

1 Corinthians 12. 12-31a

One Body with Many Members

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. For in the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less part of the body. And if the ear would 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. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. 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.’ On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has arranged the body giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Note for Preachers:

Paul writes to the Corinthian slave society, describing the Christian communion as being like a human body. Such equation of the human social organism with the body was Hellenistic commonplace. However, Paul imports a Jewish concern for its holiness as reflecting the entire person, inward and outward. The body was not merely embodied spirit but a description of the living person. Christians derive their personhood from a particular Jew. Jesus, the image of God, born of a woman, Mary. This is far from idolatry. Recognising the authenticity of the body is to love the Creator, whose icon it is, and the self as neighbour, the theme of chapter 13. It follows that any act of cruelty to the body of oneself or of another is an act of blasphemy.