

The 21st Century Disciple: Life Together

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[0:00] Good morning. Would you please turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 12, verse 12? It says in the bulletin that we're going to look at 12 through 31 today, but actually we're going to look at 12 through 26.

Today we're going to look at 1 Corinthians 12, but children are dismissed. It looks like they're already dismissing themselves. We are in the middle of a series called 21st Century Discipleship in which we're looking at the fundamentals of our walk with Christ.

When I was in high school, my family lived in the area around Dayton, Ohio, and my dad and I were fans of the Cincinnati Bengals, and we would watch the games together.

In those years, the Bengals lost a lot of games. I don't know, maybe they do that every year. But they were constantly trying all kinds of trick plays. You know, they would do the quarterback sneaks and the fake punts and the reverses and all these trick plays.

And I remember so clearly sitting there watching these games with my dad and my dad saying, they need to get back to fundamentals. Right? Because in spite of all these trick plays, they would throw the ball and they couldn't catch it.

[1:22] And the running back would fumble the ball, and they needed to get back to fundamentals. They might have the most complex playbook in the world, but if they can't catch, they're not going to win the game.

Sometimes it's important for us to get back to the fundamentals in our faith too. What are the basic things that we need to do and believe as we follow Christ together?

Well, so far in this series, Pastor Mike has preached on following Christ and being saturated in Scripture, being a person of prayer, loving each other, and today we're going to look at life together in the church.

We're going to be working through 1 Corinthians 12, 12 through 26. The whole passage is organized around this metaphor of a body, a human body. Metaphors work when we take one concept, in this case a human body, and then we relate it to another concept, the church, so that the first concept becomes a kind of interpretive lens through which you view the second.

There's something about a human body that is like the church. That's what Paul is going to explain in this passage, and it leads to some very practical applications for us when we think about our life together in the church.

[2:51] So let's read the passage. We're going to read the whole thing, and then we'll go back and take a look at it in some more detail. Here's what Paul writes. It says, of one member, but of many. If the foot should say, well, because I'm 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'm 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 be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 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 parts, 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 parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. And on those parts of the body that we think less honorable, we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable

parts do not require but God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is honored, all rejoice together. So this passage is divided into three parts. They're unequal parts, and we're going to look at each one of them in turn.

And the first part is in verses 12 through 14. That is about the membership in the body. The second part is in verses 15 through 20. That's about diversity in the body. And the last part, verses 21 through 26, is about the unity in the body.

Paul begins in verse 12 by explaining the metaphor. There are a lot of things that we could say about a human body. But Paul is focused on one aspect of the human body that relates to the church, and that is that bodies are made up of many different parts. Some of those parts are very different from each other, and yet they're all part of one whole body. They all work together, and they depend on each other, and they are collectively one body. It's not that all those different parts should be a unity.

unity is that they are a unity. All the parts of the body working in sync with each other and supporting each other. Why? Is it because they want to? Is it because they like each other? No. It's because it can't be any other way. If there aren't all these parts working together, it's not a body.

[5:58] The unity of the body is a given. If there's no unity in the body, it's dead. And Paul says at the end of verse 12, so it is with Christ.

And the key in this first section comes in verse 13 when Paul makes the connection between a human body and the church. Now just who is included in this body? Who are the body parts? Look what Paul says at the beginning of verse 13 and the end of verse 13. He says, for in one spirit we were all baptized into one body. Then at the end he says, and all were made to drink of one spirit. He uses the word spirit twice. In the New Testament, the presence of the spirit distinguishes believers in Christ from non-believers. The spirit marks those who have converted to faith in Christ and have become fundamentally altered in the process. When we come to faith in Christ, it's like our DNA just gets rewired. We're not members of the body just because we happen to believe the same things, like we're some kind of a political party. And we're not members of the body like we are at the YMCA, you know, where you get your little membership card and you get some benefit from that, you join and you get to know some people there. Because when you go to the YMCA, you choose that. You could go to the RecPlex. But we're members of the body because when we committed ourselves to Christ, we became a new creation. It's not that we choose to be members of the body, we are members of the body. If you were born physically in the U.S., you are a citizen. It doesn't matter if you want to be a citizen. You didn't choose to be a citizen. It's automatic. When you were reborn in the spirit, you are a member of the body. You have joined the people of God throughout history who have turned their backs on the world and defected to the kingdom of Christ. It's like no matter what we look like or where we come from, we all have the same color passport and it says in it, the kingdom of heaven. This is the invisible church. It's invisible because it consists of all true believers who have been spiritually changed and remade.

What we see visibly, what we often call the church, is just the structure, the organization, the constitution, bylaws, this building that we have that we appreciate so much, the finances, the bulletins that are printed, the meeting times, the ministries of the church, that's just the structure. There's one right here called Christ the King and over in town somewhere else there's one called Kenosha Bible Church and somewhere else there's one called Emmanuel Baptist.

But these are just containers. These are just containers of the true church. We come to the meetings, to the services at this place because we like the preaching, because we like the music, because we like the people, because the location is good. But the danger of confusing this structure with the true invisible church is that it makes us feel like our membership is voluntary.

And it isn't. It isn't voluntary. It's automatic. Therefore, the essential unity of the body is not a goal.

[9:33] It's a given. Unity in the body, unity in this group does not come from effort or from the similarities that we might have with each other. It comes from our shared experience in the spirit. Look at the examples that Paul uses in verse 13. Now look at the middle of verse 13. He has spirit at the beginning of verse 13 and at the end of verse 13, but in the middle he says, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free.

These are the most obvious and extreme distinctions that Paul can think of in his society. Jews and Greeks had a different ethnicity. They had a different language. They had a different religious background. They lived in different neighborhoods. Jews would not even enter a Gentile's house. And of course, free people and slaves, I mean, who can have a different social experience than that? What could they possibly have in common?

Well, the spirit, right? They share the spirit. They're the members of the kingdom of Christ, and therefore they share something so fundamental that every other social distinction that they might have just sort of evaporate. What does this mean? It means that if you are a believer, you have something more fundamentally in common with a believer in Christ who is right now hiding in a cave in Pakistan than you have in common with your neighbor here in Kenosha who looks like you and talks like you and votes like you but doesn't know Christ. It means that our community of believers believers that meet together here at Christ the King, our life together isn't something that we need to construct. It is already a reality created by God in Christ, and we have the opportunity, the joy of participating in that reality. And it means we will be a diverse body.

Because if membership simply consists of knowing Christ, if membership simply comes from being converted to our faith in Christ, then the membership might consist of anyone. If membership isn't based on all the usual ways that society sort of divides and sorts us into groups, if it's based on the spirit, then anyone might be a part of the body.

And in fact, that's exactly what happens. And so Paul turns his attention in the next section, in verses 15 to 20, to the diversity in the body. Let's look at that second section. He begins by personifying some body parts and having them speak.

[12:18] And they say really ridiculous things so that he has the opportunity to then correct them. He's setting up a little bit of a straw man kind of here. And he wants to contradict them and disagree. Look what he says in verse 15.

If the foot should say, well, because I'm 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 should say, because I'm not an eye, I do not belong to the body, that would not make it any less a part of the body.

Now here, those two, those body parts are comparable. You've got, you've got appendages, right? Extremities, a hand and a foot. You've got organs of sense, ears and eyes.

And the foot says, well, I'm different than the hand, so I don't know, maybe I don't belong. And the ear says, I don't know, I'm not the same as the eye, so maybe I don't belong here. But Paul says, the fact that these parts are different does not make them any less a part of the body.

And the church is diverse because of our faith in Christ. We come from different backgrounds. We have different skin colors. We have different types of education and different jobs.

[13:25] We're interested in different things. We have different personalities. We have different perspectives. We have different resources. We're gifted in different ways. And again, this is because of the way that the membership of the body is formed.

When I go join a basketball league, it should not be a surprise to me that many of the people there are just like me. We're all, you know, have the same level of athleticism.

We're all interested in the same, we're all interested in basketball. When I go to a jazz concert, everyone may be a lot like me. We all like jazz. But in the church, we're all members because we've been converted by the spirit.

And the church is diverse. So look what Paul says about this in verse 17. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be?

And if the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them as he chose. These are rhetorical questions in verse 17.

[14:27] And the obvious answer is there would be no sense of hearing or smell. And the body would be in rough shape. The diversity in the body, the fact that we're all different from each other, is God's own good design.

You know, I love these old black and white sort of sci-fi movies from the 1950s. You've got one that's about a creature that really is just sort of one giant eyeball.

Or a man with gigantic ears who can hear something six miles away. Or a disembodied brain with no torso. It just has to live in a big vat. Or imagine a machine like a Star Trek teleporter. Imagine a machine that could zap us and remove half of our body parts and then rearrange all the other ones. I mean, no one, I don't know if we want to imagine that. It's disgusting. It's gross. It's a horrific monstrosity. And that's because God knows how to make a human body. [15:37] He knows how to put each part in its place. Each one important. Each one contributing. The body has many different parts, but everything is beautiful and functional.

Everything is in balance. I've got hands that do things. I've got feet that take me places. I've got ears that hear. The diverse body parts that we have are all evidence of God's design. And God knows how to make a body. And he also knows how to make a church. It's made up of all different people. Some of us look different. Some of us think differently. We all have various experiences that have shaped us.

But Paul says, that's not bad. That's good. Look what he says in verse 19. If all were a single member, where would the body be?

As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The diversity in the body, the fact that we're all different, isn't just acceptable.

[16:38] It's necessary. Paul is not saying here that it's okay that we're all different. He's not even saying that it's valuable that we're all different. He's saying it's necessary that we're all different.

It's God's design that we live out our faith together with people who are not like us. And here's why this matters. It matters because we all belong in the body.

You belong here. Maybe you think to yourself, boy, I am different than everyone else. Maybe I don't belong here. Yes, you do.

You contribute something here that no one else does, even if it doesn't feel like it to you. What about that person over there?

What about somewhere else in this group? There's this person. Maybe they're on the other side of the aisle. And they're really different from you. They don't see things the way that you do.

[17:39] They don't have the same goals that you do. Their culture is different. Or maybe their personality tends to get on your nerves. They belong here too.

Does that person like different worship music than you? Or do they strongly feel about parenting the way that you think is completely wrong? Do they have different political views than you do?

Or dress differently than you do? They belong here. We have the same spirit. We have the same passport. And not only do we all belong here, but a second reason this matters is that we all contribute something to the body.

Because if we were all an eye, how could we hear? And if we were all an ear, how would we smell? But Paul says if all were a single member, where would the body be? We need each other's differences to be a whole body.

If we were all the same, then we might really be good at some things, but there would be huge deficits in others. We would be narrow.

[18:53] We would not have the benefit of a variety of experiences, and we would be extremely limited in our collective abilities. So let's review where we are. We're at the end of our second section.

Let's review. The whole passage explores this relationship, this tension between unity and diversity in the body. On the one hand, the body is a unity because its members share all one thing in common, the spirit, because they are new creations in Christ.

In comparison to that one thing that they share, nothing else matters, regardless of where they came from or who they are. If they have placed their hope in Christ, they are one body.

So there's this essential unity. That's in verses 12 through 14. But on the other hand, because their membership rests on that one central factor and not anything else, that means that the body is incredibly diverse.

A little bit of a paradox. Because God has called people out of every nation and every tongue and every neighborhood and every hobby and every personality type, there is diversity in the body.

[20:04] That's verses 15 through 20. But, on the other hand, because the body is diverse and all of that diversity strengthens the body and provides it with abilities and resources and experiences, then it has to function as a unity.

It keeps going back and forth. All the members have to be engaged, working and serving for the body. And that's the subject of the last section in verses 21 through 26.

Paul says in verse 21, The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you, nor the head to the feet, I have no need of you. In the previous section, in verses 15 through 16, the foot compared itself to a hand.

Those are similar. And the ear compared itself to the eye. Those are parallel. They're both sensory organs. They were different, but equal.

The question in that section was, is it okay that I'm not the same as everybody else? But now, in verse 21, the question is a little bit different. The image is a little bit different.

[21:20] Now the question is, do we really need that member here? Is that member of any value to us? Because the eye is more dominant than the hand.

The eye gives the hand direction and tells it what to do. So there's a little bit of a hierarchy there. And the head, which is up here, gives direction to the foot. It's up here, and it directs the foot and tells the foot where to go.

So again, Paul is having these body parts say something inappropriate so that he can then correct them. Some of these parts are saying to other parts of the body, We don't need you.

Or, we can get along just fine without you. Thank you. We know, we all know, that the question of status and importance and hierarchy just dominates the world out there.

That's the fuel that runs the world. The way that we compare ourselves to each other, the way that we go around, you know, always checking out in every group who's dominant, who's got something over on us.

[22:32] That's just the way of the world. Anyone who's ever been to middle school knows this. Anyone who's ever been on Facebook knows this.

We compare our vacations. We compare how crafty we are. Oh, that's such a cute centerpiece. We compare how well we cook, and whether or not so-and-so made cinnamon rolls last week.

We compare how cute our kids are, and then we try to figure out, Am I better than that person? Am I not as good as that person? It's always a question of dominance. But Paul says, Not in the body.

That's not how it works in the body. On the contrary, he says in verse 22, Some parts of the body seem weaker. Like internal organs. They're so weak that they have to be inside, up inside your ribcage to be protected.

But they're crucial, because without them you would die. Verse 23, Some of the parts of our body we keep hidden for modesty's sake, but they aren't any less important.

[23:36] In fact, we give them a lot of attention, and we clothe them. So appearances can be deceiving, because you might say, Well, I think I can tell which parts of the body are more important.

You know, one is visible, one is hidden, one is external, one is internal, one gives direction, one takes direction. But that's nonsense. You can't tell which parts of the body are more crucial.

They all are. Every single part is crucial. And so look what Paul says in verse 24. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body.

The point of this imagery is that everyone, every person, is indispensable to the body. Those who serve up here.

Those who sit in the back. Those who have personalities that are very loud and gregarious. Those people who are very quiet. People who are very confident and run up to strangers and give them a big hug.

[24:42] Other people are shy and kind of hold back. adults, young people. They are crucial. All of us are crucial to the proper functioning of the body. Therefore, we commit to each other in unity.

There must be no division in the body. You know, when we come to church, it's very tempting to come looking for an ideal. I want to come here.

I want people to care for me here. I want people to know me. I want to be connected and feel like I'm developing friendships. Good, easygoing friendships.

This is going to be a chance for me to see people every week. That's going to be great. But that's not what this is. If we're looking for easy, enjoyable social experiences, then we need to go join a book club or a garden club or something because that's not what this is.

This is the body. And we are committed to each other and we live out our faith together. We support each other and we need each other. And we do this with people who are not, we are not naturally attracted to.

[25:52] We do this with people who are not like us, who we might not normally naturally choose as friends, but whom God has given to us as brothers and sisters to be closer and more serious and more caring than our own natural families.

Because our own natural families may reject us for the cause of Christ. But we belong to the body. And just as members of the body are committed to each other to care for the needs of each other, look what Paul says here in conclusion.

Verse 25, at the end of verse 25. He says that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is honored, all rejoice together. If our participation in the body, if our service to each other depended on whether we were naturally drawn to each other as friends, I don't know how much that would be worth. But it doesn't.

It's the fact that we are committed to each other as members of the body, that we are purposeful about caring for each other in really practical ways based on our own variety of abilities.

[27:05] We keep tabs on each other. We notice who hasn't been at one of our services or meetings, and we check in. We listen to each other.

We encourage each other. We take leadership. We see what needs to be done, and we help get people organized. We provide for people's physical needs.

We give them money. We take meals to each other. We help fix their car. We help fix their plumbing problem. We help them move and carry their sleeper sofa. We help them prepare their taxes.

We teach each other how to read the Bible. We give a young couple parenting advice. We model what it looks like to be faithful to Christ in the midst of suffering. We visit each other at home and in the hospital.

Let's just be really direct. If you aren't engaged in the body, if you're just sitting there consuming, and you're not engaged, something isn't getting done.

[28:12] God has made you a specialist in something. You have a unique mix of background and ability and gifting and passions. You are a specialist.

And if you're simply consuming, then there's a hole somewhere that is not being plugged. Now, you might have two objections to this.

You might say, well, no, wait a minute. Wait a minute. I don't know what my gifts are or what I can do. Well, my advice would be to just start volunteering in things. Try out different things.

Help the deacons fix something around here. Work in the nursery. Volunteer on a Sunday evening to put tables away. See what you enjoy. See how people respond to you and to your work.

See what feels like a good fit. But if you sit on the sidelines, you're never going to know, it's never going to become clear to you what you can do. In some ways, the only way to figure out what you're good at is just to jump in.

[29:16] And a second objection might be, well, there aren't enough jobs and ministries here at the church for all of us. You know, what if we all jump in, right? My answer to that is, usually ministries are not turning people away.

Usually they're understaffed. And usually there's a small group of tired people who are involved in like five different ministries and they're all doing it. Because there aren't enough volunteers.

And also, your ministry doesn't have to be formal. You can start caring for people and helping and praying and inviting and your ministry can even look outward into the community around.

Not only do we care for each other in really practical ways, but we suffer together and we rejoice together. We have such love for each other that when one of us hurts, we all hurt. I mean, our bodies are large, but if I break my little toe, it's like that big.

If I break my little toe, my whole body is out of commission. I'm limping around, I'm in pain. If I have one little tooth, it's like that big. One little tooth and it's aching, I can't concentrate, I can't do anything except just sit around suffering.

[30:29] We rejoice together, we celebrate together, we cry together, we show affection to each other with handshakes and appropriate hugs.

And I want to mention, I think there's one more way we can purposefully care for each other. This is sort of just another example. We can confess our sins to each other and speak the word of Christ to each other.

Sometimes when we think about confessing our sins to each other, we think about maybe what they do in the Roman Catholic Church and then we're like, well, we're not them so just ignore it. But James says, James says in 5.16, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed.

We are a body of sinners. We cannot be, we must not be a pious body who doesn't allow sinners in our midst. What would happen if we actually found out that one of us was a sinner?

No, we're honest. We admit together as a body that we're sinners and that we sin all the time. And so we confess our sins to each other. And the way that we do that is not by confessing our sins to everyone.

[31:44] We don't confess our sins, you know, in a big group. But this is what, this is what I think we can do. This is how we do it. We find one other person in the body.

It might be someone in our life group, it might be a close friend, it might just be someone who we trust and respect. It needs to be someone who understands that they are a sinner. They're not gonna, they're not gonna judge and they're not gonna be tempted to gossip because they are also in need of grace and they're sinners too.

They need to know that. And what you do is you contact them, maybe face to face, maybe you call them on the phone and you tell them your sin. You tell them what you've done and you be specific about it.

You say, this is what I did. And you don't, you don't try and justify it. You just simply say, boldly, I sinned.

And then that person who hears your confession, they listen to you with humility. And then they speak as a representative of Christ.

[32:49] And they say to you, I understand that you did that. But Christ forgives you. And they say to you, Jesus promises that if we confess our sin that he will forgive us.

So you need to know that your sins are forgiven. And they have to say it. It's not enough to just be like, eh, don't worry, we all struggle with that sin. No, that's not good enough.

And you don't say, well, I don't think that's a very big deal. No. You say, Christ forgives you. You stand in for him. You represent him. You speak on behalf of Christ and say verbally, your sins are forgiven.

And you can say that with authority because it's a promise that we have in Scripture. Here's why we should confess our sins to each other. First of all, it's a true confession.

It is so easy after you sin to just sort of say a little prayer and say, oh, sorry about that, God. And it's sort of going your way. But why is it so easy to confess our sins to God when he is holy but so difficult to confess to one of our neighbors or friends who is a sinner?

[33:58] It's because when we confess to God it's so easy for that to be a reflex. Eh, he sees me sin all the time so he's used to it. But when you stand before another person and you confess to them and you say, I have sinned, it's humiliating.

It cuts you down. And it's shameful to stand before someone and say, I sinned. So that tends to be a true confession. Secondly, it kills the power of sin.

Sin is like a mold that grows in the dark and its power is found in secrecy. And it must be brought into light, spoken aloud and acknowledged to someone else and that will help to kill it.

When we confess to a person there just isn't any way to justify ourselves. And third, it gives someone else in the body an opportunity to minister to us and to speak grace to us.

It is a beautiful thing that we do to each other when I don't just have to look in the Bible and try and find some sort of hope there. I don't have to find those promises of Christ for myself but I have another person to verbally let me hear you are forgiven.

[35:06] That's a beautiful thing. So to summarize this last section in verses 21 through 26 the unity of the body means that we all need each other.

We care for each other. We suffer together. We rejoice together. We minister to each other. We aren't all paid pastors. We're not all full-time pastors but we all have pastoral roles to each other serving each other from our great variety of gifts and experiences.

Now if Paul's teaching on the church sounds radical it's because it's based on a spiritual reality that God has accomplished for us in Christ. It's not a human organization that we hope will get a little bit better than other organizations because maybe we're more sanctified or something like that.

It's not. The church consists of all those people throughout all time in all the world who belong to God because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

And some of us meet here every Sunday and sometimes during the week and some of us have particularly committed ourselves to this group here and we call ourselves Christ the King.

[36:14] But the church is something that God has created. We participate in it because we are born or spiritually reborn into it. We commit to each other because we all belong.

We commit to purposeful relationships because we all need each other. and we commit to each other because we all have different ways to serve each other and to serve God in our life together. Let's pray. Father, we're grateful that you have given us to each other.

We're grateful for the grace that you've shown us in Christ. for incorporating us into your body, for calling us your sons and daughters and for allowing us to call each other brothers and sisters.

We thank you that we have this family that we can commit to, that we can serve. What a gift it is to have other people to live life with.

[37:24] But Lord, there are some tough things here. There are some challenges here to love people who we personally find difficult to love, to not just accept someone as an acquaintance but to accept them as a family member, to serve each other.

and we ask that you would, by the power of your spirit, enable us to grow in these things, to be a body with a profound love for each other, that everyone outside would see us and say, they must have been transformed by the gospel of Christ because they love each other so deeply.

We pray these things in your name. Amen. Amen.