

## Recovering Body Life

When God wants to teach us something unknown, He uses something known. To get you across to where you understand something new, He uses the bridge of something familiar. So when He wants to teach you what He is like, He tells you that He is like a shepherd, or that He is like light, or that He is like fire, or wind. Jesus tells you he is like Bread, like a door, like water. When God wants to tell us who we are, He tells us we are His children, He tells us we are like branches in a vine; He tells us we are like citizens of a new country. God is always taking the familiar to teach us the unfamiliar.

God also does this to tell us what the church is, and what the church is supposed to be. But all too often, we do not pay close enough attention to the images God uses. If God had supplied us with no images to explain what the church is, and all you had was the church of 2011, what kind of images would you come up with to describe it? If you had to look around at the churches you see in your area, in the country, or through the media, what sort of images would we come up with? What would you say the church is like?

I think we would come up with some images like this. We would look around and say, in some cases, the church is a Mega-mall. People come by the thousands to a central location, where all kinds of attractions and activities are present. The people who attend are basically consumers, and the leaders of the church are service-providers, who meet the needs of their target market. People come, get what they pay for, are satisfied, and go home.

One variation on the mega-mall is, we might say, the church is like a franchise. Once one church has managed to get a really popular product in the form of a really popular preacher, it opens franchises in different places, so that people in other areas can get the same product in a different location.

Speaking of franchises, another image that might come to mind is that of church as Drive-through restaurant. The church is a spiritual restaurant where you fill up on some teaching. You attend here for some teaching, and here for some other teaching, you go there because of the dynamic youth program, but you go there because of the nice fellowship, and there because of the teaching. So church is the equivalent of a fast-food place. You do not clean the floors or change the light bulbs at the restaurant – if you like its food, you go there and leave. Some might use the image of church as a theatre. You come, take your seats, while some really good music is performed, to which you can sing along if you choose, and eventually a really dynamic, funny, interesting speaker amuses you with stories and clever sayings. You pay a little towards the admission fee, and then you go home.

Now the question we want to ask ourselves is, when the Bible describes a church, does it use images anything like these images? The answer is no. When the Bible describes the church, it uses several images – it calls us a spiritual temple, it calls us a holy people; it calls us the Bride of Christ. But perhaps the clearest image the Bible gives us is the image of a body. The church, the local church, is like a human body, with various parts making up one body. The way we treat church, what we expect from church, how we interact with each other must correspond to the way a body functions.

In our current church environment, there's a tendency to look over our shoulders at the mega-churches, and set them up as the standard. Churches feel an inferiority complex if they do not have hundreds or thousands attending; if their pastor does not have a TV broadcast; if he has

not published three books; and if there isn't a Starbucks in the foyer. While big churches can often achieve great things for God, the thing we want to ask is not, are we like that big church down the road? The question we want to ask is, are we like a body? That's the pattern, that's the standard. You can be a church of 40, and act like a body; you can be a church of 4000 and act like a corporation. The Bible and its image of the Body is what must drive our approach to church life, regardless of how big or small we are.

Here in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul explains what the church looks like. He does so because he is writing to a very dysfunctional church. The church at Corinth had all kinds of problems. It had factions in it. It had people suing each other. It had sin which it refused to discipline. It had people trampling over each other's consciences. It had abuses of the Lord's Supper. It had people questioning the resurrection. It had mixed up ideas of divorce and remarriage. And here in chapter 12 through 14, we see Paul showing them that they had a very twisted idea of ministry. Their image of ministry could probably be called the gymnastics floor demonstration. Each person has their turn to get centre-stage, show off their spiritual abilities while everyone watches, and the bigger and flashier, the more applause, admiration and envy at the end. Paul says to them, you have it all wrong. That is not what the church is about. The church is like a body. He wants the Corinthians to recover body life. That's a challenge for all of us. As we look through this passage, we'll see three ways that Paul wanted the Corinthians to recover true body life.

### **I. We Must Recover the Importance of Every member v12-20**

**1 Corinthians 12:12-20** *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. <sup>13</sup> For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free- and all were made to drink of one Spirit. <sup>14</sup> For the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot should 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. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear should 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. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? <sup>18</sup> But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup> If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.*

Paul's first point he wants to get across is that a body is made up of many different parts, and yet they constitute one body. A foot is just as much part of the body as a hand. An ear is just as much a part of the body as an eye. Each member, each body part is different from the others, but adds up to the whole.

If you cut off a limb – that limb is no longer a body. If you lose a tooth, that tooth is no longer a body. By themselves, body parts do not make up a body. But put together, they do. Now why would Paul be saying this? What is the reason for reminding us that each body part is important? Well, here in Corinth, there were believers coveting positions of status and prominence. They wanted certain spiritual gifts so that they might be in the limelight, and be regarded as important, or spiritual. So they were clamouring for the gift of prophecy and tongues, so that they could be vocal and visible because if you weren't vocal and visible in the Corinthian church, you weren't considered very useful.

I think that temptation is still with us. With modern models of ministry, you have performers and spectators. And who are the really valuable ones? Well, the performers, of course. And what about the rest? Well, we'll tolerate them, but we don't necessarily value or honour them. In an individualistic society, we think only of achievers. We think of those who lead from the front. We think of those who are skilled communicators, organisers. We see the slick

speakers, and we begin to grade Christians as useful, more useful, less useful. And slowly but surely, we begin to lose a sense of honour and value for each member. Every member is a valued member of a local church.

The fastest way to lose body life is when we begin to think that the local church is one member's ministry. In many churches today, the body is really a mouth. One really big and effective mouth, and everyone comes to hear the ministry of the mouth.

Paul illustrates this humorously by asking, if a hand felt that the big idea in a body is to be a foot, and because it was not a foot, it felt it was not part of the body, would that mean it was not part of the body? The same goes for the ear, feeling that the most important thing in a body is the eye, and because it is not an eye, it is not part of the body, would that really make it not part of the body?

What name would the Bible give to the attitude that would see others as not worth honouring? Pride. A kind of pride that does not see that when God saves you, He places you in a situation where you belong to others and others belong to you.

**Romans 12:4-5** *For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*

**Romans 12:10** *Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.*

We have to ask, have we been influenced by the world on this point? Do we treat one another like fellow spectators at a football game, or like members of an association? Do we believe the Bible's statement that:

<sup>18</sup> *But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose*

All too often, we fall into the trap of finding one another irritating and annoying, rather like things we have to put up with, rather than treasured parts of ourselves. Certainly we do have to put up with each other's quirks, oddities and eccentricities. But body life begins when we believe that each member is vital, placed there by God and worth honouring.

One of the things I often say to my church is when you look at the other brothers and sisters in the church, know two things about them: "This is one for whom Christ died; this is one in whom Christ lives." Ever think that every member in your church is a miracle?

## II. We Must Recover Our Dependence on Every member

**1 Corinthians 12:21** *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."*

As Paul puts it, the eye cannot claim it does not need the hand, nor can the head say it does not need the feet. All members of the body are necessary. In the same way, all members of a local church are necessary. This is not just a matter of honour, it is a matter of necessity. According to the Bible, we need each other in a very real way. This is not just being nice; this is the nature of the case.

When Charles Darwin published his theory of evolution, it affected every branch of science. One of the areas of human biology that Darwinists tried to use to prove their theory was the idea of vestigial organs. A vestigial organ is a part of the body that apparently has no use or no function. Evolutionists claimed it was proof of evolution – something we used to use when

we were monkeys that we no longer use now. And they had over 180 such things, including the wisdom teeth, the appendix, the tonsils, eyebrows, eyelashes, ear muscles, and the coccyx that they thought were vestigial. But in the many years since then, the almost unanimous opinion is that the so-called vestigial organs all have at least one function. God made man as He wanted to, without waste. In the body of Christ, there are no vestigial organs. No one is unnecessary. And the idea here is the local church. God composes and puts together the local church with just the people needed at the just the time needed.

In the end, what it means is the members are equal, and have equal need of one another. You need the ministry of every person that God places in this body, directly or indirectly. When someone is not exercising their ministry to this body, you will feel it. We all will. You might not know that it is because so-and-so is refusing to pray, or because so-and-so is refusing to serve, but you will feel it.

We all know what it is like to take parts of your body for granted, until something goes wrong with them, or they are hurt. You have been blessed today by the ministry of members who served in ways you take for granted. You have today lacked from members who perhaps have failed to serve.

Now, it is true that not everyone is as *apparently* necessary. Parts of the body are not equally necessary to the observing eye. But the Bible says, in reality, God has actually set things up so that the human body has equal honour to its members.

**1 Corinthians 12:22-24** *On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup> and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, <sup>24</sup> which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it,*

Indeed, a liver does not look attractive. Most of us are glad that our livers are not part of our faces. So God has enclosed them behind protective bone, muscle, skin, as if giving them a special place. The eyes are attractive. So God does not honour them by enclosing them behind all that flesh, but by letting them be on the outside. Someone says, "Come on, a foot is clearly not as nice as an eye." But Paul wisely answers, that on those parts which seem to be unpresentable, we should put greater honour on them. What do we do with our feet? We put stylish, sometimes expensive things on top of them. Our eyes don't need to be covered up, because they have a natural beauty. The result is, when we appear in public, our eyes look honourable and our feet do as well.

That's how the human body works. The parts that seem less, actually are honoured in other ways, which shows they are equal. And if they are equal, every part's function is necessary to the overall health. The one teaching or leading seems to the observer to be far more necessary than the one who prays at home for all the other members. But the fact is, they are equally necessary. The vigorous music leaders seem more necessary than the aged member who has trouble walking.

In the same way, God gives greater honour to the part that lacks it. To the weak, He gives extra attention. To the strong, who need less, He puts elsewhere, where their strength is used. To the one who is slower, He honours with a lot more instruction, than the one who is faster. The one who is less sensitive, He places them in the place to take some of the blows, because they have the honour of being tougher. The ones who are more sensitive, He honours by placing them where they are shielded.

But God says – they are equally necessary. And for us to recover body life, we must recover a sense that every member is necessary. We should feel robbed when one of our fellow members does not show up. We should sense that each person's role adds up to our total edification. Did you ever think that you need the ministry of everyone in this room? Did you ever think they, everyone in this room, needs your ministry?

Aside: ministry is not a programme. Ministry is not activity, like doing time at a non-profit organisation. I often say to my church, your ministry is sitting next to you and in front of you and behind you. Ministry is what believers do for one another.

Do you know that the NT has over 27 'one another' commandments? However God has put you together, you are able to serve the other members of this church one way or another. This is body-life: every member is valued, every member is necessary. That leads to a third point about body-life.

### **III. We Must Recover Ministry to All the Members**

**1 Corinthians 12:24-27** <sup>24</sup> which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, <sup>25</sup> that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup> If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. <sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Paul says that if we do not experience equal care and ministry from and to one another the result will be – schism. It is a sense that one member is more vital or more important or worthy of more honour that creates a schism in the body. The word *schism* means a tearing, a division. Some get more attention, more honour than others, instead of the natural care there should be. This kind of inequality brings resentment over time. People feel uncared for, unrecognised, unnoticed, and unneeded. Instead of this inequality, Paul says in v25 – the members should have the same care for one another.

The word *care* actually means a kind of anxiety. It means to be deeply concerned about. It means to think earnestly about, to be burdened for. Because we are one, we suffer when one suffers. We rejoice when one rejoices. Ministry is not shooting blanks into the air, it is targeting one another to know Christ and make Him known. This is what Christians have always been known for – our ministry and love for all of our own. Here are the words of Aristides, writing in about A.D. 125:

... they love one another, and from widows they do not turn away their esteem; and they deliver the orphan from him who treats him harshly. And he, who has, gives to him who has not, without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take him in to their homes and rejoice over him as a very brother; for they do not call them brethren after the flesh, but brethren after the spirit and in God. And whenever one of their poor passes from the world, each one of them according to his ability gives heed to him and carefully sees to his burial. And if they hear that one of their number is imprisoned or afflicted on account of the name of their Messiah, all of them anxiously minister to his necessity, and if it is possible to redeem him, they set him free. And if there is among them any that is poor and needy, and if they have no spare food, they fast two or three days in order to supply to the needy their lack of food.

Let me ask you a practical question. Do you have a copy of your church's directory? Did you ever think of using that as your prayer list? Did you ever think of just paging through it to see who you might encourage or edify? Did you ever just page through it to see who seems to be fading, who seems to have been gone a lot, who seems to be discouraged? By the way, that sometimes includes those who seem to be upfront and saying the right things. Maybe they need it too. Every member, from your pastors, to your aged, to the children, to the singles, to the divorced, the young marrieds, the young families the older families, the empty nesters – you name it- they all need ministry.

Whose responsibility is that -the pastors? No, it is the pastor's responsibility to equip you to minister to one another.

It is easy to look over at the mega-churches and wonder if there is something wrong with your church. But that's a false standard. The church is never to be judged quantitatively, it is to be judged qualitatively. In other words, the issue is not quantity – how many seats you fill every Sunday. The issue is quality – what is going on between those who sit in those seats. That makes all the difference. I would suggest to you that in heaven's eyes, the most successful churches in the world might be very different from the ones we think of. It may be a little house-church in Iran. It might be a group of 40 believers meeting in China. The issue is – is there real body life going on?

So what we're left with is this: how do we strengthen and encourage body life?

It begins with valuing each person as Christ's redeemed prize. It goes on to regard every member's ministry, including your own as necessary. It makes sure that every member is ministered to.