

## Body Life

Did you know the following incredible facts about the human body?

- In one square inch of skin there are four meters of nerve fibres, 1300 nerve cells, 100 sweat glands, 3 million cells, and 3 yards of blood vessels.
- Except for your brain cells, 50,000,000 of the cells in your body will have died and been replaced with others, all while you have been reading this sentence.
- The adult heart beats about 40,000,000 times a year. In one hour the heart works hard enough to produce enough energy to raise almost one ton of weight one yard from the ground.
- The central nervous system is connected to every part of the body by 43 pairs of nerves. Twelve pairs go to and from the brain, with 31 pairs going from the spinal cord. There are nearly 72 kilometres of nerves running through our bodies.
- The muscles of the eye move 100,000 times a day.

Now consider the passage from God's Word below:

*For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary. And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked. That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.*

**1 Corinthians 12:14-27**

Of all the metaphors that the Holy Spirit could have chosen to describe the relationship of individual believers to the church, he chose the illustration of the human body. In so doing, He chose the ultimate metaphor of interdependence.

A body is one unit made up of many parts. Single local churches are complete, autonomous units, but made up of many varying individuals. In a human body the diversity is incredible – the internal and external organs look and function completely differently from one another. There is amazing variety. Yet each part is necessary.

A local church may be made up of differing age groups, differing social standing, differing income groups, differing cultures, differing stages in life, differing intellectual abilities, differing educational backgrounds, differing occupations. But each one is crucial.

In the body, and in a church, the parts are not the same, nor do they all have the same function, yet each one is important, and affects the others. And probably the most important truth that comes out of the body analogy is this:

**The health of individual body parts affects the health of the whole body.**

**The health of the whole body affects the health of individual body parts.**

Your relationship to your local church determines, to a large degree, your spiritual health. If you believe God has placed you in a local church, then your response is to it will largely impact your spiritual life.

If your relationship to the local church is hit-and-miss, or peripheral, or perhaps a side-issue as far as your relationship with God goes, then 1 Corinthians 12 needs to be taken out of the Bible, because it teaches that you cannot be healthy spiritually if your relationship with your local church is not healthy.

I believe much of the spiritual immaturity around today exists due to the fact that Christians neglect their responsibility to be active members of a local church. Sadly, God's design has been substituted for the selfish, individualistic mentality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The independent, 'I'll do it my way' approach is the order of the day, and so today you have a phenomenon previously unknown in the history of Christianity – churchless Christians.

Here are four types and their mentalities:

- **Hitchhiker Christians** – Their approach is, "You church members can buy the car, pay for repairs, pay for insurance, fill up with petrol, and I'll ride with you. But if you have an accident – I'm out of here. You go to the meetings, you serve on boards and committees, you grapple with issues, pay the bills and do the work of church, and I'll come along for the ride. But if I don't like how you're driving, I'll criticise, complain, and probably bail out."
- **McChristians** – Church for them is a spiritual restaurant where you fill up on some teaching. You attend here for some teaching, and here for some other teaching, you go there because of the dynamic youth program, but you go there because of the nice fellowship, and there because of something else. So church is the equivalent of a fast-food place. You do not clean the floors or change the light bulbs at the restaurant – if you like its food, you go there, and then leave.
- **Church-daters** – They like a nice relationship with church. They enjoy the privileges of good fellowship, good teaching, good counsel. But they do not want the responsibilities that come with that. So they are content to 'go' to a church, not to 'belong' to a church. For them, the church can be like a steady partner, but not a spouse. They take the privileges, but not the responsibilities.
- **Researchers** – Here, church is just one more place to continue your fascination with the Bible. So you have your podcasts, your apps and blogs, your books, and your sermons at church. Church is like a lecture hall to hear the most articulate and well-researched speaker fill your mind with more information to add to the collection. There might be some friendly interaction with your fellow researchers, but basically, when the lecture is over, you may as well go home – you got what you came for.

Church is not a spiritual restaurant. Church is not a lecture hall. Church is not a fellowship-supplement. Some even seem to think that the Christian life is like a kit that you order that you put it together yourself. So you get a bit of teaching here, and some info over there, and

a video from there, and you go there to hear some preaching, and when you need some fellowship – you go to your cell-group or Bible study.

In this way, church is just a tag-on to your self-study of Christianity. You study it yourself, but you like to meet with others who are just as fascinated as you are, so you pitch up at some get-togethers to get your boost. But that approach – and the ones above – are never found in Scripture.

Sometimes we have to learn to adjust our theology to the Bible. Perhaps you were saved in a place or church where the gospel was about the only thing that was right. Then God sent you elsewhere and you got straightened out on a lot of issues, a lot of doctrine. Sometimes though, especially in a modern church culture, it is rare to find people who have gotten straightened out when it comes to the doctrine of church.

Many churches do not want anything more from you than to fill a seat once a week. They accommodate the lazy, consumerist tendencies of our culture, and so sometimes you go from one place to another, and they might be better on some doctrine, but on others, they sometimes perpetuate the problem.

If you truly want to grow, you need a biblical view of church, because your spiritual life is integrally connected to your relationship with your local church. 1 Corinthians 12 teaches us that believers are members of a body. A local body. It is referring to the local church – not the universal church.

We know this because firstly, Paul was writing to a local church – the church at Corinth – so the immediate application was that of the members of the Corinthian church realising they were one body. He was explaining how these members were to exercise their spiritual gifts in that local church.

The second reason is that the universal or invisible church does not fit the illustration. The members of the body of Christ worldwide cannot have the same care for 'one another' (**1 Corinthians 12:25**). The universal body of Christ does not baptise people, or have communion. The invisible church will not marry you, bury you or discipline you. Spiritual gifts particularly bless the local church you are in. The universal church does not 'suffer with you when you suffer.'

And there is many a person running from the accountability that a local church will provide with the rather poor excuse – "I don't belong to any one church, I belong to *the* church. I belong to the universal, invisible Body of Christ. Isn't it true that when two or three are gathered together, there Christ is among us? So I don't go to one church, I'm part of the church."

Now that to me is like someone saying to you, "I work for McDonalds" So you ask, "Oh really, where?" They reply, "Well, McDonalds." "Yes," you say, "but where? Which branch? Surely you work at a specific office or store somewhere?" "No," they say, "I don't need to go to some particular place. I am part of McDonalds worldwide!" Now you will think such a person is rather odd, for it is obvious that even if you are employed by a global corporation, you still will work at some local expression of that corporation.

When God gives us commands regarding the church, He most often is telling us how to respond to the visible, local expression of His body – that organised New Testament

assembly with pastors and deacons, that celebrates the ordinances, that preaches the Word and meets for worship, that evangelises the lost and disciples the saved as a body, that exercises oversight and, where necessary, discipline. That's the church.

So 1 Corinthians 12 – which describes Body Life – is referring to your life in a local church setting. Body Life consists of three main elements.

## **1. Presence**

Firstly, you are required to be present when the church officially gathers together. “But if I meet another believer – that's church, isn't it?” No – the assembling of ourselves together refers to the organised, planned meetings of the church, and it is commanded in Scripture.

“...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

**Hebrews 10:25**

We are commanded to gather ourselves together when the church meets. Which local church does not have members suffering from ‘Morbus Sabbaticus’ – Sunday sickness, especially Sunday evening sickness? Here are some of the signs:

- a) Its symptoms vary, but it never interferes with the appetite.
- b) It never lasts more than 24 hours at a time, for afflicted persons are back at work on Monday.
- c) A doctor is never called.
- d) It seems to subside Sunday afternoon so that the patient can go riding in the car or enjoy some form of activity, but unfortunately returns in the evening just at the time Sunday evening service is drawing near!

Yes, in some cases, people are providentially hindered. That means that God has Himself limited you from coming. God has for some reason, limited you financially, physically or otherwise. But you have to search your own heart and life to know if that is the case. Can you say, “With all my heart I would want to be there, but I cannot due to the limitation God has placed on me”?

In other words, you can sum this point up like this – when your church meets for its public services – if you can be there, you should be there. Why? What is the reasoning behind regular church attendance?

### **1. It's necessary for your participation.**

If you are to be involved in a church, and you must be, you have to be there. How do you meet needs you aren't aware of? How do you pray for needs you aren't aware of? How do you serve people you hardly ever see? A kidney that is only in the body 20% of the time will be a very poor kidney.

### **2. It's necessary for your understanding of the truth.**

In a good church, services are structured to give you the fullest possible continuity of truth. The Bible is not like certain other religious books – short statements with no context, no

continuity, only arranged in order from the longest to the shortest. The Bible is not just ideas strung together in single statements. The Bible is a collection of books. And books which have a beginning, an end, and a path to follow through them from A to Z.

The only way to understand the truth of God's Word is to follow the path from A to Z. That's why we a good church will give attention to verse-by-verse exposition of books of the Bible, to overviews of entire books of the Bible, to biblically-informed topical messages. And if you skip this on purpose, your understanding of God's truth is going to be piece-meal, hit-and-miss, sporadic and filled with holes.

If your exposure to God's Word is a tape here on this subject and a tape here on that subject, and a book here and a book there, you will never gain a cohesive, systematic understanding of God's truth. And without that, your sanctification will flounder, you will build your life on the sandy shore of what makes sense to you personally. Your worship will flounder because God will never be bigger to you than your own limited conceptions of him, and the brief encounters that you have with topicalised, decontextualised truths.

Any good, Bible-believing church has multiple services – not because it is repeating itself; not as extra-lessons for those who don't get it on Sunday morning; not to provide a kind of spiritual buffet. It will have those services because it believes every person needs every one of them. Online ministries can be very useful. But a podcast or video will never reproduce what the Spirit of God does during that actual time of meeting together and having the word preached corporately.

### **3. It's necessary for your spiritual health.**

If your lungs take a walk, you're finished, and so are they. If your teeth decided to just not be there on Wednesday, you'd have some problems on Wednesday, and guess what – so would the teeth, apart from its blood supply.

You might say to me, "Well, David, you're a pastor, you *would* sell church attendance!" It's true, it's important to me as a pastor of my own local church. But more importantly, it's important to me as a Christian. Like you, I had to learn the biblical meaning of church. Not a personal meaning – the biblical meaning.

I was saved at an early age, and when I was still a teenager, began to understand the meaning of Body Life. So through high school, college, through times of unemployment, through my first job, I sought to be faithful wherever God had placed me. It wasn't always convenient.

Assembling together is a command. And commands aren't always convenient. They can be quite inconvenient. But we are not called to obey when convenient. We are to obey by conviction. It brings to mind a church I know of in Russia – they meet on Tuesday evening, on Thursday evening, on Sunday morning, and on Sunday evening. Each meeting is 2 hours, often with three sessions of preaching. That is telling of their conviction.

## **2. Prayer**

The second aspect of body life is that we are pray for one another. That's body life. In a body, the members want grace for one another. Prayer for others begins by knowing each

other. That's why you have to be present – so as to become involved in other's lives. We bear one another's burdens. We pray for one another's evangelism. We pray for one another's unsaved family. We pray for special needs. We pray for our church. It's said that Spurgeon showed some visitors the boiler room of his church: a basement room filled with people praying for the service during the service.

In the modern church, it is a terrible reflection of the low spiritual life of members when you see the attendance at prayer meetings. Someone once said you could gauge the popularity of a church by its Sunday morning attendance. You can gauge the popularity of the pastor of that church by the Sunday evening attendance. And you can gauge the popularity of the Lord Jesus by the prayer meeting attendance. That might sound harsh, but it's probably accurate.

### **3. Participation**

Body Life means a third thing: participation. Each body part does not just exist, it functions actively in the body life. If God has allocated you to a local church, and He has, then your non-participation is negatively affecting that church. But guess what, it's negatively affecting you as well. If you remove a man's stomach, it will certainly harm his body. But at the same time, that stomach being outside of the body will also be harmed. Your participation is absolutely crucial.

The church has too many Tekoite nobles. The Tekoite nobles are recorded in Nehemiah were the rebuilding of the wall was taking place. We read, "Next to them the Tekoites made repairs; but their nobles did not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord" (Nehemiah 3:5). That ought not to be us.

So, from our main passage in **1 Corinthians 12** – we learn the following:

- A body is made up of many different parts – verses 12, 14, 20
- Each body part is necessary – verses 21 to 24a
- A body part is not a whole Body – verse 17

**Ministry begins with the decision to love the brothers and sisters in your local church as Christ has loved you.**

Ministry begins with a 'one another' mindset from the 'one another' commands. These commands are all aimed at strengthening other believers in their discipleship – in their following Christ and loving Him. Your spiritual health is integrally tied to your life in the local church. If you deny this, you deny the Body Life teaching of 1 Corinthians 12.

So remember:

1. Be present when your local church meets.
2. Pray for the church.
3. Participate in the church.