

The Whole is Greater than the Sum of Its Parts

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[0:00] 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 one spirit we were all baptized into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and all were made to drink of one spirit. For the body does not consist of one member, but of many.

If the foot should 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 should say, because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body, that would not make it any less 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 of them, 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.

[1:14] 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 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. 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 miracles, then gifts of healings, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles?

Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? Do all speak with tongues? Do all speak with tongues? Do all speak with tongues? Do all speak with tongues? Do all speak with tongues? Do all speak with tongues?

[2:17] Do all speak with tongues? May God give us understanding of His word. May He help me to share with you. How many of you in this room are Scottish?

Raise your hand, please. Okay. You can put them down. How many of you were born in Scotland? Okay. Put them down.

How many of you were born? You're not Scottish. You're born somewhere else. How many of you were born in North America? Yeah? South America? Huh.

Africa? No. How about Asia? Broadly construed. Anything that smacks at Asia. Nobody. Okay. How many of you have a science background?

Yeah? Yeah. Good. How many are like, we would say, in the humanities? How many work for the government? Ah.

[3:21] There's a few there. You can keep your hands down. How many served in the military? What? How many work in the public sector?

How many own their own business? How many are retired? How many have raised or are raising children?

Okay. How many own your home? How many of you rent? Okay. How many follow football? Rangers?

Celtics? Premier League? Well, see. Stephen Strong was here. He would raise his hand. How many follow rugby?

I thought, I knew there's a few guys out there. How about baseball? That's for my son and my wife. And Hamish. Thank you. You're here. That's right. How many of you speak a language in addition to English?

[4 : 26] Okay. And how many play an instrument? How many under 30? How many over 60?

How many like to read books more than anything else? How about watch movies? Play video games?

How many of you post regularly on social media? How many of you do it occasionally?

How many have never done it at all? How many of you would be considered on the conservative side of politics?

How about on the liberal side of politics? Nobody dare raises their hand. How many of you are Christians?

[5 : 23] Yeah. See, I think that little exercise gets a bit at what Paul is going after in this portion of 1 Corinthians 15. A diversity in unity or a unity in diversity.

See, right in this room, we have a diversity of backgrounds, life experiences, training, abilities, hobbies, specialties, even political commitments. Yet, when I ask how many of you are Christians, you all raised your hands.

Now, this is part of a series that Colin has been leading on the letter to the Corinthians, the first letter. And it's entitled, Imperfect Church, Perfect Savior.

And in fact, every church that has ever existed or that exists even now has been or is imperfect.

Now, the benefit we have is that this one that existed in Corinth some 2,000 years ago have all of their problems put down on paper for us.

So we can learn from them, hopefully, from their mistakes. Their biggest mistake, a mistake that Paul writes about somewhere else, was thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to think.

[6 : 36] You see, the Corinthians thought they had figured this Christian thing out. But their mistakes were many. They were prone to factionalism.

I follow one. I follow another. And Paul said this creates jealousy and strife that marked their fellowship. They made distinctions among the members due to the class or wealth.

And when it came to those who represented, who were the preachers and teachers, they employed worldly standards to judge if a teacher was considered worthy. What was the rhetorical skills? Rather than whether he was faithful or knew the Word of God.

And they seemed to like to hang out their dirty linen before the world, dragging one another into courts in order to sue one another. They dishonored the Lord's table with irreverent, even hedonistic behavior.

They tolerated a serious sexual sin in their midst. It's incest. In fact, Paul says there's evidence that Paul thinks has to address the whole lackadaisical attitude towards sexual morality that existed in this church.

[7 : 36] It appears that some perhaps had not made a real clean break with idolatry. Or others were so upset about it, so scrupulous that they couldn't grasp the liberty that they had in Christ.

And that became a burden upon others. And we'll learn later, some among their number denied the resurrection. Though that had been clearly taught to them of first importance.

Imperfect church. I would suggest the overriding failing that affected so much of their life together was pride. At one point, Paul warns them, Your boasting is not good.

Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse it out. And perhaps it was their pervasive pride that prompted Paul to write at the beginning of his letter, For I'll consider your calling, brothers.

Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.

[8 : 40] God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. Now, I don't think many of us would like to be told that we were chosen by God not because we were wise and strong and from an important and influential family, but because we were foolish, weak, and we came from a family of nobodies.

But Paul says the reason why he acted as he did was that no human being might boast in the presence of God. Now, I think pride was a real problem that worked its way to all the corners of this

church.

And this discussion in chapter 12 they were looking at reveals some of the problems in the church. It appears that the church's experience of the gifts, the spiritual gifts, has caused pride and perhaps even infighting among the church.

So, consequently, starting in this chapter, Paul offers some extended teaching on the use and abuse of spiritual gifts. Colin preached last week that here from verses 4 through 7, Now, there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.

There are varieties of service, but the same Lord. There are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

[10:07] All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit who apportions to each individually as He wills. The church is full of people that the Holy Spirit intends to use for the purposes of God's kingdom.

There's a variety of gifts, but they are all from the same Spirit. Everyone, we learn, has a part to play. And the extent that individual members are not active in adding their gift to the work of the church, the church is diminished.

And to the extent that the gifts are added, the church flourishes. But something is wrong. Something is wrong in how this is playing out in the church in Corinth.

And Paul needs to address it or to head it off, given the tendencies of this church. That being said, this portion of the letter is not so much an instruction manual on the use of the spiritual gifts.

It is an appeal for unity in diversity. It is an appeal for unity in diversity. Their use and abuse of spiritual gifts is the presenting issue, but underlying it is the need to grasp the concept of unity in diversity.

[11:28] Now, it is a grievous shame that something that God intends for the upbuilding of the church is actually causing the tearing down of the church in Corinth.

And so Paul needs to address it. And he's going to use this analogy of the body, of a human body is somewhat like the church, or the church is somewhat like a human body.

He says, and starting in verse 12, 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 one spirit we were all baptized into one body. Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, all were made to drink of the one spirit. That is a statement that is unity in diversity.

See, not unlike the experiment that we just did, those who make up the church in Corinth come from a variety of ethnicities, social statuses, cultural backgrounds, with all of their attendant influences, and that's true for us.

[12:37] Yet each person, no matter those differences, were all by one spirit baptized into one body and all made to drink of the Holy Spirit, a reference probably to the regenerating and indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

See, there is diversity within the church, but it's a diversity that is inescapably contained within the unity. And that's where there seems to be a problem.

It seems, I believe, that Paul thinks, fears that the unity that should exist within the church in Corinth is being threatened. It's being undermined.

One, there seems to be a tendency for separation, for people to separate from one another.

Secondly, there seems to be a valuing of some gifts more highly than other gifts, particularly the gift of tongues.

And lastly, there seems to be a lack of mutual love and respect for the other that is in the church.

And we're going to take them in order. There's this tendency to separate.

[13:41] Now, we've already learned in this letter that there is a tendency in this church towards this factionalism, that people say, well, I'll follow Cephas, I'm going to follow Apollo, I'm going to follow Paul. There already seems to be a culture that allows for this, and perhaps it's the same kind of mentality that's creeping in to the use of the gifts within the church.

And there might be two reasons for them. One might be a feeling of inferiority or perhaps jealousy, a covetousness on the part of some.

Verses 14 says, For the body does not consist of one member, but of many. If the foot should 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 should say, because I'm not an eye, I do not belong to the body, that would not make it any less part of the body. See, it might just be that somebody looks at the gift that they have, and they say, Well, you know, I mean, I'm not that gift.

I mean, I'm just a foot. I'm just, you know, I'm just a liver. But the reality is, is that pride causes that kind of jealousy.

[14:53] It's pride that causes that kind of covetousness. It's the thought that I deserve more honor than these others do. I deserve more honor than I'm getting. And because I'm not, since I'm not all that, what appears to be so important, well, then I'm not part of the body.

But this is impossible. An ear, an eye, a foot, a hand, they're all, by definition, part of the body. The whole body, if it were just one of the members, would be absurd.

It would cease being a body. Listen to verse 18. But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as He chose.

That's an echo back in verse 11 that was read last week. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit who apportions to each one individually as He wills. What that person is, what the gift that they possess, that's meant to be added to the church, is something that God has willed, that God has given out.

And so, for them to say, oh, I'm not part of the body because this is what I am or this is the gift that I possess, Paul says, that's absurd. It comes from the hand of God.

[16:08] And you can't say you're not part of the body because by definition, if you are these things, you're part of the body because God has appointed these things in the body as individuals, but together, they make up the whole.

See, verse 20 says, as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. There are many parts, yet one body.

That's the reality. That's the reality of it. There's no escaping that reality. We can never say that I have nothing to do with the body because I'm not this, I'm not going to be part of the body.

If we are Christian, we are inescapably part of the body. And it's either we're walking in those gifts, either we are contributing in the way that we've been called to contribute, or we're not, but the fact is we are still part of the body.

So perhaps, perhaps one way to read that is Paul is reflecting some sense of jealousy or covetousness or feelings perhaps of inferiority because somebody possesses a gift that's not as flashy, not as big as others.

[17:20] The other side that seems to threaten the unity are those who want to separate because of their superiority. 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.

See, if you're the one who's got seemingly all the very important gifts, then you think, well, I don't really need that other thing over there.

I don't really need that other person. I'm a complete. I'm a whole in myself. I've got all the gifts. I don't need anybody around me. That was pride again, rearing its ugly head.

See, the parts that seem to be weaker are actually indispensable. I mean, we look at a human being and what we tend to see is their face. We might see their hair.

They might see the things that are very, very visible. But what's going on inside of that person? They've got a heart that's beating. They've got a liver that's cleansing. They've got lungs that are breathing.

[18:18] They've got a colon that's processing. There's lots of things going on inside of a body that nobody sees and yet, they're indispensable. impossible. And not unlike someone who might think that because I've got all the big showy gifts, the ones that everybody sees, they might think that I don't need the other.

The reality is that God has composed the body in such a way that all of the parts are needed. Even those who were quietly in the background. Those who go visit that person.

Those who give that generous amount to somebody when they know they need something. The people who nobody ever knows about. But they're playing an indispensable role in the life of the church.

But this tendency to separate is something that threatens the unity of the church. There is diversity of gifts, Paul says, but they all add up to the body.

And so, there is this idea of unity and diversity that doesn't seem to be fully grasped by the Corinthian church and yet it's an inescapable reality. And so, this tendency to separate threatens it. [19:31] It threatens that unity. The second thing I suggested was valuing some gifts more highly than others, particularly the gift of tongues. If you read through all that he has to say in chapters 12, excuse me, through 13 and 14, it seems that tongues was the big deal in the Corinthian church.

And one can kind of understand why. I mean, if it's spirit-inspired utterance of a language that you don't know and you're in the middle of a meeting or you're in some sort of setting and you start doing this kind of ecstatic speaking and everybody goes, oh, wow, that person must be really spiritual.

Wow, they're really full of the spirit. And so, pride can attend there. Pride can make one think that somehow because I've got this, I'm a super Christian.

But when Paul treats this particular gift, by the end of everything that he has to say, he really devalues it. Not devalues it so much as puts it in its proper place.

At one point he says, you know, I'd rather in a meeting speak with five words that would actually be intelligible to somebody in order to teach them than 10,000 words in a tongue.

[20:41] So, there's a place for tongues, obviously, because God has put it within the body. But where it stands is not where they think it stands, that is on the top of the heap. Something that draws attention.

Something that says that this is somebody who's really, really spiritual. And that kind of valuing of some gifts more highly than others begins to create this kind of imbalance between the life of the church where somehow there are people that are more highly valued and more seen as more important than others.

But the way God has designed the body is that everybody has a role to play. everybody is important. So, this valuing of some gifts indeed could be a real problem.

Verses 6 and 7, back in what Colin said, preached from last week, it says this, there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all and everyone.

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. See, there's no valuing one over the other. One might recognize the place of one over the other.

[21:51] That is how it works into all that God is doing. But the fact that someone has one particular kind of gift and somebody else has another kind of gift, that doesn't make that one more valuable or that gift more valuable.

The reality is they all have a part to play. That's how God has put it together. See, other gifts might be less showy, but they are just as necessary.

The next challenge that we have is there's a lack of mutual love and care or respect for people.

See, there is an ancient church father that apparently might have been Tertullian, but I can't really nail it down, couldn't say, but he offers this observation.

One Christian is no Christian. One Christian is no Christian. That is, as a Christian, when we are called, we are called in to a group.

[22:51] We're called in to a group of people, a community of people. And the way God is so designed it is, is that you can't just be a Christian by yourself. You are a Christian individually.

You're a member of the body, as Paul says, but one Christian is no Christian because one Christian is not a complete Christian. Christian. We need all that God has brings into our life through the love and care of other people.

Listen to what he says in verses 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, 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. together. You can hear just the unity that exists in that individuality.

That is, that there is one who suffers, but all suffer together. Why? Because they are brought together in a particular grouping. That grouping that is called the body of Christ.

[23:59] And he says just that. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. That's how God has created. That's how he has designed his church. That each of us called him individually, known by name, are called into an entity called the church.

And in that respect, we understand that one Christian is no Christian because we are created in order to be part of the body of Christ. Contributing what God has given to us to contribute.

Now, I don't know about you, but I've known too many people who have stopped going to church, who have separated themselves from the body of Christ, saying all I need is Jesus and my Bible. But that's not how God has arranged the members of the human body and that's not how he intends those whom he has made to drink of the one spirit. That's not how he intends for us to live. We aren't to be private Christians in the room, just me and Jesus and my Bible. No, we are called by God to be part of something bigger, something larger than just ourselves and that's the body of Christ.

[25 : 08] So that kind of independence is not an option. We need one another. It's just not that we are supposed to be with one another, but we need one another.

That's how it works. That's how a human body works. We need all of the organs, all the parts to be working as they're supposed to be working in order for us to be healthy. And we as Christians cannot be independent or some people like the lone rangers.

We need one another. That's why we see the unity in diversity or diversity in unity. Paul is speaking to a group of people who just have a tendency to just create these kinds of divisions, these factions within their church.

And I'm arguing that a lot of it stems from this sense of pride, this sense that somehow they've got it. They own it. They know everything. And if somebody has a particular kind of gift, they like to flaunt it, they like to say that I'm very super spiritual.

People look on them and that's the way they are. But the reality is is that we are all brought into the body in the same way. Jew, Greek, slave, free. We're all made to drink of the Spirit.

[26 : 23] We're all baptized into the Spirit. We're all brought into this entity the same way. We all need Christ. Christ. And so because we are all part of one another, there needs to be a kind of mutual respect and love for one another.

That's why he says what he says. 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.

You see what's at stake when there's this kind of separation, when there's this factionalism. People are not being cared for. People are suffering alone. People are not being honored by all.

Now, I had titled this sermon The Whole is Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts. The Whole is Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts.

Now, that's a colloquial use of it. Apparently, if you who are scientists, there's actually a scientific use behind that and there's a term that's attached to it called emergence.

[27 : 29] Ever heard of that within scientific circles? Emergence. And the idea, if I get this right, the idea behind this is that individual things that have their own integrity, when added together, create something new, something unexpected, something unanticipated, or something that one could not anticipate when they first look at it.

And an example might be this. you have hydrogen and you have oxygen. Both hydrogen and oxygen, if brought or come in contact with a fire, would cause it to rage.

You bring them together and they create water which actually puts a fire out. So how would you anticipate that? That something here that causes a fire to rage and something here that causes a fire to rage, you bring them together and they actually cause the fire to go out.

That's a kind of emergence. That's when the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. There's something new, there's something unexpected that comes out of it. And I think that's a fitting understanding when we come to the church.

See, the body of Christ, as Paul says, is made up of slave, free, Jew, Gentile. Listen, we go back into the context in which that is said that would be completely unexpected, completely unanticipated, that those various disparate peoples would all become one, would all be brought into one entity.

[28 : 58] And yet, the whole being greater than the sum of its parts, what's completely unexpected is that not only are they all brought into the same entity, but they're brought into something called the body of Christ.

So these are sinful Jews, sinful Gentiles, sinful slaves, sinful free men, but they're all redeemed and brought into this one entity that's called the body of Christ and they're empowered to carry out the work that God intends for these former sinners to do.

Completely unexpected, completely unanticipated, emergence within the context of the church. The whole is indeed greater than the sum of its parts.

And we were, you know, in our opening little exercise when I asked where people were and where they'd come from and what are the things that have shaped their lives up to this point.

We could take a room full of people like this, all from, sometimes from different countries with different levels of education, different kinds of activities that they do in their life. We bring them all together and because of what God intends to do with all the different kinds of people, what unites us is that we are all brought by the Spirit into this one entity called the body of Christ.

[30 : 19] See, even a church like this is the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. When, prior to our becoming a Christian, prior to our committing ourselves to coming to this church, to this service here tonight, you would have been walking around the streets, who knows where you would have been?

I don't know where you would have been. I probably wouldn't have been here. I don't know where I would have been. But God, in His grace, calls, calls us, brings us into this reality and suddenly, the next thing we know, here we are, all in one room, worshiping the same God, each of us being given a gift in order that God's will might be done on the earth through the people that He has called and purposed to carry out His work.

I think it might be a more colloquial way of understanding emergence, but I think that's the whole greater than the sum of its parts. See, what we need to do in the church is value, value this diversity within the unity or unity in diversity.

It's how God has designed the human body, but it's also how He's designed Christ's body. In fact, it's how the church becomes what it is.

The church is what it is because it is made up of all these individual members that bring to it to create a whole. And that whole is indeed greater than the sum of its parts because of what the whole is.

[31 : 49] It is the representative of God's kingdom right here in the middle of Glasgow, right in this neighborhood. This church is the embassy, as it were, of the kingdom of God.

You and I, as the body of Christ, we are the ambassadors. We are the ones who make the kingdom known. God has empowered us by the gifts of the Spirit to carry that out and yet we need to see that indeed we appreciate how it is that we're all different and yet we're all part of the same thing.

To appreciate those differences is to appreciate how God works. To appreciate the differences is to appreciate that the empowerment that the Holy Spirit brings to each one to play their part and we're not free to look down on one or to look up to hold another one up as more worthy of our praise rather to see that God has brought all these things together and that each part plays its part none of which can be dispensed with.

the church in Corinth had some problems some serious problems but I would like to think that they listened to what the Apostle Paul had to say reflected upon it and began to change began to push the pride to the side and began in humility to look upon the others that they were worshipping with as those who like them out of God's grace had been made part of the body and to help them discover what part they were to play and then to honor that and to care for them in it and when there was a need they would rejoice with them and as Paul says they would weep with them because individually yes indeed they are members of the body but together they create the body of Christ let's pray Lord we ask God that you would help us to appreciate how you have created the church how you have made us and that Lord to see with humility and wonder how it is that together we form this expression of the body of Christ

Lord we could not have anticipated that we would not have expected it apart from what you do about what you have done of calling your people of creating for yourself a people who will serve you who will honor you who will love you God I pray that we will grow in appreciation for each other and just what part we each have to play and that we will help one another to search that out if need be because Lord we cannot do without one another we cannot Lord we need one another and so God we commit ourselves to humbly walking in what you have called us to exercising the gift that you have given to us but to do that with a sense that it is the part that we are playing for the other so that together we might be all that you called us to be all this I ask in Jesus name

[35 : 06] Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen to M.J