

The Structure of Community: The Body

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

We're in the middle of our series on the topic of community. Talking about what real community is. And as I was out and about this week I was realizing what a confused society we live in. We live in this culture that has created ways to avoid community. We have ATMs and drive-thrus and self serve checkouts. We can really go through our days without having to interact with another person. vs. China where bathroom is only peaceful place.

And yet at the same time, as we saw just this past Sunday, there are events that galvanize community. The Superbowl captivates America, as we get together to watch the game and the game and the ads become water cooler talk for the next week.

We want community and yet we don't want it. In our generation social media really captures that as things like facebook and twitter allow us this connection that give us pseudo sense community without any of the obligations that go along with it. It's connection without the cost.

Community and God's redemptive plan

We're confused and there is this tension in us because God has created us for community, and yet because of sin, all of us have this tendency toward isolation and hiding.

We've looked at this already a few weeks ago. That in God himself, in the **Trinity**, exists perfect community. And God created us to enter into the enjoyment of that community with him, and as his image bearers to reflect who he is through right community with each other. **Sin** hijacks that purpose of God and creates brokenness in community. Brokenness between man and God; between man and man.

But at the **cross**, Jesus, in his body took our isolation and brokenness upon himself. This perfect community of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit was interrupted that we might be brought in. Jesus bore the rejection of men that men might be reconciled to God and to each other. That community might be restored.

Through the cross God's purpose is to **restore** community. To create a people redeemed for his glory. In doing this God has repaired this broken image of who he is. We are restored in our relationship with him, and with each other. We are restored to live life in community together with others who have experienced this same redemption. And all of this is so that we might reflect the perfect community of the Triune God to the world around us. This is the **church**.

Well that's the view from 30,000 ft. That is the broad perspective of what God is in the midst of doing as we look at the Bible all the way from Genesis to Revelation. But over the next couple of weeks I want us to keep that 30,000 ft perspective, but get our

boots on the ground and see community in action. And so we're going to take a look at this first century community - the church in Corinth.

Now a little background. Corinth, because of its geographical location served as a major crossroads for sea traffic and so was a place where many cultures and religions intermixed together. It was well known for many things, among them were its wealth and its sexual freedom. And **the church in Corinth, instead of being a reflection of God and his community, was a reflection of the culture around it.**

Among other problems, the believers in Corinth were bragging about their wisdom and knowledge, separating into theological teams and doing battle, sleeping around, getting drunk during the Lord's supper, and claiming to be super-Christians based on the practice of certain supernatural gifts. Every time I read the 1 or 2 Corinthians, it's amazing to me that Paul didn't just write them all off.

Instead, especially in the passages we're going to look at over the next couple of weeks, Paul exhorts the believers to live both inwardly and outwardly as the people of God should. And in Ch. 12 he gives them a picture of what God's community is - one body made up of many parts. Through this analogy of the church as a body we should see what life together looks like as God's redeemed people.

There are three characteristics of the body that should transform how we live in community together. We're going to see the unity within the body, the diversity within the body and the interdependence within the body.

1. Unity

Look at verse 12:

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.

I was reading this week how some people have tried to put into computer terms the amount of genetic information stored in our bodies. They've figured that each pair of human chromosomes, if we were to translate the information into binary code and store it, would be about 1.5 G. That's not too much, but when we multiply that by the ~100 trillion cells in our body we're looking at 150 trillion Gigabytes of total genetic information!

In addition to **100 trillion cells, our bodies have 206 bones and several hundred muscles, and joints and ligaments and systems and layers of tissue - we are one body.** When we think and move and act and work, each part of us is not trying to figure it out and get everything in sync - we are a unified whole! Now there are those out there that don't always look like a unified whole - if you saw me trying to dance you'd wonder about the whole unified whole concept.

Now, just as it is with our bodies, Paul says, *so it is with Christ*. So it is with the church. Now what I would expect Paul to say, as he looks at this pitiful, messed up community in Corinth, is to tell them to look at the body. To notice how even though it's made up of many parts it works in unison. And he would tell them to **be more like that**. To work to be more like a body, to have unity like that. But do you see, and I think this is incredible, that is NOT what Paul is saying!

Let's read v. 12 again. **Paul isn't saying that the church ought to work harder to be like a body, he is saying that the church IS like the body**. The church is already *objectively* a unified whole!

Now look at v. 13 because v. 13 tells us *how* this can be. For (Paul says, it's like this because) *in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body... and all were made to drink of one Spirit*.

What's Paul saying? He's saying that objectively the church is a united whole *because* of something that happened to us in the past. He's saying that we are one body because we were all baptized *into* one body. We were all submersed, united with one person. He means that when we believed in Jesus we were so united to him, our life was so identified with Jesus in his death and resurrection, that we became one with him. And if all of us individually are one with Christ, then together too, because we are all in Christ, we together are one. Is your head spinning yet?

Summit Christian, what I am saying is this - that regardless of anything else that marks our identities, those of us who believe and love Jesus are objectively one because we are in Him and we all share in the same gift that has been given through Jesus, the person of the Holy Spirit.

The great German pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book *Life Together*, put it this way:

Christian unity is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.

This type of unity is completely different than the unity we see in the world around us. This unity that has been created through Jesus goes far beyond what we see in any human community around us. What do human communities unite around? Ethnic and cultural identities, language, interests, socio-economic level? Example of leather shop at 512 and South Tacoma Way or Anthem and Gap ads.

Look at what Paul says - *we all - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - were all made to drink of one Spirit*. He's saying that God's community, because God created it, isn't based on culture or ethnicity or language or interests and affinities, status or class, it's not created through human initiative - it is a community of the called.

What would ever bring a group like us together?! Look around?

Through Jesus death on the cross the *objective* reality of unity has been created. This is why the New Testament's exhortations toward unity are never about *creating* unity, but rather about *maintaining* unity.

2. Diversity

So we are united objectively in Christ, and that must serve as the fuel for the work it takes to maintain unity because we do have this diversity. Look what Paul says next -

For the body does not consist of one member, but of many. 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. 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.

The problem in Corinth was that instead of celebrating the diversity represented within their body, certain members of the church, because of particular spiritual giftings, saw themselves as spiritually superior to others. It created a sort of varsity and junior varsity level of members within the body. Those who were "in" and those who were "out". In response, Paul addresses both. To those who feel on the outside - the feet and ears instead of hands and eyes - Paul says that their self-pity that they aren't hands or eyes does nothing to remove them from the body. They are a part of the body whether they see themselves as valuable or not. To those who would think themselves superior Paul shows them that the body needs a variety of parts to do all the tasks that are required for the body to function as it should.

Take a look at your hand for a second. The hand is one of the most amazing parts of our body. Think of all the different movements you can do with this one part. All the various tasks you can accomplish. The same hand that can break boards and bricks can thread a needle. At once the hand is one of the most sensitive parts of the body and yet the part that performs the roughest tasks humans must do. Most hands have 29 bones and a corresponding 29 major joints. A hand has at least 123 ligaments, 34 muscles, 48 nerves and 30 arteries! The fingers do the bulk of the work we need done, but did you know that there are no muscles in your fingers? Even though the bending happens at each joint, the real work is all done by muscles in the palm and forearm! There needs to be this variety of parts to accomplish what the hand was made to do!

God's community is just like this! Our unity and diversity are not just for our own enjoyment, there is a purpose behind it. God has designed it this way with a task in mind. In Ephesians 4 Paul tells us what that task is. After laying out there the diversity in the body, Paul says that this is, "*to equip the saints for the work of ministry*". And later on in that same passage, this same illustration is given.

the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

What is the task for which God has united us and arranged our diversity? It is that the body would inwardly and outwardly grow up and out and effectively do the work of ministry.

When we talk about the body, we are talking about something living. A living, working, healthy body is going to do two things. It's going to grow, it's going to mature. It isn't going to remain a child, but grow up into what Paul calls in Ephesians 4 - "mature manhood". But not only is it going to grow - it is going to reproduce. A fully functioning body gives birth to kids and in the same way a healthy church should be reproducing healthy offspring.

In North America the church has unfortunately fallen victim to the consumerism that plagues our whole society. We see church as an event that we attend on Sundays to meet our needs. We see pastors and staff at the church store keepers paid to dispense spiritual goods and services. And while there is a need for people who are able to give their full time to the preaching and teaching of the word and the organization of the church body, God has arranged EVERY member as he chose to carry out his purposes. There are none of you that aren't needed as we work at the tasks God has given us. We are in this task together. In our diverse roles and gifts are we working together as a unit to accomplish the work God has given us to do?

*If time: Incarnation

3. Interdependence

Well the last characteristic that Paul points to is the interdependence of the body. If diversity is the truth that the body as a whole needs different parts to accomplish it's mission; interdependence is the reality that each part needs the others to accomplish it's individual purpose. Not recognizing this need, this dependence on one another, is a damaging blow to community. *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.'*

There's an old story told about a visit D.L. Moody made to a well-known Chicago businessman. The man said to Moody: "I believe I can be just as good a Christian without the church as I can be with it." Moody said nothing in response. Instead, he went over to the fireplace where a fire was blazing to give heat against the winter cold. He removed a single burning coal and placed it on the fireside. The two men sat in silence as the hot coal died out. "I see," said the other man. "I'll be in church on Sunday."

God is saying to the church in Corinth and to us that we need one another. In fact, we need ALL of us. Even those who seem weaker within the body are indispensable. Those who we think are less honorable we need to give greater honor to. Do we really feel the weight of this dependence? Do you recognize your need for the other parts of the body represented here?

Recognizing our need for one another protects us from divisions. Look at v. 25: [all of this is] *that there may be no division in the body*. How can I be divided with someone I know I need in my life? *and that the members may have the same care for one another*. Paul longs that the church wouldn't have a varsity team and jv team, but that the church would maintain unity in care for one another. That the life of the church would be mutual participation. Including suffering together and rejoicing together: *If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together*.

Isn't this picture of the body working together - united, diverse, dependent on one another - captivating? How this plays out in community groups.

The death of Boromir.

"I would have followed you to the end, my brother, my captain, my king."

This attitude is what ultimately holds unity together and keeps us following where God leads us.