

Wearing Your Own Jersey and Being Unlike Mike in the Body of Christ

Steve Burchett

“Compared to the talented people in my church, I’m worthless. Maybe I should just stay home. They don’t really need me.”

Have you ever thought like that? In a church culture that highlights certain gifts (like speaking) above all others, such feelings are common.

Paul uses body imagery in First Corinthians 12 to address this type of thinking. He says that like the human body, the church is one (v. 12), but it is made up of many members (vv. 12, 14, 20). He makes the point that *all* believers have the Holy Spirit, “Jews or Greeks, slaves or free” (v. 13). This is significant because the Spirit indwells and gifts every believer for the strengthening of the church (vv.4-11).¹



Paul then takes a loving approach to those in the church who doubt their place in the body:

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. 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. 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. (vv. 15-18)

Every body part is vital, and God is sovereign over how the parts are arranged. The analogy communicates that God gifts each person uniquely and assembles them together in the church as He pleases.

You may feel very limited, weak, and even useless. You might even be physically disabled to one degree or another. Nevertheless, you are very important to your church, whether you are a foot or a fingernail. You have the Spirit and are gifted in such a way that you will be empowered to do important ministry. You don’t have to feel guilty for not matching up to someone else. You shouldn’t even wish you were like another believer regarding his or her giftedness. Paul says, “If all were a single member, where would the body be?” (v. 19). God has gifted you uniquely,

¹ A “spiritual gift” is a God-given ability for ministry within the body of Christ that is designed to strengthen the church.

and you will be held accountable for how you use your gift.² It’s common to see men around town wearing the jersey of their favorite player, but in the church, you have your own jersey.

But perhaps your attitude in the body of Christ is not one of inferiority, but superiority. Paul has something to say to you:

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. 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. (vv. 21-25)

Paul decimates the belief that says, “I don’t need certain members of the body of Christ.” The seemingly insignificant parts of the body are actually essential. Paul is stressing mutual dependency and care for everyone in the body, including the seemingly weaker parts.

One sports writer said this about Michael Jordan (the great basketball player): “If he sensed someone might be a weak link, Jordan shattered their confidence rather than building it up.”³ That is the opposite attitude than what we should have in the church. A popular commercial during the height of Jordan’s career included the words, “I wanna be, I wanna be like Mike.” Not this time. We should honor those who don’t attract honor. We should love those whom the world would say are useless and irrelevant. We should build up those who are weak. We should be so engaged in the lives of our fellow believers that “if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (v. 26).

The body of Christ needs you, and you need the body of Christ—*every* individual member.

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² For a list of the various gifts (which I believe are representative, not exhaustive), see First Corinthians 12:1-31, Romans 12:3-8, Ephesians 4:7-16, and First Peter 4:10-11.

³ Bill Simmons, “Approaching the Zen Master in Full,” located at sports.espn.go.com.