

Sermon Series: **POWERfull: The Work of the Spirit Through Us**

Sermon Title: **POWERfull Community**

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Scripture Text: I Cor. 12:12-27

Today we are going to look at **POWERfull Community**. We need to understand how God has called us to be part of a community, how the Spirit baptizes us into a community. When God called us he didn't call us into just a personal relationship with Himself (although that's true) but he called us into a community. *We not only have to learn therefore how to relate to the Lord, but it is equally important that we learn how to relate to the community as well.* When God saved a people out of Egypt he didn't just save individuals but an entire community. This is difficult for us in the West to grasp. In the West, we think of ourselves *first* as individuals with personal identities. We form our identities by who we are *personally* and then, by who we are within a community (if we think of it at all). In the culture that the Bible was written, people formed their identity by who they were in terms of a community first before they ever thought of themselves as individuals. We have to understand this if we are ever to grasp the meaning of community.

So in a sense, Westerners need two conversions: *first, we must be converted from sin and then we need a conversion from our independence and individualism!* We do not need deliverance from our individuality; God has made us to be unique. But we do need to be delivered from our independence and our individualism (just me and Jesus). Perhaps the most powerful way to understand this is by understanding the Church as the 'body of Christ'. It was to our brother Paul that was given insight into this mystery. There are several metaphors that Paul uses to describe the Church in his writings (bride, temple, field, building). But of all of them, it is his understanding of the Church as the *body* that perhaps is his most insightful:

When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Eph. 3:4-6

The mystery was that Jew and Gentile were now united in one body (Paul didn't see a Jewish Church and a Gentile Church). Do you remember how Paul was shown the mystery of the body at his own conversion? When the Head of the body appeared to Him at Damascus Road he asked Him the question, "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?*" Saul wasn't persecuting Jesus directly (no evidence he ever saw Jesus) but those who followed Him. *But Jesus wanted him to know that to persecute believers is to persecute Him for He is the Head and they are members of the body.* Also, after Jesus gives him instruction he is to go to Damascus and wait for further instruction. Some things he can receive directly from the Head but some things he must receive from the body. So God sends a lowly disciple named Ananias to speak to Paul. Paul must learn from the beginning that to receive from the body is to receive from the Head. People who say that they receive everything directly from the Head and can never receive from the body are deceived.

If we are going to live successfully in the one body we have to develop certain attitudes that will help us navigate our way in relating to the body. Let's get our bearings in this text that is before us. Paul was probably asked some questions in a previous letter regarding the *charismas*, the gifts of the Spirit. In the first eleven verses Paul summarizes what are sometimes called the "Manifestation" gifts.

These are the various ways the Spirit uses believers as they yield to the Holy Spirit (word of wisdom, word of knowledge, prophecy, miracles, faith, tongues, interpretation). But notice that Paul doesn't really talk about the gifts in this chapter. Rather, he talks about what life looks like in the one body. The Corinthians were excelling in the gifts but they didn't understand what it meant to be the body of Christ. So for the remainder of this chapter, he describes various *attitudes* we must have if we are to live life properly in the one body. *The problem with the Corinthians was not that they didn't understand the gifts, but that they didn't understand life in the one body.* There are five specific things he wants us to understand if we are to live life properly in the one body. They are taught by five distinct words drawn from the text: *organic, diverse, uniform, interdependent, care.*

1) *Organic: the entire body is animated by the one Spirit so that it is alive (vs. 12-13)*

This means that the church is not an institution but a living *organism*, each member animated by the life of Christ. The Church isn't something I merely attend but something I am joined to by the Spirit who baptizes every member into the body. Notice that Paul doesn't say Christ is like this but that this is how Christ *is*. He is the head of the body and the entire body takes its cue from him. Every member of my physical body is animated from impulses from my brain so that my head is controlling my body. That's because I am *alive*. My movements are not mechanical but organic. So you can't treat the Church as an institution but as a living organism.

That means that the most important relationship each member must have is with the Head of the Church (can't take orders from the Head if you are not in a living relationship with Him). But then each member must have a living relationship with the other members of the body as well. It's about *relationship* not just attendance at meetings. Think of the relationship you have with your family. You have designated times when you eat together as a family but you have relationship with your family members outside of meals. The way that the members relate to one another is called 'community'. We are members and are placed in the body by God's doing. That means that God has called you into relationships of intimacy and accountability with certain members. One of the ways we do this practically at TCC is by house churches.

I need a relationship with the members of the body beyond attending a corporate meeting. Here is how Paul describes it in Ephesians: "*Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every **joint** with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love*" (Eph. 4:15-16). Notice that the body is held together by every 'joint'. A joint is a place where two or more bones are joined together. God puts you in living relationships with other members.

2) *Diversity: God has made us purposely different (vs. 14-16)*

God has made each us different and that is good. I don't need to remind you that the Creator God loves variety. There are no two snowflakes that are alike or no two persons who have the same set of fingerprints. His ultimate

display of variety and diversity though is in the body of Christ. Paul reminds us of this when he says “the body does not consist of one member but many.”

Paul is teaching about diversity for one reason: *to discourage the members from making comparisons*. “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*”. We all do it. We compare ourselves to others and think what we have is of less value. We usually do this with the more visible members and assume they are more valuable than us. That’s not the way God views us. On the day of judgment saints who no one even knows about will receive great reward.

3) **Uniformity: is not good (vs. 17-20)**

“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? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.”

These verses Paul is teaching that uniformity is not good. We must avoid any attempt to think that everyone should be like us. We do this subtly when we say, “I like prophets but don’t care much for teachers” or “I prefer teachers but have little tolerance for prophets.” We are supposed to be different. *Look at the marvel of your own body*. Your ear is categorically different than your eye and is supposed to be. Your hand doesn’t do what the foot does. We should avoid all attempts at uniformity and *function the way we are not the way we would like to be*. There is a prevalent take away from this: *don’t despise the way he made you!*

We have to be secure in who He has made us to be. If we struggle with how he made us we really are having a problem with the sovereignty of God. I used to really struggle with this. I didn’t know who I was and despised the way he had made me. I wanted to be like others rather than be the way He had made me. Eventually, I became secure in who he had made to be and how he had wired me to function.

4) **Inter-dependence: we need the other members (vs. 21-24)**

“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”

Not only are we diverse but God has so tempered the body so that we *need* of each other. The eye cannot say to the hand “I don’t need you” but every part of the body is in need of the other. Say you have a struggle understanding a certain portion of God’s Word. Do you struggle in yourself to understand it or do you go to that member of the body that is gifted in opening up God’s Word? I don’t mean to suggest that we shouldn’t ever study on our own. But that we must learn how to lean on the gifts of the body. Spurgeon was once asked why God blessed his ministry so

mightily. He took them downstairs where a hundred people were praying during the service. May God open our eyes to see how deeply we need each other. That is why all ministry in the body should be team ministry.

5) **Care: love must prevail in everything (vs. 24-27)**

“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”

“That the members may have the same care for one another”

Look at the exquisite care we lavish on our bodily members. We spend a lot of time caring and dispensing honor on the parts that lack it. *Not only is this important for the members own care, it is absolutely essential for our witness to the world.* Jesus said this was the case in John 13:34-35: *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

The new commandment goes beyond the law (love your neighbor as yourself). They are now to love one another in the same way that Christ loved them. It is this *agapao* love that alone proves to the world the claims of the Gospel. It is as the world sees the way the body of Christ interacts with one another that they become convinced. Look at how the Church has tried everything but this love to convince the world that the Gospel is real. The Roman Governor Pliny when writing to a Roman official and asking for instructions on how to deal with Christians said, *“Behold, how they love one another.”* We need to find practical ways to care for one another. We use house churches to provide pastoral care for the body.

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The questions below are for House Church Group Discussions.

1. Why do those with a Western mindset find it difficult to embrace community?
2. What is the unique metaphor Paul uses to describe the church?
3. What two things did Paul understand about the church as a result of his encounter with the Lord on the Damascus Road?
4. How does Paul shift the focus and thinking of the Corinthian Church?
5. What are the 5 distinctions Paul makes in the Scripture text (1 Cor. 12:12-27) that relate to the Body?
6. In what ways is the “Body” organic?
7. How does diversity impact the Body?
8. How does uniformity disrupt function?
9. What does it mean to be inter-dependent?
10. How is care revealed in the Body?

