

**Building Up the Body of Christ: Unity, Diversity, Mutuality, and Charity**  
**1 Corinthians 12:12–31 | 03.05.2017 | Body Life @OBC**

For the last month I've been reading a book called *When the Church Was a Family* by . . . J. H.

It looks at the community structures of the New Testament church and . . .  
It calls us to reconsider the hyper-individualistic ways we approach God and one another.

It explains from the New Testament how disciples saw themselves as a part of X's family

. . . and it exposes the way modern individualism has hurt our understanding and application of the Scripture.

For instance, one pillar of modern faith is the belief that Jesus is a "personal savior." And yet . . .  
Such a conception of Jesus as my own personal savior is surprisingly foreign to the Bible.

Hellerman observes (124–25),

It is instructive to note that of the 23 times in the New Testament that 'savior' is used in conjunction with some person or group being saved, only once does it refer to the Savior of an individual (Luke 1:47).

Elsewhere the word refers to Jesus as Savior of a group of person or a collective entity, for example, "Christ our Savior" (Titus 3:6) or "Savior of the world" (John 4:42). When Paul used a first-person possessive pronoun with the word "Lord," he chose the plural 53 times ("our Lord").

The point here is that the New Testament focus, . . . is upon Jesus as Lord and Savior of a group—not only of individuals.

Of course, . . . God chose individuals for salvation before the foundation of the world.

And no one is saved by the faith of their father or the good works of their mother.

Salvation is personal . . . but even so . . . it is personal in relationship with others.

In the OT and the New, family relationships were thick . . .

. . . which meant following Jesus required more than just turning away from sin

. . . As the Gospels repeatedly require . . . following Jesus means turning your back on your closest family and friends in order to join Jesus family

Indeed, this is what was NOT happening in Corinth.

You may remember . . . Paul began his letter to Corinth addressing the divisions in the church

1 Corinthians 1:11–13 read:

**For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Cephas,” or “I follow Christ.” Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?**

Concerned with the divisions in the church, Paul applies the gospel.

In chapters 1–4, he extols the power and wisdom of God to unify Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, educated and ignorant in the person and work of Christ.

Then in chapters 5–10 he addresses matters of holiness and love. But divisions in the church are not forgotten.

And thus, when Paul returns to consider gathered worship, he again seeks to foster unity through the gospel and the gifts of the spirit.

As we saw in verses 1–11, these diverse gifts are for the common good of the church.

And now he employs a long metaphor about the body of Christ to illustrate the way in each part of the body is designed to build itself up in love . . .

To a people who are approaching Christ and his body as members in competition with OA,

And to those who are comfortable drawing a circle around themselves and relating to God on their own terms without strong ties to others . . . Paul has much to say.

And what we find in verses 12–31 are instructions about

WHAT the church is . . .

WHO makes up the church . . .

HOW each part relates to one another.

HOW every part NEEDS one another.

And HOW God created the church to be a place where his Spirit would empower diverse parts of the body to build one another up in love.

And how the one body requires the many parts to work together to be what they are—the body of Christ.

**For us today . . . there are many practical applications.**

My aim . . . in the next 30 minutes . . . is to give an overview of Paul's argument

And show four features of his argument that are needed to build up the body of Christ.

The four biblical concepts needed to build up the body of Christ.

1. Unity
2. Diversity
3. Mutuality – defined as the mutual need we have for one another and the mutual service we give to one another
4. Charity – another word for love.

The first two—unity and diversity—we will take together as we look at verses 12–14 and 27–31.

The third—mutuality—we will see in two conversations taking place in verses 15–25.

The fourth—charity—we will see as we look how the body works to meet needs in verse 26.

Let's dive in!

## Unity and Diversity

At the beginning and end of this section, Paul makes a one compound point.

The church is one unified body.

AND

This body is made up of many parts.

Just like the human body is made up of many diverse parts, so the church with its various spiritual people is one body.

Notice what Paul says in verses 12–14:

**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.**

And again in verse 27

**Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.**

As to the arrangement of Paul's argument, I take it as intentional that he begins and ends with this balanced presentation of unity and diversity.

In between, Paul will present two conversations between differing parts of the body.

His goal is to see the church rely on one another and to love one another.

In other words, the church should experience mutuality and charity.

But such mutual love . . . will only exist if the unity-in-diversity is understood & embraced.

So, Paul makes two arguments to help the Corinthians see the wisdom and goodness of unity and diversity in the body of Christ.

## The first has to do with spiritual gifts.

**Verses 1–11** explained how all the gifts were given by God. Each gift and variety of ministry was given for the common purpose of building up the body of Christ.

Likewise, **verses 27–31** also list a number of spiritual gifts.

Time doesn't permit a full examination of each gift, but we can say a couple things . . .

**Verse 28** says each gift comes from God . . .

Paul lists three offices . . . five particular gifts.

Altogether, they list gifts present in Corinth.

They also hint at the fact that the offices of elders and deacons were yet to come.

Notice that the two gifts of **helping** and **administering** (or governing) have not formalized into the offices yet.

There is no mention of elders and deacons in Corinth – why would there be?

In its three years of existence . . . the church had apostles and prophets.

That being said, we can glimpse from Paul's words . . . a time to come when teachers would replace A & P.

Following this list of offices and gifts, Paul offers a battery of questions in **vv. 29–30**: . . .

The point being made is that no one person has all the gifts.

God has given to his church a variety of gifts, which together make up the full composite of Christ's church.

This is why we need one another.

In short, the variety of spiritual gifts reinforce the main point—God has given his church a diversity gifts to unify one body.

So . . . the gifts are the first way Paul emphasizes unity and diversity.

The second refers to the baptism of the Spirit . . . in verses 12–13.

When Paul speaks of the church body in 1 Corinthians 12, he says that all members possess the same Spirit because all have been baptized with or in the same Spirit. He writes,

**"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."**

As we saw last week, Paul turns to the baptism of the Spirit to explain the gifts listed in vv. 7–11.

But verse 13 functions in the other direction too. Jesus' baptism of the church with the HS . . . functions as the theological reason for the church's unity.

Because all have been baptized by Christ into the Spirit, we are all unified in one Spirit.

While the Spirit gives different gifts and different ministries . . . it's the same Spirit.

Jesus as cornerstone overflows his temple with his living water, the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts this outpouring goes beyond Pentecost.

It begins in Jerusalem, but soon the living waters of the Spirit flow into the world . . . first the Samaritans received the HS (8) . . . then the Gentiles at Cornelius house (10) . . . last the followers of John . . . receive the Spirit when Paul baptizes them in Jesus name (19).

Indeed, these four events mark the four phases of Pentecost in Acts . . . and form a bridge from the OC to the NC.

These four phases of Pentecost do not provide a paradigm for how we experience Spirit baptism today . . . rather they demonstrate how the Spirit arrived, . . . **such that now** . . .

All who receive Christ by faith . . . immediately receive the Spirit . . .

This is what we know as Spirit-baptism, or what Paul describes as drinking of the Spirit. The language is metaphorical and most likely refers back to Jesus' words in John 7:

**"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and DRINK. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.**

The point Paul is making is that those who are baptized in the same Spirit . . . whether they are Jews or Greeks, slaves or free . . . are ONE in Christ, ONE in the Spirit, ONE in the church.

**This is Paul's foundation for the church** . . . one we must understand and embrace if we are to enjoy UNITY . . . but clearly we must do more than believe this truth.

We must swim in its living waters. . . . and vv 14–26 show us how **thru mutuality & charity.**

## Mutuality

In vv 15–26 Paul gives us two conversations in the body of Christ.

In the first, he personifies the foot and ear as two disgruntled members of the body. They look at the other more desirable parts of the body and conclude that because they are not the like the hand or the eye . . . there is no place for them.

In the second, he personifies the eye and head as two proud members of the body who look down on the hands and the feet and say to themselves, “I have no need for them.”

Clearly, Paul is speaking figuratively, almost allegorically.

In the end (**v. 27**) he says: “You ARE the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

But from **vv. 12–26** . . . he speaks figuratively. He uses an extended metaphor to expose the ridiculousness of members chafing against OA, instead of caring for OA.

### Tackling a problem that all churches face . . .

Paul addresses members of the church who FEEL disgruntled or dejected

He says to them . . . stop making decisions based on your FEELINGS . . . but walk in the truth of who you are in Christ.

ATST, Paul addresses proud Xians who FEEL they don't need anyone else . . .

He says to them. . . . you who are more presentable, you need the weaker, less honorable parts of the body. They are indispensable to you. Stop being so arrogant.

### You can see how relevant this chapter is to us:

We struggle to walk by truth . . . because we trained to serve our feelings.

Social media and the news reinforce the message that we must express how we feel . . . and that moral (immoral) outrage (it seems) is new normal.

But the Bible gives us a different message — its news is that people who are miserable can find hope and life in Jesus Christ.

God calls sinners to find forgiveness . . . and the homeless to have a home.

Christ died on Calvary to give a place for those who do not have a place. And the church, therefore, is the family God gives his children as we march towards heaven.

If you have never heard that good news before . . . it is for you. Trust in Christ, turn away from sin, and find a place in his family.

**Sadly** . . . *there are many (like those in Corinth) who have found Christ . . . but still walk alone.*

And it is the lies that these spiritual individualists believe that Paul addresses in vv 15–26.

### FIRST . . . **The Church Doesn't Need Me.**

This is the first lie Paul confronts. **READ vv. 15–16.**

Paul quotes these discouraged members of the body and says their feelings do not make them any less a part of the body.

Even if their feelings testify otherwise, Paul uses this body metaphor to stress an important truth – even aching body parts can't leave the body – **ALL ARE NEEDED!**

WHOEVER YOU ARE . . . if you have been baptized in the Spirit, your gifts are needed.

This is what Paul is getting at in v 18 – **READ** . . . We don't choose who God brings to us; we look forward to receiving all the members God sends . . .

Likewise, those who part of God's universal body are called to give themselves to a local church – to submit to a local body and use their gifts for the building up of that church.

As Paul continues in **vv. 17 and 19**, God has made a body with many, various parts.

In this way . . .

The eye needs the ear; the ear needs the nose, and so on  
The administrative type needs the merciful type; . . . The helper needs the leader .  
The workers needs to listener. . . . The creative needs the detail

As Paul concludes in v. 20: "As it is, there are many parts, yet one body."

So Paul's first point about MUTUALITY is that every part is needed, and that parts who lament their status can stop looking down on themselves.

Rather . . . **look to the X** who has placed you in his body.

Trust that your placement in God's body is not a mistake . . .

Rather God's plan is to grow you as a part of his body . . . and more, to grow the body with your gifts.

Don't believe the lie that says you are NOT needed . . . rather, ask the Lord where he would have you commit to using your gifts.

This is the first application of MUTUALITY . . . but there is a second

SECOND, members of the church must reject the lie that says: **I Don't Need You.**

Of the two lies that Paul is addressing, this seems to be the more pernicious.

And it may be that this lie, when it is embraced actually feeds the other.

IOW When the stronger parts of the body fail to see their need for others,  
When they only give certain parts honor and care . . .

. . . THEN the weaker and less presentable parts of the body suffer.

Those weaker parts of the body are enticed to believe they don't matter.

**But Paul thinks it is the opposite.** And in verses 21 – 25 he makes the counter-cultural push to lavish honor on the weaker and less presentable parts.

**Here's what he says . . . READ vv. 21–25**

Again, the conversation here is between parts of the human body, but it is not hard to see how this conversation reflects something of the body's order and arrangement.

Whereas the first conversation lists various parts, it seems here we find in the eye and the head . . . symbolism for leaders in the church. . . .

What is so awful is that Corinth's leaders were saying . . . **we don't need lesser parts.**

It's as if the "Spiritual Ones" in Corinth were completely devoted to the world's ways.

Instead of using their strengths for the good of others; they sought to use others for their own strength.

Instead of seeing the value of every member, and looking for ways to involve every part of the church . . . they were blind to those who were not like them.

They came into church the way an up-and-coming politician might come into a cocktail party, . . . looking for the people of importance while ignoring those below them.

This is not how the body of Christ works. **And why Paul says . . .**

The weaker parts are indispensable . . .

The less honorable parts deserve greater honor

Those who are stronger or more presentable . . . DO NOT NEED HONOR

## **Do you see how different this is from the world?**

Paul uses the human body as an analogy . . . and most commentators agree he is referring to the body's private parts.

He says . . . those parts which are not presentable receive the most attention, the most covering, the most care.

And by analogy, those parts of the church which may be weaker or less honorable. . . should also receive the most parts.

## **Just to be clear . . .**

He is not identifying any individual with the body's private parts.

But rather, he is subverting the honor culture of Corinth.

For anyone in Corinth hearing this analogy would be struck by the way it contradicts the Greco-Roman way.

In Corinth, there was a clear hierarchy of power and prestige.

Many of the settlers in Corinth were military veterans . . . who were promised a position of status in the city. And beyond them . . . all classes sought to improve themselves.

By contrast, Paul says . . . there is no place for ladder-climbing in the church.

Each member of the body is equally valuable . . . and everyone needs everyone else.

Indeed, in his wisdom . . . God created local churches with all kinds of people, so that his children would learn how to die to self in order to serve and love others!

This is what was NOT happening in Corinth . . . and today . . . it is still a challenge.

We are most comfortable with people who are like us . . . but that is not what the church is. We do not gather to reinforce our social standing, political affiliations, or cultural biases

We gather in the name of Christ . . . to worship the resurrected Lord and to be made more like him . . . **AND THIS MEANS LOVING PEOPLE UNLIKE OURSELVES.**

**MUTUALITY** is necessary for the church because only in this context can we fulfill the command to love one another . . . which leads to our last core concept.

## Charity

Paul calls **diverse** people born of one Spirit to be **ONE** in Christ, live at peace with one another. And more than just live at peace . . . to actively serve and honor one another.

v. 26 – If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Church: This is love at work in the body of Christ. And why mutuality matters!

When Christ saved us . . . he did not save us to be individualistic Christians . . .

**He saved us out our sinful self-directed ways . . . and placed us into his family of faith!**

A large part of our sanctification is learning how to live in community with others.

And this community is not an abstract, universal community, but a flesh and blood people with quirks and sins that we must learn to love as we do life together.

Such a community demands more of us than we can give, but this is why the Spirit gives us gifts to serve one another.

Indeed, in contrast to the world which teaches us to live for ourselves, the church calls us to be our brother's keeper . . . and sister's encourager.

As v. 26 suggests . . . a diverse body that loves one another will function differently than the world, . . . because it is training us for another world.

Instead of envying the success of others, we find joy when any part of body the rejoices.

**In fact** . . . one way to increase your joy is to live a full life in the church . . . where your joy is magnified through the joy of others, **taking joy in Christ.**

**ATST** . . . instead of avoiding pain . . . the church enters into the pain of others. We weep w/ those who weep, mourn w/ those who mourn, and volunteer to carry burden of others.

**AND humbly** . . . when God appoints us to suffer and even to die . . . we also find the comfort and prayer of God's family ready to meet us in our needs.

Church, this is what it means to be a part of the body.

As diverse members of Christ's body . . . we long for the church to be one—that's Unity.  
With our various gifts . . . we lean in towards OA and abide with OA—that's Mutuality.  
With hearts full of the gospel . . . we love one another

By sharing our hearts . . . Sharing our burdens . . . Sharing our possessions.

All for the purpose of building up the body of Christ.

And why do we do that? Because Christ . . . gave his life for ours.