

The Gathering: One Body, Many Parts 1 Cor. 12:12-30

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[0 : 00] Word. 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. 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.

Now the body is not made up of one part, but of many. 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. 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. 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 arranged the parts of 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.

[1 : 39] And the parts we think are less honourable, we treat with special honour, and the parts that are unpresentable 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 honour 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 honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church, God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing?

[3 : 05] Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts?

Well, the church is a body, and there are many parts, and one of those parts is Ralph, and he's going to come and preach.

So, over to you, Ralph. Thanks very much. Thank you.

Now we come to hear your word preached. And Lord Jesus, I ask that your spirit would take your word and cause it to be wedded deeply in all of our hearts to the glory of God the Father.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. In just a few weeks, our very near neighbours in Britain are going to vote in a referendum.

[4 : 31] And a referendum is this, whether to stay in or whether to leave the European Union. This potential British exit is more commonly known or referred to in the media as Brexit.

And it's a defining moment for both the United Kingdom and for Europe. Will one of the big countries of the EU choose to leave or will it stay?

So, as the British and the Northern Irish are munching over their cornflakes on Thursday the 23rd of June, it will be time for them to decide.

Now many folks, well, they feel like that they're more British. British and yet want to remain part of this diverse body of nations.

While others, also feeling British, think it's time to opt out. As they're really too different. They're on a different track to the rest of everyone else. And they no longer want to be part of the club of the

European Union.

[5 : 35] Now you're wondering, well, what does this have to do with the text that's before us this morning? Well, I think in many ways the local gathering of Christians in the Church of Carn was facing a similar kind of decision point.

Similar issues of identity and belonging. Just like when different countries come together, I think the gathering of these different Christians in Carn was starting to produce infighting.

It was producing factions. It was producing doubts about the whole project of being a church. So instead of finding order and a caring community when you went to the church in Carn, it seems like it had become really a pit of one upmanship.

Everyone contending for themselves. It almost feels like every single member was in conflict with every other member. They were just tearing each other apart. A body at war with itself.

And I'm sure you've noticed that. I mean, we've gone through 1 Corinthians over a long time. But just to remind you, if we go back to chapter 1, right at the beginning, verses 10 to 12 in chapter 1, Paul, he's writing to them.

[6 : 47] He says, What I mean is this.

One of you says, Well, I follow Paul. And another, I follow Apollos. And another, I follow Cephas. That's Peter. Still another, I follow Christ. And as we go through the pages, as we flick through, there's just example and example of this kind of factious behavior in the church.

Again, one of the most recent examples we looked at was in chapter 11 and verse 18. In the first place, talking of the Lord's table, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you.

And to some extent, I believe it. Division within the church was common. The church really is taking a battering. And whether it's being the Lord's table, or in this case, it's really about the use of gifts, or deciding which leader it's going to follow, what kind of theology it was going to embrace.

It was just leading to division and argument. And I believe in these verses before us this morning, we get a sense of the real damage that that does to the body, the real damage that does to the church, this constant infighting and issues.

[8 : 22] And some folks, well, they were feeling disillusioned, and were maybe feeling a little bit inferior, and struggling, while others were pushing the vulnerable, members out of the church.

So Paul has a big task in his hand, doesn't he? To correct some of this. And to combat this damage, the church needs to see what the church is.

The church needs to see what the church is. The oneness that they have in Christ. A oneness that is sustained by the diversity of members and by the diversity of gifts.

And I guess if that's one thing to take away from this morning, it's that. It's that idea that the oneness that we have is sustained by a diversity of members and a diversity of gifts.

The oneness in Christ that we have. And it's in this context that Paul introduces the idea of a physical body. Look with me at verse 12. The body, he says, is a unit.

[9 : 28] Though it is made up of many parts, and though all the parts are many, they form one body. So Paul is going to help them work through this issue by using an illustration.

It's the illustration of the body. Think about your body. Well, it's just one body, isn't it? You have one body, but it's not just body.

What I mean is this. The body, the one body, is itself made up of different parts. You see, it's the diversity of parts that produce a unified body.

It's one body, many parts. Or we can look at it the other way, can't we? We can say many parts and one body. And Paul is asking the Corinthians to do this here, isn't he?

He says, when you think of the one, well, I want you to think of the many. And when you're thinking of the many, well, I want you to think of the one. Do you see that?

[10 : 30] You can't separate the oneness of the church body from the manyness of the church body. This is how it is with Christ. Christ has one body, his church on earth.

Each of us has enjoyed the same baptism in the Holy Spirit into one body, whether we're Irish or British or Northern Irish or young or old, whether we're leading up the front or whether we're singing at the back.

Verse 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.

You see, there are to be no tiers within the church. The church isn't structured in that way, kind of hierarchically.

There's going to be no tiers. We are not to divide the body. We're not to divide the church along ethnic lines. We're not to divide as long lines of, say, clergy and laity, that kind of idea.

[11 : 34] We're not to divide the church body by saying, well, they're spirit-filled people and they're, well, they're into the Word and they're kind of Word-filled. That's not how we're to divide the body. There are no first and second tier Christians.

We are all one in Christ. But Paul also says we must not think of the church as being made up of just one type of Christian.

Yes, there are no tiers of Christians or Christianity, but that doesn't mean that there's no variety. And if we go on to the next verse, we see that. Now, the body is not made up of one part, but of many.

You see, the body is not just one thing, but rather it's many things. We speak of one body and I'm going to repeat this a lot, but I want you to understand and hear from God's Word.

But when we do, when we think of the one, we need to think of the many. We need to think of the variety that has been pulled together to make the one body. The key thing in this then is really who has pulled the parts together to make the one body.

[12 : 49] Who has done this? Who has designed? Who has made this one body? And Paul repeats this a number of times again and again in the passage. Now, we're just going to scan through here, but notice verse 18.

Start of verse 18. But in fact, God has arranged the parts of the body. Skip down with me to verse 24, in the middle part of 24. It says, but God has combined the members of the body and given greater honor to the parts that lacked it.

And then finally, verse 28. Verse 28. And in the church, God has appointed. Now, let's take that in for a moment. What it says, across those three verses, is that it is God who arranges, it is God who combines, and it is God who appoints in the body.

God does the arranging, God does the composing, God does the appointing. And when we speak of our lives and when we speak of the church, we don't often think in those categories, do we?

We like to take the spotlight that Paul is shining on God and God's work, and we like to creak it over a little bit and put it somewhere else. And what that looks like is, well, we constantly just talk about our choice in coming to Jesus.

[14 : 17] We talk about our choice in coming to this church. It was our choice to pick our seat this morning. It was our choice about what we did during the tea and coffee and who we were willing to speak to.

It was going to be our decision during this week how much time that we are going to give to other people. You see, because it has to fit, of course, doesn't it, into our schedule. And we tend to pick and to choose based on our preferences, our preferences for people.

Oh, they're great folks and, well, I'm pretty awesome myself. So, you know what? I'm going to help them out this week with mining their children. Well, you know, because they'll return the favour and that's cool.

We get on really well. Isn't that great? And it is great. I'm not to cast aside all that we do for one another. But again, where is the emphasis?

What are we saying? You see, in our hearts, in our hearts, the tendency is to treat this church thing like an a la carte menu.

[15 : 24] You know, when you go to the restaurant and you can kind of pick and choose from each course. Pick and choose as it suits. That's okay. Have we forgotten?

Have we forgotten? Paul is asking, have we forgotten that the gathering is Jesus' gathering? The people, the people are arranged in the body by Christ and for Him.

Is this not the house of God filled with the people of God? This is the new humanity of Christ where He has shed His own precious blood to save us and to bring us into this family, to bring us into this body, to be part of the people of God.

You see, the emphasis is on He has chosen and we, we would do well to respect His choice in the matter.

Will we turn away from those that Christ welcomes? This is what Paul was calling the church to embrace and calling the church to understand about the church.

[16:40] Their identity as both a united and yet a diverse body. But it was too easy, it seems, for the church in Corinth to subdivide. In Corinth, it seems to me almost as you read through it, that every time an issue arose that things began to splinter and fray and some would start to opt out.

They would start to stand away from being part of the church. Individuals, they didn't feel like they fitted in anymore. They were feeling maybe somewhat inferior for some of the others in what they were seeing and this disconnect was starting to happen.

We see that in the next verses, 15 and 16. If the foot should say, well, because I'm not a hand, well, I don't belong to the body.

It would not, for that reason, cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, well, because I'm not an eye, I do not belong to the body. It would not, for that reason, cease to be part of the body.

You see, often comparison is a thief, isn't it? Comparison is a thief of joy. Comparison with others causes this discontentment to set in.

[17:57] And I'm not, I'm not like that person. Do I fit? You know, I don't really like it in the church because I just, I don't seem to be like anyone else. It's easier then just to step back, to opt out, to insulate yourself, even ultimately to leave.

But the word of God is clear, isn't it? As God speaks through Paul as he's writing scripture, the second half of verse 15 and the second half of verse 16.

You see, if you didn't choose to be part of the body, it's not just the case of simply opting out. You can't just declare, well, I'm not part of the body, and then cease to be part of the body because, again, it's God who was chosen.

The word of God that says that such faulty thinking about the body is actually quite comical. You know, there is humour in the Bible.

Maybe we don't appreciate it. Verse 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?

[19:05] Imagine a body that was just an eye. An eye, the size of a body, and it was just an eye. And imagine you driving down to school tomorrow to drop the kids off, and there on the cycle lane is the eye.

Boing, boing, boing. Person-sized eye bouncing along. It would just be, it would just be ludicrous. How strange and bizarre to see a body that was just an eye. Or, as we walk out this morning, there's this leg.

It's about the size of a person. And it's just kind of slithering around the car park. You know, we'd be, well, okay, that's weird. Maybe it's part of a bigger body or something, you know, where did that come from?

Ludicrous, ludicrous imagery. And the same way, Paul is trying to get us to think here, a body doesn't look like that. A body doesn't behave like that.

You see, we shouldn't want to opt ourselves out when we get discouraged and disillusioned with church like somewhere in Corinth. And that is a very real part of church life.

[20:10] Life together does highlight difference. It does bring tension. It can bring division. This is very real, but it's our reaction to it and our understanding of what church is that's going to help.

We might find it hard at times and our hearts do begin to whisper, I don't belong. We might struggle when we look around in this church and we don't see many others that are kind of like us.

Maybe I'm the only teenager here, so why bother? Surely I can just follow Jesus on my own. Can't I have Christ without the church?

Isn't that a solution? Can't I just kind of opt out and do my own thing? No. No, Paul says, verse 18, but in fact, God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

Again, if you were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

[21:17] You get it? You get it? God has arranged it. It is Christ's body. It's not your body. Instead of lamenting who you are not, we need to switch our thinking around.

The diversity that God brings about in this church is achieved through you being here. Did you ever consider that? That you being here is what makes this church, Cargoline Baptist Church, a body. Your diversity, even if you feel like you're the only one, the only one that's like you, that is helping to make this a body. And that has amazing implications.

It means that our decisions about following Christ, being part of his church, should be transformed. And we should think very carefully that when we begin to opt ourselves out, when we begin to separate, and we can blame others, and yes, life is difficult, church life is difficult, but really we are taking away from the diversity that Christ has put in place.

That is no small issue. To maintain the unity of the spirit is what we are called to. It is no small issue to separate yourselves from what God has put together. You may feel weak and limited, but God has put you here today.

[22 : 38] You are the body of Christ. Now, this diversity that each believer brings to the body has another important consequence.

It not only affects how we think of ourselves and how we think of our place within the body, but it should also affect how we relate to the other parts of the body and how we think of others.

Because there was another aspect to this, and that was the issue of superiority. 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.

You see, while some were feeling maybe inferior and maybe discontented and were opting out because they feel like they didn't belong, there were the others in the church that were kind of opening the door and watching them leave and giving them a kick up the pants on the way out. That was their approach to diversity. The attitude in that case really is one of self-sufficiency of arrogance, you know, I am the all-seeing eye.

[23 : 45] I have no need of you, lowly hand. I am the all-knowing head. Be gone, little feet, be gone, out the door. And again, if it wasn't so tragic, we could just laugh at the image that Paul paints for us of this warring body that's trying to dismember parts of itself and thinking by getting rid of these bits that somehow a better body or a more real body.

But make no mistake, this behavior and this attitude was absolutely tragic. Absolutely tragic.

Look at who was at the receiving end of this treatment, 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. and the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment.

Do you see who was at the receiving end? Paul talks about the weaker members of the body. He says the less honored and the ones in need of special treatment protection.

[25 : 08] these were the ones who were being lined up at the door for special attention by the super gifted, the up the front, the loud and the large crowd. But the special attention and special treatment was this, consignment to the thanks but no thanks pile in the church.

Isn't that tragic? Doesn't that make your heart hurt? But Paul is clear here, isn't he? The parts that we see as weak, as lacking honor, and in need of special help, how are we to treat them?

Where to see them as indispensable? They are to be given special honor. They are to be given extra dignity. You see, our natural instincts, our sinful instincts, if we put it like that, is to divide and to shun, to just want more and more like me and less and less like the other.

And Paul says to bind up. Where we want to discard, Paul is saying to pull closer. The author is Kevin DeYoung and Ted Cluck, co-authored a book a number of years back called Why We Love the Church.

It's a great title. It's a good book. I read it recently. Ted Cluck, one of the co-authors, he writes in response to the recent trend in Christianity to try and divorce, and I kind of talked about that, to divorce Jesus from the church, to kind of distinguish between the two.

[26 : 48] And the argument and the criticism, and there's merit in this at times, that's made, is that churches are, by and large, inward-looking social clubs that are more concerned with performance and appearance than living out the Christian life.

And there is some merit to that criticism. It's a real criticism, and we need to appreciate that as churches. But the answer given by those in what is called the Emergent Church Movement is that in order to follow Jesus fully, we need to leave the church.

Do you see? Because you can have Christ without the church. And what does that look like? Well, they suggest all kinds of variants. One, you know, you might just meet up with Christians at Starbucks, or on the golf course, or out on the ocean.

And that's cool, where two or three are gathered. There I am in the midst of us, the midst of you. Jesus is there. We have a church. We hold each other accountable. We do kind of cool stuff

together.

We do kind of social action stuff and really care for the body. That way, you know, we're able to better serve each other organically and do some good in the world.

[28 : 05] Now, Kevin Young and Ted Cluck are regular, boring, everyday kind of church guys. And one of the things they do in the book is look at examples of what this regular and somewhat mundane and somewhat plodding, long haul church life looks like when it's been properly, when it's properly being the body of Christ.

And so they look at some other examples in response. And Cluck speaks of the church where his brother-in-law goes to, college church in Wheaton, Illinois. And when he went there, it's in a kind of a posh area, you know, he initially saw it as one, and this is a quote, big affluent churches in that they only care about catering to the whims of their affluent clientele.

So they're only kind of looking out, that was his perception of the area and what the church building looked like. But then he was convicted of his judgmental attitude when he started to speak with his brother-in-law. Because his brother-in-law told them about this disabilities ministry that they had in the church called STARS.

It's a ministry, and this is a larger church than us, so don't be put off. It's providing various help to hundreds of people in the Wheaton area. And it started back in the 1960s by a woman in the church named Jean.

And Jean, God bless her, she saw a child with a developmental disability and was saddened that there was nothing in the church that was helping to bridge to that child.

[29 : 29] And so Jean, she lobbied the elders, and she was eventually given a Sunday school classroom to start something with this one child. And today that church serves 80 families in and outside of the church body.

They provide disability-friendly church events, they provide respite care for parents, and they give financial assistance. Clark tells us that the ministry's key verses are these.

1 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 21 and 22. Think of what they're doing and listen to these words. 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. Isn't that beautiful, folks? Isn't that beautiful to think of the work of the body?

You know, when it talks a few verses later about the presentable parts and the unpresentable parts, I'm not a Greek expert, and I rarely go for this kind of thing, but the underlying Greek phrase or our idea is this, it's talking about those that are elegant in figure and graceful.

[30 : 44] Elegant in figure and graceful. So that's who the presentable are. And we can kind of picture that, can't we, being elegant in figure and graceful. Those that need no special treatment, that can carry themselves around without any problems.

So then we can begin to understand what the unpresentable are like. They're those that are inelegant. Those that are ungraceful. Those that naturally, and not in a bad way, we would just notice them and say, well, they're a little bit clumsy.

They're maybe even somewhat embarrassing in public life. We just notice they're struggling a bit. And do you know that in our church, there are people who at times feel like that?

In our church, that feel unpresentable? Those that are suffering from depression at times, from lifelong disability, developmental delays as they're growing up, neurological issues, physical limitations, social limitations.

There are people that come here that find all of this quite hard. Those people, Paul says, are worthy of our special treatment.

[31 : 56] They are a special and altogether worthy part of the body. Pull them closer, God says.

God is really telling us through his word this morning to stop.

Where we could decide to opt ourselves out or because we don't fit in and where we want to opt others out. God says stop. He says stop dividing. Stop judging one another. Stop the envy.

Stop the condescending, looking down on others. Be a body with all of its parts. And follow me as we read through the verses from the middle of 24 down to 26.

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 special concern for each other.

[32 : 58] If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. So how do we stop?

How do we address this problem of division in the body? Well, a surprising part of the answer is actually by embracing more diversity where diversity can bring tension that lead to division.

We need a kind of a God-given diversity that sows seeds that are going to lead to unity. We saw that last week in verses 4 to 7. There are different kinds of gifts but the same spirit.

There are different kinds of service but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the spirit is given for the common good.

You see spiritual gifts are given by God for the good of the church and Paul is going to tell us again that Christ brings both unity and diversity that they fit together and that when we think of the one we should think of the many.

[34 : 06] I thought you'd be ready to echo that back at this stage. Verses 27 to 30. Now you are the body of Christ one body and each one of you is a part of it the many and in the church God is appointed first of all apostles second prophets third teachers then workers of miracles also those having gifts of healing those able to help others and those gifts of administration and those speaking in different kinds of tongues are all apostles are all prophets are all teachers do all work miracles do all have gifts of healing do all speak in tongues do all interpret God has appointed diverse gifts in the church we are not all the same praise God now we spoke last week about these lists and how it can be a bit misleading at times that we read a list and we try to pick where we are in the list but we know that this list is different from the list in verses 8 to 11 so we're not meant to do that we're not meant to just pick one list and think that's everything rather we're to see that there's a diversity of gifts given to a diversity of members and they're not verse 28 they're not given in the

Christian but he talks about them being in the church and in the church God has appointed so again the key thing here is diversity of gifts to a diversity of people in the church they're primarily for the church to build up the church now just briefly one of the things that comes up here in this list is the ordering first of all apostles second prophets and third teachers and then he goes on to list a whole other set of gifts that aren't ordered and this order one two three can be taken in two ways the first is the order that they emerge in the early church so initially we have Christ appoints his apostles to bring the good news and to build the church on that apostolic teaching of the gospel and secondly we have those that are prophets that speak the word of God within individual church contexts and declare the word of God in an authoritative way and then there are teachers who continue to explain and apply the word of God within the body so we have apostles preachers and teachers now there is a sense of the order they come and also the relative importance to the life of the church and I think that's why those gifts are ordered

Paul writing in Ephesians 2 puts it like this we are God's people and members of God's household built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets with Jesus Christ as a chief corner stone so there's a variety of gifts given by God within the church and we thank him for sound apostolic teaching that continues today through the preaching of the word of God the Bible preachers and teachers continue to proclaim the same gospel as the apostles and we want to thank God for that as D.A.

Carson puts it we need to thank God for stomachs so we're talking about the body so let's take that as an illustration we need to thank God for stomachs and you're going what is he talking about well the stomach Carson explains well it takes in a lot of food doesn't it takes in the food and it digests the food and then it begins to distribute the food to the rest of the body and such is the role in the body of pastors and teachers they take in the word of God they digest it and then distribute it to the other members so anyone that's teaching or preaching in any way in this church you're not the head that's not the symbol you're to use for yourself you're to use the idea of the stomach and the diversity that God gives like this is one reason why organizations outside of the church aren't the church so Christian unions are fantastic I was president of the CU for a while in University College Cork I met my wife in UCC so Christian union has been very good to me you know I'm not knocking the Christian union the

Christian union is fantastic but it's not the church it's not the church as great as those times are together of fellowship and friendship and staying up late and doing crazy things and witnessing on campus it's really like a lot of little legs bouncing around the campus at UCC it's not a body it doesn't have all of the gifting and the diversity and the variety that a body demands or Bible

colleges are great but you're all really just a bunch of stomachs looking at each other so we go to NBC that's all it really is a bunch of stomachs only the church is the body of Christ how awful how awful it would be if the church was only made up of middle aged white married with kids half Irish half German computer programmers who study at NBC and like Munster Rugby now maybe you're all thinking that's the ideal but imagine what the church would be like yes there are moments I think this church thing would be a whole lot easier if everyone was a little bit okay at my worst moment a lot more like me wouldn't it be so much easier wouldn't it be great to all be me and be in agreement with me all the time

[39 : 25] I can just picture you all nodding now yes this is great isn't it brilliant stop stop the foolish thinking or we're back to trying to cut off our own arm or back to trying to discard our foot out the door it's a all too common you know in our home groups as we quietly cringe when certain people start talking because we know what they're going to say and we've heard it before and it's no different this time and we wish they would stop or find another tune or something like that well you stop you stop and you remember verse 27 now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it you stop you repent and then you smile you stop and you repent and you smile seriously stop stop that thought repent and thank God right there and then that that fellow body member is different thank

God that they're not just like you as faulty as they are and as faulty as you are we are both placed right here right now by God himself to make unity in Christ's body that comes through diversity let's pray our God and father in heaven we thank you for your church we thank you that it's not our idea it is your idea and in your goodness