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Sermon Notes

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God's Wisdom in Arranging the Body of Christ

1 Corinthians 12:14-26

The human body is the masterpiece of God's physical creation... nothing in the physical world comes close to the marvels of man, male and female, created in the image of God.

The body is so amazing that the David the Psalmist said

Psalm 139:13-14 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

The body is made up of a diverse number of systems, made up of a staggering number of diverse cells... each system (the skeletal system, the nervous system, the circulatory system, the digestive system, the muscular system) has its unique role to play in the survival and activity of the human body.

No one really knows how many cells there are in the human body, but estimates put it as high as 10^{14} (1 followed by 14 zeroes). In the human brain alone, there are as many nerve interconnections as there are leaves in the Amazonian rain forest.

Unlike a single-celled creature (like a paramecium), the human body displays functional diversity... with systems interdependent on each other. The cells in the respiratory system is dependent on the digestive system and the circulatory system for the nutrition necessary to stay alive

The marvels of the human body are on display whenever we see how people can move so skillfully.

Listen to Dr. Paul Brand's description of concert pianist Arthur Rubinstein's performance of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*:

"A piano performance is a ballet of fingers, a glorious flourish of ligaments and joints, tendons, nerves, and muscles. I must sit near the stage to watch their movements. From my own careful calculations I know that some of the movements required, such as the powerful arpeggios in *Moonlight's* third movement, are simply too fast for the body to accomplish consciously. Never impulses do not travel with enough speed for the brain to sort out that third finger has just lifted in time in order for the fourth finger to strike the next key.... I marvel too at the slow lilting passages. A good pianist controls his or her fingers independently, so that when striking a two-handed chord of eight notes, each of the fingers exerts a slightly different pressure for emphasis, with the melody note ringing the loudest. The effect of a few grams more or less of pressure in a crucial pianissimo passage is so minuscule only a sophisticated laboratory could measure it. But the human ear contains just such a laboratory, and musicians like Rubinstein gain acclaim because discriminating listeners can savor their subtle nuances of control."

Or take the staggering balance and coordination of gymnast Simone Biles, the most decorated gymnast in American history. When she does a backflip on a balance beam only 4 inches wide, her brain is taking in constant information about her location, speed of rotation, center of gravity... how this backflip feels compared to the thousands of times she has practiced it, what tiny compensation this or that muscle needs to do to land perfectly.

A neurologist writing about Simone Biles spoke of the over 200 classes of nerve cells associated with human movement, and how an athlete like Biles has each of these classes of nerve cells trained and ready to land the backflip.

The human body is one of many analogies scripture uses for the church of Jesus Christ. Others are a temple, the Bride, a family, a nation, etc. But the BODY analogy stresses unity and diversity, and that is the focus of this sermon

I. The Unity and Diversity of the Body of Christ

A. One Body, Not Many

1. Every single one of you who is born-again is a member of the Body of Christ... from the moment you heard the gospel and believed it

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-- whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-- and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

2. Paul stresses this oneness, this UNITY here in this chapter

1 Corinthians 12:20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

1 Corinthians 12:27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

3. He stressed it earlier in discussing the Lord's Supper

1 Corinthians 10:17 Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

4. Similarly in Romans 12

Romans 12:4-5 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

5. God is not doing many different works all over the world... but one great glorious work of unification in Christ... of bringing together all people and making us one

John 11:51-52 Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, ⁵² and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.

Ephesians 1:9-10 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment- to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

6. Given that we are coming from an amazingly diverse backgrounds, this unity is even more vital for us to comprehend

Colossians 3:11 Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

B. This Unity is Patterned After the Trinity

John 17:11 Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name-- the name you gave me-- so that they may be one as we are one.

John 17:20-21 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.

John 17:22-23 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: ²³ I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

C. Present Functional Diversity

1. Paul is here in this chapter talking about spiritual gifts

1 Corinthians 12:1 Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.

2. He has already taught them about the various types of gifts, how they are all given by the Trinity to work within the unity God is intending

1 Corinthians 12:4-6 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all people.

3. So the analogy of the human body is powerful: unity in one body, but diversity in function

4. We have different roles to play in the growth of the Body of Christ

D. Remember the Purpose of Spiritual Gifts: The Final Maturity of the Body of Christ

Ephesians 4:13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4:16 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.

The Corinthian problem: Chaos based on their pagan background... disorder

BUT ALSO... pride problems... the more noteworthy gifted people BOASTING over the less noteworthy gifted people

This created a rift, a division in the body of Christ... the spiritual "haves and have-nots"

Paul wants them to understand how much they really need each other and are truly one in Christ!

So, he has to address both sides of the equation... those who thought too lowly of their spiritual gifts, and were therefore (probably) not doing their spiritual gift ministries...

And also those who thought too highly of their spiritual gifts, and were denigrating others and behaving arrogantly... and that is DANGEROUS!

James 4:6 "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

II. Don't Think Too Lowly of Your Gifts (vs. 15-19)

1 Corinthians 12:15-19 *If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be?*

A. This Has to Do With Thinking Rightly About Your Gifts

Romans 12:3 *Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*

1. If you see yourself too highly or too lowly, you will not function properly with your spiritual gift package
2. In these verses, Paul is addressing the lowly... those who have bought into the arrogant rhetoric of the upfront stars of the show
3. They are saying, "Because I am not one of those, my gifts are not important... I have no contribution to make!"
4. The attitude you have toward your spiritual gifts is VITAL

B. Just Because the Foot is Not a Hand, that Doesn't Mean It's Not Part of the Body

1. Perhaps the foot is jealous of the hand
2. The foot is covered every moment by footwear, gets dirty as it walks down the dusty road, gets smelly, is never celebrated
3. The hand, on the other hand, is out and about and entrusted with amazingly dexterous and skillful things to do
 - a. By his hands, a sculptor like Michelangelo can carve marble until it seems to come to life

- b. By his hands, the concert pianist Arthur Rubinstein can play “Moonlight Sonata”
- c. By her hands, a nurse like Florence Nightengale can heal
- d. By her hands, an author like Louisa May Alcott can write
- e. What does the foot do by comparison?

- 4. But we all know how dependent we are on our feet!
- 5. By our feet, we walk... moving from here to there... standing up to face each other
- 6. And just because the foot is not a hand, doesn't mean it's not part of the body
- 7. Speaking more directly, even if your spiritual gift is more obscure and behind the scenes, you are every bit as vital to the health and fruitfulness of the Body of Christ... and the LORD KNOWS THAT!
- 8. His same Holy Spirit is in you, seeing everything you do! Energizing you! Caring for you! Moving you to serve in the specific role he has wisely chosen for you to do!

C. So Also the Ear and the Eye

- 1. Imagine the ear jealous of the eye
- 2. I can see why! The eyes are sparkling and beautiful, radiant with light and entrusted with a massively important job to do
- 3. We know that we get more than 83% of the information we have about our surrounding world from our eyesight, whereas only 11% comes by hearing
- 4. The eyes are beautiful... sparkling with color—blue eyes, or brown eyes, or green eyes... everyone wants to look at each other's eyes
- 5. But the ear... honestly it's rather ugly; a bizarre twisted shape, with an earlobe hanging down

6. I know some women can beautify their ears with nice jewelry, but lets be honest—the ear can't compete with the eye
7. But Paul says to the ear, “You are still an absolutely vital part of the body!”
 - a. The sense of hearing is entrusted to the strange-looking ear
 - b. Paul gives us a rather grotesque image:

1 Corinthians 12:17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?

- c. How gross would that be? A bunch of big eyeballs rolling down the street?! Unable to hear or walk
- d. The sense of hearing is vital to a full and healthy life
- e. Think of the delights of music! Or the hearing of a child saying “I love you!” to a mommy! Or best of all, the hearing of the gospel, since faith comes by hearing.

The IMB has divided its worldwide work into seven affinity groups... all but one of them is ethnic-national... like the European affinity, and the Sub-Saharan African affinity

But there is one entire affinity group united by a human capacity: hearing

There is a DEAF affinity group... and the Affinity group leader explained it as saying deaf people all over the world are united by a similar experience in whatever culture they are in

8. Yet lest the ear get too arrogant, Paul humbles that too!

1 Corinthians 12:17 If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?

God has assigned to the nose the function of smell... even though scientists tell us we only get 3.5% of our information through smell

But is not aroma a big part of the pleasure of eating?

And Shakespeare spoke of the fragrance of a rose, saying “A rose by any other name would still smell as sweet.”

Think of the delights of the aromas of Christmas... the scent of a freshly-cut pine tree, the fragrance of Christmas cookies baking, the smell of a roaring fire in the fireplace, the rich smells wafting from a delicious roast beef dinner on the table

All of the body’s diverse capabilities combine to make the full healthy human experience in this world

No they are not equal in their impact and value to our lives... one of the greatest human fears in this world is blindness, and if forced to choose, many would rather lose hearing than eyesight. But we must see God’s wisdom in the whole body

D. God’s Wisdom

1 Corinthians 12:18-19 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be?

Application right now!!

1. Perhaps you have not invested yourself much in any kind of ministry
2. You feel like your gifts are not worth discussing, of no great worth or value
3. It is exactly that kind of person Paul has been addressing
4. You are not an up-front person; you don’t have speaking skills; you don’t have any amazing talents that cause people to talk about you for days afterward
5. Paul says God has still gifted you and arranged you just where he wants you to be
6. You are still a part of the Body of Christ

7. The Body, for it to be fully healthy and functional, needs ALL OF ITS MEMBERS to be energetically active in what God has gifted them to do
8. Delight in the wisdom of God, that he made you as he did
9. Discover... Develop... Deploy!!

Now... let's address the other side of the equation... the prideful ones!

III. Don't Think Too Highly of Your Gifts (vs. 20-22)

1 Corinthians 12:20-22 As it is, there are many parts, but one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable...

Romans 12:3 Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

A. Pride is Offensive to God!

B. Paul is Attacking the Arrogance of Some

1. They would say to the lesser prominent members of the Body, "I don't need you!"
2. In this case, it is the eye speaking to the hand, and the head speaking to the feet: I DON'T NEED YOU!!
3. How foolish!
4. The issue here is the perfect INTERDEPENDENCE of the Body of Christ
5. Just as we saw earlier with men and women... how God made men the head, but both men and women are completely interdependent

C. Appearances Can Be Deceiving

1. The parts of the body that SEEM to be weaker actually prove to be indispensable
2. Think of the power of the word “indispensable”... I can’t live without you!
3. The Greek word is URGENT! Like of vital necessity
4. Here we must think of the internal organs... the kidneys, the liver, the spinal column
5. They are absolutely not much to look at! They are very vulnerable and need constant protection... but the body can’t live without them!
6. So in the church, we cannot look on a single human being and say “You are unnecessary! We can live without you!”
7. Every single member of the church is VITAL to the full fruitfulness of the body in that community

IV. The Honor Given to Every Member of the Body (vs. 22-25)

1 Corinthians 12:22-25 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

A. Paul Now Addresses the Issue that was Driving This: HONOR

1. There was a higher community honor given to certain members rather than others
2. Honor is a precious thing... words of praise, affirmation... the community trappings of the best seats at the banquets, the central focus at the gatherings... everyone speaking of those honored people and esteeming them highly, while others are disrespected

3. Remember the pattern of factions and divisions at the beginning of the book

1 Corinthians 1:12 One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."

Remember the immediate answer Paul gives by asking this question:

1 Corinthians 1:13 Is Christ divided?

The UNITY of the Body of Christ should put an end to this kind of undue honor

This continues to be a temptation to this present day

There is a cult of personality that can develop around certain key leaders... great speakers, teachers, preachers, leaders

It was for this very reason that John Calvin, understanding the temptation that some of his followers might have to make his gravesite a place of pilgrimage in the decades that followed his death ordered that he be buried at night in an unmarked tomb

B. Paul Speaks of the Unpresentable Parts of the Body Treated with Special Modesty

1. Perhaps he is referring to clothing by which we cover our nakedness... that would make sense in context
2. In many cultures, people show a lack of concern for common decency... since the fall, we have to cover certain parts of our body to go out in public
3. So in our culture, we need to be sure those parts of the body that men and women have always covered in order not to cause others to stumble that we still cover... especially women's clothing is always pushing toward being more and more daring, more and more revealing
4. In any case, the analogy is that every single member of the body is precious, valuable, honored in its own way

C. AND in Heaven, Faithful Service Will be Rewarded by the Lord

1. Some of the most obscure servants will be draped with glory and honor that we can scarcely imagine
2. Jesus said this

Matthew 20:25-28 "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave - ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

3. It is humble servanthood that Christ will honor the most highly
4. So... the Corinthians should DISPENSE with a false humility that says "Because I am not one of the great leaders, I have no contribution to make!" or "Because I AM one of the great leaders, I don't need anyone else!"
5. The true honor will be on judgment day

Matthew 25:21 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

D. Paul then wants everyone in the body of Christ to show honor to each other and concern for each other, and not let pride or shame divide the body of Christ

1 Corinthians 12:24-25 But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

V. The Unity of the Body in Both Suffering and Honor (vs. 26)

A. Paul Finishes with an Amazing Sense of Unity in BOTH Suffering and Honor

1 Corinthians 12:26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

B. This is True of the Physical Body

1. If each of the members could speak, the eye would not be unconcerned that the intestine are wracked with the pain of a bleeding ulcer
2. Whenever any significant injury happens to the body, the whole body suffers
3. So it must be with the body of Christ
4. If any part is suffering, all should come together to alleviate the suffering

Acts 4:34-35 There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

C. Heavenly Honors SHARED PERFECTLY

“If one part is honored, the whole body is honored with it.”

1. In heaven, not all will be equally honored
2. Some will have sacrificed more and suffered more and served better for the glory of Christ
3. BUT everyone will share in those brothers' and sisters' greater honors, because we are all ONE BODY
4. I will perfectly delight in the honors given to Roman martyrs like Polycarp and Perpetua and Felicitas... and to missionary martyrs like Jim Elliot and Borden of Yale
5. I will feel no jealousy whatsoever when Ann Judson is honored far above me for her faithful service to Christ in Burma

6. I will thrill with delight when Lottie Moon and Hudson Taylor shine with greater heavenly radiance than me for their service to the Lord!

Jonathan Edwards, "Heaven is a world of love":

In heaven there shall be no remaining enmity, or distaste, or coldness, or deadness of heart towards God and Christ. Not the least remainder of any principle of envy shall exist to be exercised toward angels or other beings who are superior in glory; nor shall there be aught like contempt or slighting of those who are inferiors. Those that have a lower station in glory than others, suffer no diminution of their own happiness by seeing others above them in glory. On the contrary, all the members of that blessed society rejoice in each other's happiness, for the love of benevolence is perfect in them all.

VI. Applications

A. Come to Christ!

1. You must be a member of the Body of Christ first before you can serve him
2. The simple gospel is given to deliver you from sin and make you a beloved member of his Body
3. God sent his Son into the world to die for sins... Jesus lived that perfect life under the Law of God that we could never live; he also died under the wrath of God on the cross
4. God raised him from the dead on the third day
5. All you have to do is TRUST IN HIM! Acknowledge that you are a sinner in need of a Savior and call on the name of Jesus
6. If you do, God will make you instantly a member of the Body of Christ

Christians:

- B. This Whole Section of 1 Corinthians is about SPIRITUAL GIFTS

1. Special abilities that God has given to each of us... unique to us... for the building up of the Body of Christ to full maturity
 2. DISCOVER your gift package
 - a. Is it a pattern of quiet service?
 - b. Is it hospitality?
 - c. Is it financial giving?
 - d. Is it mercy ministry to the poor and needy?
 - e. Is it teaching of children?
 - f. Is it care for the elderly?
 - g. Is it leadership... administration... the ability to solve complex problems of stewardship in running a large ministry?
 - h. Is it encouragement... seeing how you can use words to build someone up?
 - i. Whatever it is... DISCOVER your spiritual gift!
 3. DEVELOP it... get better and better at using it
 4. DEPLOY it... get out with it and use it!
- C. Think Properly of Yourself... Neither TOO LOWLY (“I’m not needed... I’m not important!”) or TOO HIGHLY (“They’re lucky to have me! I am the most important person here! I don’t need them but they need me!”)
- D. Have a Heavenly Perspective!
1. In heaven, we will be perfectly humble... free from the fleshly commitment to SELF
 2. Let’s serve like it NOW!