

Sermon Summary | Sunday 13th September 2026 | 1 Corinthians 12.12-31

There are at least two ways to stand in a room full of people and get belonging wrong.

One is to think, “They don’t really need me.” Other people seem more gifted, more confident, more useful, more established. So perhaps I do not really belong.

The other is to think, “I don’t really need them.” I can manage my own life. Church is there when I want it. It does not make much difference whether I am there or not.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul says both voices are wrong. He describes the church as one body with many members. The body is one, but oneness does not mean sameness. A healthy body is not one enormous eye, hand, foot, or ear. It has many different parts, with different functions, all belonging to the same body.

Paul says, “So it is with Christ.” The church is not simply a gathering of people who happen to share similar interests, tastes, backgrounds, or personalities. By the Holy Spirit, Christians have been joined to Christ, and therefore joined to one another. Our unity does not come from being naturally alike. It comes from belonging to the same Lord.

First, Paul speaks to the voice that says, “*I don’t belong.*”

The foot says, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body.” The ear says, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body.” This is the voice of comparison. It looks at someone else’s gifts and concludes, “Because I cannot do what they do, I must not really matter.”

But Paul says that comparison does not change reality. The foot may feel it does not belong, but it still belongs. The ear may feel insignificant, but it still belongs. God has arranged the members in the body, each one as he chose.

That matters for those who feel unnoticed, limited, or less useful than others. It matters for older Christians who can no longer do what they once did. It matters for those living with illness, disability, grief, exhaustion, caring responsibilities, or a difficult season of life. Your value does not come from visibility. Your belonging does not depend upon usefulness. If you belong to Christ, you are not an accidental member of his body.

Then Paul speaks to the opposite voice: “*I don’t need you.*”

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you.” The head cannot say it to the feet. This may be the more dangerous voice, because it often belongs to those who appear strong. Competence can hide dependence. We may organise, lead, decide, solve problems, and carry responsibility, while quietly forgetting that we need other Christians to help us, pray for us, encourage us, and correct us.

Paul goes even further. The parts of the body that seem weaker are indispensable. That is very different from the way the world measures people. The world asks what a person can produce, how capable they are, or how much influence they have. But God does not organise his church like a marketplace. In the body of Christ, weakness does not remove dignity. Dependence does not remove value.

The body is meant to care for itself. “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.” Belonging is not simply being in the same room or filling a role. It means noticing, caring, suffering, and rejoicing together.

That changes the way we think about church. If church is a body rather than an event I consume, the question cannot only be, “Do I feel I need church this week?” My presence has consequences, just as my absence does. Someone may be encouraged because I was there. Someone may be noticed because I noticed them. Someone may be strengthened by seeing they are not alone.

Finally, Paul says, “You are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

Not, “You ought to become the body of Christ.” You *are* the body of Christ. This is something God has made true. Each person belongs. Each person matters. But each person belongs as part of something larger than themselves.

So this passage does not say, “If you really belong, you must say yes to every request.” Nor does it say, “Your worth depends on how many responsibilities you carry.” It says something deeper: you are neither unnecessary nor independent. You do not need to be everybody. But you are part of the body.

And all of this begins with grace. We do not earn a place in Christ’s body by making ourselves useful. Christ does not accept us because we have found the right rota. At the cross, Christ gave his body for us. He bore our pride, insecurity, comparison, self-sufficiency, resentment, and failure to love. He rose again. And by his Spirit he joins those who trust him to himself and to one another.

So to the voice that says, “I don’t belong,” God says: yes, you do. I have joined you to Christ.

And to the voice that says, “I don’t need you,” God says: yes, you do. I have joined them to Christ too.

God has not merely given something to us. In Christ, he has given us to one another.

Questions for personal reflection

1. Which false voice do I more often hear in myself: “I don’t belong,” or “I don’t need you”?
2. If I really belong to the body of Christ, what should that change about the way I belong to my church family?