

Jason Upchurch - 1 Corinthians 12:11-26 - A Right Attitude About Spiritual Gifts

Well, as we move on in 1 Cor. I think we come to what is an immensely practical section in this discussion on spiritual gifts. And really it's a practical theology of spiritual gifts. It addresses our attitude toward gifts in general, our attitude toward the gifts we have and our attitude toward gifts other people have.

And we all need this because the default posture we have in our sinfulness is to evaluate ourselves versus other people.

We've even see this over the last couple of years as the government has made determinations about who is and is not essential in society. They've made arbitrary distinctions about our whole society about who is and who is not essential when the reality is that everyone is essential in our society.

And if I can just be honest, this mindset isn't just a government problem. This mindset is a human depravity problem. We all have this ongoing evaluation of where we land in the social and even church pecking order.

Missionaries and pastors are way up high. Stay at home moms, eh, not so much.

Married people: the anointing of God rests upon you. Single people, you've probably got a problem even though Paul was single.

Business people, a blessing to God's church. Music people, if they could just put one song set together that didn't irritate everyone.

I don't think anyone would ever say those things out loud, but the reality is that we often think these things. We often evaluate ourselves in relation to others.

"Well, So and So can do this, so they're more special in God's kingdom. Or so and so is only equipped to do this, so who needs them?"

And what Paul does here is a massive correction to the thinking in the Corinthian church. They've got this idea of pecking order and Paul says that that is nonsense.

Remember that all these spiritual gifts we've seen, and even ones we haven't seen, are given to us by God to serve the church. **Read 5-6**

These are services and activities - these are actions that God expects us to be doing within the body of Christ.

And here's the big takeaway this morning: Your service to the body of Christ is essential no matter what gift you have or don't have.

This is huge: this squashes laziness in thinking "Well, I don't matter to the work of the church. I don't have to do anything to encourage the body of Christ."

This squashes pride "they're not as gifted as so and so."

This also squashes another form of pride: "I'm not as good as so and so."

It turns out in the Church, everyone is essential. So I want us to see that in 6 ways this morning.

1) You service to the body is essential because the Holy Spirit apportioned you your role. **Read 11, 18**

So when we're going through a doctrinal statement or basic theology we all have probably seen or read that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to believers.

RBC's statement of Faith: [The Holy Spirit] cultivates Christian character, comforts believers, and bestows the spiritual gifts by which they serve God through His church.

That's probably vague and nebulous to us and, although we know it's true, it probably doesn't impact us much. But actually this is the most fundamental truth in this whole section.

God himself - specifically God the Holy Spirit - personally assigned you the gifts that you have. Back in eternity past before anything was created, God the Holy Spirit had a plan to assign you specific gifts that would bless the Church. And when he regenerated you and brought you to life he apportioned to you - to you specifically - exactly as he desired. He's not making this up as he goes. He's not tossing out gifts Willy Nilly.

I like going down to the Spokane Indians baseball games and occasionally during the game they'll launch t-shirts out into the crowd at random and you hope you get a shirt and you hope the shirt actually fits and everyone's fighting over this shirt that doesn't even really fit.

That's not how the Spirit works when he gives out gifts. He's very intentional.

Look back to **Matt 25** for a minute. This is the parable of the Talents. And it's basically the same idea. God has given each believer gifts to use to serve the body of Christ. And the idea is that God has given us these talents to use. A talent was a weight - 75lbs. And the picture Jesus is painting here is that God gives out spiritual gifts as though he's handing out treasure to us to go use. We are to go invest what God has given us into his Kingdom. Some people he gives more treasure to, others he gives less, but whatever he gives is valuable and he expects us to use it to the max. I'll read the whole thing, but we'll focus in on the first couple of verses.

Read 14-30

So the moral of the story is God has given us gifts, and we will give an account for how we used them when we stand before the Lord. And if we completely waste our gifts, it's probably indicative that we were never really part of the Kingdom anyway.

But notice **Vs. 15** carefully. He gives these gifts according to our ability. Again, I believe that the "talents" God gives us are really the skills and abilities and opportunities and spiritual gifts with which to serve the church. But notice, he custom tailors what he gives to us.

He wouldn't give 5 talents to someone who could only handle 2. And he's not going to give 1 talent to someone who could handle 5. That would create frustration and confusion. No, God custom tailors our gifts to us.

And then - he holds us accountable to what he's given us. We give an account to him.

And notice, he doesn't chastise the 2 talent guy for only managing 2 talents. "You loser - why couldn't you handle 5 like this guy?" No, what's he say to the 2 talent guy? Well done, good and faithful servant.

The guy who gets lambasted and tossed in hell is the guy who turns out to be an unbeliever anyway. He was given 1 talent - the smallest amount - and he squandered it. And he calls the Lord a thief in the process.

God is concerned about every talent we have been given. He is concerned about every gift he has entrusted us with. Because everything we have and don't have is by his sovereign design.

Whether you're a 1 with your gifts or 4 or 5 we are called to use them wisely and diligently. When we show up on the Day of Judgment and Jesus asks us for an account for how we used the gifts the Spirit gave us the answer should be: "Look, Lord, what I made for you!!"

And even then we'll say, even this was by the grace of your Spirit.

Back in 1 Cor. 12, this is the first essential truth: your service to the body of Christ is essential because the Holy Spirit has given you your role.

One other note before we go on: It's clear here that what Paul means by service is service to the local church. It's true we're part of what we call the universal church. The worldwide church of all believers. But what Paul has in mind here is that everyone is equipped to served specifically in the local church. All these instructions are given to the Corinthians to serve one another.

So we're called to serve one another here. That doesn't mean everyone has to be involved in music or cleaning or teaching or something even on a Sunday. Maybe you should be, but what it does mean is that you should be serving the body of Christ here in some capacity - even if it's not an official ministry of RBC.

2) Your service to the body is essential because it displays the work that Jesus and the Spirit have done in uniting the church. Read 12-13

So this is an interesting aspect of the church we often don't consider. As we live our lives following Jesus, there are bigger realities that are on display whether we know it or not. Here the bigger reality is that when we come together as a church, serving one another, loving one another, it displays the absolutely miraculous work that God has done in bringing people from all kinds of different backgrounds together in Jesus.

Permit me to be a little tongue in cheek for a minute. The body of Christ is kind of like Frankenstein. We're all these various parts that are put together to form a body. And just like Frankenstein was awkward and stiff, so too is the body of Christ can be awkward and stiff.

Look at the people the Spirit has brought together in **Vs. 13**: Jews, Greeks, slaves, free.

This is a group of people that are on absolutely polar opposite sides of every spectrum possible.

Jews had a background in the Bible, knew to some extent who God was prior to faith. Greeks were not only foreign to Jews, they were detestable to them. They were polytheistic and uncircumcised - the defining characteristic of a Jew. But in the mercy of God he brought them into his blessing through faith in Jesus. Religiously, they couldn't be further apart.

Socially, slaves and free were as far apart as possible. And in the church, it wasn't just slave and free. It was often slaves and masters. That's awkward. Maybe your slave is actually your elder who shared the gospel with you and you believed.

And there's all different combinations of this situation as well. The beauty of the gospel is that the work that the Spirit has done in us through faith in Jesus is to make us one body. But really, the goal isn't to be Frankenstein where you can see the stitches and screws poking out of his neck and it's weird and awkward.

No, when the church is working together - using all of our gifts all of the time in love to each other - we look like a radiant bride. There are no stitches. There's a beauty in the body of Christ.

And the point Paul is getting at is that the Church as a whole is the place where that's reflected the best.

It's where single people and married people come together and serve each other like family.

It's where those who are well off and those who are poor talk about their riches in Christ Jesus.

Where those who are committed to higher education and those who are in the trades disciple one another and serve each other.

The church is a place where people from all walks of life and backgrounds - every tribe and tongue and nation and language - can come together with no other organic connection and be closer than blood family because of Jesus.

See, it's easy in church or any other place to automatically gravitate to people who are like us. That's common. That's worldly. Even Gentiles love those who love them back.

The Spirit's work in showing the greatness of Jesus is to bring us all together in seamless beauty serving each other in love where all we have in common is Jesus.

We are all part of the same body of Jesus. Jesus is our head, and we are the limbs who serve the head by serving each other. How'd we get into the body of Christ? The Spirit dunked us into the body. **Read 13**

This is an interesting verse because we see the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in salvation. We often forget how essential the Spirit is to our salvation but:

John 3:8: It is the Spirit who causes us to be born again.

John 6:63: It is the Spirit who gives us eternal life, the flesh is no help at all.

Titus 3:5: We were saved by the washing and regeneration of the Spirit.

Here, Paul says 2 things are kind of unconventional, but very important about our salvation.

First, he says: In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. When we were saved, it's as though the Spirit plunged us not into water, but into the body of Christ. That's what he dunked us into.

Which means that our commitment to the body of Christ is not something that's a minor part of our Christian life. It's not a small aspect. It's the proverbial water we swim in.

We don't dip our toe into relationships, we don't just put up with those around us.

One of the sad realities of many people who claim Christ over the last 2 years is that they've stopped gathering together. They've cut themselves off of fellowship. That makes as much sense as a fish saying, "You know, I'm just not going to swim anymore. I'm getting out of this water because it's scary."

No, being intimately involved in the body of Christ is exactly what the Spirit has dunked us into. And part of what baptism shows - water baptism - is that we've been immersed into the body of Christ by the Spirit.

The other thing he says is that we were all made to drink of the one Spirit. **Read 13**

This can sound weird because not only is drinking the Spirit a weird visual, but **being made** to drink the Spirit sounds odd.

But I think he's really getting to a beautiful truth. Our life in the NC is completely saturated with the Spirit and what he's done in us and in every other believer.

To drink something in is to internalize it, to have it become part of who you are.

John 6:53 Jesus says unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

That's not literal, the idea is that unless you internalize Jesus - internalize that the only way to the Father is by his sacrifice of his body and his blood - you won't have life.

To eat and drink Jesus is to take in these truths and they become part of you. Well, it's no surprise that those same images are applied to God the Holy Spirit as well.

We drink him in. He is now the one who empowers our life. And actually, it's not something we do, it's something that has been done to us by God. We've been made to drink of him.

Because every person is dead in their sins and unable to believe in Jesus on their own, God has to graciously do all the work of salvation. We would never believe in Jesus on our own and we'd never take the Spirit in on our own because we're rebellious enemies. And so we've been graciously made to drink of the Spirit.

So to bring this all around: When we diligently and lovingly use the spiritual gifts that the Spirit has given us to serve the church we are showing one another and the world and everyone that we've taken part in this great work of Jesus and the Spirit.

The more we lovingly serve each other, the more we show the work of Jesus and the Spirit in our lives. The less we lovingly serve each other, the less we show the Lord and the Spirit.

We talk about bringing glory to God: this is one way that we do that and it's really and essential way to do that.

3) Since our roles are essential, despising God's role for us is a form of pride. **Read 14-20**

You ever look around at the church and think "Man, I wish I was like that person? I mean what do I even do?" Especially when I was younger I thought that a lot. I didn't sing, didn't play music, I was scared to tell anyone about Jesus, I couldn't teach. I felt like a burden in many ways.

That's all just pride and that's what Paul is addressing here. This idea that somehow we're no good, so do we even belong in the body.

I say that's pride. Why is it pride?

It's pride because whatever your role is doesn't make you any less part of the body of Christ. If the Spirit has dunked you into the body of Christ, you're in!

And, it's pride because it misses the reality that God has specifically designed all different kinds of parts. The body of Christ doesn't look like some of the characters from Monsters, Inc. where it's just one big eye. Or Adam's Family where it's just a hand running around.

This is the beauty of diversity in the Christ's church. God has all these different parts on purpose. And all these parts compliment each other.

If my tummy is hungry it takes my feet to walk to the fridge, my eyes to check out the food, my hands to get the stuff out, my nose to make sure it's not moldy, my teeth to chew, my tongue to swallow. That's all in service to my stomach. And stomach's are kind of a pain anyway, it's not like we derive a lot of pleasure from our stomach. All the other body parts just work to keep it from being upset.

When I was in high school I broke my leg and the body part that suffered most was my armpits as they held up the crutches. Who knew my armpits had to pay the price for my brain thinking it would be a good idea for my legs to try to come to stop while skiing on a sheet of ice? Often parts of the body that have no natural connection with each other end up complimenting each other in amazing ways.

So when we despise our role it's pride because we're in the body of Christ whether we think we should be or not. It's pride because it misses the reality that God has designed all these different parts.

And third it's pride because it's a rejection of specifically how God has designed you. **Read 18-19**

God not only made the parts, but he specifically made you. God has arranged you where he wants you and if you're thinking "We'll, I'm no good, I don't like where I'm at" who do you really have a problem with? God.

"God, you messed up!" That's what you're actually saying.

But we know God doesn't mess up. He doesn't make mistakes. He designed your physical body exactly how he wanted in the womb and he designed your role in the body of Christ exactly how he wanted it. And he expects you to serve in that role.

If you're an elbow, be an elbow of mercy, be an elbow to the glory of God. If you're an eye of discernment, be an eye to the glory of God. If you're an up presentable part...be that to the glory of God.

Don't despise God role for you in the church.

4) Despising God's role for others is a form of pride. Read 21-16

So this is just the opposite. We don't look down on others because of gifts they don't have. Our real issue would be with God. Every part is essential even, what Paul calls the unrepresentable parts. .

The unrepresentable parts are exactly what you're probably thinking. It's basically all the parts that underwear covers up. And if you're in church long enough you're going to have some parts that are gluteus maximus. What in the world do we do with those people?

We do with them the same thing we do with our own unrepresentable parts: we treat them with special honor. We don't cut those people out of the body of Christ. No, we actually show them greater honor and dignity and respect.

In Jesus's Kingdom the last shall be first and the first last. Those very people who we think aren't worthy of honor are the very ones Jesus intends for us to celebrate.

Think about your body: How many times a day do you think about your right middle toe? I almost never think about it. You need your big toe the next one and the outside 2 for balance. But the middle toe? You could probably manage alright without.

Except that God designed you to have a right middle toe. And just because we're like "I don't know what good this is really doing me" doesn't mean we go chop it off.

No we rejoice that God has made us, every single one us, with the gifts we have no matter how big or small for his glory.

5) Our attitude about toward other members is crucial. Read 26

Here Paul says that if we understand all that's come before, then we'll respond appropriately when other parts are honored or other parts suffer.

In the body of Christ, we're cheering and praying for the success and honoring of other people. If we're actually hoping others in the body fail or suffer then there's something very wrong with us.

There's all kinds of medical conditions we could mention to indicate when the body is dysfunction.

When your body can't even feel what's happening to itself: could be leprosy, could be neurological degeneration. Could be gangrene.

If your body attacks itself its an autoimmune disease. Your body is working against itself.

Paul says, no. Because we are all one in Christ and have been brought together by the Spirit into one body, when someone suffers we suffer. When the leg breaks, the armpits kick in.

And when someone else is honored, we honor them too. This is often harder. Honoring people we don't think should be honored. Especially honoring the unrepresentable parts.

This is the 1 Corinthians version of rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

It's the beautiful reality of the body of Christ, though. Working together, serving each other, honoring and rejoicing together that we've been made to drink of the one Spirit for the glory of God.

Pray

