

MANY MEMBERS, MANY GIFTS

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START WITH AWKWARD WORSHIP SET

INTRODUCTION

To make sure that the next point (that all parts of the body are necessary for the body to function in a healthy way) is very clear, I want to have a couple of demonstrations.

Please try to write your name with your thigh. It simply can't be done. There are some things that can't be done by the wrong part of the body.

Please try to write your name on a piece of paper with your elbows. There are some things that are possible, but much more difficult when the wrong part of the body attempts them.

Now try to write your names on a piece of paper using your hands, but with only you pinky and ring finger. There are some things that are much harder when certain parts of the body aren't doing their part.

All of us in the body of Christ have certain gifts or functions that we've been given and empowered by God to use for the glory of God, the good of the Church, and the advancement of the gospel and there will be significant negative ramifications if we do not. That's what this session is all about...many members, many gifts.

Let's look first at the nature of these God given functions/gifts.

THE NATURE OF GOD GIVEN FUNCTIONS/SPIRITUAL GIFTS

There are several things that I'd like to point out under this heading:

1. For Paul, the various functions of the members of the body of Christ and the gifts are one and the same. I do not mean to suggest that everything today works exactly as it did at the time Paul wrote his letters, just that when Paul talks of functions of the body he has individual gifts in mind. Also, I'm aware that this probably requires more explanation than I'm going to give it this evening, but I'll give you two quick reasons why I believe this:
 - a. The first reason that I believe this is because of Paul's seamless transition between the gifts and the functions of the body in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4. In all three passages Paul uses one (gifts and functions) to further explain the other.
 - b. The second reason that I believe this is because of how obviously the synonymous nature of the two terms fits with the experience that most of us have.
2. There are certain responsibilities/privileges that everyone in the body of Christ shares. That is, we're going to spend the rest of this session looking at the fact that God designed each of us to function in a unique way for the good of the body of Christ. This might make it seem as if there's no overlap. It might seem as if we've each been given a particular job and that's all that we're responsible for. This is not the case.

Grudem, in Systematic Theology, notes that while not all have the gift of teaching, for instance, all are called to teach in a certain sense (their children for instance...Deuteronomy 6:7). This is the case with all gifts. Not all have the gift of evangelism, but all are called to evangelize. Not everyone has the gift of healing, but we are all called to pray for the wellness of and care for the sick. Etc.

There are certain functions/privileges/responsibilities that we all share.

With this having been said...

3. There are also individual gifts/functions that are unique to each person in the body of Christ. It is these individual gifts or functions that we're primarily concerned with now. We certainly touched on this idea already but I want to make it explicit in this one:

Every one of us has a certain function to perform / gift to use within the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Romans 12:4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

1 Peter 4:10-11 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies- in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

We have all have gifts that are unique to us.

I tried hard to think and pray pastorally through this idea. As I did it occurred to me that there are probably a few common or primary struggles with this simple truth.

- a. I imagine that some people don't feel as if they have anything to offer. The fact of the matter is, as we just saw in several passages of Scripture, if you are a Christian you have a function/gifts. There is no one in here or anywhere who is truly in Christ that has nothing to offer.

If someone feels as if they have no gifts, then, this leaves us with two options. Either they are not a Christian/part of the body of Christ and so they're right or, more likely, they need the help and prayers and encouragement of the Church to discover who they are in Christ and the gifts that he's given them and to use them for his glory and the good of his people.

Christian, don't be discouraged, in Christ you have all that you need to be all that you're meant to be. Be encouraged, find joy, serve boldly and confidently.

- b. I imagine that there are some in this room who simply did not know that they have a function within the body of Christ or gifts to be used for the body. Now you do. Amen.
- c. I imagine that there are some people who know they have something to offer but, for various sinful reasons, choose not to (at least not for the good of the Church). You need to turn from your sin (whatever it is). God's commands are plain and God's people need you.
- d. I imagine that there are some people who know their gifts but do not feel that there's any place for them to use them. Grudem suggests that if there are a number of individuals in the church who do not know what their spiritual gifts are, this is probably a good indication that the leadership in the church is not providing enough opportunities for the various different gifts to be used. If you're in this camp, on behalf of the elders, we're sorry. Let's work together to overcome this and equip you for service.
- e. Finally, I imagine that there are some people who are hesitant to use their gifts without further training or instruction. If this describes you, please talk to us. We're happy to find you some place to serve now with the skills that you do have and to help you develop them further for greater effectiveness.

When we don't use our gifts the entire body suffers. We force others to try to make up for our lack of obedience in areas outside of their giftedness. As you saw earlier, this can be awkward at best. Ephesians 4 makes this plain.

Ephesians 4:15-16 *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

That's our goal at Grace, to equip each of you to function within your areas of giftedness in order that each part might work properly and the body of Christ might grow and build itself up in love.

OK, but what are your gifts/functions? Where do they come from? And what are they for? Let's look at the answers to those questions.

4. There is no exact list of spiritual gifts/functions. Grudem is helpful here. He notes that there are six different NT spiritual gift lists. Interestingly, while there is some overlap, none of them are the same.

1 Corinthians 12:28

1. apostle
2. prophet
3. teacher
4. miracles
5. kinds of healings
6. helps
7. administration
8. tongues

1 Corinthians 12:8-10

9. word of wisdom
10. word of knowledge
11. faith
- (5) gifts of healing
- (4) miracles
- (2) prophecy
12. distinguishing between spirits
- (8) tongues
13. interpretation of tongues

Ephesians 4:11

- (1) apostle
- (2) prophet
14. evangelist
15. pastor-teacher

Romans 12:6-8

- (2) prophecy
16. serving
- (3) teaching
17. encouraging
18. contributing
19. leadership
20. mercy

1 Corinthians 7:7

21. marriage
22. celibacy

1 Peter 4:11

whoever speaks (covering several gifts)

whoever renders service (covering several gifts)

From this list, Grudem notes, we can see that one answer to the question of how many spiritual gifts there are is 22. However that's probably not a very helpful number in that many of the gifts listed have many different expressions as they are found in different people.

It's probably best to avoid attaching a number to the question at hand and rest in the fact that God gives the church an amazing variety of spiritual gifts (1 Peter 4:10). Consequently, we must learn to acknowledge and appreciate and even celebrate our gifts and the various gifts in others.

In short, there's no specific list of gifts or functions out there. Which leads to the next point.

5. Discovering and seeking spiritual gifts can be somewhat challenging.

Paul seems to assume that believers will know what their spiritual gifts are. If you really don't know what yours are please talk to us. Additionally, Grudem suggests that those who do not know their gifts might begin by asking themselves or others some questions:

- a. What needs are there in the church today that I could meet?
- b. What interests and desires do I have?
- c. What do others tend to compliment me on?
- d. What areas of my service has God blessed in the past?

Individuals seeking their spiritual gifts should ask God for wisdom and just try to engage in some of the various ministries of the church.

FUNCTIONS ASSIGNED BY GOD AND EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT

Another very important thing to note regarding the many gifts of the many individuals within the one body is that the gifts or functions that we have are assigned by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Scripture makes both truths plain.

1. Functions assigned by God. Our functions/gifts are not ultimately natural or developed by us. They are ultimately given by God. This is how we can be so confident that we do, in fact, all have gifts. Further, they are not only given, but also arranged by God precisely as he sees fit.

1 Corinthians 12:18, 24-26 *But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose... ²⁴ But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.*

Your gifts / function were given to you by God. What a joy it is to know that God has gifted us exactly as he sees fit. May we rest in that. But not only are our gifts given by God, they are also...

2. Empowered by the Holy Spirit. Once given, our functions/gifts are not then left up to us to control or wield in our own strength or power. Rather, if they are to be used with effect it will always be because the Spirit sees fit to empower them.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

When we combine these two Scriptural truths it means, in my estimation, at least three things:

- a. Be humble. There's no room for bragging or pride when all that we have was given to us by another.
- b. Be content. There's no room for self-pity when all that we have was given to us by our great and loving and glorious God. We must not despise the gifts that God has given us by wishing for different ones. We must not be discouraged if our gifts aren't as strong or obvious as others. We must be content.
- c. Be hopeful. There's no room for despair when God assigned us exactly what we need to do exactly what he intends and when he's sent his Spirit to give us the strength we need. The plans of God will not be thwarted. Be hopeful.

USED FOR THE GOOD OF THE BODY AND THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE GOSPEL

Finally we must remember that the ultimate purpose of functioning or using our gifts properly, as we talked about earlier, is the glory of our head, Jesus. However, we know from Scripture that one of the primary ways in which we glorify Jesus is by working for the good of his body.

Part of what makes a spiritual gift a spiritual gift (as opposed to a general talent or ability) is that it builds up the church. Grudem says, "since the purpose of spiritual gifts is the building up of the church (1 Corinthians 14:12; 1 Peter 4:10) that we rightly view our gifts as spiritual gifts when they are accomplishing this end." In other

words, if we function or use our gifts and it does not build up the Church or work toward the common good it is not a Spiritual gift.

1 Peter 4:10-11 *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies- in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

1 Corinthians 12:7 *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

1 Corinthians 14:12 *So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.*

As you consider your gifts and your use of them, consider also whether or not you're using them intentionally for the building up of the church, the body of Christ.

Finally, as we'll talk about more tomorrow, passages like Acts 1:8 suggest that the pouring out of the Holy Spirit and his accompanying gifts was to equip the church to preach the gospel.

CONCLUSION

You have a gift from and empowered by God to be used for the glory of God and the good of the Church.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Before this session, what spiritual gift or gifts did you think you had? Has your understanding of your own spiritual gift(s) changed after this lesson? In what way?
2. What can you do to stir up or strengthen those spiritual gifts in you that need strengthening? Are there some gifts that you have been given but have neglected? Why do you think you have neglected them? What could be done to stir up or rekindle them in you?
3. As you think about Grace church, which spiritual gifts do you think are most effectively functioning at the present time? Which are most needed at Grace? Is there anything that you can do to help meet those needs?
4. Do you feel as if you regularly use your gifts for the good of the Church? Is there ever a temptation to use them primarily or even solely for your own good? What might it look like if everyone in the Church functioned according to their gifts for the good of the Church?