

Body Builder

1 Corinthians 12:12-31 January 24, 2010

So have you ever tried talking out of both sides of your mouth?

It's not easy.

Have you ever tried it?

Go ahead give it a go.

See what happens.

Try to say opposing things out of your mouth at the same time.

You can't do it can you.

Your mouth just sort of sits there frozen.

So, here's a real miracle because in the passage we just read, that seems to be exactly what the Apostle Paul is doing.

First, he starts with this beautiful egalitarian statement about how all the parts of the body are equally important and he even points out that some of the less glamorous parts you can't do without.

But then he closes by saying that,
“God has appointed in the church
first apostles,
second prophets,
third teachers;
then deeds of power,
then gifts of healing,
forms of assistance,
forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues.”
Then, he ends by saying,
“strive for the greater gifts.”

So this is like, we're all equal, but some are just
more equal than others?

So what's he doin' here?
He's gonna hurt himself talking out of both sides
of his mouth like that.

Well, let's see what we can make of this.

It is important for everyone to play their part for the
best functioning of the body.

I mean, how many of us over 50 wished everything
worked the way it did in our 20s.

Everything working right makes life much nicer, and
that also goes for the Body of Christ – the Church.

But maybe this is Paul's way of recognizing that the body doesn't function as well without eyes or arms or a lung, but it doesn't work **at all** without a brain or a heart.

It's important for us to recognize the value of diversity and everyone's gifts, while also recognizing that some parts of the body are indispensable;
but it's really Paul's closing line that is without a doubt a challenge to all of us.
Strive for the greater gifts.

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This is clearly a call for all of us to continue to grow and push our limits.

Don't be satisfied with where you are in your spiritual journey.

Don't be content to just do what you're doing now.

Push the envelope.

Strive for the greater gifts.

But with a disclaimer:

beware that it's not always a smooth road.

With any growth we encounter the truth of "no pain – no gain."

I was reminded of this a week ago while skiing and I messed up my ankle and knee.

You just don't get better if you don't try to push beyond where you're at and I can't wait to get back to the same hill that did me in and do it right.

No pain – no gain.

It's going to be the same in the church as we gather up the courage to move forward.

Just like staring down that ski slope that screams out, "Are you nuts!!"

Growing in our faith also takes courage.

Openness to new ideas.

Awakening to a new vision of God and God's will.

Discovering new ways to experience God in your life.

But responding to God's call also can make us push the envelope.

Getting up the nerve to speak in public.

Going to a homeless shelter to serve meals.

Visiting the sick, the grieving, the dying.

Stepping up and confronting evil.

And beware – no pain – no gain.

So we strive for the greater gifts, but sometimes the importance of the gifts, which gifts are greater, depends on the circumstances.

For instance what gifts are needed in the advent of a horrendous tragic earthquake?

Events like the earthquake in Haiti require some very important gifts.

Faith, Hope and Love are indispensable gifts.

In a tragedy like the earthquake we are pulled towards despair, anger at God, denial of God, blaming God and we need to hear from those who can remind us of God's love.

We need to hear from those who will remind us that God doesn't cause earthquakes, despite what nuts like Pat Robertson say, blaming Haiti's problems on some fantasy pact with the devil that he dreamed up.

Did you hear that one?

As reported on CNN - Pat Robertson, the evangelical Christian who once suggested God was punishing Americans with Hurricane Katrina, says a "pact to the devil" brought on the devastating earthquake in Haiti.

Officials fear more than 100,000 people have died as a result of Tuesday's 7.0-magnitude earthquake in Haiti.

Robertson, the host of the "700 Club," blamed the tragedy on something that "happened a long time ago in Haiti, and people might not want to talk about it."

The Haitians "were under the heel of the French. You know, Napoleon III and whatever," Robertson said on his broadcast Wednesday.

"And they got together and swore a

pact to the devil. They said, 'We will serve you if you will get us free from the French.' True story. And so, the devil said, 'OK, it's a deal.' "

Leave it to ol' Pat to always provide me with wonderful examples of what being a Christian should not look like as he arrogantly and without compassion blames the victims and justifies the evil as God's punishment.

We need the faithful, the hopeful, the loving who can remind us that God doesn't cause evil, but God does call each of us to use our gifts and respond to such evil with love, mercy, compassion.

Evil happens and it is up to us to bring God's love into those places.

It is in the face of evil that God calls us to make real faith, hope and love.

Given disasters like what happened in Haiti – I would say that there are a few more important God given gifts that need desperately to be used.

The Gift of Prayer

We can all pray and we all need to have those who will help us turn our attention to God and God's still speaking voice.

We need to be with God, and help others to be there too.

The Gift of Action

Those who can act, need to act.

Doctors and health workers, engineers, construction workers, fundraisers, counselors, organizers and cheerleaders.

And the gift of Money.

If you've been given wealth, it's not just for you.

In God's realm, those with wealth are like a battery storing up energy for when it's really needed.

In times of great need, those with great wealth need to use that gift.

**Please forgive my cynicism here, but my bank Wells Fargo proudly headlines on their website that they gave \$100,000 to the Haiti relief effort, and I thank them for that generosity. But then I got to thinkin' –
that's all?**

They gave their CEO, Richard Kovacevich a 10 million dollar bonus in December to supplement his 53 million dollar salary. 100,000 for 7 million people and 10 million for 1 person. But I'm sure there were contractual obligations involved.

So I'm just hoping that Richard can find it within his heart to find a way to get by on that meager 53 million salary and donate his 10 million dollar bonus to the relief effort. And maybe he will. I don't know how he spends his money. So I pray he and others like him have their hearts filled with compassion and they will be generous.

But some of us have also been given some wealth, as a gift to use in times like these.

And no, we're not going to take up another offering.

What I want us to leave here with today, is a certainty that we all have gifts that God has given us, gifts that God is calling us to use, not just for our own benefit, but for building of God's realm.

It is using these gifts as God intends that helps to build the Body of Christ. Don't let them atrophy away.

What gifts has God given you and how are you using your gifts?

And, are you striving, are you working toward building up even more?

AMEN.