**SERVE 8 You’re the body of Christ 1 Corinthians 12 v 27 to 31**

**For the next few weeks, we will be looking at 1 Corinthians 12 & 13. The aim is to help us all to discover the spiritual gift(s) God has given us and to use them for His glory.**

For the last five verses of chapter 12, Paul returns to the body metaphor. Even the way he says it feels emphatic – ‘Now, you are the body of Christ ….’. He’s explained it and given many images to back up his point. In a first century Greek culture a visit to a temple was personal – you went there, did what you wanted to do and left. But the church was radically different – it really was a COMMUNITY of BELIEVERS who mattered to each other. This was very different to worshipping a pantheon of gods in many different shrines and temples.

1. How important is the body image to you today – is church just something you ‘consume’ at your convenience or is the concept of a ‘body community’ important to you?

What does if offer in today’s culture – is it offering something that can’t be found anywhere else?

If so, what is it offering?

Does that encourage you to be become a more ‘active limb’?

In wrapping up his point Paul makes it clear that not one of the gifts is intended for all believers. The rhetorical questions in verses 29 and 30 can only have one answer – ‘NO’. Again, - this is radical in 1st century Greek culture. Temples were not places you used your gifts – that is why Paul had to teach this so thoroughly – it was a new concept.

1. If no one has every gift needed, we depend on each other’s gifts to make the church community function well.

How good are we at depending on each other’s gifts – does good old British self-sufficiency kick in here?

Do we actually enjoy watching other people use gifts that we don’t have?

The list of gifts includes some of the same and some different gifts as in verses 8 to 10. Paul’s use of the term ‘apostle’ is broader than the 12 immediate followers of Jesus. He calls himself an apostle (1 Cor 1:1) and others are called by that name – they include Titus (2 Cor 8:23), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25), James the Lord’s brother (Gal1:19) and many others. Paul is using the term to describe ‘one sent on a mission’ – a pioneer. Some churches use the term in a similar way. Many would put missionaries or church planters in this category.

1. Does this suggest that the church needs apostle-pioneers today?

Does our current set up militate against pioneer mission initiatives?

Are we too cosy?

Do we lack ‘apostolic adventure’?

Paul clearly has ‘teachers’ as important people in the early church. After all, this was a completely new way of living. It needed to be taught and still does. In the 1st century teachers were people who communicated a fixed body of knowledge to their students often solely by rote memory work. So, teachers talking about a new way of life were doing something radically different.

1. We live 2000 years after the pioneer days of the early church. Has the need for teaching diminished? What do we need to teach in a 21st century church?

You may like to talk about Bible teachers who have been a blessing to you.

‘***Those able to help others’*** (v28) is vague in the Greek but would include acts of kindness to the poor and needy.

***‘Administration’*** (v28) may also be translated ‘oversight’ or ‘guidance’ and tells us that, in the early church, it was clear that governance was needed.

To take ‘first’, ‘second’, and ‘third’ as a ranking of significance would violate the thrust of Paul’s main point. It is best to read it as the order in which the gifts are needed – not the level of importance. So, a church needs a church planter, then it must be taught, and then teachers must introduce evangelism and discipleship (greater maturity). Tongues may be the last on the list because the Corinthians were overestimating their value but there is no hint that it is a less important gift.

1. Do we ever make one gift seem more important than any others?

Should we be more clear about the process of growing new believers?

What do you say to a person who seems to think that everyone must have a certain gift (church history is full of such misconceptions).

After all of this, verse 31a seems out of place. How can Paul encourage people to desire ‘***greater gifts’***? Again, it appears to go against Paul’s central point. It is probably best to understand ***‘greater’*** as referring to less visible gifts being given special honour (See v23). The Corinthian church, embedded in a 1st century Greek culture, would probably have given the greatest value to the more public ‘up-front’ gifts. Paul is saying they should give more value to the gifts they have devalued so all gifts are equally honoured.

1. Are we ever guilty of thinking that some gifts are a greater blessing to the church than others?

Do we ever think our gift(s) are of greater value than other people’s gifts?

Do certain groups/churches get known for using certain gifts?

Does our church have any bias?