

## 243 Playing our Part in the Body of Christ

We dwelt last time on the Holy Spirit explaining, through Paul in Ephesians Chapter 2, how all believers in Jesus Christ, irrespective of their background, are granted membership of the “household of God” (Ephesians 2.19b). The Christian life thus consists of two interwoven strands: first, our own ongoing individual discipleship of the Lord Jesus Christ; and second, our practical membership of this “household of God”, that is, a local Christian community, “the Church”, “the body of Christ”.

We know that every member of the body of Christ has been given spiritual gifts by the Holy Spirit (eg., I Corinthians 12), “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4.11-12). Some of these gifts involve “up-front” public ministry in various forms (such as apostles, prophets, teachers, healers, administrators), but many others do not. With the emergence over the centuries of “professionals” in the Church such as ministers, pastors and musicians, it is easy for others in a local church to assume they have no such spiritual gifts and hence no further responsibilities! Yet that is nonsense – for all have been entrusted with gifts to be used in the service of the Lord and of one another, and to assume otherwise leads to many being only passengers when in fact everyone on board should be crew!

We hear of Josos for example, before his prominence, selling some land and giving the money to the apostles for use as needed in the fellowship (Acts 4.36-37), thus showing a spiritual gift for basic generosity; and his nickname given by the apostles, Barnabas, “son of consolation”, reveals another of his gifts – the simple giving of comfort, as he later displayed so significantly in Acts 11.22-26 in bringing Saul back from Tarsus to Antioch.

Then we can think of Ananias (Acts 9.10-19a), chosen by the Lord to emerge from his quiet, faithful obscurity, for just a couple of hours, for an immense, world-changing act of ministry! Neither the Lord nor Paul ever forgot him (Acts 22.12): his gifts? – faithfulness, alertness, obedience, faith, and then that extraordinary God-given grace to say, “Brother Saul ...” (v.17). What a true, spiritually-gifted saint!

There was that dear woman called Tabitha (Dorcas), who died in Joppa (Acts 9.36-42): one of her spiritual gifts was very practical - the making and providing clothing for those around her. At the end of several Epistles we learn of many more saints with an array of spiritual gifts, few of which appear in any list of “official gifts” but were nevertheless being put to effective use (eg., Romans 16 / I Corinthians 16.17ff / Colossians 4.7ff / II Timothy 4.19ff / Philemon 23ff).

We are reminded from all this that each Christian disciple has God-given spiritual gifts to be used in “the body of Christ”, for the well-being of our fellow Christians. Whether our gifts are public and obvious, or quiet and discreet, or practical and unnoticed for what they really are, makes not a scrap of difference! – they are given to be recognised, accepted by others, and used.

How do we know which gifts we have been given? First, we must not limit the gifts just to obviously “holy” ones, for the gifts-list is far more wide-ranging and often far more practical than we might think: it ranges perhaps from hospitality or financial expertise, via, say, an affinity with particular age groups of people or an ability with poetry or art, through to having a listening ear, a word in due season, or an arm round the shoulder, and so on. We are all on such a list somewhere and probably under several headings.

You might consider in yourself your areas of experience, what you particularly enjoy, and what you are obviously “good at”. Then with a dose of humility and honesty between us all, it can help to ask others what they think are the gifts you have been given: you may well be surprised at the gifts that others recognise in you. There is nothing big-headed in all this; rather we are honestly seeking to function effectively where the Lord particularly wants us to be.

By knowing the many God-provided gifts we have between us all, and then finding ways in which these gifts can be put to appropriate use in our midst, the good ship “Local Body of Christ” does away with passengers altogether! - with all on board using their gifts throughout the ship as members of the crew.

In view of dire events in the news each day, we remember that none of this “body of Christ” talk is a mere party game: eternal destinies are at stake, Jesus Christ remains the Key (I Timothy 2.5-6), and individually and together we are all on the front line.

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