

Our bodies are amazing – how they are constructed and how one part affects another

Have you had a pain in one spot, but the root cause was from another part in the body?

Paul uses this imagery for the Corinthian church as he wants them to know:

- What it means to be Christ's body
- How our gifts affect the body - *positively and negatively*
- How do we learn what part of the body we are and our importance to it

We know when an essential part of our body isn't functioning, our whole body suffers. When someone in church struggles – we feel each other's pain - the whole body feels it.

We know when a part cut off from the body can't function - it eventually dies. Similarly, when someone themselves off from church, faith often suffers and so does the community.

Don't get me wrong, you can be a Christian without going to church. Many people who haven't gone to church for a while ask me this – or some make it a statement.

Usually the thought is more about what the person wants this to mean – rather than asking better questions about what God requires of us and why as his children

So, I usually point them back to questions such as:

- where else can we engage in praying to God with others?
- where else can we discuss experiences of what God is doing in them?
- where else can they unpack the depths of meaning in the scriptures?
- how else could we to *learn and exercise* the *spiritual gifts* God gave us?

Anyone can have faith in God away from a church community – yet we can't live the Christian life in isolation – Paul points out today why that is

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (v.12-13 & 27)

Paul offers a focus upon the practical matters of this question– *what it looks like to live in community as disciples of Jesus?* The answer begins with our identity.

He bookends in verses 12-13 then in vs 27, to identify themselves as Christ's very body.

In vs 12 he continues on from discussing how the Spirit of God assigns gifts as he chooses – that we are drawn together as one body like Christ - made to drink of the One Spirit.

One in Christ's body – One as we drink from the Spirit – it's a great image of the last supper – Christ's call to join together as one through shared communion – his body and blood.

Individually we're Christ's flesh, together with the Spirit we receive his blood – we move from individual parts – to become the whole of his body in community.

Henri Nouwen said it well, we're not an institution forcing anyone to follow rules, but a community inviting everyone to still our hunger and thirst at its table

In another letter to the Christians of Colossae, Paul said (Colossians 2:2-3)

*“I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of **assured understanding** and have **the knowledge of God’s mystery**, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

God wants you to know the beautiful mystery – that we can have an *assured understanding* that we are made one with Christ, Spirit and Father - through faith in Jesus.

Now if God chose community over isolation – should we not be joined with each other also – God doesn’t want *us* to live in isolation – he wants us to have an identity of community.

Here’s what that can look like:

1. We see that all we are as belonging to, submitting to, offering up to - God.
2. We engage in constant and continuous communion. Everything in life – *if offered with the 1st step* – is spiritual because it wants to glorify God
3. Sacrifices our desires to align to God’s as Jesus did – knowing and trusting in the words of Jesus from Luke 6.38 - the measure we give is the measure we receive.
4. The gifts we use in service to God are a spiritual muscle - when used, remain strong – used correctly, benefit whole body.

Where do you sit at the moment – embracing the mystery or on the fringe of isolation?

Exploring your gifts and seeing God’s Spirit move – or wondering what gifts you have?

One body many gifts (v.14-26)

Paul's 1st focus was the understanding identity. His 2nd focus is what keeps us from activating our gifts so in vs 11, he reminded them it is God who determines our gifts:

11All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

However, if we don’t like our gifts, we sabotage the development of them in many ways - two ways are - comparing our gifts with others and – pride: lifting ourselves above others

In verses 14-20 he points out that one part of the body need not compare itself to another - it has a different purpose only that part can play

Comparisons sabotages our lives - it can make us frustrated at God for what we’ve not got, apathetic towards growing the gift we don’t like - or I’m ineffective for God, so I won’t try

One of the modern problems we have today is – I need the latest and greatest – what I have, isn’t enough so I’m always looking for more – relationships, assets, work... Netflix

I used to see my role as priest as *fake it till you make it* – it was grounded in a negative – what I couldn’t do – I had the same attitude as husband, father, worker, relationships

Then I learnt to not lead from what I wasn’t - but out of the best of what gifts I had

Knowing identity in Christ is encouraging – knowing our gifts are assigned is empowering – Knowing what our gifts are and what they are not is like a weight lifting from our shoulders

Another aspect to our gifts as mentioned is pride which Paul addresses in verse 21-26

I pull others down to raise myself up – it sabotages the Gospel as the world sees our pride – & says *don't talk to me about a good God that cares for people while you pull them down*

The world likes being on the power end of pride when it offers success in some way.

A Tony Robbins self-help message says, success is to benefit yourself as much as you want – yet in the end that's all you get – you and what you can accomplish

Jesus message might look like this – in the end – you get what God knows you need and want – what others need and want – and what God needs in relationship with you

It's a reminder that pride hinders our gifts as the power of our gifts doesn't begin in us

It's a reminder that knowing, developing and utilising our gifts is not based on our efforts

It's a reminder that success in ourselves is futile and misplaced – humility reminds us to let the source of our success be grounded in the One who has *ultimate power and resources*

Our gifts and vocation in life are a free gift – when grounded in *humility – our lives are given potential beyond the natural – faith takes the ordinary and makes it extra ordinary!*

Everything you do in life – if devoted to God *as your ministry* – takes on a new dimension

This month we're asking you to take up ministry roles to serve in church – so that - God's vision for us becomes a tangible reality – imagine applying the same thinking today

Every action within the ministry you offer your gifts has the potential for something more – every ordinary action becomes extraordinary by God's intervention:

- That morning tea you provided just helped someone who hadn't money to eat
- That setup of chairs, music, children's church enabled people to experience God today
- That social media response helped a person see a Christian perspective in a positive way
- That coffee and chat you gave someone helped transformed their view of themselves
- That biblical insight you shared with your child encouraged them to study their bibles

Your everyday, ordinary gift you offered to God just changed the path of someone's life!

What are your next steps as we celebrate this month offering our gifts to God?

- Is it to ask God to give you *a heart* to serve him, draw close to him, glorify him?
- Is it to trust and believe you've got the right gifts, let God take make them extraordinary?
- Is it to learn the *what, where, when, with and as much as* - God wants from you?

This year I want to encourage you to take up your gifts and in Christ - use, develop & grow them so that God uses your gifts to transform you and the world around you. *Let's pray...*