

One Body; Many Members

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[0 : 00] Well, I think Jono pretty much summarized the sermon for us tonight with his NFL illustration.

So I'll just wrap it up, I think. It was a waste of my afternoon. I'm kidding. That was a good illustration, though, man. I might give you a call next time I'm preaching.

Well, guys, tonight I want to talk to you about the church. And I'm going to bust a few myths for you tonight about the church and about your involvement in the church.

We're going to bust the kind of myths that tell us that we need to be a certain kind of person to be effective in ministry, that we need to have certain kinds of gifts, and that if we don't have those gifts, then we're going to be useless and God can't use us in the ministry of this church.

So I'd like to pray for us, and then we'll get right to work on this passage. Oh, Lord Jesus, you know that I have a burden tonight, particularly for those people in this congregation who feel useless in the ministry of this church, feel as if their gifts are worth nothing, feel as if their personality precludes them from being involved in ministry.

[1 : 34] I have a burden for these people, and I know that you do too. So would you come now and speak powerfully to them through your word here before us?

Lord, I pray that you'd make those who are timid, as bold as a lion, that you would take those who are arrogant and make them humble.

Lord, speak to us, change us, make us a better community, more in line with what your spirit would have us do and have us act. Lord, I pray this for your sake.

I pray that this church would continue to and evermore glorify you in the ministry here in this place. I pray it all for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Let's get right to work on this passage, starting at verse 12 and 13. Paul says, 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.

[2 : 43] For in one spirit we are all baptized into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and we are all made to drink of one spirit. The first thing we need to get down pat tonight about the church, the first thing we need to acknowledge about the church is that we are it.

We are the church. We are the gathered people of God. That is the church. Somehow we've got this weird notion today that the church is a building, or a place, or an event, or a dating agency, maybe.

We need to realize that the church is us. If you're a believer in Jesus, if you've been saved by God, if you've been given the Holy Spirit, you are the church.

We are the church. And Paul is speaking in these words to a particular church in Corinth. Corinth. And the deal in Corinth is that there's many different kinds of people that have gathered together, have become Christians, and they're meeting together as the church, as the gathered people of God.

And there's people from different backgrounds, and different former religions, and different socioeconomic statuses, and all these different people have come together to form the church in Corinth.

[4 : 00] And there's been a few issues resulting because of that, and there's a bit of tension. Sometimes the rich are taking advantage of the poor. Sometimes the differences they have are causing division.

And so Paul goes to his favorite metaphor to sort them out. He goes to this metaphor that he uses about the body, the church being the body.

And it's a great metaphor if you think about it. He's saying, yes, there is diversity. There is diversity in the church. There's many different people of different backgrounds.

There's many different personalities and persuasions and gift mixes. But they're all united as one body in Christ. And so you think about it.

This body is my body. Every part of it belongs to me. It's one body, but there are different parts of my body. I have fingers and eyes and toes and a head.

[4 : 57] And these different parts have different functions. But they're all part of the one body. Paul loves this metaphor, and I can see why, because it's a great metaphor for the church.

The question is, how do you get these different people from different backgrounds with different gifts to come together as one body and have it work together for the glory of God?

And the answer is, it's done by the Spirit of God. See, we here are the same, aren't we? We all come from different backgrounds. We have different nationalities and cultures, different socioeconomic status within this group.

We have different age groups. One of the great things about this church is different age groups come together to all the services. It's a great thing. And the way God works this for His glory, the way He gets us to work together in ministry is through Spirit.

You can say it in verse 13. For in one Spirit we're all baptized, and so on, and we're all made to drink of the one Spirit. So this happened to me when I was 19 years old.

[6 : 04] I became a Christian. God gave me His Spirit, and suddenly I had new desires in my heart. I had a desire to read the Bible and to pray to God and to meet with His people and to worship Him.

When we become Christians, God gives us His Spirit which dwells within us. And it's His Spirit that works within us to will what is good and pleasing to God.

So when we come together, if you're a Christian, the way I relate to you, the reason that I'm related to you is because we both have the Spirit of God. That's an encouraging thing.

It means that the cool thing is that we of different backgrounds, all of us who have come from different backgrounds, different former religions, perhaps different cultures, can come together and be on the same mission.

We can be about what the Spirit is about, about glorifying God in this place and about winning converts for Christ and telling people the gospel and growing as Christians together, being sanctified by God slowly as we go.

[7 : 11] It's a great thing about being one body. And Paul kind of uses this as the foundation to launch his argument to the Corinthians. This is going to be the main thrust of what I want to say because I have a particular purpose tonight, to encourage those of you to use your gifts who are doubting the fact that God has given you gifts to use in this place.

So use that as the foundation. Keep that in your mind. We are the body of Christ. If you've ever been to a prayer book service, we say it, don't we, together. We are the body of Christ.

His Spirit is within us. Keep that in mind. Apparently there was people in Corinth who were doubting their ability to be involved in ministry, to be involved in the life of the body.

Perhaps there were also people, I'm sure there were people who were looking down on these people, perhaps telling them that they didn't have the right gifts to be involved in ministry. Maybe you've been told this before. Maybe you've felt this when you've seen a great ministry person doing their thing and you've been envious of their gifts and you've thought to yourself, well, I don't have those gifts so maybe I'm not cut out for ministry.

Have you ever thought that? Not a rhetorical question. One person, give me a nod. Thanks, mate. That wasn't set up.

[8 : 38] I felt like that. Man, I felt like that all the time. I see people with great gifts in ministry. I look at my own set of gifts and see them through my own poor lenses, not through God's eyes, and I doubt myself in ministry.

Well, Paul says three things throughout this passage that should encourage people like you and me to use our gifts. He encourages us that we're not useless, that our gifts have been given to us by God for his purpose.

He does it in three ways. The first way is he simply tells us that that attitude is not true. That opinion that we have, that our gifts are useless, that we're not useful in ministry, it's not true.

That's pretty much what he says. He just says, no, you're wrong. I don't know about you, but in my reading of the scriptures, I don't see Paul as getting too many jobs today as a Christian counselor or

a pastoral care worker.

Do you pick up on this when you read him? He's pretty blunt. And that's what he says here, pretty much, you're wrong. Your opinion about yourself is wrong. He said in verse 14 to 16, he says, Indeed, the body does not consist of one member, but of many.

[9 : 56] If the foot were to say, because I'm not a hand, I do not belong to the body, that would not make it any less part of the body. And if the ear were to say, because I'm not an eye, I do not belong to the body, that would not make it any less a part of the body.

It gets straight to the point. I love it. I wish everyone was like this. It just says, because you think that you're not part of the body, because you, a hand, think that you're not as fit for ministry as someone who's an eye, just because you think that that precludes you from ministry, just because you think that that means you're not part of the body, that doesn't make it true.

If you're a Christian, if you have the spirit of God within you, you are a member of the body. There's nothing you can do about it. You are a member of the church. You do have a place and a part to play.

So Paul says, that opinion is not valid. He doesn't ask you, you know, how you feel about that. He doesn't ask you what your family experience was like growing up.

He doesn't ask you if you were spanked as a child. He just says, that is wrong. You're part of the church. So remember that. It's a small point, but it's something to hang on to.

[11 : 07] Every time you feel useless or like you don't belong in the church, remember the body metaphor. Remember that you, even if you're a toenail, are a member of the body of Christ.

God will use you. The second way he encourages us is by stating the necessity of diversity within the body. He says, it's not only true that the body has many parts.

He says, it has to be that way for it to be a body. Listen to the way he explains it. It's ridiculous when you think about it.

He says, if the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?

If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 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?

[12 : 09] As it is, there are many members, yet one body. It's ridiculous to think about, isn't it? A body that's just an eye. It makes no sense.

That's what he's saying. If everyone was one particular type of person with one personality and one set of gifts, it wouldn't be a body anymore. To be a body is to be, to have manyness, to have diversification.

If the body were just an eye, it wouldn't work. In other words, if everyone in this church was Paul Barker, if we had 500 Paul Barkers, it would be ridiculous.

It wouldn't function. It would no longer be a body. So remember, throughout this passage, Paul's governing metaphor, governing argument is that the church is the body of Christ.

It is a body. One body, many members. If it's just one member, it doesn't compute. It doesn't make sense. It's ridiculous. I'm not a doctor, but I did a little bit of research, and I found out that our body has more than 200 different bones, more than 650 skeletal muscles, 210 different cell types.

[13 : 32] I mean, the body is incredibly complex. We don't notice it because everything generally works really well, but it's amazing that it does because the body is so complex.

If you reduced it down to one ear or one eye, it wouldn't be the body anymore. The truth is that within the body, there are many, many, many different members.

Third way that God encourages those of us who feel useless and ungifted, and this is the greatest way, the most important way, is the thing I want you to take away if you take away one thing.

He says that it was God's good and perfect design that made you the way you are. Isn't that good? Verse 18.

But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them as he chose. We saw this in verse 11 in the last chapter that Paul preached on. We see it here again.

[14 : 38] Paul repeats it for emphasis. In fact, this whole passage is repetition. You're going to think after a while that I'm just saying the same thing over again. I am, because Paul does. But the major point here, I think, is that God chose you to be the person who you are.

God fitted you out with the gifts that he wanted you to have. The psalmist says that we are fearfully and wonderfully made, that we were knit together in our mother's womb.

God has given you the gifts that you have, whether they're gifts of being a pastor like Paul or of putting together the supper and doing administration.

He's given you the gifts that you have. So you should be encouraged by that. It's been designed according to a perfect plan by a perfect God.

You need to hang on to that. I wasn't going to say this, but I think I will. I'm the worst person to be preaching this right now.

[15:47] Really and truly I am. At 4 o'clock this afternoon, I had torn up my manuscript that I'd written during the week. Literally. And I had a blank page.

4 o'clock. And I was freaking out. And completely doubting altogether whether I should be in ministry. I probably shouldn't say this on my first sermon, right?

It's not the way to get ahead in life. But anyhow. Freaking out. My wife, my beautiful wife, my Proverbs 31 wife came to me and she diagnosed the problem and she said, John O, Satan is just getting at you so much right now.

And I was completely doubting myself and I thought my gifts were useless. I had a blank page. I was doubting whether I should be in ministry. I was thinking about how I'd tell Paul and the diocese that I couldn't work here anymore.

And all the time I was trying to devise a sermon on how to encourage people who feel useless and telling them that they shouldn't feel that way. Now if that's not an illustration of the fact that God is the one who works through us and not ourselves, then I don't know what is.

[16:58] And I think that's the point I'm trying to get across. You may feel useless. You may feel that your gifts don't amount to much. But it's God that works through you. It's God that's designed you.

It's God that's given you these gifts. And he will see you and your ministry become fruitful as you seek his will. That's what I've got out of that part of the passage.

Let's move on. Verse 21 to 26. Paul says, 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 members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. And those members of the body that we think less honorable, we clothe with greater honor.

And our less respectable members are treated with greater respect. Whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body.

[18:00] But the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it. If one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Basically, Paul is hitting the same note in this passage, in this part of the passage. And he's saying that people who appear to be weaker, or less gifted, or less capable, are just as valuable to the body as anyone else.

This was Jono's point earlier with the NFL illustration. There are people who appear to be less gifted, or less respectable, less honorable, but they're just as valuable to the body as anyone else.

He illustrates the point really interestingly, I think, by making reference to our less honorable and less respectable body parts. And I think it's safe to say here, he's referring to our private parts.

Our genitals. Now, I don't want to push this point too much, because it's my first sermon, and I don't know what the pulpit protocol is here. But I think the point is that there are parts of our body that, even though they're less honorable and less visible, doesn't mean that we can do without them.

[19:19] Just think for a minute about doing without those parts of your body, and you'll see the point. And the principle I want to draw out here, and I'm sure there's more that could be said about that, but the principle I want to draw out for us today is about visible ministry and less visible ministry.

Because there's a myth in churches, and I think probably particularly in this church, which is known as a teaching church, and a solid Bible church, and is world-renowned for its teaching.

I think there's a tendency to consider visible ministry, preaching and leading and so forth, as being more valuable than behind-the-scenes ministry.

I was talking to a woman this morning, a great older lady, who introduced herself to me as someone who just does the behind-the-scenes stuff.

Have you ever heard that? I'm just one of those behind-the-scenes people. The truth is, being in visible ministry, that is, doing visible ministry like I am now, is no more important or valuable to the body than the stuff that's done behind the scenes.

[20 : 34] It's true that I would have preaching in a church before I'd have flower arrangements. That's not to say that people who are gifted in preaching are more important than people who have administration gifts and whatnot.

Just because something's visible doesn't make it more important. I want to move on to the last part of this passage.

Let's go to verse 27 to 31. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues.

Are all apostles? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts.

And I will show you still a more excellent way. Paul's come back to the point about there not being one member in a body more valuable than the other.

[21 : 48] That a body that was just an eye is useless. That there's many gifts in the church. There's actually a lot of debate about this part of the passage. Much ink has been spilled. And I actually do know a little bit about it.

Just so you know. I'm not going to elaborate on that. If you'd like to talk to me afterwards, I'd be more than happy to. Point you to a few good books. But I wanted to talk about one aspect of this. I think we need to be wary of. And then I'll close. See, the problem in Corinth was that they had, one of the problems, was that they had an unhealthy reverence for the gift of tongues, speaking in tongues.

It was as if there were kind of normal Christians and then there were super Christians who would speak in tongues. And it might even have been that there were the non-Christians and then there were the people who spoke in tongues who were automatically Christians.

And you might have heard this today if you've been around certain kinds of churches. You might have heard this kind of teaching that if you're a Christian, that will be evidenced by your speaking in tongues.

[22 : 55] And if you're not speaking in tongues, then, well, you might need to work on that and get yourself converted. We don't teach that here, by the way. But you might have heard other types of legalisms.

Legalism basically manifests itself in people saying that you need Jesus plus something else to be a Christian. When I was working in America, it was you needed Jesus plus you needed to abstain from alcohol.

That was the kind of place I was working in when I was working in the States in ministry. And so I got fired in my first week because I wouldn't consent to a teetotaling manifesto that they'd written up.

Something that we had to sign off on saying that we wouldn't drink. And they took that as me saying that I wasn't a Christian. They put two and two together that if I like to have a beer every now and again, that I must not be saved.

That's Jesus plus abstinence equals Christian. The Bible's clear that those who confess that Jesus is Lord are Christians. And they're saved apart from their own works.

[24 : 05] They're saved by His grace. I want to get that clear. If you hear this kind of teaching that's come, you know, it's not new. It's ancient. It's Corinthian. That you need to speak in tongues or you need to cast out demons or you need to be a good preacher.

You need to abstain from alcohol to be a Christian. You need to know that that's false teaching. And it's easy to pick out those kind of ones, isn't there?

Those kind of legalisms. Alcohol, speaking in tongues. But I think for us it might be more subtle and more dangerous. The kind of legalisms that we work with, whether we know it or not.

Maybe you are more comfortable with Christians of a certain socioeconomic background. Maybe you're more comfortable with Christians of a certain cultural background. And maybe in your heart of hearts you doubt whether some people can be Christians given their background.

Paul stamps all over that in this passage and in this book. We need to identify ourselves. We need to examine ourselves and see whether there's even a seed of that in us.

[25 : 15] I think we need to be on guard in this place against that kind of thinking. That there's a gate at the front of this church and only certain people can come in. That's all I want to say about that.

But please do come up to me afterwards if you want to learn more about that section of the scripture. I want to finish now. But as I do, I want you to be encouraged.

I hope you have been. If you're not involved in a ministry and it's because you doubt yourself, because you doubt that you have the gifts, doubt that you have what it takes, or you doubt that God would honour your contribution, I hope you'll think again about that.

I hope that you know that because we have the Spirit of God within us, that we're a valuable member of this community, that we have a valuable place in ministry. The body needs different kinds of people to function well.

It can't function without the different members working within it. God has put us together the way that He chose to put us together. He's given us the gifts that He would wish us to have and He wants us to use them.

[26 : 29] And He's not going to be happy if we don't. Let's be encouraged that we don't have to be a certain type of person or have a certain type of gift to be a Christian or to be useful in ministry, but that each is integral to the working of His people for His good.

When we came here, say this before I get down, Renee and I were blown away by the diversity in this congregation. We haven't been in a congregation that's so diverse in terms of culture and nationality and background and occupation and age.

And it's a great blessing. I don't know if you've noticed recently just how diverse this congregation is. We should thank God for that. We shouldn't take it for granted and we should take advantage of it to the glory of God.

Let me pray for us. Let me pray for you. Oh Lord God, we thank you for your word.

I don't know if I've preached a sermon tonight, but I've opened my heart and it was full for the people in this congregation who are doubting their place in this ministry.

[27 : 51] Lord, there are so many opportunities in this church for people to do ministry. I think of CRE and the kids mentoring program.

All the opportunities for prayer ministry and the prayer vigil coming up. Ministries like the working bee and practical maintenance ministries.

Think of the ministries of service, whether it's putting on a supper or cooking a dinner for someone who's just lost a loved one or can't afford a meal.

I think of the many ministry opportunities there are in music, Bible reading, service leading, ministries available to those who would seek full-time occupational ministry as a pastor.

teacher. Lord, in a place like this you have blessed us with so many opportunities, so many resources, so much money. I pray that we wouldn't take it for granted, that we would go away tonight encouraged that we are a member of the body, that you have made us the way we are, gifted us the way you've seen fit, just because we have a certain personality, a certain gift mix, doesn't mean that we're useless, but on the contrary, that you can use us mightily for your glory.

[29 : 30] Encourage us, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.