



Title: Grasping Your Value
Theme: Exercising True Church Membership
Series: Essentials for Church Growth

The passages of Scripture I am about to read is one of the most meaningful descriptions of the church of Jesus Christ. Therefore is it one of the most beautiful passages of Scripture that can be expounded upon in times such as these. Satan has used the flesh and the world's view to convince many that they have no value in the Body of Christ. Many sit in the pews convincing themselves that they play no important role in the building of the kingdom of God or in the act of public worship. Others have withheld their presence, their Spiritual gifts and their support because things don't go the way they had hoped.

Every born again Christian has gifts from God

I would propose to you that each and every born again Christian has gifts from God that can be exercised under the anointing of the Holy Spirit of Christ. Regardless of how you feel or what you have been told you have great value in the Body of Christ and when you are not exercising your gift out of sacrificial love, the Body of Christ cannot reach her full potential in the building of the Kingdom of God.

Listen as I read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, "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." Pray!

Everyone an active member in the "Great Commission"

God's heart desire is that we not be ignorant about spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12 :1) and He longs for everyone to be an active member in the "Great Commission."

We are told there are different kinds of gifts, different kinds of service but the same God and Lord works all them in all men. We are told that each and every person in the Body of Christ is given a gift for the common good. (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown)

1 Corinthians chapter 13 tells us the way of exercising our Spiritual gifts is through sacrificial love and 1 Corinthians 14:40 gives us this exhortation as we search for understanding about true church membership that is pleasing to the Lord Jesus Christ, "But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way." 1 Corinthians 12-14 holds truths about active church membership that opens the door to Holy Spirit revelation and empowerment for the operating of the church (1 Corinthians 12:7-10)

The Holy Spirit of Christ has this question for all who desire to be seen or recognized as an active member of a local church, "Do you fulfill your position and play your part in a Bible believing Christ honoring church?" The signing of a church membership card is not the endorsement that benefits the whole Body of Christ and empowers the church to fulfill the "Great Commission," but faithfulness to exercising your Spiritual gifts does.

Valuable because of what Jesus Christ has done

The first truth to grasp in being useful in the Body of Christ is to cling to the truth that you are found valuable because of what Jesus Christ has done, not because of what you have accomplished. Revelation 5:9-10 speaks of the vision the beloved John had of the twenty-four elders singing praises to God. It says, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

This is a new song because it replaces the old song of a cursed creation with the new song of redemption (Thru the Bible; Dr Stanely Horton; The Expositor's Bible Commentary) which is available to all who come to Christ and receive Him as Savior and Lord.

Christians become active members of a local church because they grasp the value of Christ's blood shed for them. Illuminated Christians become active in

service to God and Christ because they know that the blood of Christ offers a universal salvation. No person is beyond God's reach. He is able to save people from every tribe and language and race and nation. There is no prejudice or discrimination with Christ, no favorites and no partiality. God so loved the world He gave His only begotten son so that whoever believes in Christ will be saved. (John 3:16)

Those who surrender to Christ live a life of praise by becoming active in service to Christ with the local and universal Body of Christ. Their key message proclaims Jesus' universal salvation to all who will come to Him in repentance. Christians who grasp their value in the blood of Christ respond to the Apostle Paul's exhortation, "...stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:58)

R.A. Jaffra wrote about the Apostle Paul who was active in the church with joyful zeal. He writes, "The Apostle Paul was one of the greatest [laborers for the Lord in his day]. He did travel to many different places yet his writings were not about the scenery he passed through, nor about the architecture of his day and not one line set its focus on the customs of the people. Since his life changing experience with Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul's vision was focused upon the glory of Christ and the passion of his heart was to speak and teach Christ to all who would hear."

Christians grasp their value by first grasping a vision of the Christ who purchased them with His life's blood. Revelation of this truth opens the heart for full service to Jesus Christ and His church.

For application's sake: Have you allowed the Holy Spirit of Christ to illuminate your spiritual heart of the fact that Christ paid the ultimate price for you and is your vision to make sure Christ is proclaimed? The more you allow the Lord Jesus to place His love within you, the more active you will be in the Body of Christ.

Gifts come from the Holy Spirit

Active members in the local Body of Christ have revelation of their value through Christ. The second key truth to becoming and staying an active member is to understand these gifts come from the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul writes, "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He gives them to each one, just as He determines." (1 Corinthians 12:11)

Holy Spirit gifts are not given by man's will, according to man's own pleasure or for his fame. The Holy Spirit gives on the merit of what will bring the glory of the

Lord into the child of God's life, on the merit of what will accomplish the most for God and for the edification of the church. Holy Spirit gifts cannot be solicited nor bestowed on basis of personal merit, gifts come only according to the will of God.

Therefore, it is foolish to find our value in seeking fame or super-spirituality and waste time on controversy. Walking in a humble heart keeps Christians from complaining or being boastful about their gifts. The Holy Spirit knows what gifts will edify the church most, what will be the most effective to reach out to lost souls and minister to the desperate needs of mankind, especially to the Body of Christ. Grasping the truth of the Holy Spirit working in and through Christians takes all the pressure of getting results off of them and places full trust in what God can and is doing.

Christians who are active members have grasped the truth of the Holy Spirit blessing through them and this causes them to work diligently, respectfully and joyfully. Active members grasp the truth of 1 Corinthians 3:7, "So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."

For application sakes: Do you understand that it is the Holy Spirit who has gifted you and do you trust in Him for the results? One man can plant the seed in the field, another supply water, and another keep the weeds out. However, none of them can say they are the one who makes the seeds produce, that is completely in God's hands. Christians are human instruments and God alone awakens the hearts of men to the seed of God's Word.

Necessity of being involved

Active members trust completely in the work of the Holy Spirit and they grasp the necessity of being involved, exercising their gifts in the Body of Christ. Our text 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. 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." (1 Corinthians 12:12-14)

It is imperative that you understand that 1 Corinthians 12-14 is about Holy Spirit gifts given for the Body of Christ for edification and in today's key text the Apostle Paul is using the illustration of the human body to show us the necessity of the gifts working with one another in a Biblically healthy way.

On a hunting trip Dr. J Vernon McGee stepped off a cliff and hurt his foot. Pastor McGee was sure that he had broken every bone in his foot, the doctor said there are twenty-seven bones in the foot and Mr. McGee had only hurt one of them. However, that one hurt bone in his foot made Mr. McGee feel like all the bones were hurt and he hopped around just as if they all were broken.

This is the way it is when just one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is misused or disrupted from use for some reason or another. The whole Body of Christ suffers and she hops around on one foot, unable to operate in full strength thus losing effectiveness.

After speaking at a baccalaureate service Dr. J Vernon McGee was invited to eat at a doctor's house. This particular doctor informed Pastor McGee that if he had lost both of his big toes, he could not even stand behind the pulpit.

Just watching and listening to Dr. Jay Vernon McGee speak the average listener would have thought "Only the tongue and voice box was needed to get the message delivered." However, there were other parts of the body that needed to function in order for Pastor McGee to deliver the Lord's message. Without his big toes, according to the doctor, Mr. McGee could not even stand. Even though the toes are not seen they are needed for the messenger to stand. One could argue that he could have spoken the message sitting in a chair, this is true. However, it would be impossible for Pastor McGee to speak the message if his brain would have suffered a severe stroke or his heart suffered major blockage. They are unseen, yet very important.

If Pastor McGee eyes would have said, "We are no longer needed," it would have been more difficult for the Lord's message to get spoken forth. If Pastor McGee's nerve endings would have said "We're not needed, no one see us or gives us any recognition, we will just walk away from the body," it would have been impossible for the Lord's message to be delivered and effective.

It would be impossible for the message to be spoken forth if the brain would have by-passed the mouth and tried to deliver the message or if the mouth said "I will not consult the brain."

When church members feel they are not needed or become angry for some reason and walk out of the Body of Christ, the effectiveness of the church of Christ at the very least becomes hindered. The message of Christ is hindered or even stopped when one person who has a spiritual gift feels he does not need the involvement of other Christians who have different gifts.

The Holy Spirit wants you to ask yourself this question, "Do I make time to discover my spiritual gifts, develop them and exercise them for the common good of mankind and especially for the edification of the Body of Christ?"

Knowing the functions of the Holy Spirit gifts

Christians who are active in true church membership know the necessity of their Holy Spirit gifts being exercised in the Body of Christ. The fourth truth to grasp is the necessity of knowing the functions of the Holy Spirit gifts. Paul writing about the gifts, and comparing them to the human body writes, "Now you are the body of

Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church, God has appointed..." (1 Corinthians 12:27-28) The rest of chapter describes some of those gifts, showing us the necessity of the different gifts.

Here the Apostle Paul sums up the whole matter of Spiritual gifts explaining that each gift must work under the Headship of Christ (Ephesians 1:22) and each child must fulfill the responsibility of exercising his gifts out of sacrificial love. (1 Corinthians 13)

Hatred, strife and envy only come from fleshly control thus birthing forth a proud, vaunting and contentious spirit.

No one would say that every church must exercise every gift of the Holy Spirit every week, they know the Lord God will give to each congregation the gifts she needs at the time she needs them.

Once the Body of Christ learns about the service gifts; administration, leading, encouragement, giving, helps and showing mercy, the more open she is to letting the Holy Spirit have freedom to do a work.

Once the Body of Christ understands the sign gifts; distinguishing between spirits, healing, miraculous powers, tongues and interpretation of tongues the more hungry she will be to see God do a work among the children of God, much like in the ministries of the apostles and in the great revivals of early America.

Once the Body becomes hungry and understands the support gifts; the Word of knowledge, the Word of wisdom, and prophesy which includes the teaching of God's Word, the more she will be able to respond to the Christ apportioned gifts of Prophet, Apostle, Evangelist, Pastor and Teacher.

The Body of Christ who harbors hard feelings or unbelief to any of these gifts becomes hindered in her work, hobbling around like Dr. Jay Vernon McGee did when he hurt just one of the bones in his foot.

Those who have the gifts to preach and teach God's Word need Christians with hearts made ready for the teaching of God's Word. Those who need to get direction from the Bible need those who have the gift to preach and teach God's Word. Those who need help need those who have the gifts of helps.

Without givers the work of God cannot go on, without the Christ apportioned gifts (Ephesians 4:7-11) the Body of Christ can never be prepared for works of service to Christ, be fully built up and made mature and obtain the full measure of Christ. (Ephesians 4:12-13)

The entire Body of Christ needs each other because each child of God has her or his gift. Without the use of these gifts or Christians' exposure to their Holy Spirit gifts, it is impossible to achieve God's best for the Body of Christ.

Active members stay faithful

Christians need to be exposed to the gifts of others and active members stay faithful. The Apostle Paul told Timothy, "Do not neglect your gift... Be diligent in these matters; give yourselves wholly to them, so that others might see your progress." (1 Timothy 4:14-15)

Many have taken Paul's phrase "I have become all things to all men" (1 Corinthians 9:22) out of context and have put undo pressure on Christians to do what they are not called to do. Christians have been pressured to teach Sunday school when their gift is helps or administration. Christians have been forced to preach when they have not been given a word or the gift for "prophesying." Many have been pressured to fulfill a position, draining them of strength, hurting their self-esteem and abusing time, thus keeping them from developing their God given gifts.

The Springfield, Oregon, Public Schools Newsletter once published an article describing what happens when people try to develop gifts that others have which are not placed within them. The article actually was a parable starring a duck, a rabbit, a squirrel and eagle.

Listen as I read, "Once upon a time, the animals decided they should do something meaningful to meet the problems of the new world. So they organized a school.

They adopted an activity curriculum of running, climbing, swimming and flying. To make it easier to administer the curriculum, all the animals took all the subjects.

The duck was excellent in swimming; in fact, better than his instructor. But he made only passing grades in flying, and poor in running. Since he was slow in running, he had to drop swimming and stay after school to practice running. This caused his little web feet to be badly worn, thus, dropping his skills to only average in swimming. But average was quite acceptable, so nobody worried about it -except the duck.

The rabbit started at the top of his class in running, but developed a nervous twitch in his leg muscles because of so much make-up work in swimming.

The squirrel was excellent in climbing, but he encountered constant frustration in flying class because his teacher made him start from the ground up instead of from the treetop down. He developed "Charlie horses" from overexertion, and only got C's in climbing and a D in running.

The eagle was a problem child and was severely disciplined for being a non-conformist. In climbing class he beat all the others to the top of the tree, but insisted on using his own way to get there." (He Gave Gifts, Charles Swindoll)

The moral of the story as it applies to our Holy Spirit given gifts is, we as individuals can only excel in the gifts that we have received from the Lord for His purposes and for the good of others. When Christians are forced or expected to train for things they are not gifted in, they become less affective in the gifts they once mastered. Pride of being better than others creeps in while watching those without certain gifts trying to learn the God given gifts of others. Scripture is very clear, not everyone has the same gifts. It is very damaging to expect others to develop gifts or exercise gifts that are not placed with them. It is equally wrong to expect those with Holy Spirit gifts to exercise their gifts just like someone else exercises a certain gift.

This causes a critical spirit and causes Christians to become inactive in true church membership. Just as each child of God has his gifts, each Christian can only develop and exercise his gifts according to the faith given them. (Romans 12:3-8)

Christians who become and stay active in true church membership do not try to play the keyboard and lead the music ministry if they are not trained and skilled for music for the Lord in the house of God. (1 Chronicles 25:1-8) These faithful humble servants do not instruct Christians how to exercise their Holy Spirit gifts, they have learned the joy of letting the Holy Spirit do His work in Christians lives and ministries. He is fully able to raise up the right trainers at the right time.

Brain surgeons do not tell heart surgeons how exercise their skills. Mayo Clinic is one of the best hospitals in the world because they let specialists do their job. The Holy Spirit is the specialist, let Him appoint, teach and correct. Great Spiritual Hospitals have learned to trust in the Holy Spirit gifts given to their church members and they take time to rejoice in what God has given. Active church members have this joy because the Holy Spirit has brought illumination to, "But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, [the Holy Spirit gifts] every one of them, just as He [wants] them to be." (1 Corinthians 12:18)

Active church membership begins with the right response to Christ giving His life upon the Cross for your redemption. It cost God His one and only Son. It will cost you the price of dying to self before you can become an active member in the Body of Christ. Second, active members in the church of God know that only the Holy Spirit can give and anoint gifts that will have an eternal value. Thirdly, active members know that they have a responsibility to be involved in a local

Body of Christ and lastly they do not neglect their gifts.

They sacrificially train, prepare and exercise their Spiritual gifts for the common good.

The Holy Spirit has this challenge to all who want their name on a church membership role. Are you a true church member faithfully and humbly exercising your Holy Spirit gifts in sacrificial love? A signature on a membership card is not the endorsement that brings the anointing of the Holy Spirit of Christ and empowers the church. Faithfulness to Christ and sacrificial exercising of your gifts in the Body of Christ will enable you to enjoy the Holy Spirit doing a great work in the local Body of Christ you worship with.

Let us pray!

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