

Apart or A Part **(Lift: Carried by the Wind of the Spirit – Part V)**

5/24/2009

The notes that follow each question below come from discussions that occurred after the sermon or further consideration of some of the issues raised. They should not be considered the “correct” answers by any means. It is hoped that they will provide a starting point for developing your own discussion of Pastor Steve’s sermons.

1. The focus for today is on the role of the Holy Spirit in our belonging to a community of believers. Whether you call this entity a church, a family of God, or a body of Christ, the vision is that we are actively involved in a group of Christians who worship together regularly. To set the stage for this discussion, consider briefly the following:

A. What are some groups, clubs, teams, or associations to which you belong (outside of church)?

Most should have benevolent groups (Lions, Kiwanis, Rotary, etc.) and other groups to add to the list. Allow this to be as broad as you like.

B. How do you know you belong to these groups?

This seems like a silly question at first, but if you press, you will find that there are usually certain membership steps that have to be taken and there is a formal time at which one is accepted into membership. Thus, we clearly know when we have switched from attending to belonging.

C. Are there groups, clubs, teams, or associations to which you no longer belong? If so, what happened? Why did you leave? How did you know that you no longer belonged?

This could take lots of directions. Moving out of town, losing interest in a particular organization, or no longer sharing a need for that organization (e.g., kids no longer in school, so no need to belong to the PTA). The key is to get people to talk about what constitutes not belonging, which may help with the discussion of belonging.

2. Pastor Steve described five different attribute by which we might know we belong to some group or community. Each starts with the letter “F”. What were they and give examples of each.

a) Formality – we take membership vows, are voted in (or allowed to participate in votes), go to meetings, give money, and do other official things that make it obvious that we are part of the group.

b) Frequency – we participate with the group often. This is were we go when we go to something or who we go with when we go with a group.

c) Function – We are involved and play a role. We take part in activities with this group or at this place, volunteering to help out. We desire to be actively involved.

d) Familiarity – The people in this group or at this place know my name and I know theirs. I know the leaders personally.

e) Feeling – I sense that I fit in, I am accepted, and that I am compatible with others who also belong to this group.

3. What do these attributes have in common?

These tend to be external attributes. They describe what we see, feel, and do as we interact with others, but really have very little to do with us internally.

4. Let's now turn to the passage in 1 Corinthians to see how the description of those who belong to the new Christian church is different from the above. Start with 1Cor 12:4-6 and consider how God is described in this three verses.

We actually see the Trinity with the Holy Spirit (v. 4), Christ (v. 5), and the Father (v. 6) all involved in orchestrating the members of this new body of believers called the Christian church. They all work in conjunction with us to use our strengths and talents for the good of the body.

5. Read carefully 1Cor 12:7-11 to see how we receive the gifts with which God blesses us. How are the gifts allocated?

We do not all receive the same gifts. We shouldn't feel inferior or superior based on the gifts we have been given. The Holy Spirit carefully determines who will be give what gifts.

6. Read 1 Cor. 13:1-2 to see what else we need besides these gifts in order to serve God.

We can have the greatest of all gifts (i.e., be very talented), but we if do not utilize those gifts with love, then we might as well not use them at all. Reading Chapter 12 before Chapter 13 gives both a deeper meaning.

7. Now look at 1 Cor 12:12-14 and determine what all of this discussion is about.

Clearly, this passage is talking about the "body" and refers to the early Christian church. The description of Jews and Greeks being baptized into this body, this group, this family of believers makes it clear that we are all in it together with no one having a favored role.

8. So why did Pastor Steve say this body of believers was “not a collection of individuals”? How is that different from what is described in 1 Cor. 12?

Because the church is to be a body of many parts, each of which complements the other such that the whole accomplishes greater things for God than the sum of the parts could ever imagine doing.

9. How is all of this like a jigsaw puzzle?

Each piece of the puzzle might have some very interesting and pretty colors, but it is only when each piece is in its unique place, playing its special role, that the beautiful picture is produced. Any one piece missing makes the picture less than it could be. Any piece in the wrong place causes the entire puzzle to become a jumble of confusion.

10. Finish up the passage by reading 1 Cor 12:26-27. Individual churches are often called families of God. How do these verses lead one to that description?

Families tend to share events, both good and bad, together – as a unit. Whether it is a birth, a wedding, or a funeral, everyone is intimately involved. We laugh or cry together. This is what is described in v. 26. We take no joy in someone else’s problems, nor begrudge them of their honors.

11. Pastor Steve then described four new attributes that describe how we can know we belong in ways that are more internal attributes than the five presented earlier. Each of them starts with an “S”. What were they?

- a) Submission – submit to the group, so much so that, if you are disciplined or ignored, you don’t turn and leave, but work toward reconciliation of any differences.
- b) Support – we don’t just volunteer randomly, but we provide the functions that the body needs. We work within this body to “find ourselves” – to find our optimum function – rather than going off in isolation and trying to find ourselves by ourselves.
- c) Surrender – we don’t compare ourselves to others; thus, we don’t feel inferior or superior to the other members. We identify ourselves with the body, not any particular individual (such as the pastor).
- d) Sympathize – we mourn as others mourn and rejoice as others rejoice. Thus, we feel as a body, shunning any sense of competition or jealousy.

12.. Pastor Steve closed with the claim that whether or not we choose to “belong” is up to each individual. It is not up to the church to pull us in. Do you agree with that? Is it possible that we need to move prospective members through the five external attributes of belonging before they are ready for the four internal attributes? If so, do we need to be more intentional about incorporating them into our activities at first, so they begin to

feel a part of our community? What does all of this say about trying to foster a culturally diverse church?

This is obviously a loaded ending, so you may want to pick and choose what you want to tackle at this point based on the time available and what is most applicable for your church or small group. Any one of these could lead to some serious and beneficial soul-searching. Let the Holy Spirit lead you.