

“Ministry Diversity and the Centrality of Christ in the Local Assembly”
 Issues of Diversity
 Understanding Spiritual Gifting

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 Title: Learning to live inter-dependently
 Text: 1 Corinthians 12:12-26
 The Big Idea: The body of Christ is built for community.

ILLUSTRATION:

Philip Yancey in his book *What’s So Amazing About Grace* gives us our opening thought.

“Mark Twain used to say he [would] put a dog and a cat in a cage together as an experiment, to see if they could get along. They did, so he put in a bird, pig and goat. They, too, got along fine after a few adjustments. Then he put in a Baptist, Presbyterian, and Catholic; soon there was not a living thing left.” (Phillip Yancey, *What’s So Amazing About Grace*, Zondervan, 1997, p. 33)

Twain’s inclusiveness might be too elastic for me, but I believe we get his point. Our passage addresses the opposite of this idea.

This is perhaps one of the most encouraging passages in the entire New Testament. It is a call to body unity. We must not forget the larger context in which these words were penned. His initial appeals were directed toward those who were dividing the body of Christ. This theme is consistent throughout the letter (1:10-17; 3:1-4; 6:1; 11:17-22). It is in light of this factious circumstance that he lays out the truth of body unity.

Paul uses the imagery of the human body to illustrate his point. Within any body, there is a multiplicity of parts. Each one has a distinct function and each one is inter-dependent on the other parts within the body. No part is a stand alone part.

TRANSITION:

Paul’s point is not in the details but in the big idea. There is one big idea that expresses itself in two ways. **The church of Jesus Christ is singular and this singularity includes diversity and connectivity.**

- I. The unity of the members (vv. 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13)

Notice Paul’s language of comparison, “Just as . . . so also,” just as the body so also Christ.

- A. Think of Paul’s argument up to this point in 1:10-13; 3:1-3; 6:15-20 and 10:16, 17.

The entire book is built around the centrality of the cross and the resulting consequence of body unity.

- B. Think of this idea inside of our present paragraph (12: 12, 13, 19, 20, 25, 26).

¹² “For as the body is **one**, and hath many members, and all the members of that **one** body, being many, are **one** body: so also is Christ. ¹³ For by **one** Spirit are we all baptized into **one** body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into **one** Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:12, 13).

¹⁹ “And if they were all **one** member, where were the body? ²⁰ But now are they many members, yet but **one** body” (1 Cor. 12:19, 20).

²⁵ “That there should be **no schism in the body**; but that the members should have the same care **one** for another. ²⁶ And whether **one** member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or **one** member be honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Cor. 12:25, 26).

- C. Think of this idea in his other letters (Rom. 12:4, 5; Eph. 2:14-16; 4:1-16; Col. 3:12-15).

⁴ “For as we have many members in **one** body, and all members have not the same office: ⁵ So we, being many, are **one** body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Rom. 12:4, 5).

READ Ephesians 2:14-16 (Col. 3:12-15) and 4:1-16

The body does not function properly in the absence of unity. The members of Christ’s body are unified in their essence but diversified in their function.

ILLUSTRATION:

Children of one family	one Father	John 20:17
Disciples in one school	one teacher	John 13:13-35
Sheep in one flock	one shepherd	John 10:16
Members of one body	one head	Eph. 4:15
Stones in one building	one foundation	1 Peter 2:3; 1 Cor. 3:11-12

The means or agency through which the many members become a part of the one body is through the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit (v. 13). The ministry of Spirit baptism warrants our attention and I do not wish for it to be lost in the bulk of the other information. Because of this I would like to treat the idea in a separate study next week.

ILLUSTRATION:

There are two ways of being united—one is by being frozen together, and the other is by being melted together. What Christians need is to be united in brotherly love, and then they may expect to have power. (Moody's Anecdotes, p. 53)

Notice the intimate language used of our partaking of the Holy Spirit. “We were all made to drink of one Spirit.” This is the same language used in 10:16-17.

¹⁶ “Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor. 10:16, 17).

You and I have the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We have the power of God present in our lives. Jesus speaks of the Spirit overflowing within us, of life abundant. This is true because of the Holy Spirit. Are we believing this? Friend, **it is time to stop acting like believers and to be what we are.** Let us ask God to do for us what is already true. We (you and me) struggle with this. How are we to understand and access the power of God in and through our lives? Listen as John Piper's seeks to reconcile this idea.

The main point was that Paul's goal as an apostle, and our goal as pastors, is to exult in the truth that in all our work to bring people to faith in Christ, and obedience to his will, **it is ultimately and decisively God the Father, God the Spirit, and God the Son who are doing the work in and through us.** Be sure you see this before we move on. It is utterly crucial for all of you, even as non-pastors, as you will see in just a moment.

<http://www.desiringgod.org/library/sermons/06/082006.html> By Signs and Wonders: Where Christ Has Not Been Named August 20, 2006 John Piper

As believers we are one so let us live in light of this truth.

TRANSITION:

The one big idea is body unity. The church of Jesus Christ is singular and this singularity includes diversity and connectivity. Let us now consider the diversity of the members.

II. The diversity of the members (14-20)

“For as the body is one, and hath **many** members, and all the members of that one body, being **many**, are one body: so also is Christ” (1 Cor. 12:12).

“For the body is not one member, but **many**” (1 Cor. 12:14).

“But now are they **many** members, yet but one body” (1 Cor. 12:20).

In the body of Christ Jews and Greeks, slaves and free people are all placed into one body. Verses 14 through 20 speak of this inter-dependence. There is diversity within the body that is beautiful. It is cross cultural. It transcends ethnic boundaries. It does not know monetary placement, social positioning, or cultural priority. Everyone, everywhere in this period of time who knows Jesus as their personal Savior is a member of this one body. What is truly fascinating is that "God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired" (v. 18). You are exactly where God wants you to be. Your giftedness is uniquely you. You have a distinct place within the body that performs a specific task that is for the benefit of all (1 Peter 4:10, 11).

"God made unity, but not uniformity." (Rogers & Rogers)

ILLUSTRATION:

I have a tool box full of tools. Why do you suppose I need so many tools? It is because each of these tools has a different purpose. There is no one tool that can do everything. Here is a hammer. If I need to drive in a nail, this is the tool I need. If I needed to cut a piece of tin, this hammer just wouldn't do, would it? No, I would need these tin snips. If I needed to put a screw into a piece of wood, these tin snips wouldn't be of much help. I would need this screwdriver.

The Church is like God's tool box. God has a lot of jobs to do and he has given the people in His Church different gifts and talents to help Him to do those jobs. We are His tools! To some he has given musical talent to help lead others in worship. To some He has given the talent of teaching so that they can help others to learn more about Him.

If I needed to tighten a screw in my glasses, would this hammer help? Would this great big screwdriver help? No, I would need this little tiny screwdriver. It doesn't matter what your talent is and it doesn't matter if you are big or small. What does matter is that when God has a job for you to do, you need to be right there in His toolbox, ready and willing for Him to use you.

There is this tremendous diversity within the body of Christ. In light of this, how do we stay united? Listen to how A.W. Tozer explains this idea.

"Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshipers [meeting] together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become 'unity' conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship." (A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*)

Our unity is not built around my gifting, but around the infinite expression of who God is in and through His people. This gifting is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit who opens up to us the very image of Jesus Christ.

TRANSITION:

The one big idea is body unity. The church of Jesus Christ is singular and this singularity includes diversity and connectivity. Let us now consider the connectivity of the members.

III. The connectivity of the members (vv. 21-26)

Every part is necessary to the smooth functioning of the body. Notice the statement in verse 22, “necessary.” The NIV translates the word “indispensable.”

When it comes to the physical body, the “weaker” parts are “indispensable.” Most likely Paul is thinking of the internal organs, those parts which work behind the scenes, as it were. So it is with a Christian congregation. There are members who work for the life of the congregation, do so unrecognized, and whose contribution is indispensable.

Isolation is not an option. Christians are built for community. Notice verses 25 and 26. Because of this inter-connectedness no one can say, “I have no need of you” (v. 21). In truth, this union of the members within the body is such that, “If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (v. 26).

“A body is healthy and efficient only when each part is functioning perfectly.”
(William Barclay, 1 Corinthians, 114).

This passage is sobering. As a member of His body do I suffer when others within the body suffer? Do I rejoice in the promotion and celebration of someone other than myself within the body of Christ? It is only as we see ourselves in light of the whole that we can ever put to death our selfish, arrogant, and divisive spirit.

I am convinced that we do not see this connectivity within the body of Christ. Some members/parts within our family are suffering and in their suffering they are withdrawing and in withdrawing from us we all suffer. Somehow we need to help them to see who they are in Christ and their necessary connection to all of us.

ILLUSTRATION:

When my body hurts the rest of the body compensates. It picks up where the part fails. This is true for us as well. When a part is hurting the other parts are to compensate so that the weaker part can be helped.

How do you see yourself? Perhaps you have difficulty seeing how you personally fit into His body. Friend, you have been uniquely gifted by God for a distinct function and placement within His body.

God has crafted you to serve Him by serving His people within the context of His Local Church. Every Local Church has been given gifted people who are designed to strengthen and establish the fellowship.

When was the last time you entered into someone else's sufferings and joys? We live in isolation as a society and as a family. How can we cultivate a biblical connectivity? There are people inside of our fellowship who are suffering in silence. You might not know who they are, but maybe the person to whom you send a note of encouragement or perhaps slip some money to, is one of God's hurting children?

APPLICATION: (Where do we go from here?)

I would like us to ask ourselves four questions as we consider the idea of our passage.

1. Are you involved or withdrawn from the family of God?
2. Who are you currently reaching out to? This can be immediate or long-term.
3. Are you critical of other people's gifting/service?
4. Are you rejoicing in the tremendous diversity within the body of Christ?

The Gospel presented

For the truth of Scripture to change your life through renewing your mind you must be in a right relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ His Son. This relationship is impossible apart from the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This relationship is built around four key ideas. They can be summed up in four words: God, man, Christ, and response.

GOD

There is a real and personal God who is both Creator and Judge before whom you will stand and give an account as both creature and criminal.

MAN – RECOGNIZE

You have rebelled against God. We've all participated in this sinful rebellion. As a result, we have alienated ourselves from God and have exposed ourselves

to His righteous wrath, which will banish us eternally to hell if we do not accept the work of Christ for the forgiveness of our sins.

CHRIST – REALIZE

But God sent Jesus *Christ*, fully God and fully man, to die the death that we deserved for our sins – the righteous for the unrighteous – so that God might both punish our sin in Christ and forgive it in us.

RESPONSE – RECEIVE

The only saving *response* to this Good News is to believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:12; Acts 16:30, 31).

Have you turned to Jesus Christ as your only hope of eternal life? Today this can happen to you.