

One Body, Many Members

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

The church feels like a disconnected place for many people. Paul teaches an ecclesiology that is all about Jesus and our place in Him. God connects us to Himself and one another by the Spirit in perfect harmony so that we would receive, give, and thrive as a church.

Connected by the Spirit

Just as your body is made up of many parts within one organic whole, so is Christ (v12). The church is so closely identified as the body of Christ that Paul doesn't even explain the metaphor but expects the Corinthians to understand he isn't speaking of Jesus' own physical body. Augustine called the person of Jesus and His church *totus Christus*, the whole Christ, head and body (cf. v27; Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18). How did we get from outside of Christ to part of Him? By being baptized by the Spirit into the body, and this goes for everyone of different cultures, previous religions, socioeconomic positions and so on (v13). Baptism is not merely external; we were made to drink of, or were irrigated by, the Spirit (cf. 3:7-8). The body by essence has many members (v14). It doesn't change anything if the foot feels inferior to the hand, or the ear to eye (vv15-16). They're still part of the body. Chrysostom notes that we only compare (and despair) with parts similar to ourselves that "surpass" us a little, not with those totally different. Feeling like we're unimportant in the body doesn't make it so: "If the whole body were eye, where's the hearing?" (v17). God has appointed each member just as it pleased Him, whether we're talking about elbows and eyeballs or people who make meals and administrators (v18). Without this variety, there is no body (v19). However we feel, this is what God has done.

Each for the Other

Recognizing God's design of the church reveals our interdependence. Rather than think certain parts are unimportant or could be left behind, we know how necessary they are (vv20-22). Any part of the body that might receive less honor, on them we bestow greater honor (vv23-24). In our culture we have an odd phenomenon of worshiping youth while at the same time despising them with low expectations. In the church we honor the faith of children (Matt. 18:1-6) and bring them to Jesus to be disciples (Matt. 19:13-15). The glory of young men is their strength, and though occasionally they break things, we ought to honor and direct their strength to Christ (Prov. 20:29). The Bible says the gray head is a crown of glory and commands us to stand up in honor (Prov. 16:31; Lev. 19:32). A church is crazy not to not want more of this glory (Prov. 20:29). The result of honoring every part of the body is absence of schism and abundant mutual care (v25). We share each other's hardships and joys, and you never do, you're too far from the body (v26).

NOTES:

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God's Appointments

Just as God designed the parts of the human body for harmonious function, so He appoints offices and gifts in the church. The office of apostle passed with the twelve, but we carry on an apostolic ministry “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph. 2:20). Apostles in the first century wrote Scripture (or oversaw its writing), but they also planted churches and equipped pastors to ordain elders in every city (Tit. 1:5; Acts 14:23). We can speak of “apostolic” ministry this way but are careful to avoid misleading titles. Prophets proclaim the Word of God. Teachers explain it in terms the audience can understand. Last week we noted the gift of miracles and healings in the apostolic age (2 Cor. 12:12). The gifts of “helps and administrations” are listed only here in the New Testament. *Helps* includes coming alongside those in need, which Paul demonstrated in Ephesus when he worked as a tentmaker (Acts 20:34-35). People with this gift love to pitch in and will do what it takes to meet the need and get the job done. The gift sounds ambiguous because it applies all over the place. *Administrations* can be translated *governments* and is a gift of organization, delegation, prudence, and implementation, like the abilities of a chief operating officer. The church has identified this gift in ruling elders, but it is important at every level. *Varieties of tongues* is the ability to speak the gospel in other languages, and the Corinthians probably placed too much emphasis on it while Paul mentions it last (v30). God doesn't give the same gifts to everyone, but He equips the church, locally and throughout the world, with everything we need to thrive. But in order to do that, we need faith, hope, and love.