

Romans 12:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:

Analysis

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: Paul introduces the body metaphor that he will develop more fully in 1 Corinthians 12. The Greek word **members** (μέλη, melē) refers to limbs or bodily parts, while **office** (πράξιν, praxin) literally means 'function' or 'action.' The point is diversity within unity—**many members** (πολλὰ μέλη, polla melē) working together as **one body** (Ἐν σῶμα, hen sōma). This was a common Stoic illustration for civic harmony, but Paul Christianizes it: the church's unity isn't natural solidarity but supernatural incorporation **in Christ** (verse 5).

The phrase **all members have not the same office** guards against both pride (my function is superior) and envy (I wish I had that function). Eyes don't hear; ears don't see; hands don't walk—each part contributes its unique function to the body's health. This organic imagery counters individualism: no Christian is self-sufficient, and no gift is insignificant. The body metaphor will ground Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts (verses 6-8) and mutual love (verses 9-13).

Historical Context

Greco-Roman culture used body imagery for the state, with rulers as the head and citizens as members. Paul subverts this by making Christ the head and all believers—regardless of social status—members with equal dignity. In a highly stratified society where honor depended on rank, Paul's vision of interdependent unity was radically countercultural. The Roman church included slaves, freedmen,

artisans, and perhaps some wealthy patrons, all functioning as one body through their diverse gifts.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does the body metaphor challenge both your pride in your gifts and your envy of others' gifts?
2. In what ways does your local church demonstrate that 'all members have not the same function'—or does it expect uniformity?
3. What unique 'function' has God given you in the body, and how faithfully are you exercising it?

Interlinear Text

καθάπερ	γὰρ	ἐν	ἐνὶ	σώματι	μέλη	πολλὰ	ἔχει	τὰ	
as	For	in	one	body	members	many	have		G3588
G2509	G1063	G1722	G1520	G4983	G3196	G4183	G2192		

δὲ	μέλη	πάντα	οὐ	τὴν	αὐτὴν	ἔχει	πρᾶξιν	
and	members	all	not	G3588	the same	have	office	
G1161	G3196	G3956	G3756		G846	G2192	G4234	

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 12:27 (Parallel theme): Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

1 Corinthians 12:4 (Parallel theme): Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

Ephesians 4:4 (Parallel theme): There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

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