

# Appointed Interdependence – *1 Corinthians 12:15-31*

**Introduction** – Last time we saw that the diversity of the members of the body of Christ is a design feature and not a flaw, and that it is the work of one Spirit in one body. Paul now continues, showing both the strengths of this design as well as the temptations, and particularly the temptations that were being realized in Corinth. As he does so, it becomes clear that individual giftedness is a special appointment by the Spirit and that the appointments require an interdependence in order for the body to function and flourish.

**A Body, not a Monstrosity** (vv15-19) – We have been baptized by the Holy Spirit, set, or appointed, as members of the body of Christ (vv12-14, 18). The foot and the hand are as far apart on the same body as can be, and so we can have a tendency to think that member over there, so completely different from me, is not connected to me. Or we might look with envy at what that other part can do (an ear has no way of seeing, an eye no way of hearing) and conclude we must not be a part of the body if that member over there is. Instead, we are to notice and rejoice in the work of the Spirit, who appoints us to different functions, gifts us in different ways, places us in different areas, and makes it impossible to be successful in the work we have been called to do all by ourselves.

There are two temptations here. One is to think that because I am so diverse from everyone else I must not really be in the body. I'm not like them. The other is to think that because they are so diverse from me that they must not be in the body. I don't like/prefer them. Maybe nobody was actually openly saying that at Corinth (or here at Trinity Church), but there are plenty of times that they were acting like it (i.e. 1 Cor 3:3, 11:18).

**Do We Need “*That*” Part?** (vv20-26) – There are many members (and they are really, really different) yet one body (v20). Think about how well your body works together and how quickly we find out how much we need a part when it stops functioning (v21). There can appear to be a hierarchy of gifts, offices, or functions, and yet those which appear to be weaker (possibly the internal organs) it turns out are indispensable (v22). As an example, maybe he is referring to a quieter member who is given to much prayer (like Anna in Luke 2:36-38) or serves behind the scenes in a less honorable way (v23) but without whom the church can't flourish. The unpresentable parts (probably the sexual organs) need to be clothed and in doing so are more glorious in their presentableness (vv23-24). The point is that apparent weakness or appearance does not reflect how important the members of the body are.

Because God has arranged the body as an interdependent organism in which diversity is essential, the differences between the members should not lead to schism, but to caring for one another. This means that we provide the “*same care*” for one another by providing one another with different care, according to the individual member's needs (v25). In addition, we share the same spiritual nervous system. You know how your whole body responds to a stubbed toe! Therefore, there is not to only be tolerance of the differences with the community but a gracious and compassionate synergy in which all the members share one another's sufferings and glories (v26). It turns out you do need to be connected to “*that*” other member.

**Another Ad Hoc List** (vv27-31) – Paul says it the other way now (v27, compare with v20) and so his point is going to be that while we are one body, we are individual members, we are differently gifted by the Spirit and we are supposed to be. The list of gifts is not exactly like vv8-10, nor like lists found in Romans and Ephesians. This reinforces the idea that these are not exhaustive lists, nor that each and everyone of us must identify with one of these gifts. In fact, Paul's point was first of all to make sure the Corinthians stopped demanding that everyone have the same gift (probably tongues) and instead, place a higher esteem upon the “*better, more useful*” gifts (v31a). He then tees up Chapter 13 with the phrase, “*And yet I show you a more excellent way*” (v31b).

**A Range of Ministries** – God appoints (v28) which means we don't volunteer. Apostles and prophets were appointed during the foundational work (including the canon of Scripture, the Spirit-Word) of establishing the New Covenant church of Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:20) and then gifted teachers build upon that (and continue to do so). We noted before the gifts of miracles and healings which accompanied the apostolic age (2 Cor 12:12). But there are also the gifts of helps and “*governments*” that addressed the ongoing organizing, care, and structuring of the body. The gift of tongues, as we saw, was the ability to speak the gospel in other

languages unknown to the speaker. The Corinthian church had placed too much emphasis on tongues which is why Paul probably mentions it last. God doesn't give the same gifts to everyone (v29), but He equips each local church with gifts that it will need to accomplish the work God has called her to.

**Some Local Implications** – For us, in our situation, in our day and age...

**We are an Organism, not a Club** – In our individualistic atmosphere of 21<sup>st</sup> Century America, this is hard for us to fathom and live out. We can drive to our location here once a week (or less often), pay our “dues” of time and money, and be gone, away from everyone else. Imagine if your liver acted that way.

**Don't Have to Be Friends with Everyone, But...** - It's nigh impossible in a church our size for you to be friends with everyone here. However, our interdependence demands that we make and cultivate connections of all kinds within the body – and that we are aware of that spiritual nervous system, responding to it as we should.

**Did You Notice a Weakness or a Need Here?** – If you notice a glaring hole in the work of our local church, it might very well be that you are the member of the body to do something about it. That may be why you notice it and that ear or hand over there doesn't.

**Remember the Point of the Body: It's not About You** – So don't look for the church to be meeting your needs first. Rather, be looking for you to be meeting the needs of the body. As you do, as we do, we will be knit together more and more. We will then be the body of Christ sent to worship, evangelize, baptize, disciple, and create a culture of the New Humanity. That's the point (Matt 28:16-20).

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*Dave Hatcher – May 5, 2019*