



Body Parts

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

As many of you know, apart from my normal car, I also own an old Vauxhall Frontera. It was very useful when we lived in Swaffham as many of the roads were rough and muddy and having something that can cope with them was handy. If you're into technical specifications, here are a few for you. However we gave it an extra name; "The Blue Lemon" because whenever it broke down, it always did it in style, so it wasn't surprising that we changed it a year ago for something that will hopefully be more reliable. But what of the The Blue Lemon? Well, no-one wants to buy it, which is sad because it hasn't broken down for 12 months now! Well that was until last week when I took it in for an MoT. The garage rang me and said "your car's engine stopped in the middle of the MoT test and we can't get it started again". After a day of inaction, the garage finally found the fault – a tiny connector had come off one of the sensors which control the car's electronics. All that power, all that weight, all that technology and it wasn't going anywhere because a tiny component couldn't do it's job. Otherwise – the car passed!

A small part. It's the same with our own bodies – because after all, like a car, they are a machine. We are also made up of lots of parts, big parts and small parts, parts we can see and parts that are inside. **BODY PARTS** We all also know that when our parts don't work properly, we get ill. And it often doesn't take much of a malfunction to cause much pain – take toothache for example. And when bigger problems occur or parts break down permanently, we become totally disabled. But when all the parts are fit, healthy and strong, then it's quite amazing what people can do!

And Paul in our passage this morning gets to the point in comparing the church of God, the body of Christ to a body. So what is the body of Christ all about?

♦ All Christians are part of it SLIDE

When we were looking at the Lord's Table over the last couple of weeks, we saw that the table is a leveller – it reminds us that we are all one in Christ: there is now Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, slave or free: we each came by our faith the same way (through grace) and we are as each equally dependent on God for our spiritual and eternal welfare.

And at the beginning of this passage, Paul reminds us of that by saying this: we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body. **BISCUIT** Lose the baptised for a moment and substitute immersed **IMMERSED** which what baptised means and here we have it: we were all immersed by one Spirit into one body. We've been dropped into it, dunked, submerged – made part of it. We are a part of it and it's part of us.

So the body is the church. If we are a believer this morning then the Holy Spirit has made us part of the church of God. There are Christians around that say "church isn't for me, I don't want to be part of a church" or "I don't really feel committed to being part of a church" "I'm happy to go to church, to be a spectator, to come to things, but I don't want to commit myself". If that's you this morning then consider these words; "we were ALL immersed by one Spirit into one body. ALL Whether you like it or not, you're in it.

Now when Paul talks of the church, what does he mean, the church universal, or the local church? Paul, and the NT generally never discriminates in that way. It's clear all believers are part of Christ's body, but here Paul is addressing a local church in Corinth where certain people felt that they were a different part of it than others. This led some to feel humiliated and not part of it at all. Paul makes

it clear to that local church in Corinth that they were all absolutely equal before God, but that they were all baptised by one Spirit into one body.

Let me ask each person here who is a believer this morning? If we are all baptised by one Spirit into one body, do we believe that the Spirit has led us to be part of this body? If we do then we need to make sure we affirm that to one another. The major way we do that It's a way of saying to one another God has called us to be part of the church here, that we belong here, that we commit ourselves to worship together, to break bread together, to support and serve one another spiritually and socially, to witness about Jesus to our community together, to build up God's work here through giving of ourselves and what God has given to us financially, to grow together in Christ. And the device we use - in fact the device all denominations use in one from or another – is membership.

MEMBERSHIP

I've been pleased to welcome four people into membership since I've been here but I know there are others still considering it. So why be a member of a Church – surely I'm already a member of the Church because we are all baptised by one Spirit into one body. True and we are happy to recognise all true believers and we don't exclude anyone from things we do because they are not members. We welcome all.

- membership is a means of affirming that God has called us to be part of the fellowship here SLIDE
- a means of recognising one another as being part of the body of Christ SLIDE
- a covenanting together to serve God and serve one another. SLIDE

So if you are a Christian and feel that you belong here because God has called you here, then membership is for you. Take the opportunity to affirm and be affirmed as part of Christ's body.

◆ All Christians have a part in it. SLIDE

So Paul emphasises our one-ness in Christ. But in the same passage he emphasises the fact that we are all different too.

12 Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts.

14 For the body itself is not made up of only one part, but of many parts.

This is the really important part of what Paul has to say here. A body is made up of parts, different parts. It's the sum of the parts that makes the body function, grow and be healthy. The body won't work without the parts. And that's the point here. Bodies grow and remain healthy because all the parts are working properly. As I said earlier, if we are sick then nothing works.

It's the same with the church. The body is made up of parts – people. They are different parts but to work they need to work together. There are big parts and small parts.

Parts which have lots of energy and parts that are a bit slower.

Parts which seem to be able to do lots of things, and others which seem good at doing one or two things.

Some parts are practical whilst others aren't

And God provides all the parts we need as a church to function; that's you and me. That's why recognising one another as being called here is so important. We are recognising that God has given each one of us a specific role as part of His church here.

What does Paul say?

- self-denial doesn't alter the fact of your call and role - *15 If the foot were to say, "Because I am not a hand, I don't belong to the body," that would not keep it from being a part of the body. 16 And if the ear were to say, "Because I am not an eye, I don't belong to the body," that would not keep it from being a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were just an eye, how could it hear? And if it were only an ear, how could it smell? 18 As it is, however, God put every different part in the body just as he wanted it to be. 19 There would not be a body if it were all only one part! 20 As it is, there are many parts but one body.* If you are called here then God has something for

you to do. In fact Paul goes on later in the chapter to talk about how God makes sure we are equipped to answer that call. And that isn't the same as what someone else is called to do. It's funny how many people want to have the limelight roles in the church, but few are prepared to do the easy but small and unnoticed jobs.

- no role in the church is unimportant or superior *21 So then, the eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" Nor can the head say to the feet, "Well, I don't need you!" 22 On the contrary, we cannot do without the parts of the body that seem to be weaker; 23 and those parts that we think aren't worth very much are the ones which we treat with greater care; while the parts of the body which don't look very nice are treated with special modesty, 24 which the more beautiful parts do not need. God himself has put the body together in such a way as to give greater honour to those parts that need it.* It's surprising how often people are in denial about being called to the small jobs. It's surprising what a big deal they make of it. Yet God honours the faithful. I reckon when we get to heaven and Jesus rewards those who have been faithful to Him, it won't be the big shot preachers or the people who get the honour: but those who did the small things that mattered faithfully, that were always there for people, that did things without affirmation or recognition – but served God faithfully, doing what they did because they could do it even if nobody did notice that they give of their time and of themselves sacrificially before God. Of that be sure.

Let me ask you the question? Are you called to this church? Then what is the role God has given you here? Sometimes roles are desperately spiritual, sometimes it's just a matter of seeing something small that needs to be done that we can see we can do – the cleaning rota, helping with the garden, helping with stewarding, helping with the admin. Perhaps you've been ignoring God for sometime. Perhaps it's to take more responsibility, maybe to put yourself forward for the diaconate, to fill the housekeeping role. But what I think is best about any role in a church is that they are never intended by God to be served alone but with others. I find it sad that people don't do things because they think they will be lumbered with something so large they can't cope with or. If anything is like that then it shouldn't be and we need to change it. We are a body, we're interconnected, we're a fellowship. We do things together, upholding one another and supporting one another. That's what should make being church fun and worthwhile. One of the reasons our work mornings are so well attended I think is because they are a bit of a laugh. I think that's a challenge to use as a fellowship and to the leadership. When we make anything we do an unacceptable burden or is just unpleasant, should we be doing it? In truth, being part of a body where we serve one another and build one another up and that should be satisfying, or worthwhile, or a pleasure to do, or builds us up spiritually, socially, or personally or helps us or others as we journey through life. If it's not, we've got to make it like that because that's what it should be.

So the challenge is: what part of the body are you? Here's what someone has said about our diversity: *Our society seems to put a high value on conformity. The world conforms people into its mould. To drive the same car, wear the same clothes. There is a peer pressure to act alike. The Bible says you do not need to conform. You need to be who God made you to be and you need to function that way. That is why we rejoice in our differences. God is not expecting you to be someone else. God is expecting you to be just who he made – Brad Beaman*

◆ Without one another the body falls apart

The one thing I can say for certain is that God has not called anyone in this fellowship to be a spectator. The Christian faith is a participating team sport, not a spectator sport. The famous US preacher Jack Heyford once said of those who spectate Christianity: *"They come for the show, but they refuse to grow."*

Our bodies need nourishment and good health to grow. And that is when everything works as it should: together and in harmony. If some parts break down, the body becomes impaired - sick – and unless treated, the sickness becomes terminal. We need to encourage and use our bodies or our muscles waste and we get fat. We need one another. If we don't do what God is calling us to do, then we become sick spiritually and worse, the rest of the body loses as well. The reverse is also true.

A question we need to ask ourselves as a church is: how healthy are we? And in many respects we find ourselves healthy and in others unhealthy.

Paul says: 25 And so there is no division in the body, but all its different parts have the same concern for one another. 26 If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it; if one part is praised, all the other parts share its happiness. 27 All of you are Christ's body, and each one is a part of it.

Do you know your part: your function this morning? The experience and gifting God has given you means that you have a role here and now. It may be something new. On the other hand the Lord may be asking you to change your role and function – to do something new. Changes in call are not unusual – look at Ministers for example.

All God wants us to be is available, ready and willing to be used by Him. He honours us for our faithfulness not for the glory of the service. All He wants are willing people, to serve Him and to serve one another.

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