

The Church, Where Everybody Is Somebody: Part 2

Last Sunday, those of you who braved the extreme cold, heard Part 1 of my two-part sermon from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12, verses 1 through 6. In this chapter, Paul encourages everyone to utilize their individual spiritual gifts for the good of the entire church. In the face of a few "super spiritual" members, who flaunted their speech gifts and minimized the more humble abilities of less talented members, Paul insisted that everyone in the church, regardless of how impressive their abilities, was indeed somebody of importance in the church.

Today we'll consider **1 Corinthians 12:7-11**:

⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

Last Sunday I told the story of Matthew Scott, who on January 25th, 1999, in Jewish Hospital in Louisville, Kentucky, became the first American to receive a hand transplant, after a 15-hour surgical procedure involving a 17-member medical team (actually, about 70 physicians were involved in research and preparation for this procedure). The transplanted hand belonged to Glenn William Johnson, a convicted murderer who took his own life the day prior to the transplant operation on Matthew Scott.

Matthew Scott decided to receive his hand transplant, even though there were and are serious risks inherent with such a transplant. There is the possibility of an early death, even if the anti-rejection drugs keep his body from rejecting his new hand. In other words, his new hand could be detrimental and a danger to the rest of his body.

In chapters 12-14 of 1 Corinthians, Paul addresses those members of the church whose over-estimation and imposition of their spiritual gifts were detrimental to the functioning and unity of the church. Paul alerted the church to the danger of individual members exercising spiritual gifts with no regard for the spiritual needs of individual members or for the overall spiritual health of the entire church. To these spirituals the only thing that seemed to matter was their opportunity to parade their giftedness. For this reason Paul wrote the thirteenth chapter which we know as "The Love Chapter of the Bible." In these verses Paul appeals to their love for one another to take precedence over their flaunting their glossolalia as "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." (1Corinthians 13:1).

Paul says that the members of the Body of Christ and their spiritual gifts are essential to and must be compatible with the rest of the members and their spiritual gifts. We ought to be compatible, first of all, because we are brought together to form one body (1 Corinthians 12:12). Members of a local church are not there by accident, but have been purposefully united by Sovereign God. The Apostle Peter says we have been chosen by God and brought together as living stones to be “built into a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:4-5).

We’re to understand that God brings people into His church for a special reason. As the new member makes himself or herself available to serve, and the church has a ministry need, God will providentially gift them to serve. In fact, this is the way spiritual gifts are discovered and developed, as members willingly respond to opportunities for service that the church extends.

Paul says the Triune God works in and through all the spiritual gifts and ministries of the Church. How unthinkable it is that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit should be divided against himself! It’s incongruous and inherently impossible. Since God is at work in his people as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then disunity is impossible because we are gifted by him who lives in us all. He would not lead us to act divisively or in an unloving manner, but would lead us to serve together for the common good of his church.

I checked on the Internet and saw that Matthew Scott’s surgery, after 16 years, is declared completely successful, and many other similar transplants have been performed since. And so, every member of the Body of Christ is to be vitally grafted into the life and functioning of the church. Paul clearly implies that the less noticeable and celebrated gifts, such as mercy and works of service, are no less beneficial to the life and ministry of the church than the more flamboyant ones (Romans 12:8; Ephesians 4:12). How devoid of effective ministry this church would be without the faithful, gifted ministry of folks who are willing to serve in the background!

All gifts are important, even the lesser known ones. As one pastor friend remarked, “I’ve yet to have anyone excitedly inform me that he/she has the gift of giving,” even though that gift is as important as is any spiritual gift (Romans 12:8). The Lord is using the gift of generous giving at Dale Heights to support our budget and many special ministries. I love the way some of you employ your carpentry, mechanical, engineering, and other gifts. And we’re all blessed by the culinary gifts that abound at Dale Heights! These are spiritual gifts—abilities used for the Lord, and thus enabled by the Holy Spirit.

Being called upon for service and then affirmed by the church is the best way to discover, use, and develop spiritual gifts. God has a way of leading others to enlist people in service that will enable the willing to discover their gifts. There may be some of you whose teaching gift might be discovered when you’re asked to teach a special Sunday School class.

Every member is beneficial and essential, and also that in the use of gifts, love is indispensable and absolutely dependent on the grace of the Master. For this reason Paul inserted into the middle of his treatment of spiritual gifts his great Love Chapter (13). Gifts exercised as an expression of love for God and others will help grow, unify and strengthen the church. As a prerequisite to doing the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) is the doing of the Great Commandment, to love God and others (Matthew 22:34-40).

Some time ago I talked with a couple in a previous church I served, that went through a difficult time in their marriage. They both spoke of how the people in the church came up alongside them to encourage them, to spend time with them, both individually and together. Spiritual gifts were at work to counsel with wisdom, and to encourage faith. Very few people in the church knew about this ministry, and I doubt if those who helped are even aware of their spiritual gifts. Yet, the fact is, people ministered with gifts of mercy and wisdom and the Body experienced healing, strength and encouragement.

Spiritual gifts are beneficial also to the church's doing its mission in the Great Commission. As members employ their gift (s), the church and its mission are strengthened to take the gospel beyond the walls of the church, as Gerry and Jamie Klump did in recent weeks in Guatemala.

Those who utilize their God-anointed talents, such as singing, playing an instrument, and reading Scripture, to lead in life-changing worship, are as involved in the Great Commission as authentically as those who have the gift of evangelism. When our worship music, preaching and liturgy are done in the power of the Spirit, people will sense the presence of God among us (1 Cor. 14:25).

I received by way of e-mail from a friend the following story, which I think illustrates well how God works through our simple willingness to do his work:

“Wishing to encourage her young son's progress on the piano, a mother took the small boy to a Paderewski concert. After they were seated, the mother spotted a friend in the audience and walked down the aisle to greet her. Seizing the opportunity to explore the wonders of the concert hall, the little boy rose and eventually explored his way through a door marked 'No Admittance.'

“When the house lights dimmed and the concert was about to begin, the mother returned to her seat and discovered that her son was missing. Suddenly, the curtains parted and spotlights focused on the impressive Steinway on stage. In horror, the mother saw her little boy sitting at the keyboard, innocently picking out 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.

“At that moment, the great piano master made his entrance, quickly moved to the piano, and whispered in the boy’s ear, “Don’t quit. Keep playing.” Then leaning over, Paderewski reached down with his left hand and began filling in a bass part. Soon his right arm reached around to the other side of the child and he added running obbligato. Together, the old master and the young novice transformed a frightening situation into a wonderfully creative experience. The audience was mesmerized.”

“That’s the way it is with God,” my friend’s e-mail message continued. “What we can accomplish on our own is hardly noteworthy. We try our best, but the results aren’t exactly graceful flowing music. But with the hand of the Master, our life’s work can be beautiful.

“The next time you set out to accomplish great feats, listen carefully. You can hear the voice of the Master, whispering in your ear, ‘Don’t quit. Keep playing.’ Feel his loving arms around you. Know that his strong hands are playing the concerto of your life.

“Remember,” my friend’s note concludes, “God doesn’t call the equipped. He equips the called.” We’re all *spiritual*, given at least one spiritual gift God will use. You are *original*. No one else can replicate what God has created and called you to do where he has placed your life. You are also, as they yield to the Spirit’s control, *compatible* with others in the Body. And your faithful service will be *beneficial* in the work of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, to the glory of God.