

# THE CHURCH AS A BODY

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1 Corinthians 12:12-31

## Introduction:

→ Illust. – Learning to Play One's Instrument to God's Glory

Did you ever take a music class in grade school? Or join the school band? When you first join a music class you are given an instrument to play. You take your new instrument home and start learning how to turn squeaks into notes. Then the time comes when you first come together as a band to play. The teacher or band conductor raises the baton and motions for you to begin and it sounds like a train wreck. You play at different tempos... different volumes. You didn't watch the conductor and you didn't listen to each other. You love to hear yourself play so the room is filled with soloists and the result is terrible.

However, over time you learn more and grow in experience. Eventually by the end of high school the band has come together. The instruments begin working together and building on one another and the result is beautiful music for everyone to enjoy.

That is kind of the way it is in the church. God has given one of us an instrument and He has given us as a church a song to play. Maybe you are still trying to figure out what that instrument is. Maybe you are learning how to play it. But his intent is that we would become an orchestra making beautiful music to be enjoyed by the community that God has placed us in.

In 1 Cor. 12, Paul addresses the issue of spiritual gifts and the role of gifts in the church. A few weeks ago we looked at the first 11 verses of the chapter, considering the nature and purpose of spiritual gifts. A brief review:

Nature of gifts (vv. 4-6): varieties of gifts – everyone is gifted differently; varieties of service – there are different areas of ministry in which the gifts are used; varieties of activities – the way our gifts manifest themselves varies depending on personality and temperament.

Purpose of gifts (vv. 7-11): The key thought is in v. 7 – spiritual gifts are given for the common good. The real purpose of spiritual gifts is for the local church—the body of believers—to have every gift necessary for it to flourish and grow and bring glory to Jesus Christ.

So, having introduced the subject of spiritual gifts and their role in the body of Christ, Paul then devotes the next section to expanding on the idea of the church as a body. Understanding the relationship between the various members of the church is critical to understanding the importance of the gifts that Christ has given to his church by the Spirit.

We are covering a fairly large text in a short time this morning, so we are certainly not going to be exhaustive in our treatment of the passage. However, there are a few points that come out of this text, which might seem very basic, yet are very significant. First...

## We are all one body – vv. 12-13

*Read v. 12* – many members, one body. Just as our physical body is made up of many different parts – different limbs, organs, systems, cells, and every part serves a different function, yet it is all one body. So it is with the church, the body of Christ. Though there are many members, yet it is one body.

Look at v. 13 – *read it*. At the moment of conversion, we were baptized, immersed, placed into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit. No matter who we are, or what our status or station in life, we are brought together into one body, Christ's body, the church.

There are a couple of aspects to this that are important to recognize. When we are baptized into the body of Christ, we become part of the church worldwide, the body that is made up of believers everywhere. But there is also the expectation that we are brought into fellowship and joined to a local body of believers. We become a member of a local church.

Even though we are many, and we are all different, we are all part of one body that is designed and intended to work together as a body.

## There are many different members – vv. 14-20

*Read vv. 14-16* – the body is composed of many different members fulfilling many different functions. Just because a hand is different from the toes, that does not mean that it is not part of the body. Hands, feet, toes, eyes... every part together makes up the body.

Look at v. 17 – *read it*. If every part was the same there would not be a body. Certain functions would be missing. But, God in his wisdom, has brought together many different parts and placed them all exactly where they should be so that they can work together, and the body can function as it should – *see vv. 18-21*.

Clearly the analogy Paul is making is that the same thing is true in the church, the body of Christ. In the larger, worldwide church and in the local church, God has placed each member exactly where he or she should be in order that the body will function as it should. Each member is different, but together they make up a living, working, functioning body.

### **Every member is important – vv. 21-26**

In the next few verses, Paul goes on to point out how critically important every member of the body is – *read v. 21*. Every part of the body needs every other part of the body to function properly. We cannot ever claim that we do not need certain members of the body. In fact, Paul goes on to say that... *read vv. 22-24a*.

It is at this point that Paul really transitions from talking about our physical bodies to address the significance of our relationships in the body of Christ. Listen to what he says – *read vv. 24b-26*.

God has put together the body, this body—this fellowship of believers—to function as a unit. Each part, each member is dependent on all the other members. It is designed to function as a body, each member doing his or her part, working together in unity.

When one member suffers, all suffer. You know what it is like when one part of your body hurts. Something as simple as banging your little toe on the leg of a chair brings pain and suffering to your whole body. That is the way it is in the church. When one is hurting, we cannot say that it does not affect us.

So, we are all one body, composed of many different members, and each member is important and necessary for the proper functioning of the body.

### **Summary and Application – vv. 27-31**

How can we summarize and apply this? Well, look at the final verses of this chapter. *Read vv. 27-31* – Paul summarizes his case by coming back to the issue of spiritual gifts. God has put the body together with all the gifts necessary to function as he has designed it.

After listing some of the gifts that God has given the church, he reminds his readers again that we are all different. Just as the members of a body are not all the same so the members of the body of Christ are not all the same – *look back to v. 17*.

He closes with the challenge to seek out the gifts that are most beneficial—the higher gifts. We will come back to that in a future message.

I would like to close this morning with a point of application by reading a devotional thought that comes from Charles Stanley of InTouch Ministries. This devotional showed up on Wednesday of this past week. It is based on Romans 12:9-13 which is part of a larger passage also dealing with spiritual gifts. *Read Rom. 12:9-13*.

#### *Romans 12:9-13*

*There's something in human nature that resists having to lean on others for support. In fact, since its very beginnings, our country has been known for an independent spirit and self-sufficiency. But what may be considered beneficial in a national culture is not what Christ advocates for His church. Although we are each saved individually, the Lord doesn't intend for us to live as if we're on an island—set apart to ourselves. We are called the body of Christ, and as such, our lives are meant to touch, intersect, and connect with other believers in a local church.*

*The various ways we support one another are summarized in today's passage, and they cover a large range of experiences, from rejoicing to suffering. No matter where we find ourselves on this spectrum, God calls us to be devoted to one another through service, prayer, and hospitality. Paul also specifies the attitudes we should have as we care for each other: sincere love, unselfishness, honor, diligence, and eagerness.*

*As you can see, the church is a place for participants, not spectators. Yet many Christians today think this kind of involvement in others' lives is too costly. So they come on Sunday, stand to sing, sit to listen, and walk out to get back to their own lives. The term "spectator Christian" doesn't apply only to those who deliberately avoid going to church. In fact, many churches are filled with observant attendees who sit in the pews each week but never touch a fellow believer's life. What about you? Are you a spectator seeking what you can get or a participant looking for ways to give to someone else?*

Is our body functioning as it should? Are you doing your part to touch others, to contribute to the healthy functioning of the body of Christ here at Clive Christian Fellowship?