



# Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church

## Building a Healthy Church

### Church Membership

1 Corinthians 12:1-27

01/20/2019

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## Main Point

Every member of the church has an essential role to fill.

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## Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**In your opinion, what makes for a good church? What makes for a good church member?**

We often talk about how we would like the church to be and how we'd like to see it grow, but how often do we talk about our role in the church and how that impacts the church? Paul uses the human body as a metaphor for the church in 1 Corinthians 12. Our bodies work best when every part functions correctly. In order for the church to work the way God intends, it must have every part doing its job. God wants us to take an active role in serving the church and loving its members.

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# Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-11.**

God has given every Christian at least one spiritual gift to use in the church, and God expects us to recognize, develop, and employ the gifts He has given us, in order that we might fulfill our role in the body. These verses set out a basic rule for consideration of all spiritual gifts—namely, that all Christians share the common profession of faith: Jesus is Lord. On this foundation, Paul listed various gifts and explained their source.

**Where do a person's spiritual gifts come from, according to verses 4-6? Why does God give His children spiritual gifts?**

**What do you make of the diversity of gifts in verses 8-10? Is this list exhaustive?**

Paul's purpose in verses 8-10 was not to detail a complete list of all possible spiritual gifts, but rather, to emphasize the unity of the Spirit amid the marvelous variety of gifts. The one Holy Spirit is active in many ways through the devoted service of God's people. Paul listed spiritual gifts in three different letters he wrote. We also find lists in Romans 12 and Ephesians 4.

**Why is it important for believers to know which spiritual gifts they have? What roles do studying Scripture and prayer play in understanding our spiritual gifts?**

**What role might fellowship in the church play in helping you discover and understand your spiritual gifts?**

**How does understanding your gifts help you comprehend and embrace the role the Spirit has equipped you to fulfill?**

**When you reflect on your spiritual gifts, what impact does it have on your relationship with God?**

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 12:1-21.**

**What two things did Paul mention to members of the body so that the whole body would be able to discern God's will (vv. 1-2)?**

**In verses 3, 10, and 16, what are specific things you can do to prevent problems in the church that might be caused by pride?**

**"Members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts." Why are other members of the body important to you (vv. 4-6)?**

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-20.**

**Why do you think Paul chose the "body" imagery to describe the church? Do you think this is an effective metaphor? Why or why not?**

**It's easy to identify how different parts of the body function differently. What are some unique and different gifts you have recognized in our group or in our church body as a whole?**

**How can these different functions in a church create unity?**

Paul's metaphor of the body is effective because it is a clear picture that anyone can understand. Having all legs or all ears would make a body virtually useless. The gifts that God gives believers are meant to be unifying because together all the gifts make up a complete

body. We are exhorted to know our gifts so we can use them to serve the church, and the diversity of gifts God has given is a great strength. However, as we will see in the following verses, these different roles can lead to disunity as well.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:21-27.**

**Why do you think we are so tempted to compare our gifts or roles to those of others in the church? Why might we consider some to be “weaker” or “less honorable”?**

**How does Paul emphasize the importance of community by describing the church as a body?**

**Why is it important to suffer with someone in the body who suffers and to rejoice with those who are honored? What makes this difficult in our setting?**

Every Christian is important to fellow believers individually as well as to the church as a whole. Because of this interdependency of believers who make up the body of Christ, what happens to the strongest or the weakest happens to the whole of the community. As the body of Christ, we show that our community cares for its own as we take care of and uplift the weakest member of our congregation. A vibrant and vital community is one which cares for its members who otherwise might be overlooked. Church membership is not about paying dues and joining a country club, but about giving and serving as a natural outflow of the blessings God has given us.

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## **Application**

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Given what you've learned about how crucial each member of our church is, will you pledge to be a functioning member and embrace the role the Spirit has equipped you to fulfill? If so, are there any roles you feel you could do a better job of fulfilling as a part of our body?**

**What are some practical ways that we can better embrace those who are suffering as well as those who are being honored within our church body?**

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## **Pray**

Close in prayer, asking God for the courage to be a body of truly functioning members. Thank Him for His many blessings and gifts, and pray that He will help each of you live with a fresh commitment to not waste a single opportunity He has given you. Pray that you will honor God by serving the church with the gifts He has given you.

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## **Commentary**

### **1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-27**

12:1-3. Among the many problems the Corinthian church faced, one thorny issue concerned the nature and purpose of spiritual gifts. Some church members viewed the type of gift a believer possessed as a measuring stick for that believer's level of spirituality.

12:4. Apparently the Corinthians were bickering over the relative value of gifts, whether all Christians had gifts, and whether all spiritual gifts were from God. Paul affirmed a wide variety of different gifts. However, his main point in the first three verses of this section was that all spiritual gifts come from the same Spirit.

12:5-6. Paul altered his terminology slightly in verse 5 from the previous verse. Instead of "different gifts," he described these manifestations of the Spirit as different ministries. Instead of "the same Spirit," he wrote that these ministries came from the same Lord.

12:7. A spiritual gift and a manifestation of the spirit refer to the same reality, but Paul's continued use of the word Spirit is significant. As the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is fully God. The Spirit is portrayed in Scripture as active, whether participating in creation (see Gen. 1:2), giving eternal life (see John 3:8), comforting believers (see John 16:7), or interceding for us (see Rom. 8:26). The Spirit's actions are many; therefore, so are there a variety of spiritual gifts. But the number and diversity of gifts must not become an excuse for members to stir up disunity in the church. All spiritual gifts are to be received and used to produce what is beneficial to the church and its unity. This unity amid diversity is consistent with the triune nature of God, who through the Spirit grants spiritual gifts to each person.

12:8. The phrase message of wisdom recalls an issue Paul addressed earlier in the letter. Some church members viewed wisdom as a means of discerning secret truths not accessible to most Christians. Those who claimed this wisdom thought they were more spiritual than members who demonstrated other gifts. Paul rejected that view and its attendant arrogance. However, he affirmed there was indeed a spiritual gift of delivering a message characterized by godly wisdom. Such a message, if genuine, would unify and build up the church, not divide it. The gift of a message of knowledge would follow the same pattern. These first two spiritual gifts highlight the value of a Christian's speaking wisely, graciously, and correctly to bring unity to the church.

12:9. The gift of faith may come as a surprise to some people. However, Paul wasn't referring to saving faith that is expressed when someone receives Christ as Savior. The spiritual gift of faith is a God-given capacity for a believer to trust God boldly in extraordinary circumstances. Such a gifted believer often spurs a congregation facing challenges to move forward together in their ministry. Gifts of healing reflected the ministries of Jesus, Peter, Paul, and some other early disciples. Miracles of healing served to affirm that Jesus was the Messiah.

12:10. The gift described as performing of miracles covers various kinds of miracles other than healing. The gift of prophecy refers not only to foretelling but also to "forth-telling." It is a speech gift given by the Spirit for instructing the church and proclaiming the gospel. Paul later

indicated that all Christians would do well to desire this gift above any other. The gift of distinguishing between spirits probably refers to an ability to discern whether a spiritual activity is genuinely divine or demonic.

12:11. This verse summarizes the main point of the previous section and is a bridge to Paul's analogy of the church as a body. All gifts come from the same source, the Spirit. Thus all spiritual gifts need to be respected and appreciated by the church. Additionally, each member's Christian service is not merely a matter of personal effort or individual acquisition of a gift. The Holy Spirit is the One who distributes gifts to each as He wills. We are to receive the Spirit's gifts gratefully, not scramble for ones we judge to be more impressive than others.

12:12-13. Paul used the Greek word for one five times in verses 11-13 because of the continued disunity in the Corinthian church. The Source of our unity is the one Spirit through whom we were baptized into the one body, that is, the church. Paul cited two of the great spiritual dividers in the world of his day: Jews or Greeks—a racial-religious division—and slaves or free—a social barrier.

12:14-17. The dispute of the Corinthian church appears to have been directed towards individuals who were seen as less gifted members of the church. In order to address the importance of proper regard for all parts of Christ's body Paul turned to the human body for his illustration. Encouragement is given to those who might have thought that their gifts were not as needed as the spectacular, public, attention-garnering gifts. The respective functions of the differing body parts (foot, hand, eyes, and ears) are detailed by Paul in such a way as to show the needed contrasts. Functions of hands, feet, eyes, and ears each play an assigned role in the human body. Indeed, the human body would collapse into dysfunction without coordination of the body parts. The eye needs the hands to accomplish its objective, and the head needs the feet to reach its destination. Each part of the body is integral to the whole, for a human body cannot fully function as God originally designed without even the weakest member.

12:18. That God placed the parts of the body where He wanted them emphasizes why all believers are important to the church, whatever their spiritual gifts. To elevate one Christian over another because of gifts is to call into question God's design and decision. This verse reflects the same emphasis as in verse 11.

12:19-20. Paul's final application calls attention to the importance of the diversity of gifts. The body needs all its different parts to function at maximum effectiveness. Therefore, each part

is important. The same applies to the church and its members. All are needed. It is a sign of spiritual maturity in a church when it honors all contributions and does not seek to spotlight certain members who manifest particular gifts.

12:21-24. Paul moved from the inescapable diversity of members within the body (12:12-20) to the inescapable interdependence of members of the body (12:21-26). Stating the obvious, Paul asserted that those parts of the body which are considered weaker are necessary. The weaker members of the body, whether they be external parts we generally cover or inward organs (heart, lungs, kidneys, stomach, etc.), are regarded here as unpresentable but yet are shown a special modesty and greater honor. Although the weaker parts are not visible they are intimately vital for the human body. Likewise, those in the body of Christ who may be deceptively ordinary or unimpressive in their giftedness are as necessary as the most prestigiously gifted member in the congregation. Within the church all members are crucially important to God no matter what others may think, and should be to one another as well. The Christian community at Corinth was charged to care for its own individuals within the body.

12:25-27. In contrast to the Corinthian behavior of exclusivity, Paul noted that God has put the body together. Here Paul used the language of combining or blending of elements, colors, hues, or composing a musical melody in order to create a harmonious whole. Clearly divisions such as jealousy, scorn, or strife have no place within the community of Christ. Paul was clear that God has structured the body in such a way that the members have the same attentiveness for one another as for themselves. Naturally, members would have the same concern for each other, so that if one part of the body hurts every member suffers with the stricken one. However, the converse is also true of the body of believers, if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. The gift which God has given to the church is a mutual dependence on Him as well as on our fellow congregants. When we honor those members of body with the weaker or unpresentable gifts, we have the opportunity to practice the love of Christ!

## 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-27

### **Unity: The Gift of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:1-13)**

Since there was division in the Corinthian church, Paul began with an emphasis on the oneness of the church. He pointed out four wonderful bonds of spiritual unity.

**We confess the same Lord (vv. 1–3).** Paul contrasted their experience as unconverted idolaters with their present experience as Christians. They had worshiped dead idols, but now they belonged to the living God. Their idols never spoke to them, but God spoke to them by His Spirit, and He even spoke through them in the gift of prophecy. When they were lost, they were under the control of the demons (1 Cor. 10:20) and were led astray (“carried away,” 1 Cor. 12:2). But now the Spirit of God lived in them and directed them.

It is only through the Spirit that a person can honestly say, “Jesus is Lord.” A sneering sinner may mouth the words, but he is not giving a true confession. (Perhaps Paul was referring to things they had said when influenced by the demons prior to conversion.) It is important to note that the believer is always in control of himself when the Holy Spirit is at work (1 Cor. 14:32) because Jesus Christ the Lord is in charge. Any so-called “Spirit manifestation” that robs a person of self-control is not of God; for “the fruit of the Spirit is ... self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23, NASB).

If Jesus Christ truly is Lord in our lives, then there should be unity in the church. Division and dissension among God’s people only weakens their united testimony to a lost world (John 17:20–21).

**We depend on the same God (vv. 4–6).** There is a trinitarian emphasis here: “the same Spirit ... the same Lord ... the same God.” We individually may have different gifts, ministries, and ways of working, but “it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). The source of the gift is God; the sphere for administering the gift is from God; and the energy to use the gift is from God. Why, then, glorify men? Why compete with one another?

**We minister to the same body (vv. 7–11).** The gifts are given for the good of the whole church. They are not for individual enjoyment, but for corporate employment. The Corinthians especially needed this reminder, because they were using their spiritual gifts selfishly to promote themselves and not to prosper the church. When we accept our gifts with humility, then we use them to promote harmony, and this helps the whole church.

The various gifts are named in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 and 28, and also in Ephesians 4:11 and Romans 12:6–8. When you combine the lists, you end up with nineteen different gifts and offices. Since the listing in Romans is not identical with the listing in 1 Corinthians, we may assume that Paul was not attempting to exhaust the subject in either passage. While the gifts named are adequate for the ministry of the church, God is not limited to these lists. He may give other gifts as He pleases.

We have already discussed apostles (1 Cor. 9:1–6). Prophets were New Testament spokesmen for God whose messages came immediately from God by the Spirit. Their ministry was to edify, encourage, and comfort (1 Cor. 14:3). Their messages were tested by the listeners to determine whether they were truly from God (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thes. 5:19–21). Ephesians 2:20 makes it clear that apostles and prophets worked together to lay the foundation of the church, and we may assume that they were no longer needed once that foundation was completed.

Teachers (also pastor-teacher) instructed converts in the doctrinal truths of the Christian life. They taught from the Word and from the teachings of the Apostles (tradition). Unlike the prophets, they did not get their messages immediately by the Spirit, though the Spirit helped them in their teaching. James 3:1 indicates that this is a serious calling.

The evangelist majored on sharing the Good News of salvation with the lost. All ministers should do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5) and seek to win souls, but some men have been given evangelism as a special calling.

In the early church, miracles were a part of the credentials of God's servants (Heb. 2:1–4). In fact, miracles, healings, and tongues all belong to what theologians call "the sign gifts" and belonged in a special way to the infancy of the church. The Book of Acts, as well as church history, indicates that these miraculous gifts passed off the scene.

Helps and governments have to do with the serving of others and the guiding of the church. Without spiritual leadership, the church flounders. Ministry (Rom. 12:7) and ruling belong to this same category. In my three pastorates, I was grateful for people with the gifts of helps and leadership.

There were several "speaking gifts": tongues and the interpretation of tongues (about which more will be said later), the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge (the ability to understand and apply God's truth to a definite situation), and exhortation (encouragement, rebuke if necessary).

Giving and showing mercy relate to sharing material aid with those in need, as well as supporting God's servants in ministry. The gift of faith has to do with believing God for what He wants to accomplish in the church's ministry, that He will lead and provide. The discerning of spirits was important in the early church since Satan tried to counterfeit the work of God and the Word of God. Today, the Spirit especially uses the written Word to give us discernment (1 John 2:18–24; 4:1–6). Since there are no prophets in the church today, we need not worry about false prophets; but we do have to beware of false teachers (2 Peter 2:1).

Some students have categorized the various gifts as the speaking gifts, the sign gifts, and the serving gifts. However, we should not be so fascinated by the individual gifts that we forget the main reason why Paul listed them: to remind us that they unite us in our ministries to the one body. The Holy Spirit bestows these gifts “as He will” (1 Cor. 12:11), not as we will. No Christian should complain about his or her gifts, nor should any believer boast about his or her gifts. We are many members in one body, ministering to each other.

**We have experienced the same baptism (vv. 12–13).** It is unfortunate that the term “baptism of the Spirit” has been divorced from its original New Testament meaning. God has spoken to us in Spirit-given words which we must not confuse (1 Cor. 2:12–13). The baptism of the Spirit occurs at conversion when the Spirit enters the believing sinner, gives him new life, and makes his body the temple of God. All believers have experienced this once-for-all baptism (1 Cor. 12:13). Nowhere does the Scripture command us to seek this baptism, because we have already experienced it and it need not be repeated.

The “filling of the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18ff) has to do with the Spirit’s control of our lives. (In Scripture, to be filled by something means “to be controlled by.”) We are commanded to be filled, and we can be if we yield all to Christ and ask Him for the Spirit’s filling. This is a repeated experience, for we constantly need to be filled with spiritual power if we are to glorify Christ. To be baptized by the Spirit means that we belong to Christ’s body. To be filled with the Spirit means that our bodies belong to Christ.

The evidence of the Spirit’s baptism at conversion is the witness of the Spirit within (Rom. 8:14–16). It is not “speaking in tongues.” All of the believers in the Corinthian assembly had been baptized by the Spirit, but not all of them spoke in tongues (1 Cor. 12:30). The evidences of the Spirit’s filling are: power for witnessing (Acts 1:8), joyfulness and submission (Eph. 5:19ff), Christlikeness (Gal. 5:22–26), and a growing understanding of the Word (John 16:12–15).

Because of the gift of the Spirit, which is received at conversion, we are all members of the body of Christ. Race, social status, wealth, or even sex (Gal. 3:28) are neither advantages nor handicaps as we fellowship and serve the Lord.

### **Diversity: The Gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:14–31)**

Unity without diversity would produce uniformity, and uniformity tends to produce death. Life is a balance between unity and diversity. As a human body weakens, its “systems” slow down and everything tends to become uniform. The ultimate, of course, is that the body itself turns to dust.

This helps to explain why some churches (and other Christian ministries) have weakened and died: there was not sufficient diversity to keep unity from becoming uniformity. Dr. Vance Havner has expressed it, "First there is a man, then a movement, then a machine, and then a monument." Many ministries that began as a protest against "dead orthodoxy" became dead themselves; because in their desire to remain pure and doctrinally sound, they stifled creativity and new ideas.

However, if diversity is not kept under control, it could destroy unity; and then you have anarchy. We shall discover in 1 Corinthians 13 that it is maturity that balances unity and diversity. The tension in the body between individual members and the total organism can only be solved by maturity.

Using the human body as his illustration, Paul explained three important facts about diversity in the body of Christ. Why are there different members?

**The body needs different functions if it is to live, grow, and serve (vv. 14–20).** No member should compare or contrast itself with any other member, because each one is different and each one is important. I suppose I could learn to walk on my hands, but I prefer to use my feet, even though I have not yet learned to type or to eat with my feet. The ear cannot see and the eye cannot hear, yet each organ has an important ministry. And have you ever tried to smell through your ears?

There is a tendency today for some people to magnify the "sensational" gifts. Some believers feel very guilty because they possess gifts that do not put them into the limelight. It is this attitude that Paul opposed and refuted in this paragraph. Diversity does not suggest inferiority. Are we to believe that the sovereign Lord made a mistake when He bestowed the gifts?

**The members promote unity as they discover their dependence on one another (vv. 21–26).** Diversity in the body is an evidence of the wisdom of God. Each member needs the other members, and no member can afford to become independent. When a part of the human body becomes independent, you have a serious problem that could lead to sickness and even death. In a healthy human body, the various members cooperate with each other and even compensate for each other when a crisis occurs. The instant any part of the body says to any other part, "I don't need you!" it begins to weaken and die and create problems for the whole body.

A famous preacher was speaking at a ministers' meeting, and he took time before and after the meeting to shake hands with the pastors and chat with them. A friend asked him, "Why

take time for a group of men you may never see again?" The world-renowned preacher smiled and said, "Well, I may be where I am because of them! Anyway, if I didn't need them on the way up, I might need them on the way down!" No Christian servant can say to any other servant, "My ministry can get along without you!"

Paul may be referring to the private parts of the body in 1 Corinthians 12:23–24. If so, then to "bestow honor" on them refers to the use of attractive clothing. The more beautiful parts of the body need no special help.

God's desire is that there be no division ("schism") in the church. Diversity leads to disunity when the members compete with one another; but diversity leads to unity when the members care for one another. How do the members care for each other? By each one functioning according to God's will and helping the other members to function. If one member suffers, it affects every member. If one member is healthy, it helps the others to be strong.

**Diversity of members fulfills the will of God in the body (vv. 27–31).** It is God who bestows the gifts and assigns the offices. He has a perfect plan, not only for the church as a whole, but also for each local congregation. We have no reason to believe that each congregation in the New Testament possessed all of the gifts. The church at Corinth was an especially gifted assembly (1 Cor. 1:4–7; 2 Cor. 8:7). However, God gives to each congregation just the gifts it needs when they are needed.

In this paragraph, Paul pointed out that there is a "priority list" for the gifts, that some have more significance than others. But this fact does not contradict the lesson already shared—that each gift is important and each individual believer is important. Even in the human body, there are some parts that we can do without, even though their absence might handicap us a bit.

The Apostles and prophets, of course, appeared first on the scene because they had a foundational ministry (Eph. 2:20). Teachers were needed to help establish believers in the faith. The other gifts were needed from time to time to help individual believers and to build the church.

The construction of the Greek in 1 Corinthians 12:29–30 demands no as the answer to each of these questions. No individual believer possesses all the spiritual gifts. Each believer has the gift (or gifts) assigned to him by the Lord and needed at that time.

The word translated best in 1 Corinthians 12:31 simply means “greater.” Some spiritual gifts are greater in significance than others, and it is proper for the believer to desire these gifts (1 Cor. 14:1). Paul put a high value on prophecy, but the Corinthians valued the gift of tongues. Paul put tongues at the end of the list.

Unity and diversity must be balanced by maturity, and that maturity comes with love. It is not enough to have the gift of the Spirit and gifts from the Spirit. We must also have the graces of the Spirit as we use our gifts to serve one another.

Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 607–610.