

## BALLYMENA FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Lord's Day Morning Sermon Notes

26<sup>th</sup> February 2006

Read: 1 Corinthians 12: 14-31

Text: v.18

*The Functioning of Christ's Body*

One of the Holy Spirit's uses of the word "church" in the New Testament is with respect to the entire company of God's redeemed people both those on earth and those already in heaven. In this sense the word "church" includes all who have already believed in Christ and all who will yet believe on Him. Moreover, with respect to this use of the word "church" there are certain other N.T. expressions that can only be descriptive of the redeemed alone, one of them being this term *the body*. Sixteen times, all the references being in Paul's epistles, the New Testament employs this description of the Church.

We noted that in employing this description of the Church at the end of Eph 1, Paul does so in presenting a most important truth, namely that *the Church is the fulness of Christ*. The word "fulness" denotes that which is the complement, that which completes. Therefore, the Spirit of God is teaching that in a certain way the Church is the complement of Christ. The real meaning of what is being taught is seen in terms of the head & the body. Just as the head in the human sense would be incomplete without the body and therefore needs the body, so it is with respect to the relationship between Christ and His Church. The Church is Christ's body in that He as the Mediatorial Head must have a body of people who are peculiarly His by redemption, through whom He works His great purposes on this earth. It is in this sense that the Church is the fulness of Christ.

Therefore, since the Church as Christ's body is His fulness it is important that careful attention is given to the revelation of Scripture on the topic in order to see how the Church is to act in her relationship with Christ. Here in 1 Cor 12 the Apostle gives much attention to this matter of the human body with its head being a representation of Christ and His Church. We focused on this passage last week, dealing with one particular point, namely – *the features of the body* which are its *unity & diversity*. Four times in this passage it is stated that with respect to the human level & sphere of things, the individual has a body with many members, v.v. 12, 14, 20, & 27. But the point is made exceedingly clear in each verse – in the human body there is both unity & diversity. Paul's application of this point to the Church is clear, in that on the spiritual level the same two features exist. In Christ's body there is both unity and diversity – there is just one spiritual body, the Church, with Christ as its Head; but within that one body there are many members, all of them with their particular gifts & abilities – this is diversity.

With regard to these two features marking Christ's spiritual body we noted two additional thoughts. First – the *production* of them is by the power of the Holy Spirit in what is essentially a spiritual baptism, v.13. In this language these features of unity and diversity are clearly in view. There is one body – the unity of all true believers; and by the Spirit "*we are all baptized into*" that one body – this is diversity. Second – with regard to these two features we noted that there is a *pre-requisite* – these features of unity & diversity are a pre-requisite for the very life & existence of the human body; and the same is true for the spiritual body. Within the unity of the one body all the members exist. But by the same token this diversity of members & gifts enables the one body to live & function as it should to the glory & honour of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In returning to this passage we wish to focus on another line of thought that follows from what was said last week, namely – *the functioning of the body*. A human body under the control of its head is designed & intended to function; and the same is true of the Church, the body of Christ. Remember that Christ's body, the Church, is His fulness. As already explained, within the eternal purposes of God, Christ the Head needs the body of His people in the execution of His will and work on this earth. Thus it should be the desire of every believer to function within the body as Christ directs and so contribute to His glory and honour.

The key verse in this passage with regard to the functioning of the body is v.18. This verse is teaching the vital truth of the divine & sovereign selection & distribution of gifts within Christ's body. In the human body God has created, arranged & disposed the various parts so as to constitute one living, organic entity; otherwise the body could not function, v.17. It must be recognised that the Lord sovereignly selects & distributes the members & their abilities. For example, in the human body He made the eye and gave it its ability to see. The same principle is true in Christ's body, see v.28. Note how this verse commences – "*And God hath set some in the church.*" These words are almost identical to those at the beginning of v.18. Thus, the Apostle reveals that it is God Himself who sovereignly selects & disposes the offices & the gifts that are occupied and employed by the members of Christ's body. This divine, sovereign selection & distribution of both members & their gifts within the body of Christ is essentially wrought by the Lord through the Holy Spirit, v.11. Here Paul refers to the various gifts that the apostolic church possessed. But note how emphatic he is that it is all according to the sovereign work of the Spirit – "*dividing to every man severally (separately) as He wills.*"

Thus there is tremendous emphasis in our text, v.18, and its context on the truth of the sovereign selection and disposal of the members of Christ's body and the gifts they exercise. The point is clear – it is as this truth is recognised that the body of Christ will function as the fulness of Christ & to the glory of Christ. Let us seek to develop that line of thought.

### I. FIRST NOTE SUBMISSION TO THIS ARRANGEMENT IN ORDER TO THE FUNCTIONING OF THE BODY

You will note that Paul suggests different scenarios in this passage by personifying various parts of the body. In v.15 he refers to the foot speaking; in v.16, the ear; & in v.21 the eye & the head. The picture that he

builds up is most striking – here are all these parts of the human body in rebellion against the God-ordained arrangement that is to mark the physical frame. The foot, the ear, the eye, the head – all are portrayed as persons speaking in a most insubordinate fashion about roles & functions within the human frame. And the Apostle’s point is that such would result in chaos & confusion in the entire body with the features of unity & diversity distorted, the body weakened, malfunctioning – crippled in fact.

Now here is the vital point: these scenarios are never going to appear within the human frame; but sadly they appear within the body of Christ so that the Church herself not only receives hurt & damage but she fails to be the fulness of Christ. Essentially what Paul is doing is expressing various anomalies, sinful attitudes & actions among believers that stem from failure to yield submissively to the divine will & arrangement for the body of Christ. Thus, he is teaching that diversity in the members, in their roles & their gifts as arranged by God must be given acceptance & submission otherwise great disorder will result. Hence, his emphasis in these verses is essentially on this feature of diversity – recognising it, submitting to it for the well-being of the body and therefore ultimately for the glory of Christ. Submission to this arrangement is the key issue.

However, if there is not submission to the divine arrangement then many problems will arise & develop as is seen from Paul’s striking teaching in this passage. Note some of the difficulties & sins that believers have because they do not submit to the Lord’s sovereign control over His body.

1. **Discouragement** – see v.v. 15 & 16 and note the pertinent words “*I am not of the body.*” This is essentially to say – “I must not be saved; I must not be part of the body of believers.” The picture is of a believer who does not have the spiritual gifts that another has but focuses so much on the absence of those gifts in his own case that he concludes that he must not belong to the body of Christ at all. Such conclusions arise because of the faulty thinking that spiritual gifts are the evidence of salvation & the basis of assurance; but see Matt 7: 21, 22 – note how Christ distinguishes between spiritual gifts & doing God’s will. Doing God’s will is the evidence of saving grace but gifts are not, for Christ tells us of some who had spiritual gifts who were never truly saved & will actually perish at the day of judgment. Measuring yourself by the gifts or abilities of another will always lead to discouragement.

2. **Discontentment** – again see v.v. 15, 16 and note the thought of discontentment: Paul speaks of the foot saying that it is not the hand; or the ear that it is not the eye. He is really describing the believer who wishes that he had the gifts of another believer – and this is discontentment with the Lord’s sovereignty, again v.v. 4, 11, 18. It may also be said that it is discontentment that arises out of jealousy over the gifts of another – the foot jealous of the specialised abilities of the hand or the ear jealous of the multi-faceted gifts of the eye. The foot & the hand – envious at not being able to *do* or *perform* what is given to another, Mark 10: 37 & 41. The ear & the eye – jealous at not being able to *see* or *understand* what another has grasped. Instead of jealous discontent other members should be glad that there are those among the saints who can do or see what others cannot, John 13: 23-25, 1 Chr 12: 32. Jealous believers are always discontent, but in being such they bereave the body of blessing, James 3: 16.

3. **Dysfunction** – note v.17 and see how Paul’s reasoning reveals the issue of the body not functioning properly if it were all eye or all ear. He is really speaking of imbalance – and where there is imbalance then the body will dysfunction. Variety & diversity create balance and are indispensable to the spiritual health and well-being of the Church. It is through the multiplicity of gifts that Christ has given to the members of the body that dysfunction is avoided and His cause is promoted. See Eph 4: 8 & 11 – a variety of offices & gifts in view given by Christ to His Church; for her edification, v.12, spiritual maturity, v.13, stability, v.v. 14 & 15, & growth, v.16.

4. **Division** – v.v. 21-26. Here is another angle altogether: in the body of Christ there are those who have lesser gifts; or who have a place that is not so public. But v.21 reveals that if God’s sovereign arrangement is not kept in view, disdain may arise – being partial & treating some as if they do not really matter, James 2: 1-4. The outcome will always be division, inferred by v.25. Rather, our objective should be to show the love & concern that all deserve; v.v. 25b & 26.

## II. IN CLOSING NOTE THAT WE MUST SUBMIT TO GOD’S ARRANGEMENT BECAUSE THE BODY BELONGS TO CHRIST

This is a truth that is to govern our thinking always. The members set in the body are Christ’s and the entire body is His, v.27. Therefore, all is precious to Christ, see Eph 5: 28, 29. Paul is teaching here on the matter of the husband loving his wife; and shows that this is to be so within the marriage realm because husband & wife are one flesh. Thus, the husband is to care for his wife as one flesh with him, according to the pattern of Christ’s care for the Church. Then in v.30 the Apostle shows that Christ cares for His Church due to this marvellous & mystical union that exists between them – “*we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.*” This is a statement of tremendous depth, not easy to understand. But it certainly appears to rest on the fact of Christ’s having taken our human nature in order to save His people; and then He brings us into union with Himself so that we will in the final outcome of all things partake of that humanity that He has elevated and delivered from all the ravages of sin. Thus, the language stresses how precious the Church, Christ’s body is to Him.

Thus, all the members of the body are infinitely precious to Him – see yourself in that light; who you are and what you are in Christ & rejoice in the privilege of being part of His mystical body; and see all other believers in the same light. From that perspective we are shown how to treat one another.