



6. A Passion for the Body 2 (1 Cor 12:1-31)

As we have looked through our series heart of fellowship, we have begun to realise that God has made us part of something - part of His church. You will recall that last time we started to look at the subject of A Passion for the Body and we found that God has taken each and every one of us who have trusted Christ and *immersed* us in the body of Christ. We have become part of the body of Christ. That's an honour and privilege. God never does things by halves. We have been given a place of honour and privilege. Let's have a look at the graphic that we examined briefly last time:

- We are each a part of Christ's body
 - ⇒ We are all different
 - ⇒ We need one another
 - ⇒ We are made that way by God.
- We are each equipped by the Spirit to do God's work
- We each have an essential role to play
- God honours what we do with the grace He gives, not the gift

We looked at the fact we are part of the body last time. We found that the body is not uniform, but that God has made us all different to make the body of Christ - the Church function under His headship. We are all different and are meant to be like that because we need one another to function as God's people in His church. Never think, or let anyone else make you think that you are a lesser Christian for any reason.

We grow as a church when we perform the function that God has given each of us. If we don't perform that function because of disobedience or feeling inadequate, then the body of Christ as a whole loses.

Perhaps a statement like that makes you feel even more inadequate. Never fear because God never gives anybody a role or a calling without ensuring they are fully equipped for the task. Fully equipped means just that. So let's go to our second item on the list where we left off last time.

📌 **We are each equipped by the Spirit to do God's work**

Romans 12: 4 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.

1 Cor 12:4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. 7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom etc.

We all are equipped to perform our part of the body by being given gifts according to the grace given us. The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each of us for the common good. Note that word EACH.

Last time I started off this section by saying that part of the tradition of many of the free churches has been to be pastor oriented rather than body oriented. Therefore ministry was something carried out by a minority. Certainly our history has been more influenced by Catholicism than we would like to think, where ministry is only the preserve of those in special places of honour - so you had the clergy and the laity.

That's just not what the Bible teaches. As I said last week, this is a disputed passage, which is a surprise because it's unequivocally worded and was meant to be. The trouble is when you have about 1,500 years of error in the system, people will try to equivocate these words and bend them to something they just don't mean.

What these verses unequivocally show is to each of *us the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good*. Ministry is not the preserve of the few but that "all members are ministers". We are all called and all gifted to play our part in the body of Christ. That's not just me, but all of you without exception.

Another problem with these rather unequivocal verses is that many Christians of a more "traditional" stance also find these verses a problem because of the way in which verses on the gifts were taken up by the charismatic movement of the past few decades and they were put off by the chaos that sometimes ensued. In fact in many churches, people committed the sins of the Corinthians by using gifts in the flesh and creating the chaos that 1 Corinthians 12-14 was written to prevent. This caused divisions in many churches and as you know has spawned a whole "new church" movement.

You can also go to a whole series of churches in Britain which are evangelical and "traditional" and you'll hardly ever hear the Holy Spirit mentioned. There is no mention or teaching of gifts and when the sick are prayed for, there's no request for healing. Mention the holy Spirit and you strike terror or suspicion.

The answer to bad teaching in churches is not no teaching, but dealing with scripture correctly by seeing what it actually says: not what we would like it to say because Satan would prefer we lived in error or even terror of the Holy Spirit. And that's many Christians still today. Satan would prefer we didn't understand that we part of Christ's body and supernaturally equipped by the Holy Spirit to perform the role that by His grace and love, God has given us to build one another up and give God glory.

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. 28 And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit etc. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

So the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one. Not to the special few. Each one. We are all equipped by the Spirit as he determines and for the common good. All members are ministers. You are a minister; everyone's a minister because God had given you a function and the Spirit has gifted you for the common good of the body. This is unequivocal scripture. You are made part of the body, you are equipped.

All that's a work of God. Let's have a quick look at the list. I'm going to be doing some special teaching on this shortly so today just reviews them. As you can see, there are a few lists here. So how many gifts are there? What's clear is that there are a lot and this suggests that the gifts of the Spirit are not a fixed and prescribed list but that the Holy Spirit gives what's needed so that we can fulfil our part in the body. All are intended as service gifts - used to build up the body - the fellowship of God's people.

Gifts of the Spirit in the New Testament		
<i>Rom. 12.6-8</i>	<i>Eph. 4.11</i>	
Prophecy	Apostles	
Ministry	Prophets	
Teaching	Evangelists	
Encouraging	Pastors	
Sharing	Teachers	
Leadership		
Showing mercy		
<i>I Corinthians</i>		
<i>1 Cor 12.8-10</i>	<i>1 Cor 12.28</i>	<i>1 Cor 12.29-30</i>
Word of wisdom	Apostles	Apostles
Word of knowledge	Prophets	Prophets
	Teachers	Teachers
Faith		Miracles
Gifts of healing	Powers	Gifts of healing
Miraculous powers	Gifts of healing	Tongues
Prophecy	Helps	Interpretation
Discerning of spirits	Administration	
Kinds of tongues	Kinds of tongues	
Interpretation of tongues		

Now as you can see, they are a mixture of the mundane and the miraculous. So amongst all the tongues and healing is administration, helps, encouraging, sharing, showing mercy. But they are all gifts of the Spirit and are therefore supernaturally given and take us beyond our natural talents.

If you look at all of them, they are actually all intended for the purpose of building up the body of Christ. Without exception. And that is their intention.

So what about all those problems that some churches have with gifts? Gifts are tools which the Holy Spirit gives to perform the ministry we are called to. It's rather like having an electric hedge clippers. Hedge clippers are great for clipping hedges. But have you ever tried using them to cut wood? Or have you ever tried using one one-

handed? You're going to have an accident. Fortunately the manufacturer puts in safety features, but you can still do yourself and others a lot of damage. It's the same with the Spirit's gifts. Use them as intended, by the Spirit and you will find they glorify God. Use them badly - that is according to your will and not the Spirit - and you'll use them in the flesh and cause untold damage to the work of God. Let me use someone else's wisdom here that of Ray Steadman who said:

Now, if you use a spiritual gift for your own purpose, for your own aggrandisement, your own ego satisfaction, what will happen is that the Father, who controls the power, will simply turn off the tap. What you will do then is use a spiritual gift in the power of the flesh, of selfishness, and what comes out, as a result, is death and the spreading of dissatisfaction, dissension and division in the body of Christ. Spiritual gifts can be used in the power of the flesh, and then they create havoc as they were doing here at Corinth, but spiritual gifts used to benefit others always awaken and make possible the release of the power of God. The result will be life and joy and harmony and the bringing together in a beautiful way of expressions of love. Then the world will see that we are Christians; 'they will know we are Christians by our love.'

What's your call? What's your gift? If you know it, can you use it to God's glory. These will all be questions we will ask in a few weeks. If we don't know, our call, gift and role, then the whole fellowship is diminished and God's work is held back. If we know our gift and use it in the flesh, the same result is also true. It's not an issue we can drive our heads into the sand about.

We each have an essential role to play

20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour.

"No-one is indispensable" as the old saying goes. But in the body of Christ, the truth is, you are indispensable. God has placed you in this church because you have a role to fulfil. No-one can say you're not, but you can't say I'm not going to fulfil this role. I'm retired. (Actually, some of the most active servants of this church are retired!) Or I'm sick. Or I can't do much. Without you the church will not function properly.

However I do believe as we go through the changes in life, our role changes. I may have been called to be a Pastor, but I haven't always been. Years ago I did other things and operated as the Spirit determined. Now it's different. Our calling and role and therefore our equipping changes through life as God gives us the grace to be part of where He has placed us. And we are called and equipped for that role. You may have changed. You may have less energy. Your circumstances may have changed. You may have to have shifted down a few gears. You can't do what you did before any more. But you are still called to play the part God gives you now, which is according to who you are now and what by His grace He is enabling to do now.

I think that's exciting. God always wants to use me - however limited I may feel my energies are! Praise Him! You are not called to be what you were, or what somebody else is now, but you are still called and equipped to play your part - and you'll still be missed if you don't play it.

I remember last year how well the Holiday Club went. It went well, because of the role that so many people had, using their gifts and talents. It wasn't just those who expended their energy organising and being with the children. It was the army of people who helped. We pooled our gifts and our talents. Some of the most valuable ministry was done by those who promised to stay home on the afternoons and pray. Our roles are never too small for God. And those of you who don't think you have much

to give - you have more than you think, but even that little makes a difference in the body of Christ.

So how do I sum this section up? You'll remember the other week that we considered those people in the church that can become discouraged by our actions. It works the other way too. Your gift, however small builds up the fellowship. Your not using it diminishes us all. I say that to encourage you. Never feel a second-class Christian because you can't do what others can - because God honours the faithful servant. This neatly brings me to my final point.

🍷 God honours what we do with the grace He gives, not the gift

Another comment that I've often heard made is that "I don't have any gifts". Well, you already know that's rubbish. That's always told me by people who have very apparent gifts. What they mean usually is they look at all the people with all the speaking gifts, or even the miraculous gifts and they don't have them so they think "I'm ungifted". Look at the lists again. In any church, there are plenty of people who say little but do a lot. We're grateful for the people who have practical gifts. We're grateful for those who help others. We are grateful for those who encourage us, who show compassion. It's all a gift of God.

Christians today can make the same mistakes as the silly people at Corinth. They believed that those who were prominent in the church were superior to others. They thought that those who spoke in tongues were specially blessed. Chapters 12 and 14 were written against that and the whole tenor of Paul's reaction to this attitude is "Rubbish!". In fact God ensures those parts of the body that don't seem important (but are indispensable) should receive the highest honour.

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honour to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body,

God gives greater honour to the parts that seemed weaker. Gifts are given according to God's grace and God honours our use of them not our possession of them. Yet we often confuse the possession of the gift with honour and that's just not so.

Some of the worse abuses of God's grace I have ever seen and the worst abuses of ministry have been committed by those that have thought themselves superior because of the gift that they were given. Just because God may have used you in the past and that you have done things in the Spirit does not mean that you can't do them in the flesh. Those that exercise sign gifts are people most vulnerable to doing them in the flesh and wreaking most destruction on the church of God. That's precisely what was happening in Corinth and why actually why chapters 12 to 14 are actually very, very precise.

So where have we been in the last two sessions?

- 1.** We are all part of the body - without exception.
- 2.** We are equipped by the Spirit to do God's work - without exception we are all given a function and equipped by the Spirit
- 3.** We are an indispensable. If we do not function, the body suffers and the work of Christ suffers.
- 4.** God honours what we do with the grace He gives, not the gift

The question is here. What is God calling you to do? What gifts has the Spirit given you? These are vital questions. The functioning of the body of Christ depends on you. The function of this expression of the body of Christ, this fellowship; one another, depends on whether each of us is functioning as we should.

But there's more to this. It's the fundamental point to fellowship. You may even feel that I've put pressure on you this morning and am trying to guilt ride you into service. Our fellowship isn't built on a guilt trip - although we need to understand the responsibilities Christ gives us. In the end if you don't use your gift, if you ignore what the spirit gives you, then you aren't responsible to me as Pastor, or to the deacons or to the Church - but to the head, even Christ.

But motive is important. Why do we want to discern our function in the body. Why would we want to find our gifts and use them. Paul gives the answer in the famous chapter - chapter 13 as he shows us a better way - love. If it isn't love which drives us to honour Christ, if it isn't love for one another that gives us a desire and a passion to use our gifts and build the body, then forget it. Gifts used without love are in the flesh and don't honour God.

In the end fellowship is about love - a passion for God and a passion for one another. Let's pray that God will give us that passion this morning to realise who we are in Christ afresh, to understand the privilege that He gives us to be part of His family, His body; for the way He has called and equipped us to serve Him here, never mind how small that may seem. And let's serve Him as He has given us the grace to do. Then we'll see Him glorified.

Let me finish with some words by the famous Bible teacher and preacher, John Stott:

Our motive must be concern for the glory of God, not the glory of the church or our own glory.

Our message must be the gospel of God as given by Christ and his apostles, not the traditions of men or our own opinions.

Our manpower must be the whole church of God, every member of it, not a privileged few who want to retain evangelism as their prerogative.

Our dynamic must be the Spirit of God, not the power of human personality, organisation, or eloquence.

Without these priorities we shall be silent when we ought to be vocal.

