

1 Corinthians 12:12-31  
Joshua 22  
Psalm 133

“Spiritual Gifts – Many Members, One Body”

Aug 17, 2014

Joshua 22 shows us how important it is to be in fellowship with the people of God.

When the 2 ½ tribes on the east side of the Jordan built an altar,  
it was feared that they were turning away from the Lord.

God had commanded Israel to have one place of worship  
–one place where the sacrifices would be offered.

So the construction of a new altar looked like a violation of God’s commands.

But the eastern tribes made it clear that they had built the altar

simply as a reminder that they, too,

had a part in the LORD with the rest of the tribes of Israel.

The fact that Israel nearly went to war over the building of this altar

makes it clear how important it was to be a part of the covenant community.

Phineas, the grandson of Aaron, the high priest, plays a central role in this story.

That’s because the high priest is the one who embodies all Israel.

When the high priest puts on his priestly garments,

including the breastplate with twelve stones – representing the 12 tribes –  
he represents all Israel – he *is* all Israel, you might say.

All Israel is embodied in him when he goes into the Holy of Holies.

Psalm 133 reflects on this,

as it speaks of “how good and how pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity!”

It is like the precious oil on the head,

running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron,

running down on the collar of his robes!

Psalm 133 refers to the dew of Hermon (a mountain in the north of Israel)

falling on the mountains of Zion (in the south – in Judah).

When brethren dwell together in unity, that is where God’s blessing comes upon his people.

Psalm 133 is often sung at the end of presbytery meetings – or at General Assembly –

as we remember that we have a great High Priest – greater than Aaron –

who unites us not merely on earth, but in the heavenly Zion.

Sing Psalm 133

Read 1 Corinthians 12

We saw last time that there are many gifts, but one Spirit,

many ministries, but one Lord,

many activities, but one God who empowers them.

One Spirit, one Lord (Jesus Christ), one God.

You frequently find these Trinitarian patterns in Paul’s letters.

Paul is plainly convinced that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God,  
yet there is only one God.

Further, the Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Father –  
they are one God, but three persons.

As we saw last time, we need to remember that there is more to church life than the gifts.

Paul said that there are “varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit,  
varieties of service (or ministry) but the same Lord,  
varieties of activities (or workings) but the same God who empowers them.”

Ministry (or service) focuses on how the Lord Jesus commissions us –  
we are his *agents* or emissaries.

Activities (or workings) focus on how God the Father empowers us (by his Spirit) to do the work  
It is his power – his energy – that is at work in us.

Gifts focus on how the Spirit graciously equips us for the work with particular abilities.

Think about how “gifts, services, and activities” work together:

if you are a Sunday school teacher,  
the Lord Jesus has called you to that ministry/service;  
God has given you his power/energy for that work;  
and the Spirit has equipped you with the gifts to do it.

Or, if you have a friend in your neighborhood who is hurting:  
the Lord Jesus has called you to be his agent in ministering to that person;  
the Father has given you his power/energy for that work;  
and the Spirit has equipped you with the gifts to do it.

You can't just say, “Oh, that's not my gift!”

If the Lord says “Help that person” – then he has called you to help them!

Think of the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Everyone agreed that we should love our neighbors as ourselves.

The question was:

“Who is my neighbor?”

What would have happened if the Good Samaritan had looked at the poor Jew in the ditch  
and said, “Oh, that's not my gift!”?

No, the Lord Jesus has called you to love your neighbor –  
and God the Father has empowered you with his energy –  
and the Holy Spirit has graciously gifted you to accomplish his purposes!

Paul focuses in 1 Corinthians on the gifts (because that's where the *problem* was in Corinth).

Paul starts in verses 12-13 by talking about what it means to be *members of one body*.

## **1. Members of Christ – Baptized in One Spirit into One Body (v12-13)**

<sup>12</sup> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves<sup>[d]</sup> or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

I want to start by clearing up a potential source of confusion.

Sometimes, when people talk about church membership,  
they sound like they are talking about joining a club, a political party,  
or some other social organization.

And, I am sorry to say, sometimes even churches act that way!

In some churches “membership” is restricted  
to those who can sign a detailed doctrinal statement.  
Or “membership” has to do with who gets to vote at congregational meetings.  
Some churches require adherence to special rules (e.g., no drinking alcoholic beverages).  
These sorts of restrictions have caused some churches  
to eliminate the category of “membership” altogether.

If membership is something that the church has created,  
then becoming a member would be optional.

The key is for the church to *practice* membership according to what Paul says here in 1 Cor 12.

Being a member of the church does not mean “joining a social organization.”

Being a member of the church simply means being a living part of the church.

If you are a baptized Christian who has professed your faith in Jesus,  
then you *are* a member of the church.

A church membership roll is simply a tool that the elders use  
to keep track of which members of Christ’s body are under our care at this time.

Like we saw last time, the only prerequisite for becoming a member of the body  
is the confession “Jesus is Lord” –  
in other words, that you understand the gospel, that you believe the gospel,  
and that you desire to live according to the gospel.

Paul says that as the body is one and has many members,  
and all the members of the body, though many, are one body,  
so it is with Christ.

Does that strike you as odd?

You might have expected Paul to say, “so it is with the church.”

But Paul says, “so it is with Christ.”

Christ and his church are inseparable.

As the body is one—so also is Christ one.

And therefore all who are in him are united to him and to one another.

It is striking, though, to hear how Paul explains this.

If the prerequisite is the confession “Jesus is Lord,”

then how do you become a member of Christ's body?

Paul's answer in verse 13 is, "baptism":

*For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—  
Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—  
and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*

Paul said in chapter 9 that he no longer considers himself to be a Jew –  
rather, he know how to act *as a Jew* when is around Jews.  
And earlier in chapter 12 he said that the Corinthians are no longer Gentiles.

The body of Christ – the church – is a new humanity (one new man in Christ),  
which brings together Jews and Greeks – slaves or free.

And Paul says that you become a member of Christ's body through baptism.

Baptism is not just a matter of getting wet.

Baptism includes both the water, and the grace that the water symbolizes.

Baptism with water and baptism with the Holy Spirit are not two different baptisms,  
but one.

Paul had used baptism as an example back in chapter 1,  
when dealing with divisions in the church:

“Is Christ divided?...Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (1:13)

Paul says that baptism in the name of Jesus Christ is the badge of membership,  
it is the outward sign that demonstrates that this person belongs to Christ.

And that is why he says that “in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.”

All who are baptized with water are brought into the body of Christ – the church.

That is not to say that they are all saved.

Look back at I Cor 10:1-4 –

all of the Israelites were baptized into Moses

all ate of the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink –

all drank of Christ.

This is why we say that the substance of the Old Testament sacraments is the same as the NT.

It was Christ then—and it is Christ now!

But, (v5) most of them rebelled, and God was not pleased with them.

And Paul explicitly states that these things happened as a warning to us,  
that we might not follow in their footsteps.

So not everyone who was baptized into Moses,  
and drank of Christ in the wilderness was saved.

Then,

only two chapters later, Paul says (12:13)

We were ALL baptized into one body by one Spirit.

All of you who have been baptized are members of Christ's body.

To be a member of the body of Christ, you must be baptized,  
because baptism is the way in which we enter the body of Christ.

Therefore all of you who are baptized are members of Christ.  
Some people have tried to say that they are members of the invisible church,  
but not part of the visible church.

That misses the whole point of Paul's teaching.  
In 1 Corinthians 12,  
Paul is talking about the daily life of the visible church.

Remember verse 27—"Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."  
To be part of the body means that you are organically related to other believers.

And if we are baptized by one Spirit into one body,  
then we should also recognize that baptism is necessary to be part of the body.

An unbaptized Christian was unthinkable to Paul.  
If you say that you believe in Jesus, then you should be baptized!  
If you say that you believe in Jesus, and you refuse to be baptized,  
then you are refusing to do what Jesus said  
(in Matt 28, he told the apostles to go, make disciples of the nations,  
baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,  
and teaching them to observe all that he has commanded.  
If you refuse to do what Jesus said, then you are not his disciple.)

All those who are baptized become part of the body.  
It's not that they are regenerated and given eternal life in their baptism.  
Rather, they are united to the body of Christ in their baptism.

Let me ask you something.  
Do you believe that anything special happens at a wedding?  
But think about it:  
half an hour BEFORE the wedding,  
if the bride and groom were to make love, they would be sinning;  
half an hour AFTER the wedding,  
if they make love, they are being obedient to God.  
And yet on the outside,  
those two people are no different.  
There has been no radical change in their love for each other.  
It is simply that God has joined them together through this ceremony.

And marriage isn't even a sacrament!!  
But the Bible does give us Baptism and the Lord's Supper as effectual means of grace.  
So if the Bible says that "by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body"

we should believe what it says!

So you become a member of Christ's church through baptism.

To be a member of Christ's body,  
    simply means to be a part of Christ.

There is one body, and many parts.

    Each part,

        each member,

    is to work together with the rest to build up and edify the rest of the body.

Now Paul talks about the body on two levels.

    In Ephesians 4, he includes the whole church in all parts of the world.

    But here he is addressing specific concerns in a specific congregation in I Corinthians,  
        and so he tells them that **THEY**, the Corinthians, are one body.

In whatever setting you find Christ's church, you find one body.

    So this morning, we are gathered together as one body in Christ.

    When we have joint services with our sister churches,  
        we are not two bodies, but one.

    When we all gather together before the throne of grace in the New Creation,  
        we will not be separate bodies, but one.

But you are one body

    --we, all together, are members of Christ, and of one another.

In verses 14-26, Paul explores the analogy of body parts.

And I should point out that Paul is using *an analogy*.

    Don't try to push it too far!

    Otherwise we'll start trying to figure out who is the spleen, or the armpit!

Paul is using a well-known image in the Greco-Roman world.

    Political writers ever since Plato had used the analogy of the various parts of the body  
        in order to speak of the "body politic" –  
        generally in an attempt to remind people that *every part* of society  
            is necessary in order for the whole to function properly.

    If the farmers stop farming, we'll have no food.

    If the watchmen stop watching, we'll be invaded.

The metaphor works in two different directions:

    on the one hand it says to those with "lesser" gifts –  
        you are an important part of the body;

    on the other hand it says to those with "greater" gifts –

        'you need each other' – you never think about your big toe,  
            until it's *not there* (and you keep falling over!).

And that's where Paul goes with the image in verses 14-26:  
first, he focuses on how God has arranged the body in such a way  
that the whole body fits together *as he chose* to arrange it;  
second, he talks about how the different parts need each other  
if the body is to function properly.

## 2. "As He Chose" – Your Place in the Body (v14-20)

<sup>14</sup> *For the body does not consist of one member but of many.* <sup>15</sup> *If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.*

<sup>16</sup> *And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.* <sup>17</sup> *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?* <sup>18</sup> *But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.* <sup>19</sup> *If all were a single member, where would the body be?* <sup>20</sup> *As it is, there are many parts,<sup>[e]</sup> yet one body.*

I want you to look carefully at the language of verses 14-20.

There is nothing here about "needing" each other (that comes later).

The focus here is on how the body fits together –  
each part playing its own role.

The questions in verses 15-16, are both asked by body parts with inferiority complexes:  
the foot feels inferior to the hand,  
and the ear feels inferior to the eye.

Paul's point in verses 14-20 is *not* that you need each other.

His point is that *you are* part of the body.

*God has arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.*

We are not strict utilitarians.

It's not all about function and being "necessary" or "useful"!

The body is designed by God – and therefore the members of the body are arranged as he chose.  
Each part of the body has its own function – its own usefulness.

You may have heard of the recent discovery that the appendix may have some use!

For years doctors thought that the appendix was useless.  
(The appendix is a short tube connected to the colon)

But now some researchers think that they have discovered its purpose:  
a repository for good bacteria which can replenish the colon  
after a case of dysentery or cholera.

I'm sure some clever person could figure out some parallel to the church –  
but the reason why I mention it is because sometimes it's *not obvious*  
what you are you doing in the body.

Sometimes you may feel useless and unneeded.

But Paul reminds us that God knows what he is doing.  
*He* has arranged the members in the body –  
he has placed you precisely where he wants you.

And the body only functions properly when each part is doing its own work.  
Let me translate Paul's language from "body part" language to our situation.

Nowadays we often divide up by "demographics" –  
the teenagers, the home school moms, the ND students, the "older set"!

We tend to gravitate towards "people like us" –  
but God did not call us to form single-demographic communities.

He placed us in the body – with Jews, Greeks, slave, free...  
We are united *in Christ*.

There was a beautiful picture of this last night at the Sills:  
three older families, three school-age families, and three young singles.  
Sure, there was a tendency to "hang out" in groups –  
but there was good interaction between everyone

And this emphasis on how God has arranged the body sets up how we need each other (v21-26):

### **3. "God Has So Composed the Body" – We Need Each Other (v21-26)**

<sup>21</sup> *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."*

The church in Corinth was divided by factions.  
Paul rebukes that tendency.  
Every part needs the others.

Here Paul rebukes the sin of autonomy – the sin of self-sufficiency –  
the idea that "I have the right to do whatever I want."

And Paul zeroes in on the parts that seem least valuable.  
"the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable."  
Every part of the body needs the other parts to be functioning properly  
in order for the whole body to thrive!

If you are waiting for someone else to do *their job*,  
before you can do your job – that's frustrating.

But you still have to do your job!

Towards the end of her life,



my mother realized that she had always been waiting for others to do their job –  
waiting for the “grand moment” – the “white knight” – the fairy tale ending.

She had grand dreams of establishing a retreat center for women,  
but it all hinged on someone else providing the money.

She was living in North Carolina – and she went to a little Baptist church  
and she was waiting for the women in the church  
to invite her over for that famous “southern hospitality.”  
And she waited.  
And she waited.

Finally God opened her eyes to her pattern of waiting for someone else.

And so she set herself the goal of inviting every woman in the church over for tea.  
One problem.  
She lived in a tiny 400 square foot apartment, crammed with all her earthly belongings.

There was just enough room for two chairs.  
This meant she would have to invite the women over one-by-one.

The Sunday after she died, her church held an impromptu memorial service  
on Sunday morning after the worship service.

We heard woman after woman stand up and say that they had felt like royalty  
the way that my mom treated them –  
and that when they saw how she used that tiny cramped apartment to love others,  
they returned to their spacious suburban homes,  
and promised God that they would use their homes to love others.

Yes, it’s true.  
People are selfish.

So *don’t wait* for someone else to do their job!  
Maybe someone else *should be* reaching out to you.  
But that cuts both ways – because maybe they are just as selfish as you are!

In verses 22-25, Paul says:

<sup>22</sup> *On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,* <sup>23</sup> *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,* <sup>24</sup> *which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it,* <sup>25</sup> *that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.*

And particularly, Paul highlights the importance of the *weaker* parts of the body.

“Weak” refers to those who are  
“less endowed with power or status than others” (AT 1007)

A worldly organization highlights how many of its members are powerful and influential people.

Think about what Paul has said:  
God has not called many who are strong and powerful –  
but he uses the weak and foolish things of the world to shame the strong.

Well, that’s the language that Paul uses again here.

While the world dreams of power, the church glories in weakness.

Paul calls us to have a different mind – the mind of Christ.

And all through 1 Corinthians Paul has emphasized that the reason for this  
is the *cross of Christ!*  
the place where weakness triumphed over power –  
the place where foolishness triumphed over wisdom!

Paul’s point is that the “less honorable” parts of the body should be displayed with greater honor.  
And that God has composed the body in this very way – and for this very purpose.

The church needs to be a place that is characterized by the cross –  
a place where we honor those who lack honor –

just as “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.”  
(in other words, the same care for one another that God has had for us).

<sup>26</sup> *If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.*

Last week, we said goodbye to two families –  
one moving across the Pacific,  
the other moving across the Atlantic!  
It’s easy to feel like we’ve just lost an arm or a leg!

And sometimes you want to respond by saying,  
“I can’t do that again” – “I can’t imagine getting that close to someone else,  
when I know that they are just going to leave.”

Paul’s doctrine of the *body* shows us how to handle that!

God has arranged the members of the body –

God has placed them where he wants them.

Yes, in one sense, Paul is talking about the church *in Corinth* –  
but what he is saying also applies to the church universal.  
After all, we know that members of the church in Corinth *also* moved around the world.  
Priscilla and Aquilla, for instance, pop up all over the Mediterranean!

God has composed the body in such a way that all the parts need each other.  
The Oosterhoffs are needed in Cambridge.  
The Cabalticas are needed in Xining.

But as some of you are grieving the loss of old friends –  
others are just arriving in South Bend.

Some of you may be here for a year or two.  
Others may be here in a PhD program for 5-8 years.

It can be easy to say, “I’m only here temporarily – so I won’t put down roots.”

It’s too late!  
You’re already here!  
If you belong to Jesus, then you are part of his body.  
God has put you here – so you need to be connected.  
And, what is more, we need you, and you need us as well!

(Christ only has one church – so this is true whichever particular congregation you join!)

The church has always been a band of pilgrims and wayfarers.  
Perhaps it has become a little *more so* in the modern era,  
but the church is the body of Christ – the family of Jesus.  
The only way to live the Christian life  
is in the wholehearted *care* for one another that Christ showed us –  
“that all the members may have the same care for one another”  
that God showed us in sending Jesus.

I think of how the Thelens *knew* that they were only going to be here for a year,  
so they threw themselves into getting connected and being a part of the body.  
You might say, “Oh, but I’m not very outgoing.”

I’m not asking you to change your personality.  
I’m challenging you to *love one another*.  
You do know, after all, what comes after 1 Corinthians 12?  
It’s 1 Corinthians 13 - which is *all about love*.

You don’t have to be outgoing.  
You can be shy.

I don't care how you do it!

But you have to love one another as Christ loved you.

And you can't do that by sitting around and waiting for someone else to do something.

You also can't do that by ignoring that person who is standing by themselves,  
wondering what to do next.

If you are so busy with "your friends" that you ignore the one who is weak – alone –  
then that's not love – that's just gregarious selfishness.

To be a member of the body of Christ

means to live a Christ-like (cross-shaped) life.

You can't just wait for others to come to you –

after all, think of where we'd be if Jesus had waited for us to come to him!

If God only loved his friends – he wouldn't have any friends.

Even so, if we only love our friends,

then the love of Christ is not in us.