

The Spirit and the Body

1 Corinthians 12

Turn to 1 Corinthians 12 please. While you're looking that up, think about the other people in this room. What kind of a bond do you have with these people? How are you tied to them? What keeps us all together? Most you know fairly well. What is it that ties us to each other?

1 The Most Spirit-Filled Words Ever: "Jesus is Lord" – 1 Corinthians 12:3

1 Corinthians 12:1 - *Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.*

We're not sure why "Jesus be cursed" comes up here at all. So we'll go straight to the second half of verse 3: *No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.* One problem in Corinth was a prejudice about spiritual gifts. They thought some gifts were greater than others, and particularly they prized the gift of tongues. That's what the Spirit *really* wants to do, they thought. They were wrong.

So Paul begins with the clearest example of speech that the Holy Spirit gives: "Jesus is Lord." That is what Christians believe, in three words. It means, "Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, and he has full rights to my life." "He's Lord of all, and I'm his servant."

"Jesus is Lord" is normal rational speech. It is also personal, and heartfelt. Most importantly, NO ONE can say this honestly without the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. "Jesus rules heaven and earth, my life is in his hands, and I am his servant." No one ever says anything more inspired by the Holy Spirit than those words: "Jesus is Lord." If you can see that and mean it, the Holy Spirit has done a great work in you.

That confession binds us together. Then there is endless variety in the church.

2 The Spirit works in Each Believer for the Common Good - 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. The Spirit shows its presence in each person for the common good.

Our God, Spirit and Lord and Father, is behind all kinds of gifts and serving and activities. "Jesus is Lord" is the center, but after that church life goes in many different ways. We need to focus on the last verse: *the Spirit shows its presence in each person for the common good. Each one, each person that says "Jesus is Lord," has this.*

It is from the Holy Spirit himself, to the child of God, for the common good. It is for others. Each one of us needs what others here have. Each one of us sits here with packages on our laps. The Holy Spirit gave them to us. But they are not for us. They have the names of our brothers and sisters written on them. We give these to others.

There are packages with our names on them. But they are on other people's laps. *The Spirit shows its presence in each person for the common good.* See also verse 11: *All these [gifts] are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.* The Spirit decides which person gets which gift.

In verses 12 to 27, Paul shows this with a human body. He works with a simple truth: the human body has many different parts, and all the different members of the body work together, and the whole body needs what each part does.

You need your feet to work, and you need your hands to work, and you need your teeth to work, and you need your eyes to work, and you need your ears to work, and you need your heart, and lungs, and stomach to work, and so on. That's how the body of Christ operates.

3 One Body has Many Members, so also Christ – 1 Corinthians 12:12

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. So it is with Christ. The last verse, v27, says the same thing in different words: *Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

One body with many members is actually not a picture of the church but a picture of Christ himself. We live it out in the congregation, that's the whole point, but what we live out is that we are Christ's body, and each one of us a member of Christ's body.

We are talking about a local church here. In verse 27 Paul writes, *now you are the body of Christ*, that is, you believers at Corinth are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it, and you also in Kleefeld are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

The main way the actual body of Christ shows itself on earth is in the life of local churches. It is only in local churches that we get the full range of variety that 1 Corinthians 12 mentions. But at center, this illustration of the body describes Christ himself.

Here's something important about the Greek word "member." The only way they used "member" in Greek was to speak about a body part. They did not have choir members or committee members or team members or members of parliament. The word "member" meant a part of a physical body of a person or an animal.

4 How did we get Joined to Christ's body in this way? The Spirit – 1 Corinthians 12:13

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. The Spirit baptized us into the body, the Spirit initiated us into the body.

In the New Testament, the Spirit baptizes us into Christ when we are baptized with water. Do you remember Jessie here at the front? That pitcher of water that was poured over her was also the Holy Spirit. We are flooded with the Spirit.

And we all drank from that same Spirit, says Paul. In 1 Corinthians 10:4, Paul says the Israelites in the wilderness all drank the same spiritual drink, because they drank from the spiritual Rock that was following them, and that Rock was Christ. When they got water from the Rock, says Paul, that was like drinking straight from God. So Paul can say that we were flooded with the Holy Spirit, and we also drank the Holy Spirit. *That* made us members of Christ's body.

5 So you think you are *not* a part of the body? – 1 Corinthians 12:15–16

Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body.

Do you think you have no gift, no service for the common good? Others might be body members, but not you? Well, you're wrong, you are no less a part of the body for that. God expected some of us to think that, and he says that's wrong.

Look around you, people. Imagine how your nose is connected to your hands, and your ears and your feet and your eyes. We are all connected like that. Saying "no I don't think so, I don't feel like that," makes no difference.

If you are a believer, *if* you can say "Jesus is Lord of all and he has full rights to my life," then you have the Spirit in a powerful way, which means you are in the body of Christ, and that means you have a way to serve the body.

6 So you think *others* are useless and not a part of the body? – 1 Corinthians 12:21–22

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.

This goes after the people who know that they are in, but they doubt others. Think about the people in this church. Are there any that you think you'd be fine without? "They could leave and I would be fine." God says to us all through this Scripture, "don't think like that, it is wrong."

After this for several verses (22–24) Paul defends the parts of our body that don't seem attractive. He means the parts of the body we cover for the sake of modesty, or the internal organs that we don't think about but are essential. We need each and every member.

7 No Division, instead Equal Concern – 1 Corinthians 12:25–26

There should be no division in the body, but its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

People in the Corinthian church did have divisions. They were displeased with each other, they competed with each other, they avoided each other. In a physical body this does not happen. If one member suffers all the members suffer.

In March for a few weeks my right leg had severe pain. I could not get relief. I lost my appetite during that time. My stomach and digestive system were fine, but I had little interest in food. If one member suffers, all suffer. In the first part of this year, our church lost an important family. A painful tearing. We still suffer from that, for sure. We really are a body.

Verse 27 *Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.* If this was true in Corinth, it is true of us. We are the body of Christ, and each one of us is a part of it. The Holy Spirit has made us a body like this.

This section on the body, verses 12–27, explains how spiritual gifts work. But it does more than that. It explains how a group of believers should live with each other, how we should get along.

Verse 25 says that God put the physical body together in such a way that there would be no divisions. In this letter, the first thing Paul wrote to the Corinthians about, right after the opening thanksgiving, was that they would agree with each other and that there would not be divisions.

This body illustration shows us how we in the church should understand each other and our relationship to each other, as members of the body of Christ.

Imagine body parts scattered all over a yard. Feet, ears, spine, ribcage, nose, hands, knees, stomach, heart, whatever, all spread out. Why? Because none of them think they need each other. They think they will actually be fine on their own. They don't need the body. As long as each nose or the hand is connected to Christ, it will be fine – that's what the nose thinks to itself, and also the hand to itself, and so on.

But God says, *the eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable* - verses 21–22.

God connected us to each other, as all the members of the body are connected to each other, and each part works for the good of the whole body. God gives us the task of living that out. We are a body of Christ like this, make no mistake, want it or not. We don't have to live it. We can be body parts scattered all over the yard. Let's not do that. Let's be a real body.

Imagine a big wheelbarrow full of the body parts of one body. The same parts, not scattered all over the yard this time, but all together in a wheelbarrow – feet, eyes, torso, nose, hands, arms, lungs, liver, and so on. They are all together, not scattered like that first body.

But are they working together like a body, each working for the good of the others? No. That is a body with lots of divisions. We were not made like that, we were baptized into one whole body of Christ, to work together for the common good.

But if we wanted to treat each other as if we were a wheelbarrow full of body parts, we could. Enough of that was happening in Corinth. It can happen to believers who genuinely say “Jesus is Lord.” Let’s not do that. Let’s be like a real body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:7 - *The Spirit shows its presence in each person for the common good. We are what we are for the common good.*

Here’s the thing: the way God put us together, when we first repented and believed in Christ, joins us to each other more deeply and solidly than any church membership list ever could. It is too late to not like being joined to a group. We left that behind when we came to Christ. We are absolutely joined. That’s done. What’s left for us to do is to live it out together.

8 Finding Your Spiritual Gift

To discover your spiritual gift, the first thing to do is forget about spiritual gifts. Without love, spiritual gifts are a red herring, a distraction.

Instead, look around you with love. What can you do that helps these people? Look around with love and ask yourself, what can you do that our church body needs? Do *not* limit this to what happens when we’re all together.

Some things are needed, but you cannot do that. So forget it. Gifts are about serving one another. How could you fill an empty spot in our congregation? Do what you can. After some years of this, think back and recall what you’ve been doing. How have you served God’s people? That’s your spiritual gift; those are your spiritual gifts.

We don’t need to know what our spiritual gift is as much as we need to love the body of Christ and serve it. In the church where I was raised, I don’t remember a pastor ever talking about our spiritual gifts. But the people wanted church, they wanted it to work, so they pitched in where they could to make it work. They were all using spiritual gifts, they just didn’t think about it that way. The important thing is not to know your gift, but to love and serve the body.

The whole body grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Ephesians 4) In Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. (Romans 12). The Spirit shows its presence in each person for the common good. (1 Corinthians 12). Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. Amen.

I usually end with prayer. This Sunday, it seemed that prayers should come from the congregation. So would a few of you lead out in prayer now, asking God to help us live like Christ’s body? I don’t think we’re doing too badly at this, but I don’t know. The Lord wants us to live like his body. Some of you please lead us in prayer, asking the Lord to help us do what he calls us to in this chapter. After a time I will close that, and then we will have response time.

BENEDICTION: May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give us a spirit of unity among ourselves as we follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth we will glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Go in God’s peace to love and serve the Lord.