

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-27

4: MANY PARTS, ONE BODY



Historical Context & Background

Have you ever heard a pastor refer to the “early church?” What about the saying “we need to be more like the early church”? I think in some ways it’s true, we can learn a lot from those first believers. They were chronologically the closest to Jesus, so they have some important things to show us and say to us. But in some ways we shouldn’t be like the early church. Take the Corinthians for example, they were a mess. Seriously, a mess. But if we’re honest, we can be a mess too sometimes. That’s why Paul’s first letter—the first chronological book of the New Testament—has stood the test of time. Culture has changed, but the human heart has stayed the same. Even today, we wrestle with the same issues the Corinthians wrestled with.

For some context on what was going on in the Corinthian church, check out the 2nd theme. Paul’s concerned about the unity within the church, a unity that is undermined when the diversity of stations, roles, and gifts in the church become competitive rather than complementary.



Related Passages

1 Corinthians 1:10 - Be united in mind and thought.

Colossians 3:13 - Bear with one another and forgive each other

John 17 - Jesus prays for the disciples unity

Psalm 133:1 - How good it is when God’s people live in unity

1 John 4:12 - If we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete



Key Terms

Weaker & Indispensable (v. 22): Paul is challenging the typical hierarchy of Roman culture. The weaker members would be considered problematic, dishonorable, a hassle in Corinth at the time. Paul is inviting the church to be a kingdom community, where the weak, the uncool, the lonely, the poor, and the awkward are welcomed and celebrated like everyone else.

The Image of the Body: The imagery Paul is using in this passage is nothing new. It was common at the time to use the idea of the body to portray how groups of people should function. However, the image was most often used to explain who in society was important, who had value, and to accept your place in society. Here’s the thing, Paul is doing the opposite! He’s not telling the Corinthians who’s important who’s not, he’s telling them that they are all interdependent of each other! The different members need each other to be a working body. It’s not

imagery that determines who is valuable and who isn't, it's imagery that acknowledges everyone's value in the kingdom.



Key Themes

One Spirit, One Body: If you've been baptized, then you've entered into the Body of Christ, the church, the family of believers under God. It wasn't just a personal moment between you and God, it was an entrance into a family. When you step into a family, you step into a new way of being. No longer is your life just your own (although it arguably never was just "your life") but it is accountable to others. Your life is for God and for his people. It's not just a new set of responsibilities, it's a new way of being. You talk, think, feel, work, play, and rest as a member of a kingdom community. (Nowhere in 1 Cor. 12 does it say "kingdom community", but I would argue that the whole letter is trying to shape the church in Corinth into a kingdom community. So throughout this curriculum, the phrase kingdom community will show up, because even though it isn't strictly said, I think it is clearly being communicated.)

But the weight of responsibility isn't just on you! Think about the goodness of a family. Not only are you responsible for the Body, but the Body is responsible for you. When you step into the family of God, you step into a group that is called to care for you deeply. To walk with you, on mountaintops and in valleys, through the wilderness and into wide open spaces. The family of God doesn't just invite you out of loneliness and into community, but into solitude with God, the lover of your soul, your Creator. What a beautiful thing!

All of this requires commitment, patience and perseverance to grow into a deep bond with the people of God. Family can be messy, and it can be beautiful. Often it's both at the same time.

No more tribalism! If there's one thing we need to hear today, it's that tribalism has no place in a kingdom community. The church in Corinth was full of little "tribes." (Sorry, Shift.) There were so many arguments over things like spiritual gifts and Paul vs. Peter vs. Apollos vs. Jesus (1 Cor. 3:4) and eating food offered to idols, it got a little crazy. In chapter 3 Paul even calls the Corinthians babies!

This passage calls a kingdom community to be unified. Unity should be valued above our little side arguments and cultural differences. Of course, unity should never be above faithfulness to God, but it should be above things like politics and culture and personality. The problem with tribalism is that it says, "They're out. They're not welcome. They're not one of us." But in a kingdom community we say, "Welcome. Make yourself at home. Join in on what God is doing."

We even experience tribalism today! It can be hard to wrestle with comparison around CSF. "Why do they get to be on prayer team? They're dating now? They're only here because their parents are rich..." This kind of comparison breeds disunity. When we compare and compete, we become tribal. But when we, as a kingdom community, learn to celebrate other parts of the body, we grow in deep, campus-transforming community.

No One is an Island: I follow an Instagram account called Recipes for Self Love, but not because it's good. It's a perfect example of how our culture gets it wrong. Please, don't go follow it. It's so self-focused. It's so self-worshipping. It's heartbreaking. Sometimes it gets close to truth, but that can be the worst kind of lie. Here are some quotes:

1. "Don't feel guilty about putting yourself first"
2. "Don't apologize for who you are"
3. "You can't control your feelings"
4. "Don't let anyone dictate who or how you should be"

Our world has a self-esteem problem, but not just because people don't love themselves enough. Much of our self-esteem problems come from two things: 1) not having deep community that knows us deeply, loves us deeply and calls out our crap; and 2) not knowing the God who "knit us in our mother's womb" (Ps. 139). When we live life selfishly, we become an island. Our relationships become shallow and break apart. Insecurity and anxiety make us bitter.

Now imagine a kingdom community, one that speaks worth and value into you. A community that invites you to be a part of something greater than yourself. A community that invites you to know the Healer. We wrestle through putting off our old lives and putting on the new. We are challenged, encouraged. Our relationships deepen, our soul begins to sing, our insecurities and anxieties are stilled. That is the life we experience when we live in a kingdom community.

BB Quotes & Illustrations

Helplessness Blues by Fleet Foxes: The opening verse to one of my favorite songs goes like this, "I was raised up believing I was somehow unique, Like a snowflake distinct among snowflakes, unique in each way you can see, And now after some thinking, I'd say I'd rather be, A functioning cog in some great machinery serving something beyond me." The lyrics perfectly capture our human longing to be someone of unique worth and potential while also being a part of something greater than ourselves. Often it feels like we can only have one or the other, either be an island or a cog in a machine, but in a kingdom community we can have both individual worth and be a member of a body of believers.

"Obedience is the road to freedom, humility the road to pleasure, unity the road to personality."

C. S. LEWIS

"The Bible tells to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because generally they are the same people."

G. K. CHESTERTON

! Three Main Points

1. One Spirit, one body - unity, not uniformity. If we conform, we conform to Christ.

2. No more tribalism! - competition and comparison hurt the unity of the body.
3. No one is an island - we celebrate and wrestle together, for the sake of every part of the body.



Discussion Questions

- What stands out to you in this passage? Why?
- Who do you struggle to care for in community?
- Are there people you normally don't get along with? How can you grow in love for them?
- Have you ever put politics or culture in between you and another believer?
- How do you see Christian tribalism on social media or in the news?
- Have you experienced the challenge of being a part of a kingdom community?
- Have you experienced the blessing of being a part of a kingdom community?
- When have you felt like an island?
- When have you felt like a cog in a machine?
- Have other believers suffered with you? Have you suffered with others?
- Have other believers celebrated you? Have you celebrated others?
- Do you value your place in the Body of Christ?
- What often leads to disunity in community?
- What things drive people apart today?
- How can your group be more unified?
- How can you reconcile with others?
- Is there someone you need to forgive?
- Is there someone you need to ask for forgiveness?
- Do you wrestle with self-worth?



Application & Practice

Look and Remember: This week, write a note to someone in your group. Encourage them. Notice their gifts, their strengths. Pray for them. You may find that when you seek to encourage, you'll find unity growing between yourself and them.

Prayer of Reconciliation: Is there someone that you're struggling with? Pray a prayer of reconciliation. Spend time meditating on the blessings you seek for your life, and then pray for those blessings for the person that you're struggling with. To grow in desiring another person's good is to grow in love, and this prayer is a helpful practice for mending broken relationships. Do it multiple times over the course of weeks or months and you'll find yourself growing in more and more unity with this person.



Going Deeper

Article: *Life Together* - Dietrich Bonhoeffer