

“HEALTHY BODIES”

We spent some time pondering three life pursuits drawn from Hebrews 10. Due to the fact that we have confident access to God’s presence through the blood of Christ our Savior, the intercession of Christ our High Priest and the cleansing of Christ our sanctifier, Hebrews calls us to three foundational life pursuits.

- **Let us continually and confidently draw near to God in full assurance of faith.**
- **Let us continually and steadfastly hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering.**
- **Let us continually and thoughtfully encourage one another to love and good deeds.**

The Bible addresses these pursuits numerous times and each one warrants further exploration. I have felt led however to focus on the last one dealing with the call to regularly gather to together for the purpose of encouraging one another to love and live like Jesus. Such encouragement is not just a good idea but necessary. It is necessary because we live in a spiritually hostile environment. It is necessary because we all struggle with ingrained tendencies to wander from the path.

But encourage one another every day, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Hebrews 3:13

You all strengthen the drooping hands and weak knees! Make straight paths for your feet so that if any part is lame, it will be healed rather than injured more seriously. Pursue the goal of peace along with everyone—and holiness as well, because no one will see the Lord without it. Make sure that no one misses out on God’s grace. Make sure that no root of bitterness grows up that might cause trouble and pollute many people. Make sure that no one becomes sexually immoral or ungodly like Esau. He sold his inheritance as the oldest son for one meal. Hebrews 12:12-16

These things can only happen in the context of regular interaction. We, especially in the Northwest, are an independent spirit. We strive to live independent of others. Our pride resists help from other people. We can do it on our own. The reality is we cannot function well on our own. We need God’s help. We need the encouragement of other people. A predator first tries to disconnect the weak from the protection of the herd.

Over the next few weeks, I invite you to join me in a deeper exploration of and appreciation for the meaningful God-ordained interaction between followers of Jesus Christ.

It is one of the core values and purposes of our church.

- **Continually cultivate deeper communion with God. (Love God)**
- **Persistently pursue more meaningful connection with each other. (Love People)**
- **Resolutely resist evil and restore righteousness in our life and community. (Be holy)**
- **Reach and teach people for Christ.**

God used many figures and symbols to communicate essential truths regarding the church.

TEMPLE OR BUILDING

BRANCH

FAMILY

ARMY

PRIESTHOOD

CHURCH

BRIDE

BODY

One of the most expressive of these is a body. The nature and function of the human body beautifully expresses the nature and function of the church. By the way, the term usually translated church comes from the Greek words “called” and “out”. It referred to an assembly of people with a united purpose.

“Ek” (out) “kaleo” (to call)

Notice the similarity to the concept of encouragement “para” (along side) and “kaleo” (to call).

The theological study of the church is called Ecclesiology. (Study of the called out ones) The study of the church is an extensive one. Numerous books have been dedicated to understanding what the Bible teaches concerning the church. It is not my intention to attempt a thorough examination of the church. My focus through the summer will be to explore the implications of the church functioning like a body and the specific commands related to how we are to interact with each other. Many of those commands include the words “one another” or “each other”. These focus on the need for reciprocal interaction. The command to “love your neighbor” focuses on only one side of the relationship. The command to “love one another” emphasizes the need for a mutual interaction. The employment of the term “body” concerning the church strikingly expresses the nature and function God designed for His followers.

Today, I will introduce the three essential elements that characterize both the human body and the body of Christ. Through the summer I will offer some greater detail and application of these three essential concepts through an exploration of the numerous related “one another” passages sprinkled throughout the New Testament. The three essential functions can be easily observed in 1 Corinthians 12. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians included answers to some questions. One of the questions related to spiritual gifts and the body of Christ. Chapter 12, 13 and 14 comprise Paul’s answer.

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. 1 Corinthians 12:1

There is no more extensive explanation of how the function of the human body illustrates how the followers of Jesus Christ should function than in this chapter. Paul demonstrated how the three essential concepts concerning the functioning of human body perfectly illustrate how he designed his followers to interact. First, I want to introduce the three concepts and then observe how Paul uses them in relationship to the body of Christ.

UNITY

There is a difference between togetherness and unity. Two roosters tied together and thrown over a clothes line is togetherness but not unity. Unity implies commonality, agreement, common goals, common purpose, and common life. The body lives and thrives as a single unit as established and empowered by the Lord. Our bodies function as a whole. Every part is connected as a whole. Every part shares common life. Every part is directed by ONE head. The

body shares the same blood. The body shares the same DNA. The body shares a nervous system. Each part of the body serves the whole.

DIVERSITY

Although unified, the body is comprised of distinct parts which perform distinct functions. The body functions and grows according to the individual worth and working of each member as assigned by the Lord.

MUTUALITY

The proper function of each part of the body relies on the proper functioning of all the other parts as designed and directed by the Lord. There are dysfunctions and diseases which violate these principles. MS is a disease in which the body somehow attacks the natural protective coating on the electrical system which causes a short circuit or scarring which disrupts the signals to the rest of the body. Cancer attacks healthy cells in the body. Other diseases disrupt the communication between the head and the body. If the glands fail to do their part, so many other parts are affected. The list of possible malfunctions in the body is enormous at every level and system. All of these malfunctions somehow hinder the divinely designed functioning of the body.

Unity – Diversity – Mutuality

It is the same as with the church. God designed the church to function best in unity, diversity and mutuality. Dysfunction results whenever we violate any of these fundamental principles or they get out of balance.

When we fail to understand our essential unity...

When we fail to appreciate the need for diversity...

When we forget that we are mutually dependent on one another...

...The body will not function or grow as God intended.

Most all of the commands regarding our interaction with one another relate to a violation of one or more of these basic principles. How does Paul illustrate these principles in his letter to the Corinthians? All three principles appear in verse 4-7.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects (diversity), but the same God who works all things in all persons (unity). But to each one (diversity) is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (mutuality). 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

The principle of diversity is clearly illustrated in these verses by the use of the word varieties three times and the use of the words “each one”. The principle of unity is clearly illustrated by the use of the word “same”. The principle of mutuality is clearly illustrated by the use of the words “common good”. I believe this passage is a key to understanding spiritual gifting.

Paul mentions three categories; gifts, ministries, effects. Views concerning the gifts differ widely. Since my focus is not on the gifts but on the body I will only mentioned how I feel these three categories relate to one another.

“Gifts” refer to specific capabilities granted and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

“Ministries” refer to a particular ministry in which those specific gifts are exercised.

“Effects” referred to the kinds of things that result from the exercise of gifts in a particular ministry.

I believe I have a prophetic gift which I exercise in the Ministry of pastor/teacher through which any number of effects may take place through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Paul lists a number of effects that may come about through an individual exercising their specific gift in the context of their specific ministry.

For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. 1 Cor 12:8-10

The example clearly again emphasizes the principle of unity and diversity. Paul considered this principle important enough to elaborate further.

But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:11-12

The Holy Spirit brings about results according to His will. It is important to note that, when it comes to gifts, it is not what we want but what the Holy Spirit wants. Paul again points to the physical body to illustrate unity and diversity; many parts, one body. He clearly applies the principle to the body of Christ; so also is Christ. Paul thought it necessary to explain how we become members in the body of Christ. This is a very important verse regarding and often misunderstood phrase.

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:13

You may have heard the term “baptism of the spirit”. Many believe this phrase refers to a special empowerment of the Holy Spirit after or subsequent to the salvation experience. It is also called the “second blessing”. This passage clearly defines the baptism by the Holy Spirit as the moment when God places in or connects to or identifies with the body of Christ. The term “baptism” means “to dip”. It was a term used for the process of dyeing cloth. When a piece of cloth was dipped into a particular colored dye it would forever be associated with that color. At the moment of our conversion, we were baptized into or identified with the body of Christ. At that moment we become fully functioning members of Christ’s body.

Paul continued his emphasis on unity and diversity.

For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. 1 Corinthians 12:14-20

The theme here is obvious; one body, many members -- unity/diversity. Again Paul emphasized the fact that it is his placement not our preference. God places each and every member where he wants them to be. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians he clearly states that the growth of the body comes when each member operates according to their gifting.

but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. Ephesians 4:15-16

Having clearly illustrated the principle of unity and diversity in the body, Paul illustrates the additional principle of mutuality. It is clear that there is one body made up of individual parts. It is also clear that none of those individual parts can function without the other parts. This cannot be truer than in our physical bodies.

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. 1 Corinthians 12:21-26

Notice the emphasis on "need". There are no unnecessary parts in the body. Yes, we may be able to function without certain parts but not as well as when all the parts are functioning properly. The practice of discounting or removing individual body parts only hurts the whole. There are no insignificant members. See what happens when you remove the tiny little pituitary gland. See what happens when the thyroid stops working. The major organs seem to get all of the press. There are no self-serving parts of the body. Each part serves the other parts out of necessity. One little thing goes out and it affects the whole.

Paul answers here why God designed the body to function this way. First, it promotes unity. Second, it promotes mutual care. Every member is necessary to the proper functioning of the whole. We need to take good care of every member. Paul again moves from the physical body to the body of Christ.

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 healing, 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 healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 1 Corinthians 12:27-30

One more time, Paul affirms the principle of unity and diversity in the body of Christ.

We are all members of the body of Christ and each plays a specific part according to God's will.

The last verse of the chapter finishes Paul's discussion of unity, diversity and mutuality. Unfortunately it is often misunderstood.

But earnestly desire the greater gifts. Yet I will show you a still more excellent way. 1 Corinthians 12:31

Most translations indicate this as a command or imperative to desire the greater gifts. The grammar however, could also be translated as a statement of fact. Given the context, a command to desire the greater gifts would seem contradictory to what Paul had just taught. He clearly indicated that the gifts had nothing to do with our will but God's. He just emphasized that there were no insignificant gifts. He affirmed that everyone has different gifts. So the command to desire or have warm feelings for or envy the more prominent gifts makes no sense. If you understand this as a statement rather than a command the logic would go something like this.

God places and gifts individual members into the body of Christ according to his will. There are no insignificant members. Every member is necessary and dependent on all the other members. But you guys are clamoring for the more showy gifts. Everybody wants to be the heart and not pituitary gland. You're jealous that you're not the lung. Shame on you! You're focusing on yourselves and yet I'm going to show you a more excellent way.

What is that more excellent way?

What follows chapter 12? It is first Corinthians chapter 13 also known as the love chapter. Paul began chapter 13 making sure that they understood no matter how gifted they may be, without love, it was worth nothing. Self-centeredness or lack of love diminishes gifting; no matter how grand your gift may be.

Every true follower of Jesus Christ has been placed by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. Every individual member is connected to the whole by the Holy Spirit with Christ as the head. Every individual member has been specially gifted to serve the whole. Every individual member is critically necessary to the proper functioning of every other member.

We all serve the same Christ empowered by the same spirit; **unity**.

The Spirit specially places and gifts each member to serve the whole; **diversity**.

All the members need the other members; **mutuality**.

The numerous instructions concerning the interaction between believers all fall under these three principles. Let us gather together to continuously encourage one another to live and love like Christ.