

SESSION 5

Connecting to Christ's Body



QUESTION 1:

When has being part of a group really helped you succeed?

THE POINT

Spiritual growth calls for regular interaction with and ministry to other believers.

THE PASSAGE

1 Corinthians 12:12-24

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

In April 1970, Apollo 13 was headed to the moon when disaster struck. An oxygen tank exploded, forcing NASA to abort the mission. To save power they would need later for reentry, the astronauts moved from the Service Module to the Lunar Module.

This created a new problem. The Lunar Module was designed for two people, and there was not enough air for three men to last the trip home. The buildup of carbon dioxide threatened their lives. They would need to replace the CO₂ Scrubbers to clean the air, but the only spare ones were built for the Service Module and didn't fit the Lunar Module.

On the ground, NASA's Crew Systems Division put together an improvised scrubber using random parts they knew the astronauts had. The instructions were transmitted and the astronauts assembled the makeshift scrubber. It worked and three lives were saved. But no one person can take credit for this. It took a collection of engineers and technicians working together to come up with the solution.¹

Our spiritual growth is the same. We need the support and input from others—and they need ours.

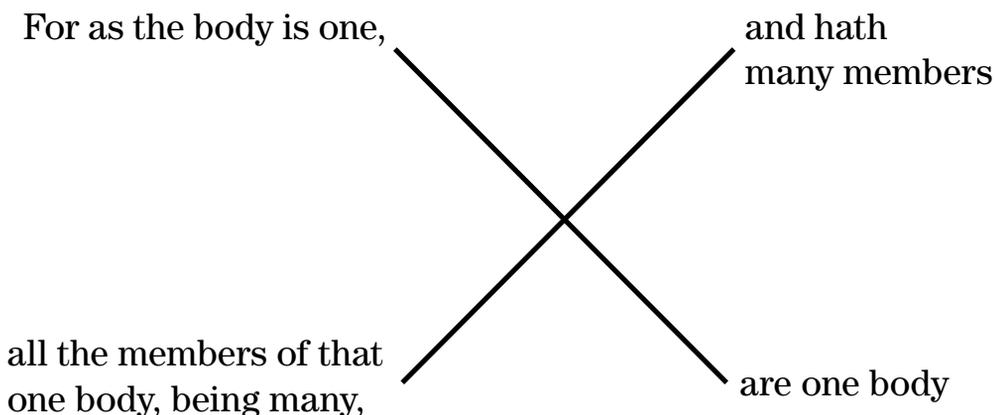
1 Corinthians 12:12-13

12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.

13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

Paul likened the church to the human body. Like a team, the body is comprised of many members, but it still functions as a single body. Paul took care to give this special emphasis.

We use different techniques to give something emphasis. Some people use ALL CAPS to emphasize a thought in an email. Authors sometimes put a word or phrase in italics to indicate that it is a key term that needs the reader's special attention. Biblical writers used something called synonymous parallelism to emphasize a particular truth. This is a literary device that repeats a phrase using slightly different terminology. If the writer really wanted the thought to stand out, he would also arrange the parallel thoughts in a chiasm, a poetic structure that placed the parallel thoughts in a crosswise arrangement. In verse 12, Paul used a chiasm to give emphasis to a truth about the body of Christ.



Paul's emphasis is clear, and he did not want us to miss it. The human body is a single, unified body even though it has many parts. He repeated the thought in slightly different words and structure, arranging his argument to make it pop off the page for his audience.

The church, like the human body, has many parts or members. The individual members are unique in their personalities, backgrounds, and spiritual giftedness, but they are all one body. The diversity does not work against unity; in fact, that diversity is functionally necessary. Just like the body works only with the contribution of legs, feet, eyes, heart, lungs, and so forth, it makes no sense to see one member of the church functioning well apart from the whole.

Paul reminded the church they were all baptized into a single body. While believers come from different races, cultures, and socio-economic levels, our differences did not threaten the church's wholeness. We are one. Coming from all our diverse backgrounds, we do not become uniform and exactly alike, but we do enter into a single body—Christ's body.

In the New Testament, baptism often refers to a person's physical immersion in water. In this passage, though, Paul was not referring to literal water baptism; instead he was using the term metaphorically to indicate that the church has been immersed into the Spirit. We have been covered by the Holy Spirit. But Paul did not stop with that word picture. It isn't just that the Spirit covers the church, but the Holy Spirit also is inside the individual members of the church; believers are "all made to drink into one Spirit." God's Holy Spirit makes us one, and He fills us and empowers us to function as one.

QUESTION 2:

What are the benefits of unity in the church?

1 Corinthians 12:14-18

14 For the body is not one member, but many.

15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

16 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?

17 If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?

18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

Unity of the body does not imply *uniformity* among the members. The human body has many members and all of them are important to its function as a whole. The foot does not resent that it is not a hand; instead, it serves the whole body by being a foot. The ear is not jealous of the eye because the eye sees and it hears; neither does it question its own significance. Without the ear, the body would only have four senses to operate. Paul made an obvious argument to clarify this point. The whole body is not an eye, and the eye is only valuable in relation to all the other body parts if it functions as an eye. It contributes to the health and function of the body just as other members of the body carry out their specific roles for the sake of the body.

Just as each individual body part has its own unique role and function, each member of the congregation serves a role and has individual responsibilities. For the church as a whole to function well, each individual member of the congregation needs to fulfill his or her role and responsibility in a way that is consistent with the spiritual gifts God has bestowed. (Paul included a partial listing of spiritual gifts in verses 4-10.)

While serving in a specific role does carry with it unique responsibilities, and everyone ministers according to his or her spiritual gifts, we do share some responsibilities. For example, every member of the body is to pray for other members (Jas. 5:16) and to give and support the ministry of the church (1 Cor. 16:2), and we are all called to share our faith and disciple others (Matt. 28:18-20).

Not all of the body's members are visible to the naked eye, and not every member in the church has an "out front and highly public" role. If we extend Paul's analogy, the results are staggering. For instance, the human body has 11 major organ systems containing at least 78 different organs. (Doctors differ on how organs are classified.) We have 206 bones, and our tongues may have as many as 10,000 taste buds.²

Those taste buds have a number of flavor receptors spread on the surface of the tongue that are designed to detect bitter, sweet, sour, salty, and savory. All these components work together to alert us whether or not what we are eating is healthy to eat. For example, because many toxins taste bitter, the taste buds send a warning signal for us to reject bitter tasting food. Salty foods contain necessary sodium, and sweet tasting foods provide instant energy. In each case, the taste buds are gatekeepers to keep needed substances in and harmful substances out. However, those 10,000 taste buds don't function alone. The taste receptors in our mouths need to work in concert with your nose to enable us to experience the myriad flavors we enjoy.³

The church, like the human body, is made up of many members that function in different roles and have unique responsibilities, but no one member could function effectively without the rest of the body. Even those serving in prominent or visible roles like pastors and church leaders cannot be effective apart from the ministry of the whole church. An effective church has everyone working together for the cause of Christ.

QUESTION 3:

What are the dangers of comparing ourselves and our gifting to others in the church?

1 Corinthians 12:19-24

19 And if they were all one member, where were the body?

20 But now are they many members, yet but one body.

21 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.

22 Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:

23 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.

24 For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked.

Paul's teaching about unity in diversity was not a hypothetical exercise. The church in Corinth was not healthy; it was rife with divisions.

- ▶ They quarreled over who their favorite leaders were (1 Cor. 1:10-13).
- ▶ They envied one another and were striving against each other (3:3).
- ▶ They brought lawsuits against one another (6:1-8).
- ▶ Their self-centeredness was evident even in the way they acted at the Lord's Supper (11:17-22).

This church desperately needed unity. Carnality and division were tearing the Corinthian church apart. In that context, Paul emphasized that every member of the church is necessary, and must be treated as an important part of the body.

Open division was occurring in the Corinthian church, but in some churches, the disunity can be less obvious. For example, it can be tempting for any individual member to value his own role in the church to the point he devalues others' roles. Or people begin to gather with others with whom they share a lot in common, but they exclude those who are not in their clique.

QUESTION 4:

What does a healthy church body look like?

Diversity in the body is necessary, but diversity should not lead to division. Paul underscored this when he said the eye cannot reject the hand because it viewed the hand as useless and unnecessary. Neither can the head reject the feet. Every member, according to Paul, is necessary. Some are covered for modesty's sake, but none is unimportant.

If you have ever stubbed your little toe on a coffee table, then you know that even smaller, seemingly unimportant members of the body are still connected to the body and profoundly affect the functioning of the whole. No body would exist without the different members. However, if the different members do not fulfill their individual functions in concert with the other members, the body will not be healthy.

In a healthy body the systems all work together, supporting one another. However, when a person suffers from an autoimmune disease, one part of the body begins to produce antibodies that will attack and harm another part. Rheumatoid arthritis, for example, causes the immune system to attack the joints, causing swelling and pain; untreated, it can cause permanent damage. Systemic lupus, like rheumatoid arthritis, can attack the joints, but it also can affect organs like the kidneys and lungs. In multiple sclerosis, the immune system attacks nerve cells and can lead to blindness and mobility impairment.⁴ Unhealthy churches have the equivalent of an autoimmune disease because one group attacks another.

In a healthy church, members not only work together, but they value, appreciate, and depend on others who have different roles. The members of the church work hard to practice true Christian fellowship. Such fellowship includes celebrating other people's joys, crying with them in their sorrow, and walking beside them in their pain—and we need that interaction for the sake of our own individual spiritual growth.

As a spiritual discipline, fellowship is not as much about the casual conversation that occurs over coffee and donuts, as it is listening deeply and entering into other people's lives. Fellowship is an intentional choice to value other believers—even those who are vastly different from us—because God desires to use His church with its diverse members to aid your growth in Christ.

QUESTION 5:

How can our group help one another recognize and utilize our gifts?

ENGAGE

Uniformity requires that everyone be alike. Unity allows diversity as people work together in harmony. Answer the following questions about your own church.

What are some ways you are uniquely different from other people in your church?

What are some ways your differences complement others in your church?

Pray that you might appreciate other people's differences just as you want them to accept yours.

LIVE IT OUT

How will you deepen your involvement with other believers and serve them?

- ▶ **Talk to someone new.** Get to know someone in your church you do not know or do not know well. Make an intentional effort to build a relationship with the person.
- ▶ **Restore a relationship.** If you are at odds with someone in your church, get together with the person and seek to work the problem out. If you need to confess a wrong attitude or wrong behavior, then do it, and seek to restore that relationship.
- ▶ **Step out and serve.** Use some of your time to immerse yourself in a new culture and serve a people group that is unfamiliar to you. Be part of a mission work that serves the body of Christ in another culture or setting.



END NOTES

1. "Apollo 13 Infographic: How did they make that CO2 scrubber?," Space Center Houston blog, April 10, 2019, <https://spacecenter.org/apollo-13-infographic-how-did-they-make-that-co2-scrubber/>.
2. "The Human Body," *Healthline*, <https://www.healthline.com/human-body-maps>.
3. Bonnie Berkowitz, "Taste buds are just one reason why we love some foods and hate others," *Washington Post*, April 25, 2011, www.washingtonpost.com/national/science/taste-buds-are-just-one-reason-why-we-love-some-foods-and-hate-others/2011/04/25/AFVYkZkE_story.html.
4. "What are Autoimmune Disorders?" *WebMD*, www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/autoimmune-diseases.