

Rule 11; a short series on the welfare of the church which meets at Amyand Park Chapel.

This morning we will consider "1 body, many members".

Turn to 1 Corinthians 12.

Was the Corinthian church united? Were they going on to maturity? Were they all pulling in the same direction? The answer to all these questions is No.

Paul tells them about the one body with many members, so that they join the dots.

Let's look together at v 12 – 27. We will divide our time into two.

Firstly, let's open up the reading.

V12, "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." Now Paul is using the body to illustrate what he has to say, which we shall later see is quite subversive.

So, one body with many parts. Those many parts make one body. This is simple and yet profound. There is unity, one body, and there is diversity, many members.

Do the many members undermine the unity? No, it's one body. Does the one body-ness undermine the diversity? No, there are many members. And what's true of the human body, says Paul, is true of the church, whether at Corinth or at Amyand Park Chapel.

So, at APC, there is one church but a church made up of many members. There is unity, we're one body, and there's diversity, many members. Does our diversity undermine our unity? No, we are one body. Does our one body unity suppress our diversity? No, we are many members. So, what is the source of this unity, what makes us one?

In the Corinthian church there were converted Jews, steeped in the Old Testament, worshippers of the one God, growing up with hundreds of lifestyle commands that kept them apart from everyone else. There were converted Greeks, steeped in philosophy, idolatry and immorality. There were slaves and free. What extraordinary diversity. How do you get them to live and serve as one? How do you stop those fundamental differences from tearing the church apart?

V13, "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." Our unity is supernatural. Our unity comes from Christ. At conversion we are all baptized by Jesus with his Spirit, we are plunged into the realm of the Spirit, uniting us to Himself uniting us to each other, making us one body, His body, so that the life which is in the Lord flows by his Spirit to each and every member. We share the same resurrection life of Jesus. As part of the new creation, we are animated by the same Spirit. Which is wonderful!

It could never happen in the Old Testament. The Spirit came down on this one or that one, but now in the era of the New Covenant, the Spirit comes down upon a community, a diverse community, making the many one and filling them with the life of Heaven. So not only have we been baptized into one body by the one Spirit at conversion, but we go on being filled with the Spirit, "and all were made to drink of one Spirit." So, a Spirit-filled church will be a united church and a Spirit-filled believer will be utterly

committed to that church. But, if you stop daily drinking of the Spirit, you'll find your ties to the church begin to loosen, your commitment lessen, your love drain away.

In v 13 Paul uses the word "one" three times and the word "all" twice. We are all by one Spirit, one body. What God has joined together, let no one undermine.

Our differences have been overtaken by someone greater and loving Him, we love one another and serving Him, we serve one another.

With all this in mind, one body, many members, united to Christ, united to each other, Paul fleshes out what that means. In v 14-26, Paul is talking about the human body, but he's saying to the body of the church "join the dots".

V14, "For the body does not consist of one member but of many." Of course! Head and shoulders, knees and toes! So, v15, "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." Of course not. However inadequate the foot might feel compared to the hand, it's just as much a part of the body as the hand. V16, "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." Of course not. Has anyone ever told you "you have lovely ears?" So, however inadequate the ear feels when it compares itself with the lovely eyes, it's just as much a part of the body. Every member is part of the body and every member is therefore needed. V 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?" Every member of the body is indispensable, each has a unique role for the good of the whole body.

And the reason for that? Because that's the way God has designed it, v 18-20, "But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body." Every part of my body is designed by God. Every member of my body has been arranged by God. There's wisdom, design, genius. We have been designed and arranged so that the many members are integrated, interwoven, interconnected, so that they harmonise as one, one body, for the good of the body, for the good of every member.

You managed to get here this morning. Just think how the parts of your body had to co-operate, co-ordinate, communicate to get you washed, dressed, breakfasted and driven or walked here. Incredible. How can any part of the body feel inadequate or superfluous or decide to go it alone?

Are you joining the dots?

Now, having said that, some parts of the body are more impressive. Does that mean they can go it alone? Are they so important that they can do without the other members, but the other members can't do without them? V21, 22, "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'. On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable." Hearts need the protection of the ribcage. How weak! Does that mean that the strong members of the body can do without the heart? V 23, "and on those parts of the body that we think less honourable we bestow the greater honour". Feet are less honourable than the hands. You wouldn't put your feet on the table. Does that mean we treat the feet worse than the hands? On the contrary, we cover them with beautiful shoes, "and on those parts of the body we think less honourable we bestow the greater honour."

V23,24, “and our presentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require.” There are some parts of our body that are never on view- because they’re too important. They may be unpresentable, but we take very great care of them.

So, no part of the body can preside or behave as though it is first among equals, or dismiss and ignore the weaker, lesser honourable, even unpresentable parts of the body. V 24,25, “But God has so composed the body, giving greater honour to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.” The body is God’s design and it is designed in such a way that every member needs every other member, where the lesser is not looked down upon but given special honour, so that there’s unity, harmony, with every member cared for and loved equally, for the good of every part, for the good of the whole body, because the good of the body depends upon caring for each member. By giving the best to each member, the whole body flourishes.

Just to underline this, v26, “If one member suffers, all suffer together.” If you have a tooth ache, is it just a problem for the tooth? The whole body is in distress. V26, “if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.” When Usain Bolt won the 100m, did they hang a medal on his legs, or maybe his ear for hearing the gun? No, the whole body is honoured. All share in the joy of winning. The members of the body are inseparable, are interdependent and although many, are one. No part suffers alone, no part rejoices alone.

Now, having said all that about the human body, we read v 27, “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it”. The real lesson is for the church, a church made up of many members. Christian friend, have you been joining the dots?

So, secondly, let’s join the dots.

One body, many members, members who are to integrate, communicate, harmonise for the good of all. Members who care for and love one another, and the greater the vulnerability, the more care to be shown. No one left out, no one lording it. Members who don’t think, ‘what’s best for me?, how does this affect me?’ But members who think, ‘what’s best for the body?’ and who therefore submit to one another for the Lord’s sake and place others before themselves for the good of all. Because what’s best for the body is what’s best for me. And so, we don’t self-reference, we think in terms of the body, of the church, the welfare of the church.

1) Ever wonder what you can do? Ever think I can’t do what they do? Maybe you think I can’t do what I used to do? V15,16, “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. 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.” Christian friend, you are part of the body. Why? Because the Lord has put you here. Which means in this church there is a work for you, to do for Jesus. So do it.

2) Ever think, ‘I won’t be missed. There are plenty of others to serve’? v14,18, “For the body does not consist of one member but of many.”, “But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.” If you’re part of the body it’s because God has put you here and equipped you to serve. Does a body miss a hand? Of course you’ll be missed. Don’t be a passenger.

Somebody, Everybody, Anybody and Nobody were 4 church members and still are. Everybody always seemed to have an excuse when absent. Anybody wouldn’t go to church because Somebody wouldn’t

Speak to him. So, Nobody went. In fact, Nobody was the only church member worth having. Nobody went to the prayer meeting. Nobody joined in evangelism. Nobody put himself out. Once, they needed a Sunday School teacher. Everybody thought that Anybody could do it and Somebody thought that Everybody would want to teach. So Nobody did it. When a neighbor came to the church, Everybody thought Somebody would befriend him. Anybody could at least make the effort. So, who won him to Christ? Nobody.

3) Ever feel you're not like others and don't fit into this church? V 17-19, "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? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be?" How many fingers are there in a body? 10. How many noses are there in a body? One! Maybe you're the nose. So, don't stick your nose in another church because you think you don't belong here. We need you here! So, get stuck in.

4) Are you someone who keeps to yourself or your own little circle and there are people in this church you've never made an effort with? V 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.'" Don't ignore anyone. If the eye doesn't bother with the feet, we all fall over!

5) Christian friend, is there anyone in this church you look down on? They're a bit needy, maybe even an embarrassment? V 22-24, "On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts that we think less honourable we bestow the greater honour, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require." They may not be as gifted as you, but we look down on no one.

6) Christian friend, do you preside? Do you seek a platform and like the limelight? Are you always lifting yourself up? Do your gifts demand special treatment? Is your opinion worth double? Well, ask yourself this question, is the body made for the hand? Because that's how you're behaving.

7) Sometimes people say, "Why can no one see what we see?" Maybe it's because they're the eyes. "Why does no one hear what we hear?" Maybe it's because you're the ears. So, don't use your calling in this church to create divisions and run the church down, to point out what's wrong. Serve the body, build us up. Use what you see and hear to do us all good, v 25, "that there be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another."

8) Christian friend, sometimes in the body we differ strongly. Does that mean that there has to be a falling out? Gossiping, taking sides? Does that mean that someone must have the last word? When I pick up a glass, my bicep and tricep pull in different directions. They're antagonistic and yet on the same side - they serve the good of the body by enabling me to drink. Do we sometimes differ strongly? If we're focused on the good of the body, it can be a real strength, we are on the same side. Together we can get things done, v25, "that there may be no division in the body."

9) Are you someone who looks sideways? "What does the stomach ever do?" "We all have to work hard to feed it." "If I hear that tooth complaining of the pain one more time." "And the head, the fuss, the plaudits. Everyone loves the head! Why am I not a head?" The sideways look, leading to jealousy, feelings that we deserve better, the long sulk where we refuse to commit or step back. And who are we thinking of? Ourselves. And who are we not thinking of? The body of Christ. We are seeking our own

interests and not the Lord's. And the sideways look divides the body into 'them and us'. What does it say? V 25,26, "that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together, if one member is honoured, all rejoice together."

10) Autoimmune diseases, where the body turns on itself. Where healthy tissue gets destroyed by an overactive immune system.

As we look over those previous 9 points, what's the trajectory? That we commit ourselves to the life, witness and work of the body, this church and one another. That, in the words of Rule 11.2, "Members are further urged to find out which section of the work of the church the Lord calls them to engage in, and then to render it with all their might as a spiritual service to Him". And, therefore we commit ourselves to the body because what's good for the body is good for us all. We commit to maintaining and deepening our love and unity. And stand against anything that divides, damages, destroys this body, v25, "that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another."

So, Christian friend, if you're holding back or doing anything to undermine or damage the health of APC, repent of it.

What an incredible honour to be part of Christ's body, v27, "Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it." United to Him, united to each other. Serving the Lord, serving each other with the gifts and callings the Spirit has given to us, for our good and His glory. No wonder the Spirit is grieved when we pursue a different path.

I said that Paul's illustration was subversive. How so? The Corinthian world was familiar with the body illustration. Pagan thinking said society was like a body, a body made of different parts. Some parts honourable and dignified, some parts dishonourable and of less value. So, there are masters and slaves, us and them. An illustration used to divide society and suppress people. And so, Paul takes it up and says in the church, in the new humanity, in the body of Christ, how different things should be. A true unity, a true love. Not, "What's in it for me?" But, "What's best for all?" Where our differences don't divide but actually flourish under Christ, for the building up of all, where we serve one another, washing feet. This is what makes the world sit up and notice and that is what will magnify the Lord in a bitter and divided world. "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

All that we have said presupposes that we are committed to a local church, that we've thrown our lot in. We're not to be freelance, uncommitted to a local church, here and there, picking and choosing. Unwilling to really commit, going so far and no further. Not submitting to the life of the body. Christian friend, beware the creeping hand! Are you a creeping hand? Detached from the body, unaccountable, with a mind of its own. Free to crawl around, here and there. Free to point the finger. Free to go its own way. The creeping hand. Now, its tongue-in-cheek, but a hand on its own has gone rogue. A hand on its own is useless. A hand on its own is depriving a body somewhere of its hand. Creeping hands don't do the Lord's work, are disobedient to God's plan for his people, are wasting their years of service for which they will have to give an account. Don't be a creeping hand! The New Testament knows nothing of the

freelance Christian. Real New Testament believers devote themselves to the life, witness and work of the body, the local church.