



+ **YOU**

Spring 2024  
Being an Authentic Church

**Sermon Title:** The Mark of a Healthy Member of Christ's Body

**To be used with Session 5:** Serving in Christ

**Scripture:** Romans 12:3-8

**Connection with Bible Study:** To complement the Bible study "Serving in Christ," this sermon will further explore Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts from a parallel passage in Romans 12. In both passages Paul used the image of a body as an analogy of the church, where each member represents individual parts of the body, humbly working together for the good of the whole. Both passages identify specific spiritual gifts. The lists are not identical, however, which points to the particular value of the Romans 12 passage. The Ephesians 4 passage focuses on *specific offices* gifted to the church (i.e., apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers), whereas the focus of the Romans 12 passage is on the grace gifts given to *every* member of the church.

**Introduction:** What makes a church great? Is it the size of its membership, the caliber of its pastoral leadership, the effectiveness of its various ministries, or the global reach of its Great Commission work? Perhaps the more pertinent question is, "What makes a church healthy?" Our denominational publications are often filled with exciting articles that highlight the "great" churches of our day, but the New Testament, and Paul's letters in particular, is more concerned with the spiritual health and growth of individual believers. It is healthy members who make healthy churches—churches that are truly great.

Romans 12:3-8 challenges us to be healthy members of the church. According to Paul, the church is like a body, and using that analogy he shows us the direct correlation between a healthy body and a healthy church. Both depend upon the health of its individual members.

**1. We must honestly evaluate our own spiritual giftedness (12:3).**

The spiritual and functional health of Christ's body, the church, begins with each individual member's honest evaluation of his or her true giftedness. Repeatedly Paul told his readers to "think" (*phroneo*), a word that appears three times in verse 3. Paul drove home his point by contrasting two kinds of thinking—super-thinking (*hyperphroneo*, "to think of himself more highly than he should") and sober-thinking (*sophroneo*, to "*think sensibly*." Paul condemned the sinful pride of super-thinking about one's giftedness, and he strongly encouraged the honesty and humility of sober-thinking. The enablement for this kind of thinking resides in each of us through faith. Through the faith "God has distributed" to us, we can discover our spiritual gifts and not evaluate ourselves to be above them.

**2. We must faithfully acknowledge our purpose in the body of Christ (12:4-5).**

Paul's favorite method for describing what the church is like and how it functions in the world was to use the analogy of a living human body (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-27). Paul said a human body is analogous to the church in three distinct ways.

- a. **A plurality of members (v. 4a).** Like a body, the church has “many parts.” Every church is made up of people that differ from one another in almost every conceivable way (the categories are too numerous to list). No two are exactly alike. Each member has his or her own unique story and journey to faith in Christ. The church has a plurality of diverse members (cf. 1 Cor. 12:14).
- b. **A variety of functions (v. 4b).** Every individual part of the human body has been created to perform its own unique function. The same is true of the church. God has gifted each member to perform his or her ordained function for the good of the whole church. Paul asked the Corinthian church, “If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?... And if they were all the same part, where would the body be” (1 Cor. 12:17, 19)?
- c. **A unity of purpose (v. 5).** Though there is a diversity of members in the body, they are all joined together in one body (cf. 1 Cor. 12:14-16). God uniquely gifts each member to function together with other members of the body to achieve a unified purpose. That purpose is the spiritual health and growth of every other member and ultimately of the body as a whole.

### 3. **We must actively employ our spiritual gifts for the good of all (12:6-8).**

Though it might make Baptists a little uncomfortable, according to verse 6 we are all charismatic Christians. Paul said the spiritual gifts we have are “according to the grace (*charismata*) given to us.” We don’t ask for them, choose them, or learn them (though we should learn *about* them from Scripture). These gifts are divinely given. Ligon Duncan observed, “That is what it means for a church to be charismatic, not speaking in tongues or prophesying or even raising our hands. Being charismatic means being indwelt by and gifted through the Holy Spirit for ministry to one another.”<sup>1</sup>

Since God has graced each of us with spiritual gifts, we must discover what they are *and then use them!* Though not explicitly stated in the Greek text, we find the admonition to actively use God’s grace gifts implied throughout this section of the passage (“if prophecy, use it . . . if teaching, use it”). This is the ultimate mark of a healthy, growing church.

**Conclusion:** Spiritual gifts were not given so that we might make a name for ourselves among our peers. They were not given so that we might be successful in ministry. God did not grace us with His gifts for personal satisfaction or public praise and admiration. The spiritual gifts given to us by God are meant for the edification of every member of Christ’s body. “A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7).

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<sup>1</sup>Ligon Duncan, “A Call to Humility and Service,” <https://rts.edu/resources/a-call-to-humility-and-service> (accessed January 3, 2024).