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A Community Centered by Love: A Linguistic Approach to the Theology of Paul's Instruction for the Corinthian Body

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A COMMUNITY CENTERED BY LOVE: A LINGUISTIC APPROACH TO THE
THEOLOGY OF PAUL'S INSTRUCTION FOR THE CORINTHIAN BODY

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A COMMUNITY CENTERED BY LOVE: A LINGUISTIC APPROACH TO THE
THEOLOGY OF PAUL'S INSTRUCTION FOR THE CORINTHIAN BODY

Abstract

This article appropriates elements of M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

to analyze the Apostle Paul's communication with the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 12-14.

The linguistic evidence of the text reveals that Paul's instructions guide the Corinthians to order

their community through love, imitating the Trinity's nature of diversity and unity. The final

section translates Paul's teachings to a modern context using Richard B. Steele's article,

"Disability and the Beloved Community," a reframing of how Christian communities interact

with and not only include persons with disabilities but fully incorporate their diverse gifts into

the church body.

Introduction

Jesus affirms that the greatest command is to love- God and one another (Matt. 22:36-40

NRSV).[1] Even with Jesus' ministry available as a guide, Christians have struggled to understand

the practical actions that follow these words for centuries. 1 Corinthians 12-14 is Paul's message

to the church in Corinth concerning this very topic. Through the lesson of the love revealed in

the doctrine of the Trinity, Paul instructs the Corinthians to use their gifts to order and edify their

church's "body." This text can lead modern Christians to model these practices in their

communities of various giftings and special needs.

When reading these three chapters separately, the reader may overlook the connections

that bind them together. A linguistic approach carefully reads the sentence structures to find

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[1] NRSV will be the primary translation used unless otherwise noted.

textual patterns. These patterns help interpret the purpose behind the author's choice of words and types of phrases. This methodology is more organized and logistical than regular exegetical reading. In particular, Paul intentionally sends this letter to the Corinthians to provoke a positive change in their community. With the guidance of linguistic clues, the reader can better understand the world of the text and use that knowledge to apply it to one's own context.

A. Theory

A.1- SFL Framework

I appropriate a theory from M.A.K. Halliday and Jonathan J. Webster's work in *Text Linguistics*.[2] Halliday calls this theory "Systemic Functional Linguistics" (SFL), as it chiefly focuses on the *function* of language; this theory "essentially equate[s] meaning with function."[3] There are three main functions of SFL, called "metafunctions": experiential, interpersonal, and textual.[4] The experiential function of SFL looks at how the author/speaker describes the world, whether real or ideal. Interpersonal focuses on relationships between two parties. Finally, textual examines how a text fits into a larger context. All three metafunctions inevitably overlap in any text, but my research separates them according to which metafunction adequately answers the questions posed. Each has its own components, or sub-systems, of grammatical structure available as

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[2] M.A.K. Halliday and Jonathan J. Webster, *Text Linguistics: The How and Why of Meaning,* (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2014). I will also draw from the examples of Thompson's work; Geoff Thompson, *Introducing Functional Grammar*, 2nd ed., (London: Arnold, 2004).

[3] Thompson, *Introducing Functional Grammar,* 2nd ed., 28.

[4] Here I use Thompson's three functions instead of Halliday and Webster's. Thompson creates four categories, making the logical its own function instead of combining experiential and logical into the ideational function. For the purposes of this paper, I will not include the logical function in my research.

options for the language user. The experiential and interpersonal categories are the most applicable to fulfill the purposes of this research.[5] I will continue to describe them in more depth.

First, the experiential function expresses the processes of a person's experiences and the other information that accompanies them. The component under this metafunction is called "transitivity," which relates to all the grammatical options responsible for expressing one's experiences. Transitivity includes processes, participants, and circumstances. The many nuances of each category in Hallidayan functional grammar are beyond the scope of this paper, so I simplify the definitions for my purposes.[6] Processes may include an "action, event, mental process, state, [or] relation" and are expressed through verbal groups. Every case of the experiential function contains at least one process but does not have to include a participant, e.g., "It is snowing." There are various kinds of participants: "person, other living being, object, institution, [or] abstraction." Finally, circumstances are the parts of a clause, usually a prepositional phrase, that make up additional information, such as time, setting, or manner of things. This function helps reconstruct the context of the Corinthian church by using these three elements within the text.

The other function I employ in this research is interpersonal. This metafunction concerns the relationship between the author and the audience, which "involves the hearer as an essential participant in the speech act."[7] Halliday calls this component the "mood and residue structure" for the interpersonal function. Again, these definitions are simplified to describe what is

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[5] I am analyzing the English translation of this text because I have not studied the original koine Greek. While there are drawbacks to this technique, I want to recognize the accessibility of using the English language in the United States. Not all people studying the Bible have the opportunity to afford an education to study the New Testament in its original language. Therefore, I would like to offer this methodology as an option for those who use an English translation.

[6] For a more in-depth description of each term within transitivity, see Halliday, *Text Linguistics,* 28-29.

[7] Halliday, *Text Linguistics,* 20.

necessary for this research.[8] The mood includes the Subject and the Finite of the sentence, and the residue is comprised of Predicator, Complement, and Adjunct.[9] In simple terms, the order of the Subject and Finite determines if the sentence asks a question (interrogative), makes a statement (declarative), or encourages an action (imperative). The Predicator, Complement, and Adjunct are the rest of the information in a sentence, the "residue." This structure distinguishes the author's intentions for the addressee by examining the mood of their words. It is constructive in the analysis of Paul's discourse with the Corinthians.

A.2- Speech Acts

Each of the metafunctions offers a variety of options as ways to express a "speech act." The term "speech acts" refers to any use of language meant to invoke a social action of some kind. The three basic forms are defined as I have stated above–questions, statements, and instructions; these correspond to interrogative, declarative, and imperative structures in most cases.[10] However, all structures of language do not fit exactly into these three categories, such as the example of rhetorical questions, which are interrogatives that contain an implied answer. These often influence another person's actions like an instruction, e.g., "Do you really want to eat that sandwich?" Since I study each verse individually, it is more helpful to use general terms because there can be combinations of more than one speech act in a single verse. Therefore, I try to use the broader categories of questions, statements, and instructions (as well as the occasional metaphor) in this research rather than the stricter SFL structures of interrogatives, imperatives, and declarative sentences.

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[8] See Thompson, *Introducing Functional Grammar,* 2nd ed., 49-74.

[9] The Subject is commonly known in English grammar as the noun or pronoun that performs the action in a sentence. The Finite is "the first functional element of the verbal group," e.g., "Did you grab your lunch? Thompson, *Introducing Functional Grammar,* 2nd ed., 49.

[10] Thompson, *Introducing Functional Grammar,* 2nd ed., 36.

A.3- Research Questions

I have compiled three research questions that direct the analysis of the text. Each question appropriates either parts of the experiential or interpersonal components. I list here precisely which components I use and why they are necessary to study the text.

    a.   How does the text represent the Corinthian community?

I analyze the community by reconstructing the narrative through the lenses of both experiential and interpersonal functions. First, I examine the participants in each verse and find the significance of the subject Paul is discussing.[11] Four different participants are in a relationship with the Corinthians: God as the Trinity, Paul, other Corinthians within the church, and the outside world. The processes (using the experiential function definition) that connect to each participant provide insight into the Corinthian church's relationship with each party, including how the church is influenced. The experiential function explains how the Corinthians experience the world around them.

Finally, I analyze the various problems within the church community. I use both metafunctions for this sub-section because they distinctly reveal different aspects of the issues. Experientially, certain parts of the text describe the circumstances and the corresponding participants of the problems–both of which are involved in less-than-desirable processes. I infer from Paul's instructions that the Corinthians are not acting as Paul wants them to, using the interpersonal function. Therefore, he must instruct them to do otherwise.[12] I broadly define instructions as any speech act used to instruct the Corinthian people, whether directly or

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[11] I use "participants" in a broader sense than Halliday's original description. While still meaning a "person, other living being, object, institution, [or] relation," it also refers to the implicit participant of the text not directly mentioned within the text itself. Paul does not always address these participants in every clause of the text, so I will use them generally to refer to the party that is either related to the Corinthian people or addressed by Paul.

[12] These inferences about the community's problems are only theories based on textual information, not statements of absolute truth.

indirectly, to act in a particular manner. These may include, but are not limited to, imperatives (as defined by the mood structure of SFL), rhetorical questions, metaphors, or statements used to define a sentence's subject. The linguistic components provide evidence to support inferences about the potential issues within the community.

b. What are the practical actions that Paul moves the Corinthians to take?

After reconstructing the Corinthian narrative, I analyze Paul's instructions further to understand the intention of this section of his letter. Using the definition of instruction from the last question, I analyze each instruction to uncover common themes or a specific overarching goal Paul is working toward through these speech acts. I study the subject Paul addresses in these teachings to find Paul's motives behind commanding such things. There are three groups I identify as subjects in these instructions: the Body of Christ, the individual Corinthian, and the collective Corinthian body.[13] Depending on the person addressed, Paul instructs differently, which explains the community's diverse needs.

c. How does Paul's instruction align with God's will/character as indicated in the text itself?

Finally, I compare Paul's instructions with God's character in the text. Several statements depict God's identity. In terms of the experiential function, God is the participant of these texts, and there are different processes and circumstances for each of God's trinitarian roles. Paul's implication of the Trinity throughout these three chapters also supports several of his points about the proper expression of the Body of Christ. The definitions of God's character remind the

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[13] I am not distinguishing between plural/singular subjects because my education does not qualify me to study the details between the original koine Greek and English. Instead, I divide the groups into individual and collective Corinthians by examining the context and inferring which instructions could be individualized and which belong to the church as a whole.

Corinthians of their own identity, and Paul includes teachings intended to help them live in ways that express that identity.

B. Procedure:

1. Annotating the text (charting in Google Sheets)

For this first step, I go through verse by verse in the text and separate each verse into different categories: declarative, interrogative, imperative, and other rhetorical devices (e.g., metaphor, parable, etc.). Then, I categorize the participants in the section according to the theme of the sentence.

2. Use Google Sheets formulas to find patterns in the text

Google Sheets gives me access to filters, charts, and summaries that aid in finding patterns within the scriptural data. These patterns give rise to my interpretation of the evidence, which I use in answering my three primary analysis questions in the next step.

3. Answer primary questions in the analysis

I use the three questions noted above to answer my primary research question: "What does Paul's church in Corinth teach us about the importance of community and the dangers of disorder?" After finding the textual patterns in the previous step, I utilize these patterns to present my findings.

4. Use my findings to discern a modern application of this text

After the analysis stages, I interpret the synthesis of my findings to learn how the modern church, specifically in the United States, can apply Paul's message in practical ways. I do this by comparing my findings to Richard Steele's article, "Disability and the Beloved Community," which writes about the community-oriented actions the modern church must make to love every person within their church well, specifically persons with disabilities. It is necessary to

understand that I choose the United States as opposed to other cultures because (1) I was born and raised in the United States, so I understand the particulars of this culture in ways that I would not understand another, and (2) as my main focus is community dynamics as it relates to (dis)order, I believe the marginalization of persons with disabilities speaks to this issue in American Christian churches today.

Analysis

The following section attempts to answer three questions: 1) how does the text represent the Corinthian community? 2) what are the practical actions that Paul moves the Corinthians to take? and 3) how does Paul's instruction align with God's character as indicated in the text itself? The first question creates an image of the Corinthian context at the time the epistle of 1 Corinthians was written. Next, the second question describes Paul's instructions and teachings in the ways they reveal how the Corinthian community needs to change to act more like God's Kingdom. The final question connects God's character with Paul's instruction, revealing how the nature of the church should mirror God's character as created "images of God." Together, the analysis response explains the dangers of disorder within the church and the importance of prioritizing love within a community.

How does the text represent the Corinthian community?

No current historical sources explain the exact context of Corinth when Paul wrote this letter, so no person can precisely capture it from the available knowledge. Thus, this section is a series of inferences based on the linguistic findings. Two different lenses provide insight into the conditions of the Corinthian culture that recreate a representation of the Corinthian community using the text. The first lens views how the people of Corinth posture themselves in relation to

others, indicating their values and position in the world. The second lens examines the potential

communal problems of the Corinthian people. These problems are inferred from Paul's

instructions and what issues he chooses to include in these three chapters. Both lenses develop a

deeper perception of how the Corinthian community was formed and how it functioned.

1) *Corinthian relationships*

Relationships define a group of people and how they act in the world. In this passage, these

relationships include God, Paul, the body's relationship with itself, and the outside world. Paul

addresses directly or indirectly includes individuals/groups in a relationship with the Corinthian

people. I call these different characters "participants." Each participant reveals a unique part of

the Corinthian identity and how the church positions itself in the world.

God is a significant participant in Paul's letter, including all of God's trinitarian roles.

Paul considers God's role in the Corinthian church and the Corinthians' role in response to God's

actions. Each person of the Trinity relates differently to the Corinthians–God the Father, God the

Spirit, and God as Jesus Christ.

Paul references God the Father the most throughout this section of his letter. In chapter

12, Paul describes the Father as the "Great Arranger" of the body.[14] God organizes the body,

giving greater honor to the inferior (1 Cor 12:24).[15] God also appoints the different offices in the

church (12:28). Paul expresses that without this design, the Body of Christ is dysfunctional and

specific and crucial roles are missing, like the sense of smell (12:17). Therefore, God's

arrangement of the church's structure redeems any disorder the church is facing at the time.

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[14] The title, "Great Arranger," is my own language for how I interpret Paul's depiction of God's actions in this section, not a citation from the epistle.

[15] Jesus' teaching supports this description, as Jesus continuously serves those which others consider inferior or on the outside of society. Such as eating with sinners (Mk. 2:15-17), going into the homes of Simon the leper (Mt. 26:6), and speaking with the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:5-30)

God the Spirit is the second most noted trinitarian member in this section. In these chapters, one of the significant distinctions between the Spirit and the Father is that the Spirit organizes on the individual level (12:11), while God designs the overall plan. This role does not mean that God does not work on the individual level; however, the text is clear that "each is given the manifestation of the Spirit," and it is the one that "allots each [gift] individually" (12:7, 11). The gifts of the Spirit only come from the Trinity, unlike the pagans, who attribute various types of blessings to a different god. Paul's description of the work of the Trinity (12:4-6) is an essential distinction from the Corinthians' former pagan way of thinking, "being led astray" to idols.

Finally, God as Jesus Christ is only referenced twice throughout chapters 12-14. The first mention is when Paul writes about the people who speak through the spirit of God will not curse Jesus's name but affirm it (12:3). Jesus' only direct address is when Paul refers to him as "Lord," a common name for Christ in Paul's writing (12:5).[16] The reasoning behind the lack of reference to the subject Jesus in these three chapters is most likely because that person of the trinity is attributed to the issue of salvation. In contrast, God's Spirit is connected to gifts for individual people, and God the Father arranges and oversees all of creation. For a group that has already received salvation, God the Father and Spirit's roles most apply to this section when discussing spiritual gifts and order in the Corinthian church.

The next relationship is between Paul and the Corinthians. As the epistle's author, Paul uses intentional language to share his insights with the church. This language hints at Paul's understanding of how the Corinthian people best receive instruction based on past interactions.

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[16] Fee comments on 12:3, stating that the English translation does not adequately describe the gravity of the confession; "Such an affirmation meant absolute allegiance to Jesus as one's deity…" Therefore, this example earlier in the passage connects with the usage of "Lord," or *kyrios* in Greek here (12:5). Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT. Revised ed., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), 644-45.

For instance, every one of Paul's questions is rhetorical in this section; this includes both of the rhetorical forms: 1) using the pattern " if xyz, then WH-question?" and 2) Paul asking open-ended questions and then following them with his answer.[17] This use of rhetorical questions could be because the Corinthians need a clear message and have trouble understanding Paul's directions if he does not state them simply. Additionally, Paul may not trust the Corinthians to answer these questions for themselves, as they may have mistaken him in the past and led themselves astray.

Therefore, these questions are used several times in the letter as a form of instruction. Though his use of "brother and sister" relays a sense of equality in the Body of Christ, Paul is still both an authority figure and teacher to the Corinthians.

The Corinthian's lives are also intertwined with each other's lives. Paul illustrates these connections using the human body as a metaphor in chapter 12.[18] Like Paul's questions, a metaphor is not a straightforward instruction; its ideas are simpler. Paul asks the Corinthians to use the example of their individual bodies to help them think critically about how to care for the collective body of the church. The problem is that they are self-centered and only focused on their personal good. Paul continuously inculcates the message that the Corinthian body should work for the common good, as well as build up the church. The Corinthians must learn how to prioritize the good of others.

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[17] For example, 1) "If all were a single member, where would the body be?" (12:19), and 2) "What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn…" (14:26).

[18] Martin discusses the misleading effects of Cartesian thought on modern Western interpreters who read 1 Cor. 12:12-26. He explains that Descartes advocates for the separation of the mind from the body. Instead, he argues that the Aristotelian description of the body, along with other Stoic philosophers, better aligns with Paul's beliefs about the body. Aristotle believed that while the soul was incorporeal, it could still occupy space as material things do. Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body,* (London: Yale University, 1995)*,* 6-8.

     Both Lee and Martin agree that the Stoics viewed human bodies as a microcosm of the universe–the macrocosm of the "body." The spirit, or *pneuma,* was thought to have held the universe together. God was connected to this spirit, the mind of the world who "was responsible for the order and continued harmony in the universe. Michelle V. Lee, *Paul, the Stoics, and the Body of Christ*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), 50-55; Martin, *The Corinthian Body,* 15-21.

Finally, the Corinthians share a relationship with the outside world. The "outside world" in this text means the broader context of Corinth. Paul references the "unbeliever or outsider" when describing the importance of using certain gifts over others (14:24).[19] This part of chapter 14 expresses a clear concern for wanting to welcome these groups into the church so that they may "bow down before God and worship him." Paul does not want the outside world to view the Corinthian church as absurd, as he states in 1 Cor 14:23. The issue of the church's image reveals the careful boundaries that the congregation must not cross as a community if they are to invite others into the Body of Christ.

2) *Problems within the church*

The text also allows the reader to discover what kind of problems the church dealt with, which deepens the understanding of the collective Corinthian identity. Paul's instructions, questions, and statements imply that there are problematic realities within the church. The main source of these problems is that the Corinthians have organized themselves contrary to the order that God has set. They are a disordered church that needs to recenter God's love so that they can function as a healthy community.

As stated, chapter 12 includes an extended metaphor about the body. This metaphor contains two negative attitudes held by the different parts of the body. The first attitude is insecurity about one's identity. For example, the ear believes that its gifts are not like the eye's talents and, therefore, are not useful or helpful to the church (12:16). These verses suggest that the Corinthians have created a hierarchy with the different kinds of spiritual gifts, associating higher status with people who possess a specific gift over another.[20] The second attitude

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[19] Fee writes that outsiders were most likely people who entered into the congregation not familiar with the Christian faith. Fee, *The First Epistle,* 759.

[20] Martin supports this claim through his theory that the Corinthian people associated speaking in tongues with angelic qualities, based on the evidence from 1 Cor. 13:1, along with the *Testament of Job;* Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 88-92.

reinforces this idea. This perspective denies another person's identity, believing that certain gifts alone can act beneficially toward the church's edification. Here, the eye says to the hand, "I have no need of you" (12:21). Again, there is an implied bias toward certain gifts, most likely fueled by one's pride or fear. Paul admonishes the church to not act as a disordered body but as a community with diverse parts working together to create one body.

Diversity of gifts can often bring adversity if not handled correctly. Paul's instructions in chapter 14 imply that the church is dysfunctional, or at least it appears that way to the outside world. As Paul admits concern for the way outsiders and unbelievers view speaking in tongues, he may also be admitting that the outsiders already think that the Corinthian church is "out of [their] mind[s]" (14:23).[21] In this state of disorder, Corinthian unbelievers will not associate with the followers of Jesus Christ because it is not a welcoming space for them. Those who speak in tongues seem like "foreigners," not a trustworthy community where they recognize the presence of God (14:11; 25). Instead of following God's arrangement of roles and gifts, the Corinthians have valued certain gifts over others. As a consequence, outsiders and unbelievers do not see the church as a place they can belong.

Paul seems to insinuate that the spiritual gifts have negatively affected the Corinthians' perspective of each other, which has resulted in dividing a community that God has placed together. Instead, Paul suggests a "still more excellent way" –the action of love (12:31). In chapter 13, Paul lists the characteristics of love. A section of this list uses negations of unpleasant attributes, such as "love is *not* envious or boastful or arrogant or rude" (13:4-5, emphasis added). When a statement, such as these verses, negates a definition of a word, it denies any association between the two terms. Each rejected term in the list describes attitudes

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[21] Paul does not want the Corinthians to be associated with pagan practices and the "mania that attended some of the mystery cults." Fee, *The First Epistle*, 759.

that are either self-centered or harmful to others–most likely a reflection of how the Corinthians acted. Paul reminds the Corinthian church that these behaviors cannot correlate with the action of love. If the use of spiritual gifts is used only to build up an individual's self-image, that person "gain[s] nothing" (13:3). The community is broken due to the mindset of status and individuality.

To summarize, the Corinthian church's identity is comprised of their relationships with God, Paul, each other, and the outside world. Every relationship influences the culture of their church and what decisions they make. It is also challenged by the various kinds of problems affecting the community. The Corinthians struggled with a disordered community because of an elevated value for status. These problems, in turn, affected their relationships with each party previously mentioned. Paul's duty was to remind the Corinthians of their purpose and mission as a church that desires to imitate God's character.

What are the practical actions that Paul moves the Corinthians to take? I have divided Paul's instructions into three separate sections. The first is instructions to the general Body of Christ, then the individual Corinthians, and finally, for the collective Corinthian church. These categories help explain the nuances of the instructions and what Paul's intent is behind commanding each Corinthian group to do certain actions. This analysis will uncover the needs of the community, as well as Paul's priorities. One of these priorities is the value of community, as I will prove below.

1. *Instructions for the Body of Christ*

This three-chapter section begins with general instructions and statements about the Body of Christ as a whole. Paul illustrates this group by using a metaphor about the literal form of the human body. Though there are no imperatives given in this section directly, metaphors or

parables are often used in this culture as images of teaching to either help the hearer visualize a correct way to live or to point out an error in living, done in a way that inspires change.[22] This metaphor specifically points out the importance of both diversity and unity,[23] stating, "As it is, there are many members, yet one body" (12:20). The parable warns against two wrong attitudes: being insecure about one's identity and denying another person's identity. The hidden instruction is that the Body of Christ should avoid both attitudes because the identity of each person is as a member of the body, and God has arranged each member for a purpose.

At the end of the metaphor, Paul states, "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it" (12:26). This is another statement that can be interpreted as an instruction. It is an example of how the community should be executed. It is only when an individual pursues the "common good" that they effectively love their community (12:7). Paul recognizes the diverse gifts given to the Corinthians–wisdom, knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, and so on–as blessings to serve the entire body (12:8-10). Alone, each gift has the ability to love others, but *together,* the body is built up and stronger than before. Together, the church amplifies the loving actions throughout Corinth and possibly reach those who also need to experience God's power. The themes about love from chapter 13 follow this idea of a community sharing each part of their lives with each other as well.

Chapter 13 acts as the linchpin of chapters 12-14, centered and holding them securely together. The entire chapter consists of a series of statements, both about spiritual gifts and love itself. In this chapter, Paul combines these two themes into one cohesive argument: love needs to

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[22] Greek political speakers often gave *homonia* speeches that shared similar qualities to Paul's body metaphor. These speeches were meant to inspire concord among the polis and to discourage any discord among the people. Martin, *The Corinthian Body,* 38-47.

[23] I will be using these terms synonymously with "many members" and "one" (12:12). These do not refer to modern ideas of diversity or unity, rather, they represent the idea Paul is present of diverse parts that make up a functioning body.

be the foundation of everything the Corinthians do because, without it, all of their actions are meaningless. Certain commenters believe that the description of love in this section is Paul's contrast to the actual state of the Corinthian church.[24] If so, this description is one of Paul's most important instructions to the Corinthians in this whole section. The heart of this message is to practice love. The Corinthians need to understand what lies behind the purpose of having gifts, so Paul describes what love is and is not. These statements are simple and clear so the Corinthians will understand, with the specific practices following in the next chapter. This format demonstrates that the Corinthians are not already achieving this standard of love. Each negative description of love appears to describe the Corinthians' actions towards one another (e.g., selfishness, boastfulness, pride, etc. (13:4-6)). Paul's entire message intends to act against this disorder of relationships in the Corinthian body, or rather, the lack or absence of sharing love.

2. Instructions for individual Corinthians

Most of the instructions Paul gives in chapters 12-14 are directed toward individuals. In chapter 12, Paul only gives generalized instructions. Chapter 14 shifts who is addressed, as Paul includes specific details for individuals' actions. All of these commands, roughly ten of them, are given in chapter 14. Each command is precise about the kind of action, the number of people involved, and the circumstances wherein the Corinthians should act. Paul instructs actions that concern the use of spiritual gifts, specifically how to use prophecy and speaking in tongues. However, not all members of the church have these gifts (12:29-30). Therefore, it is necessary to instruct the *individual* Corinthians on how to use their gifts properly to build up the church. The amount of specificity can be attributed to the importance of the directions. It seems that Paul is very

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[24] Fee, *The First Epistle,* 705-708; Anthony C. Thistleton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* NIGTC, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 1046-1060; Ralph P. Martin, *The Spirit and the Congregation: Studies in 1 Corinthians 12-15,* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 42-43.

concerned with the image of the church in this chapter, and each of his instructions reflects the necessity to use the gifts properly to represent the church well.

Paul creates a pattern by writing three guidelines on silencing particular groups of people. First, Paul advises those who speak in tongues to be silent in the church if there is no interpreter (14:28). Next, the first prophet who speaks should be silent if another person gets a revelation nearby (14:29-20). Lastly, women are silenced in the churches as well (14:33-35).[25] All three commands surround the statement, "God is a God not of disorder but of peace" (14:33). Therefore, these instructions reference the ways Paul wants the Corinthians to achieve order within their churches. Silence is supposed to offer space for other voices and different kinds of gifts to express themselves in the church. Too many voices cause chaos and disorder, but a balanced set of prophets and leaders creates a body made stronger through diverse parts.

The thesis of chapter 14 is the edification of the church through order and gifts; therefore, every gift should be used for this purpose. Paul focuses on the gifts of prophecy and speaking in tongues. He uses these gifts separately to juxtapose each other. Paul argues that speaking in tongues only benefits the person–if no interpreter is present–because no other member can understand. This not only distances the speaker from the rest of the church but from the outsiders as well (14:11, 23). It also causes more disorder within the body by adding additional voices that may confuse, such as Paul's metaphor of the war bugle suggests (14:8). In this case, order means intelligibility because that is what benefits the community.[26]

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[25] These verses are controversial among feminist theologian circles, and I would like to state my awareness of this conversation. However, this topic goes beyond the scope of this paper. For my purposes, I will use Paul's direction here simply as an example of seeking order within the Corinthian church. Fee, *The First Epistle*, 780-781; Martin, *The Spirit*, 83-88.

[26] "... 'inspired utterance' in itself does not mark what is truly 'of the Spirit'; rather it is the intelligible content of such an utterance that does so, content that is ultimately tested by the basic Christian confession of the lordship of Jesus Christ." Fee, *The First Epistle*, 637.

Conversely, prophets give instructions that apply to all the Corinthians, those within the church, and outside of it. Though Paul himself claims to speak in tongues more than the rest of the Corinthians, he still prefers to use other gifts of teaching to build up the church (14:19). Concerning outsiders and unbelievers, Paul writes that prophecy is much more effective in causing a person to worship God by disclosing the mysteries of their life (14:25). The gift of prophecy works on the collective level, where the gift of tongues is strictly an individual gift without the help of interpretation–either another person or the same person who uses tongues (14:13). Prophecy also connects to order in the church because it causes more clarity than confusion. It seeks the best interests of others: the way of love.

3. *Instructions for the collective Corinthians*

Finally, Paul's instructions for the collective body of the Corinthians summarize his main ideas of the entire section. There are noticeably fewer directions addressed to the Corinthian church as a whole, about four in total, and all in chapter 14. I have chosen three to highlight in this section.

The first is, "Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy" (14:1). This command directly follows chapter 13 and continues the theme of love. The directions about order in chapter 14 should be understood through the lens of love as it is described in chapter 13. Paul emphasizes the gift of prophecy in this verse because he believes that it is one of the gifts that has more potential to express love than speaking in tongues. In this, Paul equates the idea of love with a similar concept of edifying the church. To build up the church is to build up the body of believers, like in the metaphor. This means putting one's needs before his or her own and making sure each unique person is represented within the body.

The next collective instruction is, "So with yourselves; since you are eager for spiritual gifts, strive to excel in them for building up the church." (14:12). "Building up" or edifying the

church is Paul's main argument in these three chapters, and throughout the book of 1 Corinthians.[27] Verse 12 correlates edification with the use of spiritual gifts, just as chapter 13 pairs gifts and love. It is not right to have one without the other. This teaching follows Paul's explanation of why tongues are not useful for the whole congregation (14:6-12). Paul generates a call to action by using a simple imperative to conclude this section.

Paul ends this chapter with a final charge: "So, my friends, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues; but all things should be done decently and in order." (14:39-40). Gifts return to the discussion in these final verses. Paul is careful to defend the gift of tongues after his previous account of their non-edifying nature. His conclusion accomplishes what any well-written conclusion does: it summarizes the main arguments of the author by restating them at the end, thereby leaving the reader with key insights to remember. Therefore, the mention of order at the end of this essay conflates the idea with both edification and love. Though neither theme is mentioned in the conclusion, "order" acts as an equivalent. Without order, there can be no love, which stops edification from happening. Paul instructs all three.

In conclusion, the three categories of instruction have found that all of Paul's teachings point toward becoming a better community. Through the addressing of different groups, Paul indicates that the Corinthians have individual and collective responsibilities–to the Corinthian church and to the Body of Christ as a whole. These directives guide this section and reveal the purpose of the letter itself. Using direct and clear language, Paul intends to move the Corinthians to esteem their fellow members of the Body through gifts and, ultimately, through gestures of love. God's character guides Paul's message.

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[27] This idea is most clearly articulated in 1 Corinthians 8:1, "Knowledge puffs up, but *love builds up*" (emphasis added).

How does Paul's instruction align with God's character as indicated in the text itself?

The character of God as a trinitarian body further supports Paul's arguments in his letter. Each of Paul's instructions mimics the nature of God, a loving and ordered being which is made of diverse parts but is also one. As a servant of God's mission, Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to act in a way that honors the Body of Christ. The "common good" is whatever God desires for God's people and, therefore, must mirror God's actions and identity. These qualities remain unchanging for Christians in any context or time.

1. *God's Character*

In these three chapters, there are several areas of the text that serve as depictions of God's character. In chapter 12, each member of the Trinity is addressed in verses 4-6. These verses portray the variety of each Trinity member's role and also affirm their "oneness." Though the doctrine of the Trinity is not explicitly stated, in the rhetorical reasoning behind his use of triple repetition, Paul might be emphasizing monotheism or representing the Trinity.[28] The celebrated pagan religions in Corinth at the time contrasted that of a triune God. Instead of polytheistic thought, Paul teaches that there is one God, the same God that works through the various gifts, services, and activities he mentions. Therefore, the Trinity has both diverse parts and is unified.

A second quality that belongs to God is the role of "the Great Arranger." This suggests that God has complete dominion over the church, which includes the Corinthian body. God has the authority to decide in what ways they will be blessed, and every decision ultimately works for the benefit of God's people. Alongside the Holy Spirit, God appoints people within the church to different offices and gives them distinct gifts (12:27-31). Each function is special and

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[28] See Fee, *The First Epistle,* 649 (especially n. 75); Thiselton, *The First Epistle,* 934-935.

specific for each person it is granted. Both Father and Spirit collaborate to fulfill their respective

duties. God also arranges in a particular way that allows those who are seen as "inferior" to be

honored (12:24). In terms of arrangement within the Trinity, this does not reflect a hierarchy, but

rather, "In this unity in diversity, mutual love and deference wonderfully yield mutual

glorification."[29] This quote means that the Trinity always makes room for each person to work,

not competing for dominance but honoring the other through humility.

Chapter 13 describes the way of love. I have already explained this section in connection

with the Corinthian people and their gifts, but it is also used to represent God.[30] If God, including

all three members of the Trinity, displays love through its very nature of mutual oneness, then

God's actions will follow the depiction of verses 4-8. Paul's account of the Corinthians earlier in

the letter proves that they act contrary to the way of love. Thus, Paul is setting an example for the

believers by describing a "still more excellent way" - God's own identity. God is the prime

model of these acts of love, and through the transforming power of Christ and the guidance of

the Holy Spirit, the Body of Christ can follow the example.

Finally, chapter 14 focuses on God and order. The majority of the chapter is addressed to

the Corinthian church and how they structure their church, but there is one verse that directly

illustrates God's character: "God is a God not of disorder but of peace" (14:33a).[31] This verse

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[29] William C. Placher, *Narratives of a Vulnerable God: Christ, Theology, and Scripture,* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 65.

[30] Fee interprets the first two positive definitions of love ("patient" and "kind"), as the "two sides of the divine attitude toward human kind." God's patience is shown through the story of the Israelites who had failed again and again to keep God's covenant, and kindness through God's willingness to keep every promise of blessing bestowed upon them, though the Israelites did not deserve such love. Fee later writes, "Here again by his use of *agapē* Paul is especially reflecting the character of God, which is now displayed by God's people." Fee, *The First Epistle*, 705; 708.

[31] Vander Broek states, "Notice that Paul does not offer a contrast to disorder by describing God as 'order' or 'unity' or 'oneness' Rather, God is a God of peace, of shalom." He later explains that this peace comes from a sense of harmony that exists as a part of the order. Lyle D. Vander Broek, *Breaking Barriers: The Possibilities of Christian Community*, (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007), 142.

relays two pieces of information to the reader. First, God cares about order. Second, any type of order should result in peace, or else it becomes disorder. This kind of order is at the very core of the Trinity's being. "Perichoresis," a term that stems from the Eastern Christian tradition, offers a beautiful metaphor for this relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[32] It presents this relationship as a dance; all three members participate in choreography so cohesive the dancers become the dance itself. God's actions may seem sporadic to the human eye, but like a dance, the Great Arranger organizes each step. This order intentionally creates greater peace on earth and turns people to the way of love.

2. *Paul's Instructions*

Using the previous analysis of Paul's instructions, we can connect his teaching to the characteristics mentioned above of God. The Body Parable is one of his main teachings in chapter 12, and the evidence of the Trinity is the basis for Paul's body argument. As the Trinity is made of three diverse parts but is still one God, the church also "has many members, and all the members of the body, though many are one body" (12:12). Paul's metaphor is theologically supported by the fact that he is calling the Corinthians to imitate God. Being "made in the image of God" connotes that human beings exist in ways that mirror God's identity (Gen 1:26). God is complex, made of diverse members, and yet, unified. Therefore, Christ's Church is created in the same way. As the Great Arranger, God has already put the diverse parts of the Body into place, so Paul suggests that the Corinthians are responsible for building themselves into oneness.

One of Paul's practical actions for building up the church is to have an ordered service. The section of 14:26-35 lists several recommendations for organizing the Corinthian gatherings

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[32] In one of his lectures, Jeff Keuss lent the idea of comparing perichoresis (from the root *choreo,* like choreography) to dancing. I use this metaphor as it is helpful to visualize the Trinity. Jeff Keuss, "Attributes of God," UFDN 3100: Christian Theology, Seattle Pacific University, April 2022. Placher states that the literal meaning is "passing into one another." It is the concept that each person is fully immersed in communion, but still distinct. Placher, *Narratives of a Vulnerable God*, 71-73.

that will honor God's arrangement of gifts and abilities. In 14:26, Paul writes, "When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation." Here are a variety of ways this church could worship God. He instructs appropriate speaking in turn and silence so that the Corinthians would have the necessary space to use their spiritual gifts. Paul also encourages the gift of prophecy over speaking in tongues because it leads people to God and away from confusion. Each directive intentionally urges the Corinthians to respect God's design of their community and lean into it for edification.

Paul ends chapter 14 with the words: "but all things should be done decently and in order." As a concluding thought, this sentence becomes a vital charge for the Corinthian people in this church. This "order" can be perceived as a set of rules created for the common good of the community, resulting in peace.[33] If the common good focuses on building up the church, then it aligns with Paul's description of love- "It does not insist on its own way." The individual members are looking beyond themselves for a shared goal (13:5a). All this is to say that the church must organize itself intentionally by finding what is necessary for such peace. This action requires recognition of each person's need for the other, God's arrangement of gifts, and of course, love to hold all the parts together. The combination of all of Paul's instructions in these three chapters creates a fairly comprehensive outline for not only the Corinthian body but the modern church as well.

Considering all this, Paul's instruction align with God's character in several ways. The Corinthian community displays a similar diversity to God as a trinitarian being. Paul insists upon order within services as a reflection of God's divine orderliness. Finally, God is a loving being

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[33] Vander Broek argues that churches have become places that are too ordered. He reminds the reader that "order is defined by the Spirit's control of us, not out control of the Spirit." When executed in the extreme, order can be used as a means to silence voices that need to be heard. That is the opposite of Paul's use in this passage, as he is trying to balance the church so that those who are seen as "inferior" can be honored for the gifts they possess and use them to build up their community. Vander Broek, *Breaking Barriers,* 150.

that desires everyone to give and receive love in a communal context. The "common good" is defined by who God is, and Paul orients his message to specifically convey the importance of following after God.

Conclusion

I have attempted to answer three questions to better understand Paul's intentions in 1 Corinthians 12-14. The first question aimed to reconstruct an image of the Corinthian community using textual evidence. From the perspective of Corinthian relationships, Paul describes several parties that engage with the church of Corinth in these chapters, and they appear to influence how the community functions. Many of these relationships are broken or disordered, leading to conflict within and outside the church. Through the other lens of problems within the community, Paul shares a series of instructions that imply a need for the Corinthians to change their behavior. The inferred issues reflect the dysfunctional connections between those involved with the community. As a result, the Corinthian people began dividing the church instead of edifying it.

Second, Paul's instructions were examined to describe the actions Paul led the Corinthians to perform to build a better community. I interpreted Paul's instructions as the correctives Paul used to move the Corinthians toward specific actions. Paul instructs the individual and collective Corinthians, as well as the general Body of Christ. He prompts the church to use the gifts from the Holy Spirit to build up the church, claiming the only way to do so is through acts of love. Paul also calls for diversity and unity of the body–diversity by including every kind of gift in the body and unity through a shared goal of the "common good." These are the overarching objectives of this section which point to God's identity.

Finally, Paul's instructions were compared to the characteristics of God mentioned in these chapters to uncover unchanging truths that could be translated to modern Christian contexts. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit form the Trinity, which is diverse and unified. All beings that constitute the Trinity mutually love the others, creating the perfect community model. This model is both ordered and follows the defining traits and acts of love in Chapter 13. Paul employs God's characteristics to guide his own instructions to the Corinthian people, leading them to imitate God's nature in all they do and say. God does not change; therefore, these traits remain the same in a modern setting, and Christians must learn to apply Paul's instructions to their communities for the edification of the Body of Christ.

Application

In this final section, I discuss the implications of my research as they connect with Richard B. Steele's article, "Disability and the Beloved Community." First, I will briefly summarize his article, then incorporate the key arguments with Paul's vision for the Corinthian church. The way Christians treat people with disabilities is often neglected and rarely discussed in religious settings. The topic of marginalization is a concern that also permeates Paul's writings. Though the people of Corinth lived in a completely different cultural context than modern churches in the U.S., important lessons can be gleaned from discussing Paul's teachings in terms of conversations about disability.

Article Summary

Steele's article was originally a lecture given at Seattle Pacific University. This lecture discusses persons with disabilities as a part of the "beloved community," Josiah Royce's concept of a group of people centered on love and concerned with each other's well-being. I use Steele's

definition: "... 'persons with disabilities' shall include all those with any serious physical, sensory, emotional or mental impairment, any noticeable facial or bodily disfigurement, or any chronic debilitating illness."[34] He continues by distinguishing the two dominant perspectives on disability: the "biomedical model" and the "social-constructivist" model.[35] Both models contain important ideas that seek to benefit people with disabilities. Still, Steele holds a different view that prioritizes the role of community and, therefore, the lives of people with disabilities. The biomedical model, developed by the World Health Organization, often sees the problems of a disability as something that must be solved without questioning if the "standards of health, beauty, physical functioning, mental stability and social skills" are the only version of human flourishing available.[36] On the other hand, the social-constructivist model focuses on the rights of people with disabilities, but this overlooks other aspects necessary for healthy living. Steele states:

> I fear that understanding human beings primarily as possessors of inalienable civil, social, political and economic "rights" can have the unintended consequence of dissolving familial, interpersonal and communal bonds on which the most fragile and vulnerable members of society depend.[37]

This issue lays the foundation for Steele's alternative model, which he associates with the "beloved community."

Steele uses the story of Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 4:4 and 9:1-8 to demonstrate two distinctions–between accidents and offenses, and problems and difficulties. In the first distinction, Steele explains that an accident is an event where no blame is placed. Oppositely, an

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[34] Richard B. Steele, "Disability and the Beloved Community," *JCID* 7.1 (2018): 20.

[35] I will not discuss these models further in this article as I am not advocating for either of them, but rather Steele's "beloved community" model as it acts as a bridge between Paul's first-century context and modern Christianity.

[36] Steele, "Disability," 21.

[37] Steele, "Disability," 22.

offense is an occurrence in which a party is guilty of a committed action or neglected act. In Mephibosheth's narrative, his nursemaid drops him in her haste to flee from enemy soldiers. This is an accident that results in his lifelong immobilization. Steele reminds his audience that several moments remain out of control (accidents), and finding the boundary between our own agency and what is beyond it is wise.

The other distinction between problems and difficulties originates from Paul Watzlawick. Difficulties are "undesirable life situation[s] for which there exists no known solution," whereas problems often arise as consequences of these difficulties.[38] Mephibosheth led a life of difficulty, but his problems were eased with the help of others in his community, such as when Mephibosheth is later welcomed into the house of King David, where he receives care. The combination of this biblical text and the distinctions between accidents and offenses, problems and difficulties is necessary information that communities must learn to love people with disabilities better.

<div align="center">Textual Integration</div>

When people with disabilities are at the margins of Christian communities, the community becomes disordered, much like the church in Corinth. Christians act out scenes similar to the body metaphor, like the eye saying to the hand, "I have no need of you" (12:21). In modern churches in the United States, people who do not fit the standard for beauty, intelligence, or physical capability are stigmatized and held at a distance.[39] In turn, this makes people with disabilities and their families feel unwelcome in church spaces. In both contexts, status and

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[38] Steele, "Disability," 26.

[39] Here Brock explains that every culture "has its own code of honor and decency that ranks people. Bodily functions, and even individual body parts as inferior and superior." This quote is in response to 1 Cor. 12:22-24. He argues that Paul is instructing the Corinthians to be aware of those that society labels as inferior, though God would choose to honor them. Brian Brock, *Wondrously Wounded: Theology, Disability, and the Body of Christ*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021, 215-16.

hierarchy are at the center of society, not love. This disorder in God's perfect arrangement

(12:24) has turned what was supposed to be the most welcoming space for vulnerable people into

a place where people say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body" (12:15). Paul

refutes this claim (12:16). Using the terms of the analogy, Christians are currently treating

persons with disabilities like a body part that must be hidden away. Paul proclaims that "the

members of the body that we think less honorable" are the parts that we must "clothe with

greater honor" (12:23).[40] Paul ends this analogy with a concrete model of honoring the other: "If

one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice with it"

(12:26). This model matches the values of the beloved community.

Josiah Royce's beloved community is the alternative model that Richard Steele suggests.

Rather than the social constructivist or biomedical model, the beloved community places love as

its highest value. There are several similarities when comparing the depiction of the beloved

community to Paul's definition of love in chapter 13. Royce's description states:

> …the beloved community was a place that simultaneously deserved and evoked
> the loyalty of its members- deserving their loyalty by the thoroughgoing manner
> in which its laws and social arrangements were designed to maximize the
> flourishing of all, and evoking their loyalty by training them, precisely through
> the justice of its laws and the charitableness of its social arrangements, to be the
> kind of citizens who dedicated themselves unhesitatingly to their neighbors'
> well-being and who could rely without question on their neighbors' intention to
> do the same for them.[41]

"Love does not insist on its own way" (13:5); the citizens of the beloved community

dedicate "themselves unhesitatingly to their neighbors' well-being." The community

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[40] Brock clarifies the difference between equating persons with disabilities as "weaker" and recognizing the social construction of these beliefs about inferiority. He states that the NRSV translation of "inferior" is "misleading in insinuating an ontological differentiation. Instead, he prefers "disadvantaged" or "those who bring up the rear." Brock, *Wondrously Wounded*, 215-216. Lee approaches this text through the "mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16). Though she does not specifically focus on disability in her book, her ideas are similar to Brock's in that Christians gain a new perspective of people, different from what the world believes, because Christ has transformed them through his sacrifice. Lee, *Paul,* 146-147.

[41] Steele," Disability," 28.

"bears all things" together through their mutual support and kindness. They can "rejoice in the truth" because truth benefits their loved ones, while wrongdoing inflicts harm to the community as a whole. Thus, the beloved community embodies Paul's instruction to pursue love.

1 Corinthians 12-14 contains specific instructions that address the different kinds of members within the church. Every teaching is given for the "common good" (12:7). Paul knew this congregation well– all the diverse parts of the community and every different need among the Corinthians. To act in ways that edify the church, Christians must also understand the needs of their communities. This task, of course, requires welcoming marginalized people, like persons with disabilities. Steele explains that a community's role in the life of persons with disabilities is to be attentive to their specific needs without acting in ways that demean or render them incapable. There is no fixed rule for how to care for the people in one's community, but Paul continuously returns to the question, "What builds up the church?" Christian communities would benefit from asking themselves the same question. Steele, a faithful member of the SPU faculty, shares examples by surveying the problems within his community. These include problems that violate the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA),[42] which have simple fixes (e.g., elevators, ramps, signs with Braille, etc.), as well as using person-first language to express a person's humanity rather than focusing on a single part of their identity.[43] Though difficulties will still exist, communities can help ease the problems that arise.

Even with these practical solutions, person-first language and accessibility are only scratching the surface of how Christian communities need to improve to become

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[42] Brock, *Disability,* 14-15.

[43] Steele, "Disability," 30.

more welcoming spaces. Suppose church leaders immediately see persons with disabilities as a presence in the congregation that comes with a list of challenges. In that case, churches have missed the objective of Paul's call for diversity and unity in chapter 12. As Steele argues, it is in the reduction of a person's identity that model's like the biomedical and social constructivist miss what is important. Paul calls the Corinthians to embrace the fullness of their fellow community members–including their giftings, the socially constructed labels, and even the faults–in the same way Christ invites every person into communion with himself. Instead, Christians must see people with disability through the perspective of the Kingdom of Heaven, honoring those who the world does not. These acts of love are not out of pity or in any way patronizing, but they are the genuine concern of a community that deeply desires the good of the others.

From the time this article was written five years ago until now, little has changed in the Christian treatment of persons with disabilities. These people remain on the margins of church life, and their needs are not given enough consideration to allow them to feel welcome in Christian spaces. For these communities to start to resemble the beloved community, congregants must start regarding these members as people who have unique gifts to contribute. Paul's teachings in 1 Corinthians 12-14 act as helpful guides to discovering what a community arranged by God and centered in love could look like in churches all over the United States today.

I will end this article with a vignette from Jean Vanier's book, *From Brokenness to Community*. Vanier is the founder of the first L'Arche community, a place that desires to see those with intellectual disabilities as the whole human being that they are.[44] Vanier shares a story

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[44] Though I recognize the controversial nature of Jean Vanier due to the recent discovery of his acts of sexual offense, the L'Arche community itself is a prime example for the application of the Biblical text. Therefore, I have chosen to include an excerpt here.

about a boy in the L'Arche community and the gift he gave to those around him. Armando was a small, eight-year-old boy who was malnourished and nonverbal. People in the community would hold him and feed him, and eventually, he would want to eat again because of the care he felt. Vanier expresses the "therapeutic effect" Armando had on one of the bishops: "I could see that Armando in all his littleness, but with all the power of love in his heart, was touching and changing the heart of that bishop."[45] The brokenness of Armando helped the bishop realize his own brokenness and experience the giving and receiving of love despite it all. While there are still practical steps that churches need to make, it is stories like these that challenge our perceptions about what must be at the center of our mission. Perhaps the actions should not come first, but rather the experience of being united in the Body of Christ. We need all members to create a functioning body, a beloved community, centered by love.

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[45] Jean Vanier, *From Brokenness to Community*, (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1992), 27.

APPENDIX 1. SPU HONORS SYMPOSIUM SPEECH

Panel Title: "Marginalized Bodies: A System(at)ic Exploration of Humanity"

Part of what it means to be human is to be a part of a community. Stigmatizing labels split individuals from their common humanity so that they cannot participate in community life. This session explores a wide range of societal structures that marginalize bodies, such as people with disabilities, those who are unhoused, and those placed in solitary confinement. The systemic exploitation of these bodies prevents the collective struggle for change – but wisdom from sacred texts may offer a better roadmap forward. [Orally presented May 20, 2023.]

Symposium Speech

Good morning! I am so grateful for this opportunity to present my research to you. After months and months of hard work, my peers and I have finally reached symposium day, and I get the joy of sharing some of my passions with you. My full acknowledgments are in the program, but I wanted to express my gratitude once again to all the people who helped me accomplish this grand feat. Thank you. I would also like to remind you that my full thesis will be on digital commons soon.

We just had the pleasure of hearing Julia Austin's research about solitary confinement–one window into realizing a human being's need for community. My study of 1 Corinthians 12-14 reveals that Paul's instructions guide the Corinthian church to order their community through love, imitating the Trinity's nature of diversity and unity. I suggest Paul's

idea of the church as a model moving forward so that Christians can make room for marginalized

bodies to enter and take part in the larger Body of Christ.

       The image on the screen is a piece created by Ecuadorian artist, Oswaldo Viteri, entitled

Ojo de Luz, or "Eye of Light." I studied abroad in Ecuador during fall quarter and got to see this

painting first-hand. The image you see is comprised of many cloth dolls. As I examined the

piece, I felt sorry for the "people" who did not get a share of the color. They were kept on the

outside–the margins. They did not get to enjoy the beauty in that small circle and were instead

subjected to a life without. I think this work of art is a representation of community. The classic

"in-group vs. out-group." Without some form of a loving community, this dull life void of color

is all one can experience. It is only in community that the diversity of each person shines to

create a more beautiful image. So the question I am challenging you with today is: *who is outside of the circle? And how do we bring them in?*

For my research, I appropriate a theory from M.A.K. Halliday, called "Systemic Functional Linguistics," or SFL, as it chiefly focuses on the *function* of language. This theory analyzes the grammatical structures of "speech-acts," which are any use of language meant to invoke a social action of some kind. These speech acts can be, but are not limited to, the general categories of statement, question, and instruction, and are often a combination of two or all three. For example, "Do you really want to eat that sandwich?" is a question posed with an implied instruction for the purpose of deterring a person from eating a sandwich. We use our words as a social tool to influence those around us. Halliday's SFL helps scholars clearly indicate these patterns through grammatical structures, which are further elaborated in Halliday's work, *Text Linguistics*.

I use this theory to analyze Paul's letter, examining what actions the speech acts are meaning to influence in the Corinthian church. First Corinthians 12-14 fits together through the common theme of how to best build up the church with the use of spiritual gifts. For those of you who are unfamiliar with this text, Apostle Paul begins this section with the goal to inform the Corinthians about their spiritual gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit. Paul uses an analogy of the human body in this chapter to help explain his point. Then the section is "interrupted" by the famous chapter that portrays love in its multiple layers. Finally, Paul ends the section by explaining his specific instructions for a more orderly worship service that will lead to the edification of the church. These three chapters are written to provoke the Corinthian community to change and become more like people that represent God in their loving actions toward one another.

In order to understand the state of the Corinthian church as told in the letter, we can look at the problems described both implicitly and explicitly in the text. Paul's instructions, questions, and statements imply that there are problematic realities within the church. One major illustration of these issues is the use of the human body as a metaphor in chapter 12. A metaphor is not a straightforward instruction; its ideas are simpler. Paul asks the Corinthians to use the example of their individual bodies to help them think critically about how to care for the collective body of the church. The problem is that the Corinthians have organized themselves contrary to the order that God has set. Instead of allowing each person to fulfill their role and use their gifts, they are self-centered and create a hierarchy amongst themselves assigning higher status to certain gifts. Paul continuously drills the message that the Corinthian body should work for the common good, as he states at the beginning of chapter 12:7. The Corinthians must learn how to prioritize the good of others before their own benefit.

As a solution, Paul suggests a "still more excellent way" –acting in love. In chapter 13, Paul lists the characteristics of love. Chapter 13 acts as the linchpin of chapters 12-14, the main theme that holds the three chapters together. In the text, there are several negated statements, such as in chapter 13:4-5 "Love is *not* envious or boastful or arrogant or rude." Each rejected term in the list describes attitudes that are either self-centered or harmful to others–most likely a reflection of how the Corinthians acted. Paul reminds the Corinthian church that these behaviors cannot correlate with the action of love. If the use of spiritual gifts is used only to build up an individual's self-image, that person "gain[s] nothing." The community is broken due to the mindset of status and individuality. Paul's duty was to remind the Corinthians of their purpose and mission as a church that desires to imitate God's character. Paul combines the two themes of spiritual gifts and love into a cohesive argument: love needs to be the foundation of everything

the Corinthians do because without it the use of their gifts is meaningless. The Corinthians need to understand what lies behind the purpose of having gifts, so Paul describes what love is and what it is not. These statements are simple and clear so the Corinthians will understand, with the specific practices following in the next chapter. Paul's entire message intends to act against this disorder of relationships in the Corinthian body, or rather, the lack or absence of sharing love.

In chapter 14 Paul gives his most specific instructions to the Corinthian church. The diversity of gifts can often bring adversity if not organized well. Paul's instructions in chapter 14 imply that the church is dysfunctional, or at least it appears that way to the outside world. As Paul admits concern for the way outsiders and unbelievers view speaking in tongues, he may also be admitting that the outsiders already think that the Corinthian church is "out of [their] mind[s]." In this state of disorder, Corinthian unbelievers will not associate with the followers of Jesus Christ because it is not a welcoming space for them. Those who speak in tongues seem like "foreigners," not a trustworthy community where they can recognize the presence of God. Instead of following God's arrangement of their roles, the Corinthians have valued certain gifts over others. As a consequence, outsiders and unbelievers do not see the church as a place they can belong. Therefore, the major instruction of this section is the edification of the church through order and gifts. In 14, Paul focuses on the gifts of prophecy and speaking in tongues. He uses these gifts separately to juxtapose each other. Paul argues that speaking in tongues only benefits the speaker–if no interpreter is present–because no other member can understand. This not only distances the speaker from the rest of the church but from the outsiders as well.

Paul ends this chapter with a final charge: "So, my friends, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues; but all things should be done decently and in order." Gifts return to the discussion in these final verses. Paul is careful to defend the gift of tongues after his

previous account of their non-edifying nature. His conclusion accomplishes what any well-written conclusion does: it summarizes the main arguments of the author by restating them at the end, thereby leaving the reader with key insights to remember. Therefore, the mention of order at the end of this essay conflates the idea with both edification and love. Though neither theme is mentioned in the conclusion, "order" acts as an equivalent. Without order, there can be no love, which stops edification from happening. Paul instructs all three.

In terms of God's character, one verse in particular directly illustrates it in this chapter: "God is a God not of disorder but of peace" chapter 14:33. This verse relays two pieces of information to the reader. First, God cares about order. Second, any type of order should result in peace, or else it becomes disorder. This kind of order is at the very core of the Trinity's being. "Perichoresis" is a term that stems from the Eastern Christian tradition which literally means "passing into each other." It offers a beautiful illustration of this relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. A professor of mine once presented this relationship as a dance; all three members are participating in choreography that is so cohesive, the dancers become the dance itself. Like a dance, God's actions may seem sporadic to the human eye, but each step is organized by the Great Arranger God. This order intentionally creates greater peace and turns people to the way of love.

While all this information is important, I believe the Bible is not just an ancient text meant to be admired. I believe the words are living and breathing when the church chooses to put them into action. So how does Paul's church in Corinth apply to the modern Christian context in the United States?

The article/lecture by Dr. Richard Steele, "Disability and the Beloved Community," taught me about a pressing matter that is neglected by the church: how the existing models of

care for people with disabilities have been falling short. But Steele holds a different view from what is called the biomedical model, which often sees the problems of a disability as something that must be solved, without questioning that societal standards for living are the only version of human flourishing available, and the social-constructivist model focuses on the rights of people with disabilities but overlooks other aspects necessary for healthy living. Instead, Steele seeks to prioritize the role of community members in the lives of people with disabilities, using Josiah Royce's "beloved community" model.

When people with disabilities are at the margins of Christian communities, the community becomes disordered, much like the church in Corinth. Christians act out scenes similar to the body metaphor, like the eye saying to the hand, "I have no need of you" in chapter 12:21. In modern churches in the United States, people who do not fit the standard for beauty, intelligence, or physical capability are stigmatized and held at a distance. In turn, this makes people with disabilities and their families feel unwelcome in church spaces, causing more and more people to leave churches. In both contexts, status and hierarchy are at the center of society, not love. This disorder in God's perfect arrangement has turned what was supposed to be the most welcoming space for vulnerable people into a place where people say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body." But Paul refutes this claim. Paul proclaims that "the members of the body that we think less honorable" are the parts that we must "clothe with greater honor." Paul ends this analogy with a concrete model of honoring the other: "If one member sufferers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice with it," which matches the values of Josiah Royce's beloved community. When comparing the depiction of the community to Paul's definition of love in chapter 13, there are several similarities. Royce's description states: "…the beloved community… [is] designed to maximize the flourishing of all…to be the kind of

citizens who dedicated themselves unhesitatingly to their neighbors' well-being and who could rely without question on their neighbors' intention to do the same for them."

First Corinthians 13:5 states, "Love does not insist on its own way"; the citizens of the beloved community dedicate themselves to loving each other. The beloved community "bears all things" together through their mutual support and kindness. They can "rejoice in the truth" because truth benefits their loved ones, while wrongdoing inflicts harm to the community as a whole. Thus, the beloved community embodies Paul's instruction to pursue love.

First Corinthians 12-14 also contains specific instructions that address the different kinds of members within the church. Every teaching is always given for the "common good." Paul knew this congregation well– all the diverse parts of the community and every different need that existed among the Corinthians. To act in ways that edify the church, modern Christians must also understand the needs of their communities. This, of course, requires welcoming people that are marginalized, like persons with disabilities. Steele explains that a community's role in the life of persons with disabilities is to be attentive to their specific needs without acting in ways that demean or render them incapable. There is no fixed rule for how to care for the people in one's community, but Paul continuously returns to the question, "What builds up the church?" Christian communities would benefit from asking themselves the same question. Steele, a faithful member of the SPU faculty, shares examples by surveying the problems within his community. These include problems that violate the Americans with Disabilities Act– things that have simple fixes like elevators, ramps, signs with Braille, etcetera, as well as using person-first language to express a person's humanity rather than

focusing on a single part of their identity. Though difficulties will still exist, communities can help ease the problems that arise.

Even with these practical solutions, person-first language and accessibility are only scratching the surface of how Christian communities need to improve to become more welcoming spaces. If church leaders immediately see persons with disabilities as a presence in the congregation that comes with a list of challenges, churches have missed the objective of Paul's call for diversity and unity in chapter 12. Paul calls the Corinthians to embrace the fullness of their fellow community members–including their giftings, the socially constructed labels, and even the faults–in the same way that Christ invites every person into communion with himself. Instead, Christians must see people with disabilities through the perspective of the Kingdom of Heaven, honoring those whom the world does not. These acts of love are not out of pity or in any way patronizing, but they are the genuine concern of a community that deeply desires the good of the other.

Little has changed in the Christian treatment of persons with disabilities. These people remain on the margins of church life and neither their needs nor their gifts, are given enough consideration to allow them to feel welcome in Christian spaces. For these communities to start to resemble the beloved community, congregants must start regarding these members as people who have unique abilities to contribute. Paul's teachings in First Corinthians 12-14 act as helpful guides to discovering what a community arranged by God and centered in love could look like in churches all over the United States today.

To illustrate this point best, I would like to end by sharing a story from Jean Vanier's book, *From Brokenness to Community*. Vanier was the founder of the first L'Arche community, a

place that desires to see those with intellectual disabilities as the whole human being that they are. Vanier shares a story about a boy in the L'Arche community and the gift he gave to those around him. Armando was a small, eight-year-old boy who was malnourished and nonverbal. People in the community would hold him and feed him, and eventually, he would want to eat again because of the care he felt. Vanier expresses the "therapeutic effect" Armando had on one of the bishops: "I could see that Armando in all his littleness, but with all the power of love in his heart, was touching and changing the heart of that bishop." The brokenness of Armando helped the bishop realize his own brokenness, and experience the giving and receiving of love, though it came from an unexpected source. It was not until the bishop embraced Armando that he began to notice all the wonderful gifts the boy possessed. If we ask ourselves again, *who is outside of the circle?* I think one of the answers is those we keep at a distance and hold back from a true place in the Body of Christ. Churches may have members with disabilities, but they are not embracing them. While there are still practical steps that churches need to make, it is stories like Amando's that challenge our perceptions about what those actions must look like. If community is one of the integral parts of what it means to be human, finding a way of living together well should be a top priority, whether a person is a Christian or not. We need all members to create a functioning body, a beloved community, centered by love. Thank you.

APPENDIX 2. SYMPOSIUM VISUAL AID

Fig. 1, Viteri, Oswaldo, *Ojo de Luz*, assembly on wood, 1987, (Viteri Art Center), https://www.oswaldoviteri.org/assemblies

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