

Diversity in the Body: The Unmistakable Hallmark of God's Presence I Cor. 12:14-28

Preached @ Hawkwood Baptist Church
by Shafer Parker, Jr.
May 21, 2017

Scripture reading: Ecclesiastes 4:4-12

I Cor. 12:14 So the body is not one part but many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I'm not a hand, I don't belong to the body," in spite of this it still belongs to the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I'm not an eye, I don't belong to the body," in spite of this it still belongs to the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 **But now God has placed each one of the parts in one body just as He wanted.** 19 And if they were all the same part, where would the body be? 20 Now there are many parts, yet one body.

21 So 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 But even more, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are necessary. 23 And those parts of the body that we think to be less honourable, we clothe these with greater honour, and our unpresentable parts have a better presentation. 24 But our presentable parts have no need of clothing. **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 placed these in the church:**

Intro.

I've always enjoyed a certain kind of joke. One form of it goes, there are three types of people in the world, those who make things happen, those who watch what happens, and those who say, "What happened?"

Another form of that joke goes, there are three types of people in the world, those who can count and those who can't.

One more? There are two kinds of people in the world, those who have a way with words and those who have . . . not . . . way.

Serious application of the "Two kinds" joke

There are two kinds of people in the church, those who *go* to church, and those who *are* the church. Now please note that I did not say the two kinds of people are distinguished by the frequency of their attendance, or by the amount of money they put in the offering plate, or even by whether or not their names are found on the church role.

No, the difference comes at the most fundamental level of a person's being. We're talking about something existential, something organic in a spiritual sense. Paul's one point in this entire chapter is that the church is Christ's body, made up of people who by the Holy Spirit are as closely connected with Christ and with each other, as the various cells and organs of my body are connected physically. It is these "connected" people who are the church. Everyone else just attends.

The outline of Paul's argument

1. The beginning of the Christian life is a supernatural work of the Spirit that involves a complete re-orientation of a person's life.

"No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." (I Cor. 12:3)

When a person has been saved, or born again, when they have been transformed by the work of God's Holy Spirit, then "Jesus is Lord" becomes their distinctive song. Let me try to illustrate what I mean. We all know what a loon sounds like, and when we hear the sound, we know a loon is on the lake. In the same way a growing number of Calgarians are learning to distinguish the bark of a coyote from that of an ordinary dog, and it may not be long until the hair-raising scream of the cougar becomes familiar in our green spaces and back yards. Little children quickly learn the distinctive sounds of the cow, the sheep, the horse, the pig, etc.

But how can you tell if a Christian is lurking in the bushes? You will hear his distinctive cry, "Jesus is Lord."

2. In remaking human beings into the image of Christ (salvation), God grants each of us a unique expression of His presence and power called a spiritual gift.

"A demonstration of the Spirit is given to each person to produce what is beneficial." (I Cor. 12:7)

These "demonstrations of the Spirit" are commonly called spiritual gifts. They include gifts of wisdom and knowledge, gifts of teaching, helping, managing, leading, encouragement and mercy. There are more, but we will wait until a later point in our study of I Corinthians to dig into the various gifts. The point is that these spiritual gifts, granted to individual Christians by the Holy Spirit, are given to benefit the body of Christ, to enrich the spiritual life of the church. Every true Christian has something beneficial to contribute.

3. Our portion of the Spirit (spiritual gift) is determined by God, not by our preferences.

"But one and the same Spirit is active in all these (spiritual gifts), distributing to each person as He wills." (I Cor. 12:11)

Actually, if you go back to the first point, that all true Christians are born shouting "Jesus is Lord!" then you know that personal preference doesn't enter into any part of the Christian life. The true Christian knows "It's not about me." Life is about living for God's glory, doing what He calls me to do, pleasing Him by using whatever He gives me to accomplish any task He lays before me.

4. Each uniquely gifted Christian finds he or she has a place in the body of Christ.

“For as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are one body—so also is Christ.” (I Cor. 12:12)

This, dear people, is the body of Christ, the church. It is a living organism, with each Christian spiritually embedded, spiritually interlocked, and spiritually interdependent with every other Christian. Nothing else is church, and nothing else is the Christian life.

5. The unity of the body means that although all members of the body do not have the same public prominence, *all members experience the Christian life together.*

“God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the less honourable, so that there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the same concern for each other. So if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it.” (I Cor. 12:24b-26)

We know how this works in the human body. If my stomach hurts I feel bad all over and I say, “I’m sick.” If my legs are so swift that I am able to set a world record for the 100-metre dash, then my whole body rejoices in the victory. My arms are raised in triumph, my face is smiling, and my mouth is shouting, “I won.” In both cases no distinction is made between one part of the body and another. The whole body is sick. The whole body is victorious. I take my whole body to the doctor’s office or I take my whole body to the medal ceremony.

Now I’m well aware that all analogies break down at some point, even those found in God’s perfect Word. Obviously, the body of Christ cannot be *exactly* like a human body. Nevertheless, it is very much like a human body, and the thing God wants us to see in this passage, perhaps more than anything else, is the simple fact that all members of Christ’s body experience the Christian life *together.*

6. The gift each Christian is given, and the position each Christian holds in the body of Christ, is designed by God to enable each of us to contribute to the church’s call to carry out His purposes.

“But now God has placed each one of the parts in one body just as He wanted.” (I Cor. 12:28)

Application

1. The members of Christ’s body need one another. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you” (v.21). And neither can the gifted teacher say to the gifted helper, “I don’t need you.” Or the other way around. The fact is, we need one another because only in one another do we experience Christ in His fullness.

Listen to Colossians 1:18-19; “He (Christ) is also the head of the body, the church. . . . For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him!” This means Christ incorporates in Himself every attribute of God, every aspect of divinity, every thing that goes to make life all that God is, and all that human life was created to be. We often say that the Christian life is a

life in Christ, and that is true. But what we sometimes fail to recognize is that *life in Christ is life in His body, the church!* It is simply impossible to experience the fulness of life in Christ apart from the body of Christ.

2. The weaker members of Christ's body are indispensable. "Those parts of the body that we think to be weaker are necessary" (v.22). I don't want to spend too much time here, but in passing we should note that one of the reasons we exist together as the body of Christ is to give value to the poorest of the poor, and to also to say to the specially gifted, "you're really not all that." Whether a person is specially gifted by privilege of birth or because of some special achievement or talent, they need the humbling experience of giving value to the weaker parts of the body.
3. In a related theme, God gives greater honour to the members that lack it according to His design. "God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the less honourable, so that there would be no division in the body." (v.24b-25a). The whole idea here is that we learn something of the Spirit of Christ, who gave up the glory of heaven and humbled Himself to the point of becoming sin for us.

In comparison to Christ we are all "less honourable," yet He did us the honour of dying for our sins so that He, the Son of God, could call us brothers and sisters. It is in the body of Christ, the church, that we learn to be like Christ in giving ourselves to others, calling them brothers and sisters without any consideration of who they might be in the eyes of the world.

4. To be embedded by the Spirit into the body of Christ is to be caught up in a Living Being in which every organ cares for all the others. "So if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it" (v.26). I'll just say this. You may not have suffered much yet, but when you do, you will discover that it is no fun suffering alone. Membership in Christ's body means suffering is never as bad as it might be because you never have to suffer alone. And when you are rejoicing you always have someone with whom to share your joy.

Personal application

Here are five things you need to say to yourself.

1. I need church because without it I am only an eye, or an ear. I cannot be spiritually whole by myself.
2. I need church because it is the only way I can be in a sustained connection with Christ.
3. I need church because life in Christ's body is not optional. It is the purpose of my salvation.
4. I need church because I cannot fulfil God's purposes for my life apart from full participation in the life of Christ's body.
5. I need church because it is necessary for spiritual life. Notice that I did *not* say "helpful" for spiritual life. I said "necessary" for spiritual life, that is, if your spiritual life is going to be a life in the Holy Spirit. If the organs and limbs of your body are disconnected from your body, they do not live a diminished life, they do not live at all. Let me put it like this; if there is in you a real, heart-felt separation from the church, you cannot continue to live spiritually, at least not in the sense of living in God, in the Holy Spirit.