

**BUILDING A BRIDGE WITH OTHERS IN CHRIST**

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Rev. John Park

What does a church look like to you? Does it look like a pyramid, where ministers and elders are on the top of the pyramid and most of other members occupy its bottom? Frankly, that's how I used to view the church. In one sense, yes, ministers and elders take the highest places in the church for rightful reasons. They are most involved in the church's decision-making process and their leadership often has more significant impact on the organization than any other individuals and parties.

At the same time, however, I have to argue that the Bible's view of the church is less hierarchical. Paul says the church is a body of Christ, and in that body, all members are necessary and important (c.f. 1 Corinthians 12:12-27).

The problem was that there were some members of the church at Corinth that believed and argued that they were more important than other members of the church because of their spiritual knowledge or spiritual gifts. So, Paul had to intervene and break the news to some people. "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed" (vs 1). This is actually an interesting sentence to begin his teaching about spiritual gifts and how the church works. It's interesting because there was a group of people in the church of Corinth, who believed they were in the know. To them and those who had been fooled by them, Paul said they were uninformed.

Paul was right. We are often uninformed. I was uninformed and ignorant. It was not that I believed the church was the show of a few people, like a pastor and a few key leaders. But, I guess I was naïve; I just didn't realize what the church is and does.

One minister received a letter like this: 'Dear Minister, there are 566 people in our church. 100 are frail and elderly—that leaves 466 to do all the work. But 80 are young people at school or at college, and that leaves 386 to do all the work. But 150 of these are tired businesspeople—that leaves 236 to do all the work. 150 of these are busy with children, which leaves 86 to do all the work. But 15 live too far away to come here regularly, and that leaves 71 to do all the work. And 69 say they've already done their bit for the church. And that leaves you and me. But I'm exhausted, so good luck to you.' That's sometimes how the church runs; a few key people often run the whole business. I don't think many people are not involved in the church because they have some reservations about the church, but I find that most of the people are not involved because they are uninformed and ignorant.

When I look back, I think I was naïve about the church, because unconsciously I believed certain spiritual gifts were more important and necessary in the church than other gifts. Obviously, I had no objection to the teaching that all gifts are equal and important; but, in the back of my mind, I would unconsciously put the gift of teaching above the gift of serving, the gift of pastoring above the gift of faith. There were certain gifts and certain individuals absolutely necessary in the church, like preachers and pastors, but some gifts and individuals are put in the category "It's good to have them, but not necessary".

Paul teaches that the church is a body of Christ, and in the body, no member is considered less important or unnecessary. You see, I don't get to choose who's needed and what's needed in the

church. Paul says that's the work of the Holy Spirit. "All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses" (vs. 11). In fact, this piece of scripture tells us every member in the body of Christ is important because the Holy Spirit has given one or more gifts to each one. You are as important as Rev. Ed or Rev. John because of the unique gifts and abilities God has given you for the benefit of many.

Furthermore, God has given us spiritual gifts to make us work with one another. Paul uses the image of the body to explain how we need each other to function properly. When I was a teenager, I used to play this computer role-playing adventure game, where I got to be a warrior to fight against monsters. One of the monsters, I still remember, was a gigantic floating eyeball. When my character encountered it and looked at this monster for more than, say, 3 seconds, then my character became paralysed for a minute. But, that's as far as this gigantic eyeball did. It would paralyse me, but it could not cause any physical damage to my character. Now, this eyeball was not really a threat until I faced it with a gigantic floating hand. The hand could come to my paralysed character and slap me to cause some serious damage. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you'" (vs. 21). We need each other if we really want to make some serious damage to our enemies and produce much fruit. In the movie 'Gladiator,' there is a scene where Maximus and the gladiators were about to face the enemies who were far better equipped for fighting (i.e. spears against chariots, swords and arrows). (Watch this short clip).

I love what Maximus says in this scene; he says, "Whatever comes out of these gates, we've got a better chance of survival if we work together." So, they did, and eventually, they defeated the far-better-equipped enemies. Whatever we have to face, we've got a better chance of survival and winning if we work together, and that's exactly what the Holy Spirit intends in his distribution of gifts to the members of the body of Christ. He wants us to work together to win whatever-we-have-to-face. Watchman Nee, one of the greatest Christian teachers in China, once said, "Alone I cannot serve the Lord effectively, and he will spare no pains to teach me this. He will bring things to an end, allowing doors to close and leaving me ineffectively knocking my head against a wall until I realize that I need the help of the Body as well as of the Lord."

The value of sharing gifts and working together with one another is one of the very reasons I love Alpha so much. This is a place where individuals with different gifts come and work together. This is why Alpha can be a place, not only for new Christians or non-Christians but also a place for long-term Christians as well. Alpha welcomes and uses all spiritual gifts and many can experience the power of working with one another that brings powerful manifestation of the Holy Spirit and God's Kingdom. I would encourage you to check out our Alpha table in the narthex and sign up for our next one, starting on Wednesday, February 1.

Another great project I would like to mention is the Why Encounter project, which will occur this fall. This is also another opportunity in which people with different gifts can contribute to the work of the church. (Video Clip) I hope many will consider getting involved using the gifts God has given you.

People of God, we are called by God to work together. God has granted us gifts and talents to grow together as a strong body. Whatever we have to face, we've got a better chance of victory if we work together. All glory to our Lord, who is the head of the body. Amen.