

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many members, yet one body. 21 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." 22 On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; 24 whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, 25 that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

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 deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, 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 in tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. [Pray]

How did you like playing with Legos this morning? For some of you, it might have been a long time since you last did that! The point of course, was that while each person had a different piece to contribute, all the pieces fit together to make a unified whole. [Legos were distributed to everyone as they entered the sanctuary; at the Children's Message, everyone came forward and added theirs to a "base", creating a "church" of legos!]

Did you know that last weekend Seattle hosted a Lego convention called BrickCon? Yep! Apparently playing with Legos transcends age and culture! The BBC news reported that in July 2016, a 300,000 brick Lego model of Durham Cathedral (in Great Britain) was completed, three years and 27,000 hours, after work on it began. It is the first large-scale Lego model to have been built by the public, with visitors from as far away as Alaska taking part. The creation stands 5ft 6in (1.7m) high, is 12ft 6in (3.84m) long and 5ft (1.53m) wide. Built through donations, the funds raised were used to house a permanent exhibition of the cathedral's historic artifacts that will be open to the public. (You can see photos of the Lego cathedral here: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-tyne-36868397>)

Recently I saw a person wearing a T shirt with the following slogan on the front: "I don't go to church." The back of the T shirt read: "I am the church!"

Like the lyrics to the song I learned in Sunday school (and these motions that go with it): "The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is the people! I am the church, you are the church, we are the church together—all of God 's people, all around the world, Yes, we're the church together!!"

We are familiar with the analogy of the human body. As human beings we experience it—we understand that we need every part of our bodies—both visible and invisible or both external and internal parts - to be in good working order and that we suffer when it is not so. This is so self-evident, so experientially obvious that no one could argue with it.

Paul drives his point home: "So it is with Christ."

Here Paul is referring to how Christ is made visible in the world today. The only body Christ has in this world is the church--the church being a living organism, comprised of individual believers, yet we constitute one body. (v.27) (Not a bricks and mortar building!)

If you think about it, it is incredible that God, would entrust the work of making Christ known in the world now to mere mortals, and sinners at that! What an incredible risk God is taking...and yet because of God's grace, and because of the grace-full work of God's Holy Spirit, we flawed human beings are made or formed into this one body by the sovereign work of God's Spirit. We are in the church, as a result of the grace of God.

Paul is emphasizing the following:

The church is not a voluntary organization, like PEO, Kiwanis or Rotary. The church is distinctive in that it exists because of the Triune God! It is built on the foundation of the life, death and resurrected Lord Jesus who forgives sinners and fills us with the Holy Spirit to the end that we are now the body of Christ in the world. ***What this means is that the church is God's way of making the invisible Christ, visible and known in our world, in our community today.***

Part of the way God reveals Christ is through the diversity of gifts in the Body. The problem arose in the church in Corinth, when people began to compare their gifts and argue about how the gifts were distributed.

Have you ever had that happen, say at a family Christmas gathering?

"The gift I received is better one than the one you received."

"My gift doesn't really count for much."

"He got too much...." "She got too little.." and so on!

To all of them, Paul says the same thing. *It is God who gave you that gift.* God "arranged the parts of the body...just as he wanted them to be." (verse 18) God "has combined the members of the body and has given the greater honor...." (verse 24) God "has appointed...." (verse 28). When believers argue over gifts, we are fighting over the sovereign grace of God. *So Paul would say, "Stop comparing, and use your gifts for the common good."*

How foolish and counter-productive it is to battle over the distribution of God's grace in the church!

Paul addresses, in order, the ones that feel inferior (verses 14-20) and the ones who think they are superior (verses 21-26).

Paul illustrates his point with the use of exaggeration, that is, by drawing a caricature. Imagine a body that was one huge eye or one huge ear. You wouldn't have a functioning body; you would have something ridiculous!

"If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be?" "If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body." Again he says in essence: "*Stop complaining about how unimportant you think you are. Use the gift God has given you.*"

As to those who think they are superior, who think they don't need the presence and the gifts of other believers, Paul simply points to ordinary human experience. ALL parts of the body, no matter how small, how private, how seemingly insignificant - ***all parts are indispensable, all are necessary!*** Each part is interdependent, so be thankful and appreciate your "lesser" members.

God's whole idea in creating the Body of Christ was to show the world what humanity could be and should be through Jesus Christ.

That is exactly why God has created a Body in the world, a group of sinners who are not divided, who care equally for each other, who suffer and rejoice with each other. ***God wants the world to see what is possible, by the grace of God in Jesus Christ.***

That is why divisions in the church are so counter-productive, so diametrically opposed to God's plan. How will seekers/non-believers ever find their way to the invisible Christ if they don't see his Body working the way it should?

Like the church in Corinth, we need to repent of our divisions, to trust God's plan and to ***use our gifts together for*** the glory of Christ. If we remember

why God created the church in the first place, we will have greater motivation to unite around our mission of worship and service, working together to live that out!

There are no "lone ranger Christians". We all need one another, we are dependent and interdependent. Within the body of Christ, there are some members or roles that are more prominent or up front, and others that are equally important but behind the scenes.

In fact, a theatrical production provides another apt analogy. In a play or drama the speaking parts are the primary roles who carry the weight of the story, making the actors more prominent. However, the actors cannot do their job without the help of those literally behind the scenes, including writers, directors, producers, publicity, lighting and sound technicians, props, makeup, costumers, etc. ***There are countless people who contribute in a significant way to the whole of the production - without whom the show would NOT go on. So it is with the body of Christ.***

This same idea can also be illustrated with a symphony orchestra - different sections include various instruments, but without the whole, and every instrument within each section, playing its part--woodwinds, percussion, strings, and brass, we would hear only a small portion of what the composer intended. While it is rare that a composer may write a piece that is only for percussion. That is the exception to the rule. I once had the opportunity to hear the Utah Symphony Orchestra in concert. It impressed me then that the conductor brought out the best in the instrumentalists; each individual and each section contributed to the whole.

So it is with the Body of Christ. God's Holy Spirit bestows on each believer a gift. The Body is edified and built up as the individual members contribute for the good of the whole.

It is God's desire to have us be unified in our purpose, but not uniform in our roles within the body of Christ. Everyone is necessary, unique, significant. No member should ever think of oneself as worthless or unimportant. At the same time, we should be content with the role assigned us by God, gracefully and gratefully utilizing whatever gift God has given each one for the good of the whole. Christianity is not a spectator sport! Christianity is about many diverse players all on the same team! (Another metaphor!)

In July 2002, nine miners became trapped in a western Pennsylvania coal mine. They were stuck two hundred forty feet - over 20 stories below the ground. Efforts to rescue them involved drilling a shaft to the right location, without causing further collapse. As it was, the space where the men were trapped was beginning to fill with water. Time was of the essence.

The nine miners made a critical decision: they decided to literally bond themselves together so that the fate of one would be the fate of all. Tied together with a rope, they determined that no one would float away, and no one would slip under the water. If one man tired, the others kept him afloat. If one got cold, the others would huddle around him to warm him up. They shared food from a lunch box that floated by. They vowed that whether they lived or died, they would do so together.

As the water rose to just beneath their chins, hypothermia threatened. But rescue crews reached them just in time. All nine miners survived the ordeal, being extracted one by one, in a yellow rescue cylinder that was lifted to

safety. (*"Miners took vow to live or die together" by Larry Neumeister, Associated Press, July 29, 2002*)

Miners, Legos, theatrical productions, symphony orchestras or the human body - all are metaphors which portray one idea which Paul was illustrating: If the world is looking to see authentic Christianity lived out, what will they see when they look at you and me? What message will people receive when they encounter us? God created the Church to carry on the ministry of Jesus Christ...so we'd better look like Jesus!

I would like to close with a prayer written by Theresa of Avila, a Carmelite nun who lived in the 1500's. (1515-1582)

Please pray with me:

Christ has no body but ours,

No hands, no feet on earth but ours.

Ours are the eyes with which Christ looks with Compassion on this world.

Ours are the feet, with which Christ walks to do good;

Ours are the hands, with which Christ blesses all the world.

Ours are the hands, ours are the feet,

Ours are the eyes, we are Christ's body.

Christ has no body on earth now but ours!

Lord, may others indeed, see Christ, when they see us!

In Jesus' name,

Amen.