

THE CHRISTIAN & THE CHURCH (15)

July 20, 2008.

Review.

In our last study we returned to *1Cor.12* and began to looking at “**The Functioning of the Body of Christ.**” The first point I sought to establish is the fact of our equality in importance and dignity in the body of Christ. The second point I dealt with is the fact that there is inequality in gifts, abilities and functioning in the body of Christ. *1Cor.12:4-18* & *Rom.12:3-6* make it very clear that it is God who gives gifts to the members of the body of Christ.

1Cor.12:11 teaches us that the gifts you have to function in and serve the body of Christ have nothing to do with what you want or what you think you merit. It has to do with God’s holy, sovereign and wise will. We saw that God gifts His people to serve in His church for the common good of the church (*1Cor.12:7; 14:26; Eph.4:12; 1Pet.4:10-11*). Your **first** responsibility is to discover, develop and put to use the gift or gifts God has given to you in His church. Your **second** responsibility is to humbly submit yourself to God’s holy, sovereign and wise dealings with you. We saw from *Mk.14:8* that the God who gifted you requires that, at the very least, you must do what you can.

Thirdly, we saw from *Rom.12:3* that in relation to our gifts and the exercise of those gifts you must beware of the sin of pride or haughtiness. You must have sound or reasonable judgment regarding God’s dealings with you and not go beyond the boundaries He has set over you. **Lastly** we saw that God will judge you and reward you based on your faithful service to God in keeping with the gifts He graciously gave to you. We saw in *Matt.25:14-30* that the unfaithful slave was described as wicked, lazy and worthless and received a most unexpected judgment. He was cast into hell.

The **main point** of application that was made is that there is no room for spectators in God's church. The church is the body of Christ. The human body is used to illustrate the working of the body of Christ. In the human body each organ has its function. If an organ in the human body is not functioning properly or ceases to function, then entire body is negatively affected.

The same is true in the body of Christ. If you are not functioning properly in the body of Christ or have ceased to function then the whole body is negatively affected. Are you a spectator in God's church or are you involved in serving in the church for the common good of the church? To serve Christ is to serve His church which is His body. You cannot separate the two. If you are a spectator today, then stop being a spectator. Come and let us talk and work out a plan for your active involvement in the church.

There is a **second point** I want to raise here. There is also no room for functioning in the church outside of the designs and limits God has placed upon you. In the human body the eye cannot pretend to be or try to function as the ear. If that were to happen the body would be thrown into confusion. The eye was designed and gifted to function as the eye. The eye's best work is done when it is functioning as an eye. And the body benefits greatly when the eye functions as an eye. Pretending does not make the eye into an ear nor does it grant to the eye the ability to function as the ear.

The same is true in the body of Christ. God, by His sovereign will, has allotted to you your gift. God has also measured out to you the extent of the ability you will possess in this gift. Based upon this gift and the measure of ability you have in it, God has appointed your place in the church. The body of Christ will benefit greatly when you know what your gift is and when you function in the church in keeping with this gift and the measure of the ability you have in this gift. Are you and usher in Christ's body? Then do not pretend to be a musician. Be an usher and, to the glory of God and the common good of the church, be the best possible usher any church can have.

The Functioning Of The Body Of Christ. (continued).

With this review, I want to turn your attention to today's study. In our study today we will be continuing to deal with our functioning in the body of Christ. I stated in our last study that there is inequality in gifts, abilities and functioning in the body of Christ. Why? It is clear from what we see in the functioning of the church that some have received from God more gifts than others. We have seen that preachers are also teachers but a teacher is not necessarily a preacher. We have seen differences in the abilities of men of teach and preach. Some men are obviously better preachers and / or teachers than others.

We have seen that some are better than others in doing evangelism. Some are very comfortable and effective in doing personal evangelism. Others are more efficient in teaching an evangelism class. And yet others are good evangelistic preachers. Over my years in the ministry I have observed that some preachers who are very good bible expositors are not that good when it comes to preaching a straightforward gospel message.

In *1Cor.12:22-25* Paul spoke about "weaker" members, "less honorable" members and "less presentable" members. But Paul closed off this section with these words, "God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another." Furthermore, Paul made it clear in *vs.21* that one organ in the body cannot say to the other "I have no need of you."

"God has so composed the body." How did He do it? He made it a mixture of weak and strong, more honorable and less honorable, more presentable and less presentable. He structured the church and gifted the church in a manner that some will be leaders and others will be followers. He structured the church in such a manner that not all leaders will have the same rank, authority and ability. He structured the church with variety or diversity in mind. Paul pointed to this truth of "varieties" in *1Cor.12:4-6*. But He also

structured the church in such a manner that none would lack honor, that there would be no divisions and that we would have the same or equal care for one another.

Let me illustrate : what does it take for us to have our worship on the Lord's Day? Every week there is an ongoing plan in place that must work well to accomplish our goals. In this ongoing plan there are some people who are regularly involved and some who are involved based on tasks assigned to them. If someone drops the ball on their responsibility, someone must be in place and prepared to take up that responsibility and carry it out as if this was their responsibility in the first place. Now let me ask : is distributing the programs the same as song leading? They are both important. They are both honorable tasks. They both make important contributions to our worship. But they are not equal. The fact is, we know that song leading is a greater responsibility than distributing the programs.

Now Brethren, let me say something here about planning and spontaneity. Having a plan does not mean that you are stopping any spontaneous work of the Spirit. I know that week after week we have the spontaneous working of the Spirit in the midst of our plans. But the same Spirit who works spontaneously also said within a context of counsel and instructions to guide and govern our worship that "God is not the God of confusion" and that "all things must be done decently and in an orderly manner." (*1Cor.14:33, 40*).

If preaching to you must be based on the spontaneous working of the Spirit, then you will have no outlines and the preaching will not be expository nor even orderly. Such preaching will always be on the verge of becoming meaningless and useless. If our singing is spontaneous, will it be based on the Spirit's leading or on a person's feelings? If songs are chosen based on feelings and favorites and not on prayerful planning, will our worship be God-oriented or man oriented? Will our goal be to worship God or to please and / or entertain man? So often people boldly declare that we must ask these questions : what kind of worship do we want? What kind of worship will attract the unsaved? These questions are man-oriented and man-pleasing and totally wrong. The

only question that must be asked is : what kind of worship does God require of us? We can restate the question as follows : what kind of worship pleases God, is a fragrant aroma to God and glorifies God?

The highest point in the week is our gathering together as the body of Christ to worship our God in the power of the Spirit. If this is not the highest point in your week, then I say to you that you need to carefully examine your spirituality. If you are not looking forward to this day with anxious longing and desire then you need to carefully examine your love for Christ as the bride of Christ. Can you identify with the psalmist who said, “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; When shall I come and appear before God?” (*Psa.42:2*). The context of the psalmist’s longing is not his personal devotions. The context is worship in the house of God with the people of God. In *Psa.111:1* the psalmist declared, “I will give thanks to the Lord with all my heart, In the company of the upright and in the assembly.” Once again the context is worship in the assembly of the people of God.

Now, this God whom we have gathered to worship has commanded us to be thinkers, to be reasonable, to be orderly. When you look at creation you see order. And it is this orderly creation that declares to us the glory of God. (*Psa.19:1*). When you look at revelation, you see order. You see the unfolding of God’s plan to accomplish our redemption in Christ. When you look at Israel’s temple worship in the O.T. you see order. When sin took over in Israel the order disappeared. And the Lord asked the Israelites, “When you come to appear before Me, who requires of you this trampling of My courts?” (*Isa.1:12*).

The many Biblical precedents and patterns demand that we worship in a planned and orderly manner. *1Cor.14:33, 40* comes to us within the context of the church gathered for worship before God’s revelation to us was completed. And even then, when the church had to depend on prophets for a word from God, the demand was for order in worship. When there is disorder and confusion in our worship what will happen? Paul

said the unbelievers will say that you are mad. (*1Cor.14:23*). Disorder and confusion in our worship do not glorify God. Disorder and confusion in our worship dishonor God.

Now Brethren, let us assume that you were not assigned any task for our worship on the Lord's Day. Does that mean we can do without you? In my thirty-one years as a pastor I have known people to absent themselves because they had no assigned task in the worship service. And they felt that was as good an opportunity to take a day off from worshipping the Lord. They felt that was a good opportunity to sleep in, to rise up at their own leisure and enjoy a day of mindless involvement in worthless activities. It is as if their gathering to worship on the Lord's Day was dependent on whether they were assigned or not assigned a task and not dependent upon love and gratitude for the Lord and heartfelt desire to come and appear before God.

I have made it clear that whether your absence is legitimate or not, you are missed on the Lord's Day. When you are absent a family member is missing at the Lord's Table. The Lord is seated at the head of His Table and there is an empty seat at His Table. There is voice not blending in with the other voices in lifting up expressions of praise and thanksgiving to God in the house of God. In other words, when you are absent, your absence is felt and your absence negatively impacts the family of God in its worship of God. What we are saying is that regardless of whether you are weak or strong, single-gifted or multi-gifted, a nightingale or a frog, we need you for the proper functioning of the body of Christ to the glory of our God. This truth must grip your hearts.

This brings us to our **second** point : do not be envious of those who are multi-gifted or who may have a gift you wish to have or who may have a gift in greater measure than you have. Remember *Rom.12:3* says God has measured out to you your measure. Remember also *Lk.12:48* which says, "from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more." Be thankful to God for the gifts He has graciously granted to you in His sovereign wisdom. And be faithful to God in the exercise of these gifts.

At the same time, sincerely and earnestly pray for those to whom God has given greater responsibilities. *Jas.3:1* says, “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment” or “**greater condemnation**”. Teaching the word of God is a very important responsibility. By your teaching you can lead people into the truth, into fellowship with Christ and ultimately to heaven or you can mislead them, lead them away from Christ and ultimately lead them into hell. *2Pet.3:16* warns that those who distort God’s word do so to their own destruction.

The principle James has applied to teaching can be generally applied in view of *Lk.12:48*. Those who have what Paul described as “the greater gifts” (*1Cor.12:31*) have been given much and much will be required of them. So do not envy them. Instead pray for them and do so with all sincerity and earnestness. Pray that they will be faithful. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help them develop their gifts for greater effectiveness. Pray that the Holy Spirit will give them wisdom in the exercise of their gifts. Pray that the Holy Spirit will use **their** gifts for **your** own good, for the common good of the church and for building up the church of Christ. Pray that God will be greatly glorified through them. And pray that God will keep them humble and holy in all things.

The **third** point I want to set before you is this : do not run from your gifts. Every gift, without exception, puts you in the place of judgment. This is the lesson from the parable of the talents in *Matt.25:14-30*. It was the slave with the one talent, with the least responsibility, who failed and was judged. To deliberately fail to serve God in keeping with the gifts He has given to you is to face a judgment in the final day that you wouldn’t like. You will be described as wicked, lazy and worthless and your judgment will be the outer darkness and the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Now listen very carefully : your failure to serve God in harmony with His church and for the common good of His church would expose the hypocrisy of your profession of faith in Christ in that great accounting day of the final judgment. What account will you give to the Lord Jesus Christ on that great accounting day? We come right back to the

fact that there are no spectators in Christ's church. Those who choose to be spectators would be exposed as hypocrites and rejected. Remember the fruitless tares were clearly exposed, identified and judged when harvest day came. The foolish virgins were exposed and locked out of the wedding when the bridegroom arrived. (*Matt.13:24-30, 36-43; 25:1-13*). The arrival of the bridegroom symbolizes the arrival of the day of judgment.

I hear people say, *"not me and teaching; not me and preaching; not me and being a pastor."* What is the reason for their refusal to function in these areas? They say they are afraid of judgment. They are saying exactly what the one-talent slave told his master, "I was afraid." (*Matt.25:25*). We saw James said, "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur the stricter judgment" or "**greater condemnation**". Now please turn to *1Cor.9:16*. Paul said, "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel." Let me put it this way before explaining : to preach is to face judgment; to fail to preach is to face judgment. If you were in Paul's place which would you choose?

Paul was a preacher. This is what he spent most of his time doing. But he says, this gives him no ground for boasting. He is not a preacher by personal choice. He is a preacher because this is God's will for him. He is a preacher because this is his divinely determined destiny. He is a preacher because God gifted him for this task. Preaching was not his chosen career. Preaching is something he must do because God has taken hold of him and made him a preacher, put in his heart the love for preaching and the joy of being a preacher. Paul does not preach with an unwilling heavy heart because he knows that to preach is to face judgment and to fail to preach is to face judgment. Paul's willing embrace of God's will for his life has brought freedom into his heart and his exercise of God's will for his life has brought joy to his heart. Despite all the negative things and great sufferings Paul experienced in his years in the ministry, he thoroughly enjoyed what he was doing.

Now I want you to understand something very clearly. If you are a Christian, God has gifted you for service in His church for the common good of His church. Your role in the church, based on your gift or gifts, is your divine destiny. Your gift has placed you under divine compulsion. Your freedom, your joy, your blessedness is to be found in your embrace of your divine destiny and in the faithful exercise of your gift for the common good of the church. Run and you will run into bondage, woe, worthlessness and judgment.

Now I know there are runners in this church. The primary method of running among the adults is procrastination. You know the familiar words, *"Pastor I need time. I am not ready for that as yet."* And the days turn to weeks and the weeks turn to months and the months turn to years and you are still singing the same song, *"I need time, I am not ready as yet."* Sadly, one of these you may be singing another song : *"If I only had time, ... only had time, ... so much to do, ... dreams to pursue, ... so many things to make come true."* Procrastination is a nice way of saying : count me out. Do not depend on me. I am not getting involved.

I hear others saying : What can I do? Their meaning is : I have no ability to do anything. That is a very serious and frightening confession. If you have not received any gift or ability from God, then you are not a Christian. But is the issue : I have no ability to do anything? Or is the issue : leave me alone; I do not want to do anything; I do not want to get involved? Is the issue one of gift or one of selfishness?

There are many runners among the younger generations. Some of you are running from God and having salvation dealings with God. *"Pastor, I eh ready for dat yet."* There is one thing in this world that always has time for you – the cold icy hands of death. Ready or not, there is one thing in the next world that is waiting for you. It is called **"final judgment"**. *Heb.9:27* says you have an appointment with death. The verb used is a present tense which means your appointment with death is an ever present ever ready appointment. Wherever you go, whatever you are doing, the door in death's office is

always open and waiting for you. And then the verse says, after death comes judgment. Are you ready for death and judgment?

You can run all you want, every day you are running towards the goal of death and judgment. One of these days the bell will be rung and suddenly it will be last lap for you. The only problem is that last lap ends in an instant. Paul said in **2Cor.5:8**, absent from the body and present with the Lord. Absent from the body and face to face with final judgment. In other words it is goodbye world, hello Jesus. Goodbye life, hello judgment. Jesus said the rich man closed his eyes in death and opened his eyes in hell. (**Lk.16:22-23**).

Young Christian, are you running from your divine destiny in God's church? God, in His wisdom, mercy and grace, has gifted you for service in His church for the common good of His church. What God has done in graciously giving to you a spiritual gift (or gifts) is also for your own good. **Rom.8:28** applies here also. Whatever God is doing in your life, He is working everything for your good. Your service in His church is also for your own good. You will be well advised to humbly and willingly submit to God's wise will, plan and purpose for your life because they are for your good. This good is both your present good and your eternal good. Understand this and understand it well : your present good and your eternal good are intimately tied into the spiritual service God has designed for you to carry out in His church.

Whatever you are or become in this life, whatever career you pursue, your divine destiny of serving God in His church for the common good of His church is never nullified. There are no exemptions in God's church. You are a soldier of Jesus Christ. (**2Tim.2:3**). You are under His marching orders. You are under divine compulsion. You can choose the path of humble submission to God, joy, freedom and blessedness. Or you can choose the path of rebellion, bondage, worthlessness, woe and judgment. Which will it be for you?

Jonah ran from God and ended up in the belly of a fish that vomited him right at the very place he didn't want to go. Turn to *Psa.139:7-12*. (**read**). The simple point is this : wherever you run, you are running straight into God. Instead of running, you can do like Paul who asked the Lord on the day he was saved, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" (cf. *Acts 22:10*). You can follow the Lord's example and declare, "Not My will, but Yours be done." (*Lk.22:42*).

This brings us to the **last point** I want to deal with. If you do not know what is the gift God has given to you, the question arises : how can you discover your gift or gifts? I am afraid that the answer to that question is beyond the scope of our study. But in relation to this question I want to set another matter before you. There are two ways through which you can begin to serve God. **Firstly**, you can begin with the commandments the Lord gave to us. You are not required to have the necessary gifts before you can obey the commandments the Lord gave to us. You are simply required to obey the Lord. Let me illustrate.

The command to bear witness to the gospel and to make disciples does not say that you must first have the gift of evangelism. We are all required by Christ to be His witnesses. (*Acts 1:8*). We are required by Christ to be involved in carrying out the Great Commission in making disciples. (*Matt.28:18-20*). Now, in obeying these commands you may discover that you are not gifted to be an evangelist. But this discovery does not exempt you from obeying this command to be Christ's witnesses and to make disciples. If there is a requirement attached to the Great Commission, it is that of having a working knowledge of the gospel. However poorly you may articulate the gospel, you cannot do so without a working knowledge of the gospel.

You may not be gifted to sing but we are all commanded to sing unto the Lord. *Psa.68:4* says, "Sing to God, sing praises to His name; lift up a song for Him who rides through the deserts, whose name is the Lord, and exult before Him." The Psalms are filled with commands and exhortations to sing to the Lord. Those who can sing should be lifting up their voices in praise to God. When there is volume from gifted

singers, those who are not gifted to sing will be encouraged and enabled to join in without being self-conscious.

You may not be a great cook but we are all commanded to practice hospitality. *1Pet.4:9* says, “Be hospitable to one another without complaint.” You may not have a spacious and equipped dining room but these are not pre-conditions for obeying God and practicing hospitality.

You may not be gifted to teach but that is not a requirement for you to exhort or give counsel or encourage to your brother or sister in Christ. In *Rom.15:14* Paul said, “I ... am convinced that you ... are ... able to admonish one another.” Paul’s verb “admonish” also means “to counsel”. “You” does not mean some of you. “You” means the whole church. *1Thess.5:11* says, “encourage one another and build up one another.” The Greek verb translated “encourage” appears approximately **105** times in the N.T. and is also translated “beseech, entreat, appeal, comfort, exhort.” Note that : not once, not ten times, not twenty-five times, but **105** times. In other words one of the most needed ministry in the church is the Barnabas ministry : to become sons and daughters of encouragement or consolation. (*Acts 4:36*). How often do you take the time to encourage your brothers and sisters in Christ, to entreat them, to appeal to them, to exhort them, to comfort them?

Secondly, in serving God for the common good of His church you can begin with your natural gifts and abilities. Can you sing? Then use your singing in the service of God for the common good of the church. Paul wrote, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” (*Col.3:16*). The comparable verse is *Eph.5:19*, “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.”

My goal here is not to set before you a theology of music for worship. The point being made here is that singing is an instrument for teaching, admonishing or counseling. The song must manifest that the word of Christ is richly dwelling within you. **F.F.Bruce** says that a case can be made here for special singing in the church. Singing as worship to God, as service to God, for the glory of God and for the common good of the church is not entertainment. This is why we say there must be no applause in the worship service. Turn to *Ezek.33:30-33*. (**read**). When worship is entertainment, there is hearing but no practicing. *Jas.1:22* says, “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”

Can you play a musical instrument? Why haven't you come forward to help play music to worship and glorify the Lord? Playing music is work because it demands dedicated time for serious practice. Have you decided not to play because you are like the lazy one-talent slave? Can you plan and organize events? Are you a natural born leader? Can you write? Is it easy for you to approach people and begin a conversation with them? Do you know how to shake a visitor's hand and smile and say “welcome”? What are the natural skills that you have and how can you use them for the common good of the church and the glory of God?

It does not take any skills to be a spectator. It is very easy to be a spectator. It does not take any skills to be a procrastinator. It is very easy to be a procrastinator. It does not take skill to be like the lazy one-talent slave. It does not take any skill to refuse to get involved. All you have to do is say “no”. Getting involved is another matter. Getting involved is risky. You can fail. Getting involved means you have to work. Getting involved will cost you time and may cost you money.

Aren't you thankful that the Lord Jesus Christ got involved? Getting involved meant He had to lay aside His glory. (*Jn.17:5*). Getting involved brought Him into this world and into a life of poverty. (*2Cor.8:9*). Getting involved meant the holy Son of God who created man had to submit Himself to the authority of evil men. Getting involved cost Him His life. Getting involved meant free eternal salvation for you. From eternity Jesus

was no spectator. If He had chosen to be a spectator you would still be in your sins, without hope and on your way to an eternity in hell.

Jesus wasn't a spectator and He says you cannot be a part of His church and be a spectator. As the head of His body, He is actively involved in His church. You cannot be a part of His body and not be actively involved in His church. He got involved and so you must get involved. He accomplished your eternal good by doing that which was the most important and the most difficult. That which He requires you do for the common good and eternal good of His elect people is not difficult. It is not difficult because He has given you the gift you need; He has given you the ability you need; He is constantly supplying you with the strength you need; and He has promised to give you in liberal measure the wisdom you need if you ask for it.

It is hypocrisy to thank Him for getting involved and saving you and then refusing to get involved in keeping with His example and His commands. I say to you, do not fail to get involved as He has required of you. The one-talent slave said to His master, "I know you are a hard man." You will discover in the final judgment that Jesus is the ultimate **"hard man."**