

Sunday October 10, 2021  
Lesson 6: The Church as One Body  
Scripture: 1 Cor. 12: 12-31

**Context:**

The 2021 fall series is titled “Belong.” Each unit will focus on a way the people of God are called to seek community and discover how God has connected us to one another. Today we continue to unpack the unit titled “Into the Future,” an exploration of the early church’s foundations and a call to return to our roots for renewal. This lesson “The Church As One Body,” celebrates the unique gifts given to each individual in making up the body of Christ.

The lesson’s scripture comes from First Corinthians, a letter written to the early church in Corinth. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians explores different themes around morality, diversity, and relationships. Both letters to the Corinthians in the New Testament indicate there were conflicts and Paul sought to help the divisions and wounds within the congregation with counsel and wisdom.

One of the issues to arise deals with the spiritual gifts within the community. The background of our lesson in chapter twelve indicates people with certain spiritual gifts have been elevated over others. Paul seeks to make clear for the spiritually ambitious Corinthians this truth: there is no ground for boasting about being “spiritual,” no matter what gifts one may possess as all manifestations of the Spirit are to serve God’s purpose for the common benefit of the community.<sup>1</sup> The grace of God has gifted each person and individual merit and worthiness does not play as much of a factor as some of the spiritually ambitious Corinthians may believe.<sup>2</sup> The Corinthian community needs to see the value in one another.

Using a rhetorical device common in the ancient world, Paul presents an analogy between the church and the human body. There are two points to Paul’s analogy in presenting the church as a body. Paul presents both the need of diversity within the church and interdependence among the members.<sup>3</sup> The genius of Paul’s analogy is his ability to reach different people as he discusses how the body works. The eyes and mouth, given prominence because of their location, still need the foot and the private parts, those covered or considered less beautiful. Paul is addressing how all the members of the body are important and reminding those who think they are the highest of how they would be nothing without the others.

The greater focus for Paul is how this interdependence connects them to one another. They are to remember their gifts and to give thanks for how it binds them together. All of the gifts help the body of Christ to grow in various ways.

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<sup>1</sup> Hays, Richard B. “First Corinthians,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2011), 213.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

### **Application**

As a runner, I have discovered like all athletes, the importance of each part of my body. Often people think running only pertains to your legs, your feet, and your knees. Yet after training for multiple races, I can say how other parts of the body play an important role in training. How much weight you carry in your torso and the proportion of your upper body can shape your training. Of course, being able to see in front of you and breathing impacts your run. And for me, being able to internalize the beat of music in my ears to the steps I take plays a huge role in the stress release running gives me.

I need all the parts of my body to run as all are important. Each one of them provides a different function and when one isn't well or one is affected, I can tell and it can hinder a run. All the parts of my body are important and work together when I take off running for the race ahead of me.

The body is a beautiful analogy for the church, especially when we think each member contributing to the whole body of Christ. Those who are seen as less important are just as important as those we consider higher up and more elevated. All have a place to contribute to being a part of God's mission on this earth.

The power of Paul's rhetoric remind each one of us how important we are to the church and how all have a place. For those of us who think highly of ourselves, we are reminded of how no one is great without those around them. For those of us who think lowly of ourselves, we are reminded of how vital we are to the whole of the body.

For all of us, we are convicted by how there is a balance to our participation and contribution to the body of Christ. We should be able to recognize our gifts and see how they are valued and needed. Everyone has been given spiritual gifts and I have seen how different ones have been needed in certain times to strengthen and support the body of Christ.

I will never forget how after not taking a spiritual gifts test for years, I took one again and found my number one gift was the same from when I took the test when I was thirteen. Teaching has always ranked number one and I have felt it come alive in leading Sunday school, small groups, and of course understanding how teaching plays a prominent role in preaching.

Yet the beauty after taking this spiritual gift inventory came after taking the test and discovering one's primary and secondary spiritual gifts. As a group, all had to present their primary spiritual gifts. No one got a pass. We all had to share our primary gifts and then discuss where we saw this in our ministry. While there were similarities, there were also differences.

After this revelation, I remember turning to the different people with various gifts when it came to my ministry. I would invite them to help me think through or come up with ministry ideas. I learned to lean on others with expertise in areas where I might struggle. As I did so, I realized how the body of Christ truly needs one another. When we know our spiritual gifts and know those of the people around us, the body of Christ can grow and bloom in ways we could never do on our own. All are important in contributing to the making of disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation for the world.

What are your spiritual gifts? How have you seen your spiritual gifts contributing to ministry? Who are people with different gifts than you? Why do you think God made all of us unique with varying spiritual gifts? How can you empower and lean on those

with different spiritual gifts?

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