

Life Group Notes
Sunday 12 March 2017

Speaker: Josh Betts

Passage: 1 Corinthians 12:21-31

Title: No Division in the Body

There were social, cultural and economic divisions within the Corinthian church that had affected their communion meals and how they interacted with the culture around them. These divisions were also affecting their treatment of 'spiritual gifts', and Paul uses the metaphor of a body to confront and correct their use of them, and how they treated others in the community. In this passage, he focuses on those that would look down on others for not having certain public and expressive gifts. He parallels how the Corinthians should treat spiritual gifts with how the body cares for itself.

V21-26: Care for the Body

Paul mocks the Corinthians for acting like the 'sensory organs' have no need of other parts of the body – a head without arms or legs or torso will achieve every little indeed! He mocks them further by pointing out that the 'weaker' parts of their bodies are indispensable (lungs, bladder, etc.!) and the 'unpresentable' parts the most valuable! Paul is showing that the attitude that says, "I have no need" of other parts of the body is completely ridiculous and senseless. The church is not a social club, but a diverse group of people from all backgrounds, cultures, countries, educations, life circumstances, etc. – but sharing our lives with people that are different to us is difficult – because they are not like us! Most often it is our actions, choices & priorities – rather than our spoken words – that communicate, "I have no need of you". Like a body that stubs its toe, or has a migraine – the whole body suffers with it, and other parts in particular rush to comfort it. If we neglect to care for one another, or allow others to care for us, we are declaring ourselves self-sufficient. If we avoid the awkwardness of diversity, we are no better than the proud Corinthians.

V27-31: Gifts for the Body

The church is the body of Christ, and rather than a conceptual body, and instead of limbs and parts, God has appointed a wide variety of gifts, functions, ministries, activities – in the very same way Paul has expounded the variety of the body, he's laying out the same picture for their worship. Which means the same principles that we applied for the how the body treats itself, we apply to how the church cares for itself with the gifts, activities and functions God has appointed in the church.

Paul is broadening the Corinthians horizons beyond their narrow spectrum that they were valuing – both the more numerous and internal, and those beyond the local church. Often we too have a narrow expectation of what to expect in church – we can expect our leaders to be everything for us, and not ourselves contribute both the public and internal gifts that the church needs – like a body – to function healthily. We can expect others to become more like us, rather than encourage them to thrive in their gift. If we are the body of Christ, and the gifts are like limbs, organs and parts – there is no excuse for passivity for any of us. Not taking part is to say, "I have no need of you, or you of me".

Conclusion– 3x C's

- Care for one another (Matt 5:46-47): We have a radical call to go beyond our friendship groups to care for those in our community. It will be awkward and easily misunderstood, but we have an opportunity to stand out for Christ in this town by doing so;
- Cultivate the gifts (Col 3:15-17): The gifts are to care for the body, not to make us look good. As a community we need to 'eagerly' help and encourage each other, to help each other grow in spiritual gifts, which the church needs to function effectively. We need to be courageous and obedient to God's commands, stepping out to take our first steps in God's gifts, and by encouraging one another build a culture where we not need to fear playing our part.
- Consider Christ's example (1 John 3:16-18): We do not do all this based upon willpower – when we consider that Christ has reconciled us to God by crossing the divide between us, and paying the price for our sin, we are empowered to do the same for others. We have received grace (Ephesians 2:8-10) and share in Christ's mission (Luke 4:17-21) as his body.

Suggested Questions:

- 1 What does it look like to communicate "I have no need of you" through our actions when it comes to 1) caring for one another & 2) exercising spiritual gifts?
- 2 In what ways can you care for those that are different to you at a Sunday meeting, at Life Group, or during the week? What challenges or fears will you have to overcome to do this?
- 3 What spiritual gifts are needed within the local church?
- 4 When was the last time you were encouraged by someone in the church / received encouragement to step out in a spiritual gift? What spiritual gift would you like to try out next and what will help you to do this?