

God Put the Body Together

1 Corinthians 12.21-30

Overview

Individualism and self-reliance were growing problems at Corinth. Some of the members had come to believe that others within the congregation were dispensable and no longer needed. Why they began to think that way is a matter of speculation (although other parts of Paul's letters give us some strong clues), Paul's emphasis is that each member should value every other member of the congregation because God has placed each one exactly where He wants them inside the body.

The Bigger Picture

Paul continues to emphasize how each member of the local church is a vital part to the everyday functioning of the body. Individualism has been a problem since the fall. Cain displayed it with how he regarded his brother (Genesis 4.9). His disdain for any relationship of care for his brother characterizes the way of the world. Priding ourselves on self-sufficiency and beliefs that we can go at things alone is a philosophy of Satan. It is rooted in the desire to make ourselves our own god.

The Text

NLT:

1 Corinthians 12:21–30 (NLT)

²¹ The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you." ²² In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. ²³ And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, ²⁴ while the more honorable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. ²⁵ This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad. ²⁷ All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it. ²⁸ Here are some of the parts God has appointed for the church: first are apostles, second are prophets, third are teachers, then those who do miracles, those who have the gift of healing, those who can help others, those who have the gift of leadership, those who speak in unknown languages. ²⁹ Are we all apostles? Are we all prophets? Are we all teachers? Do we all have the power to do miracles? ³⁰ Do we all have the gift of healing? Do we all have the ability to speak in unknown languages? Do we all have the ability to interpret unknown languages? Of course not!

CSB:

1 Corinthians 12:21–30 (CSB)

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” Or again, the head can’t say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that are weaker are indispensable. ²³ And those parts of the body that we consider less honorable, we clothe these with greater honor, and our unrespectable parts are treated with greater respect, ²⁴ which our respectable parts do not need. Instead, God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the less honorable, ²⁵ so that there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the same concern for each other. ²⁶ So if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and individual members of it. ²⁸ And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, next miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, leading, various kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all do miracles? ³⁰ Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

Explore the Text

1. How are we to regard the “weaker” parts of the body?
2. Are there some practical applications you can make to the day-to-day happenings inside the local church from the analogy Paul uses in 12:22-24?
3. Who put the body together? Why is greater honor given to *the less honorable*?
4. What happens when one member suffers? Or, when one member is honored?
5. For what purpose did God distribute His gifts inside the church?

About the Text

In verses 21-30, Paul continues to stress our mutual dependence on each other. He presses his readers to value each other's gifts, which have been graciously given by the Spirit. What was happening at Corinth was no different than what can happen inside a local congregation today. Some people, due to an inflated vision of themselves, feel they can get along without some other members of the church. Paul, swiftly and concisely, debunks this thinking: *on the contrary, those parts of the body that are weaker are indispensable*, 12.22.

I. 12.21-27 – Functioning Together Properly

- A. 12.21 – a few members of the church in Corinth had concluded that the other “less desirable” people in the church weren’t necessary. They *overestimated their own importance and underestimated that of other believers*.⁵ They ignored two basic principles taught in:
 - i. Matthew 18.10: how you view another member of the body is how you view Christ.
 - ii. Romans 14.1-15.7: instead of disregarding those who we regard as weak, we are to work for their good, building them up.
- B. 12.22 – as we look at the human body, some of the more prominent parts, while very important, it is possible to live without them. People can function without an eye or hand and still live. But a person will not live without his heart or liver. While those body parts may not be visible on the outside, they are vital to the functioning of your body.
 - i. The same is true inside the church. While those who occupy the public speaking roles are important, some of the most vital operations of the church take place by those who are not visible.
 - ii. Their value should never be questioned. They should be nourished, built up, and protected.
- C. 12.23-27 – God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the less honorable.
 - i. He did this to prevent division.
 - ii. All the members should have the same care for each other. Mutual support and encouragement are desired. They preserve unity.
 - iii. There is to be no disdain or rivalry, envy or malice, or inferiority or superiority.
 - iv. Members of the church are one in Christ and one in each other.

II. 12.28-30 – What God Has Given the Church

- A. Paul returns to an earlier argument made in the chapter, stressing the need for diversity, not uniformity when it comes to the gifts and ministries of the church.
- B. In v. 28, Paul lists out some of the gifts and ministries of the early church. Some of these gifts were miraculous in nature, others were not. Some of the offices mentioned were exclusive to the early church during the time preceding the complete revelation of Scripture. Other offices and positions of leadership still exist in the church today.

⁵ MacArthur, John F., Jr. *1 Corinthians*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Chicago: Moody Press, 1984, p. 319.

- C. 12.29-30 – God does not intend for every member to have the same gift ... and not all gifts are intended to be out front and public in nature. Their response was expected to be with gratefulness and to employ them in faithful use.

Reaction

1. Individualism seems to be built in our DNA. It carries over into how we view others in the church. What is wrong with the thinking that says, “They don’t need me?” Likewise, what is wrong with the thinking that says, “I don’t need them.” What does this type of thinking forget?
2. As you think about your local congregation, what are some of the vital ministries that go on behind the scenes ... things that don’t receive much attention ... but are vital to the life of the church?
3. What can you do to strengthen, protect, and encourage those “less visible” ministries?
4. What type of care are we to have for *each* member of the body?
5. How good are you at being connected with other members of your local congregation? What can you do to improve those connections?
6. Verse 27 brings us back to the big picture. We are all part of the body of Christ. How does keeping this in mind promote unity inside the local church?
7. In the listing of gifts in v. 28, what functions still exist in today’s church? Provide a short definition of each. Does your gift fit into any of these functions/ministries?

For the Christian Today

We need to see the indispensability of each member of the local church. Can you imagine any of your body parts declaring they were more important than some of the others and didn't need them? Such a notion is preposterous. Likewise, if we fail to see the great value of others, even the "weakest" members of the body, we are falling into the same trap the Corinthians did. Remember, how we regard others reveals how we regard Jesus Christ, Matthew 18.10. Every Christian has been called to bear the weaknesses of his brother or sister and build them up, encouraging them, Romans 15.1-2, 7.

We need to understand the importance and value of our gift and placement inside the local church. No one wants to be *dispensable*. We do not want to be tossed aside or seen as unimportant. Many people church shop and hop around from congregation to congregation looking for where they will be the right fit. *Where will I be accepted?* Remember, if you are a member of a local church, you are indispensable. And all the other members are indispensable parts of your life. They, like you, are part of the body that God has put together to display the beauty of the gospel.

Mutual care promotes unity. If we are all interdependent upon each other, then we will experience joy and pain as one. If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is honored, all rejoice together. Paul also spoke of this mutual care in Romans 12.15-16. Mutual care is the expectation. This is opposed to self-care, which often reflects today's culture. This can be reflected in how we can seek to advance ourselves rather than advancing the interests of others.

How to maintain interdependence is achieved by continually looking to Christ. He could have viewed us as dispensable. Rather, he viewed us through the eyes of grace and saw us as indispensable, so much that He gave Himself on our behalf. *He became dispensable in our place.* Let's consider the body analogy again. The most indispensable part – the head – was willingly dishonored so that the *least presentable parts – you and I – might receive honor.* The strongest member was made weak and dispensable in order that the weaker members – you and I – might be considered indispensable. His love has transformed our reality, which in turn should fill our hearts with humility. We are each totally dependent upon Christ and the local church in which He has placed us. We do not need to distinguish ourselves or compete for a higher position. Our position in the body has been secured. Our identity has been given to us by Christ and is affirmed by the other parts of the body.⁶

Journal

What are some things you can do to keep the proper view of yourself (Romans 12.3) as you consider your place in the body and those around you? How can you encourage other members of the body this week?

⁶ Um, p. 226.

For Further Study

Read through Matthew 18.1-10 and Romans 14.1-15.7. What are the basic principles presented in these two texts and how do they apply to how God has put the body together?