



# Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland



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**Reading** 1 Corinthians 12 : 12 - 31

## **Sermon: 24 January 2010**

Sermon The text for the sermon are verses 12 & 27:

*<sup>12</sup> The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. <sup>1</sup>*

*<sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

I do not know if you have realized that I have my own style of preaching and that I also carry with me my own prejudices and mindset. There are things that I particularly like and dislike in life. And in some way or another it will be appearing in my ministry. You will sometime hear it even in the sermons.

I guess this is true about everybody, the things that we regard as important can be seen in our lives. Well the same is true of Paul writing to the Corinthian congregation.

Who was Paul?

- His circumcision-name was Saul, and probably the name Paul was also given to him in infancy “for use in the Gentile world,” as “Saul” would be his Hebrew home-name.
- He was a native of Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia, a Roman province in the south-east of Asia Minor.
- Tarsus was also the seat of a famous university, higher in reputation even than the universities of Athens and Alexandria, the only others that then existed.
- His father was of the strictest sect of the Jews, a Pharisee, of the tribe of Benjamin, of pure and unmixed Jewish blood
- Though a Jew, his father was a Roman citizen. How he obtained this privilege we are not informed. In those you could buy or won it by distinguished service to the state, or acquired in several other ways; at all events, his son was freeborn. It was a valuable privilege, and one that was to prove of great use to Paul.
- According to Jewish custom, he learned a trade of making of tents from goats’ hair cloth before entering on the more direct preparation for the sacred profession of becoming a rabbi. This trade which was one of the commonest in Tarsus
- Saul was sent, when about thirteen years of age probably, to the great Jewish school of sacred learning at Jerusalem as a student of the law. Here he became a pupil of the celebrated rabbi Gamaliel, and here he spent many years in an elaborate study of the Scriptures and of the many questions concerning them with which the rabbis exercised themselves.
- After the period of his student-life expired, he probably left Jerusalem for Tarsus, where he may have been engaged in connection with some synagogue for some years.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible : New International Version.* Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984, S. 1 Co 12:12-13

- He took a prominent part in the persecution against the followers of Christ generally, since he was probably a member of the great Sanhedrin.
- On his way to Damascus, which was a long journey of about 130 miles, the Lord God spoke to him and said: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"
- God answered: "I am Jesus whom you persecute" (Acts 9:5; 22:8; 26:15).
- This was the moment of his conversion, the most solemn in all his life.
- Blinded by the dazzling light (Acts 9:8), his companions led him into the city, where, absorbed in deep thought for three days, he neither ate nor drank (9:11).
- Ananias, a disciple living in Damascus, was informed by a vision of the change that had happened to Saul, and was sent to him to open his eyes and admit him by baptism into the Christian church (9:11–16). The whole purpose of his life was now permanently changed.
- He continued to preach the Good news till his death which most probably took place in Rome.

It is quite clear in the passage to see how his background shaped and formed his ideas especially on the body. As a typical Jew a body would only be a body if it was whole, without blemishes and holy! Paul wants the church as the body of Christ to be whole and in one working order. This was especially not true of the Corinthian congregation. They were not functioning as one whole body. They were competing against one another with regard to who received the greatest gift. There were people in the congregation who thought they were spiritually much more advanced than some of the others. Now Paul is writing to them telling them what is really more important.

They are as the followers of Jesus part of one body although each one of them is different and unique. God made each of them differently for a purpose like He created different body parts although each has a unique task to fulfill. There is no body part that is more important than the rest - each to its own! God intended each part of the body to be seen as undivided and respected. The point is every body part must function in order for the whole body to function. If one part is suffering, the rest will suffer too, which is actually a medical fact.

Paul is telling the so called "super Christians" in the Corinthian church that although they think that they received more gifts of the Spirit, they are actually just the part of the ONE body of Christ. They belong with the others to this Body. They also share in the same baptism and gift of the Spirit like the other followers of Jesus. They are no better than the rest. God gave each one of them gifts that they must use to the benefit of the congregation and the spreading of the good news to all the people. In order for them to be the Body of Christ on earth, they need to function as ONE body where its part plays its decisive role. To be a follower of Jesus does not mean to compete with one another with regard to the receiving of special gifts. They must strive for the greatest gifts of all namely LOVE. He is actually saying to them in chapter 13 that they lack love in everything they do!

I think the core of his message can be summed up in a very good Scottish phrase: "We are all Jock Tamson's bairns!"

One Christian cannae think of him or herself as "better" or "having more faith" than the other. I think something of the attitude that was so destructive in the Corinthian church also crept in our current day and time, in our own Christian following, and thinking. We must beware of the dangers it brings. We must work hard as a congregation to function as ONE body despite our respective differences.

This morning we as a congregation celebrated our unity as ONE body of Christ. We also celebrated exactly what Paul meant with his metaphor. Although we have two places of worship we are ONE body without the one being inferior to the other. NO we must root out every thought and talk that contradicts/threatens our unity and ONENESS in Christ. But we must also hear the clear message of Paul: If one part suffers, the rest will suffer too. In other words if ONE of us is not doing what we are supposed to be doing as followers of Christ, we are then practically bringing the whole body in disrepute! Yes then you and I become the spoke in the wheel of God's working in the lives of his followers! Everyone has received gifts but unfortunately not all of us share those gifts with others. There are so many people sitting in congregations who feel for different reasons that they are unequipped, useless and incompetent to be of service to the Lord. This passage compels us to rethink our position as members of the greater body of Christ where everyone is equally important and where each one matters. If you are sitting here this morning and feel inferior or thinking of having less faith than your brother and sister, close your eyes and hear the voice of the Lord which says to you: "you are part of the one body!"

Let us as the congregation of Kirknewton and East Calder not falter in all our attempts to be ONE working body proclaiming the good news of the Lord to everyone. Let us go out and treat all the people the same. Let us respect one another for the gifts that we received and let us all be dictated by the Love of God, which He showed in the suffering, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ!

**Amen**

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## Readings for the week

### I Corinthians 12:1 2-31 (from rootsontheweb.com)

Paul is a pastoral and practical theologian. He brings together the experience of his congregations and the resources of his religious tradition. Here he relates his concerns about divisions at Corinth to his use of the Jewish Scriptures and his awareness of Christian creeds. Drinking of one Spirit unites his mainly Gentile readers with their Jewish 'ancestors' who came out of Egypt (see chapter 10). The clothing of the 'less respectable' members recalls the loincloths made by Adam and Eve (Genesis 3.7-10). He alludes to an early affirmation about baptism into Christ being for all, whether 'Jews or Greeks, slaves or free' (see also Galatians 3.28, Colossians 3.11). From this he creates and elaborates his metaphor of the Church as Christ's body, arranged 'that there may be no dissension'.

**Other readings:** Nehemiah 8.1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Psalm 19; Luke 4.14-21

### Prayer

Who can know the secret ways of the Spirit?

Who can see the seed alive within the winter earth?

Let us open our ears to God,

Let us listen for the voice of the Spirit.

Who can know the secret ways of the Spirit?

Who can see the leaf alive within the black buds?

Let us open our eyes to God,

Let us see the hand of the Spirit in the life around us.

Who can know the secret ways of the Spirit?

Who can count the number of the snowflakes or the number of the drops of rain?

Let us open our hearts to the Spirit,

Let us open our lives to the work of the Spirit of God.

**Amen**

### Next week readings

Jeremiah 1.4-10;

Psalm 71.1-6;

1 Corinthians 13.1-13