

Sermon Summary: Serving

1 Corinthians 12:4–27

Overview

Paul presents the church as the body of Christ: one body made up of many different members, united by the same Holy Spirit. Christians are not designed to live or function alone. God brings believers into a community where each person has a place and a part to play.

Spiritual gifts are therefore not given primarily for our own benefit, experience or recognition. They are gifts of grace given “for the common good”, so that Christians can serve one another and build up the whole church.

1. We Were Made for Community

The sermon begins with the television series *Alone*. Some contestants cope physically with isolation but eventually leave because they cannot cope with being completely alone. Human beings were not designed for isolation.

This goes back to creation, where God said it was not good for man to be alone. Sin damages community, but in the church God is creating a new community: people brought together and united through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

2. Spiritual Gifts Are for the Common Good

The key statement is 1 Corinthians 12:7: “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”

Our gifts are not primarily for ourselves. They are given so that we can serve other Christians. This challenges a consumer view of church where we attend mainly for encouragement, enjoyment or a weekly spiritual top-up.

Mature Christians come to church as members of a body, seeking to serve others and contribute to the growth and wellbeing of the whole church.

3. One Body, Many Different Parts

God deliberately gives different gifts to different people. This variety is not a problem to overcome; it reflects the creativity of God.

The church can contain people from very different ethnic, cultural and social backgrounds and still possess genuine unity because that unity does not depend on everyone being alike. It comes through the one Holy Spirit.

There is therefore no two-tier Christianity in which people with particular spectacular gifts are more spiritual than others. Every Christian who belongs to Christ belongs to his body.

4. Every Christian Is Needed

Paul's picture of the body means that no Christian should conclude that because they are not like someone else, they do not belong or have nothing useful to contribute.

God has arranged the members of the body as he intends. Each Christian brings particular gifts, experiences, background and opportunities that can be used to serve others. Even roles that receive little attention are indispensable.

This shared life means that when one member suffers, the whole body suffers with them; when one member is honoured, the whole body rejoices.

5. Gifts Are Not the Same as Spiritual Fruit

An important distinction is made between spiritual gifts and spiritual fruit. A person can be extremely gifted while being spiritually immature. Giftedness is therefore not proof of godliness.

Christians receive different gifts, but every Christian needs the fruit of the Spirit. We cannot excuse impatience, lack of love or lack of mercy by saying those things are not our gift.

The priority must therefore be cultivating godly character rather than pursuing impressive gifts, recognition or visible roles.

6. Finding Where God Is Calling Us to Serve

The sermon suggests three things to consider: ability, affinity and opportunity. What has God enabled me to do? What am I drawn towards? And where is there actually a need?

The best place to begin is opportunity. Rather than starting with what we enjoy or think we are good at, we should look around the church and ask where there is a need that we could help meet.

Serving is also much broader than visible Sunday roles such as preaching or music. Church is the shared life of God's people. By trying to meet a genuine need, we may discover both an ability and an affinity for that area of service.

7. Christ Is the Model for Our Service

Christians do not serve in order to gain recognition, establish their importance or have their own needs met. We serve because Christ first served us.

Jesus loved his church, gave his life for his people and took the place of a servant. The gospel therefore shapes Christians into people who are willing to lay down their lives in humble service to one another.

Big Idea

God has made every Christian part of Christ's body and given each one a place in it.

Our gifts are not for ourselves but for the common good. Christian maturity means growing in godly character, recognising the needs around us, and using what God has given us to serve others so that the whole body of Christ is built up.