

1 Corinthians 12:12–26

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[0 : 00] Our scripture reading today comes from 1 Corinthians 12, verse 12 through 26. If you are able, I ask that you please stand for the reading of God's word.

! Starting in verse 12. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one spirit we were all baptized into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and all were made to drink of one spirit. For the body does not consist of one member, but of many. If the foot should say, because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body, that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body, that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them as He chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you, nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable, we bestow the greater honor. And our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is honored, all rejoice together. This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Praise God, we're thankful for your presence here today. We welcome you glad that you are here. As we continue this morning, our series, the Spirit-filled Church.

It's one of my grandson's favorite songs. In fact, it's second on the list right after his top hit, the wheels on the bus go round and round.

[3 : 07] It's a song called Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes. Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes.

Yeah, you know the rest of it. Eyes and ears and mouth and nose. Head, shoulders, knees and toes. It's an action song whose goal is to introduce children to and help them to identify some of the amazing parts of the miracle called the human body. The song doesn't seek to rank these random parts in any particular order of importance. No, it just seeks to help children in a fun, musical way to recognize and appreciate various parts that make up the body.

Truly, at that age, my grandson can't even begin to grasp the vast magnificence of the human body and its interconnected parts. He can't begin to grasp that the human body is made up of over 206 bones, 600 muscles, more than 60,000 miles of blood vessels. He can't grasp the fact that the heart beats around 100,000 times a day, pumping roughly 2,000 gallons of blood through your system. Or that the brain can send signals at speeds of 250 miles an hour, coordinating every movement, every breath, every thought.

Yet, if just one small part of the body malfunctions, say just one nerve misfires, or one blood vessel clogs, the whole body feels it. You don't need to break your leg to be out of commission.

[5 : 40] Sometimes, all it takes is a stubbed toe, a toothache, a paper cut in the wrong place. You could be the strongest man in the world, but get fluid in your inner ear and you'll lose your balance and you'll go down.

Our bodies are a wonderful, miraculous combination of complexity, interdependence, and unity. Every part matters. Every part matters. Every cell, every joint, every organ has a purpose. We are indeed, as Psalm says, fearfully and wonderfully made.

But this is not just a medical truth. It's also a spiritual one. This is not just true for the human body. It's true for the body of Christ.

That's exactly what Paul is getting at in our text here today. When you study the New Testament, you'll find that there are several figures of speech that are used to describe what the church is like. [7 : 03] For instance, sometimes we're told the church is like a family, a household of faith. Sometimes it's described as a flock with sheep. Other times it's described as an army or a building and even a glorious bride.

But here, in our text today, Paul uses one of the most familiar illustrations in the Bible of what the church is intended to be like.

He uses something we all understand, our own bodies. And he uses it to teach us something powerful about how the church is supposed to function.

When the Lord Jesus called us to himself and redeemed us by faith, he didn't save us as a big bunch of individual free agents in which it's every man for himself.

He purposefully saved us in order to join us together into a single body. That means we need each other. That means we belong to one another.

[8 : 18] We function better together. Yeah, that's it. Better together. That's the thought I'd like to leave with you this morning.

The spirit-filled church is a unified church with various beautiful parts that are designed by God to work better together.

As you've been hearing over the past couple of weeks of our series, the Apostle Paul has been writing to the Corinthian Christians about how they were to use spiritual gifts gifts that the Lord Jesus has given his church.

Unfortunately, the church wasn't doing that great a job. As there were those who were misusing their gifts, exalting themselves, demeaning others, and expressing themselves in self-serving ways.

So last week, Paul had to remind them that I don't know what you all are carrying on about.

Because in the end, all the gifts, all the ministries, the empowering of the community to serve others, all belongs to God.

[9 : 43] He's the source. And he gives them out however he sees fit. That leads us to this morning where we're going to have to have a member meeting.

You'll catch that later. As Paul describes how we, with all those gifts, are to function within the body. As he so beautifully compares the church of the Lord Jesus to a human body, we're going to see just three things I'd like to lift briefly and bring our attention to.

First is the unity of the members, the diversity of the members, and the dependency of the members.

There are different parts of our body, but these different parts are all brought together to form only one unified body.

You have only one body. You may not like the body you live in, but it's the only one you have.

[10 : 54] You can make changes to your body, as people spend millions of dollars a year trying to do, but you still can't change bodies.

Some of us may even have particular parts of our body that we wish were less pronounced than other parts of our body.

But they are all united into one body nonetheless. Paul says it this way in verse 12, For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ.

Each individual believer in the church family is a unique person, with unique gifts and a unique personality, unique backgrounds.

It's true that we have different abilities and different roles to play. But with all our differences, as unique individuals in the Father's household, we are nevertheless formed together by him into one body.

[12 : 12] Just as the unique individual parts of our body are formed together into only one physical body. When you meet me, you don't say, Hey, hello, all you individual distinct body parts all collected together.

How are you all doing today? No, you greet me as a whole person. And that's what we are together in Christ.

So how does that happen, you ask? Paul doesn't simply say we're united because of some goosebump feeling.

We're not united because we all dress alike. We all like the same food. We all like the same music. We all have Christian bumper stickers like Jesus take the wheel on our cars.

No, we are one because something real has happened when the triune God has done for us something fundamental that unites us in one real spiritual union.

[13 : 32] In verse 13, Paul wrote, For in one spirit, we were all baptized into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and all were made to drink of one spirit.

This speaks of a work of the Holy Spirit, something called baptism. This isn't talking about the ordinance of baptism that we perform in water.

Rather, it's something that only the Holy Spirit does. It's something that baptism in water is actually meant to symbolize. When we believe on the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit baptized us into Jesus Christ once for all time as a spiritual act so that we became permanently identified with the Lord Jesus in every way.

That's why the body-like unity of Christians is not really a goal to achieve. It's a fact to be recognized.

There is a common denominator among all of us who came to know Jesus, and it will be amongst you who desire to come to know Jesus.

[14 : 55] And that is that we were fully aware of our desperate need for Jesus. We confessed our need for him, for his saving grace, for his limitless mercy, and his ability to do in us what we could not do for ourselves.

God then took each of us in our desperation. He claimed us as his very own, and he placed us within the body of Christ. He rescued us and put us into vital union with him and made us a member of his body.

All of us, forever, better, together. Now further in verse 13, I love this, Paul says we are all baptized by one spirit to form one body, one church.

Jew and Gentile, those were the two biggest racial divisions of the day. Slave and free, those were the two biggest social and economic divisions of the day.

But they all come together as one body in Christ. One church. That, brothers and sisters, is unity.

[16 : 11] All of us brought together by the Holy Spirit. Regardless of our social status, regardless of our ethnicity, regardless of our education, cultural background, regardless of which of the 77 neighborhoods of Chicago you live in, when we say yes to Jesus, when we put our trust in Jesus, we're all baptized by the one spirit, given the same spirit to drink, supernaturally saved by God, and brought into God's family.

Let me also say this pastorally. This is particularly pertinent and important to us here at Christ Church Chicago. Because we had the audacity to put this in a unique way right into our vision statement.

to build up a multi-ethnic and cross-cultural church, many members, that proclaims Jesus Christ, one body, and displays the gospel everywhere.

This passage serves as both affirmation to us and a caution to us that we don't allow these to become merely words on a page, but we have the fortitude to do what is necessary to walk it out better together.

Now we understand that we are one unified body and that the body is made up of many members. In verses 14 through 20, the emphasis shifts and Paul discusses the diversity of those members.

[17 : 59] Now, I know the word diversity brings up a lot of different thoughts and opinions, so let me try to define it biblically so we don't get off track.

Biblical diversity is the God-designed variety among people across various cultures, ethnicities, backgrounds, giftings that when unified in Christ reflects his glory and fulfills his mission.

So now in verse 14, Paul emphasizes this diversity, this variety by saying, for the body is not one member but many.

Now, to be clear, he's not talking about the diversity of doctrine. He's not talking about the diversity of beliefs. He's not talking about the diversity of interpretations of the gospel.

There can be no variety there. He's talking about differences of the members who make up the body of Jesus Christ. He points out that we are different from one another.

[19 : 15] Just as the dynamic of diversity or variety in the physical body means there is a distinction of individual members required in order to function so it is with the body of Christ.

These next few verses, Paul uses a couple of almost humorous illustrations to get his point across about diversity in the body.

Let's use for a moment our spiritual imagination and step inside the mind of Mr.

Foot. Mr. Foot has an attitude. He has an attitude because he's not the hand.

I'm tired of being a foot. The hand seems to get all the action. When we meet somebody for the first time he's the first one to jump out there.

[20 : 25] He gets all the rings and the jewelry looking so cute. I'm down here where nobody can see me covered by a sock that sometimes doesn't smell so great.

I am out of this body. Before he leaves he runs in to Mr.

Ear and Mr. Ear has a similar attitude because he's not the eye. Just look at that eye going around seeing everything.

Everybody coming up to him saying oh what beautiful eyes you have. Nobody comes and says what beautiful ears you have. All they do is tell jokes about me and how big I am.

Just the other day I heard somebody say I ought to be a detective because I can hear all the clues of miles away. I'm tired of it. Tired of the disrespect and I'm leaving this body.

[21 : 43] Paul's point is that even though the foot and the ear may be disgruntled about not being some other part of the body it doesn't change the fact that there is much a part that they are as important a part of the body as every other member only different.

When God saved you and made you a member of his body he made you an original not a duplicate. Thank God for diversity of the members of the body.

We are all different. Aren't you glad that every member of the body is not Joe Pace? Yeah, well, I got news.

I'm glad that every member is not you either. church hears the encouragement. Accept what God has called you to be to the glory of God.

If you're an eye, be the best eye for Jesus you can be. If you're an ear, be the best ear for Jesus you can be. If you're a foot, be the best member of the body of Jesus Christ as a foot you can possibly be.

[23 : 01] Yes, you are all different but you are a necessary vital essential part of the body. In the Christian church our very diversity the diversity of gifts that God bestowed upon his people the differences in the people that make up the body of Christ in that diversity our unity is actually served.

Not only is this diversity in the body of Jesus Christ acceptable it is essential. Verse 17 says if the whole body were an eye where it would be the sense of hearing if the whole body were an ear where would be the sense of smell the body cannot work properly if all our ears or if all our eyes the body must have different parts and gifts or it would not work together effectively as a body the body truly functions better together God unites us into one body we share a unity but he still somehow preserves the variety and he arranges and distributes this diversity in a wise and purposeful way verse 18 says but as it is

God arranged the members in the body each one of them as he chose I love the King James version here it says as it hath pleased him why is the foot a foot why is a hand a hand because it pleased the designer to make it so so the hand can take no pride in being a hand the foot can take no shame in being a foot each serves the pleasure of the designer and as such in the design we see the wisdom of the designer everybody has something but nobody has everything let's rejoice in the variety that God has built into his church and let's learn to appreciate the different ways that our various gifts not only complement each other but as we'll now see are also dependent on each other the human body is bound together in such a way that the various parts of the body each need each other to do their work

Paul says in verses 21 through 24 the eye cannot say to the hand I have no need of you nor again the hand to the feet I have no need of you on the contrary the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow greater honor and our unpresentable parts are treated with the greater modesty which are more presentable parts do not require let me see if I can describe it this way the eye is a marvelous part of the body it's truly wonderful and intricate however there's only so much the eyes can do by

themselves the eyes can see the apple over there on the table but it takes the feet to get the eyes over to the apple then it requires the hands to pick up that apple and get it to the mouth that has to chew the apple and eat the apple and then deliver that food through something called the esophagus that gets down to the stomach that has to digest the apple thereby making fuel to nourish the entire body the same is true for the body of Christ we all have a part to play we are dependent on each other to survive the body truly functions better together look in our physical bodies there are parts that we never see or that we hardly ever think of we may compliment someone's hair but we generally don't tell them what great looking white blood cells they have the parts we don't see we never clean them or dress them or put jewelry on them because they're deep inside of us they're delicate frail and they would be badly damaged if handled or exposed Paul says but if they weren't there doing their silent and unnoticed jobs we would all perish quickly Dave let me render a brief organ recital if I may you never see the heart yet it's pumping thousands of gallons of blood through your body every day you never see the lungs yet they keep you breathing you never see the kidneys that filter your blood yet they do their job in obscurity you don't see the liver that's responsible for energy production and metabolism among other things but it's still working behind the scenes all the parts of the body even those that may not seem too important to you depend on each other to make the body work this is for some of you who may say pastor [29 : 24] Joe I'm I'm not a great speaker I don't have this great extroverted personality that draws people in I don't sing I don't play an instrument so what you're still an essential member of the body of Christ there are some members of the church family that seem up front and more recognizable in what they do and there are others in the church family who do things that are unseen and unrecognized but without whom none of the up front ministries could ever happen as Paul puts it in verse 22 the parts of the body that seem to be weaker like those organs I mentioned are in fact indispensable now I have to I have to pull aside and give you this warning sometimes there are parts of the body that only live to serve themselves this part of the body doesn't contribute anything to the rest of the body and everything it gets it uses to feed and grow itself we call this cancer and it will destroy a body if allowed to metastasize remember last week from verse seven

Paul says all of this that we have is for the common good of the body you're not here to serve yourself this isn't lone ranger christianity lord I just dated myself there with lone ranger reference lord all of our varied parts are here to serve the body we are dependent on one another for survival that also means we must care for one another verse 25 as if our lives depend on it and because we are dependent on one another for survival that also means when we feel it when one aspect of the body is dealing with something and going through something all the members of the body feel it verse 26 says if one member suffers all suffer together if one member is honored all rejoice together anybody in here ever stuffed their toe before your entire body suffers and reacts your your hand grabs the toe that just got hurt your face twists up in all sorts of formations in agony your eyes fill with tears and your mouth even sympathizes by letting out a yell or maybe something else that's how it should be in the body of

Christ when one hurts we all hurt when one is in pain we're all in pain when one cries we all cry likewise when one rejoices we all rejoice when one celebrates what God has done we all celebrate what God has done on a basketball team regardless of who makes the basket the points apply to the whole team this is the body of Christ better together I'm closing Dave I a few months ago I had to have a procedure done Lord help me because of a blocked artery going to my heart the doctor said okay Mr.

Pace we're going to do something called an angioplasty where we'll go through your wrist to get to the blockage in the artery near your heart wait so you're going to go through my wrist to get to my heart yeah Lord help they were going to use a seemingly unrelated unimportant part of my body to gain access to and deliver critical life-saving care to another part of my body my daddy would say right here I wish I had a praying church it is a part of my body most commonly associated with my hand

Lord Jesus but that day my heart was depending on my wrist for survival that day my wrist became indispensable that day my wrist and my heart obviously worked better together Lord Jesus help somebody here feels like they're just a wrist and not nearly as important as a heart but don't fret because in the body of Christ you are indispensable and one day you too may be called on to deliver life-saving critical care to another part of the body Lord help Jesus saints it's not about being a talented church or a gifted church or a connected church or a deep church or a hip church or a

cool church it's about being a united church a spirit filled united church that type of church realizes that

[36 : 11] God hand picked us shaped us saved us and placed us in this body on purpose for a purpose this isn't just a place you go this is a family you're a part of a body you belong to and a mission you're called to and when we're together we're better because all of us are better together let's pray father thank you for in your infinite wisdom making us all different yet unifying us through the holy spirit as one we are grateful to be one in you help us to embrace the variety that you have placed in the body help us to realize that we are strengthened by our diversity not weakened help us to realize that we need one another to survive and the more we embrace each other and our differences the better the stronger the wiser we will be father we thank you and we praise you in your son's name amen let's stand together with our response all you