

## THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

1 Corinthians 12:12-26

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### INTRODUCTION

Have you noticed that people are easily confused? I lost my sunglasses in San Diego this past week and so when I got home I went to the mall to get a new pair. They cost \$13 per pair, and you can get two pair for \$20.00. I picked out the pair I wanted and told the clerk I was ready to purchase them. He told me I needed to pick out another pair because buying two pair would save me money. I said, "But if I buy just one pair it will save me \$7.00." You should have seen the look of confusion on his face when I said that. After a long moment he responded with, "No, if you buy two pair for \$20 you will save \$6.00 because the normal price of two pair is \$26.00." You know I'm going to have some fun with this don't you? I responded with, "But I can't wear two pair of sunglasses at the same time. And besides I would save \$7.00 by purchasing just one pair instead of only \$6.00 by purchasing two pair." The conversation went on for a few more minutes and he tried hard to save me that \$6.00 but I walked away with one pair of really cool sunglasses and saved \$7.00"

Our centennial theme is "OUT OF MANY – ONE, OUT OF ONE – MANY." That might seem confusing unless you know what it means. This theme speaks of the many holiness churches in America that came together to form one church, The Church of the Nazarene. Then out of that one unified church in America came many different churches made up of people from many different cultures, and nations that have accepted the Gospel message of holiness. Out of Many – One; Out of One – Many.

At first it might seem confusing to us to think of the church as being one unified body made up of so many different and seemingly unmatched parts. Today we are going to look at an illustration that Paul uses in his writings that helps us understand this model of the church seen as the Body of Christ.

One of the most striking word pictures of the New Testament is the apostle Paul's description of the Church as the Body of Christ. The human body plays such a significant role in our experience of the world and our perception of life and reality that our minds can hardly comprehend all the implications of Paul's figure of speech. What should we understand the apostle to mean when he calls the Church the Body of Christ?

The comparison of the body with human society was a common rhetorical strategy in Paul's time. It was used to maintain the social hierarchy of the Roman Empire, keeping lower classes of society from rebelling against upper classes. The apostle turned this well known comparison to Kingdom purposes by describing the Church as the Body of Christ. But in 1 Corinthians 12 it is clear that Paul is not trying to maintain a social class structure in the Church. Rather, the Church as the Body of Christ emphasizes respecting and celebrating diversity within the Church while at the same time

maintaining commitment to the unity of the Church. We will see this clearly in a moment when we read 1Cor 12.

We often have a hard time balancing emphasis on the Church as a whole and emphasis on the individual members of the Church. When we value one, we often end up devaluing the other. As Paul describes the Church as the Body of Christ, both the individual members and the Church as a unified whole matter.

1 Corinthians 12:12-27 (NIV)

It is helpful to outline Scripture passages because it makes us see how the verses are organized and what the author was trying to say to us.

### Opening Statement: One Body

[12] The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. [13] For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Notice how Paul does away with the notions of a superior race or class among people in the Body of Christ. We are truly one body even though the parts of the body include Jews and Greeks, slaves and free men.

#### I. Many Parts with Different Functions

##### A. Multiple functions are necessary

[14] Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. [15] If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. [16] And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. [17] If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?

B. God has arranged the parts according to His will. The body does not come together on its own, it is created by God.

[18] But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. [19] If they were all one part, where would the body be? [20] As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

#### II. Many Parts Working Together

##### A. The parts of the body cannot have division or strife

[21] The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"

##### B. The parts of the body working together with respect and honor

[22] On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, [23] and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, [24] while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But

C. God has combined the parts of the body to promote unity and concern which is healthy

God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, [25] so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. [26] If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

III. You are Part of the Body of Christ (Paul makes it personal to YOU!)

[27] Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

#### I. THE BODY OF CHRIST HAS DIVERSE MEMBERS.

The Church is characterized by diversity of members. Verse 14 declares, "The body is not made up of one part but of many." In verses 15-16 Paul points out that a foot does not have to be a hand to be part of the body, nor does an ear have to be an eye to belong to the body. Further, that diversity is a good thing. All the parts of a body are necessary for it to function properly.

The analogy for a local church is clear. A diversity of people and ministries is necessary for it to function properly. There are preachers and teachers, pastoral caregivers, leaders, and those gifted in evangelism or compassionate ministries. A church consisting only of persons who preach would be a sick church indeed. A church consisting only of leaders would be hopelessly paralyzed by the lack of followers. If all the church provided was compassionate ministry, where would the prophetic voice from God be heard?

The issue is not limited to ministry roles. A diversity of personalities or dispositions is also necessary in a local church. The church cannot be healthy with only extroverts or highly creative individuals. It also needs introverts and people who find joy in creating structures that enable groups of people to learn, develop spiritually, and cooperate in service. God has gifted different people with differing perspectives on life and uses all these perspectives to enrich the life of the church together.

For this very reason it is important for each individual of the church to understand who they are as part of the Body of Christ. That understanding comes from three things that we receive but that are beyond our control. We can develop and refine them for great usefulness in the Body of Christ. We will either learn to develop and use these three things, or they will frustrate and ultimately cripple or destroy us. They are our personality, our spiritual gifts, and our natural talents. So what do we do with them?

1. Know and understand your personality. Your personality is made up of who God made you to be. Personality is a combination of the genetics of our ancestors and the accumulation of life's teachings and experiences.
2. Know and understand your spiritual gifts. Especially the seven gifts listed in Romans 12.
3. Discover, develop, and deploy your natural God given talents.

When we understand who we are, who God made us to be, and how He wants us to fit into His body, we begin to better understand the differences of the other parts of the body and how they can function and react differently to make the body healthy.

Did you know that of the top five talents that God created in you, that you stand out as the only one in 33.3 million who has those same five talents in the same order that you have them.

Did you know that of the top 10 talents that God created in you that you stand out as the only one in 447 trillion who has those same ten talents in the same order that you have them. Scientists tell us that there are more people on the face of the earth today than have ever lived before. There are approximately 6.5 billion people on earth today. That means that in history there have been about 12 billion people in existence. You are unique, one in 447 trillion. There has never ever been anyone like you on the face of the earth. God made you unique and He has a place and a function for you in His Body the church, and in His eternal Kingdom.

The diversity of the Church also speaks to the important vision of the Church of the Nazarene to be a global church. Out of one, we have become many. God does not desire a Church consisting only of Asians or Americans or Africans. A diversity of cultures, languages, races, and nationalities enables the Church to fulfill its global mission to win the world to Christ. Without this diversity, the Church cannot be the Body of Christ. We must have members with different gifts, different roles, different personalities, different talents, and different cultures for the Body to be healthy. This is why we participate in supporting our missions program.

**First**, it allows us to participate in global evangelism, helping to fulfill the great commission as given to us by Christ just before He ascended into heaven.

Mark 16:15-16 (NASB)

[15] And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. [16] "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.

**Second**, it allows us to share what we have with others who are less fortunate that we are; also a command of Christ while He was here on this earth. (Matthew 25:31-46)

Matthew 25:31-46 (NASB)

[31] "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. [32] "All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; [33] and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

[34] "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.

[35] '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; [36] naked,

and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' [37] "Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You *something* to drink? [38] 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? [39] 'When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' [40] "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.'

[41] "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; [42] for I was hungry, and you gave Me *nothing* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; [43] I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' [44] "Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?' [45] "Then He will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' [46] "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

This is not a call to **do** church stuff. This is a call to **be** the church. Even a non believer can do church stuff, but only a true believer can **be** the church. So how can we **be** the church instead of just **do** church? In personal, intimate relationship with Christ, we must come together as one.

## II. THE BODY OF CHRIST IS ONE BODY.

Though Paul clearly wanted the church at Corinth to know there was room for their diversity, he was equally clear that the Church is one. In verse 12 he states, "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body." The unity of the Church has several sources. Writing to the Ephesian church Paul made these sources clear for us.

Ephesians 4:4-6 (NIV)

[4] There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called— [5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism; [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

In these verses Paul shows us two major sources that help us to be unified.

- I. There is **One Body**: This speaks of the human parts of the body united by the God who created them and brought them together. This is what Paul talked about in 1 Cor. 12. Different and necessary parts brought together as a unit to perform their unique function so the whole body is healthy and functions properly.
- II. There is **One Spirit**: This speaks of the ongoing work of the God who combines and arranges the parts of the body for its proper functioning. God does not create the different parts of the body and bring them together to function as a unit and then leave them on their own. Like the spark of life that keeps the body functioning, the Spirit of God is the spark of life that keeps the church functioning

properly. This **One Spirit** is made up of several important facets.

- A. There is **One Lord**: The **glue** that holds the parts of the body together is Christ as Lord of each part of the body. When He ceases to be Lord, the body ceases to be healthy. When He ceases to be Lord of one part of the body, the whole body becomes sick, diseased, and eventually crippled. Christ must be the **One Lord** of every part of the body for it to be healthy and function properly.
- B. There is **One Faith**: This is the common and exclusive **entry point**. This is where the individual parts of the body become part of the whole body. The more diverse the body the healthier it is. The stronger each part of the body becomes by development and growth, the stronger the whole body becomes. We have a responsibility to be as healthy as possible so that the whole body is healthy and strong. That strength comes from our faith.
- C. There is **One Baptism**: This is the common **witness** of the body. Baptism is our testimony, that we have become part of the Body of Christ. This is a signal to the world that by this **One Faith** we have surrendered to **One Lord** and become part of the Body of Christ. This is our testimony to the world that things are different in our life. We will no longer function as an individual but we will begin to function for the good of the whole body. The proper functioning of the individual parts of the body as a unified entity becomes the ongoing witness to the world.
- D. There is **One God**: This is the common **authority** that permeates every part of the body and establishes the form and function of the whole body. There is no question about what the body is to accomplish or how it is to accomplish it because there is one common authority. There is no question about the function of the individual parts of the body because each part comes under the same authority that every other member of the body comes under. This is what keeps the form and function of the body healthy. God is over all, and through all, and in all. In other words, God will permeate the whole body of Christ if each member of the body will let Him permeate their individual lives. Only in this common authority can the body be healthy.

Ephesians 4:4-6 notes that as one Body the Church has one Spirit, one Lord, one God, one baptism, one faith, and one hope. We could add to the list one Bible, one Lord's Supper, and one Great Commission. Of all these sources of unity, perhaps the most important is that we have one Lord. Our common confession that Jesus Christ is Lord and that through the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit we experience one God creates a unity of allegiance that marks the Church as one Body. If our diversity is more important than our one Lord and His lordship over the Church, then our diversity has become an idol and not the gift of grace Paul sees in our text.

Part of the meaning of the unity of the Body of Christ is that we need each other. Verse 21 says, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!'" We need each other for at least two reasons.

**First**, we need each other to accomplish together what none of us can accomplish individually. Whether it is God's call upon us to win the world for Christ, or Jesus' instruction to provide for the needs of the sick, the imprisoned, the hungry, the naked, and the lonely, the task is too great for any one of us or any one section of the Church. We have a far better chance of accomplishing the great vision God has for the Church by working together.

**Second**, we also need each other because God has created us for relationships. From our sexuality to our desire for companions, we are not complete in ourselves. We frustrate God's creation purpose for us when we try to live without relationship with each other.

The unity of the Church means we care for each other. In verses 22-24 Paul states that we give special care to the members of the Body that are weaker or unrepresentable or lacking honor. "On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unrepresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it." Those who are weaker or have special needs in the Church receive special care. If one part of the Body suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part of the Body rejoices, everybody celebrates. It is this shared life that marks the Body of Christ as one Body. It is this shared life that is the most powerful witness the church can give the world. More than any other effort, it is this one thing, the shared life, that will get people to become part of the body of Christ. People who are witnessed to and make a decision for Christ, but do not stay in the church, leave for this reason more than any other objection that comes at them as a new Christian.

## CONCLUSION/INVITATION

**The Body of Christ is both one and many.** The beauty of the body metaphor to describe the Church is that it surrenders neither the unity nor the diversity. We often feel pressured to choose between alternatives. We cannot choose the unity of the Church over the diversity of the Church. Nor can we choose the diversity of the Church over its unity. We must work together until we bring our diversities to unity and then we must never forget our diversity. Because we are the Body we are both one and many. As we celebrate our Centennial, we remember that out of many holiness groups, the Church of the Nazarene became one. Yet out of one, we also became many people in many nations with many gifts. This unity and diversity are also important in each local congregation.

For the Church of the Nazarene to be the Church God calls us to be, we must celebrate our diversity and always provide room for our God-given differences. But we also must always cherish our unity. Only together can we accomplish the mission God has given us and truly be His Body.

Since Christ is holy, we must be holy together. Sometimes we cling to our individuality instead of the unity of the Body. Self-centered individuality tears apart the Body of Christ and makes it unholy. As we come to the conclusion of this service, I invite you to examine your own heart as I examine my own heart. Are you, are we willing to give up all selfish desires for control or power in Christ's Body, in order that we might truly be one, holy Body? If the Holy Spirit points to some area of self that you are holding onto despite the call to be the Body of Christ, I invite you to surrender that area of your life to the Spirit's cleansing fire today.

**—Roger L. Hahn**

*(Modified by Rev. David G. Bostick)*