



“Let’s Care for One Another”  
I Corinthians 12:12-26  
July 25, 2021

As we get into the Word this morning, I ask each of you to please join me in I Corinthians Chapter 12 for a message that I have titled *Let’s Care for One Another*.

As we prepare ourselves for the content of this portion of Scripture, I want to let you know that this week I have been dealing with a sore ear. I know this is kind of a gritty and personal way to get started, but here is the thing: it is very much in keeping with what we find in this morning’s portion of the Bible.

My ear has been irritated all week long, and it had to do with the buildup of the waxy substance that we all have to deal with from time to time. It is a biological reality, right? Sometimes it afflicts us all.

I am thankful that the issue has been resolved and that my ear did not have to deal with the situation by itself. It was not left to fend for itself. The ear would have had a difficult time cleaning itself, wouldn’t it? Thankfully, the other parts of my body got involved to help the ear out. The hand got involved and it went and took hold of the bottle of the solution that needed to be dripped into the ear. But the hand would have never been able to go to the place where the resource was if the legs and the feet did not get involved to carry the rest of the body there. Am I right or am I right?

Furthermore, what good would the legs and the hands have been in laying hold of the resource that was necessary if the eyes did not have sight to see where it was and the ability to guide the body to where the drips needed to be dropped?

Furthermore, what if the heart was not beating? Furthermore, what if the veins were not carrying the blood that the heart was beating out? Furthermore, what if the lungs were not drawing breath? We can go on and on with this, can’t we?

But as it is, the body is a unit and it is filled with so many different functions that all work together for the good of the body. Brothers and sisters, this is the brilliant illustration that was given through the Apostle Paul to all of us to understand how God the Holy Spirit designs the church of God to build itself up in love.

This wonderful body metaphor is used several times in the pages of the New Testament to get across to the family of Christ that the Spirit of God is empowering a whole array of abilities, so that the church can be built up and can be healthy and can be present doing the work of the Kingdom here on this earth.

Last week we talked about sixteen different spiritual gifts and it is such a beautiful thing that, by the grace of God, everything is working harmoniously but would you believe me if I were to tell you that there is something that can disrupt it? There is something that can hinder the body in working in harmony as it is designed to do.

That hindrance is the ongoing presence of sin in us. Praise God that those in Christ who have come to faith in Him, we are saved by grace and given forgiveness and the gift of His righteousness through faith in Christ. But as we know biblically and experientially, we are still dealing with the lingering presence of fallenness and sin in us.

With that fallenness can come thinking that is all twisted up. Theologians will call this the noetic effects of sin; how sin still lingers even among Christians to hinder clarity and right thoughts about ourselves and God. So we constantly need the Spirit of God to be taking us back with clarity to the truth of God.

There are forms of thought that can hinder the harmonious operation of the body of Christ. As we dig into the details of I Corinthians Chapter 12, we are going to see a couple of them. One of them is that we have thoughts of inferiority. The other is that there can be thoughts of superiority as well.

There can be some in the body of Christ who get down on themselves, looking at other people and what they do and they say, I don't do that. I'm not as significant as that. You don't really need me. These are thoughts of inferiority.

Or it could be the other way around with thoughts of superiority. It is possible to be puffed up with arrogance in the church. There can be the sense that someone thinks they really don't need anyone else. So it can go both ways. There can be thoughts of uselessness and there can be thoughts of self-sufficiency hindering the operation of the body of Christ.

We see Paul dealing with this because these attitudes were present in Corinth and they can very much be present in California. They could be present in Bellflower, California. They probably are very much present here at Bethel Grace, so must say, Lord, let me be transformed constantly by the renewing of my mind. Let my mind be in sync with what Your Word reveals about who You are and how You design the church to function.

We will take this morning's section of I Corinthians Chapter 12 in three parts because there are three paragraphs here. What we will see is how Paul started by declaring the beautiful, glorious spiritual reality of what the church is. Then Paul will deal with all the thoughts of inferiority, and he finally deals with the thoughts of superiority that can be found among even us in the body of Christ.

Paul first defined:

### **1. The wonderful spiritual reality of the church (12:12-14)**

Verse 12:

**<sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>For the body does not consist of one member but of many.**

So we see that Paul talked about the body of Christ as a Spirit-filled organization, or better yet, an organism—one man in Christ. Here in this text that has so much to say about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we are reminded of the great and wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit.

It is the Spirit of the Lord who is leading us into faith in Christ, but as we trust in the Lord and as we are being born again, it is the Spirit who comes to dwell within us. We have two images of our life together in the Holy Spirit.

There is the language of baptism and the language of drinking. The language of baptism is that of emersion. It pictures us entering into something. And the language of drinking is that of imbibing. It is the language of something entering into us so that in the same way that we are in Christ and Christ is in us, so we, the body of Christ, are in the Spirit and the Spirit is within us. The Spirit of God is saturating the church with His most Holy Presence, empowering us in so many different ways, as we have been talking about these past weeks.

As we move forward, into the teaching that helps to identify and deal with these two areas of faulty thinking, we praise God that the Spirit of God is among us, empowering new ways of thinking that we could not think apart from His work in us. He is the Renewing Agent in the church.

So if we look at what is here and think, Yes, I might tend toward the inferiority or superiority kind of mindset, praise God that in Christ we are not alone. It is the Spirit who helps to transform our thoughts. Now let us continue and see what is here about these two frames of mind that can hinder the body life of the church.

What we see first is that there is:

## **2. An admonition to the “inferior” (12:14-20)**

An admonition to the people who might see how other people are gifted and think, I’m not like that. Therefore, I am not as significant, so I might as well not even be a part of the body of Christ. People can get discouraged and down in their thinking.

We see this reflected when we go into Verses 15 through 20:

**<sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>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? <sup>18</sup>But as it is, God**

**arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup>If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup>As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.**

This is here ministering to people in the church who might see how other people are gifted and they are blown away at how the Spirit is working in them. They see significance in how the Spirit is working in others, and they see that the Spirit is not working in them in the same way, so they think that they lack significance.

It can be so discouraging for some that they can become so demoralized when thinking about their gifts in view of other gifts, so they might even say, What use am I. Why do I even come? I am not even really a part of the body of Christ. So Paul was thinking about where it could go if this kind of thinking was allowed to continue.

So that the one who has the gift of leadership or administration, they might look to the one who has the gift of mercy and they might say, Man, they have such a movement of emotion and compassion. I'm not like that. What is the point?

Or the person who has the gift of teaching might look to the one who has leadership gifts and how they have the ability to galvanize people and get them moving and they say, I don't have the ability to do that. Then they may start thinking of themselves less because they are not operating in the same way that they see other people operating.

There can be a sense for some in the body of Christ to get demoralized when looking at others because they don't see spiritual gifts firing in their lives in the same way. That is what Paul addressed here—this sense of inferiority that can settle into some people's thinking.

As we see what is in this passage, we see that Paul dealt with this in three ways. If there is the mindset of uselessness because a person does not like how their spiritual gifts compare to the spiritual gifts of others, Paul ministered to this by providing reality, diversity, and sovereignty.

Each of these are dealt with here in this portion of Scripture. Paul gave them:

### **An Appeal to Reality:**

Paul repeatedly said, That would not make it any less a part of the body. If the ear says I am not eyes. Eyes is where it is at. They see everything and have perception. I'm not an eye, therefore, I am not a part of the body.

Paul said that was not true. That is just flat out not true. Just because the ear says it is not a part of the body, that does not mean that suddenly the ear is no longer a part of the body. This is the same with the feet. The feet might say I am not like those hands, always getting to handle things. I'm just these lousy feet. I am not really a part of the body.

Paul was saying, No! Reality check, you are a part of the body. Just because you don't think that you are a part of the body, that does not make you any less a part of the body. So Paul laid it out for them, giving a reality check to those who think of themselves in inferior ways as far as the gifts of the Spirit operating through them.

From there, not only did Paul appeal to reality but he also gave them:

### **An Appeal to Diversity:**

This is the diversity of gifting that is by the design of God. In the same way that the human body is a single unit with all kinds of functions within it, so it is with the body of Christ. It is God's creative design to make people effective in different ways.

If the whole body is an eye, it is no longer an eye. I am convinced that Paul was having a lot of fun as he wrote all of this. If the whole body was an eye, where would the ear be. I keep thinking of Mike Wazowski of Pixar Animation Monsters. Inc. You have that little green figure that just has a giant eye in his head.

Here Paul was saying, If everybody had their desire to be an eye granted, where would the body be? That is not how the body works. Likewise, with all of the spiritual gifts, God has designed this whole kaleidoscope of activity in the church that He is empowering for the common good.

So we need some who will be like the speech of the operation in multiple ways, some teaching and instructing the Word of God. Some talking about the ways that the church is going to move forward in different endeavors in ministries. We need some to be the hands of the operation to do work, to build resources and ramps. To water flowers. To file music.

We need some to be the stomach of the operation, those who have the movements of unusual levels of compassion driving them toward ministry of mercy. The problem comes when the different parts think less of themselves because they are not functioning like other people are being empowered to function.

In view of this, Paul gave the sense of diversity of function that God designed. Then he brought it down to sovereignty. There is:

### **An Appeal to Sovereignty:**

We see this when we look at what is written in this text. Paul brought it to the bottom line when he said:

**<sup>18</sup>...God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose**

God has gifted people according to His sovereign will and design. Whenever there is a sense where we are demoralized in how God has gifted us in view of how He has gifted others, that repudiates the wisdom of God. It also resists the sovereignty of God.

It resists the sovereign gifting of God in a whole diversity of ways in the local church when a person has the mindset that significance is over there with what they are doing and since I am not doing what they are doing, I am not significant in what I am doing.

It calls into question God's ability to build a church and give the church the gifts that it needs. This mindset can be within any of us. We can covet what others have while we are missing what God is doing through us.

So the prayer of the one being convicted of this mindset that is being revealed in us is to say, Lord, open my eyes to Your goodness, to Your wisdom, to Your power and to Your plan. Help me to see and appreciate how You are gifting the whole mix of people in the church, including a sense of contentment and joy in what You are doing in and through me.

We must say, Spirit, You are within me and I submit myself and I pray that You would change my thinking so that if I'm not a vocal cord, I won't envy the vocal cord but instead, I will care for the vocal cord in Your Spirit's power because in the end, I am one with the vocal cord, joined as one body.

Instead of being jealous of the eyes, the Spirit is going to help us to care for the eyes because we are one with them. Instead of being irritated that you are not a foot, you are going to care for the foot because you are one body with the foot. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in us as we in the church are caring for one another in the bond of fellowship that He has given to us.

First Paul dealt with this whole mindset that sometimes some Christians can feel inferior to others, based on the gift that others are given and how they compare themselves to them. We must avoid the whole comparison game and ask the Lord what He is doing through us. And let us rejoice in how the Lord is gifting us to contribute.

Moving forward, we see that there is another kind of thinking on the spectrum. While there are some who feel inferior, there may be some who have the sense of superiority. Thus Paul also gave:

### **3. An admonition to the "superior" (12:21-26)**

These are people who are pretty much content in themselves. They don't feel the need to be ministered to by the other gifts that the Spirit is giving in the church. We see this as we move into the next paragraph, starting in Verse 21 of I Corinthians Chapter.

**<sup>21</sup>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." <sup>22</sup>On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup>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, <sup>24</sup>which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, <sup>25</sup>that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care**

**for one another. <sup>26</sup>If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.**

Here in this portion, Paul seemed to have four categories of body parts in view. There are the weaker parts, the less honorable parts, the unpresentable parts, and the more presentable parts. Those are the four different categories that Paul spoke of.

The point is this: a healthy and clear-thinking person is going to realize the importance of all of those different body parts and they are going to care for those body parts in ways appropriate to them, and recognize their value.

Here in this portion, Paul talks about those that seem weaker but are actually indispensable. That is one category that Paul speaks of here. Have you ever noticed that with some of the different parts of your body? There are some parts of the human body that are weaker than the others, but try living without those so-called weaker body parts.

Have you ever thought about life without eyelids? How much strength is there found in an eyelid? How much can an eyelid bench press? But try living a week without eyelids. How are you going to get any sleep? What would that be like? Then once you lose your sleep, everything starts shutting down. How are you going to keep dust off your eyeballs?

How about the lungs? They are so delicate. They can be punctured and torn. Thank goodness that they are behind the cage of ribs that is also covered by flesh, because how could you live without lungs in your body?

Likewise, there may be people in the church, precious brothers and sisters, and the circumstances of life have weakened them, yet their part in the church is vital. It is so important. Sometimes because of health issues, people are required to stay at home. But those of you who are at home, your ministry of intercessory prayer for the church can be the means by which the Living God is breathing life into the efforts and it is necessary. We need it.

So there are these different ways where parts that seem like they are in weakness are actually wielding power for the body of Christ. You got to appreciate the word *seem*—some parts of the body that seem weaker, but they are indispensable. We have to have that understanding when we think about the array of ministry activity that the Spirit is doing through the church.

Then Paul also kind of settled in as he talked about so-called less honorable parts of the body that receive special honor. It is so funny because Paul was talking about all of the different body parts and we try to decipher what he was talking about—the less honorable parts getting greater honor.

At least for me, the more I advance through life, the less I have been impressed with my whole midsection. Not so pleasant any longer but that very midsection that I think is so dishonorable, is covered with comfortable cotton, shielded from the sun and shielded from eyes.

Paul was talking about that in the illustration of the human body where the so-called less honorable portions are treated with special honor. When thinking about human beings and the honorable and less honorable, is that division even true?

Just thinking through human eyes, what was Paul talking about when he said

**<sup>24</sup>...But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it**

Paul was talking about something here. There may be the sense where Paul not only had in view the operation of all of the different kinds of spiritual gifts, but he was talking about the socio-economic composition of the church there in the First Century world and it carries over into our day as well, and how there can be the tendency to think of some people as less honorable than others.

God is placing special honor on those that we might think less honorable. As Paul said earlier in the text in Verse 13, in the body of Christ there was Jew and Gentile. There was slave and free. There was wealthy people and people in the servant class.

There in a very ethnocentric and class-conscience society in Corinth, Corinth being very, very much like Southern California in so many ways as we have discussed, Paul was saying, But God is clothing those that might be viewed as with less honor with even greater honor. And this is even a work of God that Paul was appealing to, so that nobody in the church might have the attitude of superiority over others.

How does this work? I was thinking about that First Century Corinthian context where there were household servants and there were slaves. Understand that there was the whole spectrum of society in Corinth—men, women, boys, girls, slave, free, Jews and Gentiles—all of them being gathered into one church.

Imagine the Holy Spirit taking one of those who was a household servant and equipping him and calling him to the very office of elder and overseer of the church, giving him gifts and empowering them to graciously and lovingly teach and guide the church with a gathering of other godly men. Wouldn't that be so cool?

Here you have these Jewish men who were like synagogue scholars all of their lives, and here you have God choosing these Gentile pagans, saving them and equipping some of them as teachers and leaders of the church, giving this honor.

Maybe that is one way God goes about this. It is a work of God. Understand this, there is true honor in being called into leadership in the church. It is a work of the Spirit of God. None of us deserve it, but it is a grace that God gives.

Understanding that it is a true honor to be called into leadership in the church, there is this mindset among people like us to think that honor goes upward. When you look at it through a biblical lens, when you look at how the Kingdom of God takes human ways of thinking and turns



them upside down, the fact of the matter is that honor comes when we get down and we serve people in the most practical and even gritty of ways. It is where we reduce ourselves.

Is not this the great glory of the Kingdom of the Messiah? That the Everlasting Son of God, the One that was enthroned in Heaven with earth as His footstool, added humanity to His deity. Then He entered the earth that He created and is sustaining, and came as One who serves.

He humbled Himself. Hands on the lepers. Close to the hungry. Hands on filthy feet. And the greatest glory of His service is that He humbled Himself even to the point of death. It was not only that He humbled Himself to the point of death, it was death on a rugged, Roman cross.

It was not just death on a rugged, Roman cross, it was a death that took upon Himself the sins and the guilt of all of His people; where He paid the price and propitiated the sin of His people; where He took the wrath, deflecting it from us and taking it upon Himself. Then, of course, He was gloriously raised up on the third day in victory.

So what we find is that there is a great honor in the way of the Messiah in serving people. There in Corinth and quite possibly in Southern California, we have people from the upper class. They have had household servants all their lives. Maybe they have never had to serve another person ever. They have been feeding themselves off of silver spoons.

Now the Holy Spirit comes and indwells them and empowers within them the gift of service and mercy and helps. They are finding such meaning and joy, driven by the Holy Spirit to help serve in situations that might not look or smell good. Yet, there is so much glory and honor in what they are doing, because they are mimicking the Messiah.

It is an awesome thing to think about and it is a work of God to give various forms of honor all throughout the body of Christ.

**<sup>24</sup>...But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it**

Sometimes I think that that is talking about the snooty upper class people that have never served being taught how to honor and the glory of serving people in the way of the Kingdom of God. This is just an amazing thing to think about.

But God's purpose was to take all of the gifts and racial composition and the people of the different economic classes and mesh them all together by giving them a whole kaleidoscope of spiritual gifts, and those spiritual gifts might not have been distributed in the way of conventional human thinking.

God has so composed the body. This is the sovereignty of God, ordering things, designing things according to His perfect will by which He knows how to build the church.

**<sup>24</sup>...But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, <sup>25</sup>that there may be no division in the body,**

And what is the opposite of division?

**but that the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup>If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.**

Right there in those last couple of verses, we have some of the most vivid and beautiful expressions of what biblical Christian church fellowship is all about. There is one who is suffering, we are all suffering with them. If there is one rejoicing, we are rejoicing with them. It is like a life that is combined.

We have so much growth to do in this, Bethel Grace. In this individualistic society where it is so easy for us just to be sectioned off by ourselves. We come together once a week for individual devotions that happen to take place in the presence of other people sitting in pews, but then we go off doing our own thing for the rest of the week, not really having lives meshed.

That is what koinonia is. We have spoken often about all the different Greek words for love. There is eros, phileo, storge, then ultimately there is agape, which is self-sacrificial, servant oriented love. I think agape is so often rightly recognized to be the greatest form of love. We will be talking a lot about that next week in the glorious love chapter that is here in I Corinthians Chapter 13.

But I think there is another word in the Greek language that is not often recognized as the word for love, and it just so at the heart of what love is. It is koinonia. Koinonia is just the blending of life, so that there is a shared and common experience in the midst of the realities of our spiritual, relational, and our emotional lives in the things that we go through.

You just share life together. The joy of one is the joy of the other. The sorrow of one is the sorrow of the other. You are gathered with people and talking about that midsection and your goal is to lose weight and you finally do. Then there are people who will find joy and celebrate with you. We are just talking about the basics of life, brothers and sisters, rejoicing.

Then on the other hand, if you have been in a place where you go to a certain restaurant and it reminds you of what it was like when your spouse was alive and you are bereaved of them and your heart hurts, you have people you can express it to and their hearts will share in that loss.

One member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is honored, all rejoice together. This is what fellowship is all about. The Lord wants to bring people together who have different functions and gifts so they can share these kinds of shared experiences with each other.

The bigger the church, the harder this is to live out. If you are in a church with a thousand people, it is going to be very difficult to have this experience with all thousand people. When you get into a church like ours that is up and down but with around two-hundred adults people, it is possible to keep up with who people are and what they are going through.

However, we all need to be knowing each other. I think there is this shared experience but when we gather into communities of fellowship within the church, this is where this can really be lived out in a very, very powerful way. This is what the ministry of Home Fellowship Groups and small groups are all about.

This is where we are meeting with one another on a regular basis. It takes a little bit of time for us to build the kind of trust with people that we can really share the sins that we are struggling with, the grief that we are experiencing. And these communities are designed to produce that.

So it can happen in Home Fellowship Groups, and it can also happen in various ministries of the church so that if you are in a ministry like Women's Missionary Fellowship or the Music Ministry or the Children's Ministry and you are not in Home Fellowships or some kind of small group, you need to cultivate this somehow because all Christians need to be connected with others in this way.

The Spirit is among us. The Spirit is at work. The Spirit is nurturing and producing this in us and when the Holy Spirit is filling the church, you are going to have a redeemed company of people found at the foot of the cross with bended knee.

You are going to find a gathering of people who are exposed as sinners, yet redeemed by the grace of the Messiah living life together, and serving one another with the gifts as the Spirit is operating through them.

This is the picture that Paul gives to us here in I Corinthians Chapter 12. It is a beautiful picture of body life. Let us pray and let us act that we, empowered by the Spirit, will be connected to one another, that we might truly be engaging each other in the ways that the Spirit lays out here.

With that, I will close in a word of prayer, asking that the Spirit be at work.