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Many Parts, One Body

by Pastor Clarissa Martinelli

How do you feel about your body? Strange question for a sermon, isn't it? Most of us would rather not think about our bodies, and if we do we probably don't think of them positively. It's too plump or too skinny, too short or too tall. Bumpy, lumpy or just plain – plain.

So it's pretty amazing that when Paul reached out to find a metaphor to adequately describe the church of Jesus Christ -- the one he came back to time and time again was that of the human body. He says in **1 Corinthians 12**, *"The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up only one body. So it is with the body of Christ.... one Spirit has baptized us all into Christ's body, and we have all received the same Spirit. Yes, there are many parts, but only one body,"* and in **verse 27** he says, *"Now all of you together are Christ's body, and each one of you is a separate and necessary part of it."* Look around you; each one of you makes up a part of the body of Christ. Just as God put our physical bodies together in our mothers' wombs, so He put us together as the Body of Christ!

In the Epistles of the NT, Paul makes over 30 references to the body of Christ. What we do often is to skip over things like that without really taking the time to think about it. We all know what a body is, we all occupy one every day, but do we really take time to look at how these vessels of flesh and blood that we live in are a living illustration of what the Church of Jesus Christ is meant to be like?

According to the Bible, the church is not an organization or an institution, it's an organism - ever growing and becoming. It's a whole new community, with a new order, with new values, very often in sharp conflict with the values of the surrounding society. By one and the same Spirit, God has called us to be "one body in Christ." Salem family – being one body, one love calls us to action. There are commitments and responsibilities to belonging to the body of:

As members of His body at Our Savior we have been called to... 1. Share in the promises in Christ Jesus. (**Ephesians 3:6**) *"We are heirs...members together of one body and sharers together in the promises in Christ Jesus."* Very often we go through life and we don't even begin to realize the blessings that we have! It says in **2 Cor 1:20** *"For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in*

Christ. " All of the promises of God are "yes" to us in Christ Jesus. God said His yes to us when in love He sent His Son to be one of us and as our substitute to die our death with the wrath of God heaped upon Him. And because God accepted His sacrifice for us, we know ourselves to be forgiven and redeemed. We are made co-heirs together with Christ of God's eternal Kingdom. We are given a peace that passes all understanding. Because of the promises that come to me because of His resurrection, and if something happens to me today, I know that when my eyes close in death, within the twinkling of an eye I'll be in the presence of Jesus my Savior. Because of that promise I can have the courage to forget what is past, put my hands to the present, face the future because I trust in Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever. I know His promise is that whatever circumstances come my way, I'm in God's hand and he will not let me go. Yet God uses my situations to build my faith. God is my strength and my shield, my mighty fortress in times of trouble. Through His Word and the Sacraments of Communion and Baptism, He promises to keep me in the one true faith. Wow!! Those are just some of the promises that cause us to come together not just for Sunday worship services – but also throughout each week and to join in doing what God has called us to do together! We are sharers together in those promises and all of the other promises we have from God to us.

He's called us to... 2. Hope. **(Ephesians 4:4)** "*...you were called to one hope when you were called*" What is hope? The Bible says that "...faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." In our language hope is a verb, but in Greek in this verse it's a noun. Some people put their hope in their education. Some put hope in their health. Some put hope for security in wealth—that's their anchor. If wealth is your anchor, it may destroy you. If health is your anchor you may get sunk at your next doctor's visit. Our hope in Christ is the only unfailing anchor for the soul. As believers in Christ we're called to the one hope of our calling -- that is, to eternal life in God's Kingdom. It's the rock solid assurance of no matter what the future has in store for us - God is the owner of all things - God is in charge!

He's called us to... 3. Belong. **(Romans 12:5)** "*...so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*" When God calls you to salvation, He also calls you to a community. There is no such thing as Christianity in isolation. There are no "Lone Ranger" disciples or solo fliers -- my life is my business! When God calls us, He calls us together. We become members of the Body of Christ.

I don't know how much of a scientific background Paul had, but he seems to have

a great grasp of biology. Each cell of the human body has a specific function. However, its purpose is to help every other cell survive. That's called homeostasis in biology. Each cell works for the good of all the others.

God keeps His promises to us by drawing us into the family of God called the church -- the body of Christ. There's a closer union and connection between us than any physical bond we could ever have because we're related to one another through the blood of Jesus Christ. We belong to Christ who bought us, and we belong to one another. We are blood brothers and sisters in Christ. Belonging to the body of Christ, we identify with Christ and His people. By identifying yourself as a member of Christ's body through Our Savior, you make it clear who's side your on. You're part of God's plan to reach people lost without Christ and to call people into fellowship with the body of believers.

We are sinners; saved by the Grace of God. And as sinners, we're naturally divisive; so it's only through the presence and work of Christ that we can stay together. Only in Christ is there basis for unity that transcends differences. Maybe more churches and relationships between believers would be preserved if we ended every disagreement with a genuine question, "Are we still together in Christ?" and "Are we focusing not on what we want but on what God, the Lord of the church wants us to do?"

We are called to... 4. Peace. **(Colossians 3:15)** *"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace."* We're called to give up our selfish mind-set and pursuits and hand ourselves over to the greater good of the Body. The way we relate to one another is supposed to be radically different from the way non-Christians treat one another. Humility, gentleness, patience, enduring one another's faults, weaknesses, idiosyncrasies, should characterize our relationships. That demands a selfless attitude.

When Jesus stands among us and His presence and His words proclaim, "Peace be with you," that peace is our bond. We're united by that peace. The peace comes through the grace of God -- a peace that passes all understanding, a peace that is our common joy. That peace frees us from competing against one another and comparing ourselves to one another. We are who we are in Christ, and with Christ as our peace, we share a common bond. You and I keep the unity of the Spirit by keeping Christ as our peace.

We are called to the 5. Truth. **(Ephesians 4:15-16)** *"Instead, we will hold to the truth in love, becoming more and more in every way like Christ, who is the head of*

his body, the church. Under his direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love." The truth that's being talked about here is God's unfailing Word. We're in this together. The health of this local Body and your individual spiritual maturity is connected to each one. God's intention is that we be united in building each other up in His Word of truth. If anyone's not serious about God or his people, it affects the entire church. The Bible speaks of spiritual maturity as a group issue. God takes our vows and commitments seriously. It means that we have a commitment to challenge those who are loosely connected and do everything in our power to draw them back to God and to God's grace. If they put up a wall, then we have to speak the truth in love and ask them where they are in their relationship to Christ as Savior and Lord. How committed are you to be spiritually "healthy and growing and full of love?" The Body of Jesus Christ is only as strong as its weakest link!

God has called us to 6. Unity and Oneness. **(Ephesians 4:3)** *"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."* And also, **verse 13** says *"So all of us together shall come to that oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God; we shall become mature and complete people, becoming fully like Christ in all we think, say, and do."*

As Herman was driving down the freeway one day, his cell phone rang. Answering, he heard his wife's voice urgently warning him, "Herman, I just heard on the news that there's a car going the wrong way down the highway. Please be careful!" "It's not just one car," said Herman. "It's hundreds of them!" Just as one or several cars can create major problems on a one-way highway if they are not going in the same direction, so, too, in the Church, the body of Christ, major problems can occur if one or more members are not living in unity with the other members. Divisions within the church? Factions? The Bible makes very clear that God has no plan for that to be a part of God's Church! Instead, He says, **(Phil 2:2)** *"...make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose."*

Why should we as believers in Christ diligently maintain our unity? Because Jesus demands it! There is only one body and one Spirit. It takes one body to contain one spirit. Anything else is impossible! If you have one body, but more than one spirit, chaos reigns within that one body. We are talking about the inner being of a living organism. It is not good to have competing spirits. We cannot have one body and several spirits. We're all pulling together for one thing: The Gospel of Jesus Christ – which others and we might come to know Him and the power of His

resurrection!

We are called to... 7. Function. **(Romans 12:4-5)** *"Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of his one body, and each of us has different work to do. And since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others."*

We have brain cells, neurons, axons, dendrites, and muscles -- but sometimes they don't work properly. The problem isn't in the brain. The brain sends the appropriate signals. The problem lies between the nerve and the muscle. The nerve conveys the brain's message, such as move, turn, lift, etc., but the muscle does not respond. The body is essentially non-responsive to the brain's commands.

Ephesians 4 tells us that there is one body and one Lord over the body -- Jesus. What happens when we don't obey his commands, follow his lead? We have a sick body. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. Muscles that are not used will atrophy. How healthy a part of the body are you?

Did you notice that your body doesn't exist for your hand? Your body doesn't exist for your feet! Your hands and feet exist to help the body function! There's no room for selfishness. Don't do anything that tears it down. The church begins to be what God intended it to be when people stop sitting in the pew saying, 'They're not meeting my needs' and start saying, 'Whose needs can I meet?' Then all our needs will be met. The Church doesn't exist to meet our needs. We exist and are a part of it to carry out the work of the Body, and in doing so our own needs will be met. When the servant spirit flourishes in our congregation, then we'll minister to each other as Christ has intended.

Heb. 10:24-25 *"24And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, 25not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching."*

Why Does All This Matter?

John 17:21-23 Because Jesus, just before He went to the cross He prayed for all of us: "My prayer for all of them is that they will be one, just as you and I are one, Father — that just as you are in me and I am in you, so they will be in us, and the world will believe you sent me. I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are — I in them and you in me; all being perfected into one. Then the world will know that you sent me and will understand that you love them as much as you love me."

After Jesus ascended into heaven, He called us to work that needs to be done. If He wants something done within the world, He chooses us to do it. If He wants a child taught, he finds a teacher to teach the child. If He wants a sick person cured, He finds a physician to do his work. If He wants his story told, He finds a person to tell it. Literally, we are the body of Christ, hands to do his work, feet to run his errands, voice to speak for him. Did you know that Michelangelo started forty-four statues but completed only fourteen? In a museum in Italy you can see his thirty unfinished works. There are huge blocks of marble with only a hand or a foot completed. The question is: Are our lives like those unfinished statues? Is our potential for service still locked up within us?

Friends, we are ambassadors for Christ. We represent Him -- and it's Him whom we want the world to know. We're here for a purpose -- working cooperatively with one another to let the world and people around us know that in Jesus Christ, people can find hope, healing and new life! May the Holy Spirit breathe upon us the grace of unity in Christ, so that in our multi-faceted diversity of gifts, we might willingly serve our God and accomplish His purposes -- that people might come to know Him and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

Amen.