

We are the body of Christ

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 September 2026

Preacher: James Ross

[0:00] Please have a seat. And now Steve is going to come and read from 1 Corinthians chapter 12. So this is 1 Corinthians chapter 12 from verse 12 to 27.

! So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit, so as to form one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free, and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. So the body is not made up of one part, but of many. Now, if the foot should say, because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body, it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 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 stop being part of the body. 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? But, in fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. 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. 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 unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving 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. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. This is God's Word. Now, if you have your Bible, please turn again to 1 Corinthians 12, page 1153. As we continue to think as a church about the house that Jesus builds, as we think about the life of God in the life of the church, this evening we're thinking about the church as the body of Christ. Last week, there was the image of the church as the house in which God builds, in which He dwells rather. And there is that foundation in the gospel that through Jesus, through faith in Him, we share in the life of God, we share in life with God and with one another. And we thought about what feature that produces within the church, and that feature is joy. That there is joy in the Lord as we belong to Him and as we belong to His people. Well, this week's image is similar and yet different. It's the church as the body of Christ. Let me read verse 27 again.

Now, you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it. And the big idea this evening is simply this, that because the church is the body of Christ, every member of God's church matters. Every member is to be valued. Every member is to be honored. And every member is to be active as we find our parts within the body of Christ. I'm going to share some hard-won insights. So, I broke my wrist. For those of you who don't know, I broke my wrist at the start of the summer. And because I'm a preacher, lots of people said, oh, when's this going to make it into a sermon illustration? Well, here it is. It's finally arrived. Some very painful but helpful lessons. For example, the moment that I fell on my wrist and it broke, it ballooned. Okay? And that's the body's response. So, I tried to read about this. I'm not a medical person by any stretch. I tried to read what was going on in that moment. But basically, as much as I could figure out, instantly the body begins to want to protect itself and to heal an injured part. And that's where the swelling comes from. So, think about it. The body understands instinctively that every part matters. The days that followed were days that were pretty much a fuzzy blur. I could not stay awake. Any moment that I was sitting was moments that I was sleeping.

And I was discovering that when one part suffers, every part suffers with it because the body is interconnected. Before, this is an admission, I didn't think much about a wrist. I didn't appreciate the value of a wrist. But now, ever since then, my body and brain so often have been given my wrist its absolute full attention. That's what pain does, isn't it? It's like, I can't think of anything else except my wrist right now. And a part that seems to be weaker, a part that maybe to me didn't seem that

important. Well, now I'm discovering it's kind of indispensable. I know I've come to admire working wrists. Our local church is described as the body of Christ. And every member matters to God. And every member, therefore, must matter to us. That whatever local church we are a part of, we must value, honor, and work and serve together for God's purpose. So here's what we're going to do to look at this wonderful theme. We're going to think 3, 2, 1. We're going to think about the fact that within this text, we're shown that the three members of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, they are working together to build the body of Christ. So we'll see that. And then we'll notice within our text, there are two threats to God's vision for the body of Christ. And then we'll identify what is the great goal for the body of Christ. So as it were, we're going to put the body of Christ in an x-ray machine. The x-ray machine is God's Word. And as we do so, my hope and my prayer is that we'll grow our love for God's design, that no local church is haphazard or accidental. It's designed that we would learn to see our place within this church or whatever church that we belong to, and that we would grow in our love and concern for every member of the body. So let's begin here, that the three members of the Trinity work together to build the body of Christ. So let's start with the Son, the Lord Jesus. Look at verse 12. This is how our section begins. Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. Verse 27, how the section ends. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. So a local church is the body of Christ. That's the basic teaching. And just as a body has many parts, and each is connected, and each is working together, so it is to be within Jesus' body. And we read a section from Ephesians 4. Paul returns to that teaching in that letter, and he describes Christ as the head, and we are the body. Christ is our control center, and we need vitally to be connected to him. And when we are, we are therefore connected to one another. There is the emphasis within this, that within Christ's body, there is a unity within diversity. So just as a physical body needs muscle and bone and organs, etc., to be cooperating together for health and strength, so it is in Christ's body. That we have been bound together in our union with Christ. The moment that we believe in the Lord Jesus, we are united to Christ, and we become part of his church, and then we are given this task, that local churches make Jesus visible on the earth. That people should be able to look at us the way that we live, the way that we function, and to recognize something of Jesus in us. And so our life together matters within the body of Christ. Let's look at the Spirit's work in building the body of Christ. Look at verse 13.

[8:45] For we were all baptized by one Spirit, or with, or in one Spirit, so as to form one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free, and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. And so the body is not made up of one part, but of many. So the Spirit, it is working to give each and every church member certain new realities. And we know this from what the Bible says. When we believe in Jesus, the Spirit is at work. It's the Spirit who gives us new birth. It's the Spirit who gives us a new heart.

It's through the vital connection of the Spirit connecting us to Jesus that we find this new place within God's family, this new part in Christ's body. It's through the Spirit that we receive God's love and God's grace and God's forgiveness and God's life. This is why it's vital for us to be within the body of Christ. That's why we need to have faith in Jesus, to have all of these spiritual blessings coming to us through the Spirit. Paul puts it in terms of us being baptized by or in one Spirit. And it's helpful for us as a church that we're beginning to go through the book of Acts.

And what we find is that in the book of Acts, when someone believes in Jesus for the first time, they are baptized. And baptism is that indication that the Spirit has been given. Upon faith, the Spirit is given. And baptism then becomes this vivid reminder that God pours out His blessings upon us, those blessings of forgiveness and love and life with God. The right to personal relationship poured out on His people. That's part of the imagery of being baptized in one's Spirit. And this baptism in one's Spirit has the ability to break down and break through all the cultural barriers of any age and generation. So two of the big ones here are Jew and Greek and slave and free. Those do not matter within the body of Christ because we share one Spirit. We're united by faith to the Lord Jesus because of the Spirit. And then as he continues in verse 13, he says, we were all given the one Spirit to drink. And that's an idea that Jesus Himself speaks of in John chapter 7. Jesus says, whoever believes in me, rivers of living water will flow from within them. And John says, by this, he meant the Spirit. So the life of God is poured into the hearts of the people of God. It's as if we're drinking in the one Spirit. And this text also reminds us and teaches us about the Father's work in building the body of Christ. Look at verse 18. In fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every

one of them, just as He wanted them to be. And then in verse 24, God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so there should be no division in the body. So God the

Father, by His design, arranges, combines, and honors the parts of the body of Christ. Again, this morning, we were thinking about God's providence and God being sovereign, ruling over all things. That includes the design of a local church, that nobody is a member of a particular local church by accident. It's God's design. And in the same way as if we kind of stop to think about it, we can appreciate the skill and the beauty of God's creative design for our own bodies. The same applies to when we think about a local church that God has skillfully and wonderfully woven very different people together often to become a vital family of faith. And Paul is reminding us that every single Christian occupies a specific place in a specific church, and that has been lovingly designed by God our Father. And we need to understand that that's both for our good and it's for the good of other church members, that your gifts and mine, our gifts together, combine to put the glory of Christ on display. So what does this mean for how we think about the church? I'm going to read one more verse from Ephesians, this time from Ephesians chapter 3 verse 10. Listen to what this is saying about the church. This is the intent of God. His intent was that now through the church, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. So God intends for a local church like this one to put his wisdom on display, not just in a worldly sense, but to all spiritual powers.

Our doctrine of the church, it really matters. Not just in theory, but worked out in practice.

[14:43] So we can all say in theory, I believe that we are one body and every member has to find their place, but do we practice real sharing in the life of the body? Are we participating, really working together to make Jesus and his glory known?

Do we really value, honor and show care to every other member of the body of Christ?

It's challenging, isn't it? When we think about the reality that we're being pointed towards, how do we make that being part of the body of Christ real? How do we practice that?

Maybe it's as we encourage one of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Maybe we tell them why we value them as being part of our local church. Maybe it's making the effort to build a stronger friendship with another Christian within our local church so that we can better serve and worship together.

Maybe it's us thinking deeply about how we can use our gifts, how we can work in partnership together. Oftentimes it's as simple as, do you know what? I'm going to show up and I'm going to be really committed to the people around me. I'm going to sacrifice time and energy for the sake of others.

[16:10] But how we think about the church and how we live in the church, it really matters to God. As we see that the three members of the Trinity, they work together to build the body of Christ. Well, let's move from there to recognize that there are within Paul's paragraphs here, two threats to God's vision for the body of Christ. And again, just to help us out, I'm going to borrow my wrist again by way of illustrating this. So suppose I was to find myself thinking, well, what's the big deal with a wrist? It's broken, but do I really need it?

Within probably a matter of hours, but certainly days, I had my answer in spades. You know, I couldn't lift anything. I couldn't open a bottle of anything. I couldn't tie my shoes for about six weeks. I discovered, it's been interesting to share this with other people, teeth make a very good substitute for a non-working hand, but they can't substitute for everything. We might think something is of no value, but maybe we're introduced to the fact that, no, perhaps our thinking was a bit, oh.

You can go to an opposite extreme. Oh, now I sense how important wrists and hands are. They're the greatest of all the body heart parts. You know, everything else is kind of pointless. Again, if we take that kind of attitude where we would elevate one thing over everything else, well, we'd discover some limitations, wouldn't we? We wouldn't get anywhere very fast.

Our sight would be profoundly affected and we wouldn't be able to eat. Within our section, we're being presented with two great threats to God's design, God's vision for his church. And Paul picks up on kind of comedic images, distortions, to help us to see that God has designed the church in a particular way, that there is supposed to be unity within diversity. So every member, every gift matters. That each part has been deliberately arranged and combined for good functioning, and we don't want to mess with that. That every part is important.

[18:22] So what are the two threats? Well, the first threat that we see from verse 14, 15 down to verse 20 is the threat of inferiority. This is what happens when any Christian says, well, my spiritual gift makes me less than others because I have this spiritual gift, because I'm this person, I'm not really needed in my local church. The second threat is the opposite, verse 21 to 24. It's superiority. My spiritual gift makes me more than others. A church doesn't really need any other gifts beyond my kind of gift. And Paul challenges both of these to help us to see that a body will flourish only when different gifts are being used for the sake of the whole, and a church will thrive only when the full range of gifts within a church membership is being recognized and valued and celebrated, and when church members are being active in using their God-given gifts. So let's look at the first problem where someone might feel inferior or insignificant. Look at verse 15. Now if the foot should say, because I'm not a hand, I do not belong to the body, it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. Paul is saying very simply, you may think that you are inferior because you have a particular gift, but quite simply you are wrong. He doesn't make it any more complicated than that. The Spirit gives us a gift. That's God's choice, and we can't say we are insignificant because of it. He continues, if the ear should say, because I'm not an eye, I do not belong to the body, it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And then he changes the logic. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? In other words, every part is necessary for the body to be a well-functioning body. If we pull ourselves out, then the body is going to suffer.

If we ignore God's design, then in effect we're saying God doesn't know what he's doing. But look at what Paul says, verse 18, but in fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them just as he wanted them to be. So it's so basic and so important for us to understand that there are no expendable body parts in the Christian church. There is no Christian who can say, well, I'm excluded, you know, I'm the equivalent of the appendix. I'm not really needed.

Do you know, any given Sunday, I think is a wonderful way to see this. So I was trying to think about this Sunday as just a typical example of how many people are involved and how many people are using different gifts and using their time and serving together. And some are visible and some are invisible, but there are always the people who open up, get here before everyone else does. There's always people at the door who give us a warm welcome. There are people who serve teas today. There were people who served us dinner. There are people who look after and teach the kids. There are people who lead the singing.

There are people who work the technology. There are those who read and pray and preach. There are those who offer encouragement, who give wisdom and counsel. There are those who practice hospitality, who provide lift, who practice friendship, and so much more. Simply to say, we need one another.

[22:06] If you're part of this church, we need you. That's God's design. That's the message of God's word. And none of us should say, I'm insignificant because my gift is not like, you know, fill in the blank. It's God's design.

But what about flip side if we're tempted to make some gifts superior and to dismiss others? Paul has an image for that too.

Verse 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. And so he gives us these sort of caricatures and just sort of comedy pictures to show how mad it would be.

You know, for an eye to say, I can go out alone. I'm totally fine without my hands. That's great until you get an eyelash stuck in your eye. And you desperately need a hand more than anything. Or if a head, feet. What are feet for? Unless a head wants to be rolling around by way of transport, we need our feet.

[23:13] And so this is what Paul is trying to say. We cannot say some are superior and we can do away with everything else. Verse 22, 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. There is actually a warning here. It was a warning to the church in Corinth because they were kind of all marked by a bit of spiritual pride and wanting to show that their gifts were the greatest.

But there is a warning for any of us individually and as a church that we can focus on, for example, the visible gifts while ignoring the invisible gifts.

To so elevate some as to minimize and diminish others. I like the way Andrew Wilson puts it in his commentary. You can survive without an eye, but not without a liver.

We can't see our liver, but it is vital to life and functioning. So yes, absolutely. And Paul will say we need Bible teaching. We need, you know, people who will open the Bible and preach the gospel. [24:23] And we need leadership. Absolutely, yes. But yes, we need people who practice those gifts of mercy and hospitality and administration. And people who pray.

And people who befriend. And we need to honor the parts of the body that maybe don't always get celebrated because they're not so visible.

God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that will act it. So when we look at ourselves in the mirror as Christians, as part of the body of Christ, Paul is saying there's no room for superiority on the one hand, but nor should we feel self-pity.

We shouldn't be judging others, but nor should we be jealous of others. Rather, we understand that our good and wise creator God has designed you and he has designed me.

He has placed you and me where he wants us to be. God has combined us for his purpose. God has combined us for his purpose. God has combined us for his purpose. And so we need each other, whatever our gifts are, in any local church.

[25:37] We are mutually connected to each other in a local church. One of the reasons why church membership matters. But this is very counterculture, isn't it?

We tend to think in terms of ourselves as individuals. And we can also tend to come to a church and think, what will the church do for me?

Where can I find the church that will meet my needs? And rather, the message of the Bible is saying, learn to think about we, not me.

To think about us rather than thinking about ourselves. And Paul is reminding us that no gift is common to everyone. And nor are any of us the whole body.

And so for us to be healthy and to function well, we need one another. And we need to practice mutual concern for each other. Because if we lose a body part, to use the image, that's a big deal, isn't it?

[26:39] The body is going to lose vital health and the ability to thrive. So it reminds us to care for one another as church members. And it also reminds us that we have responsibility to other church members to be active worshippers and servers.

And that takes us to one glorious vision. The vision of God for the body of Christ. Which is here in verse 25 and 26.

God has put the body together 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. What is God's glorious vision for his body, for the church?

It's where each shows equal concern for each other. It's an active fellowship of loving concern, not just for some people or some types of people, but for all people of any type.

[27:54] And in so doing, we put God's love on display. The gospel is a uniquely powerful form.

The Father sends the Son. And the Son comes to live a life of perfect obedience before suffering and dying on the cross and then rising again.

And then the Father and the Son, they send the Spirit so that God's love would be, could be experienced and shared by God's people together.

The gospel is what creates genuine equality within a church family, within a church body. In a Christian church, we don't try and squash down differences, but rather we practice a unity that celebrates difference.

There is within the gospel the capacity to end our natural prejudices and divisions. So here it was the divisions of race and class.

[29:05] But we can multiply those. The gospel, when it takes root in our hearts, is what enables us to move towards other church members who are utterly unlike us, except for this life-changing fact that we have Jesus in common.

That's what will allow us to practice equal concern for every member. Again, when Paul writes this, he's challenging a church that was largely puffed up with pride.

But however we find ourselves today, I think we're going to recognize, when we're honest, there is a challenge in this. Each one of us, we're made in a particular way.

We have our own personality and temperament, and so we're drawn to particular kinds of people.

But Paul is saying it's not enough in a church that we just love the people who are like us, because

that's not how God treats us.

Rather, we show equal concern for everybody. Learning to see people as Jesus does. Letting the love that Jesus has for his church shape our love for the church.

[30:17] Just as we see the love of Jesus crossing boundaries, to extend grace, so we need to learn to let our love cross boundaries. Maybe that's the boundary of age, or maybe it's the boundary of personality.

It's not easy, but it's so, so necessary. And what we find from Paul is that living as the body of Christ, it requires being part of a living, active fellowship.

Because look with me at verse 26, and ask yourself how you could possibly obey this command if we have no living connection.

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. We need to know one another, so we can know one another's joys and sorrows to seek to enter in. That's one of the reasons why every month we're going to have lunch together, so that we can build friendships, so we can know what's going on in our lives. That's why we have community groups.

[31:18] It connects us to a diverse group of believers, and we share life and life with God together. We can exercise care and concern for one another. And it's part of the goal of Christ-centered preaching as we celebrate God's grace to us.

Love that cuts across the most remarkable difference. God loving us though we were unworthy sinners. Love that unites us to Jesus, uniting the head to us as the body.

Well, as we are reminding ourselves of God's love for us in the Lord Jesus, that's when we find the love and the model and the motivation to do likewise, to live showing that every member of Christ's body really does matter, that every one of us, honored, valued, and with a part to play.

Let's pray together. Our God and our Father, we thank you for giving us this rich image image of the church as the body of Christ.

And we thank you that every person who trusts in Jesus is vitally connected to him as the body is connected to the head. Thank you that in your eyes, each one of your people matters to you.

[32:44] You have made us, and you have formed, and are forming us in particular ways, and you have placed us in local churches so that we might play our part towards the body of Christ being healthy and demonstrating something of your glory together.

Lord, you know how challenging that is to us individually and collectively. And so we pray that we would humbly look to you to lead and to guide us and to teach us.

And we pray especially for us as a local church, that we might grow in our love for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, that we might put Jesus on display in this part of our city to the glory of God.

And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.