

Title: It Takes the Whole Team
Text: 1 Corinthians 12.14-26
Theme: The importance of every part of the body
Series: 1 Corinthians #62
Prop Stmt.

Read Text:

To say that this city is going bonkers over the Tigers is an understatement. Personally, I love the game of baseball. To me it is not too slow, in fact, there is so much happening it is almost impossible to keep up with it all. Along that line, I recommend George Will's book called, "Men at Work" that gives you greater appreciation for this sport. But, what is happening right now? There is a team, a series, and a game that most of us in this community are experiencing together.

Last week when Magglio Ordonez hit that home-run in the 4th and final game of the Oakland series, one of the guys in our church who was watching this at his house, jumped in the air and yelled, "Get out of here." Of course, he was yelling at the baseball. But the poor little boy that his wife was babysitting, who was upstairs in the bathtub quite naturally and most distressingly assumed that this man was yelling at a thief. So, when the man realized that his reaction may have scared the boy he went upstairs to check on him. The boy, hearing the footsteps and assuming the thief was after him, plugged his nose and dove under the water.

We all have our baseball stories because right now, most of us are sharing this World Series in common with each other. We have some common ground that we can relate to and it is good and it is a lot of fun, for as far as it goes. Here is the difference. We are not in the dugout. In fact, very few of us even get to the game. Most of us are connected to this event by TV. We are observers. We aren't even playing the game. Oh, we buy the hats, the shirts and the flags, but if the Tigers win the Series, we don't get a ring. But, even though we are not actually on the team some of us feel like we live and die on every pitch. How much greater would our sense of connection be, if we were actually on the team? But, think about it for a second. If you are on the team, that brings with it, some serious risk. If your team wins, you share in the glory, but if your team loses, you share in the loss. If you are on the team, you may be the guy called up to bat in the bottom of the ninth and whole game depends on you. If you, like Magglio Ordonez, hit one out of the park, you will be forever remembered in greatness, but the opportunity to hit a home run brings with it the chance to strike out. Anybody here want to be Jason Verlander right now? The greater the risk of sorrow, the greater the opportunity for joy. For some, the fear of sorrow eliminates the opportunity for joy.

If you are a follower of Christ, you may not be on a baseball team, but you are part of a team. It is a body that is infinitely more personal and eternally more profound than any baseball team. When you become a follower of Christ, you are, at that moment, placed into the body of Christ. You are given a new family. You have a new name, because you are part of the stuff. You are on Team Jesus. But being on the team and learning to play

as a team do not always go together, but they should. That is the point of verses 12-13. Our oneness, our common identify, our uniqueness all stems from the fact that all of the members of Team Jesus (Church) have been baptized by one Spirit into one body. There is not an elite, 1st class members group who have the inside scoop on the truth that the rest of the regular, coach members do not have. This is a team, a body, a unit. Every member has a part. Every member matters. Every member has to play his or her position. If we lose, we lose as a team. If we win, we win as a team. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

But, how can you share the load of others if you do not think like a member of the team? That is the point of this text because we prize our independence. We do not like to be made to feel responsible. Don't get married, just rent a spouse, that way if things don't work out, either one can get out with a 30-day notice, or less. This passage is rather self-explanatory. Good preaching makes certain that you understand what the text says, what the text means and how it is to be applied. In this particular case, the first two are rather self-evident. Therefore we get to move right toward the application because there are two issues that Paul is addressing. And these are two issues that face every single church, and every single group in every single church and every single person, in every single group in every single church.

1. **What if you think that you are inferior?** (14-20)

What is it that normally occurs that provides people with a sense of belonging? Keep that question in mind for a second, I will come back to it.

Controlling Idea: The body is made up of many parts – v.14 (repeats idea from v.12) and repeats that idea again in v.20. Everything else in this paragraph is an illustration of this.

So, what do we have going on here? Let's say that one day, you wake up and your foot has somehow acquired the ability to speak and it announces to the rest of you, - "Hey, I am not the hand." "Well, - duh! No kidding – what did you finally finish that correspondence course on anatomy and physiology?" To which the foot replies, "Well, since I am not the hand – I quit. I don't belong here." And your foot decides to leave!

No sooner does your foot attempt to start walking out the door, but you hear a voice coming out of the side of your head. It's your ear. Your ear is talking! Your ear announces, "I am not an eye!" So, you are thinking – what is the problem? Of course you are not an eye, you are the ear. Well, if I am not an eye, I don't belong.

What did the ear and the foot do? They determined that they only belong if they have another part to play other than the one that God has given to them. The foot is dissatisfied with being a foot and the ear is apparently dissatisfied with being an ear. Why, well, to the foot, it is more glamorous or whatever to be a hand. And to the ear, life would be so much better if it were an eye. And I guess you can see where ear would come to this conclusion. When we fall in love we enjoy looking deeply into one another's eyes. Ears?

What needs to happen for the foot and the ear? The questions that Paul asks in v.17 give us the answer. If the whole body were only one part, we could not function because we need every part to do its part and, therefore, every part needs to be part of the life of the other so we can experience something in common where we are needed.

What happens when you come into a group for the first time? You naturally feel that you do not belong since you do not have any experiences with these people. But, if you find out that you grew up in the same neighborhood, attended the same school, like the same baseball team, share a common interest or problem, then you begin to develop a sense of connection. On top of that when you have some experiences in common, then you have a sense of belonging. Some of you experienced that in the military. You were thrown into boot camp, and at the end of our tour of duty, you developed some lifelong friends.

Think about it. As followers of Christ, what do we have in common? We have been born again. We have been placed into the Body of Christ, sealed with Spirit, indwelt by God and given a new identity, a new name, a new home, and a secure eternity. There is nothing that is more important, more significant, more impacting than that. Your relationship with Christ changes everything about you. We will be spending the rest of eternity together. Paul's point is not to figure out who is the ear, the foot or the eye. The truth is, we all think from time to time that we do not belong. Why? Because that is the affect that sin has upon us.

Think about it. What does sin do? Sin separates us from God. Sin separates us from others. Sin actually tears us apart internally because it attacks our wholeness and we do not know what it actually means to be human. Our humanity is best experienced in relationships with God and others. Your identity, or the way that you tend to view yourself is deeply impacted by your primary relationships. When those primary relationships are blown up by sin, then, apart from Christ, you are groping for an identity. You are looking for someone or something that will give you a sense of identity, but that identity is a borrowed one. The truth is, you do not know who you really are. That is what sin does. Sin ruins our humanity because it robs us of the opportunity to experience internal wholeness and relational trust. But, when sin is dealt with, then your relationship with God and with others can be restored. Sin says, "You are inferior. You do not belong here. You have problems that are too deep. Besides, no one wants to help you anyway." What do you do when you start thinking like that? You need to come back to this text because here, Paul really addresses that thinking with the facts. Here are the facts and you need to preach a sermon to yourself that has these three points in it.

- 1) No one else can play your part! – v.17
- 2) Your part is God-ordained and God arranged. – v.18

Theological unity and personal diversity is not only necessary in order to carry out the ministry of the church, it is the will of God.

- 3) Without you, the rest is deformed. – v.19

Now, if you were all that important, then why don't people miss you if you are gone? If you were all that important, then why are you often ignored? Well, part of it may be because you act like you don't belong here and you don't involved in anyone else's life and you don't really love, and pray and care for others. Part of it may be because you really do think that it's all about you and you get really annoyed when you aren't treated in the way that you think you deserve. But, the other part of it, is that this church is full of a bunch of sinners. We don't do this thing called church perfectly – yet. We forget how important you are because every person in this body is struggling with how important they think they are. What do you do if you haven't seen someone for a week or two? Do you shrug it off? Do you figure that is someone else's business? It is your business. Your foot is hurting and you need to do something. What do you do when you find out that a part of the body is in trouble? Do you say, "Why do we have to know this stuff? Why can't we just pretend that everything is fine?" Your ear is hurting and you have to do something. But, isn't that what we pay Bob to do? Isn't he the professional problem-solver? Don't we pay him and the staff to do the dirty work so that we can have a problem-free church experience? My responsibility before God according to Ephesians 4 is to equip you, train you, prepare you and deploy you for ministry to this body. You need to preach to yourself and everyone else needs to preach to themselves as well. Some of you think that you are inferior and some of you think that you are very important. Truth is, we all feel both, sometimes all at once.

If you are not living with God's view of yourself, then you will either think you are inferior, or you will think or try to make others think that you are more superior than others.

2. **What if you think that you are more important?** (21-26)

This next section is brutal. It is brutally honest. The truth is, many of us live as if we do not need others and we do many things to give that impression. What if Nate Robertson came to church here this morning? Would any of you go up to meet him and encourage him? Why would you go up to him, even though you do not know him, and you don't go out of your way to greet people that you do not know? The rotten truth is, we think he is important and we need him. We "need" to meet him so we can tell stories about it, or so that we can feel important. But, if someone comes in here who doesn't look important, we may not go out of our way to meet that person because we don't think that we need that person. We are fine without them. That's pathetic! But, it goes deeper than that. The reason we tend to shy away from people whom we don't perceive can add much to our lives is because we actually think that we are self-sufficient beings, which is another way of saying, we act this way because internally we live as if we do not need God.

Meet Mr. I-ball. Mr. I-ball thinks, that he does not need anyone else. He can handle life all by himself. This thinking is often unwittingly reinforced by those who say how, beautiful he is, how much they notice him and how gifted and expressive he can be. He winks, he rolls, he jiggles, he stares. And Mr. I-ball after thinking and thinking of how critical he is to the rest of the body, begins to think that he is the most important part.

Not only is he the most important part, but he has no need of some of the other parts. One day, Mr. I-ball says to Mr. Hand – “I don’t need you.”

Have you ever said that to someone? Now, Mr. I-ball may really believe that. But is it true? No! What happens to Mr. I-ball when he little I-lash starts running around near his cornea – now what is he going to do? The only thing he can do is roll around and cry. Mr. I-ball needs Mr. Hand, but Mr. I-ball is too proud to even know it, but one day he will.

Meet Mrs. Fat-Head. Mrs. Fat-Head is an authority on everything. If you don’t do it her way, you are an idiot. If you don’t meet her approval, you are worthless. Mrs. Fat-Head really thinks that she is the most important person in the group. The only people in the world who really have value are those who always agree with Mrs. Fat-Head. If you have another idea – then Mrs. Fat-Head will say – “I don’t need you.”

Paul then turns this whole thing upside down. He points out that the parts that receive the most honor and attention are often the ones that we really don’t need. You can live without a hand. You can live without an eye. He then goes on to say that the parts of the body that we usually refer to as the private parts, while covered up for modesty reasons are in reality extremely important to the health of the entire body. Illustrations are not needed on this point, we get it.

Wow, the parts that we think should be covered up and hidden are in reality the ones that should be given special honor. What is going on in this context? This church is all wiggled out over the gift of tongues. That gift was being used as THE standard of spiritual enlightenment. Paul is saying, “Hold the phone.” First of all, no gift is the standard because God has given different gifts to different people in different amounts at different times for different durations. Besides, the people who minister in public like the gift of tongues was being used, already get enough attention. It’s the part of the body that is functioning behind the scenes who should be reminded how important they are to the entire body, not in order to just make them feel good and get more work out of them, but because that is really true.

What should you do when you find yourself looking down at another person in the body?
Answer – You preach a sermon to yourself. And that sermon has 3 points to it.

- 1) That person is worthy of special honor (and is more important than me). – 22-23
- 2) God has put both of us together. - 24
- 3) That person is worth my care and concern. - 25

When we realize and live as if every single part of the body is connected and dependent, then we will not try to cut off, ignore or be calloused toward certain parts. No division, because there is equal care. What a radical concept.

When you choose to get close to another part of the body, you take a sense of ownership in that person’s life. But, we are the body of Christ. We are Christ to this world and to

each other. What else can that mean but to go all out? Funny thing is, when you do that, you find out that life in the body divides your burdens and doubles your joy.

So, what are you going to do about it?

1. Preach these sermons to yourself every day.
2. Accept your gift and do not minimize it or glory in it.
3. Accept the gifts of others and do not minimize them or be intimidated by them.
4. CONNECT! That is what our Small Groups Ministry is all about.
5. Figure out what it means to be a member of the team – come to faith in Christ