

1 Corinthians 12:12-32

- I. Opening Illustration: The Thing from the Addams Family
 - a. It's just a little weird, which is probably the point—but the Thing is not a full person.
 - b. It's just a bit, well disconnected.
 - c. (get a fake skeleton hand)—you know, there are a lot of disembodied hands out there, just lying around in folks' yards these days...you know what I notice...they're sort of shriveled, dehydrated...zombie-ish.
 - i. Most disconnected body parts just...don't...well, they just don't work.
 - ii. My brother's seen a few disconnected eyeballs
 1. He dissected a shark once for a biology lab—the eyeballs bounce pretty well...
 2. But they don't see outside of the shark.
 3. It's got to be a connected body, and it's got to be a living body.
 - d. Of course, Paul is going to take the metaphor of the anatomical human body, and apply it to the church in Corinth—and by extension, we apply it to ourselves.
 - i. Now, this is a passage, and a metaphor, which gets worked over—a lot, by Christian leaders and churches.
 - ii. Sometimes, this passage feels a little shriveled, too. The main point of the passage is easy to discern, and so is the application, or at least, so it feels.
 - e. But familiarity can breed contempt. I hope that today, the Holy Spirit makes this passage connected alive for you.
 - i. These verses are like fiery embers, and if the Spirit of God will just breathe on them a bit, this passage can catch fire again in our imaginations.
 - ii. Which is what I hope will happen this morning.
- II. Main Point: Through the Spirit of God, we are all in the body of Christ, and all gifted to serve.
 - a. Since we are all in the Body, we can't say, "I don't belong."
 - b. Since we are all in the Body, we can't say, "You don't belong."
 - c. Since we are all in the Body, we can't say, "I can't serve."
- III. Main Point expounded.
 - a. Paul leads in with the example of an anatomical home body. And he starts with some obvious points.
 - i. The body, the human body, is a unit.
 1. When I look at any one of you, I don't think, hello conglomeration of hands, toes, feet, legs, eyeballs, and ears.
 2. You may have a striking feature or two, but that feature is yours!

- a. Illustration: Londa once told me that if I didn't have the right kind of ears, she wouldn't have dated me.
 - i. For a while there I had an inferiority complex about my ears!
 - ii. I was like, what about the rest of me?
 - b. That's sort of the point here: we don't think in terms of ears, we think in terms of the whole person.
 - i. People with odd features get upset with us when we stare at the oddity...there's more to them than the some of the parts.
 - ii. And beautiful people wonder if all we care about is the beauty of their features.
 - iii. There's a whole person in there.
 - ii. There is one body: and in the case of the body, we are more than the sum of our parts.
 - 1. Now there are many parts, each one necessary.
 - a. Which is why doctor's don't try to cut things off or out.
 - b. What's an appendix for? I don't know. I don't think most doctors do either...but they don't just sit down and say at a routine check-up: Hey, we don't know what this organ does, so we're going to open you up and take it out.
 - 2. The parts work best when they are working all together, and all with each other.
 - a. Illustration: Ever take something a part, but it back together, and have widgits left over.—
 - i. Uh-oh.
 - b. Illustration: I swear, every once in a while, my house spits out hardware. I'll be walking around, and I'll find a screw, bolt, or nail.
 - i. It makes me nervous.
 - 3. The body is more than the sum of the parts: but requires each part.
 - b. So it is with Christ and his followers.
 - i. Paul makes a massive Jesus point.
 - ii. There is only one Christ, and he has only one body. And that body, is the Church.
 - c. Paul emphasizes that ***we were all*** placed in this one body.
 - i. Who were?—we all were.
 - 1. Now, notice a subtle shift with me.
 - 2. Paul has been talking about spiritual gifts...but he doesn't say
 - a. Whether you speak in tongues
 - b. Or whether you have the gift

3. Paul shapes this paragraph with ethnic and social background.
 - a. Whether you are Jew or Greek,
 - b. Slave or free.
 - ii. Who are in the body?---we were all placed in the body.
- d. Who put us there? The Holy Spirit did!
- i. Notice that we were all is stated twice, and followed twice by “one Spirit.”
 - ii. Notice that we were all baptized by One Spirit
 - iii. Notice that we were all given One Spirit to drink.
 - iv. What’s all this about?
 1. Baptism is a theme we are all familiar with.
 2. And it’s not actually going under water that’s the point. It’s going under the Spirit that’s important. When Jesus calls us, when we declare Jesus’ lordship, when he saves us—the Holy Spirit baptizes us.
 3. But what is the point of this drinking of the Spirit? Why are the two linked together?
 4. We need to take a step backward in Corinthians to understand this.
 - a. 1 Corinthians 10:1 Paul writes to address participation in idol feasts at pagan temples, by using an illustration from Israel’s past. “For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea.
 - i. The cloud, you remember, was God, shrouded in a cloud by and a pillar of fire by not, as they came up out of Egypt.
 - ii. The sea was the Red Sea, which the Lord parted for them as they came out of Egypt.
 - b. **“They were all** baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.”
 - i. There’s baptism again.
 - c. Now, get this; ‘They **all** ate the **same** spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.’
 - i. Here we have baptism and drinking (and eating) linked together.
 - ii. While they were baptized into Moses; who stands in this case as a metaphor for God’s redemption from Egypt and the covenant forged at Mt. Sinai, they were given spiritual food, who Paul claims, was Christ.
 5. But let’s press on further: Paul warns them.
 - a. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with some of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. Now, these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil

things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were: as it is written; “the people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry.”

- i. What’s going on there: God’s salvation out of Egypt, represented by the Red Sea and the guiding cloud, bind Israel together into a body headed by God with a national covenant of allegiance to him. God saved them, and they belong to him.
- ii. The nourishment of spiritual food, reminds them of this and strengthens that bond.
- iii. Human body’s need to eat. So do body’s made up of people.

b. Jesus binds us to himself by the Holy Spirit, and gives us spiritual drink: The Holy Spirit baptizes us with regeneration and sanctifying grace, and then sustains us with his own presence.

- i. As some famous pastor said once: “We are quenched, and drenched with God.”
- ii. And this is how God treats every believer.
 1. It also serves as a warning; careful what you eat.
 2. God likes his body to be at peak capacity; every part nourished by good food and drink.

e. What is Paul driving at?

- i. There’s just one body—the Church. It’s Christ’s body.
- ii. We all—who have given our allegiance to Christ—are bound into it by the spirit who sanctifies us and unites us to Christ (baptism), are sustained in it by the Spirit (drinking), and given gifts by the Spirit (as we saw last week).

f. If you are a believer in Jesus, you’ve been baptized by the Spirit, and you are a part of the Body of Christ! The main point of the passage is then clearly this: Through the Holy spirit, we are all in the Body of Christ, and all gifted to serve.

- i. The Holy Spirit seals us in, and binds us to Jesus, in a sort of spiritual body transplant.
- ii. So there’s no nonsense about following Christ and rejecting church. As point one makes clear:

IV. Point 1: Since we are all in the Body, we can’t say, “I don’t belong.”

a. Again, Paul reminds us of some basic antimony; the body isn’t just a bunch of one part, but it’s got lots of different parts.

- i. If the foot should say...
- ii. If the eye should say...

- iii. That doesn't mean it ceases to be part of the body.
 - b. The human body does not allow for anatomical rebellion and secession.
 - i. Our body parts don't look at each other and go: man, I'm not like the others.
 - ii. I resign! When body parts resign, it doesn't go so good for the rest of the body parts.
 - iii. So it needs every part to complete all of the functions.
 - iv. Paul makes this point for us quickly:
 - 1. If everybody were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be.
 - 2. If everybody were an ear, where would the sense of smell be.
 - c. Application: You may not like it, but you are a part of the body. And you can't resign.
 - i. At some point, everybody gets burned by church. You have, I have. It's a sad fact, and points out that Christians need Jesus' grace very badly.
 - ii. We can leave a church, resign membership, perhaps give up on going to a church altogether.
 - iii. But you are still part of the body.
 - iv. But if you do that, you're like The Thing from the Addam's Family.
 - 1. You're missing something—most of the rest of you, actually.
 - 2. And the thing about disembodied body parts, is that they slowly wither and stop working.
 - a. Ever seen a brain preserved in a pickle jar?
 - b. Or a mummy in a museum?
 - c. It's a body, but it's lifeless.
 - 3. Stay connected.
 - d. He then makes another important point:
 - i. But, in fact, God has arranged each one of them, just as he wanted them to be.
 - 1. We've got ten toes, including the little stubby one with we only think about when it hurts or is sore: because God thought that was best.
 - 2. We've got an appendix (which does what again?) , because God knows what he is doing.
 - ii. Illustration: In Geneseo, building a house by yourself is sort of a hobby. It's like on a Saturday, folks say: I'm bored. Guess I'll build a building today.
 - 1. My buddy, David, was building a house, and in an accident, he lost the tip of his ring finger.
 - 2. To this day, when it's cold, his finger hurts. Oh, he gets along fine, but he knows its not there. And that's just a joint of small digit.
 - 3. He's not a complainer, but he would give anything to have it back.
 - iii. God knows what he's doing when he arranges us in the body. And what he's doing when he arranges others in the Body around us. Which leads us to the next point:

V. Point 2: Since we are all a part of the Body, we can't say: "You don't belong!"

- a. The eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you! And the head can't say to the feet, I don't need you.
 - i. This is simply obvious in the body—it's not like the eye actually evaluates the hands performance and says, "hey, bring it up buddy."
 - ii. But this metaphor implies that the Corinthians struggled with it. What would they say is worth the trouble of actually telling someone: "We don't need you?"
 - 1. The text makes this pretty clear: weakness
 - 2. A lack of honor, or prominence.
 - 3. Being unpresentable.
 - iii. For a group of people obsessed with appearing wise according to the standards of this age, and appearing strong, important, significant, they were probably very tempted, and very good, at making divisions in Jesus—not simply based on teachers, but on social rank, ethnic background, apparent usefulness.
 - 1. Unfortunately, they have already made the same mistake about Jesus, whose Messiahship rested on a demonstration of the Spirit's power.
 - 2. They forgot that God uses the weak to shame the strong, and the things with are not to shame the things that are.
- b. Paul's next sentences prove how true this is.
 - i. On the contrary, the parts which seem weaker, are indispensable.
 - ii. And the parts that we think are less honorable, we treat with special honor.
 - iii. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty,
 - 1. We've seen these words before: weak, unhonorable.
 - 2. Paul reminded the Corinthians, caught up in the passing wisdom of this age, to "think of what you were before you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential, not many were of noble birth. But God choose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, God choose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world, and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are—so that no one may boast before him."
- c. Part of weakness, honor, and influence had to do with being Jewish or Gentile, slave or free.
 - i. Who would our weak be? God tells us they are indispensable.
 - 1. Children? The disabled?
 - 2. The elderly, our senior most adults?
 - 3. Think of Helen Keller
 - ii. Who would our dishonored be? God tells us he treats them with special honor
 - 1. Christians who fell away and who God has redeemed and brought back to us?
 - 2. Those who committed adultery, or embezzled money?
 - 3. Think about Chuck Colson

- iii. Who those among us be who we feel are unrepresentable?—God treats with special them with special modesty.
 - 1. Maybe those whose sins we find particularly repulsive...maybe prostitutes...
 - 2. Illustration: Remember in Genesis, when Noah gets drunk? He finds himself naked in a drunken stupor, and like his sons who cover him up, even walking backwards, so they don't mistreat their father.
 - a. We could learn a valuable lesson from them.
 - 3. So God covers us when our sins render us "unrepresentable" before him.
 - 4. Not a person in the body can be dispensed with.
 - 5. Nor can we boast about the particular spot we occupy.
- d. God does this not simply for the welfare of the part, but for the welfare of the whole.
 - i. But God has combined the members of the body
 - 1. and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it.
 - 2. So that there is no division in the body,
 - 3. But that its parts have equal concern for one another.
 - ii. How we deal with honor.
 - 1. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it;
 - a. If I jam my toe, my ear doesn't say: stupid toe.
 - 2. If one part is honored, every other part rejoices with it.
 - iii. Illustration: Think of Billy Sunday, an alcoholic ball player; someone who needed the body to suffer with him, and in whom the body could also rejoice, for his work as an evangelist.

- VI. Point 3: Since we all have a part in the body, "we can't say, I'm not useful."
 - a. "Now, you are the body of Christ, and each one of you has a part in it."
 - b. "And, in the church, God has appointed..."
 - i. This is a list of various sorts of people and gifts whom God has appointed to serve in the church.
 - ii. I think this is important, because not only are the spiritual gifts things given by God,
 - 1. Now, it would be easy to think of this as a sort of ranking system, because of Paul's usage of first, second, third, and fourth.
 - 2. But that would betray all of everything Paul has written so far in 1 Corinthians.
 - a. It would be a mistake to think of this as a sort of spiritual caste system in the church—with apostles coming in at the top, and the underlings with administration and the other gifts at the bottom.
 - b. But, these were all essential parts of the Church in the early church.

3. We wouldn't know what to do with some of these roles and gifts.
 - a. I don't remember the last time the elders seriously thought hard about why "we can't find enough prophets."
 - b. Or where are all the "healers."
 - c. Or if we only had a "miracle worker" to replace that TEDS student who just got placed.
 - d. And boy, if we just could locate that apostle, we'd really be doing well as a church.
- c. I'm not sure we should worry too much about the titles or the specific gifts. Like Lee said, none of the gifts has really ceased, but we don't think of local churches operating like this any more.
 - i. But you can be sure, that we've sat around in staff meetings and elders meetings and said, "I wonder if so and so would be good at this?"
 - ii. Or, "Gosh, if we could only get such and such to help us out on this project?"
 - iii. Or, "hey, this person's been here a while, I wonder if she would be willing to...?"
 - iv. Or, "you know, I've been thinking about that-person, what do you think gets her clock going?"
- d. You all have a role...and not simply a role...an appointment.
 - i. Given to you by God...
 - ii. And affirmed and equipped by the Holy Spirit for that call.
 - iii. So, don't try to hide behind, "you know, I'm not sure I'm particularly helpful."
 - iv. After all, God makes his appointments with great care, and since he's God, he doesn't make mistakes.
 1. Tomorrow is Reformation Day. Martin Luther, when his Augustinian father proposed to send him to seminary to learn the New Testament and to be a preacher, apparently quaked with fear. "I'd be a fraud as a preacher."
 2. Father Staupitz did the world a great favor by not listening to him and forcing him to go to seminary.
- v. Illustration: When I lived in Geneseo, our church had a church softball team. I don't know who came up with the idea that churches should play softball against each other, but talk about expressing divisions in the body of Christ.
 1. Anyway, as is the case with most church teams, you've got a few guys who know a lot about softball—who eat it and sleep it, who dream about it during the winter, etc. I hate those guys.
 2. Then you have guys like me, who because they are the associate pastor, have to play. It just sort of became assumed. You're playing Pastor Mike, right? Ummmm....sure.
 3. There were a few guys like me—all fighting for the coveted spot, of left fielder. Why?

- a. It's where you could do the least amount of damage if you are bad at softball.
- b. The problem was that coach could only appoint one left fielders.
- c. And there always four of us, silently praying, "God, please let me be in left field, and then please don't let the ball come to me."

vi. We don't need just left fielders. Don't sit on the sidelines.

- VII. Conclusion: We are all a part of the Body, and we are all in it together. All for One, and One for All! And the One is Jesus Christ.
- a. A few final applications.
 - b. The first is this: God has placed you, with your spiritual gift, in the body, right where he wants you.
 - c. The second is this: Don't worry about what the other parts of the body are doing, just do what you are supposed to do. They didn't place you: God did...so worry about him.
 - d. The third is this: Don't try to wiggle out of your function and role.