

# Gifts & Ministries in the Church

As we think about the Church being built together as the Body of Christ, it does us good to realise that this means that we are not being left to battle on alone as just individual Christians, but that the Lord Jesus has provided the support that we so often need. This is not just a social gathering of others who share our interests, another club, but something that we are really part of, and through which we can gain real spiritual benefit as well.

Three of the most significant chapters referring to the Church as the Body of Christ are **Romans 12**, **1 Corinthians 12** and **Ephesians 4**. In each of these we see the fact that we both benefit from and contribute to the health of the whole body. What are some of the means that God has given us to build each other up?

## **Gifts**

The Greek word is 'charisma', closely linked to the word for grace - 'charis'. Gifts are things which are given to us whether we deserve them or not; they are not rewards, bribes or favours for a select few. Any gifts we may have received are therefore things to be thankful for, not boasted about! (See **1 Corinthians 4:7**.)

**Romans 12:3-8** deals mostly with gifts which we could describe as 'natural', things which might be in our natural make-up. 'Prophesying' might not come naturally, but 'serving', 'teaching', 'encouraging', 'contributing to the needs of others', 'leadership' and 'showing mercy' are things that we can find outside the Church as well as in it. BUT we cannot just transport our natural gifts into the Church and expect great results. The grace of God needs to be flowing through our use of these abilities. These verses follow

**Romans 12:1 & 2**, where we are told to offer our bodies as living sacrifices . . . in other words, our abilities are handed over to God, we are no longer our own. (See 1 Corinthians 6:19 & 20.) Once this is settled, these gifts are really useful to the Church, and we are told to get on with using them! ‘Serving’ covers a vast range of different things we can do to help others individually and as a body – just try thinking about all the ways in which **you** would appreciate help! ‘Showing mercy’ could just as easily be translated ‘being kind’ - how encouraging it is to meet Christians who are kind and cheerful!

**1 Corinthians 12:1-11** lists gifts that are far from natural; they are above our natural abilities, however much we may present our bodies as living sacrifices to the Lord – they are spiritual and truly ‘super-natural’. We have no reason to fear them or shy away, nor to be ignorant of them, as Paul says in **verse 1**, because they are gifts ‘by the same Spirit’. We cannot find these gifts in our natural make—up, so we have to ask the Lord about them and for them . . . to ‘eagerly desire’ them (**1 Corinthians 14:1**). Their purpose is clear from **verse 7**:- through their ‘shining out’ (manifestation) through each one, they work ‘towards bearing together’ (‘for the common good’). The striking common factor in all of these gifts is that they each represent a different aspect of **God speaking to us**. Paul underlines this by coming back again to the importance of prophecy in **chapter 14**. We can see that, as far as he is concerned, these gifts are of real benefit to the Church, and can result in the evident presence of God in the Church. As God speaks in the Church, non-Christians can see the reality of his presence and respond. BUT these gifts themselves are not for individual use (with the exception of some use of the gift of tongues), and can only really function properly within the context of

the Church. Perhaps this is why so much emphasis has been placed on the gift of tongues in recent years . . . individualism has still not given way to the Lord's emphasis on Church life. We certainly have much to learn!

## **Ministries**

**Ephesians 4:9-13** lists gifts of a completely different sort. These are not gifts given to individual believers for the benefit of the whole Church, but individual believers who themselves are gifts to the Church. Paul's 'apostleship' is not a gift or ability given to him, but a commission with which he is entrusted, something that he is rather than does. These people who are gifts to the Church are there to make sure that the rest of the Body functions properly and builds itself up to maturity in Christ. These are not just people who have a natural ability enabled by God's grace, nor do they just habitually exercise one or more spiritual gift. They are people in whom the mind, heart and purpose of God has at least begun to take root and be demonstrated through their life and ministry as a whole. Certainly their role seems to be foundational in the life of the local church. In **Ephesians 2:20**, Paul says that the Church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, alongside the Lord Jesus as the chief cornerstone. In **1 Corinthians 12:27-31**, the apostles and prophets again come first and second, not so much as an order of rank but in the practical function of getting a local church started. Once they have begun to put in the foundations, the teachers, miracle workers, healers, helpers, administrators and those who speak in tongues (and everyone else!) all start to take their places in the emerging life of the local expression of the Body of Christ.

Here in **1 Corinthians 12** and in **Ephesians 4**, we can begin to see how the whole picture fits together. Although for our

ease of understanding we can separate 'grace gifts', 'spiritual gifts' and 'ministries', they overlap wonderfully in the plan that Father has for the whole Church to grow and be built up. This, after all, is what he is doing, to reveal his plan and purpose through the Church (see **Ephesians 3:10 & 11**).

So . . . what about me? First of all, have I presented my body as a living sacrifice, not counting myself as 'owning' my life any more, but as one who has been bought with a very great price? Am I allowing the grace of God to use my 'natural' abilities under the control of the Holy Spirit to serve him by serving my brothers and sisters individually and corporately? Could I honestly say that I 'eagerly desire spiritual gifts', not for boasting or spiritual 'brownie points', but to enable me to help the Body to grow as God speaks and acts through me? Do I long to be the sort of person whom my Father could trust with a commission of service to the Church?

**The Lord Jesus longs to see his Church built. He has provided us with the means to be involved in that building. Will we respond?**

“There are different kinds of gifts,  
but the same Spirit.  
There are different kinds of service,  
but the same Lord.  
There are different kinds of working,  
but the same God works all of them in all men.”  
(1 Corinthians 12 : 4-6 )

Dave Taylor. Oct 94

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