

Life Together

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.
For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.
(1 Corinthians 3:16-17. ESV)*

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same
image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.
(2 Corinthians 3:18. ESV)*

You Are The Body Of Christ

June 21st, 2015

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

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Introduction:

Good morning! Please open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 12:12; that's on page 959 in your pew Bible. This message is really a follow up on the message we did on May 17th called "A Variety Of Gifts". Paul's point in verses 1-11 of this chapter was that there is one Spirit but a variety of gifts. Unlike in paganism where there were thousands of gods and numerous spiritual paths leading in many different directions such that the more spiritual you were the further you were from other people – in Christianity we should see the opposite. Because there is one Spirit as we grow in our various gifts we should find ourselves coming closer together and closer to God. The church should be characterized by unity AND diversity; like a body Paul says here. One body with many parts. That's the metaphor in these verses and we'll look at it, we'll look at how Paul uses it and then we'll consider what it means for us as a church today. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴ For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

²¹ 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.”²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unrepresentable parts are treated with greater modesty,²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it,²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.²⁸ And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

³¹ But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. (1 Corinthians 12:12–31 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

First of all then we want to make sure that we understand what this metaphor means. Paul wasn't the first person to use the human body as a metaphor for spiritual reality – this was actually pretty common in the ancient world but Paul means some specific things when he calls the church a body – he is loading this common metaphor with some particular freight. The first thing we see that he means is that:

1. Every Christian is a member of the Body of Christ

Look at verses 12-14:

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴ For the body does not consist of one member but of many.

Paul is saying that when you become a Christian – when you are covered by the blood of Christ and when you are filled with the Spirit of Christ you become, by definition a member of the Body of Christ. You are a member of The One New Man that is Jesus Christ. In Adam all fell – in the New Adam – in Christ all LIVE. This is a more metaphorical way of saying what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5, in that letter he says:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV)

Listen, every human being is either IN ADAM or IN CHRIST. You are either part of the old

creation that is under the curse of God and passing away through fire and judgment or you are a part of the new creation, in Christ, that is under the blessing of God and moving into eternity and perfect fellowship with God. The new is being born inside the dead. This is the Gospel in metaphor. There are pictures like this all over the Bible – do you remember Samson and the carcass of the lion? What did he find inside that dead body?

And he said to them, “Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet.”
(Judges 14:14 ESV)

He found honey inside a dead animal – he found life inside death – these sorts of pictures are everywhere in the Bible. Think of the animals in the ark, think of the shoot out of the stump of Jesse – the Gospel is the story of how God births something new inside something dead. Christ is the ark! Christ is the shoot – Christ is the honey inside the carcass of old creation. Paul is saying that in the life and death of Jesus God is doing something new. If you are in CHRIST – if you have repented of your sin and you have died to your self and if you have taken Christ and eaten him by faith – then he is in you and you are in him and that changes everything. You are new creation. You have been baptized into Christ. You died to self; you were born again; you were given the Spirit to drink. Christ is in you. And you are in him. You are under the blood, you are filled with the Spirit – you are the Body of Christ.

The second and the third thing that Paul is saying comes to us from verses 15-26. He is saying that:

2. Every Christian needs the Body of Christ

You are not meant to be alone. You are part of a body. A lung in a jar filled with formaldehyde is not a body per se – it’s a science experiment and its pretty creepy actually. You are not a science experiment. You are not an organ in a jar. You were made for something bigger than that. You were made for us. Paul says:

¹⁹If all were a single member, where would the body be?

You loving Jesus by yourself is not the church. That’s not the body. That doesn’t tell the world who God is. That’s just weird. Listen to me friends, church is not optional for Christians. You

can't separate Jesus and the church. Paul understood that. Do you remember when Paul was converted? Before he was Paul he was Saul and he persecuted the church – not Jesus mind you, Jesus had already ascended into heaven. We don't know for sure whether Saul ever saw Jesus in his earthly life and ministry but he did see the church and he hated the church and he persecuted the church and one day Jesus came looking for Saul; do you remember that? Do you remember what Jesus said to Saul who became Paul?

“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:4 ESV)

ME. Jesus makes no distinction here between the church and himself. When you hate the church, you hate Jesus. Period. If you want to have a relationship with Jesus then you need to have a relationship with us. Period. You are not meant to be alone. You are not an organ in a jar you are a member of a body.

Thirdly, Paul is saying that:

3. Every Christian Matters To The Church

I remember when I was kid they used to tell us in school that the appendix was an evolutionary remainder. It was basically a junk organ. It may have had some function back when we were monkeys but now that we have evolved into the people we are today there is no further need for it. It's a junk part and they used to remove it as a matter of course in young kids. Do you remember that? The arrogance that underlies such thinking is absolutely breathtaking, isn't it? Just because you don't know what something does doesn't mean that you don't need what that something does. Man is not the measure of all things and there are lots of things in the universe that are really important despite that they are beyond our comprehension. It turns out – surprise, surprise, that the appendix actually does do something important. Let me quote to you from WebMD:

“The lowly appendix may have a purpose after all. New research suggests that the seemingly useless organ provides a safe haven for good bacteria to hang out in the gut.... That way, when the gut is affected by a bout of diarrhea or other illness that cleans out the intestines, the good bacteria in the appendix can repopulate the digestive system and keep you healthy.”¹

¹ <http://www.webmd.com/digestive-disorders/news/20071012/appendix-may-have-purpose>

Imagine that. The thing is useful even though a couple of years ago we couldn't understand how that might be. Its almost like reality is not determined by the limitations of our personal understanding. Well, as it is in the body so it is in THE BODY. There are no junk parts and no junk people in the church.

You don't need to understand how a gift or how a person might conceivably be useful in the church. You don't. For example, you don't need to be able to understand or imagine how speaking in tongues might conceivably be useful in the church. I get that some of you struggle to imagine a potential usefulness for that gift. I get it. I just don't care. Your understanding does not limit the Sovereignty or authority of God in this church. Do not forbid speaking in tongues. Do not cut out organs you cannot understand. You don't need to understand; understanding is completely optional. You just need to believe that God is in charge and God knows the future, God doesn't give junk. At some point or another, absolutely every gift that God gives is going to be absolutely indispensable to the progress of the Gospel through the church. Whether or not you see that or understand that is completely irrelevant. There are no junk parts and no junk people. If God gives it; if you have it; then sooner or later, we're going to need it. We're going to need you and we're going to be glad that you're here. God doesn't make mistakes.

That's essentially, the meaning of this metaphor; its not rocket science. Christians are born again into the Body of Christ. They are under his blood and filled with his Spirit. Every Christian needs to be united to the whole. Every member needs to connect. Every member matters because every gift is important. There are no junk people, there are no junk parts, God makes no mistakes so if you are here you are here for a reason and we need you. That's the metaphor.

In verses 27-31 Paul applies that metaphor to their story as a church. You can hear that transition in verse 27:

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

You can hear Paul saying: "This is your story! You are the body of Christ! You are new creation. You are under his blood, filled with his Spirit. Every one of you has something to contribute. Not one of you is an accident. Stop resenting each other and stop doubting yourselves. Let yourself be built into a spiritual temple for the Lord, that's Peter's phrase, but that's Paul's idea.

Let your piece be added to the whole. Get yourself out of that jar, get yourself out of your momma’s basement, stop watching church on the internet and get connected. You are the church. You are the body. You matter.”

In verses 28-29 he circles back around to his main point, just like in those essays you used to write in high school. You make a point, you illustrate, you argue and you come back and conclude in the language of your original thesis. So it is here. Paul comes back around to this idea that there are a variety of gifts – one Spirit, many gifts, all important. There is no one gift that everyone must have and there is no one gift we could potentially do without. He says:

²⁸ And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. (1 Corinthians 12:27–31 ESV)

It takes a variety of gifts to plant and sustain a church and no one person has all of them. That’s the point Paul lands on. The wording of verse 29 in English can be troublesome for us but in the Greek the meaning is very straight forward.

“Each of these rhetorical questions is framed in Greek in such a way as to indicate that the only appropriate response would be “no.””²

We are not all apostles, we’re not all gifted as prophets, we’re not all gifted teachers and we don’t all speak in tongues. But we are all indispensable. We have gifts that matter – every one of us. We are many parts, but we are one body. We are the Body of Christ.

Now, I’m going to leave verse 31 for the introduction to next week’s message. It’s a hinge verse so it could go with either sermon but I want to spend our last few minutes responding to this text. As a church we want to do more than read texts and explain texts and understand texts. Ultimately we want to bend and move and repent and reorient around the text; we want to tremble before the Word of God, so with the few minutes we have left I want to suggest some implications for us as a church from this passage.

²Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 614.

Implications:

As I reflected on this text over a couple of days this past week the first implication the Lord seemed to press on my heart was the conviction that:

1. We must not obsess over any one spiritual gift

I'm worried that most of you hear that as a criticism of the Pentecostals, and I think the Holy Spirit has been pressing that on our Pentecostal brothers and sisters. You really don't hear too many Pentecostals saying that unless you speak in tongues you are not all the way saved – you used to hear that all the time in the 20th century but in the last 20 years or so they have really started to back off that teaching. They just know too many Baptists who are really saved. So, I want to be clear I'm not saying that just to them. I'm saying it to us. In the conservative, Bible believing, long sermon preaching wing of the Evangelical church we sometimes allow the gift of preaching and the gifted preacher to dominate our churches in much the same way the Pentecostals can be inclined to obsess and gather around the gift of tongues. This can happen in our neck of the woods. A gifted preacher emerges and people begin to respond and the church begins to grow and as he is lifted up the leadership and the ministry and the focus of the church begins to narrow. Like an umbrella that is being closed. As the guy at the top goes up the rest of the organization narrows like nobody else matters. All of the sudden instead of 12 elders we have 1 pastor. Instead of being concerned about a variety of things, the church becomes a preaching theatre and one gift and one man begins to dominate a local church. Its all about that and him and the implied message to everyone else is that you don't matter if you can't do that. That's no better than when the Pentecostals obsess about tongues. We must never allow any one gift to arise in our hearts as "THE ONLY ONE GIFT". There is no ONE GIFT. There is priority but there must always be plurality – that's what I'm saying. There is one Spirit and a variety of good and necessary gifts. Let's just make sure we are watching for that in here as much as we are watching for it out there.

Secondly, I think if we are going to bow before the text I think we need to agree that:

2. We must not despise, forbid or depreciate any spiritual gift

Let's not be like those arrogant scientists in the 20th century who declared the appendix to be a junk organ. Just because you can't conceive of a use for something does not mean that there is not a use for that something. God's Sovereignty is not limited by our understanding. Here are some verses in the Bible that say some stuff that maybe you need to hear:

do not forbid speaking in tongues. (1 Corinthians 14:39 ESV)

²⁰Do not despise prophecies (1 Thessalonians 5:19–20 ESV)

Its interesting that different churches had to be told different things. The minority group in Corinth that was just about done with all the excess and silliness that had come into their church through the tongue speakers had to be told not to over react to that by forbidding speaking in tongues. Maybe some of you need to hear that. Maybe you've been burned by the silly and you need to be told that your bad experience is not more authoritative than this verse of the Bible. Do not forbid speaking in tongues. But the Thessalonians obviously had a bad attitude toward prophesy. Maybe they had been burned by some silly people who introduced all of their spiritual promptings by saying "Thus saith the Lord" and maybe people were hurt by that. That can happen and so maybe now they were over reacting and forbidding and despising the gift of prophesy. Paul won't allow that. Their bad experience of a thing does not negate the reality of the thing. Maybe you need to hear that. God gives good things. Silly people can be bad things with good gifts. That doesn't change the fact that every good gift has a good purpose. It's a dangerous thing to despise or forbid any particular spiritual gift. Let's not do that. Let's insist that every spiritual gift be used in accordance with the guidelines provided in Scripture. If we do that we'll be fine, we don't need to forbid what Scripture permits.

Thirdly, and lastly, I am freshly convinced that:

3. We must integrate, value, develop and deploy every gifted member equally

I've chosen to end here because this is really is the pastoral point that Paul has been laboring to make. The Pillar Commentary puts it this way:

The variety of gifts mentioned in this and other passages suggests that believers may have very different experiences

of God and his Spirit, but the thrust of Paul's whole argument here is that any suggestion that some believers are second-class Christians because they have not shared some experience that another group has must be utterly rejected.³

There are no second class and no second class Christians. Whoever you are in Christ, we need you. You matter. You have something from the Spirit that we need to do the work God has given us to do.

I think sometimes that the church is like a giant team building game that God has designed for our education and sanctification. We used to play games like this at Arrow Leadership. There was always some obstacle we had to go through as a team and we always learned something about ourselves in the process. That's the church. God is messing with you for your good. Its like we've each been given a tool in a little baggie and we have to assemble the world's largest piece of IKEA furniture before Jesus comes back. None of us has all the tools and pieces that are required in our little baggies – but together, as a team we have everything that we need. If you look at the little piece you've been given and you assume that it isn't very interesting, its not as fancy as the Allen Key that the guy over there got and you sit down and have a pout or you hide out in your momma's basement then you actually ruin the game for all of us. Sooner or later we're going to need what you have in your baggie, so come on out, get over here and get in the game. We need you. There are surplus parts in this exercise. If God saved you then he gave you something that we need.

I believe that and you need to believe that so real quick let me give you some practical advice on how to figure out what you've got in your little baggie. If you don't know what your spiritual gift is here are 4 things you can do.

i. Start serving

Do stuff. If you stink at it, do something else. Sooner or later you will find something that God is blessing.

ii. Talk to people

³Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 596.

A lot of people think they aren't good at anything just because they are naturally negative and pessimistic. Ask other people. Do stuff and ask people if they were blessed. Ask honest people who will tell you when you stink at stuff; that makes it way easier to find what you are actually gifted at. Don't ask the sunshine people, the sunshine people waste time. Life is too short to do stuff you're not gifted at for long. You want to find your sweet spot as quick as possible so ask honest people whether they think you are gifted at what you're doing.

iii. Be patient

Remember the appendix. 9 days out of 10 the appendix is just sitting there looking pretty. But then on the day after you've had horrible diarrhea the appendix is the organ of the hour. My point is this, you may be incredibly important to something that is going to happen tomorrow. So you need to be here when that happens. Be patient.

iv. Wash feet in the meantime

If you get through the first 3 steps and you still haven't figured out yet what your gift is, just wash feet in the meantime. In John 13 Jesus took off his robe and took up the servant's towel and washed the disciples' feet. He was the gifted teacher, he was the gifted leader, he was the prophet and the healer and everything else and yet to set an example, he got humble and he did what needed to be done. Do that in the meantime. Peel potatoes. Vacuum the carpet. Lick stamps. Do what needs to be done until God shows you what your gift is.

That's how you find your spiritual gift and when you find it go ahead and put it to work – let us help you, let us build into you, let us honour and celebrate you because you matter. You are not here by accident. You need us and we need you because only together, under the blood and filled with the Spirit can we be what we were to be: the body of Christ for the glory of God and the good of all people. Let's pray together.