

Jeff's Org

WHAT IS THE CHURCH? • THE CHURCH IS A BODY • 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-26 • NO DATE

MAIN POINT

When we see the church as the body, we recognize the vital importance of every part.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Have you ever injured a seemingly unimportant or small part of your body, like a finger or a toe? What did it feel like?

Did that experience make you appreciate the “lesser” parts of your body? Why or why not?

How do you think that experience might help in our understanding of the church as the body of Christ?

The church is the body of Christ. And just like our own bodies, every part of His body is essential. When all the parts of our bodies function in harmony with the others, we live happy, fulfilling, and productive lives. But when even the smallest part ceases to function as it should, it causes a ripple effect throughout the rest of the body. Similarly, in the body of Christ, we have all been given different gifts and roles for serving others. When the church functions harmoniously as the body of Christ, it's a beautiful thing.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-11.

What does the Holy Spirit do for Christians, according to this passage?

Why do you think the Spirit doesn't gift us all in the same way?

Why does Paul want us to understand that it's the same Spirit who gives these different gifts?

For what purpose are the gifts given?

When you become a Christian, the Holy Spirit of God takes up residence inside you. That means that the church is literally the body of Christ because His Spirit lives inside of us. That same Holy Spirit gifts each one of us in a specific and unique way. Only when each of us knows and is acting inside our gifts is the body of Christ functioning as it should. But just as with our physical bodies, the body of Christ has a tendency to give more importance to some parts of the body over others.

| READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-26.

How did Paul address the tendency to think of some parts of Christ's body as more important than others?

Why is it important for us to understand that no part is greater than any other?

Look at Paul's question in verse 19. Where would our church be if everyone here had the same gift?

The Corinthian church, the original audience for this letter, had a problem with hierarchy in the church. They were constantly comparing themselves to each other and assigning more importance to some members of the body than others.

What does God's diverse gifting of Christians show about His character?

How does the diversity represented provide greater vitality to the life of the church?

How can we embrace the diverse gifts in our midst at our church?

We serve a God who loves diversity. Take a look around and you'll see people of every age, ethnicity, size, and shape as a part of the body of Christ. Part of the job of the church is to help its members come to understand the nature of their specific spiritual gift and how they might use that gift to serve the body of Christ.

| READ 1 PETER 4:8-10.

What similarities do you see between this text and the passage from 1 Corinthians?

Why do you think Peter reminds us to keep our love for one another at the top of our minds when he was discussing spiritual gifts?

What do you think it looks like for a whole church to use all their gifts to serve well?

What kinds of things might stand in the way of our using our gifts like this?

It is possible for a member of Christ's body to use his or her gift for selfish gain rather than to benefit the body. That's why Peter reminds us to keep our love for one another at the top of our minds. We must serve not with ourselves in mind, but for the sake of others in the body. We must serve willingly and unselfishly, grateful for our role and appreciative of others around us and their place of service. Sadly, though, the main obstacle to serving the body of Christ in this way might be the fact that many in the church are unaware of how the Holy Spirit has gifted them. After all, if we don't know how God has gifted us, how can we serve in that way?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

| LOOK BACK OVER THE LIST OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS IN 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-11.

Do you have a sense of your own spiritual gift based on this list?

Compare this list to the one found in Romans 12:3-8. How are they similar? How are they different?

Does seeing these two lists give you any further insight into how you might be gifted?

Have you ever sought out how you might serve with your gift at our church? Why or why not?

PRAYER

Thank God for the body of Christ. Ask Him to help you know how He has gifted you to serve the body. Ask Him for an opportunity to find a place of service where you might be of benefit to our church.

COMMENTARY

| 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-26

12:4-6. Paul spoke of gifts in association with the Spirit, service ("ministries" NASB, NKJV) in conjunction with the Lord Jesus, and working ("effects" NASB; "activities" NRSV, NKJV) in association with God the Father. Diversity and unity coexist. There are different kinds of gifts, different kinds of service, and different kinds of working. Yet each variety is associated with a person of the Trinity: the same Spirit; the same Lord; or the same God. The authorization by the triune God indicates the unity that exists within the great varieties. The three terms—gifts, service,

and working—relate closely to one another, but they are not synonymous. Each item is the source of the one that follows: service comes from gifts, and working from service. The term gifts appears frequently in this epistle with reference to the various manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. The gifts of the Spirit empower each Christian to function in the body of Christ. Service derives from terminology that Paul used frequently to describe a variety of ministerial activities occurring within the church (diakonia).

12:7. Paul elaborated on the themes of unity, diversity, and distribution, first stating that God gives a manifestation of the Spirit to each person. The Holy Spirit is the down payment or guarantee of every believer's future inheritance (Eph. 1:13-14). So all believers receive the Spirit. Paul did not speak only of the Spirit's indwelling presence here, but also of the manifestation of the Spirit. This terminology indicates that every believer has some display of the Holy Spirit's presence in his or her life. Also, the manifestation of the Spirit has a particular goal: the common good (1 Pet. 4:10). The gifts of the Spirit are not principally for the edification of the individuals who receive them, but for the good of all believers.

12:8-10. Paul next listed several manifestations of the Spirit's gifts. He mentioned the Spirit four times in these verses to remind the Corinthians that all of these gifts come from one divine source: the Holy Spirit. But the list indicates that the same or one Spirit manifests his presence with great variety. Comparisons with other lists of the Spirit's manifestations (Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:11) reveal that this catalogue is only a sampling that probably corresponded to the gifts Paul knew the Corinthian church manifested. Paul listed nine manifestations of spiritual gifts that interpreters have attempted to group in different ways, but no pattern can sustain scrutiny.

12:11. Having covered a short catalogue of spiritual manifestations, Paul closed this list with another general comment. As Paul pointed out in the preceding verses, all spiritual gifts come from one and the same Spirit. They are all legitimate and important to the church because they come from the Holy Spirit. Beyond this, each one in the church has received different gifts, not because of differences in qualifications or circumstances, but according to only one standard: just as the Spirit determines.

12:12-13. The apostle issued three statements which set up the basic structure of his analogy. First, the human body is a unit. It is one body, even though it has many parts. Second, just as one human body has many parts, so it is with the body of Christ. Paul often called the church "the body of Christ" (Rom. 7:4). Here he pointed to the unity in diversity that exists in the church as Christ's body. Third, Paul explained how Christ's body resembles the human body. To emphasize the diversity within the church, he mentioned racial and social diversity first; Jews, Greeks, slave,

and free all contribute to the church. No matter what had previously separated these people, they all had been joined together in one body by means of the one Spirit.

12:14-17. Paul turned next to human body imagery to illustrate the importance of proper regard for all parts of Christ's body. After repeating the motif of 12:12, the body has not one part but many, he presented two scenarios that conveyed his outlook on the disharmonies in the Corinthian church. First, he imagined parts of the body thinking too lowly of themselves. A foot may say to itself that it does not belong to the body because it is not a hand. Even so, even if it thinks this way about itself, it does not cease to be part of the body. The same would be true of an ear that felt it did not belong to the body because it was not an eye. Paul meant that Christians are not cut off from the body of Christ because they think they have no importance or place of service. Each part of the body makes unique contribution to the whole. How foolish it would be for the whole body to be one part.

12:18-20. The foolishness of these scenarios indicates that God has arranged the parts of the human body according to His divine wisdom. He made them just as He wanted them to be—their composition being designed to fulfill His purposes—and God's wisdom in so doing should not be questioned. This divine coordination of diverse parts is so essential to the function of a body that Paul asked a final question: "If every part of the body were one part—all eyes, all ears, all feet—where would the body be?" Clearly, there would be no body. To drive home this point, Paul repeated the theme of this section: human beings have one body, but that body needs its many parts. Every part is important in its own right.

12:21-24a. Paul then presented scenarios in which the body parts questioned the value of others. Paul insisted it would be inconceivable for an eye to tell a hand, "I don't need you!" The same inconceivability would apply to the head speaking that way to the feet. Common sense demands that the opposite is true. The eyes need the hands, and the head needs the feet. The parts of the body which appear to be weaker are actually indispensable.

12:24b-26. Paul contended that God himself had given greater honor to the members of the body that lacked obvious honor. He did this for the purpose of making sure that there would be no division in the body and that all parts should have equal concern for each other. The interdependence of all parts evidences this design. If one part suffers from pain or disease, then every part suffers with it. Most people have experienced how things as small as toothaches and ingrown toenails can wreak havoc on their bodies. The appendix may be small and have no apparent function, but when it suffers, it jeopardizes the life of the entire body.

Moreover, when one part is honored and treated with great care, then every other part of the body rejoices with it. For example, soaking one's feet in cool water after a long walk brings delight to

the entire body. God exhibits His design in these common experiences. He has arranged the human body so that every part is important to every other part.