

God's Blender: God Makes the Church a Community

1 Corinthians 12 [esp. vv. 18, 24, 28]

Community

Our God is a glorious God.

God has promised to be with us.

Our glorious God has brought this church to this point, and he promises to walk beside us into the future.

Introduction

One of the great commentaries on leadership in the U.S. culture is the Western movie or TV show. Mythical, but a reflection of reality. The bad guys come in, hold the town hostage, bully the town to get what they want, prey on weakness, generally come in gangs.

Good guys come in singles or doubles—Long Ranger, Rifleman, Matt Dillon, Virginian.

Something in common—all help people understand they can throw off the shackles that oppress. The good guys empower people, motivate those they lead, energize others to work to accomplish their dreams. People willingly follow the good guys without coercion. The good guys carry others on their backs. The good guys are a puzzle to the controllers—how can you get someone to do what they are supposed to do without intimidation, bullying, and punishment. The answer is—relationships.

Leaders, spiritual leaders, spiritual people, are not shaped in isolation. Spiritual people are shaped in the context of the faith community. God deliberately shapes hearts through community.

This is why I believe our theme statement is true: **God has brought this church to this point, and he promises to walk beside us into the future.**

The work of God is incredibly difficult to explain. Why has this happened to us? What if... What could we have done differently? All kinds of questions.

→ Sometimes we simply join Joseph—God meant it for good.

→ At times we weep with David (2 Sam. 19): O Absalom, my son, I would have been willing to die to make things different.

→ We affirm with Paul when we cannot see: Rom. 8:28.

→ We recommit our faith to Matt. 28:19-20, the continuing presence of God.

We must agonize more than organize. Let us pray for God to do what God has said he will do.

The dynamic of a church as community may be the least understood of all the subplots that tell the story of a church.

I want to tell you about a church. I wish I could give more details about this church, but I wasn't told all of the detailed information. Unfortunately, I do not know the entire story; I only know the story from what I've been told. The church began because of the preaching and ministry of a powerful, well-known preacher. There was a small group meeting, and when this preacher came, the church began to blossom. Not that there weren't problems. In fact, one of the other churches in town was so upset about some of the early successes that they actually tried to pull

the town fathers into the fray. The preacher stayed less than two years, but a strong, vibrant church was the result.

After the preacher left, in fact within 2-3 years, it became apparent that this church was going to have a great challenge in becoming a genuine Christian community.

Let me tell you about a few of the problems they encountered. Some of the folks began to consider themselves super-spiritual. There were problems with sexual immorality; some of the members had trouble separating themselves from their previous religious experiences. And doctrinal wranglings—they got into it over the role of women, how women dress, worship questions, the role of the preacher (and which preacher was the best). Well, I think you'll be able to fill in the gaps if we just read a section of Scripture.

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 12:12-27

Prayer

Let me remind you briefly of what has gone immediately before in 1 Corinthians 12—

vv. 1-3 we share a common life which is focused in the identity of Jesus

4-11 the origin of gifts is not individual

7 we have a common purpose

These lead us to our text:

12-14 God desires unity

15ff Two principles

1) we cannot exclude

2) we must care for all

Today we will distill from this text some principles of community, but first remember the nature of the Corinthian letter.

→ Problem/solution—Division [1], preacher-itis, immaturity [3], lack of cooperation, lack of purpose, distractions, immorality [5], litigation [6], morality [6], marriage/divorce [7], participation in secular things that look religious, eating meats [8-10], questions of dress in worship, worship questions, assembly, [11], spirituality, especially surround spiritual gifts [12-14], even doctrine—resurrection [15].

→ Which preacher is the best—Paul, Peter, Cephas, Christ? What are the right answers? Consider just some of the questions--the role of women, the way women dress, whether we have a time of fellowship in the context of the worship assembly, what we sing, marriage and divorce, morality issues, the nature of forgiveness, questions of fellowship... How modern, how contemporary!

In some ways, these are symptoms/summaries of deeper problems at Corinth--

1. Individualism, independence, me-ism, lack of interdependence
2. Insignificance, only a #, loss of value, loss of worth, esteem problems
3. Impertinence, pride, competitiveness
4. Loss of community

Most of you know the history of 1 Corinthians: the preacher who was so instrumental in helping establish this church writes a letter to them, and while he says a lot of things that might be helpful in answering the questions, the central thrust of what he writes in chapter 12 is this: God has brought this church to this point. God's Spirit is present in this church. God's Spirit enables us to worship, to declare that Jesus is Lord. God has brought all kinds of people with all kinds of gifts, interests, idiosyncracies, challenges, problems, needs, goals, to this church. The same God is working in all.

And why has God brought this church to this point: for the common good, to share, for a common purpose.

These verses say some things about the church, things that are unbelievably hard to comprehend:

1. God is the originator of our differences, 12-13

God intends differences. The church is for all people. Salvation is not for a limited subset. The unity/diversity which is a part of the Christ-body is from God—we were baptized in one Spirit (passive). We were combined into one body, regardless of our backgrounds and uniquenesses (weirdnesses), we were given one Spirit.

2. God is the one who has arranged the body parts as he wants them to be, 18

Doing God's will requires a diversity of abilities. Why are you here? Why am I here today? The answer is in part: because God wants you to be. It is not quite that simple, because human will enters the picture. But be assured from this text, God is the arranger of the body, and it will be just as he wishes it to be. Diversity of personalities and abilities

3. God is the one who combines/blends the members of this church, 24

The nature of unity and diversity is that they exist in a balanced tension with one another. The church becomes visible through the blending of our individualities, not in accenting our individuality. The church is best seen and most visible through the blending and combining which is a work of God. The church is seen as one (from a distance) and up close the diversity becomes apparent. God is the only source of honor—he is the one who honors. We are called to listen to only one voice—God's voice as he walks alongside us. Diversity of visibility.

4. God is the one who appoints to works, 28

Every part of the body has a function, a role. Diversity of roles.

Take-aways:

1. The church is a community of God, because he is the power and the presence. Cannot exclude, must care for all. The church must continue to emphasize and live out its community as a gift from God according to the will of God.

2. Our gifts and work are from God. God is the giver of our gifts and abilities and functions. Our power is from God, not just our abilities. Stewardship means we are stewards of these gifts and abilities. We are stewards of God's presence. The gifts received from God give significance to every member.

3. God is one who gives us value and worth as he arranges, appoints, places us in the body. Every member is significant and necessary. Each member is necessary, no unnecessary members, none we can do without, the body without every member is a spastic body.
4. God gives us gifts to be used. Gifts are not self-serving; gifts are a gift to the faith community. Gifts are to be used for the good of the body.

God is God, God is good, Ps. 100. **God has brought this church to this point—and he promises to walk beside us into the future.**

This truth one must decide in advance. This is the nature of our glorious God. God works all things for good in the lives of those who love him and follow him.

God has brought us here, and he will walk beside us.

Story of my mother's decease....

God is God, God is good. This kind of spiritual center in life answers needs. The common purpose of God shared in this church builds the community of God despite diversity of opinion, preferences, decisions, hopes, dreams.

Forgive yourself, forgive others. The community of God has no reverse—it is impossible to backward. We cannot go back to where we were. But we can overcome the power of the past through the newness that God provides. 2 Cor. 5:17, this is not a one-time event/promise, this is a forever promise.

You and I are new and renewed daily in Christ Jesus, because God walks with us.

I trust you know this power and this faith. I urge you to come to Jesus and find that power and faith in him and in obedience to him, as we sing and encourage one another.