

# DESIRE THE HIGHER GIFTS

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Key Truth:

Every grace-gift given us by the Spirit is necessary for our health and the teaching gifts are essential for our maturity.

I enjoy maintaining our vehicles.

Compared to many others in our church family I'm a novice, but I know enough to do the basics. One of those things is brakes; I know enough to change out discs and shoes and to bleed the system. To my knowledge none of my brake jobs have failed; nobody in our family has died!

What I know I've mostly learned by doing.

But I have been discovering so much more through reading a book on brake systems.

Now that I better understand the principles of braking and the design of the system I am more confident working on things and with that comes greater enjoyment. As corny as it sounds, I am very grateful to the author for the energy and time he put into his teaching and writing.

That's the way it is in the Christian life as well. After we trust in Jesus Christ for salvation we begin a lifelong journey of learning from His teaching and the teaching of the Bible. Jesus said we would know the truth and the truth will set us free. Throughout his letters, the Apostle Paul encourages us to let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly that our minds might be renewed by the truth. And the Scriptures never separate teaching from doing, knowledge from application. What we learn from the teaching of God's Word we seek to live out in the course of our daily lives.

Learning and applying the Word of God is the most important element in our spiritual growth as individuals and as a church family. That is why we constantly encourage all of us to have a daily quiet time in the Word and to join a Bible Study or Home Group where you can study the Word with your brothers and sisters.

As we continue to study the nature of the Church and the role of grace-gifts we remember that the historical context of our study is the ancient church of Corinth. The Corinthian church family possessed all the grace-gifts (1:7), but were a very spiritually immature church (3:1). From what we can piece together from 1 Corinthians 14 the meetings of the church were rather chaotic affairs with believers perhaps "showing boating" some of the more sensational gifts such as tongues speaking.

This section of Paul's letter (chapters 12-14) was a corrective with regards to the grace-gifts and their exercise in the meeting of the church.

In this lesson we see that all the grace-gifts are necessary for the functioning of the church family but the grace-gifts involving teaching are to be prioritized for the maturing of the church family.

In prioritizing some of the grace-gifts was Paul devaluing the others?

Not at all. For as we will see, through comparing the church to a human body, Paul will show that all the grace-gifts are necessary, but some should be prioritized.

But before he begins his metaphor, Paul explains how we become members of the church family.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT UNITES US AS MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST, THE CHURCH (12:12-13)

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 (ESV)

<sup>12</sup> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

One of the many wonderful things that takes place the moment we trust in Jesus is that the Holy Spirit indwells our lives and unites us with all other believers in whom He is living. In this way we become members of Christ's Body here on earth, the Church. We do not become members of the Church by water baptism or by attending a membership class. Such things are for believers who are already members of the Church by virtue of the indwelling and baptism of the Holy Spirit.

So, bottom line, if you are a Christian and are trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation, you are indwelt and baptized by the Holy Spirit into the Church. You are a member of the Church universal and you fellowship and serve at your local church Grace Community Church, Ramona.

In addition to making us members of the Church, the Holy Spirit gives us divine enablements for the common good of the church. According to the Apostle Paul, the Corinthian church had all the grace-gifts (1:7) but there were problems in the exercising of the gifts, particularly in the meeting of the church. As we will see in chapter 14 the church family was giving priority to the speaking of tongues in the meeting of the church. This section and chapter 13 are correctives to this and other problems related to the grace-gifts.

This section teaches that while every grace-gift is important and necessary for the functioning of the church family, the teaching grace-gifts should be prioritized, particularly in the meeting of the church, for the maturing of the church family.

## **THE CHURCH COMPARED TO A HUMAN BODY (12:14-26)**

### **Every Body Part Necessary (12:14-20)**

<sup>1</sup> Corinthians 12:14-20 (ESV)

<sup>14</sup> For the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? <sup>18</sup> But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup> If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

Notice that Paul nowhere breaks out of the metaphor to make application to the church. His application is coming in verses 27-31. Like a parable, a metaphor makes one overarching comparison between two entities. We need to resist the temptation to interpret every detail of a parable and of a metaphor. The main point of this metaphor is that every individual part of the human body is necessary to the healthy functioning of the human body as a whole.

### **Each Body Part Treated According To Its Unique Nature (12:21-26)**

<sup>21</sup> The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." <sup>22</sup> On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup> and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, <sup>24</sup> which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, <sup>25</sup> that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup> If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Again, Paul stays within the metaphor of the human body. The point here is that because certain human body parts have certain characteristics they are treated differently, but all the body parts remain united.

Now, in verses 27-31 Paul applies these two principles to the church.

**Every Grace-Gift Is Necessary, But Certain Ones Should Be Prioritized (12:27-31)**

<sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. <sup>28</sup> And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. <sup>29</sup> Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? <sup>30</sup> Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? <sup>31</sup> But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Verse 27 is the transition out of the metaphor and into the application to the church.

In verse 28 Paul ranks the gifts giving top priority to the grace-gifts that involve teaching and giving least priority to the grace-gifts of tongues; the gift the Corinthians were prioritizing.

In verses 29-30 Paul applies the first point of the human body metaphor: just as every human body part is necessary for the functioning of the human body as a whole, so also all the grace-gifts are necessary for the functioning of the church family as a whole. In verses 17 & 18 Paul asked: “<sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?” That would be like Paul asking, “Is the whole body an eye?, Is the whole body an ear?”. In both cases the answer is no because all the human body parts are necessary for the functioning of the human body as a whole.

In like manner, when Paul asks “Are all apostles?”, he is making the same point. Not everyone has the grace-gift of apostleship because the church family also needs prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, etc., to function. All the grace-gifts are necessary for the functioning of the church family as a whole.

In verse 31 Paul applies the second point of the human body metaphor: certain human body parts are treated differently because of their unique characteristics. As it applies to the church family and grace-gifts, verse 31 teaches that because of a unique characteristic the grace-gifts of apostle, prophet and teacher should be prioritized. What characteristic do these three have in common and why should they be prioritized?

*The common characteristic is the teaching of God's Word which is the most important element in helping the church family mature spiritually.*

Please make a note in your Bible that the verb in verse 31, *desire*, is plural (so also in 14:1). This verse does not teach that you as an individual can choose your grace-gift as it is sometimes erroneously taught. Paul was instructing the Corinthian church family to give higher priority and place to the exercise of those three gifts particularly in the meeting of the church. In practical terms that would mean that in the church meeting more time and attention would be given to an apostle's teaching or a prophet's speaking or a teacher's lesson and less time given to someone speaking in tongues and that only when an interpreter was present.

These principles continue to apply to our church family. All the grace-gifts the Holy Spirit gives our church family are necessary for our functioning as Christ's presence in the world today. But the teaching grace-gifts should be prioritized for the maturing of the church family. Keeping the overall goal in view: the building up of the church family towards Christlikeness should prevent jealousy and arrogance. We all have a role to play in helping us reach the goal of being all that we're called to be in Christ.

We are committed to teaching God's Word through the ministries of Grace Church. We always want to improve. I am grateful for the gifted teachers we have and that we are going to discover. It is our intent to discover ways to better support you and help you develop your gift.

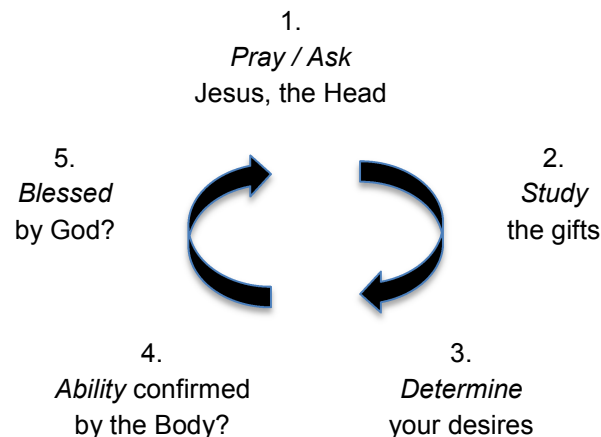
Let me challenge all those who teach: the goal of our teaching is...

Ephesians 4:12-13 (ESV)

<sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

Let us never lose sight it is our privilege to equip and empower God's people to fulfill God's calling upon their lives.

## DISCOVERING OUR GRACE-GIFTS



### 1. Pray / Ask

Jesus has a vested interest in answering this prayer; He gave the gifts to bless His Bride, the Church. We can be confident Jesus will answer this prayer!

### 2. Study

We need to know what the gifts are, their purpose and how they might be utilized in various ministries.

### 3. Determine your desires.

As you study the gifts, which ones appeal to you or strike a cord in your heart? That's a good place to start.

### 4. Ability confirmed?

Start serving whether in a formal ministry of the church or an informal ministry through a Home Group or Bible Study where you are intentionally looking for and meeting needs. Over time you will discover those things that really "light your fire" and others in the church family will notice and comment. This is confirmation you're on the right track.

### 5. Blessed by God?

Most of us are reluctant to say such a thing about ourselves, but it is a legitimate thing for which to look. Are people genuinely helped and built up in their Christian life when I serve in this way? This is closely related to #4.