

We Really Do Need Each Other

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

About six hundred years before Christ was born, there lived a slave in ancient Greece by the name of Aesop. He became known as a story teller, and his fables that teach moral lessons have survived to this very day. One of them was named “The Belly and the Members.” This is how it went:

“One day it occurred to the members of the body that they were doing all the work while the belly was having all the food. So they held a meeting and after a long discussion decided to strike work until the belly consented to take its proper share of the work. So for a day or two the hands refused to take the food, the mouth refused to receive it and the teeth had no work to do. But after a day or two, the members began to find that they themselves were not in very active condition. The hands could hardly move, the mouth was all parched and dry, while the legs were unable to support the rest of the body. Thus they found that even the belly in its dull, quiet way was doing necessary work for the body and that all must work together or the body will go to pieces.”

Our human bodies have been designed in such a way that each of the parts needs all the others working together to be healthy. And that is the way it is in the Church. Our Scripture passage for today describes the Church as a body, and after making a pretty strong case for unity in the body, Paul goes on to say very clearly in verse 27, “*Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*”

To think that God became a human being, was born into a human body, is humbling and awe-inspiring. That little infant body grew and increased in strength and stature. Jesus in that body ministered, healed the sick, taught the eternal truths of Almighty God, and fed the hungry. In that body, Jesus suffered at the hands of the Roman soldiers. In that body, Jesus was brutally nailed to the cross, where in that body, He died.

But that body was raised after three days, victorious and triumphant over death! After forty days that resurrected body ascended to the Heavenly Father. And now, the church has become that body. The Spirit which unites us is the Spirit of Christ—alive and present in His Body, the Church.

We’ve looked at the Church as being the Family of God, and as the Flock of God. But perhaps more than any other, the term “Body of Christ” is used in the New Testament to refer to the Church. Here in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul uses the analogy

of a human body to illustrate the truths he is sharing with the Christians in Corinth. But this is much, much more than a figure of speech!

The truths of God are revealed to us in the things God has made, including the human body. Our bodies, in which we live, are a constant reminder to us that the Church is the Body of Christ.

Paul pointed out that the Christians in Corinth, contrary to what they believed, really needed each other after all! The truth applies to us as well—*we* really do need each other! Why is this true? Paul underlines two basic principles which help us understand why we really need each other.

1 We really do need each other because we are different, vv. 12, 14-20

All you and I have to do to see how different and varied we are from each other is merely to look around!

The Christians at Corinth were immature in the faith. They needed to grow in Christ, and the longer they refused to admit that, the more enmeshed they became in their bickering and quarrels. One of their problems was that they looked at each other and began to notice how different each of them was from the other. They were allowing their *differences* to *divide* them.

One of their main problems, which Paul begins to address here in the twelfth chapter, is that some of them, in exercising their spiritual gifts, began to look down on those who did not have the same spiritual gifts they did, particularly the gift of speaking in tongues. They began to be possessed by such pride over this, that they missed an important truth about God's church.

Paul wrote in verse 12, "*The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.*" And in verse 14, he told them, "*Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.*" Paul was saying to them, "Yes, you are different—each of you! But that is exactly the way it should be!"

That is the truth he had argued in verse four through eleven. Over and over in those verses, the apostle uses the word "different," to emphasize that God works in different ways through many different kinds of people. Then, beginning in verse twelve, Paul uses the analogy of the human body to illustrate what he was trying to

say. The main thing he has to say about the human body here is that it is made up of many different parts. He is saying that the human body is diverse. In verses 19-20, Paul writes, *“If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.”*

Look at your own body for a moment. Diversity is necessary in your body. We cannot with any efficiency walk with our hands, nor can we pick up objects very well with our feet. An ear does not see, and an eye does not hear. An ankle has a specific purpose in the body, but it is a purpose entirely different from that of the wrist. The elbow and the knee are similar in function, but one cannot perform the job of the other.

A body must have diversity! Scientists are able to take cells from your heart and put them under a microscope, and those cells are entirely different from the cells which they would take from your blood. The nerve cells are different from the cells in your bones. But all those cells are absolutely necessary in your body.

The church is the Body of Christ, and as the Body of Christ, we must admit that we really do need each other. We need each other because of the fact that we are so diverse—we are different one from the other. The key to understanding this truth is to see that every one of us is an individual. But too often we fall into the same attitude trap as did the Corinthians. We act as though we believe everyone should be just like we are. They must act like us, talk like us, believe the same things we do, do the same things we do the *way* we do them, *when* we do them, or else we will not have anything to do with them. They must have the same opinions, and when they do not, we are offended. When they do not conform to us, we act as though their elevator does not go all the way to the top—or if it does, it does not stop at every floor!

We refuse to admit that God could possibly use someone who is not just like ourselves. We allow those differences to divide us, but that is not the way of God! We, as individual members of the Body of Christ, need to recognize that each of us is indeed diverse—different, unique—each of us performing a service and fulfilling a function no one else can. You and I are different, but that is exactly what our church needs! The wonder is that you and I *can* be diverse in God’s Church—Christ’s Body—and *not* be divided!

A youth minister in a California church was trying to teach his young people the truth of Scripture that they are a part of the Body of Christ, just as much as any older person. One day this minister of youth painted a football white, and then

painted an eyeball, with iris and pupil, on it. He wrapped this “eye” in a blanket, and walked around with it in his arms. Whenever he ran into a young person, he would say, “Hey, do you want to see my baby?” and then would show them this “eye.”

They would react with revulsion, and say “That’s terrible!” But then he would say to them, “What if your girlfriend was nothing but a big eye, and you took her out for a milkshake and propped her up in the booth opposite you, and tried to carry on a conversation, and all she could do was stare at you with this one big unblinking eye?” They got the point, and from that moment on began to take seriously the fact that they are a part of the Body of Christ.

Yes, we are different! Yes, we are diverse! **But that is exactly the way it should be!** That is exactly why we need each other. It is not something which should divide us, but something which should cause us to realize the second reason why we really do need each other.

2 We really do need each other because we are dependent, vv. 21-27

Our differences are what make us so dependent upon each other. Paul has been reminding them of their differences, but now he shows them that in God’s plan for the church, those very differences are quite normal—even desired. This is the way God planned it! That is what he told them in verse 18: “*God has arranged the parts of the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.*”

These differences among the parts of the human body serve to remind us of the fact that there are differences in the Body of Christ. These differences are designed by God to work together to accomplish God’s purpose in the Church.

Now Paul, in verse 21-27, tells the Corinthian Christians that they really needed each other, because of the fact that they depended on each other, perhaps more than they were willing to admit. “*The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’*” That truth from the human body teaches us that the same is true in the Body of Christ.

Notice verse 22: “*On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.*” That says that the very parts of our body which we think we can do without, or which we take for granted, are the very parts which may cause us the most inconvenience, or even death, should we lose them.

When we see each other in the Body of Christ as being *indispensable*, what a transformation there will be in our church! What will happen to our church is what happens in a human body. Paul described that in verses 25 and 26: “...*there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.*”

The various, diverse parts of our bodies are dependent. First of all, they are *dependent upon the head*, which contains the brain. The body can do nothing—nothing—without the signals and impulses it receives from the brain. The church as the Body of Christ should be dependent upon the Head, Who is Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:17-18 reads, “*He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.*”

We, the Body, must receive our impulses and signals from the Head, Jesus Christ, or we can do nothing! That’s what Jesus meant when He said in John 15:5, “...*apart from me you can do nothing.*”

But in the human body, the various parts are also *dependent upon each other*. Each one needs the other. I am right-handed, but I would not like to have to do without my left hand. And as Paul said, even the parts of the body we think are not very important are indispensable as well as the parts we see and use all the time. For example, we do not think of our tongues very much. But without them, you and I would have serious trouble trying to talk to each other. Our appetites would diminish because even the juiciest steak and the sweetest lemon meringue pie would be without taste!

Many of you are aware that I have arthritis, and as many of you who have arthritis, I have good days and bad days. But I have been reminded over and over again that the various, diverse parts of my body have equal concern for each other. There have been many nights over the last several years when I haven’t been able to sleep because my back was hurting so badly I couldn’t lie down. The various parts of my body were so concerned for my back that they stayed up all night just to keep it company! That is the way it should be in the Body of Christ.

When I see my granddaughter, Emma Claire, my eyes tell my brain that I should reach out and pick her up. My head sends back a signal that says, “Reach out your

arms and pick up that little girl and hug her.” But my eye cannot respond to that signal. It sees, but that is all it can do. Now my hands, my arms and my shoulders must take over. They all work together—depending on each other, to reach out to her. They really do need each other, and so do we in the Body of Christ.

Just because we are dependent upon each other in no way cancels out the fact that we are independent of each other. I do not lose my personal, individual identity when I join a church. If anything, my identity is magnified and utilized in God’s Kingdom. This is the mystery of the Church as the Body of Christ—that we can be *independent*, yet *interdependent* upon each other.

We need to remember the things that we have in common with each other. There may not be many of those things, since we obviously have so many things about us which emphasize our differences. We are different in our circles of friends, our backgrounds, our occupations, and in our likes and dislikes. Yet there is one important something which transcends all those differences. There is one something which complements those differences, and draws us together into a unified whole. There is something which makes us one, in spite of, and sometimes because of, our differences.

That one something is the fact that we, as part of the Body, have the same Head. What distinguishes my hands from your hands is that my hands are connected to my body, not yours, and my hands are directed by the signals and impulses sent to them from my head. Your hands are controlled by your head. My feet, my eyelids, the nerves in my body, my heart, my little finger—all are controlled by the head of my body.

We are the Church, and the Bible teaches that we are also the Body of Christ. What distinguishes us from the rest of the world is that though we have different functions and responsibilities, we still have the same Head—the Risen Lord Jesus Christ.

If that is true, that we really do need each other in this Body, then it is also true that we need the young and we need the old. It means that we need the men and we need the women. It means that we need the eloquent, and we need those who feel as though they will fall apart when asked to pray in public. It means that we need those who sing beautifully and we need those who can’t carry a tune in a bucket.

We need the well and we need the sick. We need the rich and we need the poor. We need the families and we need the singles. We need the person who has just

joined our church, and we need the person who has been a member for most of his or her life. We need the deacons and we need those who will never be deacons. We need those of one opinion, and we need those of another opinion.

We are different, to be sure. But it is that very difference which makes us so valuable to the Body of Christ. That is why we really do need each other—we are different from each other, yet we are dependent upon each other.

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27). If that is true, then it is long past time for us to begin living this truth in our day to day lives.