



Love the Church: Why You Need the Church & the Church Needs You – Divine Design

David Sunday

September 8, 2019

Yes, we do love the church. Open your Bibles please to 1 Corinthians 12. We're in the second of a series of five sermons on loving the church. Last week we talked about loving the church for who she is, created by God for the glory of God and not a human invention. We looked at these truths from God's Word:

- The church is being built by Christ and is therefore indestructible.
- The church is a temple in which God lives by His Spirit.
- The church is an embassy, representing God's Kingdom on earth.
- And most precious of all, the church is the bride of Christ. He loves His bride and so must we.

Today I want to drill down into why you need the church and why the church needs you. God's Word in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 helps answer the questions, "Why do I need the church? Why does the church need me?" Let's worship God as we listen together to His Word:

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.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ 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 a part of the body. ¹⁶ 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 a part of the body. ¹⁷ 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? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be?

²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

²¹ 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." ²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ 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, ²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

This is the Word of God. Thank Him for it. Amen.

Now, the Holy Spirit, through Paul, gives us a powerful metaphor in these verses. He calls the church “the body of Christ.” Someone has said, “In order to accomplish His work on earth, Jesus had a body made of flesh and blood. In order to accomplish His work today, Jesus has a body that consists of living human beings.”

What is a body? A body is a single unit which can only thrive and grow when many different parts are each performing their own function in harmony with the others for the good of the whole. When one part of the body says, “I’m no longer needed here,” or, “I’m tired of working with you other parts of this body,” the result is catastrophic. Sometimes it’s death, if one part of the body says, “I’m no longer going to cooperate. I’m no longer going to do my part.”

There is only one human body who has lived, died, risen from the dead never to die again and that’s the body of Jesus Christ. Through His perfect life and death and triumphant resurrection, you can be joined to His body. The Bible calls this “union with Christ.” You get joined to the body of Christ by faith. When you put your faith in Jesus, when you believe in Him, look at what He does in 1 Corinthians 12:13: “*For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.*” He baptizes you in the Holy Spirit or by the Holy Spirit.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit is not exactly the same thing as baptism in water. Water baptism is an illustration. It’s an earthly sign of a heavenly reality. It’s a visible sign of Spirit baptism. We might be helped in understanding what happens when we get baptized in the Spirit by thinking about what happens when a ship is submerged under water. It’s overwhelmed by the water and starts drinking in the water. It’s the same way when we are baptized in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit becomes the atmosphere in which we live, indwelling us so that we become saturated with His presence. As it says at the end of verse 13, we drink in the Spirit. “*All were made to drink of one Spirit.*”

So Christians are in the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is in Christians. When a baby is born, it is surrounded by air, but it also needs to breathe in the air if it’s going to keep living and growing. In the same way, we are now living in the Spirit, surrounded by the influence of the Holy Spirit and we’ve been given the one Spirit to drink. According to Paul here, baptism in the Holy

Spirit is not something just for an elite group of Christians. It's not a special privilege for just a few. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is something every Christian experiences when we trust in Christ, when we are converted. Being baptized in the Holy Spirit is a reality that should permeate our experience of life in Christ. We've been baptized in the Spirit, we've been made to drink of the Spirit, so our lives should be radiant with the Spirit's presence and thriving with the Spirit's power.

Paul stresses in verses 12 and 13 that there is only one Holy Spirit, and when we trusted in Christ, we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body. The purpose of Spirit baptism is to unite you to the body of Christ, the church. And in Christ's body, all the old divisions and all the old distinctions that used to separate people from people don't matter anymore. Paul makes that point in verse 13: *"We were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slave or free."*

Now every member belongs on exactly the same terms. There's no preferred status. There's no platinum club. Jesus paid our dues and purchased full membership in His body for all the people who trust in Him, with all its rights and privileges. We're all saved by the same gospel. We're all baptized in and saturated with the same Spirit. We're all members of the same body—and this is an enormous privilege. The highest honor God can bestow on a person is to make you a member of the body of Christ.

I wonder if this is how you view your salvation. According to Paul here, there's no such thing as believing in Jesus without belonging to other believers. There's no such thing as belief without the believers. There's no such thing as being born again into a personal relationship with God without being born again into the family of God's children. You can't say, "Jesus, I want You, but I don't want to be part of Your people." No, Christ will not be severed from His church. Christ is the head of His body and He's not going to let Himself be cut off from His body.

As the early church father Cyprian put it—and the Reformers Luther and Calvin echoed with great agreement—"No one can have God for his Father who does not have the Church for his mother." If you want to be part of the family of God, you need to be connected to the church. You can't separate a ray of light from the sun. You can't break off a branch from a tree and still expect it to bud. You can't cut off a stream from its source without the stream drying up. And you can't disconnect a Christian from the church, because, Cyprian says, the church is "one mother, plentiful in fruitfulness. We are born from her womb, nourished by her milk and given life by her spirit."

This goes against the grain of our culture. We're the "I Generation." I this, I that. We're very individualistic and tend to talk about Christianity like it's individualistic. I read an illustration which talked about the Christian life as if each of us is a deep-sea diver. We're connected to an air supply from the surface through a hose. Everyone has that individual connection. You're a self-contained system. You're independent from the other divers around you. If their air supply is cut

off, it's not going to kill you. You can't share your oxygen with them either. It won't make any difference to you if you are 100 miles away from them or if you are swimming right next to each other. Each of you is basically on your own with your own air supply.

Paul is saying in this chapter that the salvation we experience in Christ is not like that. God does not simply connect each individual to their own independent supply of grace. Now, it's true that each of us has an individual vertical relationship with God. We see that in verse 27: "*You are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*" So we're all connected vertically to God, but we're also connected horizontally to one another. Grace flows to us vertically from God, but grace also flows horizontally from believer to believer through the one Spirit Who indwells us all. We're not independent from one another.

If you isolate yourself from Christians around you, you're cutting yourself off from a vital channel of God's grace to you. The spiritual condition of the Christians with whom you're connected is going to affect you spiritually, just like your spiritual condition is going to affect their spiritual condition. So if we take what Paul is saying seriously here in verses 12-13, this reality that we've been baptized by the Spirit into one body, then we're going to fight against some attitudes—attitudes that can threaten the health of the body of the Christ.

There are three of them in this chapter that Paul stresses. First in verses 15-20, the attitude that says, "The church doesn't really need me." Then in verses 21-24, "I don't really need the church." And then in verses 24-27, "I don't care about the members of the body." The first attitude is one of self-pity or inferiority. The second is an attitude of self-importance or superiority. And the third is an attitude of self-absorption or apathy. Paul is dealing with these attitudes here in this chapter.

Now, if you've been around the church for a while, you've probably heard this passage we read this morning. It's memorable, isn't it? Paul is pulling out all his rhetorical abilities here, even using humor to portray something very important to us. These verses are very familiar to us. So in order to feel the force of these verses, before we look at these three attitudes we need to renounce, let me read to you a modern-day parable that reinforces what we just read here from the Bible. This is from Jonathan Leeman, in the book [What Is a Healthy Church?](#) Listen to how he puts it:

Nose and Hand were sitting in the church, talking. The morning service, led by Ear and Mouth, had just ended, and Hand was telling Nose that he and his family had decided to look for a different church. "Really?" Nose responded to Hand's news. "Why?" "Oh, I don't know," Hand said, looking down. He was usually slower to speak than other members of the church body. "I guess because the church doesn't have what Mrs. Hand and I are looking for." "Well, what are you looking for in a church?" Nose asked. The tone in which he

spoke the words was sympathetic, but even as he was speaking them, he knew he would dismiss Hand's answer. If the Hands could not see that Nose and the rest of the leadership were pointing in the right direction, then he could do without them.

Hand had to think before answering. He and Mrs. Hand liked Pastor Mouth and his family, and Minister of Music Ear meant well. "Well," he said, "I guess we're looking for a place where people are more like us. We tried spending time with the Legs, but we didn't connect with them. Next, we joined the small group for the Toes, but that didn't interest us. Then we attended the Sunday School for all the facial features, but everyone just wanted to talk and listen and smell and taste. It felt like they never wanted to get to work and get their hands dirty. Anyway, Mrs. Hand and I were thinking about going to that new church over on the east side. We hear they do a lot of clapping and hand raising, which is closer to what we need right now in the church." "Hmm," Nose replied. "I see what you mean. We'd hate to see you go, but I guess you have to do what's good for you."

At that moment, Mrs. Hand, who had been caught up in another conversation, came to join her husband and Nose. Hand briefly explained what he and Nose had been talking about, after which Nose repeated his sadness at the prospect of losing the Hands. Mrs. Hand nodded in agreement. She wanted to be polite, but truth be told, she wasn't sad to be leaving. Her husband had made just enough critical remarks over the years that her heart had begun to reflect his. No, he had never burst into an open tirade against the body. In fact, he usually apologized for "being so negative," as he called it.

But the little complaints that he let out here or there had an effect. The small groups were cliquish. The music was a little out of date. The teaching wasn't entirely to their liking. In the end, it was hard for them to put their fingers on it, but they finally decided the church wasn't for them. In addition to all that, Mrs. Hand knew their daughter Pinkie was not comfortable with the youth group. Everyone was so different from her, she felt out of joint.

Mrs. Hand then said something about how much she appreciated Nose and the leadership. But the conversation had already run too long for Nose. He thanked Mrs. Hand for her encouragement, repeated that he was sorry to see them go, then turned and walked away. Who needed the Hands anyway? Apparently, they didn't need him.

Here's a story that illustrates these attitudes that threaten the health of the local church. As we look at these three attitudes, ask the Holy Spirit to show you, "Which of these am I most

tempted to drift toward? Which of these attitudes do I need to check and repent in myself this morning?”

An attitude of inferiority: I don't belong; the church doesn't really need me.

Have you ever compared yourself to someone else and thought, “I'm pretty useless. They're so smart. They're so talented. They're so useful. There's no way I'm ever going to be like them, so I must not have much to offer. This church can get along fine without me”? That's what God is addressing here in 1 Corinthians 12:15-16:

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 a 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 a part of the body.

Here's the point. A body that's all eyes and ears is not a body at all. That's kind of grotesque, if you think about it. Just one giant, bulging eye. You don't want to look at that. Or one big ear with hair sticking out. You don't want to look at that. It's not the way a body is. In fact, it denies reality. If you say, “Because God made me like this, I don't fit in the body,” verse 16 makes it clear that each part of the body is vital. “Because I'm not an eye, I do not belong?” That does not make it any less a part of the body, Paul says. So don't deny reality. Realize that each member of the body is unique, distinctive, irreplaceable and unrepeatable.

Also, when we say, “I don't belong because I'm not like someone else,” or, “I'm inferior,” we're actually destroying diversity. Look at verse 17: *“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?”* A church that only had one type of person or one type of gift would quickly shrivel up and die because of the loss of other senses and malnourishment. Even a great gift, if it's the only gift, gets out of proportion and becomes unhealthy.

When we think, “I don't belong because I'm not like someone else,” we are actually defying God's sovereignty. Look at verse 18: *“But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.”* In other words, God is sovereign over the placement of the body's parts, both in the human body and in the church—His spiritual body. So if you disparage your place in the body, saying, “I don't like the way God made me,” you insult God's wisdom and His sovereign choice. He knows why He made each and every one of us, and He chose where to put us in His church.

I love to learn from other preachers. I love to listen to them and find out what makes them preach the way they do. A couple weeks ago we had Pastor Ed Copeland here. Wasn't it wonderful

how lively he was and how musical his preaching was? You as a congregation did a great job adapting to him as well. You were really animated that Sunday. You're more yourselves today and you've got the normal guy up here today. I get it.

I asked Pastor Copeland afterwards, "How do you preach like that? I'm fascinated by African-American preaching—the rhythm, the music and the energy of it." He said, "You've got to know what kind of instrument God made you to be. If He made you to be an oboe, then be God's oboe. Don't try to be a violin. Be the instrument God made you to be."

Community is built out of diversity. Look at verses 19 and 20: *"If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body."* So if God made you to be a round peg, don't try to jam yourself into a square hole. If God made you a square peg, you're not going to fit in a round hole. You'll either be too big to belong there or too small to fill the need. Some of you might need to stop trying to fill several holes at once, because when you try to do everything that causes other people to lie around not being used. It's one of the reasons why I'm excited about the Preacher's Cohort in developing other preachers here, for our church and other churches. We want to see people's gifts be developed.

Maybe God made you the kind of peg that is only going to fit a new hole. He's got a new kind of ministry that He wants to use you to develop, so He's uniquely suited and fashioned you for that. The point is: be the person God recreated you in Christ Jesus to be and do the good works that He prepared in advance for you to do (Ephesians 2:10). Don't ever think, "I'm not needed because I'm not like someone else." That attitude can actually be rooted in self-pity. "God, I don't like the way You made me."

Friends, think about this when you meet with your Gospel Community or when you get together in Bible studies this week. Realize there are probably some people who are feeling like they really don't have anything to offer to the church. How can you encourage someone this week that the Holy Spirit has gifted them for meaningful service in Christ's church? How can you point out to someone, "I see how God is working in and through you and I am thankful"? There might be someone in the church who hasn't heard anyone say, "Thank you for what you do, for who you are," for a long time. How can you speak affirmingly to point out evidences of God's grace and goodness in the members of His body? When you do that, you're fanning into flame the gifts of God that are in one another.

Sometimes we withhold affirmation out of fear, thinking, "I don't know how to encourage another person." So we're silent which can sometimes hurt. Sometimes we withhold affirmation out of pride. We see the work God is doing in someone else, but we're not going to tell them,

because if we do then we would need to think less of ourselves. But isn't that the point? We are to think more highly of others than we are of ourselves (Romans 12:3).

So affirm one another. Don't let fear or pride keep you from helping a brother or sister see how much this church needs them this week. Look for a way to encourage or affirm a member of the body this week. Make it a point to fan into flame those gifts that God has given.

That's the first attitude—an attitude of inferiority.

An attitude of superiority: They don't belong—I can get along without them.

The second is an attitude of superiority that looks at other members of the body and says, "Well, they don't belong here" or, "I could get along just fine without them." In verses 14-20, Paul is talking about how the body is made up of many diverse parts, but then in verses 21-24, he's showing us that the health of the body depends on each part working in dependence on the others.

Verse 21: *"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.'" Then in verse 22 he says, "On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable." Now we say, "No one is indispensable." But Paul says, "Actually, yes. Those parts of the body that seem to be weaker—they are indispensable." He continues, "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."*

Translate that into church life. One thing this means is that we should not put people up on a pedestal and treat them like they're some kind of celebrity, like they're the most important person in the body. No, we are brothers and sisters in Christ. Few of us are spectacular. Most of us are ordinary. Look around. You're looking at mostly ordinary people and that's okay. But each of us is precious to God and each of us is valuable to His body. No member of the body of Christ is optional. No member is merely helpful. Each one is necessary.

I once heard a Christian leader talking about people who left his church because they disagreed. He called them "blessed subtractions." That makes me sick. That's an awful thing to say of another Christian. There are no blessed subtractions in the body of Christ. We need those with whom we disagree. We need those who rub us the wrong way. What is community, after all?

Henri Nouwen put it this way: "Community is the place where the person you least want to live with always lives!" Realize that you are the person someone else least wants to live with. You are a difficult person in someone's life. To impress this truth on everyone's mind, Look at the person sitting next to you and say, "You are a difficult person in someone's life—do you realize that? Do you see that about yourself?"

We need people with whom we do not agree. We need people who rub us the wrong way. We need people whose value is overlooked by the power brokers of this world.

We welcomed the Friendship Class back to church this week. I'm so glad they're part of our family here at New Covenant. As you see the Friendship Class roaming our hallways or worshipping in our services, have you ever considered how God has used those precious friends to bring us joy? Have you ever thought about how they teach us to be more grateful? How they show us—when we're getting a little too puffed up with ourselves—that we need to humble ourselves before the Lord? Have you ever thought about how they communicate to us that God loves each and every one of His children? Each one is important. No one is more important than anyone else.

So don't judge by human appearances. Don't rate people by their gifts. No one has all the gifts of the Spirit. The only gift each of us has is the gift of the Spirit Himself, and the first fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives is the fruit of love (Galatians 5:22-23). So we need to love one another and realize, "I cannot mature as a believer in Christ without depending on the gifts God has given to my brothers and sisters. If I think I am fine in myself and that I can grow into maturity in Christ by myself, I'm going to grow in a very misshapen way. I need the members of the body in order to mature into the image of Jesus Christ." We need one another. There's no one you can afford to ignore. There's no one you can despise. There's no one you can treat as irrelevant to your life in Christ. So if you feel an attitude of superiority, if you think, "I can do without the body," God's calling you through these verses to repent today.

An attitude of apathy: I don't care.

Then the last attitude he addresses is in the second part of verse 24—an attitude of apathy. This is the feeling, "I don't care for the body." Look at what he says in the middle of 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."* Just pause there. When we are all honoring the weaker members, when we are all building up others and not thinking of ourselves, then there will be no division in the body. When does division happen? It's when we're thinking of me, me, me, me, me. If we would give honor to the body of Christ the way Christ has, there would be no division in the body.

Then here in the second part of verse 25, this is the phrase I really want to emphasize: *"But that the members may have the same care for one another."* Or as the NIV says, *"There should be no division in the body, but that each of its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honored, every part rejoices with it."* Just think about it. When you step on a nail, your whole body starts sympathizing with the sole of your

foot. When you have an earache, that's all you can think about. The whole focus moves to the ear. When you have a toothache, everything focuses there.

Friends, there are no private sufferings in the body of Christ. If one member is suffering, we all hurt. And there are no solitary victories in the body either. What do you say when a runner is victorious in a marathon? Do you come up to him and say, "I congratulate your legs"? No. You congratulate him. The whole body ran that marathon. And likewise, when one member of the body is rejoicing, when one member of the body is being lifted up, the whole body rejoices with him.

The point Paul is bringing home to us is that just as Christ cherishes and values each and every member of His body, so should we. We should have equal concern for one another. Jesus doesn't put anyone on a shelf. Jesus doesn't neglect anyone for the more elite. When you're talking to Jesus, you have His full attention. Jesus isn't looking over your shoulder, wondering if there's someone more important to talk to. No, when you're talking with Jesus, He's listening. He's caring. When you're weak, sick or hurting, Jesus is tender. "A bruised reed He will not break; a dimly smoldering wick He will not put out" (Isaiah 42:1-4; Matthew 20:15-21).

We need to take our lead from Jesus Who said in Matthew 25:40, "*Truly, I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me*" (NIV). In other words, whatever you do for God's people, you do for Jesus. How you treat God's people is how you treat Jesus. Sam Allberry puts it like this: "If we serve our (and His!) brothers and sisters, we serve Him. The reverse is also true. If we fail to serve His people, we fail to serve Him. Neglecting the church is neglecting Jesus." Let that sink in. Neglecting the church is neglecting Jesus. Verse 27 states, "*Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it*" (NIV).

I've been reading a wonderful book by Dr. Paul Brand called Fearfully and Wonderfully Made. He talks explains that the malfunction of a single cell in the body, like leukemia, can result in death. Before we were born, when we were in our mother's wombs, only a third of our blood—just the amount of blood we needed to develop our lung tissue—traveled to our lungs. The rest of our oxygen we got through the placenta.

He says there's a special blood vessel called the ductus arteriosus that has the sole function of shunting most of the blood flow to the rest of the body when we were growing inside our mother's womb. Then at the moment we were born, we needed all our blood to take a new route through our lungs for oxygenation. So in those few moments when you're waiting for a newborn infant to take her first breath, this shunted blood is now being redirected through the baby. Dr. Brand writes:

To accomplish this change, an amazing event occurs. A flap descends like a curtain, deflecting the blood flow back to the aorta. Over the next few days, a customized muscle squeezes shut the ductus arteriosus. That muscle exists only for this one essential act. If it fails to perform its designated task, the baby will die without surgical intervention. And if it succeeds, the heart permanently seals the ductus arteriosus and the body gradually absorbs it. On this little-known group of transitory cells, every human life depends.

What's the point? Every part of the body—every cell in the body—needs to accept that “the needs of the whole body are my purpose for existence. I exist so that the whole body can be healthy. That's why I'm here.” Dr. Brand says, “Therein lies the secret of Christ's body. If each of us can learn to glory in the fact that we matter little, except in relation to the whole, and if each will acknowledge the worth in every other member, then perhaps the cells of Christ's body will begin acting as Christ intended.”

Say that to yourself. “I matter little except in relation to the whole. My purpose is to build up the whole body.” Or as Blake put it a few weeks ago, “It's not about me.” Life is not about me. God has put me into His body so that I can build up the whole.

Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we lose sight of this so easily. We get so self-contained, so independent and disconnected. Thank You for the reminder today from Your Word that we need the church and the church needs us. Lord Jesus, we look to You as our Head and pray that You would fill us with Your concern for Your body. Fill us with Your love for Your body. Help us this week, Lord, to do our part to encourage and build up one another. Help us be renewed in our understanding that each of us matters as we work in relation to the whole body.

We look forward to the day when we're going to be gathered with Your whole church, with people from every language, tribe and nation, when we're going to live forever in the new heavens and the new earth as one body, united under Christ our Head. When we see Your face, Lord, we will see along with You diverse people from all over the world and from every age that You've redeemed through Your blood. Looking forward to that day, Lord, we pray that we would live today with deep, deep love and commitment to Your body, just as You are, Lord Jesus. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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