

1Cor 12:4-14

4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. 7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues,[a] and to still another the interpretation of tongues.[b] 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines. 12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by[c] one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 14 Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

Many parts, but one body. No part of the body is unimportant and even the smallest parts have a role to play (except maybe the tonsils). That's how the Bible describes the church. None of us are the same, and yet we belong with and among each other. Each one of us is vital to the healthy functioning of the church and if someone is missing or damaged or incapacitated – the whole church suffers.

When the Bible talks about spiritual gifts it tells us that the Spirit is the one who decides which gifts to give and whom to give them to. Giftedness is not a function of position or church office, but an aptitude bestowed by God that is intended to be used for his glory.

Take pastors for example. In Eph 4 the Bible says that the role of the pastor is the “equipping of the saints for the work of ministry,” yet depending on what particular gifts a pastor has, he (or she) will attempt to fulfill that role in a variety of ways. A pastor who is a gifted preacher or teacher will try to equip the church through lessons and sermons. A pastor who has the gift of hospitality will seek to empower members by inviting them over for fellowship and use that as an opportunity to disciple. A pastor who is great at visitation will bring members along as he (or she) goes from place to place. A pastor who is good at starting up Bible studies will try to pass those studies off to other members. In each case, the pastor is most effective when operating out of the giftedness they have been given. The “how” isn't nearly as

important as the “what”. And for pastors, the “what” is helping mobilize the church for active service to God.

For the church, the “what” is expanding the kingdom of God. Scripture tells us that God has given us the ministry of reconciliation. He could do it himself, he could have angels do it, or he could create talking rocks to do it – but he has given that work to his church. Our great big “what” is to reach the lost with the message of salvation and freedom in Christ. The “how” will depend on the individual gifts and personalities of our church members. There is no “one size fits all” approach to expanding God's kingdom and we should try to figure out how God has uniquely equipped us to fulfill his mission.

This whole thing also means that the members of the church aren't just bystanders watching the paid professionals do all the work. They are not merely the financiers of the work, or the cheerleaders of the work, or any other kind of passive example you might choose. Each member is called (and gifted) by God to be an active participant in expanding the kingdom of God. It is only when every part is doing their part (as opposed to doing someone else's part or doing nothing at all) that the church is functioning as intended.

I think that most Christians understand this idea, at least conceptually. However, it seems that the majority don't put this particular theology into practice. For some reason we assume that church attendance and the occasional church office is the same as participation in the work of the church. Unfortunately, that's just not true in most cases.

Almost all churches that have been around for any length of time have gradually moved into maintenance as opposed to mission. That means that most of their money, activities, ministries, and conversations revolve around taking care of what they already have. In a maintenance church there is little discussion about how to reach the unchurched and even fewer actual strategies evolving from those discussions. In essence, we decide to take care of our own sheep and not worry too much about expanding the flock and if anyone is expected to grow the flock it's usually understood to be the responsibility of the pastor to do so. The problem with that line of thinking is that shepherds aren't designed to produce sheep. Only sheep produce more sheep. When we expect shepherds to be the primary sheep producers we've got things a bit mixed up.

So what am I saying with all of this (it's hard to tell, really)? First, that every member is an important part of the body. The church needs each and every one of us engaged and serving. Second, we all have different gifts and different roles to play in the church.

Find your role and hop to it, try not to impose your role on someone else, and don't try to take on a role that God hasn't given you to do. Finally, sheep and shepherds work together to grow the flock and a healthy church is one that gives just as much attention to increasing the flock as it does preserving it.

Let's each one of us strive to be doing the work that God has called us to do. May his will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Happy Sabbath
Pastor Tyler