

The Body of Christ

I Corinthians 12:12-31

Introduction

A. The human body is a most magnificent creation of God.

1. Our blood is circulated through 60,000 miles of tubing reaching to every part of the body. This tubing could be stretched around the world more than seven times (if all the veins, arteries and capillaries were laid end to end).

2. Every day the heart pumps 5,000 to 6,000 quarts of blood. The heart is an amazing pump which never seems to get tired and which never takes a rest.

3. An adult has over 200 separate bones. Also within the bones there is an amazing blood manufacturing factory. Blood cells are made inside the bones.

4. There are more than 600 muscles in a person's body. These muscles, along with many perfectly designed joints, enable man to move his arms, legs and body with amazing coordination.

5. The nervous system may be likened to a highly organized postal system or telephone system, carrying messages to and from the brain. Nerve impulses can move at a speed of nearly 350 feet per second. They can zip up from a person's feet and back again more than 30 times in one second.

6. The world's most complex computer is the human brain. In fact, the entire human body is the world's most incredible piece of machinery. Men have made different kinds of robots, but they have never made any robot which can even begin to do what the human body can do!

B. In I Corinthians 12 Paul uses the metaphor of the human body to enable us to understand and properly relate to the even more magnificent Body of Christ, the church.

Discussion

I. The body human and the body of Christ is a living organism – not an organization.

A. Scripture repeatedly emphasize the life of God’s people.

1. “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³ You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. ¹
2. “Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵ Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶ But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ Let anyone with ears listen!” ² (When Jesus later explains this parable to His disciples He says the seed is the word of the Kingdom Mt.13:19)
3. In John 10:10 Jesus said “I came that they might have life and have it abundantly.”

¹ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Jn 15:1–8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

² *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Mt 13:3–9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

4. He talked to the woman at the well about living water. John 4
5. On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me,³⁸ and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’ ”³⁹ Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.³

B. Organism versus Organization – the rest of the lesson will do just that.

II. An organism follows only directions given by its head.

A. In the human body it is the **head** that directs the members of the body. Your hand cannot do anything unless it receives an impulse from the brain telling it what to do. Your legs do not just start running whenever they feel like it; rather, they must wait for an impulse from the brain which tells them what to do. The head (with its brain) is the very center of all the operations of the body.

B. Jesus is the head of the Body the church.

1. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church,²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.⁴
2. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.⁵
3. Here is another illustration of this: Suppose your hand takes something that it should not take (**stealing**). You cannot blame your hand for this sin. Your hand just did what you told it to. Or suppose that out of your mouth comes a lie. You cannot blame your mouth or your tongue for this sin. It is not your tongue’s fault, it is **your fault!** The tongue only

³ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Jn 7:37–39). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

⁴ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Eph 1:22–23). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

⁵ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Col 1:18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

says what it is told to say. If you punch someone in the nose, you cannot blame your fist. Your fist only obeyed orders! Your fist did what you told it to. Could you imagine a criminal saying, "Judge, I'm not guilty. I did not shoot that person. It was my finger that pulled the trigger. I did not do it. If you want my finger to go to jail, that is up to you, but I'm innocent!" This would be silly! The finger only does what the head tells it to.

III. In the case of a human body and the body of Christ, there is one body and many members.

A. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot would 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. ¹⁶ And if the ear would 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. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹ 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." ²² On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴ whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, ²⁵ that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another⁶

B. Several basic points from this scripture:

1. Various parts to the one body and every one a significant member. Paul devotes significant time and energy making this point.
2. Paul raises an interesting question: "If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?" Can you imagine a 197 pound 6 foot eye?

⁶ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (1 Co 12:14–25). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

3. There are no insignificant members. “On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater respect; where as our more respectable members do need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member,²⁵ that there may be no dissension within the body,”
4. Each member of the human body and the Body of Christ need each other.
 - a. Each and every member is gifted and responsible for the overall health and activity of the Body.
 - b. We share a mutual ministry where each one is charged to use their particular gift to encourage, inspire, educate and build up the Body of Christ.
 - c. No member can say to any other member “I do not need you.”
5. Each member of a body has the same care for one another
 - a. The word used for “Care” in this verse is the same word Jesus used in the Sermon on the Mount to say “Be not anxious...”
 - b. It means to have a distracting care, to worry, even though that word has a bad connotation for us.
 - c. If one of the members of my body ceases to work and interferes with the function of all other members, I will be seeing the proper person to do whatever is necessary to fix or improve the situation.
6. The body is put together in such a way that anything that affects one member affects all members alike.
 - a. “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.”⁷
 - b. An infection in my foot causes a fever in my head.
 - c. Several years ago I was diagnosed with Peripheral Neuropathy which was caused by taking Vytorin according

⁷ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (1 Co 12:26). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

to the Neurologist who examined me. Forty percent of the nerves in my legs are dead, resulting in balance problems for me.

7. A diseased member can disable the entire body
 - a. A dislocated member can put you in the hospital in traction for 21 days; that is to say it could in 1964. “My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.”⁸
 - b. The only memory I have of “Pappy John” was of him sitting in a chair with his hugely swollen, bandaged, bleeding and running leg up on an ottoman. He was disabled for life while still in his youth by an axe. He worked as a logger. He died from complications arising from his injured leg when he was ten years younger than I am now. He would not listen to anyone who suggested he have the leg amputated. A diseased member can kill the whole body.

- IV. As a living organism, a body and the church is subject to its head and to each other.
 - A. Mention has already been made about the body receiving orders from its head.
 - B. Previous lessons have dealt with the Master/slave relationship.
 1. When a person becomes a Christian, Jesus becomes his/her lord and master.
 2. From that time onward decisions are made on the basis of: “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”⁹
 - C. Equally important is the fact we are also to be subject to one another: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Ephesians 5:21
 1. An unfortunate division of the text has separated this statement from what follows and it weakens the strength of the whole passage.

⁸ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Ga 6:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

⁹ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1984 (Col 3:17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

2. All members of my body and yours are subject to every other member of my body.
- V. Human body and Body of Christ both are a living unity in diversity.
- A. Unity is very important to God.
1. Deuteronomy 6:4 “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.”¹⁰
 2. Jesus priestly prayer in John 17 focuses strongly on this idea; “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:²³ I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”¹¹
- B. Unity, union or uniformity????????????????
1. Union--the action or fact of uniting or being united. A combination so formed, especially an alliance or confederation of people, parties, or political entities for mutual interest or benefit.
 - a. Marriage is a union- is there always unity in every marriage?
 - b. Labor unions also fall into this category.
 - c. Two cats tied together by their tails are also unions.
 2. Uniformity -**adjective** the same in all cases and at all times; not varying.¹²
 3. Unity—one, oneness; the same relationship that exists between God, Christ and the Holy Spirit.
- C. Diversity – One of the most difficult achievements of the Body of Christ in my lifetime has been the ability to rise above differences.
1. Paul devoted two chapters of the magnificent Roman letter to differences and how to rise above them and be one body.

¹⁰ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1984 (Dt 6:4). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹¹ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1984 (Jn 17:20–23). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹² Soanes, C., & Stevenson, A. (2004). *Concise Oxford English dictionary* (11th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

2. In my early experiences with the church I experienced a division in my own family over how we should care for homeless children.
3. I preached for a congregation in Texas that numbered nearly 800 people. That church is no longer in existence because they would not adapt to the changing population in the neighborhood surrounding the place where the church met.
4. We have preached unity and autonomy but we have practiced censorship and judgementalism.
5. We need to be reminded frequently that the church is a living unity in diversity.

- VI. A human body and the body of Christ are a union of change and identity.
- A. All living organisms undergo change.
 1. You will undergo change during this class period that will be significant indeed.
 2. About 2 trillion cells are produced by an adult human body every day. This is about 25 million new cells per second! All cells wear out or get damaged, they have to be replaced. These new cells are formed when older cells divide.
 - B. I have been around to witness many changes in the way we do church and most of the changes came with great struggle.
 1. I can remember the days when there was a stiffly starched white covering on the communion table—there was a fight when the suggestion was made to take it off. This was in spite of the fact the cloth was initially put on there to keep the flies off since there were no screens on the windows.
 2. There was a split in the church when four part harmony was introduced into the songs that were being sung.
 3. Baptisteries in the building did not come without a fight. As a boy I attended many a baptism down by the river side or the “crick.” Some people felt strongly that since Jesus was baptized in a river everyone else should also. I have a vivid memory of baptizing a 90+ year old man in a stream and being afraid I would drown both him and me.
 4. Think of the things that have arisen recently that have caused consternation if not more; hand clapping, hand raising, praise teams, etc, etc,
 - C. Churches that are alive and growing will undergo significant change over its lifetime.

1. The most desirable and significant changes will be the change that comes into the life of each member is the change that metamorphosises them in to the likeness of Christ.
2. I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what the will of God— what is good and acceptable and perfect.¹³
 - a. The word “transformed” comes from the word metamorphosis.
 - b. Metamorphosis is the process the caterpillar undergoes while being changed into a butterfly.
 - c. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.¹⁴
 - d. Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.³ And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.¹⁵

¹³ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Ro 12:1–2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

¹⁴ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (2 Co 3:18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

¹⁵ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (1 Jn 3:2–3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.