

## The Body of Christ

Scripture Text: 1 Corinthians 12:12–31

How would you describe the church? What word or phrase would you use? If we were talking about the church building we might use words like, the house of God or God's sanctuary. But we know the real church is not a building. We have seen that the church is *a group of people called out of the world into fellowship with Jesus Christ to be God's holy people for the glory of God*. That's what the church is. That is who we are, who Good Hope Baptist is. So far in our look at the letter of First Corinthians we have seen the Apostle Paul use many analogies to describe the church, such as God's temple, God's building, and God's field. In today's passage, Paul called the church something else – he referred to it as the “Body of Christ.”

If you recall, Paul wrote the letter of First Corinthians to the church in Corinth, a city that had a reputation for immorality, religious diversity, and corruption. The church Paul planted there struggled under these influences and began to divide over various issues. In the letter to Corinth, Paul addressed issues such as who the church is and what it should be doing, about the church following Jesus and not various leaders in the church, about the church working out problems within the congregation and not taking them to the world outside, and about the church glorifying God in all that it does. Last week, in chapter eleven, we looked at the issue of celebrating the Lord's Supper and the significance of that important ordinance of the church. We learned how the Lord's Supper symbolized the sacrifice Jesus made for us and how we are to observe it carefully and regularly.

In chapter twelve Paul took up the issue of spiritual gifts. Some believe Paul was answering a question that he had received from the Corinthian church. Remember, Paul wrote this letter to address some serious issues that had been reported to him, but also to respond to some concerns the church had. In this section, Paul wrote about spiritual gifts. Paul wrote about spiritual gifts within the context of the whole church of God, what he called the Body of Christ, and the use and purpose of spiritual gifts within the church. I would like to offer the following observations from the text:

- There is One Body with Many Members
- There is One Spirit with Many Gifts and Functions
- The Body and the Gifts Have a Purpose

### One Body with Many Members

There seems to be a pattern in Scripture of defining things as one with many parts. Consider for a moment the nature of God. We are told in Scripture that He is one God and that there is no other. Yet, God exists in three Persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is an extremely difficult concept but one which is revealed in Scripture – God is Three in One. Human beings are also complex, but not in the same

way as God. Each one of you has a physical body, a mind and a spirit. Though each individual is one being, we are each composed of these various parts that make up our being. Even our physical bodies contain many parts – a head, arms, legs, hands, feet, and other parts. All of these parts make up one physical body. Even our relationships are somewhat complex. Think about marriage. We are told that both the husband and the wife are individual persons, yet they become “one” – one family unit with two persons. There seems to be a paradox of sorts where the many equal one. In a sense, human beings are the sum of our parts.

In chapter twelve, Paul made a comparison between our physical bodies and the church. Just as our physical bodies are one with many parts, Paul wrote, “so it is with Christ.” By referring to Christ, Paul was writing about the church. In fact, Paul called the church the Body of Christ. This is not the first time in the letter we have seen an analogy to describe the church. Remember, Paul has already described the church as the Temple of God, as God’s building, and as God’s field. These each describe something about the church and what God is doing with it. God is actively working within His people to accomplish His mission. It is interesting that Paul called the church the Body of Christ since he just finished a section in chapter eleven about the Lord’s Supper where he mentioned the church *symbolically* eating Jesus’ “body” – the bread in the Lord’s Supper. Paul told us that the bread in the Lord’s Supper represents the body of Christ that was given to us.

Now, Paul revealed to us that the church *is* the Body of Christ. Obviously, Jesus had a body that existed separate from the church; therefore, we realize the Body of Christ to be descriptive of what the church represents. One thing to realize is that the church belongs to Jesus Christ. The church being the Body of Christ means the church is *of Christ* – it does not belong to us or to anyone else. Oftentimes, believers confuse this. We do not own the church. Jesus Christ owns it, for He purchased it with His very blood. That is the meaning of *redemption*. Also, like our own physical bodies, the church is one entity with many members. We ought to consider this statement in at least two ways – the **universal church** and the **local church**. Sometimes, when Scripture refers to “church” it is speaking of the universal church, which consists of all believers past, present and future who have accepted Jesus Christ by placing their trust in Him as Lord and Savior. This would include Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Catholic and many other Christian traditions. The Body of Christ, the church, consists of every Christian past, present and future.

But that is not the only meaning of church. Oftentimes, when Scripture refers to “church”, it is speaking of a local congregation, a gathering of Christians. Remember, Paul addressed the letter of First Corinthians to the church in Corinth. So it is with Good Hope Baptist. This congregation is also the Body of Christ and is composed of various members. Look around you. Each of you makes up the Body of Christ, the church which meets here at Good Hope Baptist. And like our physical bodies, we have many members at Good Hope Baptist that make of the Body of Christ. Paul compared the church to a human body with a head, eyes, ears, and feet. Each part has a function, a purpose within the body.

## One Spirit with Many Gifts and Functions

Paul also wrote about how God empowers the members of the Body of Christ. Paul began chapter twelve on spiritual gifts. Apparently, there was some confusion within the Corinthian church regarding spiritual gifts and how they were given and how they were used in the church. Maybe you have wondered about spiritual gifts? Maybe you have desired to have a specific spiritual gift or have wondered what your spiritual gifts are? Paul addressed these questions in this passage, and he stated that there are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit. Just as there is one Lord Jesus Christ and one Body of Christ and we are members of it, there is also one Spirit who gives various spiritual gifts. Again, we see this unity of one with many parts – there is one Spirit with many gifts.

Paul mentioned that the same Spirit who gives these spiritual gifts to the church members gives as *He chooses*. God is sovereign in giving to each member of the church the gift or gifts He wants us to have. Perhaps you have heard or experienced from other Christians where one or more gifts of the Spirit are given greater weight and importance than others. Maybe you have been told that you are not saved or you are not “right with Jesus” if you do not have a specific gift. I once knew a church that believed this. This church, and the denomination for that matter, believed that one must have one particular gift in order to be saved. In fact, I learned from the pastor of this church that there had to be a certain percentage of people in the church who had the gift of *speaking in tongues* in order for that church to be affiliated with their denomination. I wondered about that. Did God really expect everyone to have the same gift? Was it necessary for all Christians to have the same spiritual gift? That just didn’t seem right. In fact, Paul told us as much in this passage. After Paul listed several spiritual gifts that are given to members of the Body of Christ, he then wrote the following:

**1 Corinthians 12:11** All these [gifts] are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually **as he wills**.

God gives to each member of the Body of Christ, the church, as he chooses. Just as God arranged the members in the Body as He chose to do, He also gave to each member of the Body the spiritual gifts He desired for that believer to have. Not everyone has the same gifts, nor should they. Each one of us has a gift, or many gifts, that God has given to us so that we will use it to serve Him and His church. Paul asked these rhetorical questions: “Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues?” The obvious answer to these questions is “No!” The Spirit of God empowers the church with various gifts of His choosing.

## The Body and the Gifts Have a Purpose

God did not give us spiritual gifts to just sit on the bench and do nothing. There is a purpose for these gifts. We are told that the Spirit gives these gifts “for the common good.” The purpose of these spiritual gifts is to build up the church and to further

the kingdom of God. God has given the members of the church specific gifts that are to be used to function in specific ways within the church. God expects for us to use the gifts He has given us to serve Him and the church. While Paul mentioned a few specific areas of service in this passage, I would not limit it to these. There are a variety of functions within the church. Some teach. Some preach. Some organize. Some manage. Not everyone does the same thing? Imagine a baseball game. What if everyone was a pitcher. Who would be the catcher? What is everyone played in the outfield? Who would pitch or cover the bases? A baseball team is composed of various team members and each is needed to play the game well. So it is with the church. Whatever gifts and areas of service God has given you, it is for a same purpose – *for the common good* of the Body of Christ. Paul stated something similar in the letter of Ephesians:

**Ephesians 4:11-12** And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for **the work of ministry**, for **building up the body of Christ...**

God has given the church gifts and gifted people for the work of ministry and the building up of the church. We are all in this together. The whole church is in it together. The Body of Christ has many members who are gifted with various spiritual gifts in order to serve and complete the ministry and mission of the church.

I have been to churches where the expectation was to just show up one or two times a week to receive a spiritual “recharge” and then come back the following week to do it all over again. I do not dispute all of that and in fact I need the fellowship of God’s people to encourage me and to hold me accountable. But the Body of Christ is much more than coming together to get something, but is also about coming together to serve God and each other. God has given the church gifts and functions in order to encourage one another and to complete the mission of the church. We need to think as a unified group of God's holy people gathering as the Body of Christ who are on mission for Jesus Christ. Thank God for your gifts and use them for His glory and the good of the church. If God has given you an opportunity to serve, thank Him for that and go serve Him and His church to the best of your ability.

If anyone is inclined to question whether every member of the church is needed, consider Paul’s statement about the members of the body:

**1 Corinthians 12:21-22** <sup>21</sup> 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.” <sup>22</sup> On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable...

The church needs each member in order to function properly. To disregard a member of the church would be like to disregard a member of our own body! The church would be *handicapped*. There should no sense of superiority or inferiority for we are all members of the same body, the Body of Christ, the church of the living God. Each member is needed to be the complete body.

## **Conclusion**

In closing, the church needs to remember that it is the Body of Christ, the manifestation of Jesus Christ in this fallen world. When Jesus ascended into heaven to go prepare a place for us, He left His church to be His Body in this world, to represent Him while He is away. And He empowered us with His Spirit with various spiritual gifts so that we could accomplish the mission of the church. How are we representing Jesus Christ? When the world sees the church, will they see Jesus? When the world sees you, will they see a member of the Body of Christ? If you have been on the sidelines, not using the gifts God has given you, then start today. Find an area of ministry and service within the church that will use the gifts God has given you. Join the Body of Christ as we go forward and serve God by making Jesus Christ known to the world. This is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!