Text: I Corinthians 12:12-26
Title: "The Spirit Way … Body Parts"

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION – What a miracle the human body is! Psalm 139 says we are fearfully and wonderfully made. It's staggering how unbelievably complex God has designed our bodies. I understand that we have over 200 bones in our body … 650 skeletal muscles … 210 different cell types … dozens of internal organs … scores of external features like the nose, ears, eyes, hands, arms, legs, feet, hair, etc. … the miles of arteries and veins in the body … the hundreds of nerves. And in addition there are so many different systems that work in the body. The human brain by itself is a marvel beyond description. Our bodies are fearfully and wonderfully made.

> And the fact that all of this is so intricately woven together and functions so naturally is nothing short of a miracle. We are fearfully and wonderfully made.

So it is no surprise that when the Bible sets about to describe the church, it most often uses the image of the body. And you will see the wisdom of God in this as we turn together and study I Corinthians 12:12-26 today. And all this happens by the Holy Spirit. We've been talking about "The Spirit Way" from I Corinthians 12-14. Let me just start by reading vv.12-13.

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 (NIV) - The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. [13] For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

The church is the Body of Christ. And what is true about the physical body of human beings is also true about the spiritual body known as the Church, the Body of Christ. When it is functioning properly, the church is to be like a body. Every person in the church is a part of the Body. And the Body of Christ has the same mission that the earthly body of Jesus had 2000 years ago … to seek and to save the lost. And for that mission to be accomplished, we are to function like a body, because that is how God designed the Church.

Now the verses here in I Corinthians 12 tell us about …

1. OUR <u>UNION</u> TO THE BODY OF CHRIST.

1 Corinthians 12:12 (NIV) - The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.

Do you see the word "parts" used twice in v.12? That word literally means "members." God has designed the church as a body … a body with parts or members. We talk a lot about the importance of church "membership" because we feel it is a biblical thing.

When God saved you, you were united to the Body of Christ. God didn't save you as an individual to just go about your life independent of the church, which is His Body.

> What the Spirit of God does when we are saved is that He connects us to the Body of Christ. Remember we all receive spiritual gifts when the Spirit comes to dwell in us. So as the Lord adds to His Body the people who are being saved, the Holy Spirit shaping the Church to be the Body of Christ to the world today.

This Body, this church, is to be the visible manifestation of Christ in this city, and in our world. So what must happen in our church is that we behave like Jesus in our city. That a city that is vastly lost and separated from God will see the image of Christ in our individual lives, and then in the way we live and love as a church.

1 Corinthians 12:13 (NIV) - For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

We've been talking about the Spirit Way, and here we see a very important principle in that regard. Notice it says "we were all baptized by (or with) one Spirit into one body…" Now this teaches that this baptism with the Spirit is what happens invisibly when a person is saved. It's not something that happens in a "second blessing" like some teach and that is evidenced by speaking in tongues. No, no, no! We were all baptized by one Spirit into one Body. When? When were saved. And we were all given the one Spirit to drink … <u>all of us</u>. And this is what it means to be baptized by or with the Holy Spirit … to be immersed in the Spirit, and by the Spirit, into the life of Jesus Christ and His Body.

> Now there's a difference between baptism by or with the Spirit and what we call water baptism, or believers' baptism. One is an invisible baptism; the other is a visible baptism. There is a difference between the two, but there is also a connection between the two.

Note: There is a cool invisible/visible thing that is working here. When we are saved something happens on the invisible level. The new birth that happens to us is an invisible thing. And we are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the invisible, universal Body of Christ, made up of all the saints of all the ages. But everything that happens in the invisible, is mirrored in something visible so that it will be real for us. So there is this invisible baptizing that takes place by the Spirit when we are saved. And there is also a visible baptism in water that we are to do when we are saved. And just as the invisible baptism of the Spirit immerses us in the universal invisible Body of Christ, so water baptism is the visible way that we enter the fellowship of a local visible church.

When someone is saved the Bible teaches that they are to be baptized in water. We have a place here in our sanctuary where that happens called the baptistery. Water baptism is commanded by Jesus as the way of confessing Jesus Christ before others. Jesus never calls secret disciples. So when a person puts their faith in Jesus Christ to be saved, they are to as quickly as possible be baptized. The Scriptural way this is done is through immersion. Some of you were sprinkled as a baby in a ritual that is called infant baptism. Well that's fine, but when you come to make a personal decision to put your faith in Christ to be saved, the next thing to do is to be baptized in the Scriptural way, which is by immersion. Again, it is something commanded by Christ for those who follow Him by faith. When you are saved, baptism is not something that is optional, at least if you are genuinely serious about following and obeying Christ.

Now that method of baptism (by immersion), is important because it exactly corresponds to what happened to you when you were saved. Just like you were immersed by or with the Holy Spirit, so through baptism by immersion, a believer is taken down into the water symbolizing the reality of what happened to them when they were saved.

ILLUSTRATION – When people get married they generally exchange wedding rings. The husband puts the ring on the finger of his wife, and she wears that ring as a symbol of his lifelong commitment to him. And the wife does the same thing. And that's a great picture of what baptism is to the believer. Can you be saved and not be baptized. Yes, because baptism doesn't save you. A person can be married and not wear a wedding ring for whatever reason. But my question is "If you are saved, why would you not want to do what Christ has commanded you to do? Why would you be ashamed to publicly identify with Christ through believers baptism?"

At the close of my message this morning I'm going to ask many of you to come and do what you've needed to do for a long time … to simply say, "I've been saved, but I've never been baptized in the right way." You might say, "Well, I need more time to think about it." Well, no you don't. Since when should a true believer have to think about whether or not they will obey Christ? Just come today to say, "I'm ready." And we'll set up a time that will be good for you to be baptized … you can invite your family and friends.

So when we are saved we are joined and united to the Head of the Body, which is Jesus Christ, <u>and</u> we are joined and united with other Christians in the Body of Christ.

But as we move on down through these verses we see something else. We see …

2. OUR <u>UNIQUENESS</u> IN THE BODY OF CHRIST.

So in the church, we are united in Christ, and yet we are all different and unique in the way that God has gifted us and created us.

1 Corinthians 12:14 (NIV) - Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.

Now just think about your own physical body of a minute. You are one body, and yet there are unique parts to your body. And even though you have ten fingers, they're all different from each other.

1 Corinthians 12:15 (NIV) - If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.

ILLUSTRATION – This is amazingly insightful. Feet aren't very pretty in and of themselves. That's why we keep them covered up most of the time. But where would the body be without feet. What would happen if your feet decided they weren't needed and decided just to become hands? Great! Four hands and no feet; that's not very good.

1 Corinthians 12:16 (NIV) - 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 cease to be part of the body.

> **ILLUSTRATION –** Now ears are a lot like feet. People don't compliment feet or ears. Now you hear people say, "Oh, you've got beautiful eyes." But you probably don't have many people come up to you and say, "Wow, what beautiful ears you have." No, it's probably like the story of Little Red Riding Hood when the she saw the wolf dressed up like her grandmother: "Grandmother, what big ears you have!"

Now there is an error that is stated twice in these verses we've just read:

THE <u>ERROR</u>: "I do not belong to the body" (vv.15-16).

Maybe you've been tempted to feel that way at times … "ecause I am different, I don't belong here." Or as you've started thinking about what your spiritual gifts might be, you may come to discover that it apparently isn't a gift that will put you up in front of other people teaching or leading or exhorting or whatever. And maybe it has caused you to feel a little inferior. And you may feel like you're not very important to the church.

> Caution: Whatever may cause you to feel inferior or unneeded, don't let that cause you to pull away from the church. What happens when you take a part of the body away from the body?
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> **ILLUSTRATION** – Someone was telling me recently about an accident that occurred on a construction site. As a result one of the workers had a couple of his fingers cut off. (I don't mean to gross you out here.) What did they do? Did the guy just throw those injured fingers away and say, "Ah, they're not important. I'll just go back to work." No! What they did was they grabbed up those fingers, and they put them on ice and rushed the man and his fingers to the hospital. You time is essential here. And as quickly as possible, those fingers were reunited to the man's hand.

So if you withdraw from the church, your spiritual life will dry up. And something else happens. The church is hurt because it's missing a part of the Body.

1 Corinthians 12:17 (NIV) - If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?

That's pretty straightforward, isn't it? Just because we're all not the same doesn't mean that others don't need us in the body of Christ.

Note: So the error in thinking says, "I don't belong to the body." And the error is corrected with the truth of God's activity.

THE <u>TRUTH</u>: "God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be" (v.18).

God is working in our church, and in every authentic NT church. He has put the parts in the body. God has arranged the body in this way. The word for "arrange" is a rich word. It means to appoint someone or something. It means to put something in its place. It was used of depositing money in a bank. That's what God has done. And when you say, "I don't belong here," you are not doubting yourself, you are questioning God. God has us placed exactly where He wants us to be.

The Body is about unity, but it is also about diversity. Just look at us. What a picture of diversity … young and old … different skin colors … some in suits, some in jeans … men and women … single and married … and with all kinds of differing spiritual gifts.

God has arranged the parts in the body that way. God likes this diversity. The better we understand this interdependence and diversity, the better we will fulfill the mission that Jesus is still doing through His Church.

1 Corinthians 12:20 (NIV) - As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

Now the next thing we see in these verses is…

3. OUR <u>UNSELFISHNESS</u> IN THE BODY OF CHRIST.

Some of the church members in Corinth who had the more spectacular gifts may have had the idea that they didn't need other people in the church. While the ones we just talked about had an inferiority complex about their gifts, these had a superiority complex about their gifts.

1 Corinthians 12:21 (NIV) - 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!"

THE <u>ERROR</u>: "I don't need you!" (v.21).

The first error says, "I don't belong here." The second error says, "You don't belong here." The first error says, "You don't need me." The second error says, "I don't need you."

Now look at vv.22-24a.

1 Corinthians 12:22-24a (NIV) - On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, [23] and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, [24] while our presentable parts need no special treatment.

Those parts of the body that seem weaker are really very necessary to the body. Notice they only "seem" weaker. And those parts of the body that "we think" are less honorable, we treat them with special honor. Notice we only "think" they are less honorable. God sees them as essential and worthy of honor.

> Just look at the parts of the human body. Some we see, some we don't see. Sometimes the parts of the body that we don't see are more vital than the parts of the body we see. Stop to

think about it. Would you rather live without a hand or a kidney? Would you be more concerned about foot surgery or heart surgery? Even though the heart is unseen, it's more vital than most of the parts of our body that are seen.

You see, just because a part of the body isn't as prominent as other parts of the body, doesn't mean they aren't very important to the body. You and I don't have the luxury to look around the church, or look around our small group and think, "I need you. I don't need you. You're important to me. You aren't."

We may not be all equally visible to the church, but we are all equally essential to the church.

Note: Again the error is corrected with the truth of God's activity.

THE <u>TRUTH</u>: "God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other" (vv.24-25).

The way God sees it (and his point of view is the only one that really counts), the parts of the body that we consider less honorable are really the ones that He honors. Because what has He done? He has "combined the members of the body…" God has mixed together the parts of the body to where what each one brings to the church, when blended with what others bring, makes something great.

ILLUSTRATION – Sometimes the church is likened to a melting pot. Not really? It is more like a great stew. With a stew a potato stays a potato, a tomato stays a tomato, the meat remains meat, the corn remains corn … but they all simmer together and makes something really good.

Note: I'm aware of the fact that when people are finding a church home that they tend to look for a church where there are people like them. I understand that. But if God is all-wise in the way He makes up local churches, maybe we should think about joining a church and staying in a church where people are not all like me. And by being actively involved in that church, I make the church look a little more like Jesus.

And so v.25 says that **"there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other."** You know in families and in churches there are givers and there are takers. But the way it should be is that we are a church full of "givers" trying to outgive each other.

1 Corinthians 12:26 (NIV) - If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

The Bible says "Weep with those who weep. Rejoice with those who rejoice."

In fact, in the NT we find numerous "one another" statements. We are to love one another … pray for one another … encourage one another … build one another up … be devoted to one another … forgive one another …

> **John 13:35 (NIV) - By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."**

ILLUSTRATION – I was reminded recently of the famous quote of Vince Lombardi about building a successful football team. He said: "If you're going to play together as a team you've got to care for one another. You've got to love each other. Each player has got to be thinking about the next guy and saying to himself, "If I don't block that man, Paul is going to get his legs broken." I have to do my job well in order for him to do his. The difference between mediocrity and greatness is the feeling these guys have for one another. Most people call it team spirit … when the players are imbued with that special feeling, you know you've got yourself a winning team."

That's the secret to a great football team; and it's the secret for a great church.

CONCLUSION

Now let me make this application: If this is really the way it is … if it really is true that my spiritual health depends upon my proper connection with other believers, then every Christian needs to be a member of local church.

> Note: I realize that some churches don't make a big deal about becoming a member of a local church. But I believe it is biblical. Right down through these verses we've seen the plans God has for "members" or "parts" of the Body. We encourage people to make a decision about joining the church.

You know, joining a church is a very important spiritual decision. It could mean you turn a new page in your spiritual life and begin to grow. And to go for an extended period of time without a church home is hazardous to your spiritual health. No protective covering that comes from a church … no fellow believers to pray for you and encourage you … no one to miss you when you lay out of church a few weeks.