



Chaplain's Office
University Passage Resource

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One Among Many Romans 12:4-8

Video:
Discussion with Jennifer Wolfe
and Benjamin Marsh

Paul's favorite metaphor for the church was that of the one body with many members; he used this metaphor on several occasions with slight variations (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:12-30; Eph. 1:22; 2:16; 4:4, 11-16; 5:23, 29-33; Col. 1:18-20). There are a variety of reasons for the appeal of this metaphor. It reminds us that the Church is composed of people, not structures of brick and mortar, wood, or clay. It suggests that we are unified, yet diverse. It indicates that we are simultaneously interdependent and independent. It shows that we are one mission with multiple ministries. It shows that we are individual and community. It reveals that we are a spiritual and corporeal reality. It shows that we belong to Christ and to each other. It shows that we are local and global.

One of the greatest lessons taught by Paul was that unity and diversity can be affirmed in the Body of Christ without needing to neglect one for the other. Being one does not mean being the same. Diversity does not mean division.

Paul's hope and desire was that every member of the Church would act according to "the measure of faith" he or she has received. This was Paul's way of referring to each person's ministry gift in the service of the Church. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul focuses on spiritual gifts, which seem manifested mostly in worship. In Romans 12, the ministry gifts are also manifested in worship, but also seem oriented toward outward-reaching service. Still, no hard and fast line can be drawn between these two sets of gifts. As one among many, each person can exercise his or her gift with the assurance of contributing to a greater spiritual work.

Paul affirms seven gifts for the church in Rome: prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, and compassion. Although they are different areas of ministry, there is still much overlap between them; Paul does not spend time on drawing hard distinctions between these gifts. Instead, he speaks of the attitude with which each gift should be exercised—with humility, commitment, diligence, generosity, and cheerfulness.

Use of our gifts for ministry in service to others is more of what Paul means when he urges us to present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God. Not only is it important that we do this, it is also important that we do this with the right spirit and attitude.

1. What lessons can you share about the role of attitude in ministry and service?
2. How have you been blessed or challenged by diversity in the Church of Jesus Christ?
3. What more needs to be done to strengthen unity in the Body of Christ?