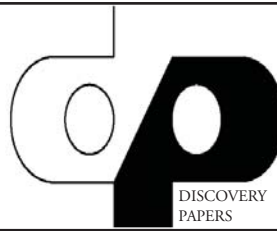


# ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

**SERIES: BODY. LIFE.**



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1 Corinthians 12:12-27  
4th Message  
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I have friends who are planning to travel to London next month to watch their son compete as a rower in the Olympics. Crew is a very difficult sport. It requires considerable reserves of strength, endurance, and concentration—all drawn upon with precise timing by multiple athletes acting in unison.

A crew race serves as a good opening metaphor for this study as we consider the body of Christ functioning together. Our text, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, is the next in a sermon series which considers Paul's use of the Greek word *soma* "body." These verses are familiar and the lessons drawn from observing a human body are straight-forward.

1 Corinthians 12:12-13:

**<sup>12</sup>The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup>For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.**

Real differences and real unity are both insisted upon. No forced conformity. Nothing divides us. And because all are shaped by the Holy Spirit, no one is left out.

1 Corinthians 12:14-18:

**<sup>14</sup>Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. <sup>15</sup>If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. <sup>16</sup>And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. <sup>17</sup>If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup>But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.**

We should first note the humor the apostle uses to teach us important truth. Components of a human body hold conversations with one another. We are confronted with

the problems of a giant eye or giant ear left alone, trying to make life work.

Christian communities in which each member looks and sounds like every other should seem odd in the same way as that the images drawn by Paul in these verses are oddities. Further, we do not get to choose the gifts given to us, nor the role we play for the good of our community. Our role (foot, hand, eye, ear, etc.) is up to God.

The content of the 'body parts conversation' in verses 15-16 is surely familiar to most of us. It is easy for us to negate ourselves, seeing value in others, and finding none in ourselves. We measure what we see in the mirror: 'given my background, appearance, education, and history of failure how can I contribute to a congregation where so many eyes are beautiful and so many hands are skilled?'

Previous chapters of this letter have dealt with factions, mistreatment of the poor, and other forms of division among believers. In such an atmosphere negatives are internalized and gifted believers who are needed by the community remain disengaged, "I do not belong to the body."

Most churches eventually fall into routine patterns of activity and the vitality of the Spirit ebbs away. When a crisis emerges or opportunity arises, it is often the marginalized 'ear' or sidelined 'foot' whose contribution is most needed. We must not let believers disqualify themselves from service because they are different from those whose gifts are easily appreciated.

It was this way in Corinth, it's true in every other place, there are people who set themselves aside because they don't know how to be what God's called them to be. And the body of Christ is crippled.

Finally, God's ways are not our ways. If we don't look for contribution from all the saints we likely overvalue worldly credentials in determining whose voice is most important in any given setting. There is no reason to assume that a person who has success in business, politics, or academia is the best candidate to give leadership in the church.

1 Corinthians 12:19-25:

**<sup>19</sup>If they were all one part, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup>As it is, there are many parts, but one body.**

**<sup>21</sup>The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” <sup>22</sup>On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup>and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, <sup>24</sup>while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, <sup>25</sup>so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.**

Here we find a second ‘body parts conversation’ in which rejection of another, not negation of oneself, is the damaging idea. We need to think clearly. Seemingly weaker organs, like the heart and lungs, need to be protected by a rib cage. The sexual organs require modesty and are covered by clothing. Yet these facts do not suggest any ranking of importance among the components of the human body.

We should always be wary of ‘lone rangers’ who think they can honor the Lord without help from others. Proud souls tire of listening to ideas that are not their own or waiting for some they deem to be too slow. They see no value in training the young or assisting the aged. And the counsel of our pride leads to ruin. The statement, “I don’t need you” uttered by any Christian speaking of brothers and sisters is always dangerous and foolish.

In verse 25 we read ‘that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.’ A clear measure of maturity in Christ is the determination to benefit from saints who are different from me and to value contributions that I cannot make.

1 Corinthians 12:26-27:

**<sup>26</sup>If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.**

**<sup>27</sup>Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.**

Paul had been speaking of ministry and service, of a healthy body succeeding in its endeavors. Now he turns to the fact of suffering. A human body is debilitated by pain wherever it exists—an infected tooth or broken toe can make everything grind to a halt. In any Christian community we must ‘take up’ the suffering of others. Jesus said that we would be seen to be his disciples if we love one another. Love is most evident when we bear each other’s burdens and care for those who suffer.

Finally, joyful accomplishments by any member overflow so that all rejoice. Olympic medals in crew or any other sport depend on coaches and trainers and support teams as well as on athletes.

Our church needs to hear all of the challenges offered by this text. Some among us have withdrawn from fellowship and service because they cannot believe what God says about them—that he has given all believers gifts and that every contribution is necessary. None of God’s children was redeemed by Jesus’ cross in order to be a spectator. None is unneeded.

Some reject their brothers and sisters, charging ahead as if a strong arm is all that a body requires to achieve its destiny. Such thinking is arrogant, and we should be sure that our pride is an affront to God and a danger to us.

Some pull back from ‘those who suffer’ as if pain can be avoided by doing so. We must hold up those who suffer for surely we will need their strength in our time of need.

God grant us eyes to see. Ignite a passion in us, Lord, for being the body of Christ.