

The Beauty of Belonging: Church Membership

1 Corinthians 12:12-26

Intro: Getting Back to the First Century Church?

I wonder if you've ever heard someone say (or perhaps you've said it yourself), "We just need to be like the first century church! If we could just do church like they did in the first century when the church was first birthed—without all the gimmicks and games, just the simplicity of church life like they did in the first century—then church *today* would be so much better."?

Ever heard anyone say that? And there is some goodness to that instinct. We want to be biblical in the way we do church. And the biblical record gives us an understanding of the way the first century church functioned.

But we are kidding ourselves IF, what we mean is: "If we just did church like them, we wouldn't have the kind of problems we have today." There wouldn't be so much selfishness, so much division, so much disunity, so much laziness and passivity, consumerism.

Let me introduce you to one of the churches in the first century—the church in Corinth. This church had problems! Problems much like the problems of many churches in the present day.

- The ***divisiveness*** in this church was off the charts. Some said, “I follow Paul. I follow Apollos!” (1:10-17) Church members were suing each other... bringing each other to court. (6:1-8)
- Many were immersed in ***sexual immorality***. (6:12-13), including one guy who was having relations with his father’s wife—and the church was tolerating it. (5)
- There was jealousy and strife. (3:1-4) There was elitism and pride. (3:18-23)
- They were engaging in idolatry. (10:14)
- There was drunkenness AT THE LORD’S SUPPER! (11:21)

This church was a mess. AND YET, the apostle Paul, in 1 Cor. 12, still paints a picture for them of the beauty of belonging to the church—belonging to a messed up people who are covered in the blood of Christ.

One Body, Many Parts

We're continuing our series called "The Dearest Place on Earth: Experiencing the Beauty and Glory of the Church." This morning I want to remind us of the beauty of church membership. I could use this time to make arguments for why every Christian should be a member of a local church. Like...

- Churchless Christianity is ***foreign to the Bible!*** The NT knows of no Christian who has not, in some way, joined him/herself to a specific local body of believers.
- OR, how can the ***pastors of a church*** "***shepherd the flock*** of God among them," if they don't know who their flock is? Are they called to give an account for every Christian everywhere? Or how about any person who shows up on a Sunday? No, they will give an account for those who commit themselves to their church.
- Or how can a ***church member obey their leaders***/pastors, as Hebrews 13 commands, if they don't have any pastors to submit to? Who are their pastors? Just any pastor? No,

it's the pastors whom they've willingly placed themselves under their care.

- Or how can a church ***practice church discipline*** without membership? If a person is living in ongoing, unrepentant, settled-in-peace with their sin, the Bible tells the church, after taking the proper steps of seeking to win that person to repentance, to remove that person from the church? But if there's no membership, how are they removed? If they were never IN in the first place, how can they be out?
- And what about all the ***one-another passages*** in the Bible that are written to specific local churches? How can we carry those out if we don't have a church we're committed to?

I could go there. But I'm not going to. Instead, I want us, not merely to know in our heads about our obligation to the church, but I want us to be captivated in our hearts by the beauty of belonging to the church. That's what church membership is! It's saying, "I belong to these people, and they belong to me!"

In this passage, Paul pictures the beauty of church membership by speaking of it in terms of a body. **[v12]**

“ONE body, many members.” “All the members of the body, though many, are one body.” That’s the main point of this passage. Oneness in our individuality. Unity in our diversity.

Interconnectedness and interdependence in our separateness and distinctness. The *parts* of the church make up the wholeness of the *one* church. **[v13]**.

This is salvation language. Paul is rooting our interconnectedness in our salvation through the Spirit. **[Gospel, appeal]** Why does he bring that up? Notice how he opened this section. **[vv1-3]**

Why does he say this? Why the emphasis on what is confessed by the Spirit? “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the HS,” meaning, “No one can believe and submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ unless the Spirit of God has so moved in their hearts to do so.” Why does he say that? Notice what he goes on to say **[v4]**

In other words, “There are different kinds of roles among the various Christians in the church, but they all have the same Spirit—they’re all saved! They all submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ because they all have the third person of the Trinity indwelling them!” **[vv5-11]**

Paul is laboring to show the beauty of the diversity of roles in the church **IN ORDER TO SHOW** the unity of the church in the Spirit. “That person is just as much saved as you are. They have the same Spirit of God dwelling in them who also dwells in you.”

The church in Corinth was tempted to elevate certain people over other people in the church. Or elevate themselves over other people in the church. “Look at me. Look at what I can do!” And Paul is responding, “Ok, great. But the same Spirit who gave you the ability to do that is also working over here in this person to do what they’re doing!”

And it’s that context of oneness/unity that serves as the foundation for his teaching on the church as one body with many parts. The

primary emphasis of this passage is not MAINLY about: “Do you have a gift that you can use for the church? Ok, use it! Use your gifts.” That’s part of what he’s getting at. But the main emphasis is: “Yes, there are a variety of gifts and roles, but we’re ONE!” The main emphasis is NOT on the gifts that individual church members can bring to the church. The main emphasis is on the corporate unity of the church.

I remember talking to a lady about her role in her church many years ago who insisted, “I must serve in the Children's Ministry. It’s my gift.” Now, that was questionable, but I think she missed the whole point.

The focus of this passage is not on *insisting* that we use our spiritual gifts in the church. The focus is on the beauty of the *unity* of the church *seen* in the various gifts that people bring to the body.

Here's how we can summarize the argument:
The church needs you AND you need the church because every member has value to the church.
Let’s break that down...

1) The church needs you. [vv14-16] You hear that language of “belonging”? Some say that because they are not a CERTAIN PART of the body, therefore, “I do not *belong* to the body.” Paul uses that same word in the second half of the sentence when he says, “that would not make it any less PART of the body.” That’s the word for “belong”. Some says: *I don’t belong because I’m not like that person.* Paul’s response: *That doesn’t mean you don’t belong.*

Vv12-16 addresses the kind of person who is so aware of his/her deficiencies and shortcomings and failings and sins and lack of giftedness and baggage, that he believes he has nothing to offer to the church. “Why be part of a church! Those people have it all together! They don’t need me!”

Listen, God didn’t mess up in the way he made you. God created you exactly how he wanted, and he did so (in part) for you to be part of a church who needs you. He knows your sins/ shortcomings/ failings/ baggage, and he still says, “The church needs you!”

- “But I’m not very outgoing!” So? The church needs introverts because too many extraverts might overwhelm and scare off introverts!
- “But I’m not even married.” So? The church NEEDS singles! We need you! Paul was single! Jesus was single! You are able to give to the life of the church in ways that married folks cannot.
- “But I don’t have any kids.” So? Use that extra time to build meaningful relationships.
- “But I have too many kids!” That one I’ll give ya! NO...NOT REALLY! The way you disciple your kids will have a HUGE impact on others in this church.
- “But I’m old and I can’t keep up with all this young energy.” I hear ya, but you’re not out of the game until the Lord takes you home. Be creative in ways you can encourage the young people in this church. Just by coming here, you’re doing that.

The church needs you. Just because you’re not an eye or hand or pastor or married or whatever ...doesn’t mean you’re not needed. If you’re a Christian, you are needed in a local church.

2) YOU need the church. [vv17-21]

Not only does the church need you, but YOU need the CHURCH. It goes both ways! Do you see how this passage guards against going to one extreme or the other when it comes to church involvement? *On one end*, if ALL you emphasize in your heart is: “The church needs ME!” Then what’s gonna happen? You’re gonna start to think you’re God’s gift to the church and you’re gonna start *insisting* that you serve in ways that YOU demand. Church involvement becomes all about you! And when you don’t serve in ways that you think you should, you start to say, “Well, they just don’t see the value I bring.” And you throw a pity party because your heart is consumed with the imbalanced idea that the church needs you.

OR, on the other side, if ALL you emphasize in our heart is: “I need the church.” Then what’s gonna happen? You’ll suck the life out of people. You’re gonna only be desperate and needy and taking from others, rather than giving to them. You won’t serve. You won’t minister TO, you’ll only BE ministered to.

This passage gives balance! The church needs you, BUT you need the church as well. If the first part of the passage (the church needs you) speaks to those who think they have nothing to offer to the church, then the next part of this passage speaks to those who think they don't need the church. It is a death blow to the "solo-Christianity" mindset. Solo-Christianity is seeking to do what Paul says *cannot* be done. Paul says in v21, "You CAN'T say to the church, 'I have no need of you.'" You CAN'T say that, if you're a Christian. The Bible does not give you that option! Why? Notice how Paul argues against solo-Christianity. **[v17]**

See his point? One person is not sufficient to be or do what *only* the whole church can be and do. Solo-Christianity is an attempt to be the whole body in one member! Impossible.

I remember going to the movies with my wife many years ago, and we struck up a conversation with a guy who said he was a Christian and was very zealous. But when I asked him what church he was part of, he said, "Oh, I've done away with organized religion years

ago. It doesn't work for me." To which I wondered, "How can he obey so many passages in the Bible that describe OUR need for other believers in the church?"

Solo-Christianity is an oxy-moron. **[Appeal to attendees to join our church or another faithful, gospel-centered church.]** You need the church! It's God's idea! See that? **[v18]**

This is how God set it up. He did not design it that you should be doing the Christian life apart from the church. You need the church. The church needs you...BECAUSE...

3) Every Member has Value in the Church

That's where Paul goes next (in v22). He just said, "Every member is needed. One member cannot say to another, "I have no need of you." And notice the contrast to that way of thinking. **[v22-24a]**

You following the logic? He's still pressing into the metaphor of the body, but now he's bringing in the imagery of clothing. He's making a comparison between those members whom we

might deem as less important and our attempt to overshadow them WITH those parts of the human body that we cover up. *What our kids call “privacy.”*

And he’s making that point that we actually HONOR those private parts of the body when we treat them modestly (by covering them up). That doesn't mean those parts are not valuable! It means THEY ARE!

That’s how we talk about modesty with our kids. “The reason you cover this up is because of how valuable it is...how precious it is, and it is to be reserved for your spouse alone.” It’s to honor it and show its value, not because it’s bad or invaluable...but because IT IS.

And so, the analogy Paul makes is, “In a similar way, those members of the church whom we might deem ‘weaker’ or ‘less significant,’ are NOT, because they might require greater attention and care.” The fact *that* they are given more tender care reveals how significant that is. And that’s where Paul goes. **[v24b-25]**

Every person gets the care they need because every member matters! That's his point. And did you notice, in the mind of Paul, this is a unity issue??!!! Did you see what he said? **[v25a]**.

When we treat other members as "less than," that divides the body. In the same way if we say, "My left pinky toe is insignificant." You won't be saying that when you accidentally bang it on the corner of a brick wall!

You ever stubbed your toe before? That'll take a grown man out. Stubbing his little toe...it hurts! But it is ironic, isn't it? When such a small and seemingly insignificant member of your body is damaged, your whole body is on the floor, holding on to your little toe.

Every member matters. Notice how Paul puts it in **[v26]**.

You see that interconnectedness? "One suffers, all feel it. One rejoices, all feel it." Listen, indifference towards other church members is NOT an option in church membership. According to Paul, indifference = disunity. But entering into the experiences of others = unity. When a

member of this church is suffering or rejoicing (no matter how seemingly insignificant that member is), the rest of the church *should* feel it.

Stories of Belonging

There is one body with many parts that make up the whole. The other members need you and you need them because everyone is valued. It is a beautiful picture of belonging. How have you experienced that here at Kinney? I hope you have! The beauty of belonging.

I love to hear how people describe this church when they come. Our guest preacher last week said to me, “You have a really happy church.” I said, “Man, we are happy. The people of Kinney are genuinely happy to see one other. It’s not fake. It’s not forced. It’s real.” He sensed the beauty of belonging in this church.

I remember a couple of years ago I got a text from a fairly new church member that said this: “Hey man, not to get too deep or personal, but I really don’t have a close family back home (I have a great immediate family but nothing else), and I have always felt the lack of a larger family

in my life. Then moving away from home made it really feel like I didn't have a family anymore, but Kinney has totally and completely filled that gap. Tonight, seeing everybody in person, it really just hit me and I started tearing up a bit, that we are all a part of a larger body and it's beautiful and comforting. I say that to really just encourage you and let you know that what you do everyday, the little, mundane things, have all worked together to really make me feel like I belong somewhere, so thank you so much."

Conclusion

The beauty of belonging to the body. What body? Is Paul just saying: "The church life is like just any human body. You got hands and eyes and feet...and they all work harmoniously together. I'm just using that as a metaphor for what it's like to be connected in the life of the church. It's just like any human body." Is that Paul's point? NO!

He's NOT making a connection between the church and the human body *in general*. He's making a connection between the church and

specific body! Someone's specific body! Whose body? **[v27 "you ARE the body of Christ"]**
Wow. "You [plural, "y'all"] ARE the body of Christ. You [the church collectively/ corporately/ as a whole....You] ARE the body of Christ." That's who the church IS! That's who Kinney IS! The body of Jesus Christ himself. And every individual member is a PART of THAT body. Not just a body called Kinney, but the body of Kinney which is the body of Christ.

What does that mean? It certainly does NOT mean that Jesus does NOT have a physical body—like, he doesn't have real arms and legs and hands and feet and eyes and ears. No, he does! He was raised from the dead BODILY and he still has that same BODY (flesh and blood) that when he walked on this earth 2,000 years ago.

Paul is pressing into a vital and key doctrine called UNION with Christ. The church is so connected to and one with Jesus, that what can be said of him, can be said of us. But we are so united to who he is for us that we are the outworking of his very self...such that, when the

church is properly functioning, we are being like Christ himself.

That's why it's so important to have healthy local churches...because they represent the very body of Jesus here on earth. That's why it's so important to join a healthy church. That's why it's so important to care for every member of this church! Church, we ARE Jesus' body. THAT, I would propose to you, is the beauty of church membership.