

Wise Up – Working Wisdom
1 Corinthians 12
March 26, 2017

Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit. 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. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. 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. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way.

Every believer in this room has been gifted by God for some service in the advancement of his kingdom. As we look at the 12th chapter of Corinthians, we are going to see that, while our gifts, abilities, and positions differ, each one of us is a vital member of the body of Christ.

Verse 12 says: *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 (1 Co 12:12 NIV). That means that the Church, not this building but the redeemed of God, is a living thing made up of many millions of parts that are all meant to function as a single unit.

Our first consideration is how do you become part of the body of Christ.

Our entrance into the body of Christ is a passive thing. Some churches teach that you must seek the “baptism of the Holy Spirit.” They said if you try hard enough, if you believe enough, if you do all the right things, you will be given the Holy Spirit and then you will be a member in the body of Christ.

That’s false doctrine. The very moment faith entered your heart you possessed the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Spirit isn’t something you can find. It isn’t based on anything you do. It’s an act of grace based only in God’s power and his love for us.

Every baptized child of God possess the Holy Spirit – all of the Holy Spirit. We don’t receive more of the Spirit as we live our Christian lives; he simply gets more control over our lives. That results in our becoming more spiritual in our daily walk.

Our entrance into the body of Christ is a personal thing. The words “*we were all baptized by one Spirit into the body*” in verse 13 assert that every believer is personally part of the body of Christ. As a member of God’s family, you are just as important as any other believer.

Our entrance into the body of Christ is a permanent thing. Once you have been placed in the hands of Jesus, no one can take you away from Jesus. Not even Satan himself has the power to take you away from God. Furthermore, God will never break his promise to hold and keep you forever. The only way out of the body of Christ is if you walk away from your faith.

Our second consideration is your position in the body of Christ.

Paul compares the body of all believers to the human body – many different parts all working together to form a fully functioning person. The body of Christ works the same. The Church is made up of people from various walks of life. We come from different social environments, different cultures, different occupations, different levels of earthly wealth.

You might call the Church a unified diversity. Often times the only thing a group of Christians have in common is that they all believe in the One true God. Yet they are called on to work together.

If you take a gas tank, a tire, a radiator hose, and a steering wheel and place them side by side, nothing will happen. They have nothing in common except they are all parts of a car. (Which, by the way, is why evolution is impossible.) However, when the tank is filled with gas, the tire is mounted on a wheel and attached to the car, the hose carriers

coolant, and the steering wheel is in the proper place, the car can function as intended. The same is true of the body of Christ.

Every believer has his or her gifts and is placed in his or her position because that's what God wants. Paul imagines the parts of the body as individual believers. The hand receives more attention than the foot. The eye receives more attention than the ear. But just because various parts receive varying degrees of attention, doesn't entitle some parts to divorce themselves from the body.

If every part of the body were an eye, the body could do nothing but see. If every part were a foot, the body would make a great doorstop. Paul's point is that God puts us where he wants us. No matter where you are in the body, no matter what gifts you possess, you are where God wants you and you have the gifts he wants you to have.

The most fulfilling knowledge for any Christian is to know that he or she is walking in the will of God. If you function to the best of your ability in the place where God has put you, then you are doing just that. God knows the work he has designed you to do. God is glorified when you allow him to call the shots.

The key to accepting God's guidance and decisions is to remember that every believer plays an important role in God's kingdom. If the eye were to divorce the hand, how could the eye reach for the things it sees? If the head were to divorce the foot, how could head travel to the places it dreams of?

How often do you think of your liver? I don't suppose most of us give much thought to our livers, but without the liver you die. Do you think about your toes? Without toes you couldn't balance your body for walking. Do you know one of the big difference between humans and apes – the opposable thumb. Take away any of these ignored parts of the body and the whole body would suffer.

When you climb into your car, do you think about the electronic ignition, the radiator cap, the hood latch, the lug nuts, the oil pan drain bolt? Probably not. But without any of these things the car would not function properly.

The point here is simply this. Every member, no matter how great or small their position and gifts might seem, is an essential part of the proper operation of the body of Christ. No one should ever think that he or she is unimportant to the function of the Church. No one should ever look at another brother or sister in the faith and think, "We don't need that person." There is no big "I" and little "you." There is only us and we all need each other.

Our third consideration is your purpose in the body.

Do you think you are here, in this church, by some choice you made? Do you think you are here because of random, accidental events? You are here, in this church, because this is where God wants you. You are here because you have a purpose here.

You are here to promote unity. When every member of God's family uses the gifts he or she has been given, and accepts God's direction to do the things God wants, the body of Christ functions in peace and unity.

However, when the feet want to be hands and the ears want to be eyes, the church suffers chaos, disunity, fighting, and division. Earlier in this letter, Paul made this appeal to the Corinthian Christians: *I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought* (1 Co 1:10 NIV).

You or I may not like our current assignment in the body of Christ, but God calls upon us to accept our position and function in that position to the best of our ability until he makes a change.

We are not all alike. God doesn't intend for all of us to be alike. We are different because God operates his kingdom on many different levels. The best way to keep unity in God's family is for everyone to be the person God has made them to be and to do your best to bloom where God has planted you.

You are also here to practice mutual care. We need each other. Christians are never promised a life free from hurts and cares. In fact, Jesus told his disciples: *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. [Because] in this world you will have trouble"* (Jn 16:33 NIV).

No one in this world is immune to the effects of sin. Loved ones die, people are robbed, families fall apart, children go astray, and a host of other sorrows exist on this earth. These things happen to God's people just as they happen to unbelievers. When these calamities strike within our ranks, we need to be here for our brothers and sisters. When these calamities strike, we need our brothers and sisters to be here for us.

You are also here to participate in the activities of the body of Christ. The Church has an ongoing mission to reach the lost with the Gospel message and with the love of Christ. That mission happens best when all the members of the body are doing their individual parts.

This church has outreach programs intended to reach the lost. It takes members of the body to produce Valentine dances, car shows, Easter egg hunts, Family of God meals, and so on. It takes caring hearts to stock our food pantry. It takes money makers to provide for the financial needs of this church.

There is not a single believer in this church who hasn't been equipped by God to perform a specific purpose in his kingdom. If you feel like you have nothing to contribute to the body of Christ, you need to spend time with the Lord. You need to be studying the Word. You need to spend ample amounts of time in prayer. You need to come here every week and worship with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

If you remain open to him, God will show you the gifts he has given you and your place in his kingdom. God will give you working wisdom. And, with working wisdom from God, you can follow Paul's advice for living out your Christianity; *I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship* (Ro 12:1 NIV).