

Least Of Us

1 Corinthians 12:22-26

Pierre Cannings

I. The Weak v. 22-24a

a. Members of the Body

- i. Members - **part, limb** *the parts of the body*
- ii. Weaker are Necessary

1. Weaker - *the weaker, less important members* “impotence” in the sense of “inner poverty” or “incapacity.”

- a. We have already discussed the meaning of in 1:25 1:27, where *the weak* were the objects of God’s elective salvation

- b. Paul refers to people in the church whose role, or more probably temperament, or perhaps both, present them as **less endowed with power or status than others**. The “strong” or the “gifted” perceived them as not providing much effective *weight* or *power* in the church’s mission, and not much *confidence* borne of *status*

2. Necessary – meeting need

- a. Nay, on the contrary (ἀλλά), much rather those members of the body which seem to be naturally (ὑπάρχειν) somewhat feeble, are necessary.’

- b. before speaking of the *attention and priority* given to “less presentable” parts of the body (v. 23), in this verse Paul first further establishes that **it is much more the case that those ... less endowed with power or status ... are essential** (ἀναγκαῖα). Normally we should translate the Greek as *necessary*, since ἀνάγκη usually means *necessity* or *compulsion*. But since the “superior” or “strong” groups see themselves as the *essence* of the church, the wordplays implicit in vv. 22 and 23 may be best served by rendering it **essential**

b. Members of the Body

- i. Deem - *consider less worthy of special attention*
- ii. Less Honorable - **to being considered relatively unimportant, insignificant** of things that do not elicit special admiration or attention, comp. *held in less esteem* μέλη **1 Cor 12:23**

1. And the parts of the body which we deem to be less honourable, these we clothe with more abundant honour.’ And so our

uncomely parts have a comeliness more exceeding, whereas our comely parts have no need.' This is the result of giving more abundant honour to the less honourable; acting on that principle, we give *most* honour to the *least* honourable. The 'more exceeding comeliness' refers to the abundance of clothing, which, even when other parts are unclothed

2. *Less honorable.*" He is probably thinking of arms and legs that are usually covered and sometimes adorned. It is not easy to say to whom Paul might be referring in the Corinthian community by this or the following Paul alludes to the elaborate use of clothing to cover the *partes minus honestae*, i.e., the private parts. Important as they are to human life, they are protected from public exposure.

3. Bestow

a. in other cases to make explicit the two aspects by two separate but related words. (a) περιτίθεμεν we translate as **invest**, since περιτίθημι means *to place around* in two senses: it regularly means *to bestow* or *to confer* (Prov 12:9, LXX), but also means *to garland* or *to place a piece of clothing or cloth band around* (as in Matt 27:28; Mark 15:17). The English word **invest** admirably conveys (i) *bestowing*, or *investing with*, honor; and (ii) *investing*, in the sense of placing a *vestment* or *cloth* around something.

4. More Abundant Honor

a. *Honor* - the respect that one enjoys, *honor* as a possession

iii. Our Less Presentable

1. Become More *Presentable*

a. those that elicit special modesty pertaining to being unattractive or unseemly—'unattractive, ugly, unpresentable.

b. They were insufficiently impressive to count for much, either socially or spiritually, within the church, or in terms of what "contacts" or ability they might show for mission or for speaking with wisdom and knowledge to outsiders. Probably they never did effective mighty works or healing, seldom or never prophesied, and perhaps never spoke in tongues. In v. 23 they are spoken of as *less attractive* and less "*presentable*

c. between *ugly* and *beautiful* or *adorned*; and (ii) between *private parts* of the body and *publicly "presentable"* limbs and organs. The only way to preserve the wordplay in English seems to be to explicate both double aspects: **our unpresentable private parts have greater adornment to make them presentable.**

- d. This seeming paradox admirably illustrates Paul's point about the church as Christ's limbs and members. Those whom the church likes to put on "on display" as our "best" people (whether because of their supposed wisdom and knowledge, or more visible gifts of the Spirit such as tongues or "mighty works") are far from being the essence of the church. There are those who are needy and know of their need
- e. More importantly, one thought to possess a lesser gift should in fact be accorded greater attention by the other members of the body (cf. 14:1–5) just as in the natural body special deference in attention to dress is paid to those parts of the body deemed less presentable (12:22–24). Possibly Paul was reaching back in thought beyond the immediate discussion of gifts when he referred to **weaker** members (v. 22; cf. 8:7–13) and **less honorable** ones (12:23; cf. 11:22) who also required special care and consideration
- f. All this constitutes a "beauty of holiness" which is Christlike in its self-effacing being "for others." But the status seekers at Corinth within the church perceive such humility as "less presentable" and even an embarrassment, while the gifted ones (socially, spiritually, or in self-confidence of disposition) perceive themselves as the "essential" core of the church. Paul's reaction, **On the contrary** ..., is expounded by means of an unexpected twist in the standard political rhetoric of the body. Those whom "the strong" wish to hide away as second class perform vital functions which the more confident, well-off, or "spiritual" can never perform. All are needed.

2. More *Presentable* Have no Need

II. The Lacking v. 24

a. But God

i. Composed the Body

1. Compose - **to effect a harmonious unit, *compose*** by unifying its members so as to form one organism

- a. The nominative is emphatic. 'But the fact is, it was God who compounded (blended) the body together, by giving to that which feeleth lack more abundant honour.
- b. *Indeed, God has so blended the body, giving greater honor to a part that lacks it.* As in v. 18, Paul again speaks of

God's design in creating the human body, as he now alludes to the natural instinct that human beings have to cover certain parts of the male and female body. That instinct stems from the way God has designed the human body, balancing its parts so that human beings develop a sense of propriety and care for the proper order of all of them.

- c. on the hearers' appropriating the word as a constituent element of the *compound* speech-act). The picture is of a craftsman *mixing a compound*, or of a musician **composing a harmony**, or of a divine agency creating a body by *combining elements to form a compound*. At all events, it is **God** who decides what or who forms part of a hidden foundation beneath the earth, or an ornamental spire or tower (more showy, but less fundamental) in the case of a building; which parts of a painting shine and which yield dark shadow; or which parts of a body are on display and which parts perform utterly essential functions for the survival of the whole.
 - d. Those who think themselves already "gifted," "attractive," "essential," or "presentable" are precisely *not* those who should be seeking still further attention and applause. By contrast, **God** (emphatic nominative here) has determined how the church is **composed**. The verb *συνεκέρασεν* is the first aorist indicative of *συνκεράννυμι*, which is used of a painter *mixing and blending colors*, of **composing** a harmonious work or substance, or of *compounding the various elements which together form the human body*
- ii. More abundant *Honor*
 - 1. The **member** who lacked
 - a. Lacked - honor to the parts that are inferior' or

III. All Of Us v. 25-26

- a. No Division in **Body**
 - i. **Division** - the condition of being divided because of conflicting aims or objectives, *division, dissension, schism* which includes mutual subjection and earnest care for the weak, 1 C. 12:12
 - 1. **He purposed that there should be no split...** We fully discussed the meaning of *σχίσμα* as *rent, tear, dissension*, or **split** under 1:10 (see above). In 1:10 the correlative verb was *καταρτίζω*, *to mend, repair, or knit back together*. The obsession with groups

and with status *tears* and **splits the body** of Christ, **limb** from **limb** and **organ** from **organ**. To have reserved the choice of gifts to God alone without further ado would have prevented the disruption of the purposed unity.

2. Significantly, Paul again uses *schisma*, “discord” (recall 1:19; 11:18), in this conclusion that he draws from the illustrative comparison that he has been making since v. 12. As there can be no discord between parts of the human body, whether weak, “less honorable,” and “unpresentable” or strong, of “greater honor,” and “presentable,” there may be no discord in the body of the Christian community, where concern for one another and due respect should reign supreme

ii. **Members Same Care**

1. **Care - *be concerned about***

- a. the members should have the *same* care one for another’: τὸ αὐτό is emphatic, and μεριμνῶσιν is plural because the argument requires that the members be thought of as many and separate: 1 Tim. 5:25; Rev. 5:14; Luke 24:11. The verb implies anxious care, thoughtful trouble.

b. **One Member Suffers**

i. **All of Suffer**

1. **to suffer with**, occurs within the NT only here and in Rom 8:17 (where it denotes *suffering with* Christ), the two terms regularly mean **to suffer** in a medical context in Hippocrates and in Galen. The effects of disability on the part of a specific limb or organ (μέλος) on the body as a whole appears widely in ancient writers. Chrysostom, e.g., compares the pain caused to the system merely by a sharp thorn in the foot.
2. As it is, the *care* or **concern** (μεριμνῶσιν, subjunctive of μεριμνάω) of a given individual or group should have been directed not at their own standing or role, but equally at the standing or role of the whole **body**

c. **One Member Honored**

i. **All Rejoice**