? If the former, you might be butting up against this temptation of self-exaltation.

And then, Paul says, "Do I prefer independence over dependence?" We don't have to spend a whole lot of time here. We rejoice in the fact that this chapter and other places emphasize that every Christian—don't miss it, now—every Christian is given at least one gift. Nobody was left out. That's emphasized about three or four times in this chapter and in other places. He underscores it here in verse 28, when he says, "God has appointed these..." and he lists some of these spiritual gifts. But he comes in verse 29 to the rhetorical questions: "*Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?*" The emphatic answer is "no." Nobody is wired to do it all. Nobody.

So Paul says again here, "There are no Lone Ranger Christians. There is nobody who is intended to act independently." Do you ever find yourself thinking, "I just like to do my own thing. I just like to exercise my gifts by myself over here"? Paul says, "You might be bordering on self-exaltation. Be careful."

And then, finally, this one: Do I want the Spirit's gifts more than His fruit? Again, we'll not camp here long because next week Pastor David—I'm so looking forward to it—is going to walk us through 1 Corinthians 13, commonly known as "The Love Chapter." And here we discover that that chapter is taught and preached and read most of the time out of its context. Do you know what its context is? Spiritual gifts. This is why Paul says at the very end of the chapter in verse 31, "*But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.*" And he launches into this teaching about love. He says, "This is a more excellent way." It's a more excellent way than even desiring the gifts that directly build up the body. The higher gifts. He says, "I want to show you something better," and he talks about, not the gifts of the Spirit, but the fruit of the Spirit.

So the question I want to give you at this point and hope you'll carry with you and bring back with you next week is: Am I more interested in the Spirit's gifts or am I more interested in the Spirit's fruit? Do I like to spend more time in 1 Corinthians 12-14 or do I like to spend more time in Galatians 5?

You see, the bottom line is, "Love is better." It doesn't mean we pick or choose. We ignore spiritual gifts. We've already covered that. What it means is that if we pursue spiritual gifts and leave the fruit of the Spirit out, we've missed it. And it's all going to crash and burn. Spiritual gifts won't ever make you a better Christian; love will. Love will help you recognize and discover and utilize and appropriate the best gifts. Love is a fruit of the Spirit given to all of us. Gifts of the Spirit—different ones get different gifts. This is something that pulls us

together. You might be butting up against the temptation of self-exaltation if you are more passionate about the Spirit's gifts than you are about His fruit.

The task of desiring, discovering and developing spiritual gifts:

In closing, let me step outside the exposition of this Scripture and draw some practical application that I want to be clear to underscore that. That's what I'm talking about here. I want to say a word to you about the task of desiring, discovering and developing spiritual gifts. I want you to understand that what I'm about to give you is one of a lot of possibilities on how you could go about doing that, but I don't want to leave this study without giving you that practical handle.

Let me just walk you through five steps of tackling this task of desiring, discovering and developing spiritual gifts that I hope will be a help to some of you. Step number one: Ask God's Spirit to guide you in the journey. Well, duh! You know, that's a no-brainer, isn't it? At the risk of stating the obvious, if these are spiritual gifts that the Spirit gives to the body, then let's don't leave Him out. This is not a guessing game. He gives you gifts, but He's not just sitting there trying to say, "I'm going to see if they can figure it out. I'm going to see how many times they miss it." He wants you to know this, so immerse this journey in sacrificial, intentional prayer. That goes for however you go about the discovery process from this point on. Pray about it, okay?

Secondly, stop being concerned with labels and definitions. I want to encourage you to minimize your putting yourself in a box with labels and definitions. I also want you to hear me say spiritual gifts inventories, assessments and surveys have value. We use them here at Brook Hills. We use them in our new member course. Many of you have gone through them. I want you to know they have value, but they also have limitations.

Every spiritual gift inventory is based on two assumptions. Number one: All the gifts in Scripture are exhaustive lists. We have them, so there would be about 22. Number two: That we know the precise definitions of those. And the fact of the matter is we're not guaranteed of either one of those. Because we're not guaranteed of either one of them, it puts limitations. So don't limit yourself to labels and definitions and categories that you might find. I'm not saying don't use those; I'm just saying don't limit yourself to those.

And then number three—this is where we make it really practical: Explore how God's wired you to build faith in others. How do you go about doing that? I want to introduce you to a simple, little tool, an acronym based on an idea out of 1 Peter 2 in which God says we're priests in His kingdom. Every one of - not just the preachers or the musicians - every one of us as individuals in the body of Christ are priests in the kingdom of God, who serve God and serve people in that context. There's a parallel here between our spiritual gifts because they involve us serving one another and serving the body and us being priests.

I want to take that acronym and encourage you to ask some questions about ministry things that you've been involved in and that you've been exposed to. Maybe you haven't been involved in them, but you've seen them done. So you've had experience in them or exposure to them. And I want you to think about service opportunities both inside and outside the church. Don't limit it to some church role. Think about those and ask yourself these questions.

What you might do is take six sheets of paper and put one of these on each one of them. First, passions: What lights you up? The Bible says, "*Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*" (Psalm 37:4) So as you delight yourself in the Lord,

what kind of service things have you seen or done or just thought about that turns you on and gets your motor running? List those things on the first piece of paper.

Next, reputation: What do others see in you? If spiritual gifts are given to the body and for the body, doesn't it make sense that the body would, to some degree, recognize them? So why don't you include some other people in your journey? Find some people that know you well and walk with God and ask them a question like this: "What do you see in me? What do I bring to the table that encourages you and strengthens your faith?" Make a list of those things.

All of us have seen people who've discovered gifts, so to speak, supposedly independently. Have you ever heard the guy who said, "I've got the spiritual gift of teaching," until you heard him teach and thought, "Not so much"? That can happen with any gift, any area, to any one of us. Include some people. What's your reputation among other believers with service?

Next, interests: What intrigues you? These are not necessarily things you've done, but what kinds of things have you seen done. Maybe you were walking downtown, and you saw some people serving at a soup kitchen and you thought, "Man, that looks kind of cool. I think I might like to try that." Or you saw somebody exercising a gift in the church—you've never done that—but you thought, "You know what? There's something about that I'm just drawn to. I'm interested in that." What intrigues you?

The next one is experience: What have you done? What kind of service opportunities have you actually been engaged in inside the church, where you have done things that the intent of which was to help others? Make a list of all those things. Next, success: What have you done fruitfully? Not just things you've done, but what have you done that you've actually seen actually help some people. Make a list of those things.

Finally, talents: What abilities do you have? Let me be clear to tell you I don't believe talents and spiritual gifts are synonymous. Lost people have talents. But I also want to tell you when the Spirit of the living God gets inside of a person and takes up residence, He can consecrate everything about that person to be used for His glory and the benefit of His body. So, while we don't make a one-to-one equation with talents, neither do we ignore them. What abilities do you have, both natural and learned? What kinds of things can you do that could be used to help other people?

That brings us to number four on the list: Take those six sheets of paper, spread them out and look for general themes that keep showing up. Step back away from them and see if you can identify some general themes—that maybe they don't show up on every gift, but they show up quite a few times—and you look and say, "You know what? I've been involved in or I've been interested in or seen some success in things that have to do with organizing stuff." Or, "I've been in leadership roles." Or, "I've been up in front of people instructing them and helping them." Or, "I've been behind the scenes in support roles that have just helped other people do other things that were more..." See if you can identify some general themes.

Finally, bring that back into the body of Christ and do some trial and error with related ministries. In other words, you find some of those general themes, you begin to look around and ask the question, "How can this be used? What's in place at Brook Hills, for example, that I might be able to explore whether I can be used in that area? Or what kinds of things Brook Hills hadn't even thought about that I could be used to encourage the larger body of

Christ? What kinds of things are out there or need to be out there in which I could take these general categories and begin to do some trial and error?"

Don't be afraid to fail. Get some counsel. Begin to try some things and see how God may bring to the surface a place or some places for you to be used. Talk to your small groups. Interact with other people and engage this journey as part of the body of Christ.

You know, when we grow from childhood to adulthood, that's somewhat of an organic journey. We do some trial and error; we succeed at times; we mess up sometimes, but they all move us along to maturity and growth. And that's really the way it is with spiritual gifts. God doesn't give us an envelope when we get saved and say, "Here's your assignment." That would be real easy. But you know why, or at least one of the reasons why? He does better. He says, "I'm going to give you myself. I'm the divine gift-giver. And we're going to walk this journey together."

So guess what? In the process along the way, you get to know more of Him, and you get to know more of how He has wired you, to use you to make Jesus look right and act right in this world.

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