

## FBC Message: We are the body of Christ

### 1 Cor. 12:12-27

You may have recognised that often in teams there are 1 or 2 that seem to have the get-the-glory roles. Think of the strikers in football, wings in rugby, GA in netball, the person driving the race car...someone may be getting all the attention and certainly the big bucks, but they're no good without the rest of the team. Imagine a formula 1 car pulling into the pits and the driver needing to change his own tyres and fuel his car, sounds ludicrous doesn't it?! Watch this and tell me what you see...(video of pit stop<sup>1</sup>)

When we are born again, a Christian, and therefore *part* of the body of Christ, we play a critical, unequivocal and unique role within the body. To serve as part of the body in the sharing of our gift/s given us by the Holy Spirit.

We give our time, our generosity, we love and encourage, and we are loved and encouraged by others. No one else brings what you bring because no one else is you. All aspects of church life make little sense if we don't see ourselves<sup>2</sup> as part of the church. *You are.*

Christianity is not an individualist religion. It is a faith journey as a body of believers and, because it is, we have to realise *we are in this together*, we have much to offer, we need each other, and we are to *build others up*.

(READ) Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 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 stop being part of the body. 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? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. 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!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honor.

\*And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. **Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.**

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=video+of+formual+1+pit+stop&docid=608019926981152319&mid=E356BF85C1ACA51D1918E356BF85C1ACA51D1918&view=detail&FORM=VIRE> (1:45 – 2:31)

<sup>2</sup> Insignificant, or unnecessary...

## OPEN

Two weeks ago in part A of this body message (from 1 Cor. 12:1-11) I mentioned the Corinthians had written to Paul outlining issues they were having, and this letter is his response to those issues. We can deduce from the scripture the sorts of things they were saying and thinking of themselves and others.

Of course Paul's teaching is about the critical need to work as one, in unity, and therefore being careful of the feelings and attitudes toward one-another that can creep into church life. The reason Paul spoke so strongly to this feeling of uselessness or independence is that this dynamic is not in keeping with being Christ's body, not of the Spirit, nor is it for the common good.

A.W. Tozer said, God is looking for those with whom He can do the impossible — what a pity that we plan only the things that we can do by ourselves. What he meant was, the effective and efficient function of the body<sup>3</sup> needs each of us to be depending on each other. So what I want us to see today, is no matter what your gift, skill, background, social standing or financial status, every person who is born \*again, has a significant and specifically designed role in the church, because you are part of the body of Christ: we're all called upon to *contribute and receive...*

*...because: The Church Is Christ's Body; We are all useful in Christ's Body; & We are all dependent on Christ's Body; we love Christ and love the church.*

### **The Church Is Christ's Body (v. 12-13)**

To fully appreciate what being the body of Christ means we must first know, what the body of Christ means? Jesus came to earth, in human form, born of a virgin. At the end of his life it was in human form that he suffered and died a brutal death on a cross. Then Christ ascended, the Holy Spirit was poured at Pentecost and thus begun a new body, in which, the resurrected Christ lives on in, and continues *to do his work* through.

Now the body is many parts, but those many parts form one body. And those many parts are unique and diverse. Those many parts are differently cultured, of differing ethnicities, are differently abled, many who have significant mental, emotional and physical limitations, but *are not limited* when it comes to their spirituality and their place of importance in the church. So in the body of Christ we have all these differing, uniquely gifted people, but all of us are working together, to one end. (*he waka eke noa*)

This body, is Christ's body. People who have died to themselves to live for him, for his purposes and for his glory, doing everything and all things as *his body* that he wants and wills for us to do, because he is the head. I'm not a doctor but I am presuming, that any body, will only live and move according to that body's head. And that is precisely how we as the body of Christ are to function.

*The church is his body...*

### **We are all useful in Christ's Body (v. 14-20)**

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<sup>3</sup> In the mission of God for us.

...in v.14-20 Paul is identifying the issue of discontent<sup>4</sup> that was brewing in the church between people, the sorts of things they were *saying* and *thinking of themselves* and *attitudes to others*. And he gives four illustrations, using speaking body parts to speak to the issue:

*(v. 15-19) Now if the foot should say (...think about where the foot is, below the hand, gets dirtier easier, less recognised...), "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 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 stop being part of the body. 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?*

So what's the issue? It is that if a person is not like another person, and able to do what they do, or receives more recognition than another person with a more prominent gift, then that person feels left out and unuseful. We've got a foot looking at a hand, and an ear looking at an eye and saying because I'm not a hand, and not an eye, I'm unuseful, "they don't need me, I don't belong to the body, there's no place for me" Pretty grim, right!

Think about this for a moment...imagine the whole body being an eye – we'd be awesome at seeing everything, but nothing else...or an ear – awesome at hearing everything but nothing else! What does a church look like that has one gift? I would say very impaired in its mission effectiveness!

But Paul says in response, you might feel that way when you compare who you are or what you do with someone else, but the fact is you *"would not for that reason stop being part of the body."*

When we want to be like someone else and desire their gift/s or position, and when we realise we can't, and think ourselves unneeded, that thinking is opposed to the biblical concept of the body. Which is, no one and no one's gift is unimportant in the body!

In fact, Paul goes on to explain that for the body to be a body, it depends entirely on the diversity and the contribution of each member... *(v. 14) the body is not made up of one part but of many.... (v. 19) If they were all one part, where would the body be?*

You are a hand, And you are grand. You can type or sew or write, And play guitar all night.  
But I'm just a foot, A lousy foot. Wrapped in this smelly sock, And stuffed in this dirty shoe, O,  
how I wish that I were you. Well I'll never get to shake feet with my neighbours, Or paint a pretty picture or hang it on the wall.

But I guess you'd never find your guitar, If you didn't have me to take you down the hall.  
So I guess we really need each other, To do what the Lord has planned for us to do. 'Cause if He didn't want us, brother, I know He would have never stuck me here with you.  
So you see, we really need each other, To do what the Lord has planned for us to do. 'Cause if we didn't work with each other, The Lord will find some others to replace me and you!

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<sup>4</sup> which was that everyone wanted the more spectacular, public, spotlight oriented gifts ...

You see, even though we do it, there's great danger in making comparisons. Great danger in our then feeling inadequate and useless. And that, leads to thinking I don't belong to the body. News flash, when you're a Christian, you belong to the body.

(v.18) You can certainly stop attending church, your home group and any involvement in ministry<sup>5</sup>, but you can't 'unbelong' yourself! Let's catch Paul's emphasis here: (v.18.) *"God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be..."* (v.24) *God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it"*

This is the most important part of Paul's response, and it means we trust that in God's sovereignty and perfect insight, he has placed us in the church, and has gifted us in the church. Not to be like a book getting dusty on the shelf, not with the thinking that if I don't someone else will, no God has placed me and you just he wanted...<sup>6</sup>

If that's true, then to believe the contrary – that we have no place, nothing to offer, or worse we resent the gifts we've been given....is actually to take a dim view of God. It is to say no to God, is to say that God has made a mistake. *"Does the clay say to the potter, 'What are you making?' Does your work say, 'The potter has no hands'? Woe to the one who says to a father, 'What have you begotten?' or to a mother, 'What have you brought to birth?'"* (Isa. 45:9, 10)

Our opinions and feeling of ourselves and others in the church are one thing but if they do not accord with truth of God and his word, then they are not the truth (vv. 15–16).<sup>7</sup>

To change that sort of mind-set around, requires us first to believe that I am/ you are, part of the body, and activate that belief by contributing your skill/gifts in the life of the church, being involved in ministry, and mission...and being content with that.

### **\*We are all dependent on Christ's Body (v.21-27)**

(v. 27) *Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it....* part of a living, active, Holy Spirit empowered, body, where the members of that body work together, depend on each other, and be depended upon. I think this is really important scripture for today.<sup>8</sup> There are a few people in this church who have taught me a valuable lesson with this scripture in mind. When I've found myself wanting to say, "I'm ok, I don't need help with that", recognising actually these people have a God-given gift, I have depended on them. It's not the kiwi way, but it's God's way!

The issue in the church at Corinth was more serious. Folk were essentially saying to others "I don't need you, we don't need that here" (v.21-22) as if only certain, more glamorous, spectacular gifts were needed.

This is a temptation to see certain kinds of people and their gifts in the church as unnecessary and not having much to offer. Whereas Paul said "on the contrary..." (v.22) everyone in the body is as important as each other (v.25-26). Ones we might deem to be "weaker...less honourable, and unpresentable", we are to treat with "special honor...and with special modesty".

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<sup>5</sup> That being said we are called into the body to contribute to and receive from the body, made difficult out of fellowship.

<sup>6</sup> This text (and Heb. 10:25) makes our decision to move from church to church, or leave fellowship altogether very seriously...must be weighed very prayerfully and carefully.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/body-pains-feelings-of-uselessness>

<sup>8</sup> I need others to know I'm *dependable*.

Who is it Paul could be referring to here? The person who can't do much physically, those who are differently abled, those who 'seem' to have less impressive gifting's, prefer background roles, less visible. These are the 'private parts', (v.23) that are critical to reproduction in the church<sup>9</sup>. More than that, Pauls point when he says "these ones you say you don't need...must be treated with special honour" (v.23), why? Because they're the hearts and lungs of the church, the parts that keep the blood pumping! The most vital and "indispensable" (v.22) parts of the body. *How many bodies live without hearts and lungs?*

He wanted to conduct. His conducting style however was shall we say, unique! During soft passages he'd crouch low. For loud sections he'd often leap into the air, even shouting to the orchestra. His memory was poor.

Once he forgot that he had instructed the orchestra not to repeat a section of music. During the performance, when he went back to repeat that section, they went forward, so he stopped the piece, yelling at the top of his voice..."Stop! Wrong! No good! Again! Again!"

For his own piano concerto, he tried conducting from the piano. At one point he jumped from the bench, bumping the candles off the piano. At another concert he knocked over a choir boy. During one long, delicate passage, he jumped high to cue a loud entrance, but nothing happened because he had lost count and signalled the orchestra too soon.

As his hearing worsened, musicians tried to ignore his conducting and instead got their cues from the first violinist. He gave up conducting eventually.

But one of life's greatest lessons Ludwig van Beethoven learned was no one is an expert at everything! How much he needed and relied on others who were gifted differently to him to form the orchestra, that would play his music. It wasn't about the one, but the all, working together.

All are absolutely necessary to the body. An eye needs the hand and a head needs the feet to carry out the work the eye sees and the head thinks, prays and dreams. An eye can't write, cook a meal, or make a coffee. A heart can't walk anywhere and feet can't pump blood! There is a place in the body for all those who are *born again*, to contribute and receive.

This brings us to Pauls statement in v.26-27. And this statement is the measure of the character and the solidarity of a church where each person sees themselves as useful, as dependant, where the church is functioning healthily as a body<sup>10</sup>: *"If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it..."*

Such ought to be our unity and strength as a body that when someone is in the pits of despair, we're there, and if someone is valued, honoured among us, testifies to the greatness of God, where they're, with them, rejoicing. We are to be "spiritually, emotionally and relationally identified with both"

This week I heard about an ancient practice in warfare, when a soldier would be wounded in battle, men who were nearby, seeing what had happened would form a protective box around the soldier and defend him from any further harm, literally putting their bodies on the line, while they waited for a field physician to tend to the soldier's wounds.<sup>11</sup> ...meals, prayer, companionship, visitation...wall!

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<sup>9</sup> Discipleship and spiritual growth.

<sup>10</sup> Interdependently.

<sup>11</sup> Steven Lawson - <https://www.sermonaudio.com/playpopupvideo.asp?SID=43122157171>

Rom. 12:15. "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn"

To begin to bring this to a conclusion, I want us to take notice of the first word in v. 27. "NOW...". It's not just any old, inconsequential "now" ...Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." Part of a living, active, Holy Spirit empowered, body. This is the bottom line church whanau: *we depend on each other*, and we all ought to be depended upon ...30 years or 30 mins...there is no unimportant person or gift in the body.<sup>12</sup>

In this, body, with all of our different motivations, attitudes towards others, abilities, worldviews, priorities (that's what Paul dealt with at Corinth)...how do we<sup>13</sup> adopt a Christ honouring, healthy way of *being* church...Love Christ, Love the Church

Last Friday J.I. Packer - one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century – went to be with the Lord. His writing has had a profound on my understanding of God and love for Christ. Packer spent his whole life stressing the importance of knowing and communing with God, for the church to take holiness and the word of God seriously. His most well-known book is *Knowing God*. When asked what the conviction behind the book was he wrote "that ignorance of God lies at the root of much of the church's weakness today." What does this mean? The strength of a church lay within its ability to know God, to love Christ and therefore love the body.

## **We Love Christ and Love His Church**

*Do we love the church?*

(Eph. 5:25) Christ loves the church; he gave himself up for the church. If Christ loves the church, and he is the head and we are his body, we are to love the church. When I love Christ, and love (NB.) his church it changes how we view our place, and our relationships in the (his) body.<sup>14</sup>

*Do we love the church?* Disappointment, and disillusionment with the church is a real thing, today. Many have been hurt by the church, and I might say the church has been hurt by many...and we must work to see such things reconciled<sup>15</sup>. Alongside this, if I don't first love Christ – the head of the church – and if I don't love the church, his, body (the people), I'm not likely to have a healthy view of church, of my place, of others' place and for contributing and receiving?

And so I ask this question: where is your relationship with the Lord Jesus, this morning?<sup>16</sup> Do you have a relationship with Jesus Christ? It may be that God has brought you here today, and he has made you aware that for the first time, you need to commit your life to Jesus Christ. In order to be placed into the body, the living body of Christ, you must be born again. If you've never come to Christ through faith I call you today to repent of your sins, means to turn from a life of going your own way, in your own strength, to dependence on Christ....believe in Jesus Christ for your eternal life.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/body-pains-feelings-of-self-sufficiency>

<sup>13</sup> In all of our imperfections

<sup>14</sup> See 1 John 4:8 (read all of 1 John)

<sup>15</sup> "I love Jesus but I can't stand the church" ...the church is his body, he is the head

<sup>16</sup> Do you have a healthy view of the body, your place in the body, others' place in the body?

<sup>17</sup> See Rom. 5:6-11; 2 Cor. 5:21