

The Church and Its Body Life

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[0 : 00] We're in week 10 of our series, The Church Jesus Builds. I wonder if you've ever heard the phrase, we need to get back to the early church.

We need to get back to the early church. Well, like it was in some kind of pure form back then. Well, when I read 1 Corinthians, you realize that some of these churches were rubbish, like terrible, like in really bad shape.

This one in particular, this Corinthian church was crazy. They had some fairly significant problems. If you opened up 1 Corinthians, and you just kind of slid your eyes through the first 12 chapters, here's some of the issues that Paul has to address.

Here's some things that are going on in the church that he has to write a letter to them and say, listen, we need to kind of, you should probably stop this. There were personality cults, incest. People were suing each other. Some guys were arguing that our bodies, kind of like agnostically arguing our bodies don't matter, so you can go visit prostitutes. Other people were in the opposite end of the spectrum saying, sex is just dirty and filthy, so no sex even in marriage.

[1 : 17] Some people were attending pagan feasts. There was snobbery at the Lord's table. And one of the things they were doing, which is of particular interest to this passage here that we're dealing with, was that they'd really got excited about spiritual gifts, in particular speaking in tongues.

And they'd elevated the speaking in tongues to like, this is it, man. And if you do this, you're kind of in. And if you don't, you're kind of out. So they're in rough shape.

They are no longer, they're not a light to the world. They are a mirror to the world, and a rather sort of distorted one at them. So a pretty bad example of what church should look like.

And when the Bible talks about what church should look like, it often uses word pictures. You would have heard of all of these. We are a flock, the Bible says.

And that's a consistent image used throughout the Bible. So that means we're like, we're led, we're protected by a shepherd who would lay down his life for us. Or the church is like a bride.

[2 : 24] Christ is the groom. The bride and groom image in Revelation. Getting across the idea of the intimacy and love that Christ has for his church. Or branches and vines is another one.

In John's gospel, that our life, our corporate life together is in Christ. Or the church is like a beautiful building, Matthew talks about, with Jesus as the cornerstone. So everyone is important. Everyone's important, but we all rest on Christ, and he holds it together.

Now, 1 Corinthians here, Paul uses the analogy of the human body to describe the church. And he's wanting to address a couple of quite specific issues in the community as they relate to the speaking in tongues business.

The issues we want to address are this. Superiority, that some people were feeling, and inferiority, that some people were feeling. And it all, again, it stems from the speaking in tongues.

Now, I've actually been, I think the first church I attended was implicitly taught this. This was it. If you'd spoken in tongues, man, you're just awesome. You've made it.

[3 : 25] You've done it. You've got the Holy Spirit. And if not, wow, it's not looking good for you. And of course, this was a cause of great division in this Corinthian church.

A lot of disunity. Some people feeling very inferior. Others, very superior. So, let's have a look at what Paul has to say about this.

And just a heads up, the first few verses are kind of some sort of theology. I mean, it's all theology, but more specific theology, first couple of verses. Then there's a section on inferiority complexes, section on superiority complexes.

And the last little paragraph there is like a transition into the next chapter. So let's have a go. All right. Paul begins with something we talked about last week. This is verses sort of 12 to 14.

Unity and disunity. Let me read it to you. For just as the body is one, and as many members, and all the members are of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ, for in one spirit we are all baptized into one body.

[4 : 27] Jews, Greeks, slaves, free. And all were made the drink of one spirit, for the body does not consist of one member, but of many. So do you see the emphasis here? Church is one body, many members.

But the specific emphasis, he's not saying, listen, even though we're really different, can you just try and think of us as one thing? He's actually saying the opposite.

He assumes we are one. And he's trying to convince us of the diversity within the unity. You see, right at the start in verse 12, for just as the body is one, and that one thing keeps coming across. And then he goes on to say how we are one. We are one because one spirit. We are baptized into one body. He's talking about that salvation. The Holy Spirit comes into our hearts, changes our hearts, changes us forever, cleanses us, washes us, frees us.

So we all have the same entry point. And as a result, in Paul's words, we are members of this one body. And this has got huge implications, clearly. It means we belong to one another.

[5 : 37] It means we can't drift in and out of church like gypsies because we're connected. You belong to me, I belong to you. We are knitted together in a way that you just don't get in any other type of organization in the world.

And that doesn't mean that we all become this kind of homogenous kind of, you know, like a mashed potato kind of thing, right? Like we're just mashed in together. We don't lose our individuality. Paul talks about individuals, Jews, Greeks, slaves are free.

Our oneness doesn't mean we're all blended together. We are one body, but with unique, vital members. Now Paul needs to establish this because people in the congregation felt super insecure. They didn't feel like members of the community. Continuing the body analogy in 15 and 16 here. If the foot should say, because I'm not a hand, I don't belong to the body, that would not make it any less part of a body.

And if the ear should say, I'm not an I, I don't belong, that would not make it any less part of the body. It is a great temptation in a church community to feel like, I just don't belong.

[6 : 50] There are so many more interesting people around me, so many more talented people here. If I disappeared, it, you know, nothing would change. It wouldn't matter. And this desire to be something other than what you are is, is, is, is, is, is disquieting.

I think it's probably the right word. It's disquieting. My high school was very good. It was one of the best achieving academically, English, I didn't learn English well there.

It was one of the best academic schools in the country, New Zealand. It was one of the best athletic schools in the country. Now, in terms of, I, I did averagely academically.

Sporting wise, this will come as a surprise to you, given my incredible physical presence. But, I was not very athletic. And, and, do you remember, we used to have these sports days, and they'd have a race for people that couldn't swim, a swimming race, they want everyone to be included.

Torture. I couldn't swim. So it was a, it was just, you just had to try and get to the other side of the pool without drowning or something, you know. And, that was my race. I was dead last every time.

[8 : 10] It was horrendous. But, not as bad as my mate who, who once, he was a really good athlete, but he, like if this is a swimming pool, he dived in here, in front of the school, it's like a thousand people watching, dived into the pool.

It was an underwater race. He got a bit disorientated underwater. He started going diagonally across, right. See, that's true. So he's closing his eyes, he's swimming. He, he just opens his eyes at one point, sees the wall in front of him, but he's just gone like this, right.

He's gone like 10 feet. And he's gone, he's looking around, can't see anyone. He leaps out of the pool. Yes! Ah, yeah.

So he had a bad. Anyway, back to, uh, my high school. So, so yes, I'm in this school, which just, just had such high standards of achievement.

And I didn't meet any of them. It is a terrible thing to feel like you don't cut it. It is a terrible thing to feel like, you don't measure up, right. Now, Paul responds wonderfully to these insecurities.

[9 : 19] 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? Firstly, he says, it just, it just wouldn't work if we're all the same.

Imagine a church full of preachers, all just yelling at each other the whole time. A church of administrators, but no one with the gift of hospitality. We would be a well-oiled, but very cold machine.

Now, it works because we are different. Your thumb should not feel insecure. Because have you ever broken your thumb? Have you ever had, not been able to use your thumb? You need your thumb. As ugly and as awkward as a stupid looking thing it is, you need your thumb. We need the thumbs in the congregation.

I'm not calling you stupid. You know, like we need, what I'm saying is, is a terrible illustration. We need everybody. Everybody has a part to play in the body of Christ.

[10:22] The church works because we all play parts. I listened to a guy the other day tell a story of a mate of his who was very shy, very pure, lovely, shy young man, about 20.

And he went to church and the preacher was preaching this passage. And he was trying to get the, trying to get this point across of like, everyone's important. We all need each other. And he said, turn to your neighbor and said, just say to him, look him in the eye and say, I really need you. So he turns, he's sitting next to this gorgeous blonde woman, this poor, shy kid, right? I need you. Anyway, I won't ask you to do that because you're Canadians and you might just completely fall apart.

All right. But it's true. We need each other. We do really need each other. The other way Paul responds in verse 18, listen to this, but as it is, God arranged the members of the body, each one of them, as he chooses.

Folks, you have the gifts you have, you have the place you have in church because God chose it to be that way. It's a divine arrangement and we need to trust God's wisdom in that.

[11:46] Otherwise we can get jealous and bitter. So then, and some so far, there are no inferior members of this church, no second class citizens.

If you have a quiet gifting, thank you. Perhaps it's a gift of giving or perhaps you just make it your role to say hello to a particular person each week who maybe doesn't get much attention.

You're just as important as everyone else. We need you. You need us. Your role is ordained. There is spiritual equality here, no matter your role.

The next issue Paul deals with is that of superiority. 21. The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you, nor can the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

Do you see how it's, the examples you use, it's always looking downwards, the eye to the hand, the head to the feet. So these guys have two problems going on. One, they're looking down on other members.

[12:50] And in this case, it's probably about the speaking in tongues thing, right? But also, they feel like they're self-sufficient. I have no need of you. Paul almost ridicules them, I think, this attitude using this analogy.

I mean, it just sounds ridiculous, you know? Like if I use an example, if I said, I'm the preacher, I have no need of you, administration. The service sheets that you're using, do you guys know how they get made up and get to church?

Neither do I. You know? But they're here. It's like magic. It's amazing. People do this stuff.

People organize it. People make this happen. Quiet, behind the scenes, people make this happen. And we would be stuffed without them. We have communion every month.

Do you know how the bread gets here? How it is we have wine in those little tiny cups, or juice, or wine in those tiny little cups, if that's your preference? Who fills those up?

[13:55] How does it get here? Where's all the silverware kept? I have no idea. But it happens, because wonderful, wonderful people do it when you're not here.

They have this meaningful and quiet gifting, and we couldn't function without them. But this whole self-sufficiency thing plays out in other ways.

Not just looking down on people, but it can really affect you in an awful way, because what happens is, if you think you're a self-sufficient Christian, you will remain on the edges of church, existing around the periphery.

I don't need these guys. I have internal resources. If the reason you remain around the periphery of church is that you're thinking, some people have legitimate reasons to remain around the periphery. But if your reason is, I'm an independent Christian. I have internal resources. It's just me and Jesus. What you're doing is, you are saying, I have no need of you to the people around you right now.

[15:06] And your position is unbiblical. You need to repent of that. And you need to come into the body and serve and be served like everyone else.

That's how it works. That's church operating at its best. Now, Paul doesn't even stop here. He keeps pushing this. And I love these verses in 22 and 24. It says, Corinthian church, those parts of the body that you think are dispensable, we should give them greater honor.

You're looking down on them. You're thinking, ah, we don't need them. They're a bit useless.

Thumbs and feet and stuff. They're a bit useless. He says, no, we need to give them greater honor. Look at 22 to 24.

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 are less honorable, we bestow the greater honor.

And our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. He's talking about internal organs and genitals and bottoms and stuff like that, right?

[16:07] He's saying, those bits of your bodies, you don't like. Oh. No, you actually treat them extra special. You protect them. You look after them, don't you?

Well, it's the same for the members of our congregation who are quiet, behind-the-scenes giftings. You look down on them. No, don't look down on them. Give them special treatment. Honor them all the more.

So Paul is completely turning this Corinthian worldview upside down here. Moving on. 24 to 26.

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, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

I love that. And if one member suffer, all suffer together. And if one member is honored, all rejoice together. There's some really important ideas in here. From the beginning of the passage, Paul is trying to set up this idea of spiritual equality.

[17:07] He is speaking to a very immature congregation who thinks stupidly about the spiritual gifts. And Paul is beginning a transition here into chapter 13.

And there's this sense that he's saying, look, stop thinking about the gifts thing here, okay?

Whatever you're doing in church, big stuff, little stuff, it's not about the gifts. You are the gift. You know, you don't value the preacher or the person who speaks in tongues as more important as a person than anyone else here.

And then there's this lovely key purpose statement in 25. Look at it. You are so, he's like, he's saying you're so uptight about these gifts and just stop it. Just care for each other. End of verse 25. Just care for each other. Just love each other for goodness sake. And you should know Paul is addressing both the overly secure and the insecure here.

The, I don't belong here. Everyone else is so much better than me. And the, I don't need you. He's addressing both of these people and they're saying you need to get your eyes off yourself and care for people.

[18:15] Because both are struggling with pride underneath it. Both are eye focused. And Paul says be body focused. Be church focused. Be other people focused.

And what a challenge. What a challenge that is. Because we are, we can get so intimately focused. I'm not interested. I do nothing. I don't contribute. Paul says stop it. Look at the people around you. You could be a gift to them. But you are so, Martin Luther has this phrase, incurvatus in C. You are so curved in on yourself.

And you need to be ex-curvatus SC. You need to be curved outwards. You need to be looking outwards. You could be the gift to them. Verses 27 to 31.

Paul does something unusual here. You might think it's unusual. He then lists some gifts and says something that sounds like he's contradiction in his previous ideas. He says, earnestly desire the higher gifts.

[19:15] Did you catch that in the reading? You're sort of thinking, hang on. Why would he say that? Well, this is Paul again trying to undermine this church's, Corinthian church's focus on speaking in tongues.

And he rattles off some gifts as you see in verse 28. God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.

Do you see where he puts tongues on the list? Dead last. And what about this? Verse 31. This is the one that I can throw people off, I think. He says, earnestly desire the higher gifts.

I'm coming to a close here. Earnestly desire the higher gifts. When we get to chapter 14, which Jordan's preaching next week, we will see that there are some gifts that are more useful than others.

But, there are not more important people than others. So Paul says, desire the higher gifts. Go crazy, you know. But he follows it up straight away with, I will show you a still more excellent way. [20 : 26] So go after the higher of the gifts. That's fine. But, there is something so much more important than that. And it's love. And that's what you're lacking, Corinthian church.

Let me read the first part of chapter 13 here. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love. You see what he mentions first here? Tongues, right? Again, undermining their position.

If I speak in tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong, a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith as to remove mountains, but have not love, I'm nothing.

If I give away all I have and if I deliver up my body to be burned but have not love, I gain nothing. Here's the message. Let's stop thinking we are less than others here.

Let's stop thinking we are better than others here. Let's try and take the focus of ourselves. And let's learn to love each other. Amen. Amen. Amen.