“Many Members of One Body!”

1 Corinthians 12:14-31  May 17, 2015

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Introduction:

The other day I saw an eye walking down the street . . . WAIT! WHAT?! Oh, the hilarity of it all. An eye cannot of itself be an entire entity. Furthermore, an eye cannot of itself be an entire entity and still propose to walk, for in walking it would still need the addition of other members.

Yes, as ridiculous as it may sound, Paul had to resort to such illustrations to teach the Corinthian church not only the importance of each diversities of gifts, but that each, no matter if it’s showy on the outside or a gift that seems more feeble – all are necessary to make up the whole of the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:14 “For the body is not one member, but many.”

Thinking in terms of using the human body as a pictorial presentation, Paul simply states what should be obvious to all: “The body is not one member, but many.”

Membership of any kind is not inclusive of “one.” In terms of clubs, organizations, and the like – to be effective; to be considered a whole, there has to be more than “one.” Association is nothing without another to associate, congregate, or be in unison with.

There is no solitary function in the human body and there is no solitary function in the church!
1 Corinthians 12:15-16 "If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?"

Paul begins to go into his “body” illustration in more detail with the “foot” and the “ear” having proposed negative views of themselves.

Both, in this lesson, say, “If . . . I am not ________ (fill in the blank with the part),” then, “I am not of the body.” To us this may seem absurd. One would think to just be grateful to be a part instead of belittling oneself and one’s function; coveting another’s while thinking less of oneself.

Although he refers to this as members of a physical body, let’s think of it in terms where Paul really intended the meaning to get across: the church.

As silly as it sounds for the body, I imagine to God our arguments that venture on such lines in the church seem silly as well.

“Well, if I am not the choir director, then I’m not really a part of the church.” Or, “If I’m not the preacher, teacher, or whatever – then, my membership here means nothing.”

How ludicrous does that sound? Yet, this is the very issue the Apostle Paul is addressing to the church at Corinth (and possibly to our churches today).

“Is it therefore not of the body?” That part may not be functioning where it views the place of importance, but it is still “of the body,” therefore it is important.

1 Corinthians 12:17 “If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?”

“If the whole body were ________ (fill in the blank with a part listed).” If the whole body were just one thing of anything there would be so much lacking in it.

If all the body were a mouth how could it satisfy the need to breathe? This, as well as Paul’s illustration, lets us know that without each other functioning in
his/her proper place, there would be deficiencies in the body. It would fall short of its potential to be and do so much more.

1 Corinthians 12:18 “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.”

“But . . . God!” “God” orchestrated the members of the body to harmoniously function together and He does the same with the church. As He did at the beginning of creation when He directed everything to be what they are, so He maneuvers and endows each individual to operate where He needs them and into what He needs them to be.

This reminds me of the story of the Potter and the Clay in Jeremiah 18-19:13. Paul also makes reference to it in Romans 9:21 where he asks, “Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonor?”

In reference to the physical body and the church, God does “as it hath pleased him.” He knows why He has set one here and one there. After all, He is the one that knows the plans and the outcome of each of our lives (see Jeremiah 29:11). Therefore, let us not fight against that plan seeking to be a part we are not designed to be by His glorious intention.

“It hath pleased him” to put us where we are because He knows this is where we can make the greatest impact in doing our part for His kingdom. Speaking of God, the Bible says, “In thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all,” (1 Chronicles 29:12).

1 Corinthians 12:19-20 “And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body.”

How would the body operate to its fullest capacity it the whole things consisted of one “member?” The answer is it can’t. Therefore, Paul clearly states, “Now are they many members, yet one body.” Each “member” comes together to make a whole.
Paul wrote a similar message to the Roman Christians where he said, “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another,” (Romans 12:5). Notice the underlying tones that speak against division and promote unity. As “members one of another” we may differ in what we do, but when we pull it all together in unison pushing toward the same goal, we are a POWERHOUSE!

When I was a kid, there was a cartoon out at the time called “Voltron: Defender of the Universe” (for a reference see Wikipedia.org). In this cartoon the team members each operated one of five lion robots. When things became too rough for them to fight individually, those five would join together to make a mighty warrior. As a whole, they became VOLTRON!

Note: This really helps illustrate what Paul was saying here in these verses to young and old alike. The younger students will enjoy seeing it come together while it would probably bring back fond memories for the older. Previewing a few clips may be fun 😊.

1 Corinthians 12:21-22 “And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary.”

None can say and no one can tell another they are not needed! Every part of a physical body, as well as a church body, is needed!

If a part was not needed, God would not have designed a place in the body for it. Every part is “necessary!” Sometimes one may feel like a “feeble” one, insignificant and unimportant. But God says they are of value to Him; they are necessary. It doesn’t matter if you’re the “head” to think with or the “feet” to walk with – YOU ARE IMPORTANT! There is to be no superiority complex in the body of Christ.

Earlier in this book, Paul reminds us of how God operates. “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And the base things of the world, and the things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and
things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence,” (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).

1 Corinthians 12:23-26 “And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked; That there be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.”

Here, Paul gives a comparison of importance to the “uncomely parts” versus “our comely parts;” things hid versus things seen and glorified; things we consider “less honourable” actually receiving “abundant honour;” dressing up what we consider the least, adorning it further.

There’s an old adage that says, “It’s what’s on the inside that matters the most.” This is not only true in reference to one’s inner character over outward beauty, but also when dealing with the physical body.

Think of it this way: some of the outer parts listed here (ear, eye, hand, feet); one could actually continue to sustain life without it (by no means am I downplaying any physical handicap). Whereas, one could never live without those things and systems that bring life to the body that we can’t see with the naked eye (i.e., respiratory system, circulatory system, nervous system, and so on). Life cannot function without these behind the scene members.

Therefore, God made sure there is “no schism in the body.” Every part of the body needs the other parts, and every member, no matter how they are gifted by God, is important.

Our God is a God of supply, perfection, success, and completion. There is no lack in His design. And, He designed this that no one is overlooked; no one is left out; rather, that there be “the same care one for another.”
Look at how important this is to God. He made sure His Word clearly states His desire that there be “care one for another.”

That “care” allows us to sympathize with one another, feeling and relating to the experiences of life they are going through, be it a time to “suffer” or a time to “rejoice” and be “honoured.”

Simply put, if something brings anguish and pain to one part of my physical body, the rest of me knows it and feels it and responds accordingly. Because my body is together as one, those pain signals will send messages throughout my system registering the trauma that has taken place.

So, it is to be in the body of Christ. Romans 15:1 tells us, “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.”

Paul asked in the opening of this letter, “Is Christ divided?” The body of Christ should be so closely knit together that we can’t help to ache with the hurts of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. And, we should be bound by so much love and concern for the body that we don’t mind celebrating the success of one.

For times of suffering or rejoicing, the body as a whole, should feel affected by the ebbs and flows of the life and ministry of each other.

1 Corinthians 12:27-31 “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.”

“Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” To reiterate his main point, Paul made it clear they are all members of the body of Christ and it is “God” who decided how one would be gifted and in what office. He “set some in the church” according to where He needs them or where He sees fit. All gifts work according to His appointment process.
He designates and we are to work in that or those specified areas that He has purposed for each and every one of us.

“Are all _______ (fill in the blank with any gift listed)?” After listing some of the gifts he was specifically dealing with (many are more thoroughly featured in last week’s less titled “Gifts of the Spirit” – click here on Word For Life Says for more information), Paul asked the general question, “Are all . . .?” Is this the entire makeup of the church, being just one thing; operating in only one gift? The answer is, “NO!”

For if it as a whole could only do one thing or operate in only a singular function, what about the other areas where people need to be ministered to?

This is where we really begin to see the bigger picture like our heavenly Father. We are more effective together, as many parts that have joined together, than just the one.

With that, Paul moves on to say, “Covet earnestly the best gifts.” Some render the reading of this verse to mean because they are going after and coveting the best gifts, Paul intends to show them a “more excellent way.” At the same time, some read it as it is, Paul exhorting his readers to go after the “best” that God has to offer, nevertheless, there is still a “more excellent way.”

Either explanation can fit. The most important idea of this verse is there is a “more excellent way” that can only be expressed through genuine love for one another; love that looks beyond the outer working of the glory of gifts to promote the inner unity of the body as a whole.

Later in this same book, Paul says, “Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church,” (1 Corinthians 14:12). The church should benefit as a whole from the gift of God in you.

**Conclusion:**

We are all together in this Christian race. Let us focus more on building the body up rather than self.