



One Body, Many Parts

Kicking It Off

What is one thing your family or friends would say is "so you," and do you agree with them?

Read

1 Corinthians 12:1-26

Summary

Everybody wants to know who they are. Our culture says the way to find out is to look inward, define yourself however you want, and cut loose from anything that holds you back. It sounds freeing, but think about how it actually plays out. We have never had more freedom to self-identify, and we have never been lonelier. That is not a coincidence. Identity does not work in isolation. You learn who you are in relationship with other people, the way a middle child figures out he is a middle child by living with siblings, or a talkative person realizes just how talkative he is by marrying someone quiet. Community does not erase who you are. It is where who you are comes into focus.

Paul takes this even further in 1 Corinthians 12. He says your deepest identity is not something you build at all. It is something God gives. You are the body of Christ. And being one body does not mean everyone becomes the same. Paul celebrates the differences. The foot is not a hand, the ear is not an eye, and thank God for that, because a body made of identical parts would not be a body. The Spirit gives different gifts to different people as He wills, not as we would arrange it, and every gift exists for the common good, to build up the body and to say the one thing that unites us all: Jesus is Lord.

That means feeling different is not evidence you do not belong. It is closer to evidence that you do. The parts that seem weaker are indispensable, and the ones that feel overlooked are the ones God says to honor most. When one part hurts, the whole body hurts. So the question for us is not how to make everyone alike, but how to honor the people God has placed around us.

Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. Our culture prizes being self-made and self-defined, yet loneliness keeps rising. Where have you felt the tension between wanting to define yourself and needing community to know yourself?
3. Paul says no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit, and that this confession is meant to be ongoing, not one and done. What would it look like for you to confess Jesus as Lord over a specific area of your life this week?
4. Verse 11 says the Spirit apportions gifts to each one individually as He wills. How do you respond when God gives someone else a gift or a season you wanted for yourself?
5. The foot and the ear in the passage doubt they belong because they are not the hand or the eye. When have you felt too different to belong in church, and what helped, or what would have helped?
6. Paul says the parts that seem weaker are indispensable and should receive greater honor. Who around you might feel overlooked or misunderstood, and what is one concrete way you could honor them this week?

Significant Quotes from Sermon

"Being in community is not trying to strip away your identity. Being in community is the only way you can better understand the identity that God has given you."

"You are not given spiritual gifts to become the body of Christ. You are the body of Christ, and therefore there are these giftings."

"There are too many times in a service where you or I will feel like, I don't belong here because I'm so different. And I am here to say, no, you belong here because you are so different."

"Our job as a body is not to say, you're misunderstood, well, it's your fault, you need to figure out how to be understood in our community. Our job is to go to those people who feel misunderstood and give them honor."

Sermon Notes**1 Corinthians 12:1-26**

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2 You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. 14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, 24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Outline

1. United by the Words We Confess (vv. 1–3)

- a. Mute idols cannot speak and cannot give identity; only the Spirit enables anyone to say "Jesus is Lord."
- b. The confession is not achieved by our logic, intelligence, or upbringing. It comes by the power of the Spirit alone.
- c. Saying Jesus is Lord is a continual confession, not a one-time prayer. The body rallies around this word, not around causes that have nothing to do with Christ.
- d. The love of money is a mute idol that turns a gift like generosity into a burden and makes the gospel feel like a ball and chain.

2. Many Gifts, One Giver (vv. 4–11)

- a. Varieties of gifts, service, and activities, but the same Spirit, the same Lord, the same God who empowers them all (Paul repeats the point three times).
- b. Every gift is given "for the common good" (v. 7), to proclaim that Jesus is Lord and to edify the body, never to say "look at me."
- c. The Spirit apportions "to each one individually as he wills" (v. 11). We have far less control over the gifts than we like to admit, and that is a mercy.
- d. If elders distributed the gifts, we would manage them into blandness. God sometimes pours one gifting into a whole congregation or a whole country, and He is free to do so.
- e. The community helps discern gifts, but it never has the final say. Christ is more invested in building His body than we are.

3. One Body, Many Parts (vv. 12–26)

- a. "You are the body of Christ" is identity, not analogy. The burden of self-identification is not on you; God gives the identity.
- b. Uniqueness is affirmed, not erased. The foot is no less the body for not being a hand (vv. 15–16). God arranged the members "as he chose" (v. 18).
- c. Feeling different does not mean you do not belong. It means you belong, because a body of identical parts is no body at all (v. 19).
- d. The weaker parts are indispensable, and the dishonored parts receive greater honor (vv. 22–24). The church's job is to go to the misunderstood and honor them, not to demand they become understandable.
- e. When one member suffers, all suffer; when one is honored, all rejoice (v. 26). You do not amputate a hurting part, you wrap your arms around it.
- f. The goal of the church is to launch every member into ministry, in their context, with His gifts, by His power.

Notes

When I went off to college, I thought I was going to reinvent myself. Forget my family, forget how I was raised, I would finally be fully me. That lasted a couple of days. As friends got to know me, they kept finding the identity already written on me. They learned I was a middle child and said it explained everything. They learned I was the only boy between two sisters and said that explained even more. I did not define myself into existence. I discovered who I was in relationship with other people. Even now, I know I talk a lot, but nothing makes that clearer than a conversation with my wife, who does not. She does not define me, but I learn more about myself in relationship with her. That is how identity actually works.

The world tells us the opposite. It says be self-realized, self-identified, self-sufficient. Define yourself however you want and do what makes you happy. I will admit that sounds freeing, but the reality is that identity only becomes visible in context. It does not surprise me that a culture obsessed with the individual has produced an epidemic of loneliness and depression. If everyone tries to identify themselves without the context of community, they end up alone, and an identity with no community around it withers. Being in community does not strip your identity away. Community is the only way you come to understand the identity God has given you, and it is where you learn your purpose and part in the body.

That is the frame for everything Paul says about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12. Before he lists a single gift, he anchors the church in a confession. The idols the Corinthians once served were mute. They could not speak anything of value because they could not speak at all. But by the Spirit, we can say the one thing that matters: Jesus is Lord. No one says that except in the Holy Spirit. Not by our logic, not by our intelligence, not because we were raised in a Christian nation. The church is united by the words we confess, and the confession is not one and done. If you said Jesus is Lord twenty years ago, you are in, brother, you are in, sister. But say it more often. It is a joy to keep confessing that you are no longer the king of your own life, that He is in charge, that He makes the rules and sets the standard. That standard humbles us because we cannot meet it, and by His power we can.

The mute idols are still with us. The love of money is one I return to often because I have watched it work. I have seen people with an almost supernatural gift of generosity, people God seems to have simply made generous, and I have watched the idol of money turn that gift into a burden. Suddenly giving feels like a ball and chain, an obligation their faith imposes on them rather than a gift the Spirit works through them. That is what idols do. They cannot speak, but we let them preach anyway, and their sermon is always the same: you will never please God, but you can please your 401k. The answer is not more

willpower. The answer is to rally again around the confession, Jesus is Lord, and to ask for the Spirit's strength to follow Him, because we cannot do it on our own.

When Paul turns to the gifts themselves, he says the same thing three times so we cannot miss it. Varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. Varieties of service, but the same Lord. Varieties of activities, but the same God who empowers them all in everyone. The gifts are not innate. You did not muster them up, and you cannot manufacture them. They come from God, and they are given to each one for the common good, to proclaim Christ and to edify the body. The Spirit apportions them to each one individually as He wills, which means we have much less control over the gifts than we like to admit. We love to add admin and logistics to the gifts, to micromanage them, to act as if we could develop them in people by program. God bless those churches, but the deeper theology is that the Spirit distributes as He sees fit. If the elders of East Renton decided who got what gifting, we could hold meetings ad nauseam and distribute everything evenly and sensibly, and we would flatten the whole thing. Praise God it does not work like that. I have seen God pour a common gifting into a whole congregation. I have seen gifts of healing break out across a country while we in America wonder why it is not happening here. If we demand the gifts we want, we are quietly questioning the lordship of Christ, suspecting we would administer His gifts better than He does. Much of the Christian life is being at peace with how God is manifesting His Spirit. He promised to build His church, and He is more interested in your sanctification than any elder board could ever be. The elders still have a role. We want to know you, to help you discern what the Lord may have given you for teaching or evangelism or shepherding or serving the poor. But we do not have the final say on you, and that is a relief to everyone.

Then Paul says the thing I have been dying to preach: you are the body of Christ. Not an analogy, an identity. The burden of identifying yourself is not on you; it is on the Lord, and He has spoken. You are His body, His bride, a holy nation. I grew up hearing that I was a child of God, beloved and saved by grace, and all of that is true. But I needed to hear the other half more often: you are unique, fearfully and wonderfully made, and it is okay that you are loud, or unathletic, or different from everyone around you. Not because it is about you, but because you are needed. The foot does not stop being the body because it is not a hand. If the whole body were an eye, there would be no hearing. God arranged the members, each one of them, as He chose.

I know from experience that the church does not always live this. I have had pastors sit me down and tell me not to come back, not because of sin, but because, as one put it, we just don't really like you. When a part of the body is different, the comfortable move is to say, be like us, we are the body of Christ and you should look more like us. Paul says thank God the ear does not look like the eye. I came from a

church where everyone drove the same cars and lived the same lives, and from the outside it looked happy. Sameness is not unity. We desire unity in message and confession, and diversity in gifting. So if you feel misunderstood in this church, the burden is not on you to become understandable. Our job as a body is to come to you and give you honor, because the parts that seem weaker are indispensable. If you feel like a foot surrounded by eyeballs, the call is not to leave for a place where everyone looks like you. The call is to bring the pain to the Lord, let Him bring order, and then use your gifts to serve even the people who misunderstand you. When one member suffers, the whole body suffers. You do not amputate a hurting part and say good riddance. You wrap your arms around it.

This is what gets me excited about ministry. I did not put you here. God did. So learn to give each other honor in the small talk and the small groups, because He placed both of you in the room. The elders are here to minister to you, but have you considered that you are a minister too? The goal of the church is to launch you into your ministry, with His gifts, in your context, not to make you into me or Dean or Gif or Scott. The mute idols truly are mute. We worship a living and active God who is saying, I love you.

Blog

Most of us carry around a quiet assumption about church, and it goes something like this: my faith is between me and God, and church is where I go to work on it. Church becomes a resource for my walk with Christ, something like a gym membership for the soul. When it helps, I show up. When life gets full, it is one of the first things to flex. I don't think we say this out loud, but we live it, and we live it because we have been trained to. Our culture teaches us that you are most fully yourself when you are self-defined, self-sufficient, and free of obligations you did not choose. We breathe that air every day, and then we bring it with us into the sanctuary.

This Sunday we come to 1 Corinthians 12, where Paul takes that assumption and holds it up against a picture that will not accommodate it. His picture is a body. "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ" (v. 12). We expect him to say "so it is with the church," but he says "so it is with Christ." The church is not a voluntary association of individually complete Christians. It is the body of Christ Himself, and a body is the one thing you cannot join casually or leave without loss.

Paul begins by reminding the Corinthians of their old life: "You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols" (v. 2). The idols could not speak. That detail matters, because a religion with no word in it can only be measured by experience, and experience always builds a hierarchy. The person with the more intense encounter, the more dramatic story, the more visible gift, rises to the top. Corinth had rebuilt exactly that hierarchy inside the church, ranking believers by their spiritual manifestations. Paul's answer is that the true God is not mute. His Spirit speaks, and the Spirit's signature is not intensity but a confession: "no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit" (v. 3).

Every real Christian, from the most visible to the most overlooked, holds the identical thing in common, a Spirit-given word about Jesus. Our unity does not come from being alike. It comes from being claimed by the same Lord and taught by the same Spirit to say so. This is why I keep coming back to the phrase united by the Word. Churches try to build unity out of shared demographics, shared politics, shared style, and those bonds hold until the first real strain. The bond Paul describes was built by God, and it runs deeper than any affinity we could have chosen.

From that common confession, Paul turns to our differences. The differences are on purpose. "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone" (vv. 4-6). Three times he names the variety, and three times he anchors it in God, Spirit, Lord, Father. The diversity of the church flows from the same source as its unity. God did not create a uniform people and then watch

them fragment into differences. He composed a differentiated people on purpose, the way a body needs an eye to be an eye and a hand to be a hand.

And every one of those differences has an address. "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (v. 7). The word Paul uses for gifts is *charismata*, built on the word for grace, and grace never terminates on the recipient. Your gift was given to you, but it was given for the people around you. The Spirit "apportions to each one individually as he wills" (v. 11), which means your gifting is not your achievement and someone else's gifting is not your indictment. It is His will, distributed with intent, like a body assembled by someone who knew what the whole thing was for. This also means there is no such thing as an ungifted Christian. If the Spirit has taught you to confess Jesus as Lord, He has also apportioned something to you that this congregation needs, whether or not you have ever named it.

This is where the chapter starts pressing on us, because Paul identifies two ways a body part can talk itself out of the body, and both of them are fluent English in our culture. The first voice says, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body" (v. 15). This is the member who looks at someone more visible, more gifted, more needed, and quietly concludes that the church would not miss them. It sounds like humility. It is actually a kind of resignation, comparison doing the devil's work in a modest tone of voice. Paul's response is not a pep talk. It is theology: "God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose" (v. 18). Your presence in the body is not your assessment to make. He placed you, and He does not compose bodies with spare parts.

The second voice is the one our culture rewards. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'" (v. 21). We admire people who need nothing. We build lives designed to minimize dependence, and we can build a faith the same way, private, portable, self-contained. Paul's point is that a body part making this speech is lying about its own nature. An eye that separates from the body does not become a freer eye. It becomes blind tissue. Whatever our culture promises, a self that detaches from every body it belongs to does not become more itself. It loses the very relationships in which its gifts meant something.

Then Paul goes further, and this is the part I find most striking. In the ancient world the body was a common political metaphor, and it was always used the same way: to tell the lowly parts to stay in their place and serve the important ones. Paul takes the metaphor and turns it around. "The parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable," and God has given "greater honor to the part that lacked it" (vv. 22-24). God routes honor toward the members the world overlooks. The quiet intercessor, the member who shows up at the hospital, the one who notices the newcomer standing

alone, these are not the supporting cast of the church. In God's composition they carry an honor the platform never confers.

Why would God arrange it this way? Paul tells us: "that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another" (v. 25). And then he gives us the test of whether it is working: "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (v. 26). A body has shared nerve endings. You know you are actually part of one when someone else's pain reaches you, when someone else's honor makes you glad instead of envious. That is a different kind of belonging than anything a culture of individuals can offer, and if we are honest, it is the kind we ache for.

I don't think the answer to individualism is to erase the individual. Paul never does. The eye stays an eye; the hand stays a hand. God is not blending us into sameness, and the gospel is not a solvent for personality. What the gospel refuses is the lie that you can be fully yourself alone. You were made an eye or a hand or a foot, which means you were made for a body, and in one Spirit you were baptized into one (v. 13). So come Sunday with two questions worth sitting with. Where have I quietly decided the body does not need me? And where have I quietly decided I do not need the body? Both questions have the same answer, and it is waiting for us in this text.