

Series: On Purpose

January 22, 2017

## **Title: The Body of Christ**

### **[Slide 1]**

**Text: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31**

## **The One and the Many**

### **Stem cells:**

Paul writes:

### **[Slide 2]**

*1 Corinthians 12:12 NIV*

*Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.*

Then, as now, people marveled at the amazing diversity present in the human body: eyes, ears, skin, hair, hands, feet. All so different, yet all part of the same person. It is the mystery of unity in diversity.

**[Slide 3]** By Seans Potato Business (derivative of the source cited above) - Blastocyst.png, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3306843>

This unity in diversity began in the first hours after you were conceived. 4-5 days after conception, you were a tiny sphere of perhaps 150 cells called a blastocyst. Nestled inside this sphere was an even tinier mass of cells that would become every single part of *you*. This *inner cell mass*, as it is called, was comprised of *stem cells*. Each one of these cells had the potential to become any one of the more than 200 cell types in your body. From them would come everything from your nervous system to your skeleton, your skin to your internal organs.

### **[Slide 4]**

An each one of these stem cells contained exactly the same genetic code – your unique DNA. In other words, while they would all go their separate ways as you developed in the womb, they would pass along that same DNA to every cell they created. Unity in diversity.

And this is precisely Paul's point when he talks about what it means to be a Christian. We are God's New Creation – living right here in the middle of a world that has been corrupted by sin and death. Together, we are the Body of Christ. We're as diverse as the many different organs of the human body. And yet we are all part of the *same* body – the Body of Christ.

### **New Exodus people:**

In the next verse Paul explains how it is that we came to be God's New Creation – how He birthed us into his family:

#### **[Slide 5]**

*1 Corinthians 12:13 NIV*

*For we were all baptized in the 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.*

This is Exodus language once again. Just a few chapters earlier Paul had described our connection to the first Exodus out of Egypt in terms of being *baptized* and *drinking* from a rock. Speaking of Israel, he writes:

#### **[Slide 6]**

*1 Corinthians 10:2-4 NIV*

*They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.*

Crossing the Red Sea was their baptism. It was the birthing of a new people. And drinking from the rock that Moses struck with his staff was symbolic of being nurtured by God's presence in their wilderness journey.

Paul says that the same is true for you and me:

- We all became God's children – part of His New Creation – the same way: we put our trust in Jesus' death on the cross for us. His baptism in His death is re-enacted in our baptism as His followers.
- We are "baptized" in another way as well: Paul wrote that Israel was "baptized in the cloud." The "cloud" was the actual presence of God in

His glory and power. Isaiah explains that this cloud was in fact a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, sent to lead and nourish Israel.

- Now Paul says that on our New Exodus journey the same Spirit is present. We are baptized into the Spirit, just as Israel was baptized into the cloud of God's presence. And we are nourished by the Spirit.
- Jesus Himself described the Holy Spirit as a "river of living water" that will flow out of us, just as water flowed from the rock face to nourish Israel in the desert.

We were all conceived in the same life-giving moment when Jesus died and rose again. And no matter how different we are in terms of race or social status, we are all equal in the Body of Christ.

## **Same only Different!**

### **Not one part, but many:**

Stem cells start out with the potential to become any of the more than 200 cell types present in your body. But then something very important happens: future generations of stem cells become "specialized" to develop and regenerate specific organs. Bone marrow stem cells, for instance, only create blood cells. They do not create kidney cells or neurons. Every organ in the body must do its work if the body is to survive and thrive.

That is why Paul makes our unique giftings and callings his primary focus in his description of Christians as the Body of Christ. As he writes:

### **[Slide 6]**

*1 Corinthians 12:14 NIV*

*Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.*

### **The power of "many"**

Paul explains that just because our organs and appendages are very different from each other, it does not mean that they are not part of the same body!

### **[Slide 7]**

*1 Corinthians 12:15-16 NIV*

*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.*

Elevating one organ above all the others or saying that only one organ qualifies as "the body" creates a monster!

**[Slide 8]**

*1 Corinthians 12:17 NIV*

*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?*

Instead, he writes that God orchestrated the amazing diversity of cells and organs according to His perfect plan:

**[Slide 9]**

*1 Corinthians 12:18 NIV*

*But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.*

Think of it as "the power of many."

**No division!**

I've only had one broken bone: my big toe. Doesn't sound like a big deal. Nothing like a broken arm or broken leg. Except when you try to walk around. It was amazing how much I took my big toe for granted – until it didn't work right!

Paul points out that no organ can say to another, "I don't need you!" The body only works if *all* the organs are in good health. And parts of the body that seem weak or embarrassing are actually even more worthy of honor than others that seem more important. He explains:

**[Slide 10]**

*1 Corinthians 12:24b-26 NIV*

*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 honored, every part rejoices with it.*

Sort of like my broken toe: my whole body suffered along with a part of my body that I hadn't given the time of day before I injured it. And my whole body felt better when my toe healed.

## **The Body of Christ**

### **"You are the body of Christ"**

Paul sums up his argument by saying:

#### **[Slide 11]**

*1 Corinthians 12:27 NIV*

*Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

Each one of us is like a member or organ of the body. We're all part of Christ's Body, regardless of our differences. We're all indispensable. If one of us is suffering, the whole Body suffers. We need each other. That's the way God put us together.

### **God's handiwork:**

Paul gives some examples of the different parts of the Body of Christ:

#### **[Slide 12]**

*1 Corinthians 12:28-31 NIV*

*And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues.*

#### **[Slide 13]**

*Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.*

Lots of different ways to serve. Lots of different functions. But remember that it takes them all to make the Body of Christ, and none are inferior to the others. They all work together and care for each other in order for Jesus the King to bring God's good rule into the world.

### **Finding your place in the Body of Christ:**

We all know what it's like to have our foot go to sleep on us. We go to get up and – oops, the foot isn't responding. In fact, we can't even feel the floor. Try walking on a foot that's asleep and you could fall over! What a difference when your foot "wakes up" and comes back online. Only then can you fully function.

The same thing can happen with our spiritual gifts in the Body of Christ. Without us, some part of the Body of Christ just can't function the way it is supposed to. But when we're fully connected and fully functioning, God can be powerfully present in the world.

We are the Body of Christ. Each one of us is a special part of that Body. God has placed us in the Body of Christ with special gifts, interests, and experiences. You aren't the same as everyone else. There is no need to compare yourself to others. You are God's special gift to the Body of Christ.

And that means discovering *how it is that God wants to work through you*. It means finding a place to serve and use your gifts and talents, your experiences and interests. It may mean stepping out into something brand new.

### **[Slide 14]**

Our ministry fair today is an opportunity for you to:

- Discover a place where God wants you to serve.
- Sign up to learn more about a ministry.
- Become part of a team that is making a difference in our church and community.

You are a vital part of the Body of Christ here at Church of the Rock. We'll never be what God meant for us to be without you. And with each of us connected and serving we will help bring about the answer to Jesus' prayer that God's will be done "on earth as it is in heaven."

## **LIFE Group Lesson for “The Body of Christ”**

### **Ice Breaker:**

- Share about a time when you were part of a group or team that accomplished something none of you could have ever done all by yourself.
- What part did you play?

### **God-given diversity:**

- God has made each one of us with unique interests and characteristics.
- For instance:
  - Some of us prefer to get things done: we’re more task-oriented.
  - Some of us prefer to build relationships: we’re more people-oriented.
  - Some of us focus on the big picture; details bore us.
  - Some of us focus on the details, making sure things get done right.
- Which best describes you?

### **Working together, or not?**

- A good example of just how different people are is found in the story of Paul and Barnabas:
  - Paul was definitely Big Picture and Task-Oriented. He was out to spread the Good News to the entire Roman Empire.
  - Barnabas was nicknamed “The Son of Compassion.” What does that tell you about his personality?
  - Their differences came to a head when they took a young man named John Mark with them on their second missionary journey.
  - Mark got homesick and bailed out on them.
  - When the next mission trip came along, Barnabas wanted to give Mark a second chance – hence the Son of Compassion!
  - Paul, on the other hand, would have nothing to do with Mark. He had failed to fulfill the task the last time around.
  - The sad result was that the powerful team of Paul and Barnabas broke up over the disagreement!
- Years later, Paul writes about how valuable Mark has become to him. I wonder what happened to change Paul’s mind?

- Could it be that he came to see how much he needed the balancing presence of a Barnabas to offset his drive and criticalness?
- God has a way of putting us together with other members of the Body of Christ who have different gifts and points of view. Only then can Christ's Body function as it was meant to be.
- No one type of person or particular spiritual gift is the only right one. It takes all of us to be effective for God.

**Your gifts?**

- What are your spiritual gifts?
- Are you using them for God's work at this time?
- If not, what might be holding you back?

**Share and Pray:**

- Pray with others in your group for each other's needs.
- And don't forget to give thanks for answers to prayer!