

INTRODUCTION

We live in an ever-changing world. With technological advancement there are always new things coming out. Rumors said that Apple is going to release iPhone 8 this coming Tuesday. If you think that 4G internet is too slow, 5G should be arriving soon. Don't worry if you don't know what those things are. You can live without those fancy technologies. I have come to an age when I am having techno-phobia. Sometimes I find it overwhelming to learn new things. I may need to spend much time to get familiar with the functions of a new cell phone or computer, but then end up just using less than 10 % of its capabilities. I tease at myself that I live like a caveman in the modern society. But what if only 10 % of the believers in a church are doing all the ministries, or what if a church is only functioning at 10 % of its potential? It will not be a healthy church because 90 % of the people are idling. It would also mean that we are wasting a lot of blessings the Lord gives us. In our passage today Paul uses a human body as an analogy for the church. Just like different body parts have specific functions, God gives believers various spiritual gifts to serve in different roles. Last week we said that when Paul mentioned the church he might refer to the universal church, which consists of believers throughout the whole human history. However, when we think of spiritual gifts the same principles we shall study can be applied to a localized church too. By definition spiritual gifts are special abilities God gives to each believer for them to serve in a church. Besides 1 Corinthians chapter 12, the other two major passages that itemize various spiritual gifts are Romans 12 and 1 Peter 4. Some people argued that there should be more gifts than those listed in all three passages. For example, what about musical skills? Those who can sing and those who can play musical instruments can enrich our worship. What about those who are handy and help fix things in the church? Therefore, people draw a distinction between talents and spiritual gifts. In this passage I will use the term "gifts" loosely to include every skill God gives us. The more important question is whether or not we are actively using our gifts to serve in the church. God's intent for us is very clear – there should be no spare part in the body of Christ. Let us ponder that principle from three angles.

EXPLANATION

1. Christ's Body is Indivisible 基督的身體不可分割

First, Christ's body, the church is indivisible. Paul says in **verse 12**: The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. Though there are many members in a church, they join together as one church. Paul repeats the same truth using similar wordings in verses 14 and 20. The body of Christ is indivisible. We are one body because we receive the same Holy Spirit. **Verse 13** reads: For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Being "baptized by one Spirit" and drink from one Spirit describe the same truth that when we become Christians we receive the Holy Spirit. Therefore, regardless of our ethnic background or social status we belong to the same church. Because of that there should be no division in a church. Paul illustrates that truth in a negative way in **verses 15 and 16**: 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. 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. If a foot is separated from a hand away from the body it will not make a complete body. Similarly, an ear without an eye will not be a full body. Paul brought this up because the Corinthian believers were experts in division. Listen to Paul’s rebuke in **3:3-4** of the book: 3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere men? The Corinthian believers identified themselves by the leader they chose to follow. There was the clan of Paul and the society of Apollos. Paul reproved them for creating division in the church. Division grieves the heart of God because Christ’s body is supposed to be indivisible.

Are we creating our own little clubs in the church? Do we somehow feel that people who do not speak my mother tongue do not belong to my own interest group? Perhaps some people may say that: “I just come here to worship. I don’t serve in any committee or wear any title. If anything in this church goes wrong it is not my problem. Let your coworkers deal with it.” Unless you come to our church for the very first time, otherwise, this is your church! You are part of the team. Don’t isolate yourself from others and don’t reject others because they don’t belong to your “club.” We have a beautiful tradition of singing a unity song at the end of worship while holding hands with the brothers or sisters next to us. I hope that not only our hands are connected, so are our hearts. Allow me to give you some suggestions. When you eat don’t just sit with the people you know. Find someone you don’t know, or mingle with brothers or sisters who speak a different language. Let’s do a little rehearsal here. Can everyone show me your smile? Can everyone say “Hi?” Can everyone stretch your right hand out? Now let’s put all three actions together. Turn to the persons to your both sides who are not your family members, and to the person in front of you and the one sitting behind you – smile, say hi and shake their hands. I give you one more request. Don’t just do it today. Do it every time you come into our church to help remind each other that we are one indivisible church.

2. All Parts are Inter-dependent 基督的肢體互相倚賴

There should be no spare part in the body of Christ because the church is indivisible. It is also because all the parts in Christ’s body are inter-dependent. God designs each of us to perform specific functions just like the different parts in a human body. Listen to **verses 17 and 18**: 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. We don’t need Paul to point out to us that the eyes need the ears, and the ears need the nose. You may have played a game before where a few teammates depend on each other to complete a task. One teammate is not allowed to speak, a second teammate is not allowed to walk while the third teammates is blind-folded. The goal is to relay directions to the “blind” teammate to get something from the room. The mute player gives hand gestures to communicate with the second teammate, then he/she will use verbal commands to guide the “blind” teammate to go to the left or right, crouch down and reach forward to grab the object. You can imagine that it is chaotic but fun. Actually, when we are listening to this sermon the kids in the children’s church may be playing this game. The purpose of the game is for everyone to see the importance of inter-dependence. The same is true for the normal

functioning of a church. No one has all the gifts. Paul reminded us that it is God who decides which gifts He gives to each person. Therefore, we should not be jealous about others' gifts. We should not grumble to the Lord, saying: "It's not fair! How come this sister can sing and that brother can teach so effectively, but I can't do either thing?" Well, don't overlook the unique gift God has given you! God wants you to make up for what other people are lacking, and vice versa. If we don't keep this truth of inter-dependence in our mind we will end up in a situation that Paul describes in **verse 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!" Once again Paul hit the sore-spot of the Corinthian believers. I mentioned earlier that they stirred up church division. Now Paul revealed their pride. The Corinthian church was blessed by God with many gifted believers. But if people felt that they were too capable to depend on others pride would sneak in. If you think you are a Superman or Wonder Woman in the church then you may feel that others are obsolete. But one person does not make a church! It is appropriate to admire others' gifts and ask God to give you the same gifts. But if God doesn't answer you the way you hope for, then you should submit to His decision. Just focus on using the gifts God has given you and work with others as a team.

Some of you may ask: how do I know what my gifts are? You can complete a spiritual gift survey on the internet to find out your gifts. But I think a better way is just like the slogan of a sporting goods company – Just Do It! Pray for God's guidance to lead you to a ministry, then just try it and see if God is gifting you in certain ways. If you see effectiveness in what you do, people give you compliments about it and you find joy in doing it, then it is likely that God has given you the gift for the ministry. Recently I met with different church committees. I can draw a conclusion that there are needs everywhere. Almost every committee is crying for help to recruit new coworkers. Many diligent brothers and sisters have been serving in the same position for years. We thank God for their faithfulness. Now is the time to train new coworkers. Are you willing to join them? Just go to any committee chair. Talk to me if you don't know who they are.

3. Every Part is Indispensable 基督的肢體不可或缺

There should be no spare part in the body of Christ because the church is indivisible, and because all the parts in the church are inter-dependent. Paul told us a third reason why there should not be any spare part in the body of Christ. It is because every part is indispensable. Let us look at **verses 22 and 23**: 22 ...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 unrepresentable are treated with special modesty. Every body part is indispensable, even the weaker parts. The tongue is a weaker organ and so God uses the jaw bone and the teeth to hide it. All of our vital organs inside the chest and abdomen are covered by layers of skin, muscle and fat. Some of them are also protected by the rib cage. Your brain is shielded by the skull. Besides watching over the weaker body parts we also give special honor to unrepresentable parts. We wear clothes to conceal our body with modesty. Nowadays the fashion industry tells us that clothing reflects our particular taste and personality. The point is that when people see you wear beautiful clothes they would not just say: "What a nice dress or colorful shirt that is!" But they would also compliment: "You look great in that outfit." That is how we give special honor to the less honorable parts.

How do we apply that principle to the church? There are some “weaker” members in our midst like elderly people and young kids. We should care for their particular needs. You can hold the door for them when they come in. You can fetch a cup of tea to our senior members or help them clean up after meal. You can help the moms baby-sit their little ones for a few minutes while the moms go get food. In addition, we should also intentionally give special honor to people serving in “less honorable” roles. They may be working behind the scene that few people notice. When is the last time you sincerely thank the people serving in the nursery or the Sunday school teachers who take care of your kid? Do you take it for granted that someone will be in the kitchen preparing meals for you and wash your dishes? Give them a pat on the back for their hard work. Do you know who take care of the trash in our church, mow the lawn, and respond to emergency situations like power outage, roof leakage or sewage backup? Give thanks to the Lord for their diligence and faithfulness. No work done in the body of Christ should be overlooked because every part is indispensable. Just in case some of our senior members feel that there is nothing they can contribute let me give you some encouragement. No one is too old to serve the Lord. God did not call Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt until he was eighty years old. Caleb remained active in the Israel army even when he was eighty-five. God definitely has a place for you to serve no matter how old you are. You can pray for church ministries and pray for our coworkers. You can make phone calls to comfort those in needs. You can offer money to support ministries in and outside of the church. Besides our elderly members, on the other end of the spectrum we have our young children. Is there any way they can serve? Absolutely! You can help put hymn books back or aligning the chairs after service. You can pick trash up if you see it on the floor. You can turn light off if you are the last person leaving the classroom. Even if no one sees you and praises you “good job!” Jesus sees it and will remember your good work. You see, young and old, every one of us is indispensable.

CONCLUSION

There should be no spare part in the body of Christ. The church is indivisible, all the body parts are inter-dependent of each other and no one is indispensable. Every one of us should be actively serving together to build our church up. Many of you still remember the damage hurricane Harvey done in Texas two weekends ago. You may come across some heroic rescue stories in the media. One particular account really touched my heart. At the peak of the flood a husband called 911 because his wife was about to give birth to their baby. Seeing that the baby might arrive at any moment this father sent out an urgent message via the social media. A guy and his friend responded. They drove a pickup truck and carried the couple to a nearby hospital. Unfortunately, as they were approaching the building the car stalled in the rising water. The driver looked around and saw a hotel. He waded across water of several feet deep to ask for assistance. A few hotel staff thus moved the future mom into the lobby. Then the manager remembered that there were a few nurses among the guests. Within minutes the team gathered all the resources they could find. Although none of the nurses delivered a baby before they simply had no other choice. At that moment rescue arrived. A few guys came out from nowhere on a dump truck and took the couple to the hospital. The mom was saved because one after another complete stranger stretched out their helping hands. These people who did not even know each other worked together just because someone was in a critical situation. How much more members who belong to the same body of Christ should serve together to build the church up?