

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

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Date: 29 May 2016

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[0 : 00] Good to see you this morning. Would you turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 12? We've been working our way through the book of 1 Corinthians in the New Testament, and today we come to chapter 12, verses 12 through 31.

That's page 959 in the Pew Bible, if you want to turn there. Page 959, 1 Corinthians chapter 12, verses 12 through 31, 12 through the end of the chapter.

All right, let me read this for us. Paul writes this. He says, 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'm 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'm 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.

[1 : 39] 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, but 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. 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 miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating in various kinds of tongues.

[2 : 56] Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts?

And I will show you a still more excellent way. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Lord we are grateful for the fact that you are a God who reveals yourself to us Lord apart from your own self revealing we would remain so in the dark as to who you are and what it means to know you and love you and be created by you and to be redeemed by you Lord so we stand just in gratitude and gratefulness this morning that we have Lord not just impressions or sensibilities but God we have your own words that you have spoken and preserved for us Father we pray that by your Holy Spirit we'd be able to understand this word this morning that you would speak to us afresh through these words and Lord that we would be changed as a result we ask this in the name of Jesus our Savior Amen well friends I think you'll agree that the human body is an amazing thing I needed to do some research on the human body to prepare for this sermon so I did what every good researcher does I Google searched some things that's a joke that's not how you're supposed to research things apparently the human body has you medical professionals can correct me on this apparently the human body has 206 bones 640 muscles and nearly 100,000 miles of blood vessels the human body is a stunning diversity of organs and limbs and parts of all sorts and shapes and sizes and yet for all its diversity it functions with an incredible unity and symmetry doesn't it so incredible in fact I

think we rarely think about it after all when was the last time you stopped and really pondered the beauty and complexity and necessity of say your pinky finger for instance in fact you might even ask as you think about it do we even really need that little thing

I mean is it anything more than kind of a decorative accessory to your hand something that you put a pinky ring on if you're Italian something to sort of extend daintily while drinking your tea I mean the Simpsons got along just fine with only four digits why do we need this fifth one in the New York Times a while ago there was an article in the health section written by someone who had broken their pinky finger apparently she fell directly on it while jogging and she sort of was stunned by how much she had you know relied on her pinky finger and apparently according to the occupational therapist that she interviewed you actually lose 50% of your hand strength when you lose the use of your pinky finger 50% the human body though made of an incredible diverse array of parts is at the same time an amazingly intricate unity it all sort of works together doesn't it now the point of our passage this morning is pretty clear

Paul wants us to view our life together as a church like a body you are the body of Christ and individually members of it now we're so familiar with that sort of language that we don't stop and really think about the real meaning of it we call the church the body of Christ all the time and it's not as if we really think about fingers and toes and eyes and ears we just think about a group of people in fact the word member today means kind of nothing more than that someone who belongs to a particular group right I was in the Lego store in the West Farms mall on Monday with my kids buying Legos of course and at the checkout I was asked if I wanted to become a member of the Lego VIP club I thought VIP wow I'm only buying two Lego sets what if I buy a third apparently I could get a \$10 gift card for every like \$3 million worth of Legos that I bought they even gave me a membership card and I'm sure they'll send me lots of emails telling me of all the Lego sets I need to be buying but such is the meaning of membership today right you sort of belong to a group there are some maybe some minor kickbacks but nothing real serious but you know for Paul the word member hadn't sort of picked up those watered down connotations the word member really meant body part a limb an organ you are the body of Christ and individually the fingers and toes and limbs and organs of it so our text today wants us to really meditate on this reality that in Christ we are a body and that's what we're going to do what does being a body in Christ mean first thing being a body means that we all have a common experience that unites us no matter what our background being a body means that we have a common experience that unites us no matter what our background look again at verse 13

[9 : 21] Paul says for in one spirit we were all baptized into one body Jews or Greek slaves or free and all were made to drink of one spirit what is the common experience that makes us into one body Paul describes it like this we were baptized in the Holy Spirit we were made to drink of the Holy Spirit okay that sounds a bit weird right what is he talking about well Paul is describing here not some event that happens for some people who are particularly spiritually elite but what happens to every believer at conversion what Paul is talking about in verse 13 did you notice is true of all Christians two times in that verse all all of you all of you when you come to believe and trust in Jesus as Lord as Savior what happens in another place

Romans 5 5 Paul will say that the love of God has been poured poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit and in John 7 that Jeff read for us earlier Jesus himself says let the thirsty come to me and drink and whoever believes in me out of his heart will flow rivers of living water which John adds was a reference by the way to the Holy Spirit which those who believe in him receive and you know this is just the fulfillment of what God had always promised the Old Testament prophets talked about it like this too when the Spirit would come after God had done his great work of redemption when he would send the Spirit to cleanse our hearts of all that defiles us when the Spirit would come even and give us new hearts taking out the heart of stone and giving us a heart of flesh and so friends you see when we come to Christ in faith turning from sin and placing our trust in him something radical happens the Spirit washes us of our stains and quenches our thirst uniting us to Christ so just to be clear the baptism that Paul's talking about here isn't water baptism water baptism is an outward symbol of this inward spiritual reality the reality of the union that we have with Christ and the Spirit that cleanses us and makes us new and the drinking that Paul's talking about here isn't necessarily a reference to the Lord's Supper no it's what

Jesus was talking about back in John 7 that quenching of our hearts thirst for God that happens when we come to Jesus and are filled with his Spirit at our conversion this is the common

experience that unites us now let me say if you're here and you're new to Christian things or if you're exploring things spiritually we're glad you're here we're glad you came you're always welcome here and let me say I think it's important to see this point that Paul's making here if you're figuring things out about Christianity because it's important to see that Christianity is very different at this point from other religions and other sort of spiritual paths and programs because Christianity after all doesn't say okay here's a spiritual regimen here's a spiritual program here's a set of rules or activities to follow and if you follow them perhaps one day you'll achieve the filling of your soul with God's cleansing satisfying presence

Christianity doesn't say that in fact surprisingly what other religions or spiritualities present as the goal Christianity presents as the starting point this is where you begin a plunging into the reality of God a drinking deep of his heart satisfying streams now how can Christianity do such a thing you might wonder does it just sort of waive the requirements okay anybody gets to come fine actually no it doesn't just waive the requirements other religions might possibly be on to something there that there are a set of standards that need to be kept because God in his beauty and his goodness demands something of us the standard for knowing him and coming to him is still perfection yes Christianity doesn't actually waive those requirements rather it says that the requirements were met for you by one who loved you and died for you and rose again so that resting in him you might be brought to God now Paul's point here is that this soul cleansing this thirst quenching union that we have with Christ in the spirit is at the same time a union with others in Christ as we are connected to him in his spirit so we are connected to one another so you see being the body of Christ is more than a mere metaphor friends it is a deep mysterious even spiritual reality we are truly vitally connected to one another in Christ by his spirit and first off that means that I can no longer look at a fellow

[15 : 49] Christian and size them up in terms of the categories by which we usually divide up the world as Paul says here for example Jews are Greeks slaves are free that is their racial background or their socioeconomic class what unites us in Christ is infinitely greater than what makes us different you see have you ever had an experience of that with another believer I was at a wedding not so long ago and at the reception I was seated next to a person that I had practically nothing in common with he was older than me he was from a different nationality from a different city a different socioeconomic upbringing our first languages were different and yet we shared Christ in common you see we had both come to know what it was like to have our sins cleansed and to be indwelt by his soul satisfying presence and you know though our differences were real though our differences were real they were not as important as what united us we were part of the same family the same body and though

I just met him and we had nothing in common we had a great time talking together until they cranked up the music and then we couldn't hear what each other was saying so you see friends first being a body means that we have a common spiritual reality a common spiritual experience that unites us no matter what our background second being a body in Christ means that no one can say I don't belong look again at verses 15 and 16 if the foot should say because I'm 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'm not an eye I do not belong to the body that would not make it any less a part of the body now here we're getting into Paul's central burden or concern with this passage it seems that in the

Corinthian church some members were made to feel inferior because they didn't exercise certain spiritual gifts as we'll see in chapter 14 the Corinthians seem to have elevated one particular spiritual gift speaking in tongues and made that one the mark of being really indwelt by the spirit and being really spiritual and so those who didn't have it were made to feel like second class citizens you see they were starting to feel in their hearts well maybe I just don't belong here and Paul wants to speak to those believers who are feeling that way and say ah but remember you are a body and in the body not only do you have full possession of the spirit by virtue of faith in Christ that's verse 13 but in addition whatever particular gift the spirit has given you no matter what limb or organ you happen to be in the body you are critical to the body's health after all imagine a body made of nothing but ears or noses that would be sort of gross and such a body would also have a hard time eating or seeing or walking it wouldn't be much of a body at all at least not for long so Paul is helping them to see that you do belong regardless of what others are telling you in fact you are the farthest thing from being an afterthought in the body or a second-class citizen no you have

been divinely arranged to play a critical role here look at verse 18

God arranged the members in the body each one of them each one of them as he chose so fellow Christian if at times you start to question in your heart here at Trinity do I really belong here perhaps you could speak this question back to your heart if all were a single member where would the body be God has given you a valuable part to play and that means you must be who you are be who the spirit has gifted you to be bring your gifts to bear don't try to be someone you're not yes emulate the Christ like character of believers that you look up to but don't necessarily try to imitate their gifts you most likely have a different yet essential part to play by being you you see being a body in Christ means no one can say I don't belong now for Paul's third point being a body in Christ means no one can say I don't need you if verses 14 through 20 spoke to those who are being made to feel inferior in verses 21 through 26 he addresses those who see themselves as superior and here's the real razor's edge of the paragraph here he's talking to the self proclaimed spiritual all-stars the Allen Iversons of the church who rarely if ever think they need to pass the ball in order to win the game sorry my wife's family's from Philadelphia I only know Philly sports teams Allen Iverson hasn't played for the Sixers in a decade I know fill in the blank with your ball hog that you know but Paul is saying stop and consider you see when you're thinking I don't need others have you thought that the church is a body do you really not need your hands do you really not need your feet of course not

[23 : 02] Paul says they're indispensable verse 22 well what should their attitude be instead not I don't need you but rather Paul says I delight to honor you verses 23 24 think about the parts of your body that are weaker or the parts that are unpresentable even yes Paul is talking about those parts what do we do with those parts of our body do we say we don't need them no just the opposite we show them greater care and attention we protect them we clothe them and why do we do that with certain parts of our body in Paul's mind it's not because they're inherently shameful that's not why we cover them up no you see for Paul the body the human physical body with all its members is God's good creation Paul couldn't be more a body affirming in this passage

God arranges it and God composes it so why do we act this way towards certain parts of our body why do we cover them up why do we show them that attention not because they're shameful but because they're too precious to just be put on display for everybody to see we honor them we treat them as more special and more valuable than our hands or our noses which are just out there in public so you see what Paul's doing here look again at verses 22 and 23 even if some members seem to be weaker in your eyes or if you think they are less honorable you need to remember that you are a body and you should show them all the more honor for being so and of course what seems weak in the world's eyes is of course not so in God's eyes and what humans think to be less honorable well friends

God thinks differently in fact God chooses what is foolish in the world to shame the wise and what is weak in the world to shame the strong and what is low and despised in the world to bring to nothing the things that are that's chapter one verses 27 through 28 of this same letter have you forgotten the gospel Paul says God gives his honor to those who lack it how ultimately through the cross where Jesus takes the shame that our sins deserve and in exchange we receive the honor his righteousness deserves and so there can be no division in the body every single one of us is the recipient of sheer unmerited grace even the spiritual gifts that we possess are just that aren't they gifts not something we've earned not something we've merited but something we've been freely given you see friends life in the spirit life in the church is not like an MMORPG video game where if you play long enough and you build up enough experience points you can level up and earn new powers and new weapons it doesn't work that way God gives graciously and often he gives gifts to those whom we would least expect from a worldly point of view anyway after all who would have thought that God would make the apostolic foundation of his church the very pioneer of the new creation who would have thought that God would make that foundation out of a few Galilean fishermen a tax collector some other guys we frankly know nothing about and last of all a self righteous religious zealot namely Paul before he met

Jesus God indeed gives honor where we least expect it so 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 that's what it means to be a body no longer saying I don't really need you the total opposite I'll suffer with you in your sufferings I'll rejoice with you in your successes what could be more intimate than that friends and you know with our physical bodies this happens quite naturally

doesn't it I break my toe and suddenly my whole leg stabs with pain and for the next month or so I'm on crutches and my whole body suffers right and on the other hand someone compliments my new haircut if I had hair that is and suddenly

[28 : 39] I stand up a little straighter I smile a little broader I walk a little lighter my whole body rejoices to be the body of Christ means we do this for one another what comes naturally to our physical bodies we strive to make natural in our spiritual body you see without a second thought when a church member loses a job or loses a loved one or gets discouraged because their efforts at sharing the gospel with their friends seems to be so fruitless their fellow members are there not just to help practically but also even to suffer with them to grieve to limp alongside to absorb some of that cost to be present with them in the pain of it suffering reverberates through the community and we face these things together because we are a body on the flip side honor reverberates through the community instead of saying

I don't need you we delight to notice the ways in which even the most unseen gifts are contributing to the common good of the church and we honor them now friends what gifts in our context might go unnoticed gifts in our church I think at times the ability to speak eloquently or to have articulate words or having a formal education can be overly exalted maybe not on purpose or intentionally but it happens and so those who happen to have those gifts need to work doubly hard to honor those with other gifts gifts that our culture might not think so highly about gifts like serving and helping administrating gifts of mercy gifts of giving we want to honor these gifts and thus let honor reverberate through our whole body we rejoice in it we stand up a little straighter we smile a little broader we walk a little more lighter and friends we need to recognize too that the polish of the speech doesn't come even close in importance to the substance of the message we need to be willing to hear the spirit speaking through our brothers and sisters who may not be eloquent or polished but who are speaking words of wisdom and knowledge that we need to hear you see are we listening for that for the timely scripture rich spirit empowered words that will build up the church even if the speaker's style doesn't conform to the typical sorts of people we happen to like or listen to and friends as we think about suffering together rejoicing together as members in a body let me just say do people know that you're a member of this body do people know that you're someone that belongs here to this fellowship of

Christ that's the value of formal membership after all it's a way of just saying yes I am a part of the body I want to do this life together so friends if you're a follower of Jesus and you're not a formal member of a church yes you're an organic member of the body of Christ whether you like it or not but let yourself be known as a member so that we can start doing this together intentionally you see being a body in Christ means no one can say I don't need you to any other member each member needs each other and so being a honor one another in all our varied gifts our passage concludes then in verses 27 through 31 with Paul just bringing things home for the Corinthians as if this sort of thinly veiled analogy wasn't obvious enough Paul just sort of jams it down home verse 28 again he reiterates it's

God who gives the gifts as he chooses in verses 29 through 30 Paul drives home the point that there's no gift that goes to everyone the way that Paul asks these rhetorical questions they all imply the answer no of course not everyone is an apostle or a prophet or a teacher of course not everyone speaks in tongues which strategically he placed at the very tail of the list you see and so God appoints different gifts to different people in the church and there isn't a single spiritual gift that will be given the basis of our so called spiritual gift rather Paul is pushing us to delight in the diversity that God has made but then in verse 31 there's this bit of a curve ball isn't there we think we're swinging and suddenly whoops if God gives the gifts if they're all worthy of honor in what sense should we earnestly desire or seek them and in what sense are some higher than the others is

Paul sort of undermining everything he just said well I think at this point after Paul sort of cleared the ground enough he can finally show us that there is a good sort of desire that we can have for spiritual gifts so long as we understand them rightly you see and the higher gifts here literally means greater gifts but greater not in the sense that they bring greater attention to ourselves but they bring greater benefit to the church as a whole Paul is saying essentially seek the gifts that do good to others and especially as we'll see in chapter 14 that means the ability to speak God's word helpfully to others something that we should all pursue rather than in their context speaking in tongues which apart from an interpreter doesn't really do the church much good because no one

can understand what's being said but all the same how do we seek something that comes as a gift well we remember that

[35 : 46] God delights to give good gifts to his children and we pray we ask God to give us what he will use to do the most good through us we ask God give us what you want to use to do the most good through me and then after we pray we get about the business of serving you see we get about the business of doing body life together of finding our place in the every member ministry life that is the body of Christ are you serving friends don't wait until you know what gifts you have chances are you won't even find out until you start serving find a way to do good to the body and do it and you see that's a completely different mindset than the mindset that had taken hold in

Corinth they exalted one gift made it a sign of super spirituality some people thought they didn't belong other people thought they didn't need anyone else but Paul turns that all upside down and says the higher gifts aren't the ones that make us look great they're the ones that do the most good to others that help the body get great in particular the ones that help people grasp God's word as Paul will say in chapter 14 verse 12 since you are eager for manifestations of the spirit strive to excel in building up the church but we need to learn that there is a still more excellent way the way we often seem to miss and that way of course is the way of love next week we'll begin looking at chapter 13 and we'll embark on this way of love but you know in a sense hasn't Paul already been showing it to us hasn't he already put it before our eyes showing us

God the father who has arranged and composed this body with such care and intentionality God the holy spirit who has showered gifts freely upon each member making us an integral part of the whole and Jesus God the son who has taken this body to himself and called it his own and has become so united to it that now what's true of him is true of us that just as he is righteous and holy and glorified friends so we are justified and sanctified and even glorified in him you see this body is encompassed with the triune God's love how could we not love this body as well let's pray together God help us to see and help us to live as what we are a people who are deeply and intimately connected to one another by your spirit Lord help us to live as your body and help us all to find our place Lord to live in a way that brings good to others we ask God we pray that as we do this Lord the world would see in our midst something different Lord a group of people who aren't just trying to get ahead a group of people who aren't just trying to one up one another a group of people who aren't just sort of occupying the same space for a little bit of time every week but Lord a group of people who are intimately connected to one another in a unity and in a love and in a compassion Lord that speaks of your unity and your love and your compassion and of the wholeness and of the perfection of the new creation that is to come

Lord help us to be a sign of that day we pray Amen God beóir