

1 Cor. 12:12-31 “Everybody is Somebody in God”

²⁻¹³ You can easily enough see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your own body. Your body has many parts—limbs, organs, cells—but no matter how many parts you can name, you’re still one body. It’s exactly the same with Christ. By means of his one Spirit, we all said good-bye to our partial and piecemeal lives. We each used to independently call our own shots, but then we entered into a large and integrated life in which *he* has the final say in everything. (This is what we proclaimed in word and action when we were baptized.) Each of us is now a part of his resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain—his Spirit—where we all come to drink. The old labels we once used to identify ourselves—labels like Jew or Greek, slave or free—are no longer useful. We need something larger, more comprehensive. ¹⁴⁻¹⁸ I want you to think about how all this makes you more significant, not less. A body isn’t just a single part blown up into something huge. It’s all the different-but-similar parts arranged and functioning together. If Foot said, “I’m not elegant like Hand, embellished with rings; I guess I don’t belong to this body,” would that make it so? If Ear said, “I’m not beautiful like Eye, transparent and expressive; I don’t deserve a place on the head,” would you want to remove it from the body? If the body was all eye, how could it hear? If all ear, how could it smell? As it is, we see that God has carefully placed each part of the body right where he wanted it. ¹⁹⁻²⁴ But I also want you to think about how this keeps your significance from getting blown up into self-importance. For no matter how significant you are, it is only because of what you are a *part* of. An enormous eye or a gigantic hand wouldn’t be a body, but a monster. What we have is one body with many parts, each its proper size and in its proper place. No part is important on its own. Can you imagine Eye telling Hand, “Get lost; I don’t need you”? Or, Head telling Foot, “You’re fired; your job has been phased out”? As a matter of fact, in practice it works the other way—the “lower” the part, the more basic, and therefore necessary. You can live without an eye, for instance, but not without a stomach. When it’s a part of your own body you are concerned with, it makes *no* difference whether the part is visible or clothed, higher or lower. You give it dignity and honour just as it is, without comparisons. If anything, you have more concern for the lower parts than the higher. If you had to choose, wouldn’t you prefer good digestion to full-bodied hair? ²⁵⁻²⁶ The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don’t, the parts we see and the parts we don’t. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance. ²⁷⁻³¹ You are

Christ’s body—that’s who you are! You must never forget this. Only as you accept your part of that body does your “part” mean anything. You’re familiar with some of the parts that God has formed in his church, which is his “body”: Apostles; prophets; teachers; miracle workers; healers; helpers; organizers those who pray in tongues.

But it’s obvious by now, isn’t it, that Christ’s church is a complete Body and not a gigantic, unidimensional Part? It’s not all Apostle, not all Prophet, not all Miracle Worker, not all Healer, not all Prayer in Tongues, not all Interpreter of Tongues. And yet some of you keep competing for so-called “important” parts. But now I want to lay out a far better way for you.

Exegesis:

12-13 The Church exists collectively, not alone.

14-20 No reason to feel inferior

21-26 No reason to feel superior.

27-31 The best gifts build others up.

See also:

Matt. 20:16, John 7:37, Acts 18, Rom. 12:5-8, 1 Cor. 11-14, Gal. 6:2-10.

Prayer:

ALMIGHTY God, Who has given us grace at this time to make our common supplications unto You; and promises that when two or three are gathered together in His Name He will grant their requests; Fulfill now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of Your servants as may be most expedient for them granting us in this world knowledge of Your truth and in the world to come life everlasting. Lord our God, of might inconceivable, of glory incomprehensible, of mercy immeasurable, of goodness unspeakable; O Master, look down on us in Your tender love, and show us and those who pray with us Your rich mercy and compassion. Amen. (John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, 347-407)