

The Body of the Lord

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Introduction.

- A. One of the biggest challenges facing any local church is the challenge of maintaining unity. Some of the saddest times that a church can endure are the times when unity fails, when Christians who ought to be brethren in truth as well as in name cannot get along at all. Satan introduces some dispute into the church—it could be a dispute about anything from a minor application of Scripture to what color the new carpet should be—and rather than being settled quietly by brethren who love each other and who love peace, this dispute takes on a life of its own. Both sides refuse to yield, but either side is all too ready to gossip about the other, and things that should never be said about anyone are said about fellow children of God. Often, controversies like these lead to the church being split, but wherever they arise, they do terrible damage to the Lord's work.
- B. The same thing was true even in the days of the New Testament church. Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth paints a picture of a congregation that is tragically torn. The Corinthians loved to exalt themselves over even the other members of their church, and so they divided themselves into factions. These factions supposedly devoted themselves to the teachings of a particular apostle or evangelist, but they were really just vehicles for division and arrogance. Paul devotes most of 1 Corinthians to a rebuke of factionalism.
- C. However, 1 Corinthians also contains Paul's cure for this disease of division. The later parts of the book contain a stirring appeal to unity and love, and it's an appeal that we still need to hear today. The devil isn't trying to do anything more to us today than he tried in the church in Corinth, so the same divinely inspired answer can teach us how to win the battle against division. Let's turn, then, to Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, to see what we can learn from Paul's instruction concerning the body of the Lord.

I. One.

- A. The first thing we learn from this text is that the Lord's body is one. Paul makes this point in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13. This passage is actually the place where we get so much of the language that we use about the church. Let's look at how Paul does it. He begins by describing the human body. It is one thing—a body—and yet is composed of many different parts. The body is many, but its members are still one in that body. Paul concludes by saying that just as the body is like this, so too is any church of Christ.
- B. In 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul expands his metaphor. He describes the many backgrounds of the Corinthian Christians. Some of them were Jews, some Greeks, some free, and some slaves. Corinth had all these different people in it, and some from each obeyed the gospel. However, when they were baptized, they were baptized not only into Christ, but into one body with each other, joined together as brothers and sisters. This is equally true for us today. As we have been baptized into Christ, we too are one in the church in Margaret Street. We are the Lord's body in this place, and we are bound to each other as we are bound to Him.
- C. We need to emphasize this unity in both our speech and our actions. Each one of us is intimately connected with this church, and we need to talk like it. The Margaret Street Church of Christ must never be a "they" to any of us. It must be a "we." WE, the Margaret Street Church of Christ, are having a gospel meeting. WE are considering some changes to our class schedule. WE had a great worship service the other day. If we make an effort to use this language, it will reinforce the understanding of unity that God requires.
- D. Also, we need to remember that the local church is one, not two, three, or five. Now, it's fine, indeed, even desirable, for us to have friends in the church. It's even fine for us to have a circle of friends whom we enjoy spending time with. However, we must never feel more loyalty to any sub-group within the church than we feel to the church itself. We cannot form cliques within this church that turn the rest of the church into a "they," because that is the breeding ground of division. Once we begin to make that distinction, once we start to talk about "our" beliefs and "their" beliefs, we have helped the devil to begin splitting the church. We must remain united in our loyalties and in our language so that we can also remain united in our church.

II. Composed of Different Members

- A. In addition to being one, the body is composed of different members. Paul makes this point in 1 Corinthians 12:14-17. Here's what Paul is saying: Just as the body has many different kinds of members in it, so too the church has many kinds of members in it. This body of the Lord's people has all kinds of different people in it.
- B. However, all of these different members share equally in being part of the body. No one looks at his foot and says, "Yep, it's part of my body, but it's not as much a part of my body as my hand." Nor do our ears ever start fussing and complaining because they think the eye is a more important part of the body than they are. Nor does anybody get upset because he wants a third ear in the middle of his face instead of a nose. Instead, we are glad that we have all of these different parts. We recognize that they all share equally in being a part of us, and we recognize that the parts of our body are different because they are used for different things.

- C. All of this is true here. To begin with, every member of this congregation is just as much a member as every other member. No member is more connected to the body than anyone else. This works in two ways:
 - 1. First, it shows that we are just as much members here as anyone else. We can't say, "Yeah, I go there sometimes, but that's not really a church for people like me." That's not true. This church is a church for everyone who wants to serve God. If we are a part of it at all, we are as much a part of it as anybody.
 - 2. Second, it makes us recognize that truth about other Christians. There is no distinction among the members of this church, and we must not create one. We cannot look at someone else and say, "He comes here, but he's not really like us. I'm going to ignore him until he takes the hint and goes away." Brethren, that attitude is a sin, and if we nourish it in our hearts, we will go to hell. Someone may be different from us, yes. Someone may have different abilities than we do, yes. But everyone who worships here must be equally loved, equally valued, and equally treated as a part of this body.

III. Organized by God.

- A. Paul goes from there to explain that the body has these different members because it has been organized in that way by God. His explanation is in 1 Corinthians 12:18-23. God caused the differences of the members of His church. He made membership open in the body of His Son to everyone, and He did this so that the body could work in many different ways. Different people have different weaknesses and different strengths, and the Lord's body is organized so diversely so that the strengths of one member can offset another's weaknesses. Everybody in the church has a role to play, and everyone is equally honored.
- B. Here are some ways we need to put these principles into practice.
 - 1. First, each one of us must recognize that we have work to do. God endowed us with gifts He meant for us to use to His glory, and He put us in this body so we could use them. If we are not active in this body, it is not because we have nothing to offer. It is because we are not using what we have been given. If you hear this and realize, "I'm a part of this church, but I don't really do anything but show up," let me challenge you. Go to the elders and say, "I'm looking for work to do for this church. Please give me something I can do." They will be thrilled to death to hear you say that, and God will be thrilled too.
 - 2. Second, we need to look to each of our brethren as people who have important work to do. Not everybody is going to be a preacher. Not everybody is going to be an elder. However, everyone here can do something significant to make this church better. Let's encourage each other to do the work.
 - 3. Finally, let us give all the works we do for God the honor that they deserve because every task is glorious when we do it for God. On the night before His death, Jesus washed His apostles' feet, a task for the lowest-ranking slaves in the household. However, that task didn't demean Jesus. Instead, Jesus glorified the task. The same thing is true with us. There are all sorts of things that the church needs done that aren't glorious in the world's eyes, things like cleaning the building, visiting the sick and shut-ins, and giving people rides. Let's honor these things as doing His work, and let's all resolve to share in them.

IV. Attentive to Its Members' Needs.

- A. Lastly, the Lord's body is attentive to its members' needs, as per 1 Corinthians 12:24-26. This has two causes:
 - 1. First, it comes from the oneness of the body in the first place. This is the same way our human bodies work. When we stub a toe, the hand reaches down to cradle the toe, the other leg hops up and down, the face grimaces, and the mouth says "Ouch!" The whole body is involved in the hurt to the toe. If we are one as we should be, we will be similarly involved in the sorrows and the joys of any member of this body.
 - 2. Second, it comes from the equal honor that each part of the body possesses. When the body is working as it should, when every part is being honored as it should, no part has any cause to resent another. Instead, natural affection is allowed to dominate, so that the sympathy we should be inclined to feel for each other is not trapped by the barriers of envy and pride.
- B. There are two ways we should apply these principles:
 - 1. First, this should teach us how important it is for us to be involved in the lives of other Christians. Our relationship with the people with whom we worship should be so much more than just a greeting and a handshake on our way out the door. Instead, we need to know our brethren. We need to know who they are, what they care about, where they've come from, and how they're doing. We need to know as much about them as we know about our closest friends, because they need to be our closest friends. We also need to make sure that everyone in this congregation has this kind of attention from somebody. If we notice that there's some brother or sister whom nobody talks to, we need to be the ones who talk to them.
 - 2. Second, this passage should warn us not to become envious of another brother. Sometimes, if we think too much like the world, this can be an easy trap to fall into. We can see someone who we think has been given better gifts than we have, and who we think does a more impressive work than we do, and we can withhold emotional attachment from them because we're jealous. Instead, we need to recognize that we are just as important as they are, as long as we're working for the Lord, and rejoice in their good works.

Conclusion. If you're not working for the Lord as you should, now is the time to change that.