

8/14/2011 TOP TEN TEACHINGS OF PAUL: 9 - "Parts of the Body of Christ"

Key Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; and Romans 12:3-18

by Rev. Dr. Bruce A. Jones

I was in seminary for four years. For the first two years, I worked at a mid-sized church some 75 miles away from the school's campus. The church was in Logan in southeastern Ohio, just north of Athens and southeast of Columbus. The second two years, I worked in automobile dealerships. One year I worked in the service department at Tynes Chevrolet in Delaware, Ohio; and one year I worked in the body shop of Rodenfels Chevrolet in downtown Columbus. You don't have to be around cars very long to realize how many parts it takes to build or repair a vehicle. In fact, the average car has between 25,000 and 30,000 separate parts. And none of these parts is unimportant. As you might guess, no manufacturer is going to make specifications and order a slew of parts that are not important. Every last screw or bulb or hose is vital. A vehicle needs all its parts to be whole, to operate and to be safe. So the next time you get into your car, take note of the screws, the bolts, the door handle, the linkages, the latch, the sill plate, the arm rest, and on and on. These all make your car both comfortable and safe, they make your car operate the way you'd expect.

Human beings are not like parts, and they are not interchangeable. The assembly line worker might open a drawer full of screws and use a few, but God created you and me to be individual and unique. There is no one like you.

The church is referred to as the body of Christ, and Paul uses the illustration of a human body in several places among his letters. We all can look at our hands and arms and legs and feet, and look at those around us and see ears and eyes, noses and mouths, and we can see that the human body has parts too. Then Paul said, consider yourself as one part in the body of Christ, the church. You are integral to the wholeness of the body. And if for some reason you don't feel so connected to the church, that doesn't make you any less a part of it, or any less a part of the body of Christ.

Paul wrote, **If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.**

Have you seen that commercial with that huge ear walking around? Aren't you glad that is not how we look? Well it is not how we function either.

So perhaps we have a bit of an identity crisis. I think this is especially true of new members of the church, and probably of those who are just beginning to feel that God may be calling them to be a part of this church family. We all ask ourselves at some point, "What can I contribute to this church?" "What role should I take on?" We don't want to take someone else's place so we are hesitant to just jump in. That is natural and normal, but let me make this clear: because you were created uniquely by God, and because God has called you to be a part of this church, then God has a plan for you and a plan for how you will fit into this family of the body of Christ.

Everyone, even you, has special gifts, unique talents, and individual perspectives that make you an invaluable asset to not only this church, but to the whole of the kingdom of God.

I don't expect every single person to end up on a committee or ministry all at once. But my understanding of how God works tells me that every single one of us has a 'ministry', a purpose, and a commissioning from God. It is our job – not to sit back – but to seek God's guidance, to ask him to open doors, and to point us in the direction we should go. You will find your niche. You will see a place where you can help. You will find something that is not getting done, and when you volunteer you will be amazed how all the pieces have come together to make that ministry a success, and a blessing. That's how our dance troupe got started. That's how Blessed Lambs got started, that's how our food pantry got started. Someone came up with an inspiration, started talking to other people, and God began to put the people and the pieces together.

The coolest thing about serving God; the greatest thing about volunteering to help others, is that we get such personal satisfaction from doing that ministry.

I have always seen myself as a jack-of-all-trades. I am good at a lot of things, but I've never been great at anything. I was good in sports, but never a star athlete. I am a good organizer, but I wouldn't say I'm great at it. I love people and being with folks, but I'm not a politician type of person. I do fairly well with public speaking, but I could never be on the keynote speaking circuit. I love graphic arts. I enjoy computers. I am a capable carpenter, etc.. But, and here's my point, I am not good enough at any of these to make a career. So God placed me in a job, in a calling, where I can use all of my varied skills and gifts, and I love every aspect of what I do.

God's intent for you whether you are highly skilled in one or two things, or broadly skilled in many areas, is that you find that perfect place where you will fit in using the gift set that you have.

You are a part of the Body of Christ. The church needs you, and you need many of the opportunities that the church can open to you. That's what we mean when we say you are a part of the Body of Christ. You fit in here. You are needed. Even if you don't think you are needed, even if you don't think you fit in here, that doesn't make you any less a part of this body. Just because you have not recognized your place in the body, or recognized how important your role is or will be, that doesn't make you any less a vital part of the body of Christ.

That's what Paul is saying in this passage. **The body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot ... If the ear ... that would not make it any less a part of the body.** I think we can all understand where he's going with this. If this is your church, if you are a member of this church, if you worship here regularly, or if you feel that God is calling you to become a part of this church, then you are a part of the body. If you belong to another church and you are just visiting us today, you are still a part of the body of Christ at your home church. Just because you may be new, or may be young, or may be old, or may have certain challenges – you still are part of the body.

Paul continues, **If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.** We are not supposed to conform to a single role, a single service, a single perspective. The church is blessed by its diversity. The more different ministries we can perform, the more different views we can express, the more different gifts we give opportunity to be used – the stronger the church becomes.

Look around you for a moment. Those of you who have been around for a while, and you know a

number of the people around you, think about the different things these other folks do for and in the church. I could tell you stories of people who have come to our church, who were hesitant or unsure at the beginning about what they could do to be a part of the church, and who now are significant blessings to all of us.

I could tell you about Marilynne Landweer, whose health sometimes holds her back, and she wasn't sure at first if this was where God was calling her to be, but as we discovered her gifts she found an amazing opportunity to use her skills and do the two things she loves best: she is now leading our weekday women's Bible study, and she heads up our Congregational Care Team, which visits our shut-ins. Her training and her compassion is leading her to also start a new grief support group. And to think she wasn't sure what she could offer.

I could tell you about Wiley Tolbert, who has slowly come out of his shell and has discovered he has some great gifts to share with our church. He is a saint. He works behind the scenes doing janitorial and handyman kinds of things. He cleans to help Ed McKenzie. He changes our sign board out here on the front yard, he is now teaching our youth Sunday School class and boy you should have seen him at Vacation Bible School. He is just a great blessing and joy to me.

I could tell you about Carrie Summers, or John Tompkins, or Lisa Stone. And I could lift up the names of so many of you here today. The point is, everyone has some gift to share. Not everyone is a Sunday School teacher or a singer in the choir. Not everyone can serve in the nursery or work with youth. Not everyone is good with graphics or organizing, but everyone has something to share.

Finally, as Paul states in the Romans passage: **For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.**

It is grace that God has given us. That each of us does have something to contribute, means we are all important, all vital and all needed. We belong to each other. We need each other, every single one of us is an integral part of the body of Christ.

So, doesn't that make you feel good? Doesn't that help you see how perfect is God's plan: his plan for the church, his plan for you? You are exactly what God wanted you to be. God has equipped you to be a perfect fit into the body of Christ. Amen.