



1 Corinthians 12:12-26

TITLE

When I was about ten, my school decided to send us regularly to the local swimming pool to make sure we could all swim. I hated water and couldn't swim and got teased rotten by the other boys because I was afraid of the water. My mum and dad decided that they were going to teach me to swim in the nicest way possible. Every Sunday morning they used to take me to PENARTH BATHS to teach me to swim. It was an unusual pool. It was on the seafront at Penarth and water for the pool was drawn directly from the Bristol Channel and purified. It meant that because it was seawater, it was more buoyant – great for learning to swim, but odd because it tasted like salt and had enormous quantities of chlorine in it. They finally persuaded me to swim, which saved my embarrassment in school. My dad was taught by his dad in a less than sympathetic way – he threw him out of a boat into the sea – THROWN IN AT THE DEEP END. Either way, if you want to swim, you have to get into the water! BAPTIST CHURCH JOKE

In the past couple of weeks we have been looking at what church is and we found that the Greek word for church used in the NT is EKKLESIA – an assembly - a group of people called together for a purpose. Each person accepting Jesus as Saviour and Lord becomes part of God's assembly – God's church. That's the gist of the opening of the passage we had read to us this morning. Here's the words again but in a slightly different translation:

SLIDE

For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body- whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.(NIV)

What we're given here is another picture of the church and another picture of how God puts us there. It's as a body. BODY In one way we can connect with this straight away as we often call an organised group of people a body. But Paul uses the picture of the body to describe our relationship both to God and to one another.

Let's consider that verse I just read:

We were all baptised by one Spirit into one body SLIDE

Paul uses this word baptism. People have created all sorts of theologies every time this word appears. Let's do the usual of translating it properly and see what we are left with: IMMERSED *We were all immersed by one Spirit into one body.* What does that mean? Let's go back to our photo: SLIDE We've all been incorporated into the church! However we like to look at it, whether it's like my dad or his dad, we have all been plunged into the church. Sploosh. Whether we like it or not, God the Holy Spirit has made us part of the Church of God. He's done that. It's not an optional extra – we're in it for the whole of eternity because it's God's will. We can't pick up and drop. Interestingly, although we can apply the idea of the body to describe the universal church, Paul is clearly talking about the local church at Corinth here. We may be immersed by the Spirit into the universal church, but we need to realise that the Spirit throws us into a local church too. Sploosh! No difference or distinction is made in scale. Christians are meant to be part of a local church – that's God's plan and intention for each of us.

But it's not our choice, it's His. We were immersed by one Spirit into one body. How much WE like to pick and choose our churches as if WE have the choice. We don't. God calls each of us to be part of a church. He immerses us in it – and like me learning at Penarth Baths, for many Christians, their desire is to get out and go to another pool or another place a little more congenial!

The problem with the Corinthians was that they decided that there were different kinds of Christians – I follow Paul, I follow Apollos, I follow Peter, I follow Christ. We still do the same today. We don't like the water we're in because it doesn't suit OUR own beliefs and foibles. God just doesn't recognise our denominations as conferring anything above or beyond what He makes us in Christ. If we know Jesus as Saviour and Lord, we're part of the church – and by definition that is on an equal footing – whether Jew, Greek, British, black,

white, Baptist, Anglican. That's why we have an open membership in this church. If you know Jesus as Saviour then you are a member of the body of Christ and therefore eligible for membership of this local church regardless of what your denominational background or not has been. There is just one criterion we ask – and that's the same one that God has before he dunks someone into the church of God – knowing Jesus. Local church membership is the way by which we confirm and affirm together that God has called us to be church.

SLIDE

We have all been given one Spirit to drink.

Interesting this phrase. What is it most of all that sustains our bodies and keeps us alive? It's water. Without food, most of us could survive weeks, but without water we would be dead in a few days. Water is essential for life. How do we remain alive spiritually? By drinking of the Spirit – allowing Him to invigorate us spiritually, to put life into us, to fill us with the presence of God. And what's most healthy. It's the same as water – to drink until we are full. That's why we are encouraged to be filled with the Spirit in more than one place in the Bible. This was written to a church not just individuals. How do we remain and grow as a body? By ensuring that we drink of the Spirit. And how do we do that? Firstly by receiving from His word. And secondly by walking closely with God as we worship and pray as God's people.

God wants us to be people who are full of His Spirit so we function together well. That can only happen if we realise who we are – that we've all be put in the one body and only have the one source of spiritual nourishment – and seek to get that nourishment to every part of the body. Quite a challenge isn't it.

However – we have all been splashed into one body so we are all the same before God, but actually God has made us all different. Now before you think that contradicts what I've just said, Paul uses the picture of body parts to show how God creates diversity amongst us to build up the body. INTERNAL ORGANS. And that's the core idea. Just as God makes us part of a church, He determines what part we should play. Again, we like to do what we want to do -or not as the case may be – as our contribution to the life of the church. No, that isn't what Scripture teaches. Whether our role is conspicuous or hidden, large or small, skilled or unskilled, our part is determined by how God calls and equips us – how He makes us different for His purposes.

So we're all different and Paul uses the example of body parts to show how God has made us all different intentionally so that His body works properly. Paul gives us two silly pictures here. He means them to sound funny. 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?*

ONLY ONE PART

It doesn't make sense – each organ has a role in the body. If bits are missing or non-functional then we have a problem. WHAT HAPPENS? In a real body then it makes us very sick, debilitated, disabled.

PICASSO. The Corinthians rejected certain people in their church because of their own prejudices – wrong race, wrong colour, wrong class, wrong habits, personal animosity, lack of respect, lack of value of skills and gifts. But what's clear is that we are all different but that God has given us all skills, personalities, attributes that are designed to build the church. BODY SLIDE If we don't value people and encourage them, or if we don't participate fully in the church, then individuals lose out, the church loses out and the church becomes sick, debilitated. If we are called by God to do something and don't then the church loses as much as we do personally. If we don't think this church is functioning as well as it could, then have we encouraged one another as we should have? Have I played my part as I should have? I've announced the election of deacons this morning. It isn't all about "he's a good bloke, he should be a deacon", it's about us asking "is God calling xxxx to be a deacon – I'd better speak to him". Or maybe you know God is calling you to put yourself forward – are others willing to affirm that call? All I know at the moment is that our leadership is deficient, which puts enormous pressure on the rest of us; so someone who should be doing it isn't.

How do I conclude. We are given this message from scripture so that we would value one another, and value ourselves because that makes good church – a healthy body. SLIDE *And so there is no division in the body, but all its different parts have the same concern for one another. 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.*

Let me bring you a challenge IF GOD HAS CALLED YOU TO THIS CHURCH – ARE YOU PLAYING YOUR PART? To play our part we need to be a part. That's why we have a membership in this church – so that

we can confirm, affirm covenant with one another to serve God together in this neighbourhood and to encourage and build one another up. "If God has already made me part of the church, why do I need to become a member?" Because we need to affirm that we have been called and for others to affirm that call. We don't make it hard for people to be members – you just need to know Jesus as your Saviour and Lord, and of course you need to ask. If you believe you are called to be part of this church and are not willing to affirm and be affirmed, how come your calling is different from the rest of us? If we're thrown into the same pool, then we swim together.

IF GOD HAS NOT CALLED YOU? - by that I mean is that you know you should be somewhere else. Then WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? If you are visiting, then welcome – take our greetings back to your home church. If you don't know if you are called here and are not sure if it is here or elsewhere then ask someone to pray for you after the service. Scripture teaches us clearly that we need to belong to a church fellowship as that is the God-appointed way we should grow and thrive. There isn't an alternative life for a Christian. LONE RANGER The Christian faith is a lone ranger free zone.

Being part of church is not optional extra – we have been chucked in it! Sploosh! We're in the church universal, and God chucks us into a local church too. We're in the water together, let's swim; and to change metaphors, let's drink of the Spirit together and grow and thrive.

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