We From One body and We Form One Body

(Serve Together)

1 Corinthians 12:1-31

Key Verse: 12:26 “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.”

Today we live in the era of diversity. In the past, we had only a few TV channels, such as NBC, ABC, CBS, CNN and so on. But today we have more than 200 TV channels including cable and internet. We can choose any channel by operating a remote control and watch all the channels we want. We also experience diversity in university. There are different races, nationalities, cultures, languages, ages, and so on. The word ‘university’ means ‘unity’ in ‘diversity.’

In the Corinth Church, there was division not only caused by preference, but also by comparison of spiritual gifts. They compared and competed with each other because of their different gifts. As their spiritual father and mentor, Paul admonishes them and teaches them the importance of unity and the spirit of community as parts of the body of Christ.

First, from one and the same Spirit (1-11) In the book of Judge we read a grotesque story about the civil war between the tribe of Benjamin and the rest of the tribes of Israel. The tragedy started with the rape of a Levite concubine by the vicious Benjamites. When the report of the rape and death of the woman was reported to the whole assembly of Israelites, they were furious and were about to attack the Benjamites. To shorten the story, through the civil war between the Benjamites and the Israelites, all the Benjamites were killed, including women and children. Later, all the Israelites wept and grieved over the death of their fellow Benjamite brothers. Even though they practiced justice against the evilness of their brothers, it was still painful for them to see the tragedy of their brothers. This is because they knew that they all, whether Benjamite or other Israelites, came from the one and same father, Jacob.

Paul had the same feeling about the believers in the church. They received different spiritual gifts from God, but all of them came from the one and same Spirit, who distributed them as God determined. (4,11) They served the Lord in different services, but they all served the same Lord. (5) They worked hard in many ways, but they all worked for the same God. (6) They were all baptized in the name of Jesus and confessed Jesus as their Lord and Savior. By calling God ‘*Abba*’ father, they all became children of God, and they all became brothers and sisters who had the same Father in heaven. Paul said that in the past they were idol worshipers, but now by the grace of God, they became children of God. Without the work of the Holy Spirit no one confessed that Jesus is Lord. (2-3) Paul emphasized spiritual brotherhood and unity among the church members by the work of the Holy Spirit.

In verse 7 Paul said that their spiritual gifts as the manifestation of the spirit have a given purpose which is for the common good. Read verse 7. “***Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good***.” What is the common good for all these different spiritual gifts? It is to build up the body of Christ, which is the church. As parts of a body are given to form a body, so are too the spiritual gifts given to build up the church of Christ. Some are given with a message of wisdom. Others are given a message of knowledge. Still others with faith, or of healing, of miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in different kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. (8-10) In verse 11 Paul repeats, “***All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.***” In this verse we must consider God’s sovereignty over spiritual gifts from the words, “*just as he determines*.” God knows each of us more than anyone else because he made us. He knows what each of us needs and what is good for us. He also has his own right to do as he pleases. We call this God’s sovereignty. When we acknowledge God’s sovereignty over our lives, we give thanks to God in all circumstances and obey his will. It is the same as a body becoming healthy and strong when each part of the body functions well as is given. Paul explains this in verses 12-31.

Second, unity and diversity in the body. (12-31) Look at verse 12. “***Just as a body, thought one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.***” As I mentioned before, the Corinth Church consisted of the Jewish believers and the gentile believers. Among the gentile believers there were many different nationalities and cultures. But when they came to Jesus, they all became one family. They were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ by one Spirit so as to form one body. (13) In Jesus there was no Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, but only Christians. Paul illustrates this with a picture of a human body. The foot cannot say that it does not belong to the body because it is not a hand. (15) The ear cannot say that it does not belong to the body because it is not an eye. (16) If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? (17) If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? In other words, if the whole body wants to become an eye, which part can be an ear? If all American citizens want to become a president of America, who can be a vice president, or secretary, or congressmen, or police officer, janitor, or chef? If all members in the church want to preach, who can serve music, prayer, teaching, offering, and so on? Look at verses 18-20. “***But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.***”

Thus far, Paul mentioned unity in diversity of spiritual gifts by comparing the function of each part of the body. Now he wants to talk about the attitude of each part toward one another. Each part of our body has its own role and function which is indispensable to support the body. The eye has the sense of sight like a window of the body. But if the eye becomes proud and says to the hand, “I don’t need you!” The head is one of the most essential parts of the body, but it cannot say to the feet, “Hey, feet. Because you are far from me, I don’t need you!” Even though the hand cannot become an eye and the feet cannot become a head, they are all indispensable. Paul said that those parts which seem weaker are indispensable, and the parts that are less honorable we treat with special honor, and the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty. (21-23) As any part of the body is not unimportant and indispensable, so any person and any position in the church is not unimportant and precious before God’s eyes. Just as a pastor is important and precious before the eyes of God, so too are the elders and deacons important and precious before the eyes of God.

But here Paul emphasizes the mercy and compassion of God on the forgotten people and least parts of the body. Look at verses 24b-25. “***But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other***.” God loves all parts equally regardless of their function and position. This is because all parts were made by God. There is no unimportant and least precious part before God. There are no unimportant and least precious children before their parents. All their children, whether they are good or bad, are precious and lovely to their parents because they were born of them. God does not want division among their children. God shows his equal concern for all of them. Jacob loved Rachel, his uncle Laban’s second daughter. Jacob worked hard for 7 years to marry Rachel. But on his wedding day Laban gave Leah, Rachael’s older sister, to Jacob instead of Rachael. Jacob worked seven more years to marry Rachel. Leah was sorrowful because she was not loved by Jacob. God had compassion on Leah who was not loved by Jacob, who loved only Rachael. So, God opened the womb of Leah and gave her four sons while God closed the womb of Rachael. Here we learn that our God is fair and compassionate. God showed his compassion on Leah who was not loved by her husband Jacob. Through the story of Jacob God teaches us to have equal concern for each other as he did to Jacob’s family.

Look at verse 26. “***If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it***.” There is no finger, whether it is the thumb or last finger, which cannot feel pain when we bite them. When I bite both, I feel more pain in the last finger. The weaker I bit, the more pain I felt. This is the same as how we treat our children and our co-workers. We must remember that God takes care of and is equally concerned about the weak and the least with the strong and the most. I had a chance to watch the movie Ben Hur last week. In the movie, Jesus was preaching the sermon on the Mount to the crowd. But the eyes of Jesus were not on the crowd, but on Judah Ben Hur, who was passing by the crowd with anger and hatred. The eyes of Jesus were on one of his lost sheep Ben Hur. Jesus said this in the Parable of the Lost Sheep. Jesus said that the good shepherd leaves his 99 sheep in the open country and goes after one lost sheep until he finds it. And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. (Lk 15;3-6)

We must learn the sense of community and the importance of unity in a family and in a church. If one coworker suffers, all members suffer with them. If one coworker is honored, all members rejoice with them. This is possible when we have the heart of Jesus. The heart of Jesus is the heart of the father in the Parable of the Lost Son (Lk 15:11-32). There was a man who had two sons. The younger one asked his father to give him the portion of his estate and left for a distant country. In the distant country he wasted all his money. When he had nothing and became hungry, he came back to his senses that he sinned against God and his father. After his second son left home, his father could not sleep. He waited and waited until his son came back home. Finally, his son came back home. The moment he found his son, his father ran, hugged him, kissed him, and restored all his rights as his son. But his first son who was with his father was not happy with his brother. He did not celebrate and even not join his father. He did not know the heart of his father. The heart of Jesus is the heart of the shepherd for the lost sheep. The heart of Jesus is the heart of the father for his lost son. I am sorry for my lack of love and concern for suffering coworkers here. I pray that God may help me to show more concern and care for them. Look at verse 27. “***Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it***.” Amen!

In a church or ministry, some are called to be apostles, which means missionaries. Others are called to be prophets or teachers. Still others received gifts of doing miracles, of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of speaking in different tongues. They all received different gifts from God, they all use their gifts to build up the body of Christ, which is the church. Among us, the West family received gifts of music. The Lee family received gifts of serving. The Park family received gifts of coworking. The Lanier family received a gift of life, baby Gabriel, and so on. When we have equal concern for each other and establish the unity of Christ, God will surely bless each family and our ministry. May God give us the spirit of unity and the sense of community so that we may continue to advance the gospel, raise Jesus’ disciples, and expand God’s kingdom in Wash U and in all other campuses around us. Amen!

Let us read verse 31. “***Now eagerly desire the greater gifts***.” We will study what the greater gifts are next week.