

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:14-26

And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body.

Our kids have recently taken an interest in puzzles. They have princess puzzles, and Paw Patrol puzzles, we even have a 3D puzzle that's a little more complex. We haven't worked our way up to the really big, thousand piece puzzles, quite yet. Maybe we'll get there one day, but for now ten or twenty pieces is about all I can handle. Aireanah is especially good at it. She enjoys opening the box, and dumping all of the pieces onto the table, sorting through each one to find the edges, and those with similar colors or shapes. She has the patience to see how it all fits together. Sometimes little kids try to force the pieces together, [pounding with their fist] – "I will make you fit one way or another!") but she is really good at snapping them into place the way they're supposed to fit. One by one, the individual pieces join together, until the whole picture is revealed. It is a wonderful feeling to set the last piece in place.

The neat thing about a puzzle is that each and every piece is important. There are no unnecessary parts. Corner pieces or middle pieces, big pieces or little pieces... they are all essential. You don't go through the box and toss some of them aside, "I don't think we'll need that one." If you do, the puzzle will never be complete. Isn't it frustrating when you spend all that time putting it together, only to realize that one of the pieces is missing? You look on the floor, and on the chair, or in the closet, because you can't finish until you find it.

This is similar to the church. There are many different people, united together as one, in Christ. In the church, there are no unnecessary parts. Each person is special, and the church wouldn't be the same without them. We're not simply a group of people who happen to sit next to each other, in the same room, for an hour on Sunday morning. We are brothers and sisters in Christ.

There is a word for this, in the Bible: it is called fellowship. We often associate this word with potlucks dinners, or special events, and those are good times. But it is much more than sitting around the table and sharing a meal. Fellowship is partnering together with other Christians as we live out our faith. We worship together, and serve together, and grow together in the Lord. We are able to experience fellowship with one another because when we come to know Christ as Savior, we are not only brought into a relationship with God, but also become fellow members of God's family.

Every once and awhile I hear someone say, "I don't need to go to church to be a Christian!" And I tell them, it's true, going to church doesn't make you a Christian, but if you are a Christian you need the church, and the church needs you. Why would we try to go it alone, when we can walk together in our journey through life?

If believers have been joined together as brothers and sisters in Christ, we should seek fellowship with one another.

This one of the core values of Grace Gospel Church. --- *Church family is important to us; we all need fellowship within the Body of Christ.* That's why we have small groups, and why we schedule special events. As we spend time together, friendships are forged, and we get to know one another on a deeper level. We cherish our relationships with one another. The closer we are as a church, the more effective we will be carrying out the work of the ministry.

The word "fellowship" isn't found in our passage this morning, but the concept is certainly there. In 1 Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul encouraged believers in the church at Corinth to work together as one body. As we mentioned last week, this was something the Corinthians had struggled with at times. They were a divided church, filled with jealousy and strife. They weren't acting like the family of God. I guess you could say they were acting more like a dysfunctional family. Instead of cooperation, there was often competition among believers. And so the apostle urged them to stop arguing, and to remember the faith they shared in common.

As we read through these verses we gain insight into how we can keep our relationships strong with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Fellowship is connecting with one another. (v.12)

It is important to remember that we are not merely individuals, but we are fellow members of God's family. I Corinthians 12:12 reads, "*For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.*" This is one of Paul's favorite descriptions for the church. He tells us that we are the Body of Christ.

Think about your body for a moment. The human body is composed of many different parts, but there is an essential unity. We have a head, shoulders, knees, and toes (knees and toes)... eyes, and ears... arms and legs, hands and feet... Yet, all of these different parts are connected. They are unified and work together as one. You don't see a hand walking along the sidewalk by itself. That would be a little creepy. The hand is connected to a body. You don't see a foot hopping along the road, on its own; it is connected to a body. The same is true in the church. Although there are many different members, we are one body. Our common faith unites us together as brothers and sisters in Christ. He is the head. We are His hands and feet. The Lord is working through us in this world.

It is interesting to think about all of the people who are a part of Grace Gospel Church. We have unique personalities, and come from a variety of backgrounds, yet, there is something that unites us together as one... the Lord Jesus Christ.

Connecting with our church family should be a priority in our lives. One way or another we need to maintain our fellowship with each another. That's not always easy, in this day and age. Life becomes busy, and we have so many things to do, that we can find ourselves drifting away.

You might ask someone, “do you belong to a church?” and they respond, “Sure, I’m a member of that church over there.” You ask, “Oh, who is the pastor over there?” And they answer, “I don’t know, I really haven’t attended for several years.” Then how can you say you belong to that church? Being part of church family involves more than having your name written on a membership list somewhere, it means being involved and getting connected with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Hebrews 10:25 *“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”* Everyone misses a service, now and then. Even the pastor gets sick or goes on vacation. But it is so easy to allow that to become a habit. The alarm clock goes off, and we hit the snooze button. We mumble, “This is the only day of the week I have to sleep in. It won’t hurt to skip this once.” But next week rolls around, and we find another reason not to go... and then another... and another... Church gets bumped down the list of priorities, and before we know it we are out there in the world, on our own, disconnected from our brothers and sisters in Christ. Our spiritual life suffers, in the process.

I wonder how many hours the players of a football team spend together preparing for the Super Bowl. Tom Brady is a great quarterback, and he has all kinds of talent, but what do you think would happen if he suddenly quit showing up to practice, stopped going to team meetings, and quit talking to his teammates? That’s probably not the best way to get ready for the big game. He might think that he can do it all without them. Who needs linemen, and receivers, and running backs, anyways? But the moment he steps out of the field, he is going to realize just how important they are. If he doesn’t spend time with his team, he’s going to lose the game. We face spiritual battles in our lives every day. If we’re off on our own, isolated from the team, trying to make it by ourselves, we’re going to struggle. We need to be connected.

Fellowship is also complementing one another. (v.15-18, 21)

God has given each one of us different strengths and abilities, and then brings us together so that we might complement one another as we serve Him. In verses 15-18 the apostle tells us...

¹⁵ If the foot says, “Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear says, “Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.

Every member is unique. We have different gifts and abilities. We fill different personalities. We are passionate about different areas of ministry. None of us are exactly alike, and that is a good thing! God places us in the body, exactly where we are meant to be, so that we can a blessing to others.

The church needs you. Sometimes we lose sight of that. We start feeling discouraged, and wonder what we have to offer. “She has such a beautiful singing voice; I wish I could I could

sing a solo like that...” “He is such a greater teacher; I wish I could lead a Bible Study...” “She is such a talented piano player; I wish I knew how to play an instrument...” “He is such a good leader; I wish I could organize a meeting...” Doubts creep in, and we begin to feel like we don’t fit in. That’s what Satan wants us to do. If we start comparing ourselves with others, he can distract us from discovering our special role. The truth is, God doesn’t want you to be just like someone else, He wants you to be the person He made you to be. Maybe it’s your smile that brings joy to other people. Maybe it is your gift of compassion, or the time you spend in prayer for others, or your willingness to help out in different ways. You may not consider that a special role, but it is. Chances are other people are looking at you and thinking: “I really appreciate that person and what they do.”

Think of how boring the church would be if we were all exactly the same. Our ministries would be terrible out of balance. There are no insignificant parts. Each person in the church is valuable to the body. We need people with a heart for evangelism to encourage us to share the gospel. We need people with a passion for discipleship to help us grow in our Christian lives. We need prayer warriors to remind us how much we rely on God’s wisdom and strength. We need people who love children to help us raise up the next generation in the Lord. We need people with a heart for service to inspire us to show the love of Christ to others. We need people with a heart for missions to focus our attention outward, so we see how God is working around the world. We need people with a heart for worship to lead us into the presence of God. Every one of these roles is essential. If all of us had the gift of evangelism, we might lead a lot of people to Christ... But then who would help them grow in their Christian life? If all of us had the gift of teaching, we would learn a lot of important things, but who would be there to inspire us to go out into the world and share our faith?

We need each other. Verse 21 goes on to tell us,

...the eyes cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you;” or again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”²² On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary...

How arrogant it would be to imagine that we don’t need one another, or to think that we could do it all on our own. Imagine that you are going to a concert at the school. You are sitting in your chair, waiting for the curtain to rise. A friend has told you how talented the band is this year, and you are excited to hear them perform. But when the curtain is raised, the crowd is shocked to see the musicians out of their chairs, standing around the drums, arguing. “I want to play the drums this time,” “No, you played them at our last concert, it’s my turn.” Meanwhile, there is a cello, a violin, a flute, and a whole host of instruments laying on the floor, waiting to be played. The band director is beside himself. What’s going on? Don’t you realize that you all have a special part? Each of you are very talented in what you do, but this isn’t going to work unless you fill your part. That what part of the problem in the Corinthian church, everyone wanted to be in the spotlight, everyone wanted to be up front, but the apostle reminded them that this isn’t what it’s all about. They all had a special role to play, in the ministry of the church, but unless they appreciated how much they needed each other, it wasn’t going to happen.

How do you know what your role is? Just get involved. Start serving, and you'll find it. And then make sure to let other know how much you appreciate them. ("I'm glad you're here, it's always great to see your smile... I really appreciate your insight in Bible study tonight... thank you for the song you shared this morning, God used it to touch my heart... it's great to see the work you do with the children, do you know I still remember some of lessons I learned when I was in Sunday School...)

We were made to complement one another. God places us in the body together, that we might serve Him together, and be a blessing to one another.

Fellowship is caring for one another. (v.26)

The apostle tells us that the members of the body should look out for one another, with mutual care and concern. Look at verse 26: "*...if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.*"

The church is to be a place where people are there for each other in good times and bad. The experiences that affect one member impact the entire body. *A few weeks ago I was battling a kidney stone, and I wasn't feeling so good. I woke up, that morning with a dull aching sensation in my lower back, and I knew right away that it was going to be a bad day. I've been there before. And it is no fun. I tried to lay in my bed, but couldn't get comfortable. It didn't matter whether I was on my back, or my side, I just hurt. I tried to sit up in the recliner, and it didn't help. During that unpleasant experience, my whole body felt the pain. It may have been a problem in my kidney, but my stomach was churning, my muscles were aching, and my head was throbbing. The different members of my body were all suffering together. So it is with the Body of Christ. If we truly are one body, then we will share in one another's joys and sorrows. When one person is celebrating, we are eager to join in their excitement. And if one person is hurting, our hearts are breaking with theirs, and we reach out to help in any way that we can. Sometimes the only thing that we can do is to sit beside them and let them know we care. And that means a lot.*

It's an amazing feeling to know that we are loved, and to feel the support of so many caring people. There may be moments when you may start to wonder if you're all alone, in the midst of life's struggles. We can tell ourselves that no one cares, but then a card comes in the mail and you realize that people are thinking of you. The phone rings, and a familiar voice is on the other side offering encouragement. There is a knock at the front door, and someone is standing there with a meal. You're not alone. People are lifting you up in prayer. There is an entire church full of people who would do just about anything for you.

We see that same idea expressed elsewhere, in the NT. **Romans 12:15** says to "*rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.*" Listen to the Holy Spirit when He places someone on your heart. Pay attention to the needs of the people around us. Make a point to pray for your church family throughout the week, and then let them know how much you care. **Galatians 6:2** tells us to "*Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.*" There are times when life lays heavy burdens across our shoulders, and we can't carry it on our

own. We don't have to. God is there, to give us the strength we need, and one of the ways He ministers to us is by giving us brothers and sisters in Christ to help us in our time of need.

Conclusion –

Why is fellowship a core value of Grace Gospel Church?

Because this is how God designed the Christian life to work. Together we help each other grow in our faith. We hold one another accountable and inspire each other to live for the Lord. We find encouragement through the challenges of life. And as the world sees our love for one another it is a powerful testimony. Being part of a church is not merely about being blessed, but being a blessing to others.

And because it is pride that causes a person to imagine he doesn't need anyone else. That pride will get us into trouble. When we cut ourselves off from the life of the church, it will be much easier to be led astray.

You may remember the old tv classic, the Lone Ranger. He wore a white hat, and a mask to hide his true identity, and he rode in on his trusty horse "Silver" to save the day. But even the Lone Ranger had friends who helped him along the way. There are no lone rangers when it comes to living the Christian. We are stronger together than we are apart.