

Every year college football has at least a few upsets, a team with weaker talent beating a team with better talent. Oklahoma was ranked number three and gets bumped off in an upset by BYU. The next week Oklahoma State was ranked number five and Houston upsets them. It's happened before and it'll happen again. It happens because teams thinking upset usually play like they have nothing to lose. There's no pressure and they play as a team. Each one doing their part working together.

Our opponent isn't looking for the upset. He's the superior talent. We have the weaknesses, the pressure points, and the sin that cripples our hopes of winning. On top of that we don't even work together as a team against him. Our sinful nature would rather go it alone. We think we're tough enough to take on this opponent ourselves. But the devil and his angels are stronger than all of us. Our sinful natures easily respond to his temptations. We're like the weaker talent playing against a far superior team. How can a group of individuals who sometimes can't even work well as a team defeat an opponent in difficult circumstances? When it comes to church...

**There's no "I" in church
The anatomy of a losing team
The anatomy of a winning team**

Look at the human body. Thirteen major systems made up of a variety of individual organs. It's one of the best pictures of variety and multiplicity actually forming unity and oneness. Each organ has its role. The Apostle Paul tells us what these organs aren't saying, **"If the foot should say, because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body."** **"If the ear should say, because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body."** Never. Just because you're not the starting point guard doesn't mean the bench warmer isn't on the team. One organ not being another one doesn't mean it isn't a valuable part of the body. There's no jealousy between organs of the body. Each is necessary for a whole human being.

What about the variety of this congregation, is it enhancing unity? That can't happen if there's jealousy between the parts. Everyone probably knows some members who have prominent gifts and abilities. You might think if only you could lead like they can, or give as much as they do, or demonstrate your faith as clearly as they can then you'd be somebody worth having on the team. Spectacular gifts and abilities make us feel special. When they're lacking we feel something is missing. Maybe I'm not a good enough member? Jealousy makes for a losing team.

Neighborhood football games can be great fun with kids getting together for a good time. But it won't work if all the kids want to be Sam Bradford, the quarterback. Imagine our spiritual gifts worked the same way. What if God let us choose. Like Christmas shopping for a popular toy, everyone would rush for the most prominent gift or the most spectacular. Paul asks, **"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?"** God's church cannot grow if everyone has the same spiritual gift or ability. Who would preach if everyone were lawn mowers? Who would serve as treasurer if everyone were the kitchen helpers? A church of superstars will be a losing team.

Narcissus was a mythical character who became thirsty. Bending over at a river for a drink he immediately fell in love with his reflection. Careful so his reflection wouldn't go away, he never drank the water. He died of thirst while loving himself. By nature that's every one of us. We're in love with ourselves. A bunch of "I's" within the church creates a losing team. People holding grudges wreck the unity the church is building. Self-absorbed people destroy the team. Sin pulls us away from each other and God.

Paul used the human body to picture the church. Ears that aren't eyes doesn't mean the ears are excluded from the body. In the same way Paul says not having certain spiritual gifts doesn't exclude you from the body of the church. The human body won't work if the eye is jealous of the hand or feeling superior to the hand saying "I don't need you". Our church, no church can exist filled with "me-first" people trying to get rid of someone else. Paul pictures a healthy body, **"Though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ."** The church's health and strength come from one place, Jesus Christ.

Hockey usually includes five skaters chasing the puck keeping it away from the goal. One goalie's only job is to keep the puck out of the net. To win, a team needs both. The human body is similar. You might never think about your liver unless it fails. Then suddenly you know you can't live without it. You might be someone who hates their feet. But I'm sure you treat them well anyway with nice comfortable shoes and cozy socks. **"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."** There's no part of your body you can do without.

You might wonder how a bunch of sinners who fail themselves and others so often could ever come together in unity. **"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."** In Christ no divisions, no cultures, no races divide us. We know who cared for us so much he gave his life. We know how he shared his honor. We know Christ's love. Now we know our calling. God combines all of us individual parts into a body for Christ in just the way he wants us. Those who serve, serve. Those who teach, teach. Those who pray, pray. Every one of us brings our unique God-given gifts together to benefit the church.

The goal of any team is to win. The goal of the body is maintain physical health. The goal of the church is the church. To be on Jesus' winning team is to be about gaining more for the team. Christ went to the cross to save each one of us, and now he wants us to be about sharing that cross to save others. Our one task is to win more and more for Jesus' team. Our tool is the Word of God and baptism. Our privilege is to use our gifts, talents, money, and abilities right where God has placed us in the body of Christ.

Think of the last time you got a cut. What happened inside your body? The brain responded to the pain. White blood cells rushed to the area to form a clot. The immune system fought off infection. The whole body takes part in the healing. Those that are part of Christ's winning team but are hurting in some way need all of our help. If someone falls away from regular attendance a concerned member might call to urge their return. Someone who can no longer drive might find another member willing to pick them up. When someone sins a compassionate person will show them their sin and offer them forgiveness with the gospel. Winning people for Jesus is the privilege for all parts of the body of believers in Christ. That's you folks, all of you, young and old. By the power of the Holy Spirit you're a Christian and you're right where God wants you in the body of Christ to serve him and others.

In team sports, individuals never win a championship on their own. There's no "I" in team. There isn't in church either. No congregation, no church body or synod can survive with division, self-righteous attitudes, or uncaring hearts. Only the winning team with Christ as the head is going anywhere. Christ eliminates division, gets rid of self-righteous attitudes, and grants caring hearts to his body of believers. Our church, our synod, is walking together as that winning team, that healthy body, that body of Christ.