

“The Body of Christ”

By General Pastor Peter F. Paine

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In professional sports, there is a team on the field, there are cheerleaders, and then there are people in the stands, or watching the game on TV, or listening on the radio or whatever. But, you see, here at church when we talk about Christ, we don't have a team and then fans; we're all on the field. Amen? None of us should have an 'in the stands' mentality; all of us should have an 'on the field' mentality. We're here to be about something. We're not just here to root for the team; we're not just here to cheer them on; we're not just here to shout when they make a touchdown, we're here to be part of the touchdown. I want you to think about a potluck for a minute (maybe I should have saved this for the end of the message, because I don't want to lead you astray here). If you are planning on going, you're not just a passerby, you know way in advance you're going to a potluck... Anybody not know what a potluck is? it's a meal where everybody brings something. If you're going to a potluck, usually you bring what you're best at. You go shopping ahead of time, and you make it up; your husband tries to sneak a bite before you take it to the church... And then you're thinking, "Oh yeah, I know what Sister Ashley's gonna bring." And you start thinking about what your brothers and sisters are going to bring and calling them up and asking, "What are you making?—I hope you're making..." Right? Everybody with me? Anybody need a tissue? So you get the idea of what I'm trying to get you to understand. So, you know at a potluck, you're supposed to bring something. It's great that you're coming to get something. It's great that you know you're going to get something there that you know you couldn't bring. It's all right to know that brother George is going to make something and he's going to cook it the way he cooks it and I sure hope he's not going to be out of town this weekend for the potluck, right? But it's also important to know that you're bringing something. I tell you this because I want to look together at the text that the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth in what we now call First Corinthians, the twelfth chapter. I want to talk to you about what it means to be part of a team where you're not in the stands just cheering for your team, but you're on the field. Amen? And I want to remind you that we have an audience of one, and that's Jesus Christ. We're to be on the field every day of our lives; we're not just to be fans in the stands, but we're to be on the field, every day of our lives. When we come to the potluck, we're supposed to bring our best dish—we're not supposed to just stop at the store and buy a bag of chips (although that should not be taken as an indictment against those for whom bringing a bag of chips IS their best dish—some people have limited cooking skills and/or facilities. If buying a bag of chips is the absolute best you can do, then bring a bag of chips, but if you have the ability to bring more, then you should). Chips are fine; they're not great. If you could bring a roast and then end up just bringing some pretzels, you know, that just ain't right.

Before I read this text, I want to see if I can set the scene this way: You see, Paul loved this church in Corinth. This church was made up of people that really loved God. Here's what happened to the church in Corinth: some things got out of balance; some things got out of whack; some things got off course. These people loved God. Do you love God? These people had let some things that were supposed to be in the church become too big of a deal in the church, and they had let some things that weren't supposed to be in the church come into the church, and they lost their way somehow. I'm not telling you that I think they weren't saved; I'm telling you that I think that they weren't being the best that they could be. Anybody here

willing to say, "You know what? I'm saved, but I'm not the best that I could be. I'm just not the best that I can be. I'm willing to let God speak to me through His Word and through His Holy Spirit and tell me, 'you know, you ought to embrace this more than you're embracing it. You ought to let go of that and leave it alone. You know what? You've got some things out of balance.'"? Now stay with me for a minute, I'm still laying a foundation, but I get started preaching, it'll go quick. I can tell you that there have been times in my life when it was out of balance. Anybody here ever have times when your life was out of balance? Raise your hands, and keep them up for a minute; look around at your brothers and sisters. There've been times in our lives when we've been out of balance. Almost all of us. Out of balance doesn't mean you've lost your way; out of balance doesn't mean you don't have a goal. Out of balance doesn't mean that you're all wrong; it just means that you're not all right. The church in Corinth wasn't all right. The church in Corinth had gotten out of balance. Some of the people in the church in Corinth thought they were bigger than they really were; some of the people in the church in Corinth thought they weren't important when they really were important. Paul the Apostle loved the church so much that he said, "I've got to talk to you." And in verse 1 of chapter 12 he said:

1 Corinthians 12:1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren...

Let's take our first piece right there: "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren..." So you know he's not just saying, "Oh, by the way..." He starts out saying, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren..." Now, if I'm in the church, and my leader (and Paul was their leader) says, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren," he has my attention, how about you? Amen? If you're in the church that was birthed by Apostle Paul, and Paul says, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren," does he have your attention? Amen? There were some who were expecting the next word on the page that he had written to be 'awesome!' Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, you rock! But he didn't say that, did he?

1 Corinthians 12:1 I would not have you ignorant.

He said, it's my job to tell you that something's broke. Here's the good news: If God's telling it's broke, there's still some time to fix it. You know, when a child is young, they think Dad can fix anything. As we get older we find that Dad can fix some things, but not all things. When we get wiser, then we realize that God CAN fix all things. So Apostle Paul says to the church at Corinth: "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have ye ignorant." Evidently, Dale Carnegie was not teaching his course on how to win friends and influence people, yet. Evidently, Apostle Paul hadn't heard anything about that, yet, because he says in verse 2:

1 Corinthians 12:1-2 ... ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols...

Feel good about that, don't you? But, you know, that's the reality, all of us needed to be saved. We were all lost until we were found. The Bible says, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God;" (Romans 3:23). Did you sin and fall short of the glory of God, or are you the exception to that rule? I am a sinner saved by grace, how about you? So, they didn't have the truth, but now they have the truth.

1 Corinthians 12:3 ... no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost...

In other words, if you're led by God, you're not going to say that Jesus is accursed. No man can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. If someone is saying to you, "Jesus is Lord," there's something happening in their life. There is some kind of Holy Ghost influence that they acknowledge that Jesus is Lord. They may not have everything in tune; they may not have everything right, but there's some kind of understanding there to work with. Amen? Now, if you're carried away by idols that can't speak (and the word 'dumb' there means they can't speak)... When you say that Jesus is Lord, that means that you have some understanding that came from the Holy Ghost.

Now, to lay some foundation, Paul said this about the Body of Christ:

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 ... there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God...

In other words, there are going to be differences. Remember the potluck? We're all bringing something different. But, it's not for you, it's for everybody. It's to profit withal. Stop comparing yourself to someone else; you're not supposed to bring the same thing that she brings. We're supposed to be different, but serve the same God. Amen? You're not better because you're different, and you're not worse because you're different. That's what Paul is speaking to the church about. He's saying can't you get it folks? It's God's plan for us to bring different things, to be different things, to have different things, to have different strengths. Some of you would love to sing at the microphone, but you're like me, you just don't have a good singing voice. That's not your talent! For a long time when I used to sing in the choir I thought I was the only one with a cordless mike; it turns out I was the only one that was unplugged. Not everybody has the same gift. Be who you can be! Bring what you can bring! Celebrate what you are and get better at it every day. Some of you are looking at your weaknesses and shortcomings, and you thinking because of that, that you can't do what God has got for you to do. Get over that thinking. Let's look at something else for just a minute. That kind of thinking will wear you down, and keep you from standing up for the glory of God.

Acts 3:1-4:14 ... perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men...

Peter and John were going to the Temple at the hour of prayer, and they met a lame man. They healed him, and he was leaping and praising God, right? What did the people of the Temple say about Peter and John? They were ignorant and unlearned men. That's how they knew that it was God that did it. Now, if Peter and John had been men with an education, then people would have said, "See? That's just a couple of educated guys." But they were ignorant and unlearned men, so it must be God. Isn't that cool?

Some of you know my testimony that I stuttered when I was young. In addition, I wore thick glasses; now there's a recipe for humiliation, huh? It'll really keep you humble. You're an easy target for the kids at school to make fun of. I never thought that I would grow up to be any kind of a speaker. I had to be called on to speak in class—anybody know what I'm talking about? My vision has actually improved since I got saved; God has blessed me in that way. Some of you are so focused on your shortcomings that you've lost sight of the fact that God can use you. In the Bible God chose people because of their shortcomings. Time would not permit

to go into all the examples, but there's lots of examples in the Old and New Testament where people were chosen and used, and it was actually BECAUSE of their shortcomings, so that God would be glorified. Remember the man born blind, and the disciples asked who sinned, the man or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus said that his blindness was not the result of sin, but that God might be glorified (John 9:1-3). Sometimes things look to us like they're broken, but to God they look like they're ready for a victory. God has set the church in order as it pleased Him, and Apostle Paul is writing to the church:

1 Corinthians 12:7-8 ... to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another...

Are you picturing the potluck? Are you picturing us coming into the room with a word of knowledge, a word of wisdom, amen? What are you bringing to the table? Sometimes somebody will get up and speak, and that looks like they're bringing a big piece, but it's just one piece. Some of the pieces on your car that you will never see are the most important piece, amen? You don't have to know anything about automobiles to believe that. Some of the pieces in the church that you don't see are some of the most important parts, also. I'm here to tell some of you that you're important. I came to tell somebody today, "Your gift is needed in the body of Christ." I came to tell somebody today, "Just because you stand up front where everybody can see you, and you screech into the microphone, you're not more important than somebody else."

1 Corinthians 12:10-11 ... the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will...

Don't be jealous of someone else's gift. Embrace the gift that God's placed in your life. Maybe there's someone here today, that gift that the Holy Spirit spoke to you about in your life? Embrace it. Maybe Brother Kenneth called someone else to do that, and you think, "Well, I'm never gonna get called on." Embrace that gift. How long was Joseph away from his dream? Some of you are called to greatness and the devil has just about got you fooled into thinking that you will never amount to a hill of beans. You're going to get there one day, and you're going to hear, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," because in the day that you were supposed to stand up, you stood up for the glory of God. Whether it's a Macedonian call, or a "As for me and my house..." or Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego saying, "We are not careful to answer thee, O King..." There is a moment in time when what you bring to the potluck is more important than anything else at that very moment. Amen? I came to tell somebody today, "Don't give up; your best days are right around the corner." God's got something great for you. Somebody say amen.

1 Corinthians 12:12 ... the members of that one body, being many, are one body...

Remember the context here: Paul was writing to a church that had a lot of things right, but they had a few things wrong. They needed a tune-up. Is it possible I came here today because somebody here needs a tune-up? You say, "Oh, not me, Pastor, I'm perfect!" Then you're exactly the person I'm talking to! Because I'm perfect, and even I know I'm not perfect.

1 Corinthians 12:13 ...by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body...

And he goes on to talk about the parts of the body. We've talked about football—the analogy being, get out of the stands and onto the field. We've talked about the potluck, and bringing our best dish, and not just a bag of chips, because you can make something better than that. Now I want to help somebody to see their place in the body of Christ. I want somebody to look at these words together, see the sense of it, and see your place in the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:14-15 For the body is not one member, but many...

Some of you came to church today thinking that you are not of the body, but you are. Maybe you're a foot, and you look at the hand, and think that the hand gets *seen*, and people don't usually see the foot. He said, if the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not part of the body, it's still part of the body. It's still needed. He goes on to say in verse sixteen:

1 Corinthians 12:16-17 if the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing?...

That's what the ear has to say to the eye sometimes when it looks like the eye has a bigger role to play... You know what, Sometimes my wife will say to me, "Peter you've got beautiful blue eyes. I love them." We've been married thirty-seven years, and not once has she said to me, "Ooh, I love your ears." Imagine how lonely my ears feel. I've got as many ears as I do eyes, and not once has she looked into my ear and said, "Aah!" My lonely lobes. Are you with me? Some of you feel like a lonely ear that never gets recognized. I know it seems way too easy for me to say these words since, right now, I'm the one being recognized. I know I'm the man with the microphone right now, but those aren't my words; those are the words that Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. He told them that they all matter to the body of Christ. Stop thinking that you're more important than someone else; stop thinking that you're less important than someone else. You are needed in this body! Amen? And every one of us have human qualities; we get our feelings hurt.

Anyone here ever get your feelings hurt in church? It wasn't nearly as unanimous as I thought it was going to be. Let me tell you story about myself: I one time asked, in a message, if I had ever offended anyone to the point where you thought about leaving the church because of the offense that I brought into your life? I thought there would probably be ten or fifteen hands. Every single person in the sanctuary raised their hands; there were people that came in off the street to raise their hands. People I had never met came in to raise their hands. I may have exaggerated that a little bit, but I have to admit, at the time I thought, "Did y'all understand the question?"

The reality is, we're in this thing together, and we need each other. Can you say amen? You matter in the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:18-25 ... those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary...

That's up to us, saints. That's what we're supposed to be about. That's what we're supposed to do. That's what we're supposed to be. Don't ever underestimate what you bring to the body. If God has dealt with you about a gift that has gone dormant, let today be the day that you say that you're going to wake it up. I'm going to read the rest of this chapter in just a minute, but, before I do, I want to encourage you to receive all that God has for you. Somebody

here today, maybe several of you, you know the gift that God has placed in your life—maybe a word of prophecy that God has spoken to you of and made it undeniable—but you know the gift in your life, and you know you’re not living in the fullness of your calling. It’s a very personal thing; I’m not calling you out, I’m asking you to call yourself out. Are you with me? If you know you’re not doing everything you’re supposed to do, if you’re bringing chips to a potluck when you really ought to be bringing something special, because you have something special to bring. Amen? After this message, you’ll never be able to look at chips at the potluck the same way again, but if that illustration works for you, then embrace it, because some of you aren’t bringing your best.

You say, “Well, this is nice, Pastor, you come visit us one a year, and you came to yell at us.” No I didn’t, I came to shout the Word of God to you in such a way that you say, “Oh yeah, that’s right, I am part of this body. I’m not supposed to be sitting in the stands watching the game; I’m supposed to be out on the field, making a difference.”

Some of you hearing this message today, God’s given you a dream. God’s given you a passion. You see yourself making a difference for the Kingdom of God. You see yourself, whether it’s teaching, or encouraging, or ministering, or giving, or just saying a word of encouragement, or just living your life as a silent example of just who Christ is to you, or whatever it is, and yes, I think that those who stand up front and get recognized—the musicians that play the instruments or the people that stand behind the microphone—all those things that are noticed and seen, that’s great, but for all of us whose names will be forgotten, we’re important to the body of Christ, too. Amen? There are herbes mentioned in Scripture whose names we do not know. What greater accomplishment is there in life than to do what we’re made to do? I want to do what I was made for. Foot, hand, eye, ear—I want to do what I was made for, how about you? I want to be the part of the body of Christ that I’m supposed to be. Yes, I can tell the story that I was the young boy who stuttered and now I speak to people, but that doesn’t make me better than someone who will never say a word out loud in church. Do what you’re made for, and you’ll hear, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of the Lord.”

GREAT LAKES

1 Corinthians 21-30 ... there should be no schism in the body...

What’s the answer to each of those questions (“Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?”)? No. It seems to be pretty much unanimous that not everyone should have every one of these gifts. Now, I’m going to read those questions again, and, this time, tell me if those gifts are important to the body of Christ. “Are all apostles?” Yes (it’s important). “Are all prophets?” Yes, prophecy is important to the body of Christ. “Are all teachers?” Yes, teaching is important to the body of Christ. “Are all workers of miracles?” Yes, miracles are important to the body of Christ. “Have all the gifts of healing?” Yes, healing is important to the body of Christ. “Do all speak with tongues?” Yes, tongues are important. “Do all interpret?” Yes, interpretation is important. So, not everybody should have every one of those gifts, but, yes, the body of Christ should have every one of those gifts. Say, “I am important to the body of Christ. I’m going to be the person that I was called to be. I’m going to do what I was called to do. I’m going to be the example that God’s called me to be. I’m going to live the life that God’s called me to live. I’m going to let my place be where He wants me in the body of Christ and quit trying

to be here I'm not supposed to be. I'm going to be what I am, and be the best at it." Remember when Martin Luther King Jr. said, "If you're a street sweeper, be the best."

Someone asked me a question recently, and they've known me a long time, and they remember when my job was to clean up at the end of the night in the building that we used for worship. That was one of my responsibilities, I was sort of a clean-up guy; I was the last man out, so to speak. I don't mean I did it alone, but that was my responsibility, and at the end of the day, we would put everything away, and lock it up, and that way everything would be ready to go the next time, right? They said, "Were you happier then, or now?" They prefaced that by talking about all the responsibilities and challenges that I have now, but they asked, "Were you happier then, or now?" I thought for a moment, and I said, "Neither." At that time, I was doing exactly what I was supposed to be doing (and I don't mean I was perfect; please don't misunderstand me; I'm not saying that to be boastful), and now I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing, so I'm equally happy in both places. Equally happy as a janitor and as the General Pastor? Yeah, equally happy; equally content. At that time, I felt like I was doing exactly what I was supposed to be doing for the body of Christ, and now I feel like I'm doing exactly what I'm supposed to be doing for the body of Christ. Does that make sense?

Last verse:

1 Corinthians 12:31 But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.

He goes on in Chapter 13 to talk about love. Saints, I love worship. I love to make a joyful noise. But I also love the quiet times. I love the times when I am alone and awake (I love the times when I'm asleep, too). I love the times when I'm alone and awake and I just sit in communication with the Lord. Sometimes I choose not to even open the Bible so that I can just be still and just listen to God. Whatever it is that the Holy Spirit has pricked your heart to do, or to do more of for His body, please do that. Ed Howes said to me today that one of the things he appreciates about me is that I'm a good listener. It's interesting that he should say that, because just the other day that Holy Ghost pricked y heart and said, "Slow down, and be a better listener." When Ed said that today, I said "Thank you, Lord, that's a confirmation that I needed." Sometimes you get busy, and—anybody ever been busy? The Holy Ghost told me to slow down and be a better listener, and Ed said to me that I am a good listener, so I thank you, Lord. Pastor Davis said to me one time, "Son, God gave you two ears and one mouth, and it would be good to use them in that proportion." I love you, saints.