



5. A Passion for the Body 1 (1 Cor 12:1-31)

I'm sure like me you have made up jigsaw puzzles in your time. I actually don't have the patience for them but I know that some people enjoy 500 or 1000 piece puzzles which they take patient days or weeks to make. Do you know what's really annoying - when there are a couple of bits missing. OK, you can see what the jigsaw is about; you do have the picture to compare it too. The more bits missing, the more annoying it is. I particularly don't like the ones when many of the pieces look the same. You think you have them together, but somehow they don't fit.

That would be a good picture of the Corinthian church. It was like an incomplete jigsaw. Some of the parts fitted together, but there was much missing or ill-fitting. Some people thought they were "super-Christians", they thought they could do whatever they liked because they were so super - but their lives showed something different. But it was worse than that. They thought that they were a cut above the rest. Particularly if they spoke in tongues. And they didn't fit. Some I guess were discouraged and therefore just didn't contribute to the fellowship.

And here we come to chapter 12 where Paul gets right down to the truth of the meaning of unity and diversity within the fellowship of the local church. In some ways it's a controversial chapter but never allow the interpretation of one or two of the verses to divert you from what otherwise is a chapter that has a fairly clear and unequivocal message.

Paul starts off by telling us about the reality of unity

13 For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 14 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.

Unity amongst God's people is a reality now. If we have trusted Christ, we are all part of the body of Christ. It's in the past tense - we were baptised by one Spirit into one body. Let's get rid of the fog that's created by our translators not translating words. *For we were all immersed by one Spirit into one body*. We have been immersed into the body of Christ; we've become an integral and organic part of it - we've disappeared into it.. When we believed we became part of the church of God - the body of Christ, with Christ as its head. It doesn't matter who we are, we all became part of the one body. Let's read about that in Colossians:

Col 1:15 (C) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 (C) For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 (C) He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 (C) And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19 (C) For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 (C) and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

He's the head. A body is just a body, but with a head, there is complete control and coordination. Christ is always the head of His church. There is only one church - the body of Christ - and it is not the denominations, ecumenical or otherwise. It is God's church, not man's church and is a body in which consists all believers - all that have been immersed by one Spirit into that body. It is Christ's church; one church.

Whereas in Colossians we see a global definition of Church, Paul uses the same set of terms in 1 Corinthians (or for that matter in Romans too) to describe the local church also as the body. That's quite intentional, because local expressions of the body only reflect, and should reflect the church at large.

The local churches indeed to reflect the wider church! In individual churches as in Corinth, many churches are held back, firstly by a lack of unity - which we amply dealt with in a previous week and also with misconceptions about the notion of diversity which Paul introduces here: *Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.*

Paul gets right to the heart of the issue - we are part of a body, and for a body to work, it is made up of thousands of different parts. However, to the Corinthians, Paul presents their local church as a body. The same is true here. So what can we learn?

I would divide what I have to say into four headings:

- 🍌 We are each a part of Christ's body
 - ⇒ We are all different
 - ⇒ We need one another
 - ⇒ We are made that way by God.
- 🍌 We are each equipped by the Spirit to do God's work
- 🍌 We each have an essential role to play
- 🍌 God honours what we do with the grace He gives, not the gift

I'm going to deal with the first two this week and the others on our next occasion.

🍌 We are each a part of the body

For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body. This is a statement of unity. We are all part of the body and we have just understood that the head is Christ - and it's the head which controls the rest of the body. We are all body parts.

14 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15 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. 16 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. 17 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? 18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be?

God has made us all to be a part of His body. We all have a function in His church. therefore we all have a function in THIS church. This is a clear passage that means what it says without equivocation. Because some Christians have problems with how some interpret the section on gifts, they avoid this bit. But it's really clear. What is it clear about:

⇒ We are all different - not just in the way we function but also in the way we look

Organs don't just function differently. They look different too. We look different, we do different, we worship differently, we have different tastes, we have different experience because that's the way God wants us to be. It's our difference that makes us strong as a church. Diversity is what makes us strong and gives us vitality. We learn through the fact that we are different.

It's not the way we like it, is it? We'd much prefer that people worshipped in the way we'd like. We'd prefer it if this church was like the one we were at before. We don't like the way some in the church interpret scripture. We wish things were different.

That was the case with the Corinthians. They got into factions because they gelled with people of like mind and did not see the worth in those who thought differently. "We'll do things our way. we don't need them." That's been at the root of much schism in churches. "Their faces don't fit. Their beliefs don't fit." Throw them out. Or worse "I don't like it here, I'm off". The most unsuccessful churches often have something in common a lack of diversity. They may have a unity in belief but they have no diversity in the people and their functions. What's clear from 1 Corinthians is that you need both a unity of purpose and a diversity of people and gifts to function as a healthy fellowship.

We're different because being different allows the church of God to function and grow. We're called to accept one another. So rather than seeing differences as negative and people not worth talking to or considering because they are so different, maybe we should look again and see how we can learn from them.

At my last church, the first job I was given was the evangelism ministry. It was a challenge, but most of the people I worked with had the same vision as myself and we worked well together. I was then moved as part of my training to the worship ministry. I was put along side a guy called Philip who was a Ghanaian who arrived at about the same time I did. He was from a Pentecostal background, and an African one at that. His forte was prayer ministry and already had an itinerant healing and deliverance ministry. How could we work together? What did we have in common?

We had Christ! And in the couple of years we worked together we built up a huge respect for one another. He learnt from me and I learnt from him and we found we worked together well. He's one of the few people I've kept consistently in touch with since coming here. He's moved on now and is currently in Ghana preaching and setting up a prayer centre there. We share together about what God is doing.

Different but those differences made the difference in taking God's word forward then, and influencing both our ministries separately to this day.

⇒ we need one another to function properly - not just as a church but as respective parts

I've kind of covered this already in what I've just said. Not only should we accept one another despite our differences, we should also realise that we can't actually function properly as a church or as individuals without their presence. It's like that with organs. If our organs do not function properly then the rest suffers. With some organs, failure represents death. But any failure limits the ability of the body to work.

15 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. 16 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.

Churches are hampered because people are part of the body but are non-functional for whatever reason. Do you feel you belong here? I find that in most churches there are people who come, but they never feel they belong because they are different. Maybe they've had a different church background, or things are not quite as they would like. So they hang on the edge and never contribute much to the life of the church.

If you believe that God has called you to this church, then you need to become part of it because it isn't functioning properly because you're not part of it. It's like the missing jigsaw piece. Maybe we can work out the picture, but it would be a whole lot better if you added your piece.

⇒ we are made that way by God.

But most of all we have to realise that we are made that way by God. *But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.*

The bottom line is as we look at one another is that God has made us diverse in order to work His purposes out. Knowing that fact should mean that you never look at another believer again in the same light. We're different and we need to use our diversity to build up the body of Christ.

🍷 We are each equipped by the Spirit to do God's work

Romans 12: 4 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.

Last week I said one or two things about the Brethren which I felt had a negative influence on my life. Well, this week I'm going to tell you something more positive. One of the most critical re-alignments in the theology of many Baptist churches in recent years has been the notion of "whole body ministry". It's what I've been talking about this morning. We are all part of one body and we are called and equipped to play our part. It's very much a product of the charismatic movement but prior to that had its roots firmly in the Brethren (in fact, a strong influence on the "new church movement" has been those that came out of the Brethren). I was brought up to believe that God had called me to my role in His body and had gifted me by His Spirit to do that work. We were encouraged to find our call and with it our gift.

It was quite different in Baptist and other free Churches who tended to be much more "Pastor oriented" so that the main "spiritual" functions in the church were carried out by the pastor and deacons and the rest of the people were consumers, only contributing practical skills to the church. In Woodberry Down interregnum back in the 1980s, the church secretary would only book "suitably qualified men" (that is the Rev Thisorthat) even though I was a recognised Lay Preacher and being asked for by our congregation. Sometimes the Rev Thisorthat was appalling. It didn't matter how revered he might have been, Rev Thisorthat sometimes brought us very little of

God's word and certainly a word for us. There were some other great preachers around but he wouldn't book them because they weren't ordained.

But who is it makes people anointed preachers, or pastors, or for that matter, helpers, those with administration or whatever. It isn't men but it's by the Spirit of God. And who are these gifts given to.

7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit etc. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

To each one. Not to the special few. Each one. We are all equipped by the Spirit as he determines and for the common good. You are a minister; everyone's a minister because God had given you a function and the Spirit has gifted you for the common good of the body. This is unequivocal scripture. You are made part of the body, you are equipped. Some of those ministries are spiritual, others practical. But we are all involved in having those gifts which are given to us by the Spirit.

Next time I'm going to explore these gifts in a little more detail, but how can we sum up? First of all this piece of scripture affirms what we already know - to God we are special. We are His children. We have been immersed into the body of Christ. We each have a role to play in the church, and as we will find out next time, we depend on one another for our growth and well-being and the growth and well-being of the Church. Don't be phased by that. God in His grace and mercy wants to use us - each of us - to build up this fellowship and extend His kingdom. We each have our part and function. And God has equipped us by His spirit. He never leaves us without the means. Praise Him. It's through our functions and gifting that we see His blessings.

Do we know our function in this church? If we don't then there is a bit missing from the jigsaw and we don't have the picture. God wants to bless you through knowing and performing your function in the body.

Do we know our gifting? Because it's through this that we have the power and ability to fulfil God's purposes. God wants to use us - each of us. What a privilege! Let's eagerly have a passion for His body that we build up the fellowship to His glory.



Preached by Mark Reid, Swaffham Baptist Church, 8/2/04. Scripture Quotes NIV © Mark Reid 2004