

*Over the last couple of weeks, I've been pretty crook. I had a bad head-cold, which should've run-its-course within a few of days. But it went to sinusitis, where your head gets all infected, and head-aches and snot and your teeth ache, and my forehead swells up like a Klingon.... – If you've ever had it before, you know what I'm talking about – it's just awful...*

*And it seems to go on and on...*

*It's amazing how that one little, insignificant part of my body – the sinuses, can affect the whole body... The **purpose** of our sinuses, is to filter and moisten the air, before it gets to our lungs. We never see them – we never give our sinuses a single thought,,, But when they get infected, boy don't we know about it....*

*My body depends on those little cavities in my face and forehead, called "sinuses"... And when **they're** sick, the **whole** body is miserable.*

We've been studying Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> letter to the church in Corinth, and so far, you may have been a little bit surprised at just how much it seems to focus on relationships within the church...

You see, the best-known (and most preached-on) bits of this letter, are chapters 12, 13 and 14, where Paul covers the topics of "Spiritual gifts"; and "love"; and "The church as a body"... and we know these bits pretty well, because we preachers love to preach on them... But the first **11** chapters, often get overlooked... And those 11 chapters are **very** important, because they prepare us, to receive things of the Spirit.

Unless we've learned to apply chapters 1-11, we are too much of the flesh, to take on Chapters 12-14.

*A new pastor preached his first sermon at his new church. He preached a wonderful sermon "Repent, repent, repent. The Kingdom of God is at hand." Everyone loved the sermon. Some said it was the best sermon they'd ever heard.*

*On the second Sunday, he preached exactly the same sermon. "Repent, repent, repent. The Kingdom of God is at hand." It didn't really matter much, because most of the congregation couldn't remember what they'd heard the previous week.*

*On the third Sunday, he preached the same sermon again. "Repent, repent, repent. The Kingdom of God is at hand." This time the folk thought "We've heard this before."*

*On the fourth Sunday, "Repent, repent, repent. The Kingdom of God is at hand." And the church council pulled him aside and asked for an explanation.*

*His answer:*

- *Yes, he was able to preach other sermons.*
- *Yes, he did have other sermons.*
- *Yes, he did want to preach other sermons.*

*The problem? He would preach another sermon as soon as the congregation repented.*

In the first 11 chapters (that may seem a bit repetitive at times), Paul's been addressing a church, that is broken. He's been writing to a people who are divided... They're divided

on theology; they're divided socially; they're divided personally... And so much of the first 11 chapters, have been about how in Christ, we are one... We **shouldn't** be divided. Division is sin...

And if we cannot get our relationships with each other right, that means we're too much of the flesh, and we're not spiritual,, and therefore, not yet ready for spiritual teaching...

Right back in chapter 3, he said to them:

**3:1** But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. **2** I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even **now** you are not yet ready, **3** for you are **still** of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?

What he is telling them, is that while they are divided, they are of the flesh, and not of the Spirit. And so, they weren't ready for spiritual teaching.

Last week, (at the end of Chapter 11) in communion, it came to the culmination... When we are divided from our brother or sister in Christ, that is sinning against the body and the blood of Jesus Himself. And if when we come to worship (and specially in communion), if we **don't** connect with the body – if we **don't** connect with the church – if we **don't** connect with our brothers and sisters in Christ (because there is schism – there is split between us),,, then we bring judgment upon ourselves... Serious stuff...

And so when (**and only when**) we're **not** divided, but when we're connected with our brothers and sisters in Christ – **only then**, are we ready for deeper, spiritual stuff... So, let me ask, "Are we ready for deeper, Spiritual stuff?"

Because that's how Chapter 12 begins:

**Now concerning spiritual stuff, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.**

I don't know why our English translations put the word "gifts" in there. In the original Greek, the word "gifts" doesn't appear until verse 4.

It literally says: **Now concerning spiritual stuff, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.** (or "spiritual person" [not limited to gifts])

If we're not divided, we **are** ready for Spiritual stuff, and one of the first spiritual truths we learn, isn't **just** about gifts – this is a spiritual principal for us to apply, in every area of our life:

This teaching, takes us from:

- The unity of the church (which he's been driving home for a while now); to
- Diversity of worship; and then onto
- Diversity of gifts.

So today, let's talk about diversity of worship.

Different people worship God in different ways. And different denominations, and even churches within the **same** denomination, will worship God in very different ways...

- Some churches will take their worship straight out of a book, and they follow a set order – it’s called “a litany”.
- Some churches will have a traditional 3(or 4) -hymn sandwich.
- Some churches make the music and singing, the **prominent** part of their worship. It might take up the first  $\frac{3}{4}$  or even 90% of the service. Not much prayer; not much bible teaching, but lots of music.
- Some churches (like this one), will give Bible teaching, a very prominent place in our worship.
- Some churches will focus on the Pentecostal experience.
  - Some will focus on healing
  - Some on speaking in tongues
  - Some on prophecy...
- Some churches focus on human experience, and they love to share with each other, what God’s been doing in their life.
- Some churches will claim to have “no set order”, For example, when the Quakers began, they would sit down together, and just wait for the Spirit of God to fall upon them, and they’d just start shaking.

- Some churches have what I call, “A very carefully planned spontaneity”... They want their service to come across as being spontaneous, and so they plan that into it...

Different people worship God, in very different ways...

Who’s right in their worship? And Who’s wrong in their worship?

Well I reckon, if we find ourselves asking that question (or worse still, if we find ourselves **answering** that question), then we haven’t begun to understand, ‘the body’ and ‘the unity of the body’ and ‘the diversity of the body’, much at all...

Some people will see those who worship, in a very set order (maybe straight from a book), and say “Oh, they’re just religious – that’s just empty religion – it’s not real – it’s not genuine worship...” And they make that judgment, because that’s not how **they themselves** worship... And so they assume that nobody else could possibly be genuine in their worship of God, if they worship like that...

Likewise, other people will see those who worship God with drums and electric guitars,,,, Or maybe they see healings and prophecies,,, and they poo-poo it, and say “Ah, it’s just all emotion and manipulation.... – or it’s a concert – That’s not true worship...”

Really???

*You know, one day an elderly man – a deeply Spiritual man (from another church), brought me a gift... He said, “Michael, I want to give you a copy of the old Anglican Prayer Book.” And he went on to tell me, about the depth of the theology in that book, and the way that he personally, connects with God (in worship), through the words of that prayer book...*

And that really opened my eyes, to the fact that this man (who I know, genuinely loves God), worships God in a way that is right for him, even though I find it difficult to worship God in that way... Worship is more about the heart, than it is about the tradition... I’ve found that **usually**, I can worship God in all sorts of different types of services... As long as my heart, is focused on God, and I’m not looking to please my own senses, we can worship God in all sorts of different ways.

Yes, it is possible to get led astray, into **false** worship – that’s called “idolatry”...

And that’s why Paul helps us to distinguish the difference between genuine **Christian** worship and **false** worship. And it’s all about the place that **Christ** takes **in** our worship. V3 says: I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.

When our worship is centred on Christ – when our worship proclaims and praises Jesus as Lord, that’s Godly worship – whether it comes from a book or whether it comes through

song, or whether it comes through a preacher... – no matter how it comes....

Now of course, it's **not just** a matter of words... Anyone can make an empty statement that "Jesus is Lord" (We taught our budgie to say "God is love") – that didn't make him a Christian... But when those words also come from the heart, – **that's** spiritual worship.

Jesus told us that the mouth is the overflow of the heart... If you're full of love for Jesus in your heart, out of your mouth you'll proclaim "Jesus is Lord"... But if in your heart, you don't love Jesus, then you won't automatically honour Him with your lips,,, and "Jesus" or "Christ", will probably just be a swear-word to you...

And so we shouldn't judge the way that other people worship God, and say "Oh, they're not spiritual – they're just religious, or they've been caught up in the experience, or their emotions...."

I guess what Paul's saying to this Corinthian church is, "Hey, in your past, you've been caught up in idolatry; You've experienced the spirituality of idolatry; Even in paganism, you've seen the mystical and the miraculous.... So don't be too quick, to accept that all worship is Godly... But likewise, don't be too quick to reject other people's worship, as not being Godly, simply because it's different to how you worship..."

And this goes for Spiritual gifts in the church as well... But not just for spiritual gifts:

**<sup>v4</sup> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.**

**<sup>7</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.**

- There's varieties of gifts
- There's varieties of service
- There's varieties of activities

Different churches, will do things differently.

Within the **one** church, individual members, will do things differently...

- varieties of gifts
- varieties of service
- varieties of activities

And yet it's all the activity of the **one** God, in the one church...

We're going to be coming back to the Spiritual gifts over the next few weeks, but for today, we're going to learn about "the body"...

V12 says:

<sup>12</sup> 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.

“Church Membership”. Let’s talk about church membership... That sounds so “last-century” doesn’t it????

*Once upon a time, you became a member of a church, (and it was usually the denomination your Parents were members of), and you would be a member of that church until the day you died...*

Whereas now, official church membership, is largely seen as a thing of the past... Churches are often seen as a provision of a service to be consumed... Some churches have hundreds of people attending every Sunday, but they might only have 5 or 6 official members – just enough to satisfy the constitution, and have them registered as an organisation...

A lot of us might think of church membership as getting tied up in committees and meetings and processes and constitutions.... But what is church membership really about????

To understand church membership properly, we have to **stop** thinking about it as a constitutional necessity, to justify the existence of a church in a legal and corporate world...

To understand church membership properly, we have to start thinking about it anatomically.

Do you know what anatomy is? It's the study of the body.

This, is my body. This is my hand. It is a member of my body. If my hand is cut off, I am dis-membered.

- My finger, is a member
- My ear, is a member
- My eye;
- My tongue;
- My foot,,,

are all members...

My sinuses (that have been causing me so much grief over the last couple of weeks), are members of my body...

My eye, is different to my hand. They function differently... But my body needs my eye and my hand... The eye is not more important than the hand, and the hand is not more important than the eye... They're all just members of the one body...

Have you ever thought of church membership, anatomically???

If the hand disconnects itself from the body – if it is dismembered, it's useless. On its own, it's useless...

And likewise, if the body is missing a hand, then the body isn't how God designed the body to be...

God has designed the church to be a united body... No one member, is complete on their own. And we can never **be** complete, unless we are united together, as the body... And God brings a diverse people together – a people with different gifts; and different passions; and different activities... But in Christ, and in our common faith, we are united as one...

It is amazing, but very strange – the way that God has designed his church. Without the unification of the Holy Spirit, we'd end up with Frankenstein's monster – A head from here; a torso from there; this one's foot; that one's ear...

Look around you – all these different people... – We are so different... We have different gifts; Different skills; different backgrounds; we worship in different ways; we probably have different politics and different educational backgrounds.... But God chooses to bring this diverse people together, and to create one body out of us... As I said, without the unification of the Holy Spirit, we'd end up being like Frankenstein's monster. But **with** the unification of the Holy Spirit, praise God, we become the body of Christ...

We become the body of Christ, not because we're the same, but because we're different...

You know, these days, we seem to have entered the age of the boutique church – where churches seem to cater for a very specialised clientele...

- We have a church for older people
- Younger people
- Young families
- Young marrieds
- University students

Or at least we have different services or different bible studies for these groups...

And in essence,

- all the hands flock together to make one body;
- and all the feet have their little group;
- and the eyes congregate together
- and the sinuses are so agitating, who wants to be with them anyway

But God designed his church, to be unified, in all of its diversity. United in faith; United in Love; United in Hope.....

....United in Christ, as the body of Christ.

Don't ever feel that you don't belong in God's church because you're different... That's exactly why you do belong. God made you different, because His church, needs your differences. If we were all the same, we wouldn't be the body.

And don't ever feel that that other person doesn't belong in this church, because they're different to everybody else...

God made **them** different, because his church needs **their** differences. If we were all the same, we wouldn't be the body.

<sup>4</sup> ... there are **varieties** of gifts, but the **same** Spirit;  
<sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of **service**, but the same Lord;  
<sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of **activities**, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.

<sup>7</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

We're going to leave it there for today. Next week, is Pentecost Sunday – what a great day to focus on the diversity of the gifts of the Spirit.

Church membership...

- It's not about politics
- It's not about sameness
- It's not about control
  
- It's about connectedness.
- It's about the anatomy of God's church
- It's about mutual interdependence, where I depend on you, and you depend on me, because together, we are the body of Christ.

Christ is the head of the church. To be connected to Christ, is to be connected to all the members of the church.

I've been thinking about the human body, and different types of connections, in the human body. In the human body, there are members; there are parasites; and there are cancers.

A parasite, is in the body, but it's a completely different organism – like a tape-worm. And it's **in** the body, but it's not **of** the body. It's just there for its own growth and development. It draws its nutrients from the blood, but it's not part of the body...

And some people, connect with a church on some level, but they're never a member of the body. It's an environment they like to be in – it helps them to grow personally, maybe emotionally (or morally), but they're not part of the anatomy – they're not connected to Christ. And they don't build the body up – they drain the body.

Then there's cancers... Cancers are connected to the body. In some way, they are part of the body, but then something happens, and they take over, and growth is all about themselves, and not about the body...

And in the church, sometimes we get fed-up with the other members – the other body parts, and our concern isn't for them – it's all about us (it's all about me personally) – as long as I'm growing, that's all that matters – blow those others...

But then there's members...

- My hand, brushes my teeth
- My eyes, make sure my feet don't trip
- My teeth, chew the food for the stomach.
- My Kidneys, filter the blood

- My sinuses, filter and moisten the air for my lungs...

Each member, is working for the good of the other members...

So, in the body of Christ, am I a parasite? Am I a cancer? Or am I a member? Connected to the body, loving and caring for the body....

The anatomy of the church – members who love and care for other members, because in Christ, we are one body.

Let's pray,

Oh God, what an amazing design Your church is.

Humanly speaking, we look at it, and we find ourselves wondering, "How on earth, could it possibly work?"

Left to our own devices, the church would soon become Frankenstein's monster,

And yet we know, by the power of Your Holy Spirit, we, Your church, are united and joined together, to fulfil Your good and wonderful purpose.

Oh Lord, make us members. – Body parts that love and care for each other, because we are all part of the one body.

Lord, help us to never reject another member of Your body. And help us to recognise our place **in** Your body.

In Jesus' name,  
Amen.