

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Spiritual Gifts: A Tempered Working Body

*If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. (1 Corinthians 12:15–27, KJV 1900)*

Any man who has served as a pastor for any length of time has encountered the downside opposite of this passage, a member who feels entitled to exercise the gift that he thinks he has, whether anyone else in the church body is edified or not. In the healthy human body, each body part and system smoothly attends to its function for the benefit of the body. No body part works exclusively for its personal gain or benefit. That body part will only survive if the body to which it belongs survives and remains healthy. Paul's analogy deals with people in a church. He used the analogy to show the Corinthians how silly their present attitude and conduct was. Imagine the hand, ear, eye, or nose of your body complaining, "If I can't be what I want to be in the body, I hereby resign from the body. I'll not be any part of the body at all." How long would your hand survive amputated from your body? Bare minutes, no more. Any church member who suffers from this unhealthy attitude has forgotten a fundamental truth of Biblical teaching. Because of the Lord's kind grace, each church member receives from the church—and through the church from the Lord—far more than he/she ever gives to the church. Far more. When we cut ourselves off from the church, we de facto cut ourselves off from those blessings. We lose; we never gain. Lest someone might complain, "But you don't know how imperfect my church is," I suggest that you take a look at the Church in Corinth to whom Paul wrote this letter. There is no perfect church in this world, but the Lord has still appointed the church as the vehicle of His blessings and the body through which He manifests His spiritual gifts.

*is it therefore not of the body?* Because an individual ignores the Lord and Scripture and follows the sinful line of thinking that Paul here describes, does that person's sinful and self-

centered thinking make his/her vain imagination true? No, of course not.

I use another analogy to reinforce a point that Paul makes repeatedly in this lesson. For a moment, consider a healthy fruit tree instead of a healthy human body. How many fruit trees produce their tasty fruit for their own exclusive use? None, none at all. Every fruit tree produces fruit to be used and enjoyed by another. And the greater health and work of each part of the human body, in this analogy of the church, produces its "Fruit" for the benefit of others when it follows its role/assignment from God and works to honor that role. Many years ago I was counseling a young preacher—or wannabe preacher—who had grown to think of his position more as an entitlement than as an integrated part of the whole church body. He had the obvious habit when he spoke of looking at walls, windows, ceiling, floors, everywhere except where he should have been looking, into the eyes of his hearers. When I called this habit to his attention, he explained that he consciously did not look in the eyes of his hearers because he saw clearly that they were not engaged with what he was saying. He didn't remotely think about the fact that, if they were not engaged with his words and thoughts, they could not be edified by them, so why was he standing up there wasting his and their time in full knowledge that he was not fulfilling his primary assignment for being there, to teach and to edify the body, not the walls, windows, and floor? This sad and frustrated man had obviously forgotten that his spiritual gift was given to him by the Lord as an integrated part of the Lord's church body, not as an autonomous entitlement that existed wholly apart from that body. When I suggested that his sole reason for speaking to the church was for their edification, his reaction

surprised me, “Oh.” He had not remotely thought of this obvious Bible truth. He had grown to think of his preaching role as an entitlement, not as a “tempered” part of the whole dynamic church body. The wisest self-counsel a preacher can live by is the mirror opposite of this young man’s habit. If you are speaking to a body of people and realize that they are not engaged with you and the things that you are trying to teach them, immediately sit down.

Another common but faulty attitude of our day regarding church deals with this same point of an integrated functioning body. “I have no Biblical need to go to church every time the church meets, or at all for that matter. All I need to do for my spiritual health is to download sermons from the preachers that I like and listen to them. I can serve God better all alone than I can serve Him as part of any church body.” If we apply Paul’s healthy integrated body analogy to this attitude, what do we see? We see an isolated body part that is either dead or soon to die. It’s only hope for a healthy life is its integrated function as part of a body where it contributes to the health of that body, not stands in critical and independent judgment against the body. The lesson here has to do with discipleship and serving God as part of a healthy church body, not new birth and going to heaven when you die. Paul emphasizes in this chapter that the Lord sets His spiritual gifts “*in the church,*” not out of the church or independent of the church. (1 Corinthians 12:28)

*If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. Individual believers do not choose their gift; the Lord bestows spiritual gifts to the church “as it hath pleased him.”* If we were allowed to choose our own gifts, we’d end up with a Frankenstein body, not a healthy, diverse, unified, and working body. A man may be a leader in his profession, but he may not be at all qualified to lead in the church. Sadly, sometimes men who are successful in their business career will decide that they should impose their personal flavor of business philosophy onto their church so that they can make their church successful. This self-serving attitude wholly ignores and contradicts every tenet of truth that Paul teaches in this lesson on spiritual gifts. Paul did not write three chapters on spiritual “Self-Fulfilling Accomplishments.” He didn’t write a thesis on “How to Realize Your Personal Spiritual Success” or “How to Transform Your Church into a Bill Gates Success Story.” He wrote three chapters that, beginning to end, affirm that the Lord is the head over all things in every church of His claiming, and He alone dictates the church’s function. He sets forth the church’s “Philosophy” in Scripture; He does not rely on the successful business member of the church to impose a Wall Street business or, Lord forbid, Washington, DC, political philosophy onto the church.

Early in this study I confronted the willful ignorance mindset that claims that Scripture says almost nothing about how a New Testament church should function, theoretically leaving us to do anything we wish. How much about this chapter reads as if the Lord adopts a hands-off, do-your-thing policy with His church? I haven’t read a single sentence so far that remotely suggests the idea. Nor have I found such a sentence anywhere in Scripture, though I find repeated and quite explicit directions to the Lord’s church regarding what she is to do and how she is to do it. The willful ignorance attitude cannot stand on Biblical ground; it is carnal fantasy.

*But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.* If the Lord sees that one of His church bodies needs two feet, He can bestow the “Foot” gift to two people in that church. At times we have observed churches, perhaps our home church that seemed to have obvious needs that remained unsupplied for long periods of time. How do we explain this void in light of Paul’s words? I suggest that Jesus gave us the answer.

*Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, **that he would send forth laborers into his harvest.** (Luke 10:2; emphasis added)*

If we find ourselves in a situation of obvious need, a situation where a very specific spiritual gift is needed, but it has not been supplied for a time, it might be a ripe season for self-examination and for prayer. I’ve seen all too many people face obvious unmet needs in their church and immediately start preaching the church’s funeral. Stop the wake! Get on your knees and start praying for the Lord to do what He said He would do. He has warned us that He will not answer the prayer of unbelief. Do you pray as if you already know your prayer will go unanswered? Stop. Don’t say another word in prayer till you have changed your heart from unbelief to faith. Then He shall answer the prayer and supply your church’s need.

Until they face real needs and go to the Lord with passion and conviction, I fear that many believers have unbiblical ideas about prayer. On one extreme hand, you have folks who may be ever so clear in their rejection of fatalism, but they nevertheless adopt a near-fatalistic attitude in their prayers. Why bother to pray? The Lord already knows what I need and whether He will supply that need or not, so why should I bother to pray. I just need to sit silently by until He decides it is time to give what He has chosen for me. Why don’t you try to find this attitude toward prayer in the Bible? Don’t spend too much time; you won’t find it anywhere in the Bible. It isn’t there. In fact, this attitude is the mirror opposite of what Scripture

teaches regarding prayer. I've learned that a person will reveal their fatalistic mindset faster in their prayer habits and attitude than in most other parts of their faith.

A second flawed attitude toward prayer begins with an entrenched unbelief. I don't really believe the Lord will grant my prayer. I have no real expectation, but I'm supposed to pray anyway. The Bible will tell you how the Lord reacts to a prayer of unbelief, and its teachings are no surprise to the believing child. (James 1:5-7).

*For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.* The idea that one body part is more important is often a rationalization for the member who thinks himself/herself to possess that particular gift and use it to lord his/her ideas and opinions over the other members. This idea contradicts Paul's point in this teaching. Rather than bully ourselves and our presumed "Gift" over others in the church, the Lord directs every member, regardless of his/her spiritual gift, to honor every other member and their spiritual gift. From the little toe to the lungs or the heart or the brain, a healthy body needs every part intact and working in its wisely designed assignment for the good of the whole body, not for its personal supremacy or gain. Instead of self-promotion, the Holy Spirit directed Paul to insist on a tender care toward every other member in the church. When a particular member suffers a trial, you don't smugly promote yourself to the seat of divine judge and jury, "Serves him right, considering how carnal he lives." (James 4:12) Keep yourself out of the judge and jury role. Leave that role and function where Scripture shows it to be, with the Lord alone. Invest your labor in seeking the Lord's help to be sensitive and tender hearted toward every other member of your church. When something good happens in their life, be the first and most eager to congratulate and to encourage them. When they encounter a discouraging trial, be the first to stand beside them and to take their case to the Lord in your prayers. Be sure your words, attitude, and actions communicate to that person that you care and that you are suffering with them.

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Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor