



You Are the Body

Kicking It Off

What is one small thing you and someone close to you can never agree on, like the thermostat setting, how loud the TV should be, or whether the food is actually spicy?

Read

1 Corinthians 12:27-31

Summary

Last Sunday we sat with the truth that everyone belongs in the body of Christ, that being different is not evidence you don't belong but closer to evidence that you do. This week pushes into the harder question that follows: if we all belong, why is there still so much conflict? Why do people who love Jesus struggle to get along?

Picture your two ears having a conversation. A sound comes from your right side. One ear says it was loud. The other says it barely heard anything. Both are telling the truth. Both are doing exactly what an ear is supposed to do. And if they argue about who heard correctly, they miss the whole point, because the body doesn't need the ears to agree. It needs both reports to know where the sound came from. A lot of our conflict works like this. Two people experience the same situation, perceive it differently, and each concludes the other is failing. Paul's answer isn't that one of us is wrong. It's that we are one body, and individually members of it. Your perspective is a gift to the body, and so is theirs.

That leads somewhere uncomfortable but freeing. You will not like everyone in the church. Nobody does. But love in the body was never based on liking, on shared passions, or on matching opinions. It's based on the fact that Christ died for them too. And here's the most important point: God appoints where we go and who we're with, and He often places us with people we would never choose, because when love breaks through between people who don't naturally click, nobody credits how great we are. All the credit goes to Jesus. The higher way isn't collecting impressive gifts. It's using whatever God gave you to love the people He put in front of you.

Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. Two people can experience the same situation truthfully and still perceive it completely differently, like two ears hearing one sound. When have you been in a conflict where you later realized the other person was seeing something real that you couldn't see?
3. When life feels scarce or anxious, we tend to protect and love "our people" first, which is how cliques formed in the Corinthian church. Where are you tempted to love only the people you already like and call that faithfulness?
4. The disciples waited for the Spirit at Pentecost rather than launching out on their own strength and logistics. Where in your life are you serving, or avoiding serving, in your own power instead of depending on God's?
5. God often appoints us to people we would never choose, so that when breakthrough comes the credit goes to Jesus. Who is a difficult person in your life right now, and how would it change your posture toward them to see them as placed there by God?
6. Belonging to the body is where it starts, but the body only works when each part gives itself away in love, even in hidden ways no one applauds. What is one concrete, maybe unseen, way you could use what God has given you to serve someone this week?

Significant Quotes from Sermon

"You are the body of Christ not because you provide any value, not because you provide any production. You are the body of Christ because Christ died for you and He loves you."

"It is a good thing when God places you with difficult people, because when there is breakthrough, no credit goes to you or to me. All credit goes to Jesus."

"It's not the gift that leads people to Christ. It's the power of the Spirit in the manifestation of the gift that builds the kingdom of God."

"Your gifting is higher when you are able to use your giftings to love people, to sacrifice of yourself for people."

Sermon Notes

1 Corinthians 12:27-31

27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Outline

1. You Are the Body (v. 27)

- a. Paul holds unity and individuality together: one body, individually members of it. Neither is sacrificed for the other.
- b. Membership is by grace, not production. You are the body because Christ died for you and loves you, not because you provide value.
- c. So is every other believer, whether or not you like them. Two ears can hear the same sound differently and both report truthfully; the body needs both reports.
- d. Conflict often comes from demanding that others perceive the world exactly as we do.

2. God Has Appointed (v. 28)

- a. The gifts differ, and the lists differ (Romans 12:4–8), because the point was never a fixed taxonomy to locate yourself in. The point is that God grants gifts as He sees fit.
- b. "God has appointed" takes the pressure off. The disciples waited for the Spirit at Pentecost; they could not build the church on logistics and willpower.
- c. God can work through weakness: Moses with his slow speech, Paul lecturing past midnight. The power is His, not ours.
- d. He will often place you with people you do not naturally click with, so that when breakthrough comes, the credit goes to Jesus, not to your charisma.

3. The More Excellent Way (vv. 29–31)

- a. The rhetorical questions all expect no. Nobody has every gift. Only Jesus had everything, and He carried it in humility.
- b. The higher gifts are not a better category on the list. Your gifting runs higher when it loves people and sacrifices for them, which is why chapter 13 follows.
- c. "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another" (1 Peter 4:10). Church is not a passive weekly event; it is you using your specific gifting to love people.
- d. Hidden service counts fully: the listening ear at the potluck, the person taking out the trash, done heartily unto the Lord.

Notes

I keep coming back to a question that bothered me growing up and still meets me in ministry: if the church is the body of Christ, why is there so much conflict in it? I grew up assuming church was the one place where everyone got along, where the adults around me were my examples of Christ. Many of them were wonderful Christians, but they were also selfish, like me, and my view of God was shaped and sometimes marred by them. Paul is writing to a church like that. Corinth was a dysfunctional community, full of divisions, and the first half of this letter names them one by one. Into that mess Paul says, now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Notice what he refuses to do in that sentence. He does not tell the Corinthians to lose their individuality for the sake of unity, and he does not let them reject unity for the sake of their individuality. He holds both together. You are united as the body of Christ, and individually you look different from one another. Praise God you look different. A body made of one part is not a body.

Here is where the conflict comes from. Imagine your two ears could talk to each other. A sound comes from the right side. One ear says, that was loud. The other says, it barely registered. Both are doing their job. Both are reporting what they perceived, and both are right in their own way. The argument between them misses the point entirely, because the body does not need the ears to agree on volume. The body needs both reports to know where the sound came from. That is depth perception. Or take your two hands. The right hand is on a hot stove and screaming. The left hand feels nothing and concludes the right hand is dramatic and oversensitive. The body still needs to move the hand. So much of church conflict looks like this. I know what I perceive, and I cannot understand why you do not perceive it, so one of us must be failing. But the response is not for one ear to surrender its report, and it is not for the other to pretend it heard what it did not hear. That only creates confusion. What the body needs is for each member to share what it perceived, truthfully, as a member of one another. It is not about winning the argument. It is about serving the body with your perspective while trusting that God gave the other person theirs.

This is why I have to be honest about something. You will not like everyone in the church, and I will say it plainly, I do not like everyone. For a long time I thought that was a defect I needed to fix by putting on a face at the door. But Paul does not say, love the people you click with. He says every believer is the body of Christ, beloved by Jesus, and that status has nothing to do with whether their theology matches yours in every detail, whether they read a passage the way you read it, or whether they share your passions. They will not. I am passionate about nearly everything and people still do not share my passions. That is not why I love them. I love them because they are the body of Christ,

and when one member suffers the whole body suffers, and when one member is honored we all rejoice, because the unity is in Jesus and not in affinity.

Watch what happens when affinity takes over instead. When everything is abundant, everyone gets along. But the moment scarcity or anxiety enters, people protect their own. I need to make sure I get mine, and I will love mine first, and then maybe everyone else. That is exactly the clique-forming Paul confronts in Corinth, and it is an unhealthy body. It takes the grace the Spirit gave us for the common good and spends it only on the people we already enjoy.

The second thing this passage settles is where the gifts come from. God has appointed in the church apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, healing, helping, administrating, tongues. I do not read that list as a ranking of importance, and I do not think Paul intends for you to scan it like a menu and find your one category. The list in Romans 12 is different from this one, which tells me the point was never a complete taxonomy. The point is the verb. God has appointed. He grants giftings as He sees fit, in His infinite wisdom, and that takes enormous pressure off of you and me. The disciples did not decide to build the kingdom and demand God fund the project. They waited for the Spirit, because they knew they could not build the church on their own logistics. Moses had slow speech. Paul could lecture long enough to put a young man to sleep. When the Spirit fills a person, the power of God moves hearts, and so it is never the gift that leads people to Christ. It is the power of the Spirit in the manifestation of the gift. That should produce humility in everyone operating in a gifting. It is not me, it is Him.

It also explains the least enjoyable part of God's appointing. He will put you where He wants you, and most likely that is with people you do not naturally click with. I am adamant about this because of what it protects. When God places you with difficult people and there is breakthrough, no credit goes to you or to me. All credit goes to Jesus. The cowardly move is to look at the difficult person with different convictions and different wiring and say, I would rather not, and then wonder why God is not using us. He keeps sending us people. We keep calling them the wrong people. And if God gave us what we ask for, a life surrounded by people exactly like us, same beliefs, same stage of life, same number of kids, we would suffocate in the sameness and call it mundane. The way out is not a more exciting version of comfort. It is surrender. God, appoint the people, and I will trust You to give me what I need to love them well.

Then Paul walks down the list with rhetorical questions. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Do all work miracles? The expected answer every time is no. You are not everything, and praise God for that, because having everything would make you insufferable. Only One ever had everything, and He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. So when Paul says earnestly desire the higher gifts, I do not hear

him reopening a ranking he just dismantled. The still more excellent way is the next chapter. Your gifting runs higher when you use it to love people, to sacrifice for people, including the ones you do not enjoy. Loving the people we like is easy; even the pagans do that. Peter says the same thing from a completely different personality: as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace, so that in everything God gets the glory.

So church is not a passive event where you sit, sing, listen, and leave. Receiving is good, and we receive Christ Himself at the table. But the body works when every part functions. If your gifting is to listen, then the person having the worst week of their life needs you at the potluck table more than they need my sermon. If your gifting is service, then serve, and someone will watch you do it heartily unto the Lord and see Jesus. And if you can look at the difficult person in your life and say, you are the body of Christ, and God enjoys you, God wants you, God loves you, then we are becoming the church I want us to be, one that is walking together toward Christ.

Blog

Most of us have a secret ranking system. We walk into a room and, without deciding to, we start sorting: who matters here, who is impressive, who would be missed if they stopped showing up, and where we land on the list. We do it at work, we do it in families, and if we are honest, we do it at church. Somewhere in the back of the mind sits a question we rarely say out loud: what am I actually good for? And underneath it, a more anxious one: if I never figured that out, would anyone notice?

This Sunday we come to 1 Corinthians 12:27-31, and Paul walks straight into that question. He has spent the whole chapter building a picture of the church as a body, one body with many parts, a foot that should not resign because it is not a hand, an eye that cannot tell the hand it is not needed. Then at verse 27 he turns from the picture to the people and says it to their faces: "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."

I want you to feel how surprising that sentence is. Paul is not writing to an impressive church. Corinth was fractured into factions, suing itself in the public courts, and shaming its poor at the Lord's table. If any congregation deserved a probationary status, some category like "aspiring body of Christ, pending improvement," it was this one. Paul gives them no such category. You are the body of Christ. Present tense, no conditions attached. Their identity did not rest on their performance, and neither does ours. It rests on Christ alone. That order matters more than almost anything else I will say on Sunday: what you are comes before what you do. The church never earns its way into being Christ's body by serving well. We serve because that is what we already are.

Now, for many of us, the phrase "spiritual gifts" is unfamiliar territory. Maybe you have never thought about it at all, or you have only heard the term used in ways that felt strange or intimidating. So let me define it simply. A spiritual gift is not a religious version of a talent, something you discover through a quiz and then list on a profile. In this chapter Paul's word is *charismata*, built on the Greek word for grace. A gift is something God graciously supplies through you for the good of the people you belong to. It exists for the person in the next seat. That is the whole idea.

Verse 28 tells us where these gifts come from, "God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues." God has appointed. Nobody in Corinth applied for their role. Nobody campaigned for it, tested into it, or earned it by seniority. Earlier in the chapter Paul said the Spirit distributes gifts "as he wills" and that God arranged the parts of the body "as he chose." Verse 28 completes the thought. The composition of a church, who is in the room and what they carry, is God's deliberate arrangement, not an accident of who happened to sign up.

Look closely at that list, because it holds two surprises. The first is what comes first. Apostles, prophets, teachers, the ministries of the word, lead the list because the church is created and fed by the word of God. The second surprise is what comes next to last: helping and administrating. Those two words appear nowhere else in the whole New Testament, and they are as ordinary as words can be. One means practical assistance, especially for the weak. The other comes from the world of sailing and means steering the ship, the work of planning and managing and keeping things on course. Paul sets these unglamorous gifts in the same sentence as apostles and miracles, all of them appointed by the same God. Which means the person who quietly restocks the supply closet and the person who builds the volunteer schedule are not doing lesser work while the real ministry happens elsewhere. God appointed that work. The casserole and the spreadsheet are His arrangements.

At this point a question surfaces, and I would rather raise it myself than leave you wondering. What about the dramatic items on the list? Apostles, miracles, healing, tongues. Do we expect those at our church? Here is how I would frame it. The apostles in the foundational sense, eyewitnesses commissioned by the risen Christ, belong to the church's foundation, and Ephesians 2:20 says exactly that. A foundation is laid once; you do not keep re-pouring it. But for the other gifts, Scripture gives us no similar statement of expiration, and so we hold a posture of affirmation with humility. We affirm that the Holy Spirit gives gifts today, really and freely. We also admit that we do not control them and do not fully understand them. The Spirit distributes as He wills, which means the gifts were never ours to schedule or to rule out. I am suspicious of any teaching that claims mastery here, whether it manufactures the spectacular on demand or confidently forbids what God has not forbidden. The distribution list is in His hands, not ours, and the church is healthiest when it remembers that.

Then Paul asks seven questions in a row. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? In Greek, each question is framed so that the expected answer is no. Paul is not quizzing the Corinthians; he is releasing them. No one has every gift. No gift belongs to everyone. Your incompleteness is not a defect in your faith. It is the design of the body, because your lack is the exact space where someone else's gift fits, and their lack is the space for yours. This is why I keep saying we need each other, and why the ranking system we carry into every room has no place in the church. If God decided the distribution, then comparing gifts is arguing with His arrangement.

I find both comfort and correction in this. Comfort, because the pressure is off: you do not need to be everything, and you were never supposed to be. Correction, because the excuse is also off: the fact that you are not everything does not mean you

are nothing. Somewhere in the body there is a function that God appointed you for, and the body will run lopsided until you take it up. You may not be able to name it yet, and that is fine. Gifts usually surface in the ordinary act of showing up and serving, not in a moment of private revelation. For most of us it will not look dramatic. It will look like helping and administrating, like noticing the weak and steering things faithfully. Verse 28 has already dignified that work beyond anything our rankings can measure.

Just when we might want him to close with a plan for discovering our gifts, Paul points past the entire subject: "But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way." Desiring gifts is good; Paul commands it, and the higher gifts turn out to be the ones that build others up. But he will not let the conversation end there, because there is a way that outruns every gift on the list. He means love, and it takes him a whole chapter to say it, the chapter we open next Sunday. For now, notice the shape of the handoff. Not all are apostles. Not all heal or teach or interpret. But the more excellent way is open to every single member of the body, because love was never a gift distributed to some. It is the road all the gifts travel on, and without it, chapter 13 will tell us, even the most impressive gift amounts to nothing.

So come Sunday with your question, the one about what you are good for. The text will not answer it by handing you a title. It will answer it by telling you what you already are, the body of Christ, and by assuring you that the God who arranged this body did not forget a single part.