

The Rock: 10-03-2021

The Gifts series

First reading: 1 Timothy 2:1-7

Title: One body - Many parts

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

Theme:

Being part of the body of Christ in the truest sense demands no boasting or division, but rather a grateful humility and unity.

Introduction:

As we continue here in Paul's letter to his Corinthian friends, I began looking at this big portion of text and was prayerful around what is the key here for us all.

Afterall, when you read it through at a quick pace, which we always tend to do, we walk away thinking -one body, many parts. Got it, moving on.

So, what I want to do is break it down into what seems to be the two sections or points Paul is trying to make here.

First, verses 12-20 and then 21-26

Two things stood out for me that I feel are for us to focus on. First is: "...so it is with Christ." 12:12c

The second is: "...that there be no division in the body..."12:25a

The thing we need to remember in all these things which are given to the Church is that Christ is the cornerstone of it all, and it is from there we build.

Each one of us is a unique and necessary piece of what God is building -His Church. Operating as we are gifted and designed.

We find that again, Paul continues with the theme of unity within diversity by adding another layer to it.

Almost as if to say: "This is a big thing that you struggle with, so I'm going to emphasize again how important this is."

The necessity of each part having a vital role in the success and health of the whole. That is what we strive for: Health and success. One can be successful and not very healthy. Strange, I know, but it can happen.

Remember, just because you are not like the person sitting next to you, not gifted as they are, whether more or less, does not diminish your role and

importance in the purposes and plan of God.

Again, unity is critical. So, to carry this analogy another step:

The Story:

What happens when you get sick? Or worse, when one of your body parts begins to fail, to diminish? Nothing good, as we all know.

The simple fact is that nature and time tell me that I am no longer 25. My brain may think I can play football and baseball, and run like I'm being chased.

But my back, my knees and my eyes are all telling me, "Your warranty is either running out or has run out. Slow it down pal. Things ain't what they used to be."

Yet, I still need these to operate as best as possible in the grand scheme of things. This is simple to understand, I know. We all know this, but as is seen in this text, it is not so easy to practice what we know to be true. Why?

Because too often we struggle to see this truth within the local congregation, and sadly in the global church of Christ.

Comparing, trying to be something we aren't, jealousy over those who can do

things which I cannot. Big church vs. little church, smoke show and all the lights vs hymns and a piano..

Instead of asking God: "Ok, since there is no good place to serve you, except where you set me down, what do you have for me to do? What part am I to fill?"

The unity within diversity is once again mapped out for us in the trinity. We are all one in Christ -Yet, as individuals, we are still who we are:

-1 Corinthians 12:13 (ESV)

"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."

White, black, Hispanic, Asian, Middle eastern and so on. Unity within this diversity is Christ's body, the Church which He is putting together for God's glory.

John the Apostle says as much:

-Revelation 7:9a (ESV)

"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb..."

Yet, in Christ, through His Spirit, God the Father has made us one body. Being one doesn't mean we cease to be the individual God made us to be -in fact it's just the opposite.

Being in Christ ought to bring out the best of each part in the community, no matter how insignificant that part feels.

The best example I have ever heard is that of an orchestra. I've shared this before I think, but it bears repeating.

All the sections, so different from one another: brass, strings, wind section, percussion and way in the back this one little triangle. At the end of the line in the flute section also, sits the tiny piccolo.

Two seemingly insignificant little instruments. That is until they are out of time with the rest. Then you got problems.

As the conductor directs the entire mass of people in perfect unity -different instruments -different parts -all together in unity -sounding wonderful...until...

That guy in the back playing that little triangle decides to go rogue. He doesn't like the idea that he sits and sits and

sits until the end of all things to hit his instrument once...ping...

One ping only...

Instead, he does his own thing, then the piccolo player, emboldened does her own thing, high pitched and out of time, you no longer have Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite.

You have noise, a glorious train-wreck, indistinct and horrible. Why? Because they didn't work together under the direction of the conductor.

That is just what we've got going on here in verses 14-17, and Paul, as always speaks order and sense into the chaos:

-1 Corinthians 12:14-17 (ESV)

"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 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. 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?"

You see, when the body of believers (The Church community) operates outside of its giftings and God's calling -comparing, envying, and being jealous, the outworking of that is not the symphony God's wants to conduct through His people.

Why does this happen? It seems so obvious we ought to get it. Well, Paul tells us in both his letters to the church of Ephesus and Colosse. Reminding us of things we too must do:

-Ephesians 4:31-32 (ESV)

"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

-Colossians 3:8-10 (ESV)

"But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator."

These are the things that the enemy, the devil, uses to cause disunity and they

stifle the gifts and the growth of God's people.

How do I know? Well, who of you would try growing in your gifts, knowing that you will likely miss the mark at times, when there is always someone right there to make sure you know just where you went wrong and missed the mark?

Or worse, you heard about their thoughts from another who heard it from another that sister or brother so and so thought (you fill in the blank here) about you.

Now, I know this never happens, but hypothetically speaking, just in case it did.

The answer is: You wouldn't even try. You see, a body has to work together in order to be healthy. The gifts will not function as they should if you are not.

There has to be unity in the midst of all our differences to be successful.

Let me ask you something: How emboldened do you think a young person would be to step out and into ministry if they were encouraged by those who have gone before, and continue to serve and minister in the congregation.

Being that mentor, which young person needs. Pastor Marty is asking those of

you seasoned Christians about that very thing. Do not ever think that when you hit a certain age you no longer have anything to offer. That thinking is unhealthy and does not create a healthy body.

Let's be careful too, because if that young person is simply told all the time that, "You are doing it all wrong, you need to do it better, do it my way."

That too is very unhelpful in the discipleship process here at The Rock.

You see, this is what Paul is dealing with here with regard to the body -and all the gifts that were to be working in unity. He reminds them in verse 20:

-1 Corinthians 12:20 (ESV)

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

Which is why he moves once again to clarify even more. Section two -and then we are done.

-1 Corinthians 12:21-22 (ESV)

"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..."

I know, again very basic. But I take the time because Paul took the time. For it seems that it is always the basic, the simple, the mundane which always trips us up.

Thinking that the other is always less important than the self. Remembering the lesson from the upper room last week.

God, in His goodness and purposes is conforming us to the likeness of Jesus, and yet we are still ourselves. Right? Yes, and that is the blessing and the problem..

Gifted and designed as God sees fit. So, that means that being conformed to Jesus, we are actually becoming our true selves, as God designed us to be from eternity. Having knit us together in our mother's womb. Numbering our days and giving us our part in the divine orchestra.

The closer we are to Him, the more we are conformed to Jesus, the more we have to be rid of the old self, and clothe ourselves with the new.

When I see myself that way, I find that the other is as much an Image Bearer as I am, and as necessary a part of this community as I.

So, it is foolish to think the eye can do without the hand. Don't believe me? When

you leave here today, grab the steering wheel with your hands, close your eyes and try driving away.

See how that works for you...pun intended. It won't, and none of us would ever even try that.

For Paul, this is essential and central in all of his letters. The unity of the body of Christ.

-1 Corinthians 12:23-24 (ESV)

"...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..."

These verses seem to be the natural outworking of modesty and sensibility within a healthy society. AS well as reinforcing the fact that all parts, no matter which, are absolutely essential.

No boasting about what you have, or fretting and complaining about what you don't.

Bloom where you are planted, within this community of believers. Bloom outside of this body, outside of these walls where

God has set you down to work, where you spend the majority of your time.

I close, as Paul does, and then with a quote from Gordon Fee:

-1 Corinthians 12:25-26 (ESV)

"...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."

"The diversity in the body, Paul says, is by God's design. 'God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be.' That could sound like an argument for the orderly arrangement of the body; but not so. The emphasis is on the fact that each member is there by divine placement."

-NICNT Fee Pg. 611

You are here by God's design and your choice. I find great comfort in that. The greater challenge for us all is to ask: What are my gifts and am I seeking God and the opportunity to use them, to grow in them, to reach my world and serve my community?