

All for One and One for All and All for Christ!

1 Cor 12

Good morning! My name is Mike Lynch and I'm a much-loved child of God... I still don't know why He cared, but He did and He does, and that's why I'm here today... to remind us all of that! Like Kelly, I love this time of year! Here it is the first Sunday in October and we're all wondering who is going to take the snaps for the Patriots this afternoon! Heck... the way they're playing you or I could play QB and they'd still win! The Sox are playing October baseball...the Bruins are getting ready to start another season, leaves are turning, we're done with the humidity! I'm not a big pumpkin spice fan, but hot coffee sure tastes better in the fall! Life is good! Life is good, because God is good... and this was all His idea!

Anyway, welcome to Harbor today! If you are just joining us, we are in the last quarter of a series that began back in January, called **Garden to City**. And we have been traveling through the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation. We just finished the gospels and the story of Jesus in the summer. Last month, John & Kelly led us through Acts, the inception of this new thing called the church. And today I get to hit lead-off for the next section which is cryptically entitled "**Trouble in Paradise**." In this section we're going to cover the epistles, or letters of Paul and a few other disciples to the young churches that have sprung up not only in the region of Israel, but now throughout what we now call Turkey and Greece and Italy. These were brand new start-ups and their leadership was also young, so you can expect that they had some issues. Also they were human... so you **know** they had issues. It's not a lot different today! You're finally thinking about faith and Christ and beginning to experience new stuff like grace and forgiveness and a new life inside... and you think it's all pretty great... and then you go to church! And you find that again, you've got to deal with ... people. And you know people... they make mistakes, they say the wrong thing, sometimes they have attitudes... in short, they're a mess. Hence... trouble in paradise!

Today we're looking at Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12. So who are the Corinthians anyway? I'll be honest the first time I heard that word I thought of Ricardo

Montalban talking about a 1977 Chrysler Cordoba upholstered with “*fine Corinthian leather*.” And it probably did come from there... but Corinthians were people from the city of Corinth... just like Bostonians are people from Boston... and people from Pepperell are called ... pepperoniacs or something... Corinth was a city located on the eastern coast of Greece. The church there was started by Paul & Barnabas a few years before as they traveled around the region preaching the good news about Christ. Wherever the people were open to this message, they spent more time there teaching them and appointing leaders before they moved on to the next place. And apparently they had found some pretty receptive souls in Corinth... so a church had started there.

So what was Corinth like back then? At that time, the whole region was part of the Roman Empire. The glory days of Greece were long gone. In the first century it was a bustling seaport city, a major trading hub for the entire Mediterranean. So it was like Boston... or New York... or LA... a big, prosperous seaport city... with all the dark side of a major city as well.

That’s why Paul went there. He went there primarily because the people needed to hear about Jesus. He also went because it was a strategic port, the business hub of the region. He knew that a church planted here would impact the entire Mediterranean... and at first it did! Many people committed their lives to Christ and they were changed by His grace! The church grew rapidly and had all the growing pains a young church gets. And they *would have been* a tremendous force for Christ in the region ... except that they had to iron out a few problems first. That’s why Paul wrote back to them a few years later... this letter... 1 Corinthians.

You see this young church at Corinth had developed a health problem. Have you ever been on a team? An athletic team... a business team... a work group of some sort? When human beings get together to accomplish something, the results can be amazing... but sometimes egos get in the way, and attitudes develop, and the team’s potential goes right down the toilet. That was exactly what was happening in this young church. And that was preventing them from becoming the joyful, thriving, reproducing, missional community that was their calling. Let’s take a look and see what we can

learn... 'cause guess what?... we're a young church in a bustling city that has grown quickly and experienced a few growing pains... and our calling is clear and strong: to help people find their way back to God! So we need to know if there is anything holding us back from that calling! There's a lot at stake!

In 1 Cor 12, Paul writes a brief Spiritual Anatomy & Physiology chapter in which he talks about what the Body of Christ is, how it can thrive, and how it can be sick.

1 Cor 12:12-13: *"The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. ¹³ Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit."*

The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. Just like Bones here, all the bones are connected together to support the rest of the body – the muscles and blood vessels and organs and brain and skin. But by itself... a skeleton is not a body... and definitely not healthy! The core of what Paul is saying is that for the church, which is the Body of Christ to be healthy, all the parts need to be there and all working together, doing their own unique jobs. Let me offer you a slogan for that, with a nod to the Three Musketeers: **All for One and One for All and All for Christ!** Say that with me: **All for One and One for All and All for Christ!** This is spiritual health in the church, the Jesus Team! When we are All for One and One for All and All for Christ!

We are ethnically diverse, we are socio-economically diverse, we are politically diverse, we have different personalities, different body types and different opinions on all kinds of topics. And with all these differences in the same room, do you think there might be the potential for conflict? Just a little?!

Yet Paul's point is that this diversity is by design... God's design. It was God's choice to bring all different types of people together to form one unified body... one team. Why?

To show the world that Jesus reigns! To help people find their way back to God. “All for one and one for all and all for Christ!”

Maybe you’ve been on a good team at some point in your life... I hope so, it’s quite something. For the past few years I’ve had the privilege of serving on an amazing team of educators at Lawrence HS. The school I work in used to be a pit of despair... a black hole... But four years ago a team was put together and led extremely well. This past week the Mass Dept of Education released last year’s results and we learned that in four years we went from the 4th worst HS in the state to a bonafide Level 1 school! So I’ve seen what can happen when gifted people leave their egos at the door and just do their jobs to the best of their ability. It’s fast-paced, it’s challenging, it’s really hard work, but it’s fun... and the results that a well-functioning team can achieve are impressive.

People, there is no more powerful force on earth than the church of Jesus Christ **when** we are united in the Spirit and all doing our jobs! When the church has been “***all for one and one for all and all for Christ,***” amazing advances have been made for the Kingdom of God... whole countries and people groups have been brought the grace and truth of Christ. When the Church is healthy and unified it is magnetic and contagious and people are swept into the Kingdom of God in mass numbers.

But, when it’s not... when the church is **sick** and **dysfunctional**, it becomes judgmental, stiff, rules-based, fearful of failure, and exclusive. Ironically, the church can become the **biggest barrier** to people being introduced to the love and grace of Jesus. Sadly, I’ve seen that happen too... in my own family! So I guess we better listen to what Paul has to say...

#1 What does a **Spiritually Healthy church** look like? We don’t have time to go into this deeply, but at the beginning of this chapter, Paul talks about all the different spiritual gifts that God has given to the church. And he makes the crucial point that, (7) “*to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the **common good.***” In other words, the gifts of the Spirit weren’t given to individuals for themselves. They were given to

individuals so they could be used for the church and to help people find their way back to God! The common good!

Here's a partial list of spiritual gifts that the Spirit gives to people; from this passage and Romans 12: special wisdom, deep knowledge, amazing faith... some can heal, some can prophesy, some can discern spirits, some can do miracles, some can speak in other tongues, some are apostles, some are gifted at teaching or leading or administering, or encouraging, or serving ... some have incredible mercy and some have boundless generosity. And that's just a partial list! All these gifts were given by God to grow the church and help people find their way back to God!

So a healthy church is like a healthy body... all the parts are working together, each doing their jobs... loving one another, serving one another, thinking the best of one another... A healthy body thrives and grows and moves forward, and enters into healthy relationships.

#2 On the other hand, a sick body cringes in pain, withers, remains immobile, and isolates itself from the world. The spiritual health of the Body of Christ, the Jesus Team, the church is of utmost importance! So Paul talks about two very specific ways the Body of Christ can become sick: 1) **Parts Envy** and 2) **Parts Pride**.

Parts Envy (14-20) *"Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. ¹⁵ If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear says, "I am not part of the body because I am not an eye," would that make it any less a part of the body? ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything? ¹⁸ But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. ¹⁹ How strange a body would be if it had only one part! ²⁰ Yes, there are many parts, but only one body."*

OK, so if I gave you the choice between being the **pinky toe** or being the **brain**, which would you choose? Most of us would probably choose to be the brain! I mean who

wants to be the pinky toe? Mine's got calluses, the nail is all crooked and it's got some nasty stuff underneath! Besides... it doesn't do a whole lot! The brain however? That's where it's at! You're at the top, you're well-protected, and best of all, you get to tell everybody else what to do! So which do you want to be: Pinky or the Brain? (ha! My favorite cartoon) That's **Parts Envy**. When we look down on ourselves and have a pity party because we don't have the gifts we think are better. Honestly, that's really being ungrateful and short-sighted! God made you and gave you certain gifts to use... as Bill Belichick says, **just do your job!**

The truth is that **every** part is necessary for the Body to be whole and healthy and thriving. Do you know what the smallest bone in the human body is? It's called the **stapes** bone and it is part of a sequence of small bones inside your inner ear that converts sound waves to electrical impulses that run along the nerves into your brain, telling you that you just heard something! I love all the biophysics of that! Now this is one SMALL bone! But so important! Imagine your life without it. No hearing – none! On one hand that would mean no hearing political commercials... or boring sermons... no hearing your boss when he calls you... but it also means... no hearing music, or birdsongs, or a baby cooing, or your special someone saying "I love you!" It's important! So are you.

There isn't a body part that does not contribute to the health, growth, and purpose of the Body! Even the appendix... even though no one knows what it does! You may not feel important in the Body of Christ, the Jesus Team, the church, but that is a lie, my friends! That is an absolute lie. You are not only important, you are critical to the success of our mission! Critical!

I had the privilege of serving several times in Kenya alongside a church that had a vision to love the street kids of their town. In Kenya, the street kids were mostly orphans who lived together in little packs, finding shelter wherever they could. They are filthy, uneducated, undernourished, and most of them are addicted to glue-sniffing... because it dulls the hunger pangs. These kids are not welcome anywhere – they are

shooed out of stores and chased by the police. My friend, Rev. Peter Kimemia, loved those kids and had a vision to help them.

On one trip with my son, Davey, we set up a week of ministry with these kids in which the day would start with a soccer game (that was Davey's forte), and then we would bring them inside the church to feed them lunch and sing songs, and talk to them about Christ. In the group, there was one kid who was quite mentally handicapped. He just wandered around aimlessly. He couldn't speak, couldn't play soccer, he couldn't even feed himself. Very, very sad. Then I saw something... and I learned something. The other kids in his "pack" took care of him. They kept him out of harm's way. Even when he wandered onto the soccer pitch, they gently redirected him – no one ever yelled at him. And when it was time to eat, I saw them help him eat before they had fed themselves... *before they fed themselves*. In the midst of filth and poverty and hunger and fear, I saw the beauty of human love and kindness, and I realized that this child's role in the body was to teach the others how to love, how to remain human in an inhuman environment. What a high calling!

There are no unnecessary parts! There are no lower-class parts! We all need one another if we are to be the Church that helps people find their way back to God! All for one and one for all and all for Christ!

The second sickness the Body is prone to is **Parts Pride**. If Parts Envy is thinking less of yourself and your gifts than you ought to think, this is the opposite. Parts Pride is an ego trip, being puffed up, thinking more of yourself and your gifts than you ought to think. Because when you think you're all that... you can make it on your own... you don't need others...

(21- 25) *"The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you." In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, while the more honorable parts do not require this special*

care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other.”

Human nature is pretty predictable you see... if I find somehow that I have one of the “cool” spiritual gifts or I find myself in a position of leadership in the church... in my heart of hearts a little tiny seed of pride is planted. “Gee... I must be pretty important!” And if allowed to, that seed will sprout and grow like a weed that chokes out all the good fruit I could have borne for the good of others and for Christ. In fact, this is the biggest pitfall for leaders anywhere. Pride... it will take you down the garden path... then it will simply take you down period!

Dr. Steven Aicinena in The Sport Journal wrote,

“The hubristic individual is a poor teammate for it becomes clear to all that their own views and their personal success are all that is important. The hubristic athlete feels entitled to tell others what they are to do instead of making suggestions. The hubristic quickly express their displeasure in the poor performance of others and are incensed when others have the audacity to suggest that their play could be improved. Teammates come to fear and in a way despise them.”

Ever been on a team like that? It’s no fun... and it generally sabotages itself and never amounts to much. Pride is a mission killer.

Finally we come to the last verse which shows how it ought to be!

26 *“If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.”*

When’s the last time you thought about your left thumb? I confess that I probably haven’t spent more than a few minutes contemplating my left thumb. Until one summer day in my college days when I was working on a roofing crew. We had stripped and papered the roof and were now installing the asphalt shingles. This was before nail guns... so everything was nailed by hand. After the first few thousand shingles, I had

gotten pretty fast... in one fluid motion I could grab and position a shingle with one hand, get four nails from my pouch with the other, and drive them home with a tap and a whack. So tap & whack, tap and whack... tap and thud... And before I could even feel the pain, I could see that my left thumb was flat. Flat... like I had just mashed it with a full force blow of a hammer! Aiiiiiyyeeeee! At times like that you have to remember where you are... I'm on a roof... I'm on a roof... I'm on a roof... so I couldn't just jump and dance around waving my thumb in the air. So I'm just shaking it and holding onto it... and for the next few hours... and a couple of days... all I could think about was my left thumb.

“If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it...”

The Church ought to be the community in which someone who is suffering finds true compassion and strength to keep going!

The Church ought to be the community in which everyone feels loved and accepted... because we've all been loved and accepted by Christ!

The Church ought to be the community in which honors & victories are celebrated and where failures are accepted as a learning process and people are loved back to health.

The Church ought to be the community in which **everyone** can serve and contribute what they have!

The Church ought to be the community in which people find deep friendships and help one another grow as human beings...even when that means tough love.

The Church ought to be the community in which egos are checked at the door and everyone is equal before the resurrected Christ...where leaders are servants and everybody has a role.

When it becomes that kind of community, it will change the world.

So what's your take-away so far?

1) Do you know how God has gifted you to contribute to the common good? If you wonder what spiritual gifts you have, what do you do? Take a class, read a book, take

an inventory? I'm going to suggest... no. The best way is to start loving the people God has placed around you... learn what it means to truly love... your family... your neighbors... your coworkers... your boss! And as you love them, you will discover ways that you are exceptionally good at loving... ways that bring you great joy and that seem to bring great results... those are your spiritual gifts. Once you get it, use it. As Coach Belichick always says, "Just do your job!"

2) Are you feeling insignificant or wish you had some other gifting? You've got Parts Envy! You've got to reread this chapter and start thanking God for who He made you... and then find out what your role is on the Jesus Team! Or...

3) are you trying to figure out how to rise to the top? In your heart of hearts you've got Parts Pride... Watch out, because it will eventually wipe you out as well as your team!

Finally if you are asking, "What does it take to become part of this community? This Jesus Team called the church?" It's pretty simple...

You see, the message of the Christian church is simple and pure: the God who created the universe loves us, and when we had gotten ourselves stuck in selfishness and greed and pride, with all the awful relational & environmental consequences of that, He came to us, in the person of Jesus Christ. He showed us what a life full of grace & truth & love looked like. And when He died on the Cross and then three days later rose from the dead, it was to pay the penalty we deserved for our sin and to show us that in Him, death has been conquered... a Door into another world has been opened, and Jesus is that Door.

All it takes is the humility to admit your personal need for Jesus and a tiny amount of faith. He promised to meet us way more than halfway! Are you in yet? Well, come on it... the Door... is wide open!

All for One and One for All and All for Christ!