

1Corinthians 12:14-25 "Window Dressing, Spare Part, or Precision Instrument?"

When we were last here in our text we came to the passage where Paul is trying to stress the importance of how the body of Christ needs to understand its unity within its diversity. There may be many different parts to the body of Christ, but like the human body each part is designed by God to work in harmony to the betterment of the body and the glory of God.

1CO 12:14 "Now the body is not made up of one part but of many."

Paul's emphasis to the church in Corinth that there are many parts to the body suggests that there were those who felt that only a select few were to be actual functioning parts while the rest were simply passive by-standers. In fact, this attitude has come over to the church in our day as the Pastor in many instances is seen as the hired gun who's responsible for going out and making sure the church grows or functions properly.

Part of the reason for this attitude is that Christianity has in some instances become a spectator sport. Many people take the attitude that coming out on Sunday or mid-week is like going to the movies to catch a show. And unfortunately in many quarters of the church it has become more of a Broadway production vying for the attention of people rather than a place where the worshippers of God come together to honor Christ and grow in their relationship with Him.

It's not uncommon to hear of churches advertising on radio or television the virtues of their particular strengths in accommodating people; be it their youth ministry, their contemporary worship band, their comfortable seating along with a variety of other creature comforts they can expect to find when they walk through the doors.

And as much a blessing as any of those things may be, these things in themselves would have been foreign to the apostle Paul as to the reason the church exists. Imagine a person in China today contacting the Pastor of an underground church there, where they are continually persecuted, and asking that Pastor how big their church is and do they have pizza parties for their youth?

Imagine that same person telling the Pastor that unless they meet in a building with a steeple they wouldn't be interested in coming out. And yet in this country, these are the requirements for many people who claim to be Christians, to be a part of a local body.

If these are the types of conditions which must exist before the body of Christ can function properly then we would have to wonder why the church in China or India or any Muslim country is growing and flourishing in many of these areas of the world, albeit underground.

The truth is, when believers in these countries come together, where they literally risk their lives for meeting together, they do so to worship the Lord out of thanks and love for Christ, and to be equipped to further the kingdom of God through the gospel.

Now, I'm not against having a youth group, or air-conditioning, or steeples on churches, or lots of people, but these are all secondary to the real reason the body of Christ exists and goes forward. And what Paul is emphasizing in our text is that the body of Christ is made up of many members for a specific reason and that is to bring glory to Christ whether we're comfortable in this world or not.

You'd be amazed at how many people call our house and ask the kinds of questions which will ultimately determine whether they will come and check us out or not. Do you preach only from the King James Bible? if you don't we're not interested. Do you have a building? if you don't we're not interested. If you do have a building, we're not interested.

How many people do you have? I'm always tempted to say, we have them all; every single one that God wants us to have at this point in time. Do you have a choir? What is the average age of your congregation?

Very rarely do we get phone calls where people ask, do you faithfully teach the word of God? Do you promote the unity of the body as each is encouraged to love one another? Is your congregation encouraged to take the gospel out into their community? Is your worship of Christ something that goes beyond a Sunday morning?

Instead, the church has become like a restaurant where people only go if they can create their own menu. The fact of the matter is that God has already laid out the menu and the cuisine, and He's given each of His people the privilege of not only eating in His house but

also serving as waiters, or cooks, or dishwashers, or hostesses, or bus boys, in this most important place where we are to dine on the word of God as well as serve according to the word of God.

This is where Paul is going in our text. He is saying that if we are part of this body then we must understand how God has put it together and how we must promote the healthy growth of it as the Lord intended. Any deviation from this plan of God causes abnormalities, as we might see in the function of both the physical body and the body of Christ, as Paul's illustration bears this out.

1CO 12:15-19 "If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be?"

What is Paul trying to say here? Well, the point is that simply because we may not see our part in the body as something which can be viewed as vital to the body doesn't mean it isn't.

He's also saying that if we are not content with the gifts God has given us, and we covet those things which He's given someone else, we can't use that as an excuse not to serve.

1CO 12:15 "If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body."

The analogy of the human body here is a beautiful picture of the irony of the way the body of Christ sometimes works. After all, if you think about it, there is no part of your human body which is jealous of another part. It doesn't have the capacity to be jealous, nor does it have the capacity not to work properly because it wants to be something else.

Can you imagine your spleen deciding that it won't work because it isn't getting the same attention as the eyes? "Oh, her eyes are so beautiful, they're so blue, they so compliment her beautiful face. I'm sick of all the attention the eyes are getting. I'm stuck here next to the stomach. I spend my life listening to gurglings."

By the way, all of the blood in the human body passes through the spleen approximately every 90 minutes. "The spleen is the largest organ of the lymphatic system and is closely associated with the circulatory system. The functions of the spleen include the formation of antibodies and the removal of cell waste products and worn-out red blood cells." (Grollier Encyclopedia, 1999)

Hey, even if the spleen thought it was unimportant, it would have to answer to the designer of the human body and take it up with Him. And yet, we don't usually think of our place in the body of Christ in such a way as to understand that the designer of the church set it up a particular way and gave us the privilege of being a vital organ in that body whether we think we're a special organ or not.

For any of you who ever played sports you know how vital those parts of the body are which we deem less important. How many of us go around boasting about our Achilles tendon? How many even know what an Achilles tendon is? If you've ever stretched it, or pulled it playing sports you know. And now all of a sudden it is the most important part of your body, because you don't move without it.

Ever try running on a broken toe? But it's such a small and insignificant part of the body. It's always covered up in a stinky shoe. But you learn how important it is when you find it won't work properly.

The same is true in the body of Christ. When we decide that we can't or won't be that part that God wants us to be then we find that the body of Christ is trying to run a race while limping through life. And then we wonder what's wrong. We mentioned this a couple of weeks ago where Paul exhorted the church in Ephesus.

EPH 4:16 "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

But each part won't do its work if it feels that it is either not a viable part or that its part is not as important as other parts. But, like our human bodies, where the eyes cannot do the work of the spleen, each member must be doing the work God designed for them to do with the gifts He's personally given them.

1CO 12:16 "...if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body."

The implication in this and the previous verse is that unless I am a part of the body that most people deem important, or that most people can see, then I literally cease to be a part of the body. But that just isn't the case. If you and I are in Christ then He is in us and therefore we are necessarily part of His body and we are gifted and empowered for service in it.

But where Paul is going is that being part of the body of Christ needs to find its fulfillment in the way we function in the local body. Whenever we see Paul dealing with the body of Christ universal it's never out of the context of a local body.

This is why there is this fallacy that I don't need to belong to a local body, a local church, since I'm part of the body of Christ wherever I may happen to be. I can have church by myself or at home with one or two other people. But in reality that attitude translates to a part which has been severed from the larger body which needs us.

Now there will always be those instances where we may in fact be severed from the local body, as in the case of persecution where many people are imprisoned for their faith, or where someone is sick and simply cannot be part of that local body. Or where a bible-following church is simply not available in your city or town.

And yet, the comfort they can get from God is that they are connected because Christ has connected them to Himself. But that's not the norm in the outward expression of the church.

The norm is where each part is connected to each other doing its part and fulfilling the will of God as His body represents Him in this world. If everyone sought to be the worship leader, or the Pastor or the prayer warrior to the exclusion of their own particular gift, then nothing would ever get done.

We've all heard the expression, "all chiefs and no Indians." And everyone knows what that means in the corporate world. Lots of idea men and women. Lots of bosses, but no one to carry out their wishes. In the body of Christ a similar attitude can exist which is why Paul addresses it here.

1CO 12:17-20 "If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would

the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body."

Can you imagine if the body of Christ were only one big worship service? As glorious as that may sound, how glorious would it be if no one shared their faith, if no one prayed for one another, if no one came along side to comfort one another, if no one taught the word of God, if no one met the needs of the poor.

It sounds ridiculous, but no more ridiculous than thinking that the physical body can only be an ear or an eye. Picture that. This huge ear trying to function as though it had a purpose when in fact it would just be a big blob of cartilage in the form of an ear. If it's not attached to the brain, which is attached to the nervous system, which is attached to muscle and ligaments to take advantage of what it hears and move accordingly, it has no purpose.

In the same way, if individuals in the body of Christ don't understand how they're attached to the body and working as parts which are attached, then they turn out to be window dressing or prostheses instead of functioning parts.

Paul fully understands that as messed up as these Christians were in Corinth he still knew that each member of that local body had gifts which, if understood, could make that body a functioning church which would bring glory to the Head, Christ Jesus.

It may be a different part with different functions, but unless all of the parts are complimenting one another and doing what God designed them to do, then all the other parts will ultimately suffer.

What Paul is saying is that there is no one part which can function properly without the others. And if God has designed it such, why would we try to alter the proper functioning of His body which He has put together?

1CO 12:18-19 "But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be?"

Notice who is arranging the parts. It's not me. It's not some board of people determining who will be involved in whatever ministry. Unfortunately, this is often the way it works. We need a slot filled. Let's find a warm body with some potential in this area and plug them into it.

The way ministry was designed by God was for Him to gift His people and then to use those particular gifts with the prompting's His Spirit gives to use those gifts in particular types of ministry in His power.

I've always found that when someone desires to serve in a particular capacity as the Lord moves them, I can usually be assured that they will follow through in that ministry. If people are being compelled by me or someone else to do ministry then that ministry usually ends up back in my lap. And believe me I don't need another ministry.

I'm just trying to be the part God has called me to be. The problem however, is that unless we each begin to look at what God wants us to do, then other people end up picking up the slack for those who are not using their gifts, for whatever reason. And so, an eye is trying to be an ear as well as an eye. A foot is trying to be a hand as well as a foot.

But when we understand and appreciate how God is the One arranging the parts then we can be more prone to be that clay in His hands as He molds and prompts and empowers us to be the very special part each one is. And instead of being seen as a spare part, we will see ourselves as being a main part functioning with the other parts.

I like the last part of verse 18 where Paul speaks of God as not only the One who is arranging the parts, but how He has arranged them just as he wanted them to be.

There is purpose with God. There are no mistakes. This goes back to that personal aspect of how God is involved in our lives and how He has personally put us where we are. It is no coincidence that you are a part of this local body. God has arranged you here just as He wants you to be.

And with that in mind then we each need to discover how He has arranged us and what our functions should be with the gifts He has given us.

1CO 12:19-24 "If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor.

And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it..."

So as to drive home his point, Paul now repeats himself in just a little different way. But the central theme is the same. No one is unimportant in the body. No one need be jealous of the other parts. No one needs to think that you can't serve because your gifts are less desirable in your own eyes.

God is combining the members of the body. And if God has combined them then the combination is good. We don't need to reinvent what God has already established. We don't need to reevaluate the importance of the body of Christ and its separate parts working together, we need simply do our part.

The Greek word for combine, as God being the One doing the combining, simply means mixing together, uniting. Like a Master Chef carefully and lovingly mixing all of the ingredients to create a culinary master piece, God has put each one of us into the mix and has carefully and lovingly combined each one of us together to be a unique body called Calvary Chapel Port Charlotte.

And He has done this all over the world. Granted there are churches who have tried to wrestle this aspect away from God combining people together as they insist that the mix needs more salt, more paprika, more butter, more of this or that, instead of realizing that God's mix is always the best.

This is why we must always be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit of God instead of trying to dictate to Him, or trying to create a body in our own image instead of in the image of Christ. Unfortunately, it's very easy to do. Just look at the different distinctions within Christendom which one particular group designates more important than other aspects.

The Baptists. Have you ever wondered where that name came from? It came from an aspect of ministry, namely the water baptism which involves total immersion which they deemed very important. Thus the name Baptist.

Pentecostals. They deem the sign gifts, which were demonstrated on the day of Pentecost and subsequent to it, to be very important. Thus the name Pentecostal. Methodists. In their zeal to become a sanctified group of people as unto the Lord they had a method

which they deemed to be a holy approach to being conformed into the image of Christ. They were one of the first to be identified with the "Holiness movement."

My point is not to trash any of these groups, only to show how we can become so enamored with what we deem important in the body of Christ that we can lose sight of what Christ may want to do through us and how He wants to build His church.

And that is an important aspect we should never lose sight of. It's not our church, it's His. Remember, we are the branches, He is the vine. And to cut ourselves from the vine, or to cut ourselves off from the body is a sure recipe for producing nothing that will last.

JOH 15:4-5 "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

In the context here Jesus speaks of being united to Him in Spirit, but there is a parallel to His church. If we are in Him, and He in us, then we need to be where He is working, and that is in His own church, His own body.

This is where the branches flourish. This is where the fruit not only becomes mature, but useful in the lives of other people, both inside and outside of the body of Christ.

But notice in verse 25 why God has arranged the parts of the body in the way that pleases Him.

1CO 12:25 "so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other."

Remember, Paul is addressing a church in flux, a church with many divisions in Corinth. He's suggesting to them that if they would spend more time discovering how Christ has placed them in that body, what gifts He has given them, and the service He has appointed each of them to participate in, they would have less time seeking their own wills, thus less time causing divisions.

This is an important lesson for any church, because there isn't a church anywhere in the world which is not prone or tempted to do its own thing. How many times have we heard it said, "they started out with such zeal for God and following Him; what happened?"

"They were a church which was compassionate and loving with a real family atmosphere and then they grew so large that they lost that loving family feeling and replaced it with a plethora of programs."

Just study the mainline denominations of our day. If you were to go back 100, 200 years at their inception you would have seen, in many cases, a people dedicated to God's word and the gospel. Some of these denominations instituted schools which taught and promoted men to go into ministry; Harvard, Princeton, Yale. These institutions now teach things which are nothing short of heresy.

Denominations that once held to the word of God now encourage homosexual relationships, or have redefined whole portions of God's word to gloss over those passages which deal with sin. The Crystal Cathedral is a classic example where they have replaced the gospel of Jesus Christ which calls people sinners in need of a Savior, to a gospel of self-esteem and that people are just in need of good vibes and positive feelings to get through life to the glory of God.

It must make our Lord sick to see His church-at-large defamed and held in contempt as men have combined the members of the body and the teachings of Christ in such a way where the true church is no longer distinguishable from the world and its pagan approach to God and instead has become a monster of a being.

May God be found true and may we follow His ways and be content in the body He has formed and is continuing to build up to demonstrate that He is alive and well and in the midst of it as the Head and Master that He is.

As each part has equal concern for each other, as Paul points out in verse 25, may each part do the work Christ has called us to do for the edification of each other. It's only as we use our gifts for one another will there be unity instead of division. Only as each part is functioning as Christ intended in the power of the Spirit will His will be accomplished and the church will be a dwelling in which God lives.

EPH 2:21-22 "In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

Let's be that dwelling as we honor our Head by being the body He desires for us to be.