

1 Corinthians 12:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But now are they many members, yet but one body.

Analysis

But now are they many members, yet but one body—Nyn de polla men melē, hen de sōma (νῦν δὲ πολλὰ μέν μελή, ἓν δὲ σῶμα)—the balanced Greek construction emphasizes the paradox: many members (πολλά, polla), one body (ἓν, hen). The men...de construction creates antithesis: plurality and unity coexist without contradiction. This is mystery—mathematically absurd (many = one?) yet spiritually true.

But now (nyn de) signals transition from hypothetical ("if they were all one member") to reality. God's actual design features multiplicity-in-unity. This reflects Trinitarian theology: three persons, one God. Diversity within unity, unity expressed through diversity. The body-metaphor isn't Paul's invention but revelation of spiritual reality: believers are actually, ontologically, organically united to Christ and each other through Spirit-baptism (v.13). We are not merely like a body; we are Christ's body.

Historical Context

Greek philosophy struggled with the one-and-many problem: how can ultimate reality be both one and multiple? Paul's gospel provides the answer: unity comes not from uniformity but from shared participation in Christ through the Spirit, creating organic unity amid personal diversity.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does the paradox 'many members, one body' reflect Trinitarian theology (three persons, one God)?
2. What practices help your church maintain unity amid diversity of gifts, backgrounds, and preferences?
3. Where do you see contemporary Christianity wrongly choosing uniformity over genuine unity?

Interlinear Text

νῦν	δὲ	πολλὰ	μὲν	μέλη	ἐν	δὲ	σῶμα
now	But	are they many	G3303	members	one	But	body
G3568	G1161	G4183		G3196	G1520	G1161	G4983

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 12:14 (Parallel theme): For the body is not one member, but many.

1 Corinthians 12:12 (Parallel theme): For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.