

08/29/10

Lessons from the Body for the Body -- 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

- this morning I'd like to begin our time this morning with a couple of purposely outrageous pictures I'd like you to consider...
 - but I'm doing this on purpose...because the passage of Scripture we're going to study this morning does the same thing...and because as outlandish as some of this will seem, that's nothing compared to how bad it is when this dynamic actually occurs in Christ's church...so here we go...
- how many of you brushed your teeth this morning?...
 - would that be true of every person in the room today?...let's hope so...
 - what would have happened if you had tried that this morning and when you did so, you discovered that your elbows were gone?...
 - when's the last time you even thought about your elbows?...or expressed appreciation for them?...
 - yet, please explain to me how you would brush your teeth if you didn't have them?...
- so let's say you go back to your bed and your elbows are still lying there...
 - and you ask them what's up, and they tell you that they no longer desire to be part of your body...
 - because you don't appreciate them...you never thank them or acknowledge them, so they're quitting...
 - and let's suppose that as you are considering how bizarre this morning is becoming...you're regretting that pepperoni pizza you ate just before going to bed last night...
 - when all of a sudden your toes speak up...
 - and they start mocking your elbows...we never liked you any way...you were never really clean and we can do without you...
 - and then your toes say – we can learn how to do the toothbrush thing, just give us a chance...who needs elbows?...
 - by now would you be concluding that this was going to be a really bad day?
- you have some body parts refusing to do their job imagine that...acting as if their participation in the body is solely optional...
- you have other body parts who won't give appropriate honor to anything different than themselves and believe they can do things they were clearly never designed to do...
- let's face it, your teeth are probably not going to get brushed today...
- a foolish thought – for sure...humorous/ maybe in a demented sort of way...until you think about this...
 - that is exactly the way God's Word would picture some of Christ's churches...and some of Christ's children....completely dysfunctional when it comes to understanding and applying how the various parts of the body work in harmony together...
 - we really need to talk about that today...with that in mind, please open your Bible to 1 Corinthians 12...page 136 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
 - this year we're doing a series entitled **Taking the Next Step...with Joy...**

- we're working our way through the book of 1 Corinthians verse by verse and looking for the principles Paul gave this church family about how to grow and address some of the challenges they were facing as individuals and as a church ...
- what we're finding is that there is a timeless aspect to Scripture...as Solomon said, there is nothing new under the sun...
 - because these truths are equally applicable to people like you and me...
 - so we're trying to let this book impact us exactly like Paul wanted it to initially impact the Corinthians...
 - we want to take the next step, with joy...
- now, one observation we've been able to easily make is that this book breaks down into clear teaching units...
- for example, chapters 8, 9, and 10 were all about Christian liberty...
 - that was a problem in the Corinthian church---how to make decisions about areas in the Christian life where the Bible does not specifically speak...
 - and it's a challenge in the American church as well...so we worked our way through that particular teaching unit...
- last Sunday we started a brand new one...the issue of spiritual gifts...and we learned that this too is a very important topic to the Lord...because chapters 12, 13, and 14 are all devoted to that...
 - and this apparently is also something that is sometimes neglected by God's people...because Paul launches all of this by saying... **1 Corinthians 12:1 - Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware...**
 - the Greek word agnoew...from which we get our English word agnostic...
 - Paul's point is – I don't want you to be an agnostic regarding the identity and use of the spiritual gifts God has given you...
- now I realize that some of you were not here last week, so here's a few ideas we studied to be sure everyone is on the same page...we defined spiritual gifts like this:

Spiritual gifts are divine enablements for ministry, characteristics of Jesus Christ that are to be manifested through the body corporate just as they were manifested in the body incarnate.
- we also saw that the Bible doesn't give an exhaustive list of the gifts...as you compare the various passages—they are all different...apparently on purpose...
- then we studied the issue of the sign gifts, or the revelatory gifts, and we saw that Paul clearly predicted in the very next chapter that those kinds of gifts would die out...
 - they wouldn't be necessary after the NT was completed...God's final revelation to man...
 - if that was not the case, then the NT would not end with the twofold prohibition to not take anything away from the Bible, or add anything to it...
 - see exercising the sign gifts after the Bible was completed would be adding to the body of revelation God had given His people...
 - so our focus is on the non-revelatory gifts God has given His people for the edification of the church... the gift of administration, and the gift of serving, gift of teaching, gift of leading, the gift of giving, and even showing mercy...
- and the twofold question was --- what are the spiritual gifts that God has given you?...
- and how are you using them here as God seeks to further His mission by drawing men and women to Himself?...
- using last week's terminology---you haven't inadvertently thrown your banana cream pie in the dumpster, have you?...you haven't wasted or squander your gift, have you?
- and if you say – well, what if I have?...

- well, you would be contributing to this church being like a body trying to brush its teeth when its elbows decided to stay in bed and boycott the process...it's really not a very pretty picture...
- with that in mind, please follow along as I read 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 – **READ**
- we're talking this morning about **Lessons from the Body for the Body...**
 - with the time we have remaining, let's look for **three observations to help us use our spiritual gifts well.**

I. The Church of Jesus Christ is Miraculously Unified.

- remember the historical context of this book is that this church in Corinth was terribly divided...
- chapter 1 explained that there were groups going around saying, I'm of Paul, I'm of Appollos, I'm of Cephas...
- and that kind of division persists even today...
- it is incredible to me the number of things that God's people find to argue about...
- no wonder Paul said to be ... **Ephesians 4:3 - ...diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**
- there's a reason why the average evangelical church in our country has less than 100 people...
- and it has practically nothing to do with purity of doctrine...and everything to do with the fact you can seldom find more than 100 Christians who can get along with one another...
- and that bleeds over into this issue of the use of the spiritual gifts...what God intended to be a source of unity and blessing and edification in the Corinthian church had turned into the polar opposite...where they were arguing about the gifts, and envious of those who had the showy gifts, or demeaning towards those whose gifts involved service for Christ behind the scenes...
- so there is a heavy emphasis on unity...if you glance back at verses 1-11 that we read last week...over and over you read phrases like...the same God, the same Spirit, for the common good...
- that same theme is emphasized in verse 12...we are miraculously unified as...

A. We are one body.

- **v. 12 – the body is one...though they are many, are one body...**
- think about all the diversity that exists in this church family...
- economic diversity, ethnic diversity, gender diversity, academic diversity...
- different ages, different occupations, different states of origin, and in some cases, countries of origin...and on and on...
- but Paul says – God has brought all of those various parts together into one body...
- now please do this...please follow the argument of verse 12 carefully...[read v. 12 again] – what would we expect to read at the end of verse 12?...so also is “the church...”
- but that's not what Paul says...instead he says – so also is Christ...another important way to speak about the church...why?...

B. We are supernaturally united with our head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

- **v. 12 – so also is Christ.**

- one of the reasons this church accomplishes what it does is because the average person around here cannot conceive of his/her existence apart from their union with Christ...
- in fact, I would encourage you, not to think about yourself as a separate entity, but always in union with Christ...
- it's not – what does Bob want?...but what should Bob in Christ want?...
- those are two entirely different ways to think about ones place in the church...
- and a lot of people around here get this... **Colossians 1:18 - He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.**
- I was speaking with someone this week in a leadership position in a church a fraction of the size of this one and she was talking about the power struggles in the church...and I thought, I'm not aware of any power struggles around here...but part of that is because it really doesn't matter what Mr. Big Britches thinks, or what Mrs. McGillicutty wants...it's what does the Lord want...He has come to have first place in everything,...and we do not think of ourselves apart from our union with Him...
 - **Galatians 2:20 - I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.**
 - **Philippians 4:13 - I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.**
- that union is so strong, by the way, that when you use your spiritual gift to serve another person, Jesus views it as you serving...Him...
- do you remember this passage?... Matthew 25:34-40 - Then the King will say to those on His right, "Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me." Then the righteous will answer Him, "Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You *something* to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?" The King will answer and say to them, "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even* the least of *them*, you did it to Me."
- we are supernaturally unified with our Head, the Lord Jesus Christ...and that impacts the way we think about and exercise our spiritual gifts from a number of different perspectives---we'll get there in a minute...
- these verses also emphasize how...
 - C. We were baptized by one Spirit.**
 - **v. 13 – For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body**
 - this is speaking about spirit baptism, which happens the moment you trust Christ as Savior and Lord...
 - water baptism is a physical act of obedience that later pictures what occurs the moment you're saved...
- but every person who has trusted Christ as savior and Lord has the same Holy Spirit resident inside us...

- **Romans 8:9 - However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.**
- Paul is just heaping truth on top of truth for why followers of Christ in a local church ought to be able to exercise their God-given gifts in a unified way...
 - because we are dependent on the Spirit of God to use them well...
 - sometimes people from outside our church look at what has been accomplished here and concluded...well, they must have a lot of smart people, or they have a well-honed philosophy of ministry, they are effective strategic planners, etc...
 - and a lot of that may be true – but we know that the real issue is whether the men and women here are walking in the Spirit of God...and being filled/controlled by the Spirit of God...
 - that's what unifies us and that's what we're trusting in...the upshot of that is...

D. Our superficial distinctions melt away in Christ.

- **1 Corinthians 12:13 - For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.**
- see, your skin color, your economic position, your political views, your family of origin...who cares about any of that if we have the same Spirit of God resident inside of us?...
- now, you might say – OK, that's well and good, but what does that have to do with anything?...the answer is – it's understanding and valuing that common ground and unity that positions us to celebrate and embrace and exercise the diverse gifts that exist among us...so here's what we do with that diversity...we understand that...

II. The Church is Effective to the Degree to which All Members of the Body Wholeheartedly Play their Position.

A. By valuing your place in the body.

- **1 Corinthians 12:15-16 - If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.**
- now, why would a person take that position?...
- here's a couple of reasons...
 - 1. Because of envy.**
 - If I can't be the soloist, then I won't use my musical gift at all...
 - If I can't be the main teacher, I won't serve as an assistant...
 - If I can't run the show, then I don't want to play any position in the show...
 - do you realize how offensive that is to the God who made you?...
 - and do you recognize that the vast majority of what truly is accomplished for God in the average church, or the average town doesn't happen because of the star performers?....
- that's why I began this morning with the crazy illustration about your elbows...when's the last time you thought about your elbows?...doesn't get a whole lot of attention, does it?...
- but see how long you can go before you use them...

- and the bottom line is – if that is the position God has given you in the body---be at your post, whether anyone ever notices or not...or whether you're particularly happy about the fact that God made you in that way or not...
- envy of another person's gift will keep you from celebrating what God has given you and using it for His glory...
- here's the second reason...

2. Because of apathy.

- some people really don't care about how God has gifted them and how that was intended to be of use in Christ's church...
- they just don't care---and here's why that dynamic is so prevalent in so many places...it's because too many of God's people view the church through the lens of --- what's in it for me?...
- Am I getting what I want, or what I think I need, out of church?...
- I'm not being fed, or I didn't like this or that...

- whatever happened to – is there a place there for me to serve?...
- is there a place there for me to make a difference?...
- is there a place for me to impact others for the cause of Christ?...
 - if the answer to those questions is yes...then a big part of the equation is handled...
 - when you get your hands on the plow of serving Christ in a local church, it's amazing how many other things fall into place...

- and by the way, if you're here this morning and you're a student and you say---well, I'm pretty busy with my studies so I won't be able to serve God until I graduate...
- excuse me while I go get some bread, and a jar of mustard, and some lettuce and a tomato...and I'll be right back...
 - do you know why?...cuz I'm going to make a big baloney sandwich with that excuse...
 - and sure you need to do well in your studies...but part of maturity is learning to juggle multiple priorities well...
 - I mentioned that when I was in college, I also worked 40 hours a week my senior year and was a weekend youth pastor at a church 2 1/2 hours away from campus...
 - yea, I was busy...but I wouldn't trade that experience for anything...
 - I've had people connect with me on FB recently who were in my youth group 30 years ago...
 - and it is gratifying to hear about the way they are still living for God today...
 - I also learned a lot of lessons in ministry during that time that are with me to this day...

- I'm simply saying – if God made you an elbow---don't let the rest of the arm down by not being at your post...

B. By valuing diversity in the body.

- the argument really changes in verse 17... **1 Corinthians 12:17 - If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?**

- 1 Corinthians 12:19 - If they were all one member, where would the body be?

- see, the mistake many people make is believing that a church really just comes down to the efforts and giftedness of one or two people...or a handful of people...
- nothing could be further from the truth...
 - for example, let's take Titus – how many of you are thankful for Titus?...
 - how many of you would like everyone to be like Titus?
 - the lesson?---one of Titus is just about enough...
- and instead of saying, well, I'm not like so and so, therefore there isn't a place for me – no, God made you the way He desired...find a way to celebrate and exercise that...
- and you might say – well, I don't know where/how to get started...
- don't make it harder than it is...
 1. Cf. the form going around right now for people to serve at the NANC Conference in early October
 2. Or speak to your deacon, ABF teacher, Jeff/Laurie Walters, one of the pastors
 3. If not a member yet – jump into Intro to Faith
- he overall point – just do something – you'll figure out your area of giftedness by trial and error...

C. By finding ways to express our need for and appreciation for one another.

- the argument changes again in verse 21...
- **1 Corinthians 12:21-22 - And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary;**
- I would encourage you today, or this week, to find a way to express appreciation for someone who serves you here...
- perhaps it's a nursery worker, a member of the worship team, your child's SS teacher, one of our sound guys, the folks working at the Welcome Center, or the Resource Center, your deacon...
- [develop – this is one of the reasons we want to have our college ministry on the campus of a church – because we want college students to become comfortable being in a church family, and recognizing all that is involved in keeping a church strong...]

D. By recognizing that God places each person in our church body for a reason.

1 Corinthians 12:24 - whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked,

- think about this – every gift, to the exact degree that they are represented here – was designed specifically by our sovereign God...for a specific purpose...
- the question is – are you fulfilling that purpose?...

III. God Wants His People Not Only to Know These Truths, But to Act on Them.

- I would encourage you to think about why the Lord wanted you to hear this message this morning...

A. By being sure you have trusted Christ so this process has truly begun in your life.

- remember these are gifts of the Spirit...and your relationship with the HS begins when you trust Christ

B. By identifying the gift (s) God has given you.

- Do you know the identity of your gifts, and what are you doing to solidify your answer to that question?...

C. By looking for ways to be equipped to use your gift (s) well.

- **Ephesians 4:12 - for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;**

D. By allowing yourself to be deployed in whatever service opportunity the Lord provides.

- **Ephesians 4:16 - from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.**