

Membership Matters: Session 7

The Body of Christ: Unity and Diversity

*“It is a serious thing...to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.” – C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory**

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

- Background: Spiritual Gifts
 - 12:1-11 is the beginning of lengthy explanation of spiritual gifts (chs. 12-14)
 - *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (12:4-7)*

- Baptism and the Body
 - *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. (12:12-13)*
 - The metaphor of the body for the Church: unity and diversity.
 - This includes not only the diversity of spiritual gifts, but all diversity (ethnicity and socioeconomic status are listed in vs. 13)
 - The function of our baptism: a new corporate identity
 - *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:27-28)*

- What if I feel like I don't belong?
 - *For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. (12:14-16)*
 - Paul really leans into the body metaphor: a hand and a foot, and an ear and eye.

- What happens in the body? We are jealous of others and can feel as if we don't fit in.
 - But, importantly, self-evaluation (*I'm not good enough*) isn't enough to validate your removal from the body.
 - *If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. (12:17-20)*
 - The diversity of the members of the body is a design feature, not a problem. If we were all alike, we would actually be weaker.
 - God's sovereignty in arranging the body: why are you here? *God put you here.*
- What if others tell me I don't belong?
 - *The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." (12:21)*
 - In the first example, it is negative self-talk and comparison. In this example, it is someone else telling you: *we don't need you.*
 - A simple argument for the church: if the eye *cannot* say: "I have no need of you," to the hand, then what does that mean about the eye's relationship to the hand?
 - *On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, 24 which our more presentable parts do not require. (12:22-24a)*
 - Why would someone say "I have no need of you" to another? Because they feel like that member is weighing them down, messing things up, being ineffective.
 - Paul flips that argument entirely on its head: *the weaker are indispensable.*
 - If you feel weak, you are critical to the church.
 - Just like we go out of our way to honor our unpresentable parts with modest clothing, so too should we go above and beyond to make sure that the weakest members of our body are honored.
 - *But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. 27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." (12:24b-27)*
 - Paul doesn't emphasize efficiency, but unity and love. (*Paul wasn't an American*).
 - What is our church's goal? Love and unity.