

“The Church’s True Image ~ Part 2”

**I Corinthians 12:12-26**

October 20, 2013

We have been looking at the church’s true image. Last week we discovered that we should think of ourselves as the family of God, the bride of Christ, and the temple of the living God. This week we are going to discover that we should think of ourselves and function as though we are the body of Christ.

This morning from I Corinthians 12 we are going to discover that...

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 all of those 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 flawed understanding of how the body is to work. If you don’t understand that the body is made up of many members, you may struggle with feelings of uselessness, thinking that you don’t have an essential role in the body (see vs. 14-19). But on the other hand, if you don’t understand that as many members we make up one body, you will err on the side of self-sufficiency, not acknowledging your need for others in the body (see 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 we make to the functioning of the whole body.

Just as a physical body needs each of its members 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 are an eye for vision 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 point in a certain direction but the body lacked the hand of mercy? The body needs whatever gift that you have been given.

Yet there are some 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 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 the Bible says is true. If we assume that we are not a necessary member of the body, we deny the very design that God has given us. What the Bible says is that we have each been uniquely gifted to build up the body. [vs 7]

So the question we need to ask is *not*, "now could God possibly use me?" 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 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 as 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 exercise great caution 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 alongside them and serve them by encouraging them and challenging them to grow in godliness.

*Illus:* When you sprain an ankle, do you just avoid that hurting ankle 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].

## 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. I've never seen an athlete flaunt his big toe, yet I have never seen a man win a race without one. 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 physical 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. 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. So in the body there should be an abundance of care, encouragement, and appreciation.

Let me clarify that 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. 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.<sup>1</sup>

But **Honor** raises the bar by setting the needs and interest of others ahead of our own. Honor is motivated by the selfless character of Christ. 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 benefits (vs. 26).

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 (1 Tim 5:17; cf. Rom 13:7-8). The NT attitude is that **we are to be a people of humble, honorable character, honoring others above ourselves, rather than seeking honor for ourselves.**<sup>2</sup> When Paul teaches about the body in Romans 12, he specifically exhorts us to not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (12:3) and urges us to "give preference to one another in honor" (12:10).

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

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

In Ephesians 4, Paul urges us to use our gifts to build up the body until we become "a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (vs. 13). What does that look like? Paul concludes that it is a body mature in truth and love. And what does love do? It honors one another.

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He says, "As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love" (Eph 4:14-16).

Give attention to your spiritual growth—strive to maturity. In as much as the body needs you to contribute your God-given giftedness, they need you to be healthy and mature.

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

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<sup>2</sup> Proverbs 15:33; 18:12; 19:23

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You need the body.

The body needs you.

And the body needs you to grow to maturity in love, honoring one another as stewards of God's grace.