

Title: YOU ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST, 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12 – 31
(Chatham, NJ; 01/24/16, AM) [D, Pc – Exegesis]

Theme: Paul discusses the unity of the church along with the diversity of gifts, and he exhorts each member to have equal concern for one another.

Purpose: To encourage each member to discover their gift in the church and use it to love and serve each other.

Introduction:

1. We can't belong to the church without belonging (participating).
2. Do you belong or do you just say you do?
 - Some are members in name only
 - Some say "I was brought up _____."
 - Korean term for those who come only for major events: "Rice Christians"
3. 1 Corinthians 12 teaches the importance of participating and the benefits of belonging.
4. Paul balances the unity vs. diversity/corporate vs. individual issues.
5. The body must have the same care for every member.

I. The Body Metaphor: Not New with Paul

A. Menenius Agrippa in 5th century B. C. Greece

1. A speech to persuade the plebeians to end their revolt against the patricians
2. In his body metaphor the belly is attacked by the other members of the body for not contributing in the work the other members do: feet, hands, shoulders, etc.
3. As if the feet might say to the stomach today: I'm not the one who ate two desserts and munched cookies all afternoon, you go for a two-mile run; I'm tired
4. Can the rest of the body seek independence from the stomach?
5. Starvation would be the result
6. Menenius argued that a commonwealth was composed of many classes that contribute to the common good, just as members of the body do for the whole
7. Plutarch makes use of his speech in the 1st century

B. Cicero, Roman Orator

1. To rob and mistreat others goes against the nature of the community
2. It destroys human interaction
3. If we gain strength by exacting it from others, we destroy the very body of which we are a part

C. Paul's use: don't know if he was familiar with these writings

1. Remember the factions he is facing in 1:12 and the division of labor in 3:5-9
2. As with those above, he emphasizes unity, diversity, and interdependence, 12
3. But he inserts equality, love, and empathy into his conclusions
4. Jesus becomes the source and foundation for his rationale, 13

II. The Dialogues, 14 – 26

A. 1st Dialogue, 14-20

1. The foot and the ear suggest they don't belong because they aren't a hand or an eye, respectively
2. Why do some parts think they don't belong?
3. Do they feel alienated because they don't feel as important?
4. Or do they just think they can act independently?
 - Those who prize knowledge
 - The "spiritual" group who prize their charismatic gifts
 - The social group who value prestige

5. Whatever the rationale, just saying this doesn't make it so, 15-16
6. It is an allusion to think that the parts of the body can act independently
7. Or be something more than what God has ordained
8. An independent, self-sufficient, or self-effacing group misses the "many parts, one body" connection in verse 20

B. 2nd Dialogue, 21-26

1. "I have no need of you" says the eye to the hand and the head to the feet
2. The "Yoda/Harry Potter" argument: the mind/magical incantation can levitate things without touching them
3. This is the "supreme importance" group speaking; they want to elevate themselves above the rest
4. Perhaps they expect public recognition and status
5. Paul inverts the social order: "The first shall be last, and the last shall be first"
6. The allegedly "weaker" parts are indispensable, 22-24a
7. We all rejoice and suffer together, 26 – we are in this together
8. We are all members of the body – unity and diversity held together

III. God's Fingerprints on the Design of the Body

A. God has arranged the parts of the church body (just like the human body: Whittaker Chambers, former communist spy, reflected on the complexity of his baby daughter's ear and went from atheist to committed Christian)

1. In 12:4-6 God is the creator of the different gifts
2. Ephesians 4:7, "Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.
3. In 12:18, 24 God has done the arranging
4. To seek independence from or superiority over others rebels against God's sovereign design
5. It violates God's created order

B. Participation with Christ

1. Being a part of the body derives from our participation with Christ
2. 10:17 – we partake of one bread
3. 10:2-4 – we have received the same Spirit
4. We possess a common spiritual lineage

C. Tension resolved

1. Tension between individuality and conformity is balanced
2. On the one hand, individuality finds a way to be expressed
3. On the other, individuality is tempered by working for the good of the entire community

Conclusions:

1. Look for the gift that God has given you.
2. Use it to build up others and promote unity within the church.
3. Participate in the lives of others: suffer and rejoice along with them, 26.
4. Seek to make these things real; practice them; live within and for the community of believers.
5. The church is a body of those who will participate in the Resurrection (chapter 15): we invite you to join the community to experience the same hope for eternal life.
6. Being in the church means we participate in the life of God both in this age and the one to come.