

Church Illustrated

The church, as a body

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

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HDBC

There are a number of metaphors in the N.T. for the church. These are word pictures designed to help us understand the church. **Today let's** consider how the church is like a body.

The human body is perhaps the most complex organism on in the universe. In his book, ***The Body, a Guide for Occupancy***, Bill Bryson offers some insight into the human body in language that even I can understand. It's a fascinating book. Here's a little of what I have learned.

According to Bryson, it takes fifty-nine elements to construct a human body. Six of those account for 99.1 percent of what makes us. Those are **carbon, oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium and phosphorus**. The biggest component in any human is oxygen. Ten percent is hydrogen, which as you know, when combined with the oxygen makes water. About 60% of your body is that water.

Of those fifty-nine elements, twenty-four are considered essential. You gotta have them. The rest are a mixed bag.

Your body is an amazing thing. It takes 7 billion-billion-billion atoms to make you. That's 7 octillion. **Your lungs**, smoothed out, would cover a tennis court and their airways would stretch nearly from coast to coast. The length of your **blood vessels** would take you two and a half times around the Earth. The most amazing part is your **DNA**. You have a meter of it in every cell and so many cells that if it were formed into a single strand it would stretch ten billion miles. That's way past Pluto.

The human brain is a complex marvel. It is composed of 75-80 percent water and the rest is mostly protein and fat. Yet those three things come together in such a way that allows for thought, memory, vision, personality and emotion. Just sitting quietly, your brain will churn out more information in thirty seconds than the **Hubble Space Telescope processed in thirty years**.

Skin is the largest organ in the body and possibly the most versatile. It keeps the right things in and the wrong things out. It is thinnest on our eyelids and thickest on the heels of our feet. The skin is what keeps us in touch with the world around us. When you feel a gentle breeze on your skin you enjoy it. If you touch your hand on a hot object it quickly tells you to get it off.

One interesting thing about touch is that the brain not only tells you how something feels, but **how it should feel**. That's why a caress from someone you love feels wonderful, but the same touch from a stranger would be creepy. It's always why it's difficult to tickle yourself. One other thing about skin, **According to Dorothy Parker, *Beauty is skin deep, but ugly goes clean to the bone***.

I'm not sure about that, but I do know that the Bible indicates that the church is like a human body. So, what does the human body teach us about the church?

The body represents the church.

The head represents Jesus.

The various parts of the body represent believers.

This is clearly stated in Colossians and Ephesians, then illustrated in Romans and 1 Corinthians. For example list to Col. 1:15-18. Writing of Jesus . . .

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in Him all things ^dhold together. ¹⁸ **He is also head of the body, the church;** and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. Colossians 1:15-18*

*And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as **head over all things to the church,** ²³ **which is His body.** Eph. 1:22-23.*

So, the church is a body with Christ as its head. But what does this mean? We can go a little deeper by looking at 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. **Five things** that the human body illustrates about the church.

1. There is a foundational unity in the body (12-13)

The first and most obvious thing to note about the human body is its unity. It is one body. You don't first notice the individual parts. You first notice the whole. *If you see someone walking into the front door of the church you don't think, their comes a couple of arms and legs, a heart, a liver, a pair of lungs, some eyes, ears and a nose.* No. You see them as a unified body, a person.

The same should be true of the church. I love that Paul writes first of the unity of the church rather than its diversity. We see that in **verses 12-13**. The focus here is not on the individual parts but of the unity that makes it a body.

There is a unity that brings all the parts together into a unified entity. One of the primary unifiers in the human body is DNA. *If my hand were severed, scientists could tell it was my hand because the DNA would match my body.* So, what is the DNA in the church that bids us together? It is our **common relationship with Jesus that begins for all of us through a common salvation experience.**

Note 13. It was the same Holy Spirit who has baptized each of us in to the same body, the body of Christ. At salvation the Holy Spirit placed each of us into the body of Christ. That common salvation and the common relationship with have with Jesus unifies us. *What unifies my daughters is their common relationship with the parents.*

I need to point out that the Bible speaks of the body of Christ, and thus, of the church in two ways. One is the larger body of Christ, or as some would say the universal church. This includes all believers, across generations. That is the body that Paul is writing about here.

But the Bible also speaks of the body of Christ or the church in a local, visible sense. That would be individual churches like HDBC. All believers are not members of this church, but all true believers are members of the spiritual body of Christ. Each local church is a visible expression of the larger church. That foundational unity applies to all believers.

There is a foundational unity. BTW, that why it is so important to have a regenerate church membership. What I mean is that the members of any given local church are all truly born again. Without that, we can have no unity.

2. There is a necessary diversity in the body (14-17)

Even though the body is considered a single entity, it is made up of unique members. It is not just a collection of **parts**, it is a collection of **unique parts**. Hands/feet, arms/legs, eyes/ears, muscles/bones, lungs/skin, etc. They don't look the same. They don't act the same. Yet, all are important.

When they are joined together they make up the body. *As Bryson has stated, perhaps the most astounding thing about us is that we are not just a collection of inert components, the same stuff you would find in a pile of dirt. The only thing special about the elements that make you is that they make you. That is the miracle of life.* BTW, he does not claim to be a Christian.

In a similar way, the church is made up of an assortment of members. Not only are we not ALL alike, we are absolutely all different. Age. Gender. Ethnicity. Education. Wealth. Intelligence. Size. Looks. We are all different.

Like the members of the human body, in the church, we all have different abilities that enable us to carry out different functions. In this passage and in a number of others, Paul wrote about **spiritual gifts**. These are God-given abilities that enable us to carry out our God-given assignments. Every believer has at least one spiritual gift and I believe most if not all have a gift-mix; a combination of a spiritual gifts. These enable us to effectively serve in our given roles within the church. *The body works best when the arm does arm things and the ears do ear things.* The same is true in the church. We will be most effective when you do you and the person next to you does him or her.

3. There is a strategic placement in the body (18)

In the human body, the various parts are placed strategically where they can provide the best service to the body. I'm neither a doctor nor a scientist, but I know that there are clear reasons why our various parts are where they are, shaped as they are. *Think about how much trouble it would cause if suddenly various parts of your body were rearranged. Hands where your feet should be, eyes and ears swapped places.*

I love verse 18. God has personally placed the members in the body as He desires. You are in the body of Christ for such a time as this. You are at HDBC for this time for a reason. God has placed you here. You are not here

by accident or randomly. And, do you know why you are here? For what you can contribute to the church. Look at verse 7. That's why you are here!

4. There is a mutual dependence in the body (19-25)

To put it simply, the various members of the body need each other.

What if the throat simply rebelled and said to the mouth, I don't need you anymore. The stomach would also be hurt by that. In order for you stay in balance when you walk, there are parts of the ear that have to cooperate. If they don't you are in trouble. Note the silly illustrations Paul uses.

For me to stand and preach, there are multiple systems and parts of my body that are working in sync with each other, simultaneously. The obvious: walking, talking, breathing, using my hands, etc.

In a similar way, in the church need each other. We are best when we are working together, in unity, with and for each other. We are not simply a group of isolated, independent people who happen to come into the same room a few times a month to watch the same thing. If that is your idea of the church, you are so wrong. **We are interconnected and interdependent** on each other.

5. There is a shared experience in the body (26)

When one suffers the whole body suffers.

When one rejoices the whole body rejoices. We experience life together. We share in each other's pain and we share in each other's joy. **Stub your toe and your whole body reacts. Get a speck in your eye and your whole body notices.** If the **wrong artery** gets clogged the whole body gets involved.

That's how it is in the church, or how it is supposed to be. When you hurt, I hurt with you. When you celebrate, I will celebrate with you.

Takeaways: Really tempted right now to have us all do **Head, Shoulders, Knees, Toes**. Or, to sing together, *Dem Bone, Dem Bones, Dem Dry Bones . . .* Instead, let me offer **four two-word things** you can do.

1. Join up

Two levels of joining. Remember there is the larger body (or church) that includes all the saved. Then there is the smaller body (or church) with is the local church.

Everyone is invited to join the first. You do that through faith in Christ.

If you are not a believer in Jesus, I invite you to become one today. He gave His life for you. He wants to forgive your sins. He wants a relationship with you. He is inviting you to trust Him and he will save you. When you do, you will instantly become part of the body.

Every believer is expected to join the second, a local church.

You need to join a local church because the local church is the visible expression of the larger church. You don't have to join this one, but if this is where you are attending, why not? **Take the next step! Join Up!**

2. Jump in

Get connected and stay connected to the body, which is the church. Be here when the church meets. Join a group. Develop relationships. Understand the importance of each member being actively connected with other members. That is the way we were made to function.

When disconnected, get reconnected as soon as possible. **A part of the body that is disconnected from the body is of no use to the body.** In fact, it begins to die very quickly. **I've heard of fingers and toes being surgically re-attached after they were severed.** This has to happen quickly. Apart from the body, the member begins to wither and die.

3. Get busy

You have gifts and abilities that this church needs. You are here because God has placed you here at this time in your life. So, figure out what you can do, and start doing it. Find a ministry. Any member who is not serving is like a member of the body that is dead or atrophied. It hinders the body.

4. Stay focused

It is so easy to get our eyes off of the right things and onto the wrong things. If I start focusing on myself and how important I am to the body, **it will lead to pride.** If I start focusing on how insignificant I am, compared with others, that's the wrong focus. **It will lead to resentment.** If I start assigning some artificial worth to the other members of the body, then I have the wrong focus.

If you are a foot, don't focus on wanting to be an eye. Just be the best foot you can be. **If you are a spleen**, don't resent that you are not a heart. Just be the best spleen you can be. **If you are a heart**, don't arrogantly look at a blood vessel and think you are better. Just keep beating and thanking God for those vessels. Every member of the human body is important, especially those that are doing their thing, tucked away, unseen and un-applauded. In fact, in His kingdom, God honors the least and most obscure greater than those outfront.

The three smallest bones in the human body are the middle ear ossicles, the hammer, anvil, and stirrup.

Though they work in obscurity, completely invisible to the outside world, they are absolutely essential to our ability to hear. Without them, only 0.1 percent of the sound energy that hits the eardrum would be transferred to the inner ear. But God has arranged them in such a way that they produce maximum effect.

Just as the human body has no insignificant parts, the body of Christ has no small or unimportant members. Every member is absolutely essential to the purpose of God. **If your function** in the church puts you out front, be extra wary of the temptation to pride. If you are called to serve in obscurity, don't resent the lack of applause. If you are serving faithfully, just know this, Jesus is seeing and applauding! Just stay focused on the mission.

So, what do you need to do today? What is your action step?

Is it to **Join up**?

Is it to **Jump in**?

Is it to **Get connected**?

Is it to **Stay focus**?