

# 1 Corinthians Series #34

## "The Body" - 1 Cor. 12:12-31

RR = Romans 12:1-8

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. Sequoias

1. Last Summer, went camping in Sierras
2. Visited Giant Forest
3. Saw General Sherman - biggest tree in the world
  - a. 300 ft. tall
  - b. over 100 ft. around
4. Ground not especially solid
  - a. winds fierce in winter
  - b. snow load brutal!
  - c. yet trees only rarely fall over
  - d. due to their amazing root system
    - they go deep
    - also intertwine,
    - link up to other trees
    - provide strength and support to each other

#### B. Church

1. The Sequoias are able to stand because they are well rooted and grounded
2. The only way we will be able to stand as Christians is if we too are well rooted and grounded
3. In Eph. 3, Paul prays that believers might be rooted and grounded in love, and that they might grow up together in Christ
4. This dynamic of growing up together in the faith was one that was lost on the Corinthian church
5. As we continue our study in ch. 12, we see how powerfully Paul calls the Church to unity

### II. TEXT

#### A. V. 12

12 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.

1. Paul was fond of referring to the church as the body of Christ
2. And for purposes of illustration, he often used the analogy of the human body
3. Notice the last words of v. 12

- a. For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.
  - b. what we expect to read is the word "church"
  - c. but Paul pulls a fast one on us and inserts the word "Christ"
4. You see, the body isn't merely a metaphor for the church
  5. The Church is in a very real sense, the spiritual body of Christ.
  6. No doubt, Paul began to realize the union between Jesus and His followers on the Road to Damascus.
    - a. Jesus asked, "Saul, Saul; why are you persecuting ME?"
    - b. but Paul had been persecuting Jesus's followers
    - c. Jesus revealed to Paul that to hurt His people was actually hurting Him.
  7. Jesus taught this truth to the disciples in Matthew 25 when He spoke about the final judgment of mankind.
    - a. He said that when people offered water or comfort to one of the least of His followers, they were really offering it to Him.
    - b. in Zech. 2:8, God says that whoever touches those who belong to Him, touches the apple of His eye, meaning the pupil of His eye.
      - you know how sensitive your eye is
      - how you protect it
      - that is how sensitive God is to the care of His people
  8. Paul says that just as the human body is one, yet composed of many parts
  9. So Christ is composed of many members; meaning the church

B. V. 13

13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body; whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

1. Every Christian has a common spiritual origin and tie
2. It is by the Holy Spirit that we led to Christ and born again
3. As Christ is our common creed, the Holy Spirit is our common need

C. Vs. 14-17

14 For in fact the body is not one member but many.

15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?

16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?

17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?

1. Remember that Paul is dealing with the problem of dissension and disunity in the Church at Corinth
2. They had fallen to fighting over spiritual gifts.
  - a. different groups with different gifts had come to think that their gifts was more important than others
  - b. they were jealous and envious of each other
  - c. fighting and squabbling
3. So Paul illustrates the foolishness of their disunity by this picture.
4. The human body is made up of many different parts
  - a. each has it's own, unique role to play
  - b. a healthy body is one in which all the members fulfill's its task
  - c. what would happen if one part began to grow envious of another part, and for that reason refused to perform it's function?
  - d. what if the foot, growing envious of the hand, decided to withdraw from the body?
  - e. what if the ear, becoming jealous of the eye, decided it wasn't all that important so it decided to quit?
5. The danger Paul points out here is that the foot feels inferior to the hand; the ear feels inferior to the eye.
6. Thinking themselves of less importance, they justify their withdraw from the body
7. We tend to praise and exalt those in the church who are gifted with great ability in ministries that are visible
  - a. music
  - b. speaking
  - c. leadership
  - d. the miraculous
8. Those with gifts and callings that are less visible can tend to think that they are of less importance to the

- church, and so their participation is not really needed
9. It is that kind of mentality Paul is addressing here
  10. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing?
  11. Even so, if the whole church were speakers, where would be the hearing?
  12. If all were leaders, who would they lead; were would be the followers?
  13. Part of the American culture is the image of the ***Rugged Individualist***
    - a. grown from our philosophy of individual liberty
    - b. The American Dream = a man or woman can become whatever they want to become
    - c. this ideal holds great promise
    - d. but it also carries the seeds of its own destruction
    - e. for a society of rugged individualists lacks the binding power to become a society at all
      - no sense of mutual commitment
      - of obligation to others
  14. Rugged individualism has done great damage to the church
    - a. it has damaged our sense of community
    - b. it has hindered our sense of dependence and commitment

D. Vs. 18-20

18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

20 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.

1. We are not given to chose what gifts we receive from God
2. We are not permitted the right of choosing our calling in the Church
3. It is God who gifts and calls
4. Our responsibility is to simply be faithful to His gifting and calling
5. Paul has talked about those who might deem themselves less important ;
6. Now he turns the tables . . .

E. Vs. 21-26

21 And 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 No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.

1. One of Aesop's fables says that one day it occurred to the members of the body that they were doing all the work and the belly was getting all the food. So they held a meeting and after a long discussion decided to strike work until the belly consented to take its proper share of the work. For a day or two the hands refused to take the food, the mouth refused to chew, and the throat refused to swallow. But on the third day the members began to find that they were lacking their usual energy. The hands were weak, the mouth was dry and the throat was parched. Soon the legs were wobbly and the whole body felt sick. Thus the members realized that in its dull and quiet way, the belly was doing necessary work for the body and that all the parts must work together in the capacity God created for them.

2. There are no useless members of the body of Christ  
3. Every member has a part to play  
4. And while that part may be a quiet, hidden thing; in the counsels of heaven it is every bit as important as the most remarkable gifts.

5. In fact, we must consciously resist the tendency to fall into the trap of glamorizing the ministry to the visible

6. Look at what Paul says next . . .

23 And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty,

24 but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it,

25 that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.

7. Those parts of the human body that may seem less important still get their share of care from us.

a. between the eye and hand, the eye seems more important

b. but let something get in our eye and how thankful we are for that hand

- c. the head is in fact more important than the feet
  - d. but when the head is hurting, watch how it appreciates the foot's ability to walk to the medicine cabinet or doctor.
8. And then there are those parts of the body that for modesty sake, we keep hidden
- a. do we hate these parts?
  - b. do we abuse them or neglect them?
  - c. not at all - rather, we spend extra time and effort on them
    - to keep them hidden
    - to maintain their modesty
9. Paul's point in this whole section is that each member of the body has a unique and different role to play
10. Health means that each part does its part

26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

11. How true this is.
- a. if you've ever had a tooth ache, you know exactly what Paul is saying here
  - b. when one member suffers, the whole body is in pain
12. Conversely, when one member is honored, the whole body is honored
- a. Michael Jordan's legs
  - b. Luciano Pavarotti's vocal chords

F. V. 27

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

- 1. This whole long example of the human body and how it works is but a picture of the fact that we are members of the body of Christ
- 2. And if individual members of His body, then members of each other
- 3. So there is no room for envy and division
- 4. Especially over spiritual gifts which are the very thing God gives that place us individual members in the body

G. Vs. 28-30

28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets,

third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.

1. We are not going to elaborate on these things today
2. Because that is not Paul's point
3. His point is that these are some of the gifts and callings of the members of the church
4. Then he asks rhetorically . . .

29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?

30 Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

5. The answer he expects from his readers is, "No!"
6. Not all are apostles, not all are . . .
  
7. Just as we are all unique as people
8. So we all have a unique calling and gifting in the Church
9. We must learn to enjoy and appreciate the diversity God has built in to His people

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. V. 31

31 But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

1. The first part of this verse has proven to be difficult for a number of commentators
2. Just what does Paul mean by desiring the best gifts?
  - a. after all, he's just told them that God gives as He pleases
  - b. then he tells them to not be envious but to live with each other in faithfulness
  - c. what can it mean to desire the best gifts?
3. The answer to this apparent dilemma is that the gifts he refers to here are not the spiritual gifts he's mentioned in Ch. 12
4. He is referring to another classification of gifts that can be asked for and received
5. In fact, it is those gifts that he goes on to write about in the next chapter
6. And that is why he says - "And so I show you a more excellent way."

#### B. What Can We Learn From All This?

1. What can we take home today?

2. Know that YOU are a vital part of the body of Christ
3. But there is no room for pride in that knowledge
4. Rather, there is room only for diligent faithfulness to your calling
5. It is important that you seek the Lord about what your gifts and calling are
6. And that you be faithful to step out and begin to function as He leads.