

Why Church? #5

“Body Ministry” and Church Discipline

What are the Valid Activities of the Church? (what do we do that makes church church?)

How do the actual activities and purposes of churches today compare with what we see in the Bible?

From previous lessons:

Regular meetings

Recognized leadership

Reading, preaching and teaching of the Word

Discipleship training

Worship

Prayer

Evangelism

Fellowship and General Communion

Financial relief of poor saints

Participation in the “ordinances”

1. Encouragement to “body ministry”

As we have often seen in Eph. 4:11-16, the “five-fold ministry” (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers) have been given by God to the church, not so they can do everything, but so they can prepare and perfect the saints (that is, all the believers) for the work of their ministries (4:11-12). The goal is for us all to be living in a unity of faith and knowledge of Christ, in completeness and spiritual maturity (v. 13), not naïve and gullible children tossed around with every wind of doctrine, and not being deceived by spiritual frauds (v. 14). We are to grow up into Christ, in both truth and love (v. 15). Then it gives the picture or analogy of Christ as the head of the body, which is the church. In such a body, every member is important, but for differing reasons. As each member functions according to its own purpose and calling, the body increases and grows (v. 16)

Another analogy is back in 2:19-22, where we are likened to a building with Christ as the cornerstone, and the foundation being laid out by the apostles and prophets. Then each of us takes our place as parts of this building, “fitly framed together”. Again, it is obvious in a building that not all parts are the same. Some are structural, some finish; some electrical, some plumbing, etc. The point is that each one of us has a specific calling and purpose in the church, and God has given us the gifts and abilities to fulfill those callings.

1 Cor. 12 also covers these concepts. In the church there are diversities of gifts, administrations, operations, etc. (12:4-6), “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal” (v. 7). This doesn’t mean that God gives you a gift for your own profit merely, but that it is to be for the profit and benefit of the whole church.

Then he lists the nine commonly known gifts of the Spirit –

Gifts of revelation

Word of wisdom

Word of knowledge

Discerning of spirits

Gifts of power

Faith

Gifts of healing

Miracles

Gifts of utterance

Prophecy

Kinds of tongues

Interpretation of tongues

(There are other gifts listed elsewhere, like “helps”, governments, intercession, beneficence, etc.).

12:11 says “But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.” Notice that God gives gifts to every man (person), and that it is not dependent on our desire or ambition, but upon his own will.

If God has given each of us at least one gift, then it is quite necessary that we find out what it is, and begin functioning in it. 1 Tim. 4:14 – “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery [elders].”

How can you know your gifts? There are no hard and fast rules, but there are various ways: by the witness of the Spirit in your own heart, usually with confirming “sanity checks” from others, by prophecy and laying on of hands (like Timothy), or by circumstances that gradually reveal certain talents that are uniquely yours. Sometimes others, like a pastor) may recognize something and call it to your attention.

We should pray specifically in this direction, and ask God to reveal to us what our gifts are. The answer probably won't be audible, but as we continue praying and open ourselves to the needs and opportunities of service around us, it will eventually become plain.

1 Cor. 12 uses the same analogy of the parts of a body, starting in verse 12. The body is not made of identical parts, but different, and each one has a function. What good would a body be if it was all ears or legs? The church needs different members and it needs for them all to be working. We can live with one leg, or even none, but we can't fully function that way. Every person is important. The pastor cannot do everything, and neither can anyone else, but together, God can work through us.

12:18 – “But now God hath set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.”

Do not fret because you think your part is insignificant (verses 22-24). Wishing you were a different part (either more or less prominent) is not going to change God's gifting. Like in the parable of the talents, we will be called to account for how we have used what God has given us.

Does this mean we should not desire gifts? No, 12:31 says to “covet earnestly the best gifts”. But if you will do that and be faithful in what God shows, you will see that the “best gifts” for you are exactly what he has given you.

2. Discipline of erring members

The goals and direction of all organizations is subject over time to drift, and it seems inevitably to be downward. If the church is to maintain, or regain, its purity and its scriptural foundation, it must have a way of dealing with those people who attempt to lower the standards. Whether in doctrinal beliefs, or in sinful behaviors, they openly or secretly try to obtain a foothold in the church to drive in a wedge of dissension. They use wedge issues and the “gradual slope” to water down the church and its message. In such cases, it becomes necessary to exercise some form of church discipline against church members who are in some form of open sin, offense, or divisiveness. Here are different levels of problematic behavior, and the proper responses:

Offense	Response	Scripture
Personal offenses where the offender is repentant	Forgiveness	Mt. 18:21-22
Personal offenses where the offender is <u>not</u> repentant	Personal confrontations of increasing severity	Mt. 18:15-17
Sins that people “fall” into (they are not proud of it, or flaunting it before the church and the world)	Kindly restoration in meekness and consideration	Gal. 6:1
Disorderly conduct and refusal to live according to the word	Shunning (withdraw from them, have no company with them, yet not as an enemy)	2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15
Open, unashamed, and gross misbehavior	Paul said to “deliver him unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh”, yet did not count him as utterly lost	1 Cor. 5:1-5 2 Cor. 2:4-8
Blasphemy and doctrinal heresy	Paul “delivered them unto Satan”	1 Tim. 1:19-20 with 2 Tim. 2:17-18
Divisiveness and heresy	1-2 admonitions, and then complete rejection (excommunication; no fellowship)	Tit. 3:10-11 2 Jn. 7-10