

“The Borg or the Body”

Ephesians 4: 1-16

I Corinthians 12:1-11

Ephesians 4

¹I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”

⁹(In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) ¹¹And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (ESV)

I Corinthians 12

¹Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. ²You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. ³Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit. ⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. (ESV)

If you've looked at your order of worship sheet, the title of the message, “The Borg or the Body” might make you wonder where on earth is the boy going? I wanted by contrast to try to show us something that the body is not. The “Borg” comes from a science fiction series, if you're not familiar with it, called “Star Trek.” In Tommy's absence I had to refer to a movie somewhere. There is a “Star Trek” movie called “First Contact” in which the Borg is the great enemy. The episode, however, that the Borg first appeared in is called “Q Who?” It's in that episode that this tyrant super-space person (whatever) transports Jean-Luc Picard and his ship to this other galaxy to show them that if they're going to boast about being able to go to worlds beyond, they're going to see how quickly they're going to crash and burn – how they're not really prepared to go where no man has gone before and conquer the universe. In fact, at the end of this first episode, “Q Who?” in “Star Trek: The Next Generation,” Jean-Luc Picard basically gives up and says to Q, “Take us back. We're not ready for this.” And that's in essence what happens. This foreign being (whatever) Q transports the starship back to the Alpha quadrant. The one mission of the Borg (they are this cyber kinetic race people-thing that's part human and part machine) is to assimilate all things that exist—life, people, planets, technology. The slogan throughout this is, “Resistance is futile.” You cannot stop the Borg. They're going to keep consuming and assimilating until nothing else exists. Now, if you're of a younger generation (I mean younger in the other way) think about George Orwell. Think about his book, “1984,” because in essence it was the same theme that what was facing man with technology was a totalitarian rule that ultimately was going to destroy all of mankind. These themes constantly come up in the narration of literature because there is constant fear within men that man left to himself, given his own limitations and everything else, is either going to lose who he is as man, as a person, as a human, or he's going to just give up because resistance is futile. What's the point?

I bring this up to cast a contrast to what the scriptures teach about the church about the body of Christ, because in many ways people in our generation look at the church as a bit of a “Borg” institution that only exists to consume and assimilate your life. They look at the church as a man-made institution that no longer values people but sees them as commodities, to almost be bought and sold at the whims of whatever the local church so desires. I want us to leave this place clearly knowing that we are not an institution of that type. We're certainly not the Borg. We are the body of Christ. We do not exist to simply assimilate people. When people come here they're not to lose their identity of who they are. They are, in fact, because of Christ, to discover the essence of what it means to be part of something bigger than themselves in this glorious plan of

redemption when God has chosen to use our frailties to reach other men just like us who are lost and fallen. I want to bring about this comparison by simply laying out some truths about the body of Christ and hopefully give us some encouragement to give some answers to those that simply see us as another institution that's just there, that just exists, "You guys just come and go and you don't even maintain your own identity or your own self worth anymore because you live for the Church." No, we live for Christ but we're part of His body. Let's jump in first of all in I Corinthians chapter 12. Let's look at a passage I didn't get to, verse 12.

¹² *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. (ESV)*

The apostle Paul in several places in scripture makes reference to the fact, using this metaphor, that the church is the body of Christ. He uses the same metaphor in Ephesians chapter 1 when he's talking about all that God has done from all eternity to work out His plan and His purpose in the church. He says in Ephesians 1:23 that the church "is his body, the fullness of him who fills all things." Think about that for a moment. The Church, you and I, the living body of Christ, are an expression of the fullness of Christ.

This week we've had the kickoff with the Winter Olympics and one of the major themes that's been happening (you'll hear it over the next two weeks) is the unity that comes about through the spirit of sports. Sports is wonderful, I'm not putting it down or anything like that (I enjoy watching it myself) but there's only so far that being a participant—of a human organization or activity or anything else—can take you. But when you give your life to Christ, you become part of the body of Christ that will live forever. Paul says in I Corinthians 12:27, "Now you are the body of Christ . . ." Think about that. Collectively there is something unique and awesome about the presence of God with His people. Paul says in Ephesians chapter 2:21-22 that, "The Holy Spirit dwells within us. We have become temples of the Holy Spirit, but collectively we are being built up into this holy temple in which we are to worship and praise our God and sing his praises forever." The picture that Paul paints is that the life of Christ is flowing through us, invigorating us, empowering us. His transforming life - transforming us so that more and more we're dying to ourselves and living for Him. Now, when I get that image from the Bible it does a lot to encourage me with my own personal journey because we're part of something much bigger than ourselves.

Secondly, not only is the church the body of Christ, we need to understand as Paul lays it out that the head of that body is Christ. Christ is head of the church. Ephesians chapter 1 that I made reference to earlier says this in verses 22 and 23, "God put all things under his feet (speaking of Christ). God put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." Christ is our head. He is the one that is in control of His body. Whenever one of us starts to try to take that control, the body of Christ grows weak because we're wearing the wrong head. The scriptures teach this because they want us to understand that the authority of Christ, the headship of Christ, the leadership of Christ is what empowers the church as the Holy Spirit brings those things into our lives. One of the side benefits of that is that it takes it all off us because He's the head of His church, we're not. We don't have to pretend to be. I know sometimes as a pastor you kind of slip over into that temptation.

When pastoring a church in Australia, my wife and I lived right beside the church, literally. Our manse was like from here to the organ, from the church building. I was out working on the car in the driveway between our manse and the church building, and a guy came by and said, "I need to talk to the priest." He said that because the name of our congregation was "Saint Andrews Presbyterian." He mistakenly thought we were Catholic. But he said, "I need to talk to the priest." I said, "Well, he's not here." "Where is he?" I said, "He's in heaven." He said, "No, no, no, not that priest. I want to talk to whoever is head of the church here." I said, "Well, He's still in heaven." People are not satisfied with actually understanding a Biblical doctrine, the headship of Christ over the church, but it's where health begins in the life of any congregation.

On March 30, 1977, my wife and I were driving home from a prayer meeting on a Wednesday night, and we stopped at a stop sign. A drunk driver who was going 55 m.p.h. rear-ended our car, pushed us across two lanes of traffic - crumpled up. I was driving a '64 Valiant and back then cars were actually made of metal, but it crumpled all the way back to the back seat. I had my arm around Gloria and she was okay, but I suffered a lot of neck injury. The consequence of that was that over the years I've had five different disc operations, including three cervical surgeries. I know what it is when your head isn't screwed on right. There's a physician that's part of this fellowship that's working on me right now, and he's trying to help that get realigned. It must bring particular joy to know that he's been part of helping a Presbyterian minister get his head screwed on right. But if the head isn't there and if it's not aligned and it's not correctly setting upon the shoulders, nothing else flows health-wise to the body. So it is with Christ. Constantly remember that He is our head. He's the head of the church and before Him we have to live. Not only are we the body and Christ is the head, Paul says in these chapters that the body of Christ is made up of many members. I Corinthians chapter 12, verses 12 and 14,

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. . . ¹⁴ For the body does not consist of one member but of many. (ESV)

There are many parts, yet there's one body. Now, you are the body of Christ and individually members of it; one body but many members of it. That, too, is an awesome thing because, as Paul says in I Corinthians 12, that brings equal value to every member of the body of Christ. Look in verse 17 of I Corinthians 12.

¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? (ESV)

Every member of the body is important for the health and functioning of the whole body. Paul says in Ephesians 4 that as Christ has poured out His gifts upon the church He has done so in order that she might become healthy and strong and grown and mature. That happens as we speak the truth in love, and it happens as every supporting ligament, every joint does its work. It's only then that the body of Christ is growing and healthy and strong. Our hands function as the hands but they also have individual members we call fingers. Those individual fingers all have joints. If any part of that joint in our fingers freezes or locks up with arthritis or injury it causes great pain to our whole body, not just to our hand. So it is, Paul says, with the body of Christ. But to restore health we have to remember we're in this together individually as members of the body of which Christ is the head.

Fourthly, not only are we the body of Christ and not only is Christ the head of the body and not only are we individually members of it, but we are different as members by design – God's design. I Corinthians 12 verse 11 says this,

¹¹ All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. (ESV)

This is another one of those awesome passages that speak about how God has chosen by design to gift and empower his people to specific ministry functions so that the whole of the body of Christ be healthy. When I was converted, I was 19 years old. I had no idea that what God was doing in my life was a significant part of the lives of anybody else because I only knew that my life was changing and getting drastically altered. I was grateful for that but I had no idea that what God was doing in me was significant in what He was doing in the body of Christ. Let me give you a picture. You know all these young ones we had up front a few minutes ago [children's choirs]? Everyone that God touches is a significant member of the family of God and the body of Christ. Their singing today contributed to our worship and there's not one cry that God does not hear - anywhere. God designs us for service. One body, individual members but given different graces, different ministries. Look in I Corinthians 12:4. There are varieties of gifts but the same spirit, varieties of service but the same Lord, varieties of activities but the same God who empowers them all in every one with different gifts, different activities, different services. But God has this grand design in view. Like that illustration that many of you would know of and have personally experienced when you look at the underside of a tapestry with all of those broken, tied knots. But from the top it's beautiful. God designs us for His purpose, and empowers us so that we will be given the grace to accomplish the specific ministry God wants us to do. What if you woke up tomorrow morning and instead of saying, "Oh, it's Monday," you thought, "God has something for me to do today. Give me grace and power and wisdom and strength to do it."

Not only are we the body of Christ and Christ is the head, and we're members of it and different by design, but fifthly, God arranges us in that design pattern (if you will) in particular ways, in particular ministries, for particular times as he so desires. You are not here today by accident. You're here today by God's sovereign placing of you. It reminds me what is taught by Solomon in Ecclesiastics 3, where Solomon says, "To everything there is a purpose under heaven." It reminds me of what Paul says in Acts 17 where he says to pagans that, "God has appointed you and put you in different nations so that your life experience would bring you to the place of calling upon him and seeking his mercy." It's what is taught in I Corinthians 12:18 where Paul says, "God has arranged the members in the body, each one of them as he has chosen." Incredible.

The sixth principle (I just have one more after this): Not only are we the body and Christ the head and we are individually members and here by design purpose, not only has God arranged us in a particular way for that purpose to be fulfilled, but we are also here to serve a grander purpose than ourselves. I Corinthians 12:7.

⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (ESV)

So often in the life of the church, because we as individuals have so many needs and concerns and burdens and all legitimate (all needing to be prayed about and addressed and all those things), but sometimes we forget that our partnership in the body of Christ is to bring about the common good of the body of Christ. It's not just about us. "What is it in my life I need to do for the common good of the body of Christ? What do I need to contribute in order that the body of Christ is matured?" Paul says, "I have to do my job, every joint, every part working together so that the body functions and grows and matures. One

of the greatest hindrances for effective ministry is when we forget that we are part of something bigger than ourselves and we only see ourselves as part of something. God is always calling us to participate in the church universal that has no time restrictions and no national borders, and no age limits.

Lastly, part of discovering the healthy church and the joy, is when we learn to minister as one. In our responsive reading today in Psalm 133 it says,

¹Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! ²It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! ³It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing . . . (ESV)

People mistake differences in personality or differences in giftedness or differences in perspectives as somehow diminishing the body of Christ when in fact we ought to embrace them all. Look what Paul says in I Corinthians 12:15.

¹⁵If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. (ESV)

If my foot should suddenly start talking and say to my hand, "I am not part of the body because I am not a hand." Paul says, "It would not for that reason stop being part of my body." If on the other hand as I Corinthians 12:21 says,

²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," . . . (ESV)

Paul comes at this both ways. He says that for a body to be healthy we have to understand our oneness in Christ, that we're baptized by one Spirit into one body. Jews or Greeks, slave or free, we're all made to drink of the same Spirit, and on the one hand you can't have an inferiority complex when you say, "Well, I'm not a hand and I'm just eatin' dust all the time. Therefore I'm not a part of the body." Nor can you say to the hand, "I don't need you." There can be no inferiority complex and there can be no superiority complex either because as one we are to minister in the body of Christ.

I preached on this today because God willing for the next couple weeks I'm going to talk to you about the body, leading up to the Session's desire to have this as our emphasis in ministry, worship, and small groups for the years to come, at least for this year. If we're going to function as a body, as a ministry, we need to understand healthy body life. We are the body of Christ. We're not some Borg, cyber-cube floating through space consuming what exists in our way. We're the body of the living Savior, and we've been called to minister one with another. We're part of something bigger than ourselves and yet valued because of the ministry that God has given to us, and it's out of that God has called us to rejoice. May the Lord bless you this week and encourage you. May you have something to say the next time somebody says, "Aw, the church – it's just there for itself." No, we're not. We're here for Christ and for each other.