

Bible Study - Covenant and Communion - 1 Corinthians 12.12-31

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. **13** For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. **14** Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. **15** If the foot would 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. **16** And if the ear would 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.

17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? **18** But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. **19** If all were a single member, where would the body be? **20** As it is, there are many members, yet one body.

21 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.” **22** On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, **23** and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; **24** whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, **25** that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. **26** If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. **28** And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. **29** Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? **30** Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? **31** But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Note: 1 Corinthians continues at this point explaining that the “more excellent way” is the way of love. Chapter 13 is the great “love hymn” which includes (13.13) “...now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. This continues yesterday’s discussion regarding the law of Christ being love of God and love of neighbor as indicated in Jesus’ summary of the law (Matt 22, Mark 12, Luke 10) which is a quote from Deut 6.4-5; and Peter’s statement that “love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4.10-11).

Here are some paraphrased excerpts from Tom Wright’s, Paul for Everyone, Galatians, pp 75-76, on bearing one another’s burdens. The crisis in Galatia centers around what the “right kind” of Christian did and thought. They looked down on other Christians; perhaps feeling smug – thinking, “this is not the way we behave.” There was a legacy of division in this church, much of it based on non-theological factors such as status, perceived and real differences. It is very easy for this type of attitude to creep in to any church. Divisions in the wider society (class, income, race, neighborhood, etc...) can quickly lead one group of Christians to look down on another. Just as Jesus the Messiah carried the cross for others, so Christians must carry one another’s burdens.

Questions for discussion: 1 Corinthians 12.12-31 and the proposed Anglican Covenant

In addition to these questions and topics, each of the four sections (and the Preamble) of the proposed Anglican Covenant provides much thought in regard to biblical and theological understanding; and throughout 2010 you are encouraged to discuss each section individually as well as the covenant as a whole.

In this passage from 1 Corinthians 12.12-31, Paul indicates that each person has unique experiences and contexts which shape our thinking and acting. It will be helpful to keep the following in mind as you discuss this passage and the proposed covenant: *I wonder why that person thinks like they do? I wonder what have been and are the major influences that have made them who they are? I wonder why I think like I do? What have been and are the major influences that have made me who I am?*

1 - Verse 26 states: If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. How have you experienced this as a fact in your life in the Church?

2 - Why do you think God values unity in the church?

3 - In this passage, what does unity in the church look like? What human practices, dispositions, and habits serve to build up the unity of the church as Paul imagines it? What appears to be threatening that unity?

4 - Paul was addressing a single group of people with a shared day-to-day life, while the Anglican Covenant attempts to shape a relationship among diverse people who likely will never see one another face-to-face. What does it mean to you to be in communion with these other churches and people? How might your life be deepened in Christ by such a communion? What practices would need to be engaged in order to experience such a deepening? What are the challenges inherent in trying to be in communion with people you likely will never see?

5 - Section 2 of the proposed Covenant describes the Communion as a "worldwide family of interdependent churches." What are the benefits of such a worldwide family? What are the costs? What might we learn from and about Christ that we would not know otherwise?

6 - The Preamble of the Covenant states one of the purposes is "to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...in our different contexts." Each church affirms, through the Covenant, that they are "called by Christ to pursue all things that make for peace and build up our common life." What does our "common life" as a Communion consist of? How do we know what kinds of things make for peace and build up the common life of a global network?

7 - What are the benefits and the risks of this type of written document in guiding the life of the Communion? What role does the Spirit play in the use of written documents to govern relationships? What role does the Spirit play in the use of Councils to govern relationships?

8 - Section Four of the Covenant speaks of "common commitments and mutual accountability which hold each Church in the relationship of communion one with another." Using the passage from Corinthians as a guide, how do the various "parts of the body" have common commitments? How do the common commitments work with the distinctiveness of the individual members of the body?

9 - Paul indicates that a body will be harmed by too much disparity or too much conformity. How can mutual accountability be used to keep the Church on a middle path between these two extremes? Using Christ's own life and teaching, as well as the overall biblical witness, how do you understand the relationship between unity and uniformity; accountability and autonomy; independence and interdependence?

