

23. Team, no prima donna

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One day I watched a portion of the Indy 500 Auto Race with utter fascination. I really don't understand how the whole race works and all the rules. I am guessing that whoever finishes the whole distance in the fastest time wins.

Actually, I was more interested in how a pit crew works together to get the things done. In less time than it takes for most of us to put our seatbelts, the crew had changed all four tires, filled the gas tank, washed the windshield, and made vital adjustments to the car. The fastest time I saw was 2.1 seconds. It happens so quickly and efficiently, because each crew member knows about his job exactly and does it right.

Like wise, in the body of Christ we all have been equipped with different skills to do certain tasks. We can't all be pastors or teachers. Some of us have to "change the tires," and "wash the windshield." And each job is as important as the other. For the body of Christ to fulfill its purpose, we each need to concentrate on our part and do it the best we can.

A. MANY PARTS, ONE UNIT

1 Corinthians 12:12-14 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. 14 For in fact the body is not one member but many.

Instead of getting into a dry and boring theological discussion, Paul explains the spiritual oneness of the body of Christ by likening it to the union of the parts of our physical bodies.

From the tops of our hard skulls to the soft soles of our feet, each part of our bodies, though diverse, is united as a whole. Likewise, every member of Christ's church is a part of the same unit. Paul told us why in verses 13-14.

It is because of the Holy Spirit's ministry that we are all part of the same unit. All believers are members of the same body, because we all have been baptized by the Holy Spirit.

B. A CLARIFICATION OF THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Unfortunately, in the church nowadays, the teaching of the baptism of the Holy Spirit has become a battleground of confusion rather than a doctrine of clarity. We are commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit, but being baptized by the Spirit is not our responsibility.

Acts 1:4-8 And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; 5 for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." 6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has

come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

After His resurrection from the grave, Jesus told His disciples that they were to wait in Jerusalem until they received the promise of the Father which He had been talking to them about. I asked you to underline the word "power" in v8. We already learned this Greek word last Sunday. It is "dynamis." They needed that overflowing power of the Spirit to effectively serve the Lord.

We believe that this is the experience that Jesus was referring to in John 7 when, on the great day of the Feast of Tabernacles, He stood and cried to the assembled multitude.

John 7:37-39 On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." 39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

This 'come upon' in Acts 1:8 has been referred to as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, or the overflow of the Spirit. What kind of overflow would that be? It would be like a torrent of living water flowing out of the life of the believer.

So it's one thing to be filled with the Spirit, and it's quite another to have the Spirit flowing out. The inlet of the Spirit is powerful and dynamic, but there has to be that flowing forth of the Spirit from my life to affect and touch those who are around me.

It's the Lord's desire that the Holy Spirit flow forth out of our life. It's one thing to have the Holy Spirit poured into our life and another thing to allow the Holy Spirit to pour out of our life.

That's the necessary power for the ministry. Even the disciples were not permitted to engage in the ministry until they had received this dynamic of the Spirit according to Acts 1:4. The "promise of the Father" is this power of the Holy Spirit.

So we believe that there is an experience with the Holy Spirit that is distinct from conversion and indwelling. Some call it baptism. Some call it being filled with the Spirit. Whatever we choose to call it, it means being overflowed with the Spirit. It only happens when born-again Christians realize that they no longer want to live the life the way they want, but they yield their hearts to the Holy Spirit completely. Grant that it doesn't mean they become sinless, but they will strive to sin less to please the Lord.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit should not be measured by speaking in tongues.

C. MANY PARTS, EACH IMPORTANT

Next, Paul builds on his analogy, and with imagination and humor he illustrates the significance of each believer in the body.

1 Corinthians 12:15-20 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the

whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? 18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. 19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be? 20 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.

Pop Quiz: Turn over your sermon notes and write down your answers to these questions:

- Who visited with Dwight L. Moody at a shoe store and spoke to him about Christ?
- Who was the wife of Charles Haddon Spurgeon?
- Who was the elderly woman who prayed faithfully for Billy Graham for over twenty years?

OK, how'd you do? Before you excuse your inability to answer these questions by calling the quiz "trivia," better stop and think. Had it not been for such unknown persons – such "nobodies" – a huge chunk of church history would be missing. And a lot of lives would have been untouched.

Nobodies. What a necessary band of men and women... servants of our Mighty God... yet nameless to the other Christians in the Kingdom of God, but extremely well-known to our King. Men and women who, with silent heroism and faithful diligence, relinquish the limelight and live in the shade of public figures.

Jim Elliot, martyred missionary of the Gospel to the Aucas once remarked: "Missionaries are a bunch of nobodies trying to exalt Somebody."

Though big ears and dirty feet are less appealing than clean hands and bright, sparkling eyes, they are still vital to the body. In the same way, every member of the body of Christ performs a significant function for the entire body.

In verse 17, Paul shows the absurdity of a body composed of only one member. Picture it. A body that's one huge ear – no sense of smell, no sight, no taste. You might like to say to others, "I am all ears." But you cannot say that. Because you don't have a mouth to speak. Without the other members, it wouldn't be of much use.

Some Bible teachers use this portion of Scripture as support verses for the different church denominations. I disagree and can prove that they misinterpreted it. By context, the Scripture says about different parts' functions, not different denominations that came out of our sinful pride. God does not care about denominations. Would He still use different denominations? Yes, He even uses satan for His glory.

God didn't create bodies that have only one part and function, because they would be grotesque and not really bodies at all according to v19. Similarly, He didn't design the church to have members who possess the same spiritual gifts, but He has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.

If you've been gifted as a foot, it's easy to look at those gifted as hands and think how skilled, how capable they are, and that you're not important at all. That's exactly what the enemy wants you to think. He'll do anything to make you think that you are nothing in the body of Christ. If you listen to him, you just become satan's one of the first accomplishment of dividing the body of Christ in your church.

But the truth is that, in its perfect design, the body of Christ is dependent on each part – feet, ears, hands, as well as organs that are never seen to be healthy. Don't

let satan discard your position in Christ in a spiritual dumpster or sell you the idea that you aren't important. Remember that each part is important. That includes you.

In God's eye, you are the only one in the whole world. God made you as you are, not with sinful attitude, but you as a human being. There is no one like you in human history. Individually all of you are special to Him. As children of God, you have a very special place in His heart. That is why He sent His only begotten Son to die for us.

D. MANY PARTS, ALL INTERDEPENDENT

1 Corinthians 12:21-31 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. 23 And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, 24 but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, 25 that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. 28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

In a healthy body of believers, all the members depend on each other, lean on each other, and help each other function at their best.

An eye may be able to see a hurt child, but it could never reach to comfort the child like a hand could. The tiny anvil bones in the inner ear that hold part of the secret to the world of hearing, they are desperately needed by the other members. Paul explains why God has created us to be interdependent.

In verses 27-28, Paul makes it clear that no single gift is all important. And that if you were to put differing gifts on a scale, they wouldn't necessarily weigh in evenly. Notice the order in which he lists the gifts.

Paul emphasizes the spiritual side of his analogy, explaining that there is no such thing as an exclusive gift in the body of Christ. The Corinthians had inflated the value of the gift of tongues. They made it as the single evidence that one possessed the Holy Spirit like many charismatic Christians think.

In closing, Paul urges us to "earnestly desire the greater gifts" in v31a. The greater gifts, such as prophecy and teaching, build up the whole body. The lesser gifts, such as tongues, build up only a small part as we will see in 1 Corinthians 14:1-5. So, as Christians, we should pursue the exercising of the greater gifts, with the building up of the whole body in mind.

Speaking of building up, this end of chapter 12 is a nice buildup for Chapter 13.

E. APPLICATIONS

- 1) Don't ever think that you are better or more godly than others because of your spiritual gifts.
- 2) In the body of Christ, the church, we are interdependent to one another for the glory of God.
- 3) Are you one of those invisible and unknown parts of the Kingdom of God? Praise God. But you are extremely visible and well known to the King of kings.
- 4) Our Lord wants us to be team members working together, not a snobby prima donna.