

Session 5

February 21, 2021

CONNECTING TO CHRIST'S BODY

1 Corinthians 12:12-24

The human body is a miraculous thing. Dozens of organs wrapped up in 22 square feet of skin, energized by 1.5 gallons of blood coursing through more than 600,000 *miles* of tiny vessels, pumped by a single muscle (the heart) and totally controlled by a single organ (the brain). Yet we somehow manage to make it through 72 years of life (or more)...when everything functions properly.

In this week's text, the apostle Paul uses the analogy of a human body when speaking about the church. For this reason, the church is referred to as "the body of Christ." Like the human body, the body of Christ is incredibly complex. Yet when everything functions properly, it is a beautiful and miraculous thing. Three principles help keep the body of Christ vibrant and healthy.

Unity (vv. 12-13). The phrases of verse 12 are awkwardly worded, but the thought, taken as a whole, is very clear. While a body has many distinguishable parts, it still represents a single, living organism. So it is with the body of Christ, the church. What is that factor that unifies the various members of His body? His Holy Spirit. Let me paraphrase verse 13 in my own words: "For we were all immersed into the body of Christ by His Holy Spirit, regardless of our backgrounds, and we all partook of the same Spirit." This union is both real and mystical. Just as water baptism serves as the believer's initiation to the local church body, Spirit baptism joins us to the mystical body. The depiction of *drinking* of the Spirit (v. 13) likely alludes to the other ordinance of the church, the Lord's Supper. Jesus frequently likened the Spirit to both a drink and a spring in His teaching (see John 4:13-14; John 7:37-39). For reflection: *Why do you think Paul mentioned "whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free" in this context? How would you apply this in today's church?*

Diversity (vv. 14-18). Once Paul established the cardinal rule—*there is one body*—he turned his discussion to the significance of its many parts. He begins by addressing the envy and jealousies that often creep into the membership. Notice how he focuses on what we might think of as the *lesser* or *humblest* parts of the human body. Clumsy feet might envy elegant hands, but they are no less vital to the body's function. Folded ears might envy sparkling eyes, but again, they are no less vital to the body's function. Anyone who has lost a foot or his hearing would attest to that! Two key ideas are presented. First, the value of each member is attributed to his *function* in the body as a whole. The whole body can only function as each member functions within it (vv. 16-17). Second, the placement of the members (and their spiritual giftedness) is a sovereign act of the holy God who saved us; not to *establish some status* within the membership, but rather to *equip* the whole body for the work of ministry (v. 18). For reflection: *Are local churches guilty of assigning status to its members? Does James 2:1-9 have anything to say about this?*

Necessity (vv. 19-24). In verse 20, Paul reiterates the two main points he has made so far: 1) there is one body; and 2) the one body is made up of individual parts. Since the health of the one

body is dependent upon the proper working of its individual parts, petty squabbles about the status of certain body parts must stop. The phrasing of verses 22-24 is again awkward. But the general gist is that human body parts that are small and not particularly attractive (e.g.: heart or brain) are extremely important! What's more, those less noticeable body parts are often covered up by clothing to protect them. The very fact that they are covered by both skin and clothing indicates their value to the health and wellbeing of the body. For reflection: *What important functions do members of your church play that are often "covered up" or go unmentioned? What do you think would happen if those members suddenly stopped functioning?*