

OUR PLACE

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-31

Becky was the clerk at the local Christian bookstore, and she enjoyed chit-chatting with her customers.

One day she was speaking with a local pastor when she complimented him on the wonderful church he pastored. Becky blurted out, “Oh, Pastor Tom, I just love your body.” Oops! She was speaking of “*the Body of Christ*,” but that’s not how it was heard by everyone else in the store. It made for an embarrassing moment.

The New Testament uses numerous idioms for the Church. *We are God’s fellow-workers, God’s field, God’s building, the bride of Christ, the flock of God, the household of faith, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the candlestick, the pillar and ground of the truth* - and all these pictures sharpen our view of the Church.

But of all the idioms used in Scripture for the Church none is quite so illuminating as the one Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 12. He speaks of the Church as a body!

Together, we, you and I, are “*the body of Christ*.”

At the Incarnation Jesus clothed himself in a human body - in flesh and bone - to touch, and help, and heal, and reveal God, to a lost world. Today, Jesus carries on that work through another body, His Church.

Just as your spirit and mind interact with your surroundings through your body; likewise the Church is the means by which

Jesus reaches out to a needy world. We are the hands, the feet, the mouth of Jesus!

1 Corinthians 12 teaches us that *the Spirit of Christ* works through *the Body of Christ*. Our job is to cooperate with the Holy Spirit, and not hinder His work.

I hope people take a look at our church... and then make the remark, “**Lord, I just love Your body!**”

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul spends the first 11 verses encouraging us to **use our gift** - our spiritual gifts. Then in verses 12-31 he instructs us to **find our place**.

Remember, verse 7 tells us, “**But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.**” The smorgasbord of spiritual gifts that Paul says are on the Christian’s table aren’t there for his or her own benefit. Rather the gifts are given “*for the profit of all.*”

You’re here to bless me, and I’m here to bless you.

Every Christian’s usefulness for God, as well as their own personal fulfillment, is directly connected to the Body of Christ. If we want to live out our purpose in life it’s vital that each of us *use our gifts* and *find our place*.

Verse 12 begins, “**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.**”

If you're an adult of average weight and height, here’s what you accomplish every 24 hours...

"Your heart beats 103,689 times, and your blood travels 168 million miles - your lungs breathe 23,040 times and inhale 438 cubic feet of air - you eat 3 1/2 pounds of food (some of

us more, some less), you drink 2.9 quarts of liquid, and expel 7/8 of a pound of waste - your vocal chords utter 4,800 words - you move 750 muscles - your nails grow .000046 inches, and your hair (if you still have it) grows .017 inches - and to top it all off you use 7 million brain cells."

No wonder you feel exhausted at the end of a day!

The human body is a miracle of engineering. It consists of several trillion cells, and ten major organs, working in precise synchronization with one another.

Your body is a blend of *unity **and** diversity*, and so is Jesus' Body. We are many members, but one body.

Look around at the people in this room. *We're different folks, from divergent backgrounds, with varied gifts, and diverse callings* - yet God has put us together in this one place, at this one time. We're His Body.

And God expects us to function like it, and work in harmony with one another to build up His kingdom.

Paul begins his analogy of the Church as the Body of Christ by noting our common spiritual starting point.

Verse 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."**

We've all slaked our thirst from the same spigot. You and I share and enjoy the same spiritual watering hole.

We've been baptized into Christ, and now drink of the life of Christ - *the living water* - by the same Spirit.

Though the body of Christ might be organized, that doesn't make us an organization. We're an organism.

The body has structure, but a mere structure it's not.

We're growing, changing, adapting. Though involuntary systems operate within my body, I'm more than a machine. I have a mind, will, emotions - a soul and a spirit... So does the body of Christ. We're alive!

We're the *people of God* filled with the *life of God*.

AW Tower once remarked, "One-hundred religious persons knit into a unity by careful organization do not constitute a church any more than eleven dead men make a football team. The first requisite is life!"

When we give *our lives to Jesus* He gives *His life to us*. Just as I slip my hand into this limp, lifeless glove, God slips His Holy Spirit into my spirit. I'm animated with the *life of God*, by the presence of His *Holy Spirit*.

And the same Spirit who lives in me, lives in you.

This inseparably links us together. We're now and forever connected spiritually through the Holy Spirit.

This means, just as my four kids can look at each other, and say, "*My blood runs through him.*" Likewise, we can look at each other as spiritual brothers and sisters, and think, "*We're born of the same Spirit!*"

We may be male and female, blue collar and white collar, dark-skin and light-skin, Tech and Georgia, old and young, trendy and traditional, Jew and Gentile...

There is a connection between us that transcends the differences that might exist! We've been baptized or initiated into the life of God by the same Holy Spirit!

While we're addressing verse 13 here's an opportunity for us to clear up a doctrinal confusion...

Non-Pentecostals point out from verse 13 that Spirit-baptism is used synonymously with conversion, *and they're right!*... But then they conclude Spirit-baptism always speaks of Christian conversion, *and it doesn't.*

The term "**baptize**" is like the English word "**watch.**" It has multiple meanings. You can *wear a watch* or *stand watch.* And likewise "**baptism**" has multiple meanings.

It can mean "**to initiate or make part of**" - like when a rookie quarterback gets sacked for the first time, we say, "**Well, he had his baptism.**" *He was initiated into the action...* Or it can mean "**to engulf or immerse**" as in a water baptism. "**He was submerged in the river.**"

Now, in the NT, whenever **Paul** uses the term "**baptism**" it does refer to our *Christian conversion.*

Romans 6 says that by faith we're baptized into Christ. We're united spiritually into the life of Jesus, and now share in all that He is, and has accomplished.

But when **John** or **Luke** or **Jesus** or **Peter** use the term "**baptism**" it speaks of *immersion* not *conversion.*

In Acts, Luke writes of the outpouring of the Spirit, or the filling of the Holy Spirit - *a moment in time when He gives us boldness* - and calls it being "**baptized in the Spirit.**" It's the same word, but a different experience.

As with any *text* the correct interpretation hinges on the *context!* Whether the NT intends for *the baptism of the Spirit* to mean our *salvation* or our *saturation* depends on the author's intent at the time... And here when Paul says we've been "*baptized into one body*" he's referring to *our initiation into Christ - our salvation.*

There are some churches that you join by coming forward or applying for membership. But you join *the Church* the moment you trust your life to Jesus Christ.

This kind of Spirit baptism is like a merger!

A smaller company gets gobbled up by a huge corporation. The smaller outfit still does business - *but it now has big partners - it's under new management - it has a new mission - even new and better resources.*

Here's how every member of the Body of Christ should see themselves... we're no longer "*a mom and pop.*" We're now subsidiaries in God's kingdom!

And in the next 14 verses - verse 14 to 27 - Paul describes the interconnectedness in the Body of Christ.

Verse 14 begins, "*For in fact the body is not one member but many.*" The Church is one body - we're united - but that body is made up of many members.

The Church is a blend of both unity and diversity.

Realize, this emphasis on the Church as a body - as an integrated whole - was revolutionary to the ancients.

When you visit the ruins of Corinth, a must-see is the Archaeological Museum. There's an exhibit of terra-cotta, or clay-baked figurines, fashioned as body parts.

In the display cases you find legs, hands, eyes, ears, female breasts, even genitalia, and internal organs...

The city of Corinth had a Temple dedicated to Asclepius, the Greek god of healing. So when a person became ill, they made a replica of the diseased or broken body part, and offered it as a sacrifice to Asclepius in hopes of his healing. Thousands of such parts have been found in the ruins of the ancient city.

This is strange to us, but it was in keeping with notions of healing in the ancient world. Body parts were considered isolated - separated from each other.

If an organ or appendage was diseased, the ailment was assumed to be confined to that particular part.

Few folks understood the inter-connectedness of the human body. Pagans isolated the body's members, instead of viewing the body's health holistically.

In contrast, Paul believed in a Creator, a Designer, who's imprint is left on all He touches - *even our bodies*. God made us one body with multiple members.

And the success and health of our bodies are determined by the cooperation of its members.

To which Paul asks in verse 14, "If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? 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?" The body works best when each member knows its place, and accepts its role.

If your foot got tired of being out there on the end of your leg, and it started to grumble with your toes...

"Man, it's hot and smelly stuck in a sock. And I have to bear the weight of the whole Body! I'm tired of being treated like a heel. My sole is weary. I'm the one who's always toeing the line. My only friend is Dr. Shoals.

I keep putting my best foot forward and nobody ever notices me. I've had enough, *I'm putting my foot down.* People even think I'm corny!" *I feel so de-feeted.*"

Or imagine your ear complaining, "I'm tired of getting waxed all the time. And if someone sticks another needle in me, *I'm outta ear!*" What if the members of your body got tired of playing their role, and became resentful - even started competing with each other?

You would become incapacitated. Not much would ever get accomplished... And the same is true in the Body of Christ. If everyone refused to cooperate with each other the Church would be *useless* and *fruitless*.

One of the problems in the church that hinders our harmony is our failure to accept *our place*. Either we're restless ourselves or jealous of someone else's calling.

We refuse to embrace God's will for our lives. God calls us a "*foot*," and we want to be a "*hand*." Because I'm stuck being an "*ear*," and I'd rather be an "*eye*," I'll just take my shades and lashes, and go home.

Sadly, too many Christians are poor followers.

In fact, the term “**follower**” has become a dirty word for some people. *“You should be a leader, not a follower. There’s something wrong with you if you follow...”* But that’s not true, especially for a Christian.

As Christians we’re called to follow Jesus, and part of that following is knowing our place in the Body; then having the humility to be content with our role.

Being an ear isn’t as glamorous as as being a eye.

Your eye sits in the middle of your face. It’s the first thing that gets noticed. Whereas your ears hang out on the periphery of your head, or often get hidden under your hair. *Eyes get far more attention than ears.*

Same with your hands... We shake hands. We don’t shake feet... We speak with our hands. We wave with our hands. We hide our ugly feet in a pair of shoes. Who wants to be a foot... I demand to be an hand!

And this is the problem in the Church! Everyone wants the glamor positions - without realizing that every post in the Body of Christ is strategic. *Every member - all roles - should be honored and respected.*

Your body doesn’t need a dozen eyes or fifty hands. The eye needs an ear, and the hand needs a foot.

At church we need to leave our agendas at the door.

Church is not about any *one of us individually*, but *the whole of us*. No member should expect to serve or give on his or her own terms. Let’s accept *our place*.

And whatever your calling, there's no more satisfying feeling in the world than finding your place in the body of Christ, and fulfilling your God-given purpose.

On a baseball team it's the manager's job to put players in the positions that'll best help the team. And in the body of Christ, the Holy Spirit is the manager!

If you'll follow... He'll help you find your place.

Verse 17 tells us, **“If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing?”** Here Paul paints a grotesque image. *What if the whole body were an eye?*

What if your body were a big eyeball rolling around? You'd be sad. You'd be blue!... You might look good over a rosy cheek, or next-door to a nose, but on your own - by yourself (without a face), you're out-of-place.

If you're an eye you can see, but with no feet, hands, legs, arms - you can't go anywhere or do anything.

And I'm afraid that's what becomes of many churches. They turn into one big **“I”... “I want this” or “I deserve that.”** Some churches suffer from ***I-strain!*** We need to be led by the Holy Spirit, not our own ego.

And **“If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?”** *If we were all an ear how would we smell?* You don't listen to a rose. It's silent. But it produces a fragrance you don't want to miss... A ear needs a nose.

If you told your Little League team everyone could play the position they wanted, you'd end up with ten pitchers and maybe one shortstop - no outfielders, definitely no catcher.

Everybody wants to play the prestigious positions... *And you'd have a lousy team.*

And the same is true in the Body of Christ.

You and I are most *beautiful... in a body. We find our function... in a family.* An eye has a socket. A nose has a bridge. A hand works best on the end of an arm. And a Christian functions best, attached to the Body.

This is why Paul says in verse 18, **“But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.”** Again, the Body of Christ is a blend of *unity and diversity* - to stress one above the other is a mistake. We need a healthy balance of both.

Our diversity shouldn't infringe on our unity, and our unity shouldn't nullify our diversity. We're a blend.

Twenty years ago now, a group of Scottish scientists cloned the first mammal. It was hailed a breakthrough in genetics. The cloned sheep was named, *Dolly*.

I recall reading the article and thinking, **“That's no big deal, churches have been cloning sheep for centuries.”**

Often the church will strip people of their individuality in the name of discipleship. We want to conform them - not into the image of Christ - but into our own image.

Here's a poem, **“Be what I want - no more, no less - because I am right and no one else. Think what I think, do only what I do, then and only then, can I fellowship with you.”** That's an attitude the church needs to avoid.

If you're a senior citizen don't try to act like a young person, *just because your pastor is a young guy.*

If you like country music; then like country music. If you're from Nigeria, celebrate your culture. If you're well-to-do financially, don't try to act poor. If you're poor, don't pretend to be rich. If you like NASCAR; then like NASCAR. If you're a biker, be a biker. *Be who you are!*

It's our diversity that gives the Body of Christ its richness and beauty. God wants us all to be genuine. Each of us are uniquely fashioned by God. And if we're true to who He made us; we'll maintain that diversity.

Yet on the other hand, *if we over-stress our diversity it can hinder our unity.* At times, the health of the Body needs me to express my individuality. At other times, it's best served by me suppressing my individuality.

There're Christians who never settle in and become part of a church because they're unwilling to swap their own personal agenda for the good of the group. *They insist on their own thing, and miss out on a God thing!*

Unity and diversity are balanced by maturity!

Remember verse 7, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are for *"the profit of all."* And this should be our motivation when it comes to all our interactions at church.

Verse 21 says it best, *"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."* Each of us has a place. We all need

each other! As Christians God knows we're better together than we can be apart.

One day, the ship's *captain* and *chief engineer* were arguing over who's job was most vital. They decided to swap places to prove their point. The engineer went to the bridge, and the captain headed to the engine room.

An hour later the captain appeared back on deck covered with oil and grease. He was waving a monkey wrench and shouting to the engineer, "Chief, you need to get down there. I can't get this ship to go!"

The engineer shouted back, "Of course you can't get this ship to go, I just ran her aground." *Both men needed each other!...* You have gifts that can bless and benefit me. I have gifts that will bless and benefit you. We should recognize that we all need each other!

At the close of World War II Jimmy Durante was invited by Ed Sullivan to a veteran's hospital to entertain some wounded soldiers. Durante said he had a radio show scheduled that night, but would try to squeeze in a short routine. Sullivan was shocked that night when Jimmy's short routine turned into hours.

Later, Sullivan asked him why he'd stayed so long...

Durante pointed to two soldiers sitting side-by-side on the front row. Both had lost an arm in battle and they did their clapping with their two remaining hands. *It so moved Jimmy Durante, he just couldn't leave.*

And this is what moves the Spirit of God to move upon us. Spiritually speaking we're all disabled in some way. Where I'm weak you make me strong, and where you're weak I can help

you. God wants us all to see that we're better for Him together, than we are apart!

Verse 22 tells us, “No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor...”

For example... In your body there's a tiny valve that acts as a lid to your stomach. When that valve softens and weakens, stomach acids float back up into your esophagus. And the result is called "esophageal reflux." Or in layman's terms, "*major league heartburn!*"

And speaking from personal experience this is no laughing matter! It amazes me, that the weakening of one tiny flap of flesh can create intense pain. It's a reminder that every part of the human body plays a pivotal role... In the Body of Christ, you may be a tiny valve, but if you don't do your part, our church suffers.

Every part of this body is important!

There are parts of the human body like the stomach valve that *serve*, but they're never *seen*. No one thinks of these parts until there's a problem. *Have you ever had a hang nail?* ... And this is also true in the church...

If a nursery worker fails to show up, or the sound man sleeps in, or the ushers miss a week - suddenly, everyone realizes how vital their role happens to be.

Some might say, *the pastor has the glamor job*. I get to stand here and teach the Bible weekly, but if everyone else in

our church didn't do their job, I'd never get to do mine. I'm one among many members.

Verse 23 encourages us to make sure folks behind the scenes don't have to breakdown to be appreciated.

The Church should go out of its way to give honor to those members who tend to end up getting overlook.

Verse 23 tells us, **“And our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need.”** In essence, the service I perform is obvious, but not so for the people who serve behind the scenes.

A pastor gets recognized - *and like anybody else I appreciate being appreciated.* But Paul teaches that our deliberate shows of gratitude need to be reserved for the unseen members who never get recognized.

He says, verse 24, **“But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.”**

Division in the Body of Christ is less likely if thanks and attention is divided equally among all its members.

But not only should be share the care, we all should also help shoulder the suffering. **“And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.”**

If I accidentally pound my thumb with a hammer, it won't just cause my thumb to swell - my entire body will throb. When one member hurts, all the body hurts.

And just as the members of the human body are interrelated in this way, so is the Body of Christ.

I've heard it said, "Real fellowship doubles our joys and divides our grief." The church ought to be *praying for each other* or *rejoicing with each other*. Sharing both *our pains* and *our joys* - living life side-by-side.

Did you hear about the big controversy at the *First Church of the Hand Tools*? It was a real donny-brook.

Some of the members complained about Brother Hammer. "You're too forceful. You're always pounding home your points and nailing the rest of us."

Hammer pointed to Brother Screwdriver, "Hey, I'm no worse than him. He's always going around in circles."

This angered the Screwdriver, "What about Brother Plane, all his work is on the surface, he has no depth."

Brother Plane shouted at Brother Tape Measure, "You're so judgmental. You're always measuring people, sizing them up. You always think you're right."

Brother Tape Measure then turned and snapped angrily at his Brother Sandpaper, "Well, look at him. He's so rough and gritty, he's always rubbing people the wrong way. Why don't you all go back into the box!"

That's when the Master Carpenter arrived. Jesus put on His carpenter's apron and went to work building a pulpit from which the Word of God could be preached.

He used the hammer, the screwdriver, the plane, the tape measure, the sandpaper, and all the other tools, each in the *right way*, and at just the *right time*.

Finally, Brother Saw saw *it!* He rose up and informed the others, "Brothers, we're all tools of equal importance in the hands of the Lord." *And so are we!*

Verse 27 tells us, "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. 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."

Earlier in the chapter, verses 8-10, Paul provided us a list of spiritual gifts, or "*manifestations of the Spirit.*"

We discussed those nine gifts last week. Here, Paul mentions two other gifts: "*helps*" and "*administrations.*"

Let me briefly summarize these two spiritual gifts...

The gift of "*helps*" is a supernatural knack for assisting folks without making them feel like you're taking over. I've had people help me in a way that only highlighted *their competencies* and *my inadequacies*.

This was more *discouraging* than *empowering*.

But a person with the gift of "*helps*" has the ability to enable a person, and bring out their very best. This is a wonderful gift in the Body... "*Helps*" is a big help.

The gift of "*administrations*" is also a valuable gift. This is the ability to organize and manage ministry.

Business mogul Andrew Carnegie use to brag, "Take away our factories, our trade, our avenues of transportation, our money - leave us with nothing but our organization and in four years we could reestablish ourselves." Organization is a

powerful force, and Spirit-led mobilization is a needed tool in the Body of Christ.

Seldom does a church need *more* organization, but I believe every church could use *better* organization.

It's been said, "We need people with the courage to dream, the ability to organize, and the faith to execute."

But after listing these spiritual gifts, Paul goes back to his main point... the success of the Body, *even our own personal fulfillment*, depends on us *using our gift and finding our place*. Each of us has a unique role...

Paul asks a few rhetorical questions, verse 29, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings?"

He's emphasizing the diversity within the Body. Each of us have different spiritual gifts and callings. Not everyone is an *apostle*, or a *teacher*, or has *a gift of healing*. Use *your gift*, and be content in *your place*.

The most frustrating experience in the world is trying to be something you're not. Try to step into someone else's calling, or mimic their gift, and you're destined for misery... *Find your place and use your gifts*.

And when each of us is faithful to do so, God bountifully blesses us both individually and corporately.

Notice Paul's last two rhetorical questions: "*Do all speak with tongues?*" And "*Do all interpret?*" And the obvious answer is the same as it was to the previous five questions,

“No.” We all have different gifts, and nobody has all the gifts. *God gives them as He wills...*

This is why I don't agree with some Pentecostals who believe that everyone who is filled with the Holy Spirit will speak in tongues. In Chapter 14 we'll discuss the gift of tongues and interpretation... For now let me say, it's a wonderful way to *praise God* or *pray to God*.

Every Christian should be open to speaking in tongues - but Paul is crystal clear, ***not everyone will!***

In some circles the gift of tongues is worn like a badge of honor - it separates the spiritual haves from the have-nots. If you don't speak in tongues you're treated as spiritually inferior. That's sad and unbiblical!

We're going to learn in Chapter 14 that the gift of tongues is actually the least of the spiritual gifts...

Paul says in the last verse, **“But earnestly desire the best gifts.”** And of course, this begs the question, **“What are the best gifts?”** Here's my answer...

I believe the best gift is whatever I need at the time...

If I need added information to make a decision; then the best gift is a *word of knowledge*... To sort out all of my options, I might need a *word of wisdom* or a *gift of discernment*... If I'm afraid, I need the *gift of faith*... If I'm sick, the best gift would be a *gift of healing*...

Yet there's one commodity even more important than spiritual gifts. Chapter 12 concludes, **“And yet I show you a more excellent way...”** This sets the stage for Chapter 13,

where Paul identifies this *“more excellent way”* - **as love**. Sandwiched between the two chapters on spiritual gifts is *“love”* - *for the greatest gift is love*.

Here's the surest way to know you've been filled with the Holy Spirit... *Do you love people? Especially your brothers and sister in Christ...* You can speak with the tongues of men and angels, but if you lack love, you're just a clanging cymbal... Next week, we'll look at love.