

## How to Maintain a Healthy Body 1 Cor. 12:12-27

In 1998, I underwent surgery. You know, during the time that I was in the hospital, I was thinking about why I had to undergo an operation. The answer, of course, was obvious: I didn't take care of my body. In fact, I abused it. Although I knew that a part of my body was not functioning well as it should, still I ignored the warning signs. What happened next was one of the most painful experiences I ever had. Not that I didn't have anesthesia, but it was when the anesthesia wore off that brought much pain. Because of that I've learned to become more careful about my physical activities and diet.

There is another body which every Christian should be concerned about. This is the spiritual body of Christ. This spiritual body is otherwise known as the church. And as we learned already, the church is composed of believers in Jesus across time and space.

We're continuing our series on "We are Family." We've reached the last part of this series. Today, I'd like to talk about "How to Maintain a Healthy Body".

Now, I'm not going to sell you medicines, but I hope to convince you at the end of this message that there's a body that really needs some good maintenance if it's going to fulfill its purpose.

To start, let us look briefly at what I spoke about the church since the start of this series. As I said quite a few times, the Bible refers to the church as the Family of God and the Body of Christ. And each of us, everyone who is saved, everyone who has placed his or her trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, is a member of that family or that body. According to 1 Peter 2:9, we

are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. As such, we occupy a unique and high position. We have been given certain privileges and we are peculiar and precious to him.

Now, as a member, each of us has a role to play. Each of us has certain responsibilities to handle.

Today, I'd like us to look at a passage in the Bible which talks about how we can get involved as members of the Body of Christ. Specifically, how we as individuals can maintain the health of the Family of God. And as I go through this message, be thinking about our own local church which we call Fil-Am Community Church.

As we all know, the body of Christ is spiritual, it is universal and invisible. But it is represented by local churches, which can be Baptist or Methodist or Pentecostal or what-have-you, that exist visibly in a point in time at a particular geographical location. Thus, Fil-Am Community Church is just a small representation of the spiritual Body of Christ.

Please open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 and follow along as I read these verses. I know it's quite long but it's important that we read it in its entirety because what it says is very meaningful.

Now, in verse 12 of our passage this morning, Paul the Apostle compares the church or the body of Christ to the human body. Such analogy is very appropriate because the spiritual body of Christ is composed of many parts just like the physical body that each of us have. Also, like the physical body, the overall condition of the body of Christ is dependent on the condition of each member of the body.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians because the Corinthian church was beset by troubles during that time. Although its members were greatly gifted, they were also quarrelsome, petty, immoral, selfish, and carnal. In other words,

they were immature and unspiritual. There was also so much infighting and divisions. The church in Corinth was just in pure chaos. This must really have broken Paul's heart because he was the founder of this church. He founded it in the spring of A.D. 52 and nurtured it for 18 months.

What has happened to the Corinthian church is still happening today. Many churches are going the Corinthian way, so to speak, to the detriment of everyone concerned. Every now and then we hear of church splits or church dissolutions which shock not only us but the world outside as well.

In the Philippines, there's a beautiful island called Palawan. In this beautiful island, however, is an ugly scene that is going on. You see, I heard that there's a building in that island that houses two churches. Well, what's wrong with that? Perhaps, these two churches hold their services at different times on Sunday. A lot of churches do it this way even here in the US because they cannot afford to buy a building. Even if they hold it at the same time. No problem with that as long as they don't disturb each other's Worship Service. Just like what's going on in this church building. But, you see, these two churches in Palawan hold their services at the same time because they used to be one. Because of misunderstanding and miscommunication, one day they split and so they also split the building literally by erecting an artificial wall inside the building.

This is an unhappy situation but it's true. It is situations like this that give the church a black eye. Once, Mahatma Ghandi was asked why he didn't become a Christian although he admired the Sermon on the Mount so much, he replied, "When you can convince me that Christians live by it, I will be the first to become a Christian." It is sad but the example I gave you is just a symptom of the sickness that is afflicting the body of Christ. Of course, there are Christians and there are churches that set good examples

but the world, by and large, judge us only by the bad examples. We all live in a glass house, and we cannot escape the peering eyes of the outside world.

How then can the body of Christ be brought back into a healthy state? How can we prevent the body of Christ from becoming too sickly?

The Apostle Paul shares some of his insights regarding this matter. He recommends a few things that would help to bring order back into a church which has lost its purpose and forgotten its mission.

This afternoon, I have enumerated three things which I believe the Apostle Paul wants us to consider if we would like to have a healthy body or church. Now, I'm not saying our church is unhealthy. In fact, I believe we are very healthy. Maybe we cough every now and then but, by and large, we're in a good spiritual condition. But I just want to share with you something that would maintain this healthy body. And we should be mindful of them to prevent us from going the Corinthian way too.

So, Paul has given us **three prescriptions for maintaining a healthy body**. The first prescription goes like this:

### **I. Recognize Your Importance as a Member**

In verse 13, Paul says that **"we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free."** Paul here is not talking about water baptism. This is the baptism of the Holy Spirit that the Lord Jesus Christ himself exercises upon those who have accepted him as Lord and Savior. At that moment, which actually is the moment of salvation, the Holy Spirit indwells the new believer and he or she becomes a part or member of the body of Christ.

Now, in the body of Christ, there are no distinctions, no Jews or Greeks or Ilocano or Bisaya or Ilonggo, no white or black or brown or yellow, no slave or free, no blue-collared or white-collared workers, no

Commanders or Giants fans, no Democrats or Republicans. “...and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” (1 Cor. 12:13b) meaning, it is the same Holy Spirit who immersed us into the body and the same Holy Spirit who gave us spiritual gifts and walks alongside us in our spiritual journey. Thus, we must realize that God doesn’t discriminate. He treats us all equally and fairly. Moreover, God put us in the body because we are important to him. It is, therefore, important for us to recognize our importance as a member of the body.

You see, there are those who have been Christians for quite a while and yet are afraid to get involved in any church ministry. You know why? They are afraid because they feel inadequate. They think they’re not up to the task. They feel that God cannot use them. So, day by day, they go on their usual routine, ignoring the gentle nudge of the Holy Spirit to do this or that for God.

You see, I believe each Christian possesses at least one spiritual gift and that gift must be used for the glory of God. It would be a great waste if that gift is not put into use. BTW, aside from the spiritual gift or gifts which the Holy Spirit gave you when you became a Christian, you also have natural abilities or talents that God has given you when you were born. And there are those talents that you acquired throughout your life like singing, doing construction jobs, Kuya July and Marco come to mind, or fixing cars, Kuya Elvin and Andrew, come to mind, and so you know who you will call. My point is, your spiritual gift, your natural ability, your talent, must be put to good use.

Do you think God would put you into the body of Christ for nothing? God has a plan and purpose for your life. God says in Jeremiah 29:11,

*“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’”*

It is now up to you to discover that purpose. How do you discover that purpose? Surely, it is not by belittling yourself. It is not by having a self-defeatist attitude. It is not by saying things like what the foot says in verse 15, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body” or saying things like what the ear says in verse 16, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body.”

So, how do you discover your purpose in the body of Christ? It is by being open to God, making yourself available to him, and being sensitive to his leading. Remember, God is not looking at your ability but at your availability. Let me repeat that, God is not looking at your ability, but at your availability.

There was a Christian lady in England who was bed-ridden because of a terrible sickness. Before she became sick, she was an active member of a church. In her present situation, she wondered how she can be of use to the church. So, she asked God. Then, God prompted her to pray for revival in her church which she did religiously. Months passed and then one day someone from her church told her that the church was experiencing revival.

It all started when an evangelist from America visited their church and spoke for several Sundays. This evangelist was Dwight L. Moody, the famous revivalist at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

God can use you whatever your situation in life is. God can use you whoever or wherever you may be. In the expert hands of God, an unattractive piece of clay can be shaped and molded into a beautiful piece of useful jar.

In the church, God has called each member to a particular task. Not everybody can be a pastor. Not everybody can be a teacher. Not everybody can be an usher or a worship leader or what-have-you. Obviously, if everybody were doing the same thing, who would do the other things? That's why verse 17 asks us, "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?"

You see, God is a God of order, not of confusion. He knows what he is doing. You can trust him why he has placed you in a certain situation. Verse 18 tells us, "*But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.*"

So, God places the members where he wants them to be not where they want to be. We must then learn to serve God where he puts us. We must learn to accept his will in our lives.

Another point to consider in order to have a healthy body or church is to:

## **2. Realize that Self-Importance Must be Avoided at All Costs**

Beginning verse 21, we read, "*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!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 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, while our presentable parts need no special treatment.*"

If there are people in the church who belittle themselves, there are also those who belittle others. These are people who have a high view of themselves. So high in fact that they could no longer see below them, and

they go around stepping on other people's toes. This is a disease that's far worse than the disease of belittling oneself. This disease of self-importance is so deadly that it could divide the church as what happened to the church in Palawan.

In the body of Christ, each member must realize that we all need one another. I need you; you need me. "No man is an island" as the saying goes. Each of us, therefore, must accept one another. Each of us must not reject one another. We must look beyond our differences. We must see that all members of the body have been placed there by God for a purpose.

You see, in Paul's illustration, it is really ridiculous for the eye to say to the hand, "I don't need you!" Yes, the eye can see the things that need to be done, but it can't do them. It depends on the hand for that. In the same way, it is also ridiculous for the head to say to the feet, "I don't need you!" The head may know where it would like to go but without the feet it cannot go there.

In verses 22-23, what Paul is saying is that our attitude toward our fellow believers must be the same as our attitude toward the parts of our body. For example, our lungs don't seem to be as strong as the arms and yet we make sure that they are always in good condition. If we are careless and smoke six packs of cigarettes a day, eventually, we will lose our lungs and that's it for us.

I read the story of a preacher who, after speaking in church, was approached by a doctor who was a member of their church. The doctor said, "You may be interested to know that there is a certain part of your body that is absolutely essential to you as a preacher. You probably do not even think about it when you are preaching, and yet without it you could not do the work you are doing. Do you know what it is?" The preacher said, "No. Is it



my tongue, or my brain?" "No," the doctor said, "those are obvious. It's your big toe. Did you know that if you didn't have a great toe on each foot you could not even stand up to preach? It is the toe that has the ability to sense when your body begins to lean, or shift, or get out of balance, or fall, and it immediately strengthens you so that you can stand up and speak."

When I heard that story I have been guarding my big toe very carefully ever since, because I need that big toe! It is an essential part of my ministry.

So, if we treat the weaker and less honorable parts of our body with TLC or tender loving care, then we must also do the same to our fellow believers. We should not look down on anyone whose spiritual gifts or functions may not be the same as ours or may appear to be ordinary. Instead, we should support and give help to anyone who would like to be involved in church even in their own small way.

Now, we are talking about showing concern for one another, which leads us to our last point. And this is to:

### **3. Remember that it is Important to Care for One Another**

Paul says in verse 24-26 that *"God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it."*

When you begin to understand what the church is, as God sees it to be, this will be the result. You will begin to have the same care for one another. You will stop saying that teachers are all-important, or a certain line of preaching or doctrine is the great and important thing. You will see that

God works the whole body together in a beautifully articulated and coordinated way.

The human body is a beautiful and exquisite creation. It was created and designed by God. No part of it was intended to be removed or taken out. Sometimes, however, it is necessary to cut out a part of it because of disease or what-not, but the bodies that God gave to Adam and Eve, before they sinned, were perfect.

Now, there is something more beautiful and more exquisite than the human body. This is the body of Christ. Spiritually, it is the most marvelous organism in the whole universe. Since God has created it and designed it, therefore, we ought to have great concern for its health. And we can do this by building mutual concern for each other. As members of the body, we must improve our relationships so that we can all be well-coordinated. We must show real love to one another. Because that's how it should be as the Lord Jesus himself tells us in John 13:34, *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."*

Real love will melt divisions. Real love will produce godliness. Real love can prevent divisions in the body because the Lord designed the body of Christ to be just one unit.

Now, in verse 26 Paul says: *"If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it."*

Notice that he does not say all "should" suffer with it, or all "should" be honored together. He says they actually are.

We have heard of pastors and ministers who have fallen into evil and sin in their lives. They have lost their ministries, their congregation, and some, their wives. Because they have fallen into dishonor, all who meet them or hear of them see the whole Body of Christ less honorably than they

did before. They will look upon me, as a Christian, less honorably than they did before because of their action. You do not have to be aware of the suffering or dishonor of another brother or sister to be affected by it. You are affected by it.

Now it is true the other way around also. If one were honored, all are honored with him. If some member of the body does an outstanding piece of work that opens the door for the deliverance of hundreds of people, or even a few people, and ministers the grace and the love of Christ, everybody touched by that will be blessed by it. They will regard the Body and the Church of Christ in greater honor than before. So the responsibility for the reputation of the body rests with every one of us, and how we act is going to govern how other people see the Body of Christ at work in the world today.

Right after my surgery when the anesthesia wore off, the lower part of my body experienced terrible pain. The rest of my body was so concerned that it stayed awake for the most part of the night to keep it company! My upper body did not just say, "Oh, go to sleep! Go off and hurt over in the corner and let me go to sleep." It suffered with it all night long. And that is what happens to the body of Christ. We belong together and we rejoice and suffer together.

In closing, I just want to say that people around us are affected by our actions. They stumble when we stumble. We must show the world that we are still the light of the world who represent Jesus, the original Light of the World. We must show them that the light is still shining. So, what do we do now? It is to follow the apostle Paul's prescription for recovering and maintaining the health of the body of Christ. Thus, we need to recognize the importance of each member; we need to realize that self-importance must be

avoided at all costs; and we need to remember that it is important to care for one another.