

February 20, 2011

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1 Corinthians 12:12-31

**BODY-BUILDING**  
**“The Problem With Spiritual Gifts”**

*“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”*

**One of the great joys of having my friend John Hartman here to preach last Sunday was getting a few days to hang out together.**

**John and I go way back and so, for us, it was a time to kick back and catch up.**

**We stayed up late talking...**

**We grabbed some barbequed wings and watched OSU basketball...**

**Played a little basketball ourselves.**

**But, one of the best parts was simply popping a disk in the DVD player and watching old reruns of the *Odd Couple* together.**

**Now, John and I – and even Faith, as it turns out – are big fans of the old *Odd Couple* TV show.**

**You remember the *Odd Couple*, don't you?**

**Well, I've got every episode ever made. And, as far as I'm concerned, the *Odd Couple* is one of the best sitcoms in the history of TV!**

**Now, for you “kids” who've been sorely deprived and have never seen the *Odd Couple*, or don't know what it's about -- the premise of the show was this...**

**Two divorced men share a New York apartment together.**

**And, even though they're friends, they constantly get on one another's nerves.**

**Felix – played by the late Tony Randall – is a compulsive “neat-freak” who drives everybody around him crazy with his obsessive compulsive tendencies.**

**And, Oscar – played by Jack Klugman – is a perpetual slob – more often than not spilling something on himself or finding a petrified tuna fish sandwich underneath his pillow.**

**Well, we watched about a half-dozen episodes last weekend. And, as we watched, I got to thinking, “Who’s really more important to this show? Felix or Oscar?”**

**In other words, “Who really makes the show go? Finicky Felix with all his odd quirks and mannerisms or sloppy Oscar who’s always making a mess of things?”**

**Both are funny! Both are great characters!**

**But, who does the show really depend on to make it click – Felix or Oscar?**

**Well, as I pondered this deeply profound question, it occurred to me that the answer is -- “neither!”**

**Neither Oscar or Felix is the key to the show. The fact is, the show only works because both of them work so well together!**

**Despite the fact that in real life they were two totally different men with totally different interests, playing totally different characters, Tony Randall and Jack Klugman had an unbelievable chemistry together!**

**And, this chemistry – the two of them working together -- is what truly made this show a classic!**

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**Well, we can think of Spiritual Gifts in much the same way.**

**The key behind Spiritual Gifts is that God has given them to the Church to be used together...**

**To complement one another...**

**So that in the end, what we develop together is far better than anything we could accomplish individually and by ourselves.**

**But, of course, that's easier said than done!**

**Because one of the problems with Spiritual Gifts...**

**Or rather – one of the traps “we” tend to fall into when considering our gifts...**

**Is to regard some gifts as “more” or “less” important than others in fulfilling God's work here on earth.**

**Think of it like this...**

**A certain sea captain and his chief engineer got into an argument one day over who was more “important” to the overall operation of the ship.**

**Failing to come to an agreement, the captain and the chief engineer decided to settle their disagreement by temporarily switching jobs.**

**The captain went down to the engine room while the chief engineer took command of the bridge.**

**Well, after a couple of hours, the captain suddenly appeared on deck all covered in soot and oil.**

***“Chief,” he yelled, waving a large wrench. “You’ll have to come down here right away – I can’t make her go!”***

***“Of course you can’t” the engineer replied.***

***“She’s run aground!”***

**Both really learned a lesson – didn’t they?**

**Well, that's Paul's point today as he writes the Corinthian Church trying to get them to understand their mutual dependence on one another.**

**Now, the problem – simply put...**

**Is that the Corinthians had begun making their Spiritual Gifts more about “themselves” than about the Body of Christ!**

**In other words...**

**Rather than recognizing how God had gifted each of them for the betterment of the entire church – they began considering their gifts as spiritual status symbols for themselves.**

**And, in their warped economy, some of these Gifts carried a higher status than others!**

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**It's like when I was in Junior High School.**

**Our school had an odd way of dividing the students into appropriate academic clusters.**

**Say, for instance, the 6<sup>th</sup> grade class was split into 15 different groupings.**

**The way my school did it was to put all the really smart kids into the class known as “6-1.”**

**Those were the kids who always got straight “A's!”**

**They usually weren't too good at sports. But, boy could they work a square root!**

**Now, the next smartest group you might imagine would have been “6-2,” and then “6-3,” and so on up the line.**

**But, that's not the way it worked.**

**You see, I think they thought that would have been too easy to figure out.**

**So, the next smartest class was actually the class known as “6-5.”**

**These were your “A” and “B” students.**

**Then, (I think) came the class known as “6-13.”**

**These were the kids who were smart but who didn’t always try as hard.**

**And so, we had this elaborate system designed to categorize kids without making them feel they were being labeled. But, we figured it out!**

**The “6-1” kids – of whom I wasn’t a part – usually “whomped” us in math class. But, we got them back during kickball in gym.**

**The point is...**

**As human beings we tend to categorize...**

**We’re prone to develop our own hierarchies and assign worth relative to where people fall on whatever scale we’ve created.**

**And, that’s what they were doing in Corinth!**

**Now, to be sure, the Corinthians were an incredibly gifted people.**

**Paul says so himself!**

**In fact, his opening remarks in chapter one are very enlightening. There Paul says this:**

*I always thank God for you because of His grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in Him you have been enriched in every way – in all your speaking and in all your knowledge – because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed (1 Cor. 1:4-7).*

**In other words, these were people through whom the Holy Spirit was working in powerful ways!**

**They had Spiritual Gifts in abundance! No doubt about that!**

**And yet, it wasn't too long before some in the church began using their gifts as measuring sticks against which to judge others – who perhaps didn't have the same gifts.**

**And so, Paul writes to correct these misunderstandings and to help them realize that God has graced each of us with something unique to offer in the Body of Christ.**

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**Now, the first thing Paul does – and we saw this previously in verses 1-11 -- is to stress the “oneness” of the Spirit even amidst a plurality of Gifts!**

**He says there are “different kinds of gifts”...**

**“Different kinds of service”...**

**And, “different kinds of working”...**

**But, they all come from one and the same Spirit!**

**And, this is key because what we so often forget when talking about Spiritual Gifts is that the Holy Spirit Himself is really the Gift!**

**Speaking through the Old Testament prophet Joel, the LORD said:**

*And afterward,  
I will pour out My Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your old men will dream dreams,  
your young men will see visions.  
Even on My servants, both men and women,  
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.  
Joel 2:28-29*

**Later on when this prophecy is fulfilled at Pentecost, Peter himself says:**

*Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*  
*Acts 2:28*

**And so, we make a huge mistake if we try to disconnect the Gifts of the Spirit from the Holy Spirit Himself.**

**The Holy Spirit is the gift – the Presence of Christ within us! And, the various little “gifts” of service we’re blessed with is the manifestation of the Spirit working in and through our lives.**

**And, the purpose of these gifts is to glorify God by building up a mutually-edifying community of faith under the Lordship of Jesus Christ!**

**That’s what the Corinthians were missing!**

**You see, they mistakenly assumed these Spiritual Gifts were for their own glory rather than for the glory of God.**

**And, once that assumption was made, it was easy to start discriminating – figuring some gifts were better than others.**

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**Now, in some ways it’s hard to blame them. Like us, the Corinthians naturally assumed – “The Flashier The Better!”**

**The more “pizzazz” a gift seems to have, the more spiritual – the more in tune with God -- the person having that gift must be!**

**I mean, don’t we often assume the preacher’s “got” to be more spiritual than the person folding bulletins or working in the nursery or the one rolling up their sleeves and washing dishes after church!**

**That’s not right! But, that’s how think – isn’t it!**

**Well, this way of thinking really got a toehold among the Corinthians.**

**So, gifts like speaking in tongues and miraculous signs really made quite a splash.**

**Pretty soon, those with the flashier Gifts were lording it over those whose gifts weren't quite as spectacular. And, it caused a lot of dissension in the church and left some people wondering whether they were really worth anything to God!**

**But, as Paul points out, those with the less spectacular gifts were just as indispensable and important as anybody else.**

**And, the way he proves it, is by comparing the church to a human body.**

**Now, the point Paul's driving at here is clear.**

**In fact, it's really just an extended sermon illustration.**

**But, what he says is that just as one body is made up of many different parts – each interdependent on all the others – so too, the Church of Jesus Christ is made up of many different people each exercising different gifts...**

**But, all interdependent on one another!**

**And, ANY discrimination among these gifts – assuming some were better than others – would be as ludicrous as different parts of the body claiming to be more or less important than other parts themselves.**

**For instance...**

**Ever notice how a headache can really knock you for a loop?**

**And, not just your head – but your whole body!**

**And, have you ever gotten an eyelash stuck in your eye?**

**No big deal – right?**

**I mean, an eyelash is such a tiny little thing and, relatively speaking, the eye is such a small part of the body. But, it will make you miserable all the same – won't it?**

**I know a fella who had a kidney stone once.**

**Told me it was the worst pain he ever had!**

**One day at work he started feeling sick and started sweating profusely and told his boss he had to go home. And, when he was at home he was finally able to pass it. But, he was amazed at how tiny that kidney stone was and how something so small could affect him so much!**

**He even saved it to show his wife and she was amazed how small it was too!**

**On the other hand, you every notice how something as simple as a foot-rub or someone massaging your neck can make you feel good all over?**

**Well, this is Paul's point!**

**The body's a unit – even though it's made up of many different parts.**

**And, all these parts are connected and play an integral role in the overall health and well-being of the body...**

**Just as all the various Gifts of the Spirit are important for the health and well-being of the Church!**

**No part of the body is unimportant – just as no Spiritual Gift is insignificant!**

**The person working behind the scenes who never gets noticed is just as important as the person front and center!**

**Now, the person front and center may get all the attention. But, God is keenly aware of the person working behind the scenes too!**

**And, it's God's will that each and every person in the Church...**

**Whatever their gifts may be...**

**Would be using those gifts...**

**And, that everyone else would be honoring and upholding and celebrating the gifts each one of us brings!**

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**I've shared with you before that one of my brothers was on a boat that sank in the Atlantic Ocean some years back.**

**My brother and some of his buddies were about 15 miles out to sea when their boat caught fire and they suddenly realized they were in serious trouble!**

**But, when my brother told me how they handled it, it was truly a testament to everybody working together for the common good.**

**For example...**

**Once they realized what was happening, everybody sprang into action.**

**Each person had a different job!**

**The guy who owned the boat immediately got on the radio and contacted the Coast Guard and gave them their position.**

**My brother began trying to extinguish the fire...**

**Another guy started tossing flotation devices off the boat in case they had to abandon ship – which eventually they did.**

**Everybody had a job to do and their survival depended on everybody doing that job!**

**I mean, could you imagine with that fire raging if they had all started arguing about whose job was more important – or who should do what?**

**Imagine if my brother thought trying to extinguish the fire was beneath him and argued that he should be talking to the Coast Guard instead.**

**You know what would have happened?**

**They all would have ended up as shark-bait!**

**But, they knew better!**

**And, Paul's hope in the Church is that we do too!**

**That we know God has graced each of us with something unique to offer in the Body of Christ.**

**That we know your gifts might be different than mine and my gifts different than yours.**

**That we know no matter how different our gifts are, they're all given for the common good, and that each one is dependent on all the others!**

**And, that we know in the end all Gifts ultimately fade away and the only thing left is the way we've loved one another in Christ!**

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**Now, one of the things I'm certain of here is that there aren't folks going around judging one another's gifts like they were doing in Corinth.**

**That's not who you are and I don't perceive that to be a problem at First Pres.**

**But, at the same time, I do know there're people in this church who wonder if their gifts matter...**

**If there's anything of worth they bring to the table or can contribute to the Kingdom of God.**

**I know there're people here who feel just because they don't preach or teach or sing in the choir what "they" have to offer isn't as valuable...**

**That it isn't as important!**

**But, that's wrong!**

**You see, if you've confessed Jesus Christ as Savior and repented of your sins, the Holy Spirit is living inside of you. And, the Spirit has gifted you uniquely and in ways that will bless this church and others.**

**You've just got to believe it and start acting on it!**

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**I was talking with someone once who was about to join the church.**

**And, I asked this person where they felt like they had gifts to serve. And, very modestly this individual said they really didn't think they had much to offer – except that they loved children and really enjoyed working with kids.**

**Well, could you imagine a church where children weren't loved and where there weren't folks with special gifts of love and compassion and patience for little ones?**

**It's not a church I'd want to be part of!**

**Yet, this person honestly thought they had nothing important to offer.**

**But, what they have is indispensable!**

**That's why pieces of a jigsaw puzzle were passed out to you today.**

**Because you need to see that you are an indispensable part of the church!**

**You're just one piece – true!**

**But, without you – the picture's incomplete!**

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**Some centuries ago, a European nobleman in a certain mountain village wanted to leave his townspeople a special legacy.**

**He wondered what he should do. And, they at last, he decided to build them a church.**

**Now, no one saw the plans for the church until it was all finished. And, when the townsfolk gathered, they all marveled at its beauty.**

**But, someone quickly noticed there were no lamps in the church and they wondered how it would be lighted.**

**The nobleman pointed to some brackets on the walls and then gave each family a lantern which they were supposed to bring with them every time they came to worship.**

**Then he said, *“Each time you’re here, the area around where you sit will be lighted.”***

***“Each time you’re not here, that same area will be dark.”***

***“This is to remind you that whenever you fail to come to church, some part of God’s house will be dark.”***

**Well, the same is true of the gifts the Holy Spirit gives us.**

**They’re like lanterns lighting the way.**

**And, as each of use our gifts and celebrate and honor the gifts of others – a powerful witness for Jesus Christ shines brightly...**

**And, we fulfill that for which God created us to be.**

**Amen.**