

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. (Rom 12:4-5)

Brother Sam gave us a wonderful exegetical work on the duty to excise out of the body those who will not walk with us in an orderly fashion. I want to focus on one specific quote out of that sermon to lay the foundation for our discussion today:

“Through that work, the Lord will exercise each of us, and will make manifest when a person among us is “failing of the grace of God”

There are many ways that the Lord can and does make these things manifest to us, but I believe the most incredible and important way is through this miraculous bringing together of a disparate group of personalities and people into a body.

We talk about ‘the body’ a lot. It’s central to how the Church comes to be a shining beacon of light in the world. These are not the days of the Prophets, where Elijah or Samuel largely stood alone in the public eye. In the early days of the New Testament Church, where the Apostles travelled to bring people together and organized them as churches, the body was preeminent; neither the individuals who made it up, nor the Apostle who founded it were a primary focal point. Consider how Paul’s epistles begin:

“Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:” (1Co 1:2)

“Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia:” (Gal 1:1-2)

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:” (Eph 1:1)

“Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (1Th 1:1)

Paul writes to the body in each of the locations he corresponds with, not calling out an elder or individual of great faith but addressing them all in his greetings. Dealing with individuals is much easier than dealing with a group, but there is only one individual that deserves the preeminence – our King Jesus Christ.

It is important for us to deeply consider the idea of ‘the body’ and what behavior and thinking that should drive. If we frame our thinking every day around the idea that we

are not just individuals, but truly a part of a body, the ideas of considering one another, entreatment, forgiveness, unity and compaction become easier to not just understand, but to act upon. Action is, as always, the key, because these are not academic exercise we are engaged in.

The metaphor of 'the body' is perhaps one of the most elegant and powerful of all the metaphors in Scripture. It is powerful because it is immediately relatable, and immediately understandable. But at the same time, it is very, very deep and offers ample opportunities for study and furthering our spiritual walk. As I plumb this, I'm not certain it is possible to fully understand it because as I consider it I keep finding new things I'd not thought about before. It's a thing of great beauty to me.

Paul explains this in the greatest depth in 1 Corinthians, so we'll start with a look at this

"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. 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." (1Co 12:12-26)

This is among the most elegant passages of Scripture I think you can find. Let's break this down and look at it more closely.

- *For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.*

This is the key element to remember whenever considering the body we are all members of – Christ is our head. While a body has lots of different pieces and

parts, there is only one head. A headless body takes no action, makes no movement, etc. This is the reason why it is so abundantly clear that so-called Christianity today is not a global church – they won't acknowledge and follow the actual and literal head of the Christian church. You can't have your head doing one thing in one place and your body someplace else doing a completely different thing. It doesn't work that way, and we all know that.

If we aren't working toward those things Christ has instructed His church in, through His word, you aren't part of His body. Just labeling yourself a Christian doesn't make you one. Saying 'I believe in Christ' doesn't make you a Christian. If you're not willing to acknowledge His being your head and following His ways, you aren't part of that body.

- *“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”*

This doesn't happen by chance. This isn't the Kiwanis club or a professional association where people just have some common interests and happen to like one another. This is a spiritual, mystical thing if you will, that comes together through our baptism into the body, regardless of what kind of person you are, your race, background or life experience. This isn't a Frankenstein's monster, either, even though it is made up of varied and different parts – it is a work of the Spirit – elegant, purposeful, and full of meaning.

This is something we must remember, that we are not here by our own initiative or ambition. We are here because we have been made to drink into one Spirit; these pieces and parts are here by design and intent, and each should be considered in that light. Even those who bring in heresies are here by design and purpose of God. That should help us to regulate our thinking.

- *“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.”*

This is where the meat of the metaphor comes under our consideration, and where our understanding should be easiest. We all have a body, and while we might not understand fully how it works, it is a great and glorious thing that the

Lord has created. Similarly, it may not be entirely clear how we receive our calling and come together in the fashion we have, but is it not a glorious thing to behold?

Our parts all have a role to play, and the roles are many and varied. It is, I think, impossible to declare any one of them as being more important than another. Would you rather lose your sight or your hearing? How would your life change if you lost a limb? Our bodies are built in a specific and spectacular way, and you would want to lose no part of it.

That's **precisely** how we should think about and behave toward each other. In every thought, every word, every interaction, looking to care for each other as we do our own body parts, because we are all parts of the same body.

There is more here than just the matter of gifts or skills. Here is how the Lord helps us to look "diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God". It isn't just standing back and watching each other, that's not what 'look' means.

The body is *how* we look diligently, how we know if anyone is failing of God's grace – if we are fully connected to each other **as a body** then it is easy to see and know when someone is in need of help. We know when our joints are out of place, our eyes aren't working, our body is not functioning the way we need it to. If we are properly knit together as one, as the men of Israel were then, then those times when we are out of joint become more easily apparent.

"So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, knit together as one man." (Jdg 20:11)

If we knit together not just in times of trouble, but at all times, those instances when one of our members is suffering from a problem are immediately discovered and I posit even predictable to the point of proactive prevention. Those things become easier to address, provide corrective guidance against, and are less painful to bring back into alignment.

I specifically say they are less painful, because like a body going through growing pains or rehab, there is still pain. Many of us have trained and competed as athletes, and we know that the pain that we work through delivers results if we approach it with the right attitude. We know that growth and advancement does not come without that pain. Excising heresies from our midst may create pain, because as I hope you recall, to excise means to cut out. If we are cutting something out of our body, we must expect and be ready to withstand some pain, with the sure knowledge that we will come out the other side of that pain the better for it.

But it starts with being a body. The Spirit brings us together but it doesn't stop with that or absolve us from having to perform the work necessary to overcome our pride and selfishness and elevate others above ourselves. Without the behaving as a body, that growth simply doesn't happen.

The body is a wonderfully complex system of organs, cells, vessels, bones, muscles, synapses, nerves, etc. When was the last time you told your eyes to blink, or your heart to beat, or the synapses of your brain to fire? Can we become so tightly knit together that we operate in the same manner? I have faith that we must, and that we can. I don't know how that works precisely, but I am certain that it will because all the elect of God, those who were selected and written in the Book of Life before time began, those souls are bound together in the body with **Him** as their head. That's how I know it will happen. It must for Christ to gather His elect to their calling and complete the work of redemption.

If we aren't clear in our own hearts and minds that this has to happen, it won't be accomplished with us. I'm not saying that we can thwart the purposes of God, or anything like that. But like anything, we have responsibilities and duties to fulfill. Just because it might be difficult to understand the deep details of how we could possibly be so close to one another that we literally operate like our own bodies, doesn't mean we don't act in faith to do our part. If we won't do those necessary things, the Lord will build His body out of another group of individuals – we are not a necessary part of the equation if we will not obey Him. Never forget that.

- *“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.*

Here we have the most direct instruction in regard to our behavior toward one another, and another way that this metaphor is so delightful. Our bonding and binding together is precisely like a body in the sense that there are by human estimation, more and less desirable parts.

Not everyone can be a set of sparkling green eyes or a bright room-brightening smile, now can they? If we were all eyes or all smiles, two things that people find to be points of attraction, how would we get anywhere? We couldn't breathe, we couldn't eat, we wouldn't be a living entity to put it simply.

And so it is with us as a church body. This portion of the passage is what makes it clear Paul is not speaking just about spiritual gifts. He speaks to honour, not

just gifts. That word translated honour is Strong's 5092, which has a primary definition of a value or price, not the typical sense where it means esteem or glory.

There are two key elements to this, I think. First, is that element of value. Every part of the body has a price that can be applied to it, especially those that you might think are less valuable. You might not think some ugly or some smelly part of your body has as much value as your sparkly eyes, but it has a value regardless. Which leads to the second key – you don't get to assign the value because you didn't build the body.

God has put all the pieces of your body together, whether you like your colon and see value in it or not, it's there, and it has a purpose. You might not understand what your appendix is for, but the purpose of it is known to God, and you don't have any reason or right to call it unnecessary or value-less because of your understanding.

So, too, the people of the church body. You might look at someone in exasperation when you're working to help them with something for seemingly the millionth time and wonder if things would be better if they weren't here. That's an understandable thought because we're humans and we have moments of weakness. It isn't the right thought to have, though. If a person is here, a part of this body, having made a profession of faith and evidencing grace, no matter how weak you might think they are, no matter how frustrating their weaknesses might be to you, they have value. And here's the lesson – they likely have more value than you do to the body.

Value isn't measured by our standards of beauty, going back to the metaphor and its use of the phrase 'comely parts'. God doesn't build a church body based on outward appearances, He builds it based on His providential purposes and what is needed to achieve those purposes in each generation, in each place that body has been placed.

You have here the equivalent in the church body of having a 'help meet'

"And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." (Gen 2:18)

Should there be any surprise that these are tied together?

"For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church." (Eph 5:31-32)

The union of husband and wife is a mystery that represent this very body – Christ and His church. If that union is built to be a help meet for one another, is Christ’s body not going to be built similarly? This is yet another example of how nothing is coincidental with God. He has established these things from the creation to fit together and in blessed simplicity make perfect sense. The fact that God has placed all the people here for specific purposes should fully temper our thinking about and our actions toward one another. You don’t like one person as much as another? You don’t see this person as very valuable? Stop placing your value assessment on them and try to see them as the Lord does – a critical member of this body.

This is why Paul draws the distinction between the comely and uncomely, and calls out that our uncomely parts have “more abundant comeliness”. That word ‘comely’ isn’t used much in the English language anymore, but it doesn’t just mean pretty to look at, though when you do see it, that’s generally how it will be used in modern English. The word can mean any quality you value as good or in high standing. In this context, it can mean endowed with spiritual gifts, or it can mean having other favorable qualities – an ability to speak, to deal with people, being super-smart, etc. It can apply to any quality that you, when you look at a person add to or subtract from the value you assign them.

Those parts – those people – that you assign little value to in your estimation and in your comparative assessment against yourself are likely one of the most important pieces in God’s estimation and valuation. They do things on the inside that you don’t account for and don’t properly value, in all likelihood. Think of it this way – you can survive pretty easily without your hand or your eye, but how about your pancreas or liver? The hand gets all the glory, able to write and create things, while the liver just works in the background getting rid of all the old gross blood cells that are dead or damaged. No glory there, just lots of critical and dirty work.

Would you judge the liver uncritical to your life? I should think not. Well, then you shouldn’t judge any part of this body as not critical. That’s not a simple or natural thing to do all the time, but as you see in this passage, an important duty we have to God. Think of it this way:

“What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” (Mar 10:9)

This may not be a very traditional connection of this verse, but it is applicable. In context, it is obviously speaking about marriage, but have we not seen in this passage that the body is something God has joined together? Paul warns specifically about schism – which is a split or a division, a dividing asunder – schism created by that assignment of value you give in your heart and mind to

varying members of the body.

This concept of schism connects heavily into the idea of being a respecter of persons. Typically we look at that with an eye toward how you treat or deal with two people, playing them off each other. I want to point you at a specific element of that which this metaphor lends itself to – your view of yourself in juxtaposition to other members. Elevating ourselves above each other is a massive trap for us always, especially as we work and help each other overcome our sins. It becomes easy to look down on a person and devalue them when you dig into their sins with them.

“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” (1Co 10:12)

That ‘standeth’ carries in it the idea that in your view of the world you stand taller than others – you have elevated your value to be greater than the others around you. That thinking leads to schism.

The key to keeping that from happening, besides the obvious work on humility and meekness, is to keep front and center in our view that none of us, not a single one of us, is the head of this body. We all play lesser, subservient parts to the head.

“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” (Eph 4:15-16)

Here again we are reminded that the whole body is fitly joined together under the head. Again, we are reminded that none of us is the head. That should bring us into a proper state of heart and mind, if we consider the service our head performed for us, which is a service none of us could have performed for ourselves, much less anyone else.

- *And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.”*

Here’s the key to executing on all these emotional and difficult issues – being so close to each other that whether it’s pain or exultation, we feel what each other feels. It’s more than empathy, but empathy is a start. We empathize with the struggles, afflictions, and general hardships of even our enemies. We’re human after all.

This suffering and rejoicing is more than simple empathy, it is genuine connectedness in such a way most people can't understand. I'm not certain I can articulate or explain it. It is, after all, a mystery. There is one piece of behavior and thought that helps this connection build, and that is embracing growth.

We have conflicts, we have misunderstandings, because we're human. But if we can embrace those times when we're learning new things about one another and learning to behave spiritually and not carnally we learn from the moments and our connections grow stronger.

When we are in a bad spot with someone, looking at it as a learning opportunity not a conflict or a fight, we tear old behaviors and old habits down and build new, better ones – that happens if we keep this passage and others like it in mind while we're caught up in the moment.

Rach tells me that when you exercise and build muscle, it requires that old muscle be torn. That's what we have to do. We can't just be static or satisfied with our relationships with each other, we must look to grow and improve them when we can. That doesn't mean you get to just go around beating on people, calling it 'counsel' or picking at people constantly to come to your way of thinking. It means more submission, more patience, more open and honest realization that you aren't the best, the smartest, the most valuable, the holiest, the most righteous, etc. It means trying to make yourself better by first helping others in humility and meekness.

I think the mindset of learning and growth is very important for us, because bodies should grow, not necessarily in size, but in strength, resiliency, and in this context, faith. There is a faith this body has that isn't just a sum of all our individual faith. We must have faith that there is a body, mustn't we? If there is no body, so much of our faith is of no effect, so I think there must be.

I want to make two final points about this beautifully poetic metaphor.

First, don't start thinking about what body part you are. That is strictly not the point, and plays right into the opposite way of thinking this is encouraging us to. If you're sitting here thinking, 'wow, I do lots of work, I must be hands' or 'I can quote lots of scripture, I must be the voice', you're looking at this entirely the wrong way.

I am quite certain that not one of our body parts gives a single thought to what they are and how they compare to the other parts. They simply work together. We've all watched young children gain their coordination and as they learn to move get their arms and legs into sync. But they aren't having to tell their hearts to beat or their lungs to fill with air. They don't have to think about and coordinate with their stomach and

intestines to get food digested, any more than we as adults do.

As “many members, yet but one body”, no one member should spend one thought about what member they are, spending that energy instead on the working of the body. It is easy for us to let our thoughts wander in these paths, but it is dangerous and wasteful behavior.

The second closing point I want to make is one that brings me a great deal of contentment when I think about what we need to do and how do we go about preparing for the return of our King, and I want you to consider it – bodies have a natural inclination toward healing.

This is a mysterious thing, the idea of all these different people being stitched together (and who knows, maybe there are missing members even now) and forming up a body that is unified and operates as a single entity. Because it is a body built and headed up by our Lord and Christ, it cannot be destroyed. As we encounter difficulties, growing pains, afflictions, mis-steps, etc., we can take a firm and lasting hold on this thought – as long as we are serving God and not ourselves or some false idol, we will heal from whatever comes our way. There is no permanent damage a false brother or sister can do, no enemy that can mortally wound the body.

We can't be arrogant or think more of ourselves than we ought, but as we work our way, every day, closer to the return of our King, we can be assured that we are brought together, stitched together, tempered together in precisely the way God wants us built, and we can heal from our mistakes if we keep ourselves properly focused on serving Him.

We must be properly thankful for one another not just in words, making vain apologies or rote “I love you's” and platitudes. We must be a body in deed and tightly, inseparably tempered, together in thought and action, operating with a unity of mind in everything we do. How we were yesterday is not good enough for tomorrow, we must improve. We must be willing to learn and grow. Let us endeavor to make progress every day with one another until the return of our King, that we might be welcomed into the wedding supper of the Lamb and not found speechless

“And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.” (Mat 22:12)