

What Does the Perfect Church Look Like?

I Corinthians 12:12-26

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, April 9, 2017

World War II was considered one of the worst wars in human history. It lasted for six years, involved more than 70 countries, and by some estimates, killed more than 60 million people. But there was another war that started just after World War II that was just as terrifying. It was known as the Cold War. The Cold War was terrifying, not because of the damage it caused, but because of the damage it could have caused. Some of you remember it, but in the Cold War both the U.S. and the Soviet Union threatened to blow each other up with nuclear weapons. They threatened to annihilate each other with the Atom Bomb, and while it never happened, the very idea brought the world to the brink of chaos. Shots were never fired and battles were never fought, but threats were made, insults were given, people were attacked behind closed doors, and in general, fear reigned supreme. I mention this because most people experience this in the church. They experience a Cold War. They experience threats and insults and fear. They experience getting attacked behind closed doors. They experience what we could call “covert hostility.”

I read somewhere recently that in North America, everyone has two cars, two kids, two dogs, and more than half a dozen church that they used to attend. Why? Because people get attacked in churches. They get blown to smithereens. I can't tell you how many Christians I have talked to who left a church because someone came after them, or because someone said something nasty to them, or someone attacked them behind closed doors. I have family members who swear they would never go to church again because people treated them this way. I've met neighbours who have said the same thing. I've had friends who have said it because they're seen Christians eat each other alive.

It isn't just the people who experience this, but the pastors experience it too. According to some statistics, the average pastor only stays in his church for three to four years before moving on. He is at his church for three to four years and then he quits. Why? Because he gets attacked. Because he gets blown to smithereens. And before we get too discouraged, I want to remind you that it has always been that way with the people of God. There has always been a Cold War brewing behind the scenes. You saw it in Moses' day. In fact, in Moses' day, God opened the ground to swallow some men who were attacking him. He literally created an earthquake. Numbers 16:31-35 says:

As he finished speaking all these words, the ground that was under them split open; and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah, with their possessions. So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol, and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly... because they rebelled against the Lord and His servant, Moses.

That all happened because people were fighting behind the scenes; because people were trying to fight Moses and tear the kingdom away from him. It didn't stop there. You see, the same thing happened with David. 2 Samuel 15 says,

Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way to the gate, and when any man needed the King... he would say, "Oh, that someone would appoint me judge in the land, then every man who has any suit or cause could come to me and I would give him judgment...so in this manner, Absalom stole away the hearts of the men of Israel.

Absalom threatened to blow up the kingdom. He threatened to smash it to smithereens, and eventually he did. He brought about a civil war that had to be put down with violence. You see the same thing happening with Solomon's son Rehoboam and Jeroboam. They split the kingdom in two, this time permanently. This time it would never recover. You see the same thing happening with the Apostles. Paul writes to the Galatians: "You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose very eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?" People were bewitching the Galatians. They were tricking them and leading them astray.

Peter writes in 2 Peter 3:3, "Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts..." Mockers were coming or were going to come into the church – people who follow nothing but their own lusts. The point is that the church has always been at war. There has always been violence in the household of God. There has never been a time of total peace. You saw it in Israel; you saw it in the church; you saw it all throughout the Bible. In fact, there are only four chapters in the Bible that don't have any violence in them. Do you know what they are? The first two and the last two: Genesis 1-2 and Revelation 21-22; the beginning and the end.

In the beginning, sin isn't there yet, so you don't have violence and you don't have conflict. In the end, sin has been done away with so you don't have it there either. It's all gone. But other than that, the entire Bible is full of tension. It is full of threats, and insults, and fear, which should encourage you because it means that God is not caught off guard by any of that. He has a solution to the problem. There is a way to end the Cold War.

This morning we are continuing a series called "Foundation of the Church" where we are looking at some foundational or fundamental issues in the church. Some key principles of the church, if you will. In doing that, we have talked about what the church is and what the church does. We have talked about how the church is different from the world and how it is different from the parachurch. In the next month or so, we will talk about who leads the church and who can join the church. We will talk about church eldership and church membership, and then we will draw it to a close. We will go on for another month and then we will bring it to a close.

But you can't talk about all of this without spending at least one week talking about the "perfect church." You can't go over every angle of church life without spending at least one week talking about its ideal. What does the perfect church look like? What is its ideal? If we could draw a picture of it, what would we draw? I want to tell you on the front end that it's hard to draw a picture of the perfect church. I came across a poem this week that said it like this:

I think that I shall never see
A church that's all that it should be
A church whose members never stray,

Beyond the straight and narrow way

A church that has no empty pews,
Whose preacher never sings the blues;
A church whose deacons always 'deak'
And none is proud and all are meek

Where gossips never peddle lies
Or make complaints or criticize;
Where all are always sweet and kind
And all to others' faults are blind.

Such perfect churches there may be,
But none of them are known to me.

That was right, "none of them are known to me." There really is no perfect church. There really is no perfect place to worship, because the church is full of sinners. It is full of people who bite and claw and scratch at each other. But with that said, God still gives us a picture of a perfect church here in 1 Corinthians 12, and He says that it looks like a body. It looks like a body.

The perfect church is a place where everyone stops the Cold War; where they learn to work together and stop blowing each other up. A body works together, doesn't it? It doesn't fight against itself. If you see a body fighting against itself, you will know that it's sick. You will know that it needs to see a doctor. It's the same say with the Church. To kind of lay this out, in 1 Corinthians 12, the Corinthians were fighting over the spiritual gifts. They were engaged in a Cold War. Verse 1 says, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware."

So this is over the gifts. The battle was fought over who thought they had the best gift; the prophets, or the tongues-speakers, or the healers, and Paul has to remind them that, "All the gifts are important to God. Every one matters to Him." I won't read this for the sake of time, but if you look in verses 4-11, you will notice that the word "same" and the word "another" appear over and over again in this passage. The idea here is that in the perfect church, the same God gives different gifts to different people. To "another" this one, and to "another" this one, and to "another" this one. That's what the passage says. We have the same Lord, but different gifts. We have the same God, but we don't all look alike.

Some of you grew up in church where everyone looks alike because you thought that was the perfect church, right? You thought that was the way to do it. Make everyone wear the same clothes and have the same haircut and read from the same translation of the Bible. But that's not the perfect church. It's not even close. It has nothing to do with it.

Some of you have dreams of a church where everyone walks in on a Sunday morning happy and holding hands and singing hymns, and the angels are singing in the background and there's a rainbow peaking in through the clouds and there's never any snow ever. That's not a perfect

Church. That's a Hallmark card. Do you guys have Hallmark here? That's a Norman Rockwell painting.

Some of you think it's a place where there are never any problems; where people never have to work through anything because there are no disagreements. But Paul says that's not a perfect church. That's not even reality, like we just talked about. Paul says that a perfect church is where there are problems, but we figure them out. It is where we do fight, but we repent and we make peace; where we are different, but we serve the same God. We have different abilities, we have different gifts, different preferences, but we bring them together to serve the same God. And that's what I want to talk to you about this morning.

In 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, I want you to see several images for the perfect church. In verses 12-26 Paul shows us how to stop the Cold War by giving us several images for the perfect church. The first one is this: It is a healthy body. Like we just said, the perfect church looks like a healthy body. It looks like a place where everyone is united even though they are different. Read verse 12 with me: "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ."

There are a lot of different images in Scripture for the church. For example, Ephesians calls it a "bride" or a wife of Christ. It has a love relationship with Him. It has an affection for Him. The Gospel of John calls it a "vine" and a "flock of sheep." The church draws life from Christ like a branch from a vine, and it follows Him like sheep. Other New Testament books call it a "family" or a "kingdom." Some call it a building and a house. Revelation calls it a lampstand. But here Paul calls it a body. Jesus' literal body is seated at the right hand of the Father in Heaven. His literal body is gone, but His spiritual body is with us in the church. As Alexander MacLaren put it, "People can't see Jesus, but they can see us." They can see His church, which should be sobering for us because that means that what we do as a church reflects on Him. If we live holy lives, it shows others that He is holy. If we live unholy lives, it shows others that He is unholy. I want to say more about verse 12 in a minute, but in verse 13, Paul elaborates on this when he says, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."

I mentioned to you before that Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, were the biggest barriers that anyone knew about in the First Century. The Jews hated the Greeks, or the gentiles – the word could translate either way. In fact, they hated them so badly that when a Jew came to Israel from "gentile territory," he would shake the dust off his feet to make sure that he didn't bring any of it into the Holy Land. Gentile dirt was considered too dirty for the Jews. It was too contaminated, so they would shake it off. He would also make sure that when he was away, he would never enter a gentile house, drink from a gentile cup, or touch a gentile hand. There are even stories of Jewish sects like the Essenes starving to death when they went into exile because they would rather die than eat gentile food. It was pretty extreme. Everything about the gentile was repulsive to the Jews. Everything about them was filthy. Some Jewish men even started the day with the prayer, "I thank you God, that I am neither a woman, a Samaritan, or a Gentile." And the Gentiles felt the same way about the Jews. They couldn't stand them because they were arrogant and so obnoxious to everyone around them.

But Paul says here that that's all over now. Jew and gentile – that's all finished now, because you are one. You are all baptized into the same Body and made to drink of the same Spirit. The word “baptized” and “drunk” is in a Greek tense which shows that it's a one-time event. When you were saved, you were baptized one time. You drunk or took of the Spirit one time. You did it once and that was it. It was over. Jew or gentile – over. Slave or free – over. Now there is only Christian. Now there is only Christ. Race doesn't matter anymore because now there is only one colour in the church, and that is red, because you must be covered in the blood of Jesus Christ in order to be saved. Money doesn't matter anymore because now there is only one tax bracket in the church, and that is broke, because the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

By the way, since the church was small back then, everyone knew who the slaves were. Everyone knew who was owned by someone else. It was humiliating to them, and it was embarrassing. It made them feel small, as you can imagine. But Paul says that's all over now in the church. Slaves; free – that's all finished now. Can I just say that this is something that God alone can do in the church? This is something that God alone can produce? You can't manufacture this. You can't make this up. Some of you grew up in churches that tried to manufacture this by doing outward stuff like I just talked about – by telling everyone to wear the same clothes and listen to the same music and wear the same haircut. All the men wear suits and all the women wear dresses. All the men shave every day and the women don't wear make-up. All the men have short hair and the women have long hair. Or there is a flip-side to this: Everyone wears jeans and a t-shirt and they all have long hair and nobody shaves and they all wear black-rimmed glasses. I don't know why they do that, but in the edgy churches black-rimmed glasses seem to be a big thing. But can I just tell you that your glasses can't do this? Can I tell you that your haircut or clothes or your make-up can't do this? You see, that's all surface stuff. That's all external. You need something more for this. You need something greater and more powerful. You need the Holy Spirit. You need the saving work of Christ.

There is a Peanuts cartoon where Linus and his sister Lucy are watching TV and she tells him to change the channel and he says, “Why should I do that?” and she says, “Because I have this,” holding up her fists. Listen, you can make people look alike with “this”; you can make them change their clothes and their haircut with “this,” but you can't make them change their souls. You can't make them change their inner man. The unity Paul is talking about here is a unity of the soul. It is a unity of the inner man. It goes deeper than your clothes or your taste in glasses.

Let me say it another way: Unity is not the same thing as uniformity. Verse 12, which we just read, says, “For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.”

The body is one even though it has many members. It is united even though it is not uniform. Everyone doesn't play the same position just like on a hockey team. Everyone doesn't have the same gifts. Everyone is not a goalie or a forward or a defender. In the same way, a body is united even though everyone doesn't play the same position – even though everyone doesn't look the same. We can be united even though we are Jew and gentile; slave and free. We can be united even though we are white and black; rich and poor. That is the power of the gospel. That is the power of salvation – to draw people together from different backgrounds.

That's what the perfect church looks like. It doesn't look like perfection on the outside. It looks like perfection on the inside. This is when the same people are humbled by the same Law, run to the same cross, cry out to the same Father, believe on the same Jesus, are baptized by the same Spirit, and join the same body. This goes beyond culture. It goes beyond outward things. Some of you have seen this. If you are a Christian, you can go to India and find brothers and sisters in Christ, can't you? You have nothing in common with them outwardly. You have nothing in common with the way they dress or the way they talk or the way they look, but you have everything in common with the way they think. You have unity of soul with them. That's what this is talking about.

I've got to be honest. When I first moved to Canada, I thought, "Boy, I am going to say things to these people and they're going to think I'm crazy." I'm going to say things that are going to make them say, "What is he talking about? We don't do that here in Canada. This is not the U.S." I am 2300 miles away from home and I thought I was going to get blank looks from you guys and I didn't. Why? "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."

That goes beyond culture. It goes beyond Canada and the U.S. It goes all the way to the heart. Which leads me to ask, "Is this what you want in our church?" If I could ask for anything in the world, I would ask for this, but is this what you want? Do you want to see this in our body? And if so, how badly do you want it? What are you willing to do? What are you willing to give up to make it happen? Are you willing to give up your personal preferences? That's the only way this is going to work. Are you willing to say, "I don't have to have it my way, on my terms. People don't have to dress the way I dress or talk the way I talk or look the way I look. That's all preference. I can give that up." Are you willing to do that? If not, we can never have the "perfect church." We can never even have a healthy one. In his book "Maximum Impact," Wayne Mack tells the following story about Hudson Taylor, the famous missionary to China.

Hudson Taylor is recognized as one of the most effective missionaries who ever lived. He loved Christ supremely.

But when he first came to China, he soon realized, that if he was ever going to reach the Chinese for Christ, he would have to become Chinese himself. That meant, of course, learning their language, but it also meant learning their culture. He decided that he would adopt their customs unless their customs opposed Scripture.

So he began to wear Chinese rather than British-style clothing... He also shaved his forehead and wore a ponytail in the rear.

He also adopted a Chinese name and began eating with chopsticks. His wife even picked up on this. For example, when they were in public, Maria [Hudson Taylor's wife] would no longer walk arm in arm with him as they did in England, but instead, she would walk several paces behind him.

Are you willing to do that for this church? Are you willing to die to your personal preferences? I think if most of us were honest about it, we would say, "I'm not eating with chopsticks. I wasn't

raised that way. That's uncomfortable to me. That's not my preference. I'm not walking behind my husband. That's ridiculous. I won't do that."

Paul says, "I have become all things to all men that I might win some. To the Jew I have become a Jew. To the Gentile I have become a Gentile." He says, "I do all things for the sake of the Gospel, so that I might become a fellow partaker of it." He says: "For the love of Christ compels us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."

Can you say that? Are you willing to live for Him who died and rose again? Are you willing to let the love of Christ compel you and become all things to all men? That's the only way this will work in a church.

That leads us to a second image for the ideal church. The first is that of a healthy body, where everyone is united even though they are different; where everyone is together even though they are not the same. "The body is one and yet it has many members." That leads to a second image for the ideal church: A happy foot. Yes, I said "a happy foot." The perfect church looks like a happy foot. It's a place where the lowest members are still happy.

For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.

The foot is the lowest part of the human body. You can't get any further down than your foot. It does all the dirty work. It gets continually walked on. It is also hidden most of the time by socks or shoes, and it smells bad.

I remember coming back from a conference in Louisville, Kentucky, and I asked the men on a car ride home if I could take off my shoes because my feet were hot. They said, "No. Nobody wants to smell your feet." Paul says here that it only makes sense that your foot can resent all that abuse. In verses 14-15 he relates it to the hand. The hand is on the top part of the human body. It is in a very noticeable location and is much more appreciated. It gets more attention than the foot. It gets washed more often; patted more often; held more often.

So Paul asks, "What would happen if the foot said, 'Because I am not treated like that, I quit.'?" What would happen if the foot said, "Because I am not a hand...because I am not more noticed and given that kind of respect, I am no longer a part of the Body."? He said the same thing about the ear in verse 16. It wouldn't make sense for the ear to say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the Body...because I am not out front being noticed, I don't belong." It's the same way in the church. It doesn't make sense to say that I don't belong because I don't have any public gifts. It doesn't make sense to say that I don't belong because I don't get patted or held or appreciated more often. Verses 17-20 say it this way:

If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body.

Going back to what we keep saying, the body has many members. It is united but it's not uniform. We don't all have the same gifts. We can't all be an eye or a hand. Everyone can't be a hand or an eye. Someone has to be a foot. Someone has to get walked on. Someone has to go unnoticed. That's just the way it is. To say this another way, God has arranged the members of the body just the way He wanted them, and to go against that is to go against God. To be angry with your gifts is really to be angry with God who gave you the gifts. He made you an ear or an eye or a hand. He made you a servant or an administrator or a helper or a teacher, and to buck up against that is to buck up against Him. To get mad at that is to get mad at Him.

Jerry Bridges says, "When you complain about the weather, you actually complain about God who gave you the weather. When you complain about your gifts, you actually complain about God who gave you the gifts."

Let me just say that this can play itself out in a lot of different ways in the church. You see it when people get territorial – when they get territorial about their ministry; territorial about their gifts; when people say "mine." This is "my" territory. This is "my" ministry. This is "my thing. Back off! The rest of you just leave me alone."

I have been in churches where no one gets to play music but one person and one person only, and if you question that, you get a Cold War. You get a nuclear bomb. I have seen other churches where one person gets to serve in the nursery and one person only. One person gets to lead music and one person only. One person gets to teach and one person only. Everyone else has to watch. Everyone else has to stand back. Paul says that's like a body full of eyes. He says it's like a body full of hands. In fact, he says it's not a body at all. It's a monster. It's a freak of nature. A body has many parts.

This also plays itself out when new people come in and say, "All you guys are idiots. Everything you have done for the past 30 years is a wash. This is my gift – let me fix it. Get out of my way." I think we can all be guilty of that sort of thing, but this is where someone new comes in and starts cutting off parts of the body. "Oh, you're a foot. Well, we don't need you." *Snap*. "Oh, you're an ear. We don't need you, either." *Snap*. "All we need is my part. All we need it my gift. All we need is my territory. The rest of you can just go away."

Which leads me to this question: Are you okay when someone else butts in on "your" ministry? Are you okay when someone else gets involved in "your" thing? Are you okay being a foot or an ear or a nobody for a while? Or do you have to be in charge? It has been said that, "Many people want to serve God in an advisory capacity only." Is that you? Do you want to serve God in an advisory capacity only? Do you want to serve the church in an advisory capacity only? Or are you willing to follow someone else? Paul says that a body doesn't work if everyone is the boss. A church doesn't work that way. So are you willing to give up being the boss? Are you willing to give up being in charge?

You could look at it this way: There is no territory in the church anyway, because the church doesn't belong to you – it belongs to Christ. It's His territory. We just serve in it. We just live in it. We don't own it. If He brings new people into His territory to serve, let them do it. By all means, let them serve. If you are new to us, and other people have been serving for a long time, let them serve. And be very gracious with how you offer to help. Be very kind. But be happy with the gifts God has given you. Be happy to be a foot or an ear or whatever. Just be happy to be saved at all.

During the American Revolution, a man in civilian clothes came across a group of soldiers repairing a well, and he got off his horse and helped. The whole time he did that, their captain yelled and shouted and belittled them. He acted like a jerk. When they finished, the man in civilian clothes got back on his horse and said, "If you ever need any more help, just call me up and I will come. My name is George Washington. I am the General of this army." None of us is too great to serve, amen? Not even the General. None of us is too great to get down off our horse and help. Let's be sure to remember that. Let's all be happy feet this morning.

All of this leads to one more image for the ideal church. We have a healthy body where we are one even though we are different. We have a happy foot where we are happy even though we are unnoticed and even though we are unappreciated. And finally, that leads to one more image for the ideal church: A humble eye. If you skip down to verse 21, it says, "And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; or again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'"

Just as everyone can't be an eye, so those who are eyes can't say to those who are not, "I don't need you. You don't matter." The eye is the most visible part of the human body, obviously. When you look at someone, you look them in the eye. It is the most memorable part of the body, but an eye can't say to a hand, "I don't need you," or the head to the foot, "I don't need you. You aren't necessary. You aren't needed," because we are all part of the same body. Just like in Hockey, a forward can't say to the goalie, "I don't need you," and a goalie can't say to the defenders, "I don't need you." We all need each other, and Paul says this a different way in verses 22-25:

On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

To explain this, when I first moved to Indianapolis, I took a Saturday morning to visit one of our members who worked at a homeless shelter downtown. I went to visit him during lunch time, so he asked me if I wanted to join him for lunch. As we were eating, a piece of chicken got caught in my esophagus. Now, I don't know if you know this or not, but chicken is not supposed to get caught in your esophagus. That's a bad thing. The esophagus is the muscle that helps you to swallow. When something gets stuck there, everything that goes down comes back up. So for the

next hour and a half, everything that went down my esophagus came back up – my water, my food, my spit. Everything came back up again. It was horrible. And I mention that because my esophagus is “less honourable” than other parts of my body. It’s less visible. You wouldn’t want to see my esophagus. You wouldn’t want to reach out and touch it or put jewelry on it. It’s ugly. It’s revolting. But you can’t live without it. It has “abundant honour,” as verse 23 says. I could cut off my eye and still live, but if I cut off my esophagus, I would die. I would be finished. And that’s what Paul is referring to here. You can live without your eyes or your hands, but you can’t live without your esophagus. You can’t live without your heart or your kidneys. You can’t live without your lungs or other vital organs. They have “abundant honour.”

It is the same way with the church. There are people in Grace Fellowship Church that we can’t live without, and you don’t even know who they are. They are hidden. They are unseen. They seem weaker because they work behind the scenes, but they are not. They are the strongest of all. The church can survive without me. You survived without a pastor for more than a year. But if some of you left, it wouldn’t. If some of you left, it couldn’t make it. A famous evangelist was once asked who the godliest person was that he knew, and he gave the name of an elderly woman that no one ever heard of before. They asked, “Why her?” and he said, “Because she prays for me; because I can’t do it without her. She has abundant honour.” We could say that about some of you. This church can’t survive without you. You have abundant honour. You are the heart of this church. I was going to say that you are the esophagus, but that’s not very encouraging. “You handle all the spit in the church.” No, you are the heart. You seem to be weak, but you are not. You seem to be unnecessary, but you are the strongest muscle of all.

This leads me to ask, “Do you serve when nobody sees?” That’s a very clear way to apply this. Do you serve when nobody sees, or do you only serve when people are looking? Do you serve to get abundant honour before men, or do you serve to get it before God? Do you serve to get a reward in Heaven, or do you serve to get a reward down here on Earth?

Remember what Jesus said:

And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners in order to be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

You pray to get a reward from God. You serve to get noticed by Him. So are you doing that? Do you stack chairs and pass out bulletins and pray for people and evangelize so others will say, “Wow, what a godly saint you are – what a blessed servant of God!”? You can’t be a healthy body and a happy foot and a humble eye if you do things like that. You can’t serve God if it’s all about you. Paul says it this way in verse 26: “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.”

You can’t suffer with people if it’s all about you, can you? You can’t rejoice with others if you are consumed with yourself. That’s really the point of this passage. In a body, the members serve each other. In a body, the members suffer together. The word for “suffers” in verse 26 is

sumpaso, and means “same feeling.” The church should be so united that we all have the “same feeling.” If one part suffers, we all suffer. If one part rejoices, we all rejoice. We feel it together. If one person gets hospitalized, we all feel that. We all weep with them and pray for them. If one person gets married, we all feel that. We all rejoice with them and celebrate with them and cheer with them. It’s not about me – it’s about us. It’s not about the hand – it’s about the whole body.

We could say it with a story. In 1986, two ships collided on the Black Sea just off the coast of Russia. The cause of their accident was not a technical malfunction or bad weather – nothing like that. It was human stubbornness. Both vessels knew about the other one’s presence, but they simply refused to get out of the way. My friends, that is how the Cold War starts. It starts when we refuse to get out of each other’s way. It starts when we refuse to step aside and give up our rights. But the Cold War ends when we do that. It ends when we give up our rights for someone else. It ends when we give up our own way for someone else. It ends when we have *sumpaso*, the “same feeling.” If one member suffers, we all suffer. If one member rejoices, we all rejoice.

The perfect church is not a place where everyone dresses alike or talks alike or looks alike. It’s not a place where we all hold hands and sing on our way into church, and it’s not a place where we have no problems. It’s a place where we are one even though we are different. It’s a place where we are united even though we are not the same. It takes a lot of humility to do this, by the way. It’s not easy. It’s not easy to get out of each other’s way. It’s not easy to get down off your horse and help, but that’s the point: it’s not easy. It’s supernatural. And that’s what we want to see in the life of our church. We want to see the supernatural. We want to see something that God alone can do, and we want to give Him all the glory for it. Let’s pray for His help in doing that today.