

“CHRISTIANITY 101 (#5): BODY PARTS”

(1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

[PROP NEEDED: “Body Parts” & “Body of Christ” Stop-Animation PPTs]

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 2-10-08]

–I–

1. Read Text: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 and Pray.

2. **[WATCH “Body Parts” Stop-Animation PPT (Time: 0:45)]**

A–*What and Who* is the Church of Jesus Christ? *Why* does it exist? And *why do you and I need it* as Christians?

B–These were just some of the questions that the apostle Paul addressed in today’s scripture, where he gives an analogy of the Church being like the individual parts of a human body.¹

1–As we saw in the video so expertly created by our own Lisa Haman, separately and individually these “*Body Parts*” can’t accomplish much.

2–But when you put them together, they form the intricate wonders of a human being.

C–And just as Paul used this analogy to describe the church of *his* day, so I also want to use it to talk about the church of *today* as we continue our series “Christianity 101.”

3. Now, let’s begin by discussing exactly **WHAT the Church is, and WHY it exists**. In other words, *what* is the church, and what *purpose/role* does it play in our lives of faith?

A–Well, our English word “church” comes from the biblical Greek word *ekklesia*, which literally means “*a calling out,*” or a “*public assembly.*”

B–In ancient times, it actually referred to *any* assembly of citizens in a Greek city.

C–But early Christians began using this word to refer to *themselves* as an assembly, *called out* of the world by God for the special purpose of sharing His love through Jesus.²

4. So, based on this purpose, I’d like to suggest a description of the church found in your bulletin “Sermon Notes” (please fill in blanks): “**A diverse community, committed to the belief and practice of Christian faith, and to the transformation of the world.**”

A–First, it’s a “*diverse community*” – meaning that it’s not only *NOT* just made up of people who look, or worship, or think like *me*, but also that I can’t be a mature, growing Christian *without* being connected to the diversity of others through it (more about this later).³

B–Second, it’s people are “*committed to the belief and practice of Christian faith*” – meaning that everything we say & do should reflect the ministry and teachings of Jesus.

C–Third, this description reminds us that the church exists for “*the transformation of the world.*”

1–Now, this is very different from what we hear in today’s consumer-oriented culture, where we often think that “*The church exists to me MY needs. And if my church doesn’t meet my needs, then I’ll just go down the street to some other church that does*” – and there are folks who’ve left our church and gone elsewhere for this reason, and some of you have even come here because of this.

2–Now, I’ll say this: God *does* want to meet our needs; But God also knows that sometimes the thing(s) we actually *need* are NOT the things *we think* we need.

3–And so, God doesn’t give us the Church so much to meet *our* needs; Instead, He gives us the Church so that *we* can meet the needs of others!

4–In other words, the church doesn’t exist just for those of us who’re *already* here; No, it exists for those who’ve *yet* to find God = for the “*transformation of the world.*”

–II–

5. Now, if the statement in your bulletin describes what the church is *supposed* to be, then we all know that it doesn’t always live up to that ideal.

A–In the words of the 20th-century French theologian Lewazee, “*Jesus promised us the Kingdom of God. We got the church instead!*”

B–So, **WHY do we need it?** What about all the hypocrisy and imperfections of the church? Aren’t we really better off *without* it?

6. First, let’s talk about **the “hypocrisy” & imperfections of the church.** I’ll grant that it’s there—we’ve all experienced it from time to time. And I’ll be honest: there’ve been times when it made me so sick and frustrated that I’ve felt like saying “*to heck with it! I don’t need this!*”

A–Augustine, the great 2nd-century pastor, used to say, “*The church is a lot like Noah’s ark: if it weren’t for the raging storm outside, you wouldn’t be able to stand the stink inside.*”

B–But here’s the thing: ...the only reason that the church is *imperfect* is because it’s made up of *imperfect people* like you and me.

1–You see, in the end, *none* of us live out *perfectly* that which we profess. So in the end, we’re *all* hypocrites to one degree or another.

2–Therefore, the presence of one more hypocrite in the church isn’t really going to matter, because the church exists specifically *for* the salvation of hypocrites like you, me and ever other person on earth. ⁴

7. So I often hear (and you have, too), “*Well preacher, isn’t it possible to be a good Christian without being part of an organized church?*”

A—And I always get a bit amused at this argument, because I’m happy that people who say this have figured out how to challenge their own presuppositions and move out of their own comfort zone every week all by themselves.

1—I’m glad, when they’re down, that they know how to encourage themselves alone.

2—I’m thrilled that they take time to live out the mission of Jesus to change the world without help from anyone else.

3—And I’m thrilled that on Sunday morning on the golf course, they worship God by bringing their Bibles along in their golf bag, and share scriptures and sing praise songs with their friends as they play golf!

4—And of course, you know I’m being extremely facetious, because I haven’t figured out how to do it this way!

B—My point is that while you and I possibly *could* live out our Christian life and transform the world all *by ourselves*, the *reality* is that most of us *do not*.

1—And what organized Christianity does is it takes what would be merely *good intentions* and turns them into the potential for fulfillment.

2—Lots of people have good intentions about helping the needy or growing in their faith, but the church – imperfect as it is – can give us the tools and the means by which those intentions can become reality.

8. You see, even Jesus didn’t think a person could be a “good Christian” without belonging to an organized community of believers.

A—We know this because the very first thing he did when he started out in ministry was to gather together a group of 12 disciples.

B—And these weren’t just 12 individuals who happened to be traveling along in the same spiritual direction – they were 12 very different/“*diverse*” people who nevertheless committed to making the journey of faith with Jesus *together*.⁵

C—I think that’s why, in today’s scripture, Paul compares the church to a human body.

1—He believed that it would make no more sense to think a person could live out their Christianity *alone* than it would be to say that the parts of the human body – the the ear, the hand, the foot – could live and function successfully *alone and apart from* one another.

2–Maybe you’ve heard it before, but “A *Christian without a church is like...*
...a student without a school; ...a soldier without an army;
...a citizen who won't vote; ...a seaman without a ship;
...a child without a family; ...a drummer without a band;
...a ballplayer without a team; ...a honeybee without a hive;
...an ember of coal without a fire;
...a scientist who does not share findings with colleagues;
...a party that you have all by yourself.”

9. So, WHY do we need the church?

A–We need it because we really can’t be strong, healthy, growing Christians *without* it!

B–We need it because, unlike any other government, civic club, or organization (non-profit or otherwise), the Church of Jesus Christ *alone* has the potential to change not only *us*, but the entire world.

–III–

10. Now, **WHO exactly is the Church?** Is it some human hierarchy headquartered in Nashville or New York or Atlanta? Is it merely the Pastor, Staff, or Lay Leaders of our church here?

A–As we wrap up, let’s watch another video created by Lisa that answers this question:
[WATCH “Body of Christ” Stop-Animation PPT (Time: 1:27)]

B–You see, whether we’re in New Orleans, or Kenya, or right here in Cobb County, *the Church is... you and I*, working together to share the love of Jesus with those around us.

C–We may consist of different individual “*Parts*,” but together we are the “*Body of Christ*.”

11. [PRAYER]

12. [CLOSING SONGS: UMH#558, “We Are the Church” ; OR “How Beautiful”]

ENDNOTES:

1. There were, in fact, other analogies/metaphors used in the New Testament to describe the Christian Church. For example, the church was called as the “bride of Christ” (Ephesians 5:22-31), “God’s new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17), and as “the household/family of God” (1 Peter 4:17). However, the analogy of the Church as the “body of Christ” was used more than any other.

2. Jesus himself first applied the word to his followers in Matthew 16:18 as he spoke with Peter at Caesarea Philippi. The biblical book of Acts, in fact, is a short history of the early church’s efforts to shared God’s love through Jesus as recorded by Luke, the writer of the third Gospel.

3. The word “*community*” reminds us that there’s no such thing as a “solitary Christian.” And the word “*diverse*” in this description reminds us that the Christian “church” does not refer merely to one *local* homogenous congregation or denomination (i.e., Read Acts 5:11 and 8:1), but *also* to the “*diverse*” church universal (i.e., the church throughout the world, of *all* denominations, styles of worship and ministry; Read Acts 9:31).

That, in fact, is what we mean in The Apostle's Creed, when we say "*I believe in the holy catholic church...*" – the word "catholic" (small "c") means "universal." A popular children's hymn [that we're going to sing later today] puts it this way: "*The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple; The church is not a resting place, the church is a people. I am the church, you are the church, we are the church together. All who follow Jesus all around the world, yes we're the church together.*" ["We Are the Church," United Methodist Hymnal #558].

What's more is that biblically the church of Jesus Christ doesn't even refer simply to God's "saints here below" in the "here and now," but also to the "saints up above" in heaven who have gone before (as well as to those who have not even been born yet)! The Bible calls this the "*communion of saints.*" The "saints" who are here among us today are called "*church visible*" or the "*church militant,*" and those "saints" who are in heaven with God or who have not yet been born are often referred to as the "*church invisible*" or the "*church triumphant.*"

4. That's why Saint Augustine also used to say that "*The church is not a museum for saints, but a hospital for sinners.*"

5. In other words, the church is not simply a collection of persons who have individually discovered a personal relationship with God through their own private spirituality. No. The church is a "*community committed to the belief and practice of Christian faith, and to the transformation of the world.*" It's that entity that Jesus commissioned on earth to provide the form, means, and vehicle whereby the people of faith can *actually* transform the world.