

“One Body; Many Members”

I Corinthians 12:12-26

October 20, 2013

Intro prayer focus: I Thess

Life in the Body: *Spiritual Gifts and the supremacy of love in the ministry of the church.*

Thank Volunteers: on avg 30 volunteers needed per Sunday service; *but it takes every person for the body of Christ to function properly.*

God has designed us to need each other so that we will not be divided against one another.

There is an important equation in 1 Cor 12 that all believers must understand if they are going to be part of a healthy body:

One Body = Many Members
Many Members = One Body

This is the point Paul is trying to drive home to us in [vs. 12]. Paul is using the analogy of a physical body to help us understand the essential nature of the body of Christ. His body is made up of many members, and each (and all) of those believers/members make up one body. We are His hands; we are His feet. We are His eyes and His ears and His mouth. If we are going to be an effective body that serves Him and His purposes in this world, we need to be a body that is whole and complete with all its parts properly functioning as one body.

Illus: Or we might say that the church is like one giant jig saw puzzle. Every piece of the puzzle is needed and every piece is absolutely unique. Each piece brings a unique color and shape that contributes to the beauty and glory of the whole picture. Yet each piece is not only unique in what it contributes to the whole, it is also necessary. If even one piece is missing, the puzzle will never be what it is meant to be. On the other hand what use is a single piece without all the others?

Illus: What is a football team without a quarter back? Or what if there is one big gapping hole on the defensive line because one member of the team is missing?

So it is in the body of Christ; there are many members that make up one body. The members of the body need each other.

Now we might ask the question, “*how do all these unique individual members become one body?*” The answer is found in [vs. 13]. The idea here is that the Holy Spirit baptized or immersed us into one single body. He is the glue that holds us together. Because “we were all made to drink of one Spirit,” we are all filled with His life making us one with Christ and one with each other. We must regard His presence in one another’s lives with honor.

The danger we face is that if we neglect either side of the equation, we will end up with an erroneous understanding of how the body is to work. Paul proceeds to explain that if you don’t understand that the body is made up of many members, you’ll run into trouble (vs. 14-19). But on the other hand, if you don’t understand that as many members we make up one body, you will also run into trouble (vs 20-21). Finally, Paul will move us beyond equations, to see how all this practically works out in how we relate to one another.

So let’s consider 3 truths about the body of Christ highlighted in this passage:

1. **Because the body is made up of many members, the body needs you** [vs. 14-19].

Here Paul is focusing on the side of the equation that emphasizes many members. If we fail to recognize that the body is made up of many members, we may be tempted to feel as though the body doesn’t need us—we may fail to recognize the contribution that our member makes to the functioning of the whole body.

Just as a physical body needs each of its members to have a sense of wholeness and to function effectively, so you are a necessary part of the body. If you are foot that serves, the body needs you. If you are a hand of mercy, the body needs you. If you are a finger of leadership

that points the body in the right direction, the body needs you. If you have an eye or ear of discernment, the body needs you. But can you imagine if we were all ears or all eyes without any feet to do something about it? What if we were all fingers pointing in a certain direction but the body lacked the hand of mercy? The body needs whatever gift, whatever manifestation of the Spirit, that you have been given. [vs. 7].

Yet there are more than a few people who feel that they don't have anything to contribute to the body. What do you say to the person who has a hard time believing that they are gifted or that they are necessary/essential to the body?

Well the first step is to go back to the Word of God and say, let's not base our convictions on what we feel but on what Truth actually says. If we assume that we are not a necessary part of the whole, we deny the very design that God has given us. Some people get stuck here because they haven't come to understand the unique giftedness that God has given them and they need to discover their gifts. Others use this perspective as an excuse to not get involved and serve within the body of Christ. Yet in any case we must recognize that when we reject our essential role in the body of Christ, our faith (or rather our lack of faith) is focused on ourselves rather than on God. I love what Paul said in 2 Cor 3:5—*“Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit...”*

So the question we need to ask is not, “do I have what it takes?” The question we need to ask is, *“Do I believe that God is big enough, powerful enough, and wise enough to use the very instruments He made for the very purposes for which He made them. Do I believe that God is great enough to use me for the good of the body?”*

Take special note of [vs. 18]. For us to refuse to be an active part of the body of Christ, is rebellion against the will of God. IT's saying, God You're not really wise. IT's saying, God I really don't need to

do things according to Your design.” But God has placed you in the body just as He desires. Your role is to discover the joy of walking in His design and desires for you.

2. **Because many members make up one body, you need the rest of the body [vs. 20-21].**

Here Paul is focusing on the side of the equation that emphasizes that there is one body. If we fail to recognize that many members make up one body, we may be tempted to feel as though we are self-sufficient and don't need the rest of the body.

Many people wear masks in the church, but there are no legitimate lone rangers. When we put up our masks and say, “everything is just fine—I'm not going to let you in” we are saying to the rest of the body, “I don't need your gift of encouragement; I don't need your gift of mercy, wisdom, discernment, service, etc.

You were never meant to function independently of the body. And there are no other members of the body, regardless of how they look to you, that you don't need. Eph 4:25 & Rom 12:5 teach us that we are individually “members of one another.” That means that we not only belong to Christ, we belong to each other. Just like children not only belong to their parents they also belong to each other as brothers and sisters. When you are a part of a body, you can't just write off other members, just as you can't write off family members and still be a healthy family. I would urge you to take great care with criticism because when you tear down one another, you tear down the very body that you depend upon for a fruitful and healthy life. Just as a husband who tears down His wife ultimately diminishes himself because they are one, so we are one in the body of Christ and cannot minimize each other without diminishing ourselves.

That's not to say that every member of the body is healthy or mature. Yet our response should not be to avoid such people or criticize them but to come along side them and serve them by encouraging them and challenging them to grow into godliness. When you burn your

hand, do you just avoid that hurting hand or criticize it? No, you serve it by nursing it back to health. Sometimes, in God's wisdom, we need injured or less refined members of the body to help us grow in grace, patience, and love.

To reject our need for the rest of the body, or certain members of the body, is to reject God's will and design for the body. We must not be divided against one another, because God has designed us in such a way that we need each other (vs. 24-25).

In the context of spiritual gifts specifically, those who have more pronounced or "showy" gifts must carefully guard themselves against the trap of pride. Those with more visible gifts must not look down on those with less visible gifts because they need each other.

3. **Because we are one body made up of many members, every member should be cared for with honor** [vs. 22-26].

Just because some people's gifts are less "impressive" doesn't mean that they are less important. In light of Paul's illustration in vs. 22, no man goes around flaunting his lungs; yet are they not more important than his biceps? The point is that the gifts that we tend to overlook in the body are essential. In vs. 23-24, Paul is suggesting that just as certain parts of our body require that we clothe them more carefully, in the same way we should be careful to bestow more honor on those gifts/members which operate behind the scenes and are often unnoticed.

We must be careful to honor what God honors according to His perspective. Vs. 24 says that He has so composed the body that those members whose gifts appear to be the most humble are indeed those upon which He bestows the greatest honor.

So the way we avoid divisions within the body is by remembering that we are one body made up of many diverse parts. According to vs. 25, the way we avoid division is not by trying to make everyone the same but by honoring each one's God-given uniqueness. According to vs. 25, there should be no favoritism based on our gifts

or place in the body. Each member should be regarded with the same care regardless of his or her gift. That's why vs. 26 indicates that when one suffers, we all suffer. And when one is honored, it's cause for all to rejoice. That's what it means for individual members to be one body.

However, let me offer a word of caution. The principle that is driving this passage and so many others in the NT is not fairness, but honor. **Fairness** focuses on *my* rights and needs so that others will not gain an advantage. **Honor** sets others needs and interest ahead of my own.

I want to warn us against becoming "fairness police." When we focus on keeping everything fair, we are comparing ourselves to each other and the result is pulling us all down to the lowest common denominator.¹ But the point of this passage is that we are diverse and can't compare ourselves to each other. Rather, our focus should be on rendering honor to all members of the body. We should treat everyone with honor knowing that when one is honored, the whole body is honored.

When our attitude is to treat everyone with honor, we won't need to worry about fairness. The reality is that not all will receive the same honor—and that's not the point. In fact, elders who rule well are to receive double honor (I tim 5:17; cf. Rom 13:7-8). The point is that everyone is treated with honor because everyone has a God-given role within the His body.

Perhaps the best summary of this honor principle in the NT is **Romans 12:10**—"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; **give preference to one another in honor**"

The NT attitude is that **we are to be a people of honor not by seeking honor for ourselves, but by giving honor to others.**

Pastoral Exhortation: *Limbs are necessary; healthy limbs are better.*

¹ This is the danger of policies. Fairness boils everything down to a policy; honor elevates how we treat each other to Christlikeness.

The reality is that a limb can become so unhealthy that it becomes detrimental to the health of the rest of the body (ie. Grandpa Ewert's amputation; church discipline).

Don't neglect giving your attention to your growth to spiritual maturity. In as much as the body needs you to contribute your God-given giftedness, they need you to be healthy and mature.

You need the body.

The body needs you.

And the body needs you to be mature and healthy so you can honor Christ and His body by humbly serving one another through your God-given gifts.

How is God speaking to you today?