

1 Corinthians 12v12-27 – Body image

By Ian Fraser – preached at King of Kings Church, 10th Jan. 2021.

Series: What Your Life Is Missing

Reading

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.

18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

21 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!**" 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour...

24b But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honour to the parts that lacked it

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Introduction

This morning we're looking at the picture of church as a body. Jesus Christ is pictured as the Head of the Bod, and we are the parts.

We are parts of the Body of Christ if we have received Him as Saviour and own Him as Lord, Leader, and the Head of our lives.

I heard from someone that as you get older you get to know the different parts of your Body because the creaks, rumbles and pains tell you more about what's there than you knew before.

I said to Bron that I hope that she remembered that when we met I had a six pack. She looked at me as if to say that all I have left of that six pack is a big sack.

There is so much going on under our skin, we are truly fearfully and wonderfully made! Some respond differently to what going in here –

(1) I remember a young friend of ours saying that she gets freaked out thinking about what's going on in there, because things are happening over which she has no control;

(2) But a different take on our bodies I heard from a newly qualified medical doctor. She said that now that she had studied Anatomy she is so relieved that she knows now exactly what's going on in every part of her body.

So what's this picture about, that the church is the Body of Christ, and what has it got to do with us, and with this series, What Your Life is Missing?

To answer that we will look firstly at what it means for Christ to be the Head of the Body; then what that has to do with the Church; and finally a word about how we are in Christ's image.

1. The Holy Spirit attaches us to Christ

“The body is one unit, with many parts – So it is with Christ” (v12).

To understand verse 12, let's pull vv3b, 7, 11, 12 and 13 together.

Notice in these verses the indispensable role of the Holy Spirit: “3b No one can say, “*Jesus is Lord*,” **except by the Holy Spirit.** 7 Now to each one the manifestation **of the Spirit** is given for the common good; 11 All these [manifestations or gifts] are the work of **one and the same Spirit**, and **he gives them** to each one, **just as he determines.** 12 The body is one unit, with many parts – So it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized **by one Spirit** into one body.”

Why are we called **Christians**? Why is the confession, “**Jesus Christ is Lord**” so NB? Let’s start by saying that each person is made in the image of God.



This image of God, we believe, is a fundamental principle of human dignity. Unfortunately, we also acknowledge that in a fallen, suffering & broken world, each of us is also a fallen, suffering & broken image. It is an image of God, but a dead one – “As for you, you were dead...” (Ephesians 2:1ff).

This is where the Holy Spirit’s work of attaching us to Christ is so important. We are called to come to the Cross, for God to work on us. We need to be forgiven, to die to our old life, to be cleansed from our Sin, and made alive by the breath of God. This work is symbolized by baptism. It plays out the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, as verse 13 says, “We were all baptized by one Spirit.”

(1) Attached to Christ is to be alive in Christ.

“Baptized by one Spirit” is about being taken from death to life, dying with Christ, living with Him. “You were dead in your transgressions and sins,” but by faith made alive in Christ (Eph. 2:4, 5): The work of the Holy Spirit.

For some of you it is so gradual, you only see it in hindsight – like the sailor who three weeks into Basic Training yelled in the canteen, after struggling with the slop in his metal food pan, “I

want my Mom's cooking!" - He had come to realize that over time he had loved his mom's cooking, but only now did he realize how much he appreciated it. For some of you, a long road with Christ has resulted in you loving Him as Saviour and Lord with all your heart, but you can't recall an exact time when that change came about. All you know is that now you love Him as your One and Only, by faith.

For others the work of the Holy Spirit is more radical: We know of many who have amazing stories of Christ saved them from sin. The radical change is said by some like this: "I was such a new person that it was as if I now saw the world in colour."

This kind of story is not such a strange thing: A girl in love: looks different and sees the world differently – A man who holds the couple's first child in arm never sees children the same...

But being born again into Christ is no minor change. It is a new experience of seeing yourself, and the world:

George Wade Robinson wrote of it in the hymn: *"Loved with everlasting love, led by grace that love to know... :*

...Heav'n above is softer blue; Earth around is sweeter green; something lives in every hue Christless eyes have never seen".

How could he write lines like that? He could do so because he knew the difference between being biologically alive and spiritually alive in Jesus Christ by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

This is what being attached to Jesus Christ is about. It is a work of the Holy Spirit, through the cleansing of heart and soul; of making the spirit live; or of making the image of God a Christ-attachment.

When the Holy Spirit gets a hold of you as a person, the image of God is restored or attached to Jesus Christ – "Christian" is a generated work of the Holy Spirit; and "Jesus Christ is Lord" is

more than a confession; it is move of worship from the heart, burst forth by the living Spring who is the Spirit of God!

This is what verse 12 means: “The body is one unit, with many parts – so it is with Christ.” The Holy Spirit attaches the believer to Jesus Christ. And that person comes alive. The image of God is plugged into Christ and switched on. As the Holy Spirit combines each one into Christ, He turns the lights on, gets the geyser going, and turns the motors and pumps into life, and spiritual life starts thumping with the rhythm of Heaven, as each part does its work. It’s a living, rocking being of worship!

(2) Attached to Christ is about being unique in His Body.

The second thing about being attached to Christ is this: The Holy Spirit takes each unique individual and fits their uniqueness into Christ, in the way that He sees fit, to make the Body work as ONE WHOLE UNIT. “The body is ONE UNIT” (verse 12). It’s UNITY is precisely because of the DIVERSITY of each part. V11 says that each person’s gifting is a work of the Spirit of God.

John Piper puts it this way: “Everyone in the Body of Christ is designed in a unique way to manifest something of the Spirit of God that no one else can.” The Holy Spirit takes each individual who is yielded to Jesus Christ and not only makes them alive in Christ, but also combines something of His grace or image to each one to produce unique images of God-at-work.

The Holy Spirit makes each person a living attachment to Christ; and He also makes each person a unique attachment to Christ. In this way, the Body of Christ is made up of living, unique parts!

(3) Attached to Christ in the church, and also in the world:

[a] Uniqueness: Best in the world at something.

What I am talking about is not beyond the reach of those who understand the business world. For example, Jim Collins in his book “Good to Great” seems to catch a glimpse of this when he says that each company can work on answering the question, “What can we be best in the world at?” Such an answer is possible when it based on the truth that each company is unique in its composition of skills and knowledge.

I apply this principle to people: What has God made you to be, that when He takes hold of you, you become more than you were: **HE ADDS SOMETHING OF HIMSELF THAT WAS MISSING IN YOUR LIFE.** Can you see the Holy Spirit attaching you to Jesus Christ so that your uniqueness is made a living image of Himself in the world and in the church that no one else can match? A divine work of God happens in you that adds an eternal quality – Heaven’s investment, if you like – into who you are and what you do. **Now ask, “Is this living connection with Christ the very thing that is missing in my life?” I urge you to consider this question.**

[b] On the job, doing more than the job.

When I was transferred to KZN I had this thought in one of my times alone with Christ: “Reduction”. I wondered what it meant. It shaped the way I did my work there. I learned that a change in the South African economy was compelling companies to **unbundle** peripheral business units, and to concentrate on what was central and **core** to their businesses. As a result, I was involved in the changing company model, and worked with business unites that were about to reshape or close down. At this time, I found myself not just doing my job, but also praying for and meeting with people who were facing retrenchments, and with those were facing changes in their responsibilities. I was not only fulfilling my work task, but was also learning from the Holy

Spirit how to follow Him in His love for those who were affected by what was happening around them. I had a unique contribution to make which lifted my work into something full and meaningful. I was learning what it meant to be in the image of Christ in the workplace. **This had been MISSING in my life.**

[c] A person uniquely in God's hands. This has been even better illustrated in the legacy of Ian Nash. Glynn and her family, and some of you, have shared with me about Ian. He was someone in the working hands of God. He was an outworking of Jesus Christ wherever he went. He was a person who walked the talk, making friends with people he met. A security guard, when he heard from Glynn that Ian had passed away, wept. Why, because the Holy Spirit of God had combined Ian to Himself, in what He was doing in the security guard's life, besides many others. **Christ was not missing!**

These are examples of our uniqueness in the hands of the Holy Spirit. I hope you now see the value of John Piper's statement, *"Everyone in the Body of Christ is designed in a unique way to manifest something of the Spirit of God that no one else can."* **The Holy Spirit combines each one's uniqueness to make the Body of Christ function as a UNIT.**

"What your life is missing" is now a question to be asked.

2. Attached to the Body

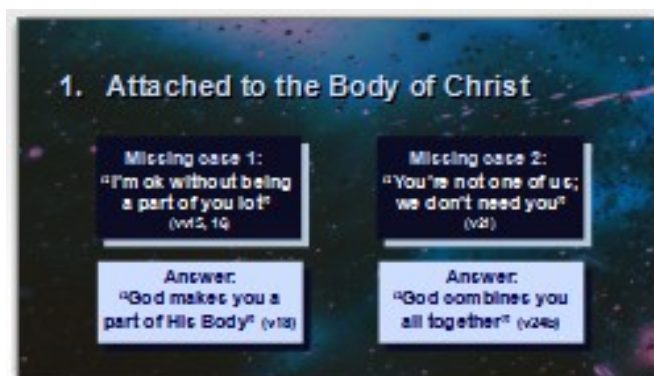
Paul points out two problems , which we also face today:

(1) Problem 1: "I'm ok without being a part of you lot"

“15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," and v16: "If the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,""

A DETACHED person
is a MISSING person.

You or I might have a very good argument for not belonging to church, for not including church in our life and lifestyle. But our argument does not win the case, **because God has made an attachment of our selves to Himself that He is entitled to make** – and without which we are like planets in the lostness of space with no sun to give us an orbit of life.



Are you able to consider this: Are some of you missing from your local church? If you are, have you considered that the Body that you should be connected with is limping, or impaired – missing a leg, or a lung, or an ear, a foot, or a wrist – all because you're saying, "I don't need church"? If the Body is missing you is it because you have said to Christ, "I don't belong to You?" If you are happy to be a part of Christ, then receive (accept the fact of) His Holy Spirit's baptism making you a unique member of His Body – a transformed, growing, learning, glowing image of Jesus.

Paul's point about this argument is in v18: "God has placed the parts in the Body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be." If God makes you a part of Christ, He makes you a part of His Body the local church. Every online church should be "local", somewhere.

The point is this: DIVERSITY is important. The Body is meant to be diverse.

“I don’t need church” fails on at least these two counts:

- (1) You have a part to play in the Body that you uniquely bring to it;
- (2) God has designed that your part in the church is a part of His purpose into the world. It is the Holy Spirit that makes it happen.

(2) Problem 2: “You’re not a part of us; we don’t need you”(v21).

The second problem Paul addresses is where someone in the church says to someone who is different: “I don’t need you”:
“21 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!" 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honour to the parts that lacked it.”

Have you considered that group-thinking is not Body-thinking?

Are some of you excluding others out of your life just because they are different from you? If you are a finger, do you only associate with fingers? That’s a clique-mentality not a Body-mentality. The Holy Spirit has not baptized us into our comfortable groups, He has baptized into the whole Body. Now groups are important, but we should always resist clique and closed-group thinking.

Remember in Acts 2:47? It says that “The Lord added daily to the church those who were being saved”? Imagine if the church said,

“No, thanks, we’re happy with those we have; we don’t want more.” The Body is dynamic and growing, as the Holy Spirit makes it grow. The local church was receiving those the Lord was adding.

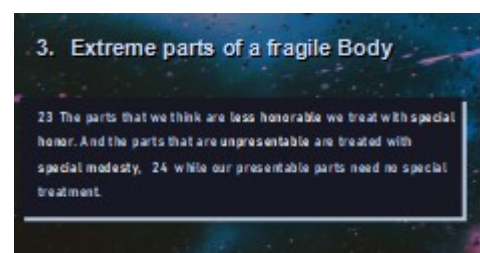
Some parts of the Body are EGR parts. Some parts of the Body are robust and thick-skinned. Some are fragile and need to be handled with thoughtfulness. We call them EGR members, meaning, “Extra Grace is Required” because of who they are and how they operate. Some need extra care, because of their needs or because they are sensitive people. God has designed the Body in such a way that Body-thinking accepts the full diversity as a part of what each of us needs. So if one hurts, the whole Body hurts; and if one rejoices, we are all glad.

Men, when you head out into a day full of meetings, it is not your kneecap that needs deodorant. Ladies, some of you also know first-hand that spectacles, contact lenses, and hearing aids are really helpful to see and hear as we should. Here’s the point: The attitude that says, “We can do without parts of the Body that are not like us,” is destructive to the Body, or at least impairs it.

Thirdly, a word on “Extreme parts of a fragile Body”

3. Extreme parts of a fragile Body

“23 The parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. The parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special



treatment.”

Here is a word about about extremely different people.

This paragraph speaks about giving special modesty to unpresentable parts of the Body.

Some people are extremely different from the general population. They might exclude themselves from the run of society. If they are part of the Body, the church family does not know how to handle them.

As a result, they might be missing in society, or the Church does not know how to keep them from going missing.

[a] Some are extremely different by their sheer intellectual brilliance; others by their unusual giftedness in one or more areas of their lives. They might be without equal in their capabilities; and some might be very difficult to get along with;

[c] Some are extremely different because they are born that way; and others because of some event or accident that has changed them forever.

> In each case, the Sovereign Lord knows how to shine the light of His grace into and through those who are very different.

Prayer may be needed for anyone whose difference has become a foothold for the evil one to exploit and take advantage of. Just as each of us needs the work of the grace of God in our lives, so unusually different people need the grace of Christ, at the foot of the Cross. Praise God, He is able to make us into new creations, where the old has gone, and the new has come. This is the wonder and majesty of God.

In cases of extremes diversity we can trust God about the following two things:

[a] He is a wonderful resource for extreme GRACE for every extreme case; His love and care knows no bounds, and He gives wisdom to those who ask Him for it. Praise God.

[b] Think through what Isaiah said about those who are very different, and the struggle to accept it:

9 "Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker... Does the clay say to the potter, 'What are you making?' Does your work say, 'He doesn't know what He's doing' [or "He's really messed this one up"]? 10 Woe to him who says to his father, 'What have you begotten?' or to his mother, 'What have you brought to birth?'" (Isaiah 45:9, 10).

God may make you very different from anyone else; or He may allow things to happen that make you very different from what you would like to be. You'd like to be a hand, and He's made you something you don't like, perhaps because of the way you are treated by others. Remember verses 18 and 24b: God has His reasons. And extreme diversity is still within the working of God the Holy Spirit.

Just because you are different does not mean that you should be missing.

> Some extreme differences in the Body of Christ need to be tempered by verse 7: "Now to each the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the **common good**."

Extreme differences are moderated by the Holy Spirit for the common good. You may be exceptionally gifted. But remember that your gifting needs to be tempered for the COMMON good. If the Body is overpowered by you, you may need extra grace to apply the gentleness of the Holy Spirit to a fragile Church. Each gift is to be appropriate to the UNITY of the Body. This requires

humility and wisdom.

Application in a COVID situation

Make Body life happen in a safe and socially distanced way.

