

"One Body, Many Parts, All are Needed"

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

The New Testament writers use a number of metaphors describing what we the church are like. We are the bride of Christ, emphasizing Jesus' love for us but also our security in Him. We are the temple of the Spirit, the place where God's presence dwells in us collectively and individually. We are the Family of God, all closely related to each other, all responsible for each other with God as our Father.

It was Paul who used the body as an image of a local church here in 1 Cor. 12:12-31 because a body needs all its parts to function healthily and productively. So far, Paul has been confronting the Corinthians in numerous ways that they were not functioning well. And every local body of believers is never functioning at its fullest capacity, so we need to listen closely to Paul's words here.

Paul continues to help them become more unified but here he wants them to understand a healthy unified body of believers functions properly when it uses its diverse gifts. We already saw in Ch. 11 in the communion instructions, Paul rebuked the wealthier members who were not treating the poorer members well. Social divisions still remained. No doubt there were some Jewish and Gentile tensions too but that didn't seem to be a huge issue in Corinth. The other divisive issue was the unhealthy attraction of the gift of tongues. Here in 12:12-31, Paul prepares the believers now for his direct rebuke in Ch. 14 about the excessive attraction to tongues by emphasizing here in Ch. 12 how God hasn't gifted everybody with tongues, or healing or prophesying – and that's okay! We need the diversity of all gifts so we work together to build each other up in unity. Ch. 12 is about celebrating our diversity in Christ through our different gifts so that we are a healthy body functioning at its highest capacity.

Paul already mentioned in 12:4-7

⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.

⁶ There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

We're all gifted differently and all of it is the combined and unified work of the diverse trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And in v.11 Paul reminds us/them,

All these [different spiritual gifts] are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines/wills.

So stop envying and pursuing the more spectacular gifts as a way to measure yourself more spiritual than others. Instead, celebrate and work together with all your differing gifts for the benefit of each other. Because,

The Holy Spirit Brought Us All Together **(12:12-20)**

He just finished telling us our spiritual gifts are given to us purposefully by the Spirit, he continues along this line,

¹²[For just as] *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.* ¹³ *For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*

So what exactly is the baptism of the Spirit? It's very understandable if we read what Paul has said. Baptism means being fully immersed. So whoever has been baptized by the Spirit has been fully immersed with the Spirit. So you either have it or you don't. Paul says 'We were all baptized' by the Spirit meaning it was something that was done to them not something they needed to do themselves. And they were all baptized by the Spirit, so no one missed it. When were we baptized by the Spirit? At salvation. In Eph. 1:13-14 Paul also said,

¹³ *And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,* ¹⁴ *who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.*

When we accepted Christ we were sealed by the Holy Spirit or baptized by the Holy Spirit. And He remains with us because He guarantees our salvation. Paul says all believers have it, all believers received it at salvation and that's how all believers are now in Christ. It is not something we need to get after our salvation, it is something that was done to us. The Holy Spirit brings us all together because

Formerly we were separated by our sin (vv.12-13)

We were not in Christ; we were separated from Christ and from being in the body of Christ because sin separated us from God and each other. When we confessed our sins and understood Jesus alone paid for our sins and He alone can make us right with God, then we received His presence (the Spirit) in us and sealed us to Christ and to each other, His body. Now we're all equal because none of us can save ourselves. The things we use to compare ourselves with no longer matter. No one has an advantage. We all are valued and gifted for the body of Christ

Presently connected for edification (vv.14-20)

¹⁴ *Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. ...*

¹⁸ *But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.* ¹⁹ *If they were all one part, where would the body be?* ²⁰ *As it is, there are many parts, but one body.*

Here Paul is hinting at their divisiveness. You can't all be the same. You can't all have the same gifts. Every part of a body is important. Using anthropomorphic language imagining the body parts could speak to each other, he says you would call a foot silly if it thought it wasn't part of the body because it wasn't a hand. Or if an ear would say since it wasn't an eye that it was no longer part of the body? That's ridiculous, anyone would say.

What's he getting at? Some believers were elevating themselves and putting others down because they weren't wealthy or didn't have certain gifts. If everyone has the same gift, how would the body of Christ function with missing eyes, hands, feet or ears? Stop separating yourselves from one another because you think you're more important to the body based on your social status or spiritual gift. Now He reminds them how, like a body is perfectly arranged by the Creator,

The Father Has Blended Us Purposefully **(12:21-26)**

So that ...

All are necessary and needed (vv.21-24)

²¹ *The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"*
²² *On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it,*

"In accordance with" the Spirit who determines the gifts we have, the Father and the Son are all involved in designing the parts of the corporate body of Christ and I believe each local body of Christ so that everyone should know they are necessary to the church's ability to function at its highest spiritual capacity and as such, everyone is needed. Paul says no body part can function without the other parts. And that goes for the less visible and even internal parts of our body. Paul now goes to a different level. Just as not all parts of a physical body are visible – and a few we intentionally cover up – yet even the parts we can't see are necessary so that a body/church functions healthier.

Because we know where Paul is going with this in Ch. 14, we know he is using an analogy to point out to some of these believers who were arrogantly thinking they were more important to the body of Christ because they had more resources or more spectacular spiritual gifts (assuming they actually had these gifts), that in fact they were not. A church consists of many people who through the use of their gifts help God accomplish His purposes; some of whom are less visible (behind the scenes) than others.

If God has blended us purposefully, what then is His purpose? V. 25 and 26 explains,

²⁵ *so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.*

There it is – unity. No divisiveness. Why is that so important?

To be a collective witness through our mutual care of each other (vv.25-26)

How can a church grow if it's divided? Who wants to come to a church that has an unhealthy focus on specific topics in the Bible or an imbalanced slant on a social issue or isn't interested in all of Scripture or is too cliquy? We all probably know of churches that claim to be evangelical yet we would never go there because of some of these things.

We need to have equal concern for each other and avoid creating divisions over doctrine or practices or issues. It's not always easy, but love for one another must be first and foremost. While Paul doesn't talk about being a witness here, he will more in Ch. 14 and the words of Jesus should ring loudly here when He prayed for all believers in John 17:20-24

²⁰ *"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world*

may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. 24 "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

If Jesus prayed that our unity and love for one another would help others come to know God, then our disunity will be a deterrent to people wanting to know God through Jesus. Paul said there should be no division in the body and that we should have equal concern for each other, suffering together when one suffers and rejoicing with one another when they are praising God for something. Which is not as easy as it sounds. When one person is hurting we can be callous and thank God it's not us, or even wrongly conclude that somehow God is pleased with us and displeased with them. Or we may not always feel like sharing someone's joy because we're going through some difficulties and wondering how come God hasn't come through for us? Show love for one another by helping them in their difficulty or rejoicing in God's work in their life being thankful that God is working in our life as a church.

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Paul reminds them once more of everyone's need for one another and God's sovereign placement and gifting of each one for others, not yourself. This is where he's been going all along. Those who think of themselves more highly than they ought to need to come down from their self-made platforms, or even God-given platforms if that's the case. Because God is a God of order in the church and it's necessary for churches to grow. So with some more rhetorical questions Paul challenges each church to

Glorify Christ Harmoniously **(12:27-31)**

28 And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

God is a God of order as we've already discussed in Ch. 11. There is order in the Godhead, order in the home and order in the world and even order in the church. Everyone is equal in Christ but we all have different roles so that when we walk by faith in Christ, God's church is built up. Paul mentions here the foundation of the church. In Eph. 2:19-22

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Paul lists the foundational roles that the church was founded on. Then he lists a number of the gifts, the point being that all are needed for the church to be built up and glorify the Lord. He lists tongues last not because it's the least important but because it was high on the Corinthians' list. But Paul's point here is that not everyone has every gift and that's okay because that's the way God designed for His church to function healthily and bring glory to Christ.

So graciously accept our God-given gifts (vv.27-30)

Some of the Corinthians were not happy with the gifts God had given them and desired what they thought were the greater gifts. But Paul obviously disagreed with their idea of what the greater gifts because he exhorts them

³¹ But eagerly desire the greater gifts.

What did he mean by that? Does he mean we can somehow get the Spirit's gifts on our own efforts? No, that would contradict everything he has just said. Does he mean pursue love as a spiritual gift because now he talks about love in Ch. 13? Well, love isn't a gift it's something we're all commanded to do. Paul pauses here to remind the believers that a healthy church that works together well loves and serves one another regardless of our gifts or lack of gifts and regardless of whether we are Jew, Greek, slave, free, male or female. If we jump ahead to 14:1-5 we'll get a better idea of what he meant;

14 *Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. ² For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. ³ But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. ⁴ He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. ⁵ I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophecy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.*

The greater gifts are the gifts we understand that are intelligible because when we hear words we understand we can be edified and built up. So when we pull 12:31- through Ch. 13 and see how he picks it up here in Ch. 14 Paul is challenging us to

Use our gifts in love for everyone's growth (v.31)

We all have gifts distributed by the Spirit according to God's will so we build up the body of Christ. When we accept our gifts as specifically designed with us in mind, we graciously accept God's gifts to us, accept our roles and use our gifts in love to build each other up. So we can become the spiritually healthiest, Christ exalting body of believers that attracts those outside the church as well.

So where are we at as a 'body part'? Are we making ourselves available with and for others so the body functions well or are we holding back and making the body limp along? Are we unsatisfied with how God has made us and gifted us? God has a purpose for all of us and gifted us specifically as He willed. That should make us thankful.

It was encouraging to see so many of you on Friday morning helping tie candy canes to a card that was handed out yesterday at the parade. Some of you helped put the float together, others were on the float or decorated the float. Some of you handed out the candy canes and many of you watched and Lord willing prayed that our generosity and the gospel seed on the card was planted in people's hearts. It was a good example of our need to share God's joy of the gospel as we work together to glorify God. Some visibly, others behind the scenes.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And

⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

We know that in our minds but does the rest of the body know that through our life?

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
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