

Where do we belong?

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[0 : 00] Our bodies are quite amazing. Take a very small part of our bodies, our toes. They are really important.

! I was reading about them this week. Really interesting. Our toes provide us with balance whilst we're walking. Apparently they stay on the ground 75% of the time, which is really important because they're exerting pressure to help us walk correctly.

If you go running at all, our toes help us to run faster apparently. Because the toes extend the length of our feet and that extra length helps us to run faster.

Which is a big encouragement to me. When I go running. Another small part of your body, another maybe seemingly insignificant part is our nails.

Maybe some of you do all sorts of fancy things with your nails and so in that way you think your nails are amazing. I don't. They are useful for all sorts of reasons.

[1 : 15] They're useful if we've got a scratch, an itch to scratch or removing a dog hair from our jumpers. Fingernails also provide good clues to a person's health.

For instance, a doctor can press down your nails and check your blood circulation. And also, by looking at our nails, doctors can find problems associated with skin problems, lung disease, anemia and other medical conditions.

Our nails are in the know. That's just two small parts of our bodies. Our nails and our toes. Our bodies have been amazingly designed.

And each part plays an important role to serve the other parts of the body. Here in 1 Corinthians, as we've already spoken about with the children, we find Paul speaking about a body.

And he uses the body as a way to picture what we are together here. The church. Last week, Phil helped us to think, why bother with church?

[2 : 35] This week, we're thinking, where do we belong in the church? Where do we belong? Where's my place?

Paul is addressing the Corinthians here. The Corinthian church. Because it's quite a mess, this church.

In this section of the letter, Paul is particularly speaking about the topic of spiritual gifts. Of which the church was a total mess on.

It seems that some in the church were saying, well, I've got the gift of prophecy. Or the gift of speaking in tongues.

Therefore, I am more important here than they are. And there's probably others in the church who are thinking, well, my gift doesn't seem to be as good as theirs.

[3 : 36] So, I don't belong here. I have no place. And this topic has caused disagreement and division in the church.

Which is, in fact, the very opposite of what a church should be. And we're looking at this passage particularly that Ruth read for us.

Chapter 12, verses 12 to 31. To ask ourselves, where do we belong? Well, Paul makes it clear right from the beginning that those who are saved in Christ, those who know Jesus as their saviour, he joins us together as one.

Verse 12. Just as a body, though it's one, has many parts, but all its parts form one body.

So it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one spirit so as to form one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free.

[4 : 45] And we were all given the one spirit to drink. And so the body is not made up of one part, but of many. Paul makes clear that together, if we've come to know Jesus as our saviour, we are united together as one.

This one body of Christ. And therefore, if that's us, we do belong. We do have a place, as we'll see more clearly.

See, the Lord Jesus has united together people from different nations, Jewish people and those who are not Jewish, Gentile people, together in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So it doesn't matter whether we're slave or free, working or unemployed this morning, single or married, female or male, in Christ we join together as one.

We all belong to the body. Verse 14 says this. The body is not made up of one part, but of many.

[5 : 59] Our bodies have many different parts. Nails, toes, brains, hearts, eyes, mouths, ears, many different parts.

And here this morning, I am looking out on many different people from different walks of life, different ages of people. And that's a good thing.

Diversity within the body. Lots of different types of people, different characters is a good thing. We are each unique and we offer something unique to this church, to the body of Christ.

Being a Christian doesn't mean we need to be clones of each other. Diversity is a good and important thing. We are many different parts joining as one.

Got three points for us this morning. The first is this. Each part is important. Each part is important. Paul shows us this in a really vivid way.

[7 : 15] Imagine your foot getting up to say this in verse 15. Because I'm not a hand, I do not belong to the body. Or imagine if your ear stands up to say this in verse 16.

Because I'm not an eye, I do not belong to the body. What a ridiculous thing to say. We need our feet and our bodies to walk.

We need our ears to hear. Each part is important. If you are visiting with us here this morning, I really hope you feel welcome and valued here.

And if you don't, I'm sorry. Because if you are a Christian joining us this morning, you are important. You are part of the body. Perhaps, though, you don't feel like you belong here.

Because actually you are not a Christian. And there is a sense in which that is a good thing. You are really welcome to be part of things that we do here.

[8 : 30] But you are never really going to belong to the body that is Calvary Church until you know the Lord Jesus as your saviour. And when you do, you get to belong as part of his people.

It's a great thing. Each part of the body is important. Verse 17 says this.

If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? And if the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? This is your body.

It's not just an eye. We need each part. Otherwise, how could we hear? How could we touch? How could we walk? How could we smell? How could we think? Each part is important.

Because imagine if your body was just that. Just an eyeball. It would be gross, wouldn't it? Just an eyeball rolling around. It would be really funny.

[9 : 36] And we wouldn't be able to hear each other. We might be able to see each other, but we couldn't hear each other. We couldn't shake hands as we come in. It would be ridiculous, wouldn't it? So hopefully we can agree.

It's good that each part is different. Many different parts joining as one. And so I think that means a couple of things for church life.

I think that means, first of all, we don't need to compare ourselves with other people. Don't compare yourselves with other people. Don't say, look, I am here at the prayer meeting this evening and they are not, so I am better.

Or don't say, I've made it to communion this week and they have not and so I am better. We don't need to compare ourselves with other people.

Actually say, I've made it to communion. I actually say, I've made it to communion. How I need to be here to be reminded of the gospel. And isn't it great I can share it with those who have come.

[10 : 45] Or I've made it to the prayer meeting and what a blessing it is to pray with these brothers and sisters in Christ here this evening. And for those who haven't made it, instead of comparing ourselves, why not say why?

Why have they not been able to come? Maybe it's impossible or extremely difficult for them to get there. They've got children to put to bed. They're working full time way into the evenings.

And maybe if someone just doesn't want to be there, we don't want to force people. But maybe we could say to someone, Pride meeting really encouraged me on Wednesday.

I think you'd be blessed by it too. Rather than thinking I'm better than them. Don't compare. Don't compare ourselves with others.

The amount of times I have looked at Angela playing the piano or Phil playing the guitar. And thought how good would it be if I could play the guitar like Phil.

[11:54] Or play the piano like Angela. And be able to lead us in singing sometimes. But that's not good. That's not something God's gifted me to do. Which I'm sure you're relieved about.

But he's given that wonderful gift to Phil and Angela and others. Who lead us in our music. Don't compare ourselves.

Be thankful that God has given them that gift. Or maybe you come to a church lunch. And you go and get your plate filled up with food.

And Maria puts curry on your plate. And you think, if only I could make a curry like Maria. But that's not how God's gifted you may be. You are the you that God has created you to be.

Therefore you belong. You are part of things. So don't compare. Instead, be encouraged by what God has done.

[12:51] Verse 18. 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 many. Sorry, many parts but one body. See, if we were all Angela playing the piano.

Or Phil playing the guitar. Then where would the curry be at the church lunch? Or if we were all sitting on the streaming or sound desk. As Eben and Aaron are this morning.

Then the church toilets might be a mess. Or if we were all Rachel teaching the Sunday club. As she is this morning. Then where would the tea and coffee be?

Or if we were all drawing up rotors. Then where would the encouragers be? God has placed each part together in his wisdom.

[13:54] To do what he has gifted them for. And each part of the body is important. I think it also means something else.

Maybe comparing yourselves with others isn't a problem you feel like you have. But maybe pride is. I think this passage helps us to see that we don't need to be proud.

To the point where we are like an eye saying to the hand, I don't need you. 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. Maybe you feel like you make tea and coffee better than anybody else in the church. And maybe you think that you don't need anybody else on the rotor for tea and coffee.

Because you should be on it every week. Even on the rotor for Sundays you're not here. And everybody should be at church speaking to each other about how great you are about making tea and coffee.

[15:06] We shouldn't be proud. Maybe a silly example. More seriously, and this is certainly a danger for myself and anybody who preaches.

Maybe you say, well I preach the Bible. So I don't need to listen to anybody else. How untrue that is. How I need to sit under the preaching of God's words.

Or maybe you think I pray better than anybody else does in a prayer meeting. So you might as well not bother turning up to a prayer meeting. Because I'm the person who should be praying.

Or you think I come to more church meetings than anybody else does. So I am better than the rest of the church. No, Paul says, don't be proud.

Don't say, I don't need you. We need one another. We need each other. In fact, Paul says this, verse 22.

[16:16] Maybe this morning you feel your weakness.

Maybe it's hard just to even get along to church on a Sunday morning. Maybe you feel like you really struggle to know where you belong in this church.

Maybe you wonder if anybody sees any value in you at all. We need you here.

Verse 22 again. On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. We need you.

And even if nobody does see any value in you, God has seen value in you.

[17:24] So much so that he has sent his son to die for you. A song that I sometimes listen to goes along the lines of, my worth is not in what I owe, not in skill or bone, but it's in Christ who's died for me at the cross of Calvary.

The weaker parts are indispensable. We cannot have church without you. Christ has died for you. He loves you.

You are valuable in his sight. We are richer with you.

Maybe on a Sunday, it's good to think about those who seem to be more on their own, the tea and coffee time.

Those who others just don't seem to want to talk to for some reason. Good to go and say, hello, how are you? How are you doing? How's your week been? How can I pray for you?

[18:36] Maybe we even need to think about those who are not here, who are not able to join us because something is preventing them from coming and they feel so weak and so fragile.

Maybe think about sending them a message. How are you? How can I pray for you? Is there anything you need this week? Each part of the body is important.

Let's value and love one another. Moving on more briefly to the second point. Each part is to be honest.

For a long time, I was really obsessed with my hair. I thought it was the best part of my body.

And so I would get expensive haircuts. I would spend literally minutes in front of the mirror instead of the maybe seconds that I do nowadays. I would spend money on hair, styling products, giving greater honor to a part of my body that I could really survive without, actually.

[19:52] And there's a danger that maybe we do that in church, that kind of thing in church life.

Verse 23, the parts that we think are less honorable, we treat with special honor and the parts that are unrepresentable, we treat with special modesty.

It's very easy to think that those who are here at the front, the leaders of the service, the preachers, the musicians, it's very easy to elevate them to a higher level than they should really be.

because they are the parts that are seen. Whilst those who are quietly serving us by drawing up rotas, praying in their homes, making tea and coffee, they get very little attention and little thanks and little honor because those are the parts which are largely unseen in church life.

Whilst we do see the preacher, we do see the leader of the service, we do see the musician at the front. Paul is saying, honor one another.

Those parts that you see and those parts that you don't see. Just because you don't see the liver in your body, it doesn't mean it's not important.

[21:31] So maybe today, but not just today, think, who's sat at the sound desk for us that we can thank for serving us? Who has made you a cup of tea or coffee and you can thank them for doing that for us?

Thank Martin, who draws up rotas for us every few months. Thank those who have served by teaching the children the Bible.

We don't see much of that going on, if any of it going on. But thank them, honor them. It would be easy for us to do that today after hearing a sermon about it, but what about in a week's time?

Or what about in a month's time? What about in a year's time? Are we going to keep doing that?

Honor one another. If we honor each part, the people we see and notice and the people we very often do not, surely that honors God as well, who's given them that gift to serve in the church.

And honor so that we are together a united body. Verse 25, so there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for one another.

[23:10] In a couple of weeks, Phil will help us to think about when we're not united, when there's division, when things get a bit ugly. But this week, let's think about a united church family, which I think, on the whole, we are.

Thanks be to God. And if we are united together, we should see each part as belonging to the other.

And if that's so, then we should have equal concern for the other. So Paul goes on and says this in verse 26, if one part suffers, every part suffers with it.

If one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. If you've stubbed your toe, your whole body knows about it.

And so the same in church life. If someone is suffering in some way, we suffer together with them.

So if someone is grieving the death of someone, we grieve together.

[24:24] If someone is sick and struggling, we struggle together, we pray together, we show care and concern for these people together. That's what we should be doing.

Likewise, if someone is rejoicing, we rejoice with them. We've had a couple of births of babies in the last year.

We rejoice together with them and their families. If someone has passed a driving test, we rejoice together.

And someone has. Well done, Richard. If someone's passed an exam, we rejoice together.

Or if someone's got a new job, we rejoice together. And we do that because together, as many parts, we form the one body of Christ.

[25 : 25] We unite it together as one, though we are many. So each part is to be honoured. And thirdly and finally, each part is a gift to use.

Each part has a gift to use. Verse 27, we're reminded again by Paul, now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it.

And then verse 28, and God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, and third teachers. Christ is at the head.

The church is built on the foundation of the prophets and the apostles' teaching. We're benefiting from the apostles' teaching this morning. Paul is an apostle.

We're going to look at the book of Acts from the middle of May and see the beginnings of Jesus' church, see the apostles' teaching, laying the foundation for local churches like us.

[26 : 33] You've got prophets and then teachers, people who teach the Bible to the body. In order to build the body up in the word of God. And then there's other gifts and this is not an exhaustive list.

There's many other gifts that God gives to his church. But these are a few that the Corinthians particularly needed to be reminded of. He says, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues.

Different gifts. There is no suggestion, particularly as we remember the context, the verses that we've looked at before, that there is no suggestion that all of us should be having the same gift. If all of us were an I, it wouldn't be good. If all of us were pastors, it wouldn't be good. If all of us were administrators, it wouldn't be good.

Paul mentions there, gifts of helping. Helping seems to be practical ways of helping. And this morning, there are people helping us practically.

[27 : 53] Tea and coffee. Maybe you've given someone a lift to church. Practical ways of helping. In the version of the Bible that I've got, it's the new NIV.

After helping, it says of guidance. But I think the church Bibles, the old NIVs, is much better on that. It says, those able to help others and those with gifts of administration.

And the word that Paul uses there is a word you could use for the helmsman of a ship, someone who's steering the ship. And so if you're involved in administration, be encouraged this morning that you're helping to steer the ship that is Calvary Church.

And if you want to apply for the church administrator job that we're advertising, let us know because you can help steer the ship even more. It could be your whole job.

God gives different gifts to his church that we're to use within the body. Now you can join in with this and answer me from verse 29.

[29 : 05] Are all apostles? No. Are all prophets? No. Are all teachers? Do you all work miracles?

No. Do you all have gifts of healing? Do you all speak in tongues? No. Do you all interpret? No. I think that's very straightforward. And is any more of them important than the other world? Well, no. spiritual gifts are a blessing spiritual gifts are a wonderful blessing to the body.

And yet, yet, Paul says, at the end of verse 31, and yet, I will show you the most excellent way. and then he goes into his passage, which is all about love. Maybe it's a passage we should go away and read this afternoon.

[30 : 17] Love one another. Don't use your gift. Don't use what God has given you to boast. Don't say, well, I've made you that cup of coffee, so you're going to be thankful for it.

Don't say, I've drawn up that rotor, so you better be thankful. No, use your gift to serve one another humbly in love. Genuinely get involved in each other's lives.

Genuinely care. Not just for a few parts of the body, but for all. Can I challenge you this morning? I've already challenged us to thank people who've been involved in helping to make our service happen. People that we don't see at the front. But can I challenge you with something else?

Will you speak to someone this morning that is here that you don't know or someone that you don't normally speak to? Because you need them and they need you.

[31 : 23] the church is a body. The church is a body. Each part of the body is important. No one is more or less important in this church than anybody else.

We must honour each part of the body. We rejoice with those who are rejoicing. We suffer with those who are suffering. And we use our gifts in love for one another.

Let's pray. Let's pray.