

THE BODY and SPIRITUAL GIFTS

1 Cor. 12:12-13

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Our understanding of the Body affects our approach to spiritual gifts like prophecy, healing, speaking in tongues, etc. It also controls our approach to evangelism, salvation, prayer, and worship – every aspect of the Christian life.

Many Christians today – even those from traditional and mainline churches – are interested in spiritual gifts and the operation of the Holy Spirit in the church today. Of course, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches have this as their distinguishing characteristic, at least historically. There are innumerable books and seminars about how to discover and use one's own spiritual gifts.

We believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are supposed to function within the context of the Body – both on the local church level and the global level – not in isolation with individual believers. The Bible teaches that the Lord gives the spiritual gifts TO THE BODY, not merely to individuals. He uses individuals for the manifestations of various gifts (for example, when a person is used to pray for a healing, or to deliver a prophecy), but the "gift" is not for the person, but for the Body. Also, certain individuals may benefit from a particular manifestation of a spiritual gift (like the person who is healed), but the Lord's ultimate purpose is to edify the church, the Body, through the manifestation of the gift, not merely to benefit a lone individual. See 1 Cor. 14:26,31.

Due to our understanding of gifts in the context of the Body, our members do not generally worry about discovering "their" personal gift. Instead, we understand that active participation in a healthy Body of Christ will be the occasion for the Lord to use us in various spiritual gifts. Some people are used more in certain gifts than others, but the Bible teaches that this is determined by the Holy Spirit, not by a human. The Holy Spirit can decide to start using a person in a certain way, and can also decide to stop using a person at any time – especially if the person is not going to use the gift to edify the Body, but instead wants to use the spiritual gifts for their own vanity or self-interest.

Every gift has a purpose. The spiritual gifts are not supposed to be mere "signs" that God is powerful and can work miracles – anyone who believes in the Bible already knows that God can do anything. The gifts are supposed to be MORE than mere demonstrations of Divine power. The gifts have a purpose, a lesson, and the gift accomplishes this purpose only when used in the context of the Body. The reason is that the purpose always pertains to the Body itself. The Lord does not need to show off His power or prove anything to anybody. He is fulfilling an eternal project of salvation in our world, a project to save people from sin and bring them to eternity forever. The centerpiece of God's project of salvation is the Body of Christ, where a person can continue to grow and progress in their Christian life until the Lord brings us to eternity. So every spiritual gift comes for the ultimate purpose of helping with this overall project of salvation and helping the Body. If a supposed "gift" occurs somewhere that serves no purpose toward God's overall project of salvation, and the purpose of edifying the Body, we reject this as a false gift – it did not come from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's gifts come with a purpose and are integrated into the Body of Christ.

Our Message: The Body

For this reason, our members follow the advice in the New Testament that spiritual gifts should occur in the context of the Body, and that the rest of the Body (NOT the person who was used in the gift) determines if the gift was really from the Holy Spirit. 1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:21. This takes spiritual maturity – to let others in the Body decide whether one's spiritual gift was authentic. Our flesh, of course, prefers to assert that we are right all the time. But many people mix up genuine gifts of the Spirit with their own imagination, or even worse (bad spiritual influences that do not come from God), and nobody is able to be objective about their own gifts or revelations – we need the Body to discern what comes from God and what does not. We do not have the gifts function independently of the Body. The Body decides whether the gifts is from the Lord, and how it should be applied or used.

The blessing of this approach is that the gifts become cumulative steps in the church's growth and spiritual progress, fitting together like pieces of a puzzle. Each manifestation of a spiritual gift then has value for many people, not just one individual. This is the Lord's intended purpose for the spiritual gifts.