

September 25, 2016  
1 Corinthians 12:25-31  
Forward Together

Like the classic which came first - the chicken or the egg - dilemma, I wonder why Paul wrote the passages about the unity of the "body of Christ" before he penned his famous description of love which comes next. While it may seem that love should come before unity, with one (love) as the mover and the other (unity) the result, Paul lays out the goal and then describes the means. So, if unity is achieved, and division is ended, then the Body of Christ is healthy.

Health, as many of you know so very well, is never a given nor is it easy to achieve. Part of the challenge is our human nature. We like things that are sweet and rich to eat just as we have come to prefer leisure over work. There is nothing innately better about either of these preferences, people can learn to enjoy the natural sweetness of fruits just as they can appreciate the feeling of using their muscles. We simply need to drop some old ways and develop new habits. The same formula applies to growing the body of Christ.

The necessary ingredients for physical, as well as community, health are: commitment, nutrition, action, and staying in the lines. It starts with desire. As Jesus said in the Garden: "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." We are more prone to failure when we commit only to ourselves. And the first place to ask for assistance is God. Next, we can turn to others. Interestingly, to create unity requires unity.

Intending to let down the barriers between people, however, is not enough. We need nurture to provide the needed strength to live out this commitment. Nurture comes through the disciplines of prayer, worship, reading the scriptures and seeking / sharing support with others. As Paul writes, In the church God has put it all in place. It is easier to break down barriers when others are with you helping.

Muscles, however, are not strengthened by diet alone. You must use them. Again, Paul describes ways to act. He lists several spiritual gifts as examples. We must be cautious not to use this list to excuse ourselves from action. "I can't teach". "I'm no good at speaking to groups". "My faith story is too boring to be inspirational for anyone else". All of us have gifts and it is our responsibility to use them.

Lastly, implied in Paul's message, is "staying in the lines". This means remembering that, 1) we are not all the same, 2) there are limits on what anyone can do and, at the same time, 3) everyone has something unique to contribute to the functioning of the body of Christ. The concept is simple. Some of us are better teachers than preachers, or better with kids than adults, or better with things than ideas, and so on. However, rather than forcing yourself to do what is not "you", focus on what is "you" and apply that part to building the body of Christ.

Over the past weeks, the message has been clear - division is not the natural state of God's world. Difference is. But, difference adds contrast, interest, beauty, variety and possibility. Differences are complimentary. Divisions are simply divisive.

Grace & peace,  
Pastor Ron