

Called Out:
The Body of Christ
Romans 12:3-8

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Text Introduction: I want to take us on a short three week doctrinal survey of the church. Our primary focus will be some word pictures that the New Testament gives to the Church. The word pictures help us to see the doctrine of the Church. We noted last week in a key text from 1 Timothy 3:15-16 that the church is called the household of God, the Church of the Living God, the pillar and foundation of truth. Then Paul, in verse 16, finished off that thought with a beautiful hymn about Christ. We said simply about that passage the as a church: 1) We are family—We do things families do—love, represent each other, encourage one another, and sometimes correct one another. 2) Our founder is the Living God. This changes everything. We are no mere organization or club; we serve and belong to the Living God. 3) We said that our foundation is truth. Christians as well as the culture need the church to remain in the truth. 4) We said that our focus has to remain on Jesus.

Today, I want to take you to a key illustration or analogy consistently used in the New Testament of the church—**the body of Christ**. I think you will discover with me that the use of this analogy is powerful.

Text: ³For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one. ⁴Now as we have many parts in one body, and all the parts do not have the same function, ⁵in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. ⁶According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts:

If prophecy,
use it according to the standard of one's faith;
⁷if service, in service;
if teaching, in teaching;
⁸if exhorting, in exhortation;
giving, with generosity;
leading, with diligence;
showing mercy, with cheerfulness.

Introduction: Romans 12 is a critical chapter in the book of Romans. It is the chapter that transitions Paul's thought from theology to practice. In Romans 1-11, Paul beautifully depicted the Gospel. He displayed humanity's depravity, but then expounded God's mercy on that depravity. Ultimately, Paul invites all to drink deeply from this mercy and call on the name of the LORD Jesus for salvation. In chapters 12-16, Paul outlined the effect that salvation should have in a person's life. He began with life in the church. He incorporated an important New Testament illustration of the church.

The Illustration

The consistent illustration of the church in Paul's writings is the body.

The human body is an amazing thing. Now, if you are a doctor, nurse, or biologist, or disagree or otherwise know better about these things, just give me one moment to describe for the rest of us some of the unbelievable things about the human body. I got these things off a Kids website, so again, if they are not quite right, just forgive me a brief moment to make a point.

- The adult body is made up of 206 bones (of which over $\frac{1}{4}$ are in your feet), over 600 muscles, 230 joints, 22 organs, and trillions of cells (32-100).
- Every hour 1 billion cells must be replaced.
- The average head has about 100,000 hairs.
- The circulatory system of arteries, veins, and capillaries is about 60,000 miles long.

What an amazing body indeed! And think of how many parts to this amazing body. That's why this analogy of the church as the body of Christ is a purposeful one for us. There are at least four primary passages in Paul's writings that point to this illustration.

- Romans 12—The passage before us today.
- 1 Corinthians 12—A longer passage which really zeroes in on this analogy using the hypothetical situation of a part of the body declaring that it was not a part of the body.
- Ephesians 4—This passage gives indication of the purpose of the body being built up together.
- Colossians 1—This passage is noteworthy in its reference to Jesus being the head.

The point is that this is not the only time Paul used this illustration. He must have sensed that it was a powerful illustration of truth that should be communicated to the church.

The analogy of the church as the body of Christ helps highlight four powerful truths for the church.

The Importance of Humility

Three of the four Biblical texts that reference the body also reference the use of spiritual gifts. Our text begins with an instruction about using our gifts in the body with humility. Sometimes, there is the temptation of saying that my gift is not as important as someone else's gift. Other times, though, I am afraid that there is the temptation of saying that my gift is more important than someone else's gift. The analogy of the body helps us to get a handle on this necessary humility.

God is concerned that we find and use our gift. God is also concerned with how we use our gift. Al McGuire was the basketball coach for Marquette University in 1976 when that team won the National Championship. Marquette had a star player on that team by the name of Butch Lee. He was a superstar and as some superstars are guilty, he knew he was a superstar. After the first practice of the year, Coach McGuire pulled his star aside and said, "Butch, the game is 40 minutes long. Divide that in half and each team will have the ball approximately 20 minutes. Divide that 20 minutes by 5 and that means that each person on our team is going to have the ball for approximately 4 minutes. Now, Butch, I know what you can do with the ball for 4 minutes. What I want to see from you is what can you do for that other 36 minutes."

I think a principle like that one applies when we think about using our gift within the whole body of Christ. Can we use our gift with the same energy and excitement if we receive no applause? What if no one notices?

And by the way, you didn't have anything to do with getting the gift you have, God gave it to you. So, be a person of humility in using your gift.

The Importance of Diversity

The second truth is the importance of diversity. The body illustration highlights this truth. The heart might be important in the physical body, but God made the human body to need one heart. If you had no feet, but three hearts, that would not be good. All of the parts of the body do not have the same function. All of the parts of the body of Christ do not have the same function. We have different gifts. The wonderful thing about that is that with different gifts, we have different ministries. The wonderful thing about that is that we then have different effects.

(The Parable of Spiritual Gifts) A Bible study group met in a home to study how various ministries should work in the body of Christ. One member commented, "I don't understand how different gifts can work together."

At that moment a woman accidentally dropped her cup, which broke and spilled coffee all over the floor. Each group member responded differently to the mishap, according to their spiritual gifts.

The teacher gave some advice. "Next time if you will put your cup on the coffee table, that won't happen again."

The administrator responded by organizing a clean-up committee. "Bill, please go find a mop. Sally, could you help him with a towel?"

Bill, who had the gift of service, hurried to get the mop.

Sally, who had the gift of helps, followed Bill and said, "I'll help you!"

The person with the gift of exhortation said, "We all make mistakes so don't let it get you down."

The person with the gift of mercy put her arm around the woman, patted her hand and said, "I feel so badly for you."

The person with the gift of giving exclaimed, "I'll buy a new set of coffee mugs to replace the broken one!"

They all used their various gifts together to resolve the situation. (Kent Crockett, www.kentcrockett.com)¹

I think we see some implications here.

¹ <http://www.kentcrockett.com/cgi-bin/illustrations/index.cgi?topic=Spiritual%20Gifts>

1. If I am a Christian, I am part of the body of Christ.
2. If I am a Christian, God has given me a spiritual gift.
This gift is both individual and important.
3. If I am a Christian, I need to be part of the church in order to use my gift.
Two wonderful by-products—The church receives my gift; I receive the giftedness of others.

The Importance of Unity

We who are many are one body in Christ. Wow! Think of that. Here we are contemplating again the unity of the body. We do not belong to ourselves. Our gifts do not belong to us. We belong to Christ. We belong to each other. Unity is the cry. We find our unity, first of all, in Christ. That is who all of this is about anyway. Perhaps that is the focus of the 1 Corinthians 12 passage when Paul declares, “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” So, we have unity in the person of Christ. But we also have unity in the purpose of the Church. We need to examine our use of our gifts to make sure that we exercise our gifts toward the goals of the church. Listen to Ephesians 4:11-16.

And He personally gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,¹² for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ,¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness.¹⁴ Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit.¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head—Christ.¹⁶ From Him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part.

Sometimes, we are guilty of using our gifts according to our passion instead of the purposes of the church.

The Importance of Purity

Let’s not miss this in the analogy. We are the body of Christ. This speaks to our purity.

So What?

- Discover your place
Most of you have done that.
- Discover and use your gift.
- Use your gift to help meet the goals of the church.