

Church as the Body of Christ
1 Corinthians 12:12-31
Week 1

Opening

Ask if anyone would like to open in prayer. They can pray on their own or use the prayer printed below. It also might be a good idea to reach out to a group member prior to your meeting and ask them ahead of time if they'd be willing to open in prayer. That's a great way to encourage participation without putting anyone on the spot.

Holy God, as we study Your Word and reflect on Your Church, we pray that the power of the Spirit would be at work to connect and renew us. Give us wisdom and insight and strengthen our bonds with one another and you. In the name of our risen Lord we pray, Amen.

Depending on time constraints you may want to take a bit of extra time to check in with folks and see how they're doing. You could also wait and do this at the end of the session before closing in prayer.

Check-in question

Describe a time when you have seen people accomplish more by working together. This could be as vague or specific as you'd like in a personal, work, or global setting.

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

**The Message translation is printed below or you can read from your own Bible

¹²⁻¹³You can easily enough see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your own body. Your body has many parts—limbs, organs, cells—but no matter how many parts you can name, you're still one body. It's exactly the same with Christ. By means of his one Spirit, we all said good-bye to our partial and piecemeal lives. We each used to independently call our own shots, but then we entered into a large and integrated life in which he has the final say in everything. (This is what we proclaimed in word and action when we were baptized.) Each of us is now a part of his resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain—his Spirit—where we all come to drink. The old labels we once used to identify ourselves—labels like Jew or Greek, slave or free—are no longer useful. We need something larger, more comprehensive.

¹⁴⁻¹⁸ I want you to think about how all this makes you more significant, not less. A body isn't just a single part blown up into something huge. It's all the different-but-similar parts arranged and functioning together. If Foot said, "I'm not elegant like Hand, embellished with rings; I guess I don't belong to this body," would that make it so? If Ear said, "I'm not beautiful like Eye, transparent and expressive; I don't deserve a place on the head," would you want to remove it from the body? If the body was all eye, how could it hear? If all ear, how could it smell? As it is, we see that God has carefully placed each part of the body right where he wanted it.

¹⁹⁻²⁴ But I also want you to think about how this keeps your significance from getting blown up into self-importance. For no matter how significant you are, it is only because of what you are a part of. An enormous eye or a gigantic hand wouldn't be a body, but a monster. What we have is one body with many parts, each its proper size and in its proper place. No part is important on its own. Can you imagine Eye telling Hand, "Get lost; I don't need you"? Or, Head telling Foot, "You're fired; your job has been phased out"? As a matter of fact, in practice it works the other way—the "lower" the part, the more basic, and therefore necessary. You can live without an eye, for instance, but not without a stomach. When it's a part of your own body you are concerned with, it makes no difference whether the part is visible or clothed, higher or lower. You give it dignity and honor just as it is, without comparisons. If anything, you have more concern for the lower parts than the higher. If you had to choose, wouldn't you prefer good digestion to full-bodied hair?

²⁵⁻²⁶ The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance.

²⁷⁻³¹ You are Christ's body—that's who you are! You must never forget this. Only as you accept your part of that body does your "part" mean anything. You're familiar with some of the parts that God has formed in his church, which is his "body":

apostles

prophets

teachers

miracle workers

healers

helpers

organizers

those who pray in tongues.

But it's obvious by now, isn't it, that Christ's church is a complete Body and not a gigantic, unidimensional Part? It's not all Apostle, not all Prophet, not all Miracle Worker, not all Healer, not all Prayer in Tongues, not all Interpreter of Tongues. And yet some of you keep competing for so-called "important" parts.

But now I want to lay out a far better way for you.

In Corinth, "who's got the best gifts" or "who's got the most gifts" had apparently divided the congregation. The emphasis on love in chapter 13 and on the superiority of prophecy over tongues in chapter 14 suggests that spiritual gifts had become points of pride for the Corinthians. There's no place for personal pride in the body of Christ.

The body of Christ in Corinth was as diverse in its composition (Jews, Greeks, slave, free) as it was in its giftedness (v. 13). Paul emphasized what brings the body together: we are baptized into one Spirit, and sustained by one Spirit (v. 13)

The image isn't of every part of the body doing the same thing (v. 17-19), but every part of the body contributing to the same purpose. In a symphony, everyone plays different instruments, but they are all playing the same piece.

[Possible illustration: this might work for your group, or it might not.] Although the Beatles are arguably the most influential rock and roll band in history, their career really only spanned about eight years (1962-1970). In 1970, the conflicts between them became too much for any of them to put up with any longer, and they broke up. Have you ever noticed how similar they were in their gifts? All four of them sang. All of them wrote songs. Three out of four of them played guitar. As talented as they were, there wasn't a lot of diversity between them. Compare them to U2. No one has ever sung on a U2 record except for Bono. No one has played lead guitar except the Edge. Is it a coincidence that U2 has had a career that is now in its fourth decade?

[Another Illustration]: There are several diseases, such as muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, and cerebral palsy that attack the central nervous system and affect the body's ability to communicate with itself. The brain knows what it wants to do, but can't make the body respond. The mouth knows what it wants to say, but can't make the tongue cooperate. Every step is a struggle because the body has lost its coordination. As a result, the body loses its capacity to function the way it is supposed to.

Main Point: At the end of the day, the one thing makes a church more than just a bunch of talented people is the death and resurrection of Christ. Everything we do points to the sacrifice Christ made for us, and the reality of His resurrection. Without that, we could still be a group of talented people. But because of the resurrection, and the power of Christ that works within us, we are gifted people, brought together into one body, for one purpose.¹

¹<https://www.lifeway.com/en/articles/sermon-body-building-1-corinthians-12>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Initial Reactions

1. What from this passage confuses, inspires, or resonates with you? Perhaps hearing it read from a different translation caused you to notice a new word or phrase.
2. When you read these words about the Body of Christ, what images come up for you? Maybe do a quick Google image search and find one you'd share with the group.
3. Were there stories or images you took away from Ryan's sermon on Sunday that helped you better understand this part of Paul's letter to the Corinthians?

Diving Deeper

4. What does this passage tell us about God? What does it tell us about humanity?
5. Often when we think about church membership, we think about going to an Inquirers' Class for a few weeks and then joining the church as if we were joining the YMCA or the local country club. But here, Paul uses the word "member" in a totally different way. Members are living organs that the whole body needs. It is the reason we ask this question of new members "Do you promise to **participate** *actively* and *responsibly* in the life and mission of this church?". Does this passage give you any new insights into what being a member of FPC really means? What might Paul envision for us as the Body of Christ here in Nashville?
6. How does Paul's image of a human body help us understand what the church is and how it functions? What limits might this metaphor have?

The "so what?" Questions

7. Why might some Christians feel unimportant or envious of other parts of the body?
8. Why might some feel superior to others?
9. What are some examples of "*behind the scenes ministry*" that your church would miss if they stopped happening?
10. After reading (and re-reading) this text, listening to the sermon, and discussing it with your COB, how might God be calling you to act or think differently (this can be as broad or narrow as you'd like)?

Closing

Check in if you haven't already done so and ask for any prayer requests. Encourage group members to write down these requests and follow up as necessary.

As your group prays, take time to try to name gifts in other members of the group or those you recognize in yourself and thank God for those.

