



From Invisible to Indispensable: A Bible Study

1 Corinthians 12:12-26

Abortion and physician-assisted suicide pull quite a sleight-of-hand trick. With the smoke of “quality of life” and the mirrors of “personal choice,” they pretend to relieve pain and resolve problems. But beneath these illusions, they really just remove persons. And then they persuade bystanders to “pay no attention to that life murdered behind the curtain.” While we’re not looking, they filch from us more than merely wallet and watch. These evils steal humanity and sanctity from us all.

It doesn’t take a wizard or magician to make a person disappear. We all have that ability. You just have to close your eyes. Someone’s invisibility to us reveals more about our ignoring than it does about their importance. The first-century Corinthian Christians of the Scriptures appear to have mastered the art. Several individuals among them seemed to sort of vanish. St. Paul the Apostle diagnoses a vision deficiency that actually continues to affect us today. The Word of the Lord in his epistle pulls back the kerchief on some pretty serious consequences of it. But he also unveils a different and better superpower – invisible but invaluable, and available to everyone.

1. Paul compares community to a person’s body in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26. What differentiates one part of a person’s body from another? What characteristics do all the parts of a body have in common?
2. Which people are the Corinthians ignoring and treating as invisible (1 Corinthians 5:1; 6:1; 7:4; 8:10-11; 11:20-21)? Which persons do assisted suicide and abortion treat as though invisible?

5:1 *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father’s wife.*

6:1 *When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?*

7:4 *For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.*

8:10-11 *For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died.*

11:20-21 *When you come together, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk.*



3. What justification are the Corinthians offering for it (1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23)? What justifications does our culture offer for abortion and for assisted suicide?

6:12 *“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything.*

10:23 *“All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up.*

4. What is really motivating the Corinthians to behave this way (1 Corinthians 4:6-7; 5:6; 1:29; 3:21)? What real reasons for abortion and assisted suicide lie behind our culture’s excuses for them?

4:6-7 *I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.*

5:6 *Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?*

1:29 *... so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.*

3:21 *So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours.*

5. What harms does Paul warn are resulting from this blindness (1 Corinthians 6:9; 8:11-12; 11:29-30)? What constitutes the ultimate threat to humanity (1 Corinthians 15:56; 3:17)? Who brings this risk to the body (1 Corinthians 2:14; 15:22)?

6:9 *Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?*

8:11-12 *And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.*

11:29-30 *For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.*

15:56 *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.*

3:17 *If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.*

2:14 *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*

15:22 *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.*



6. Tumors also attach to a body, and parasites also occupy the body's space. Yet neither of these belongs to the body. What makes a tumor or a parasite different from a body part? What identifies an embryo or unborn baby as unlike a tumor? What defines a person of advanced age, a person with a disability, or a person suffering from a terminal diagnosis as unlike a parasite?
7. How is assisted suicide like a foot saying, "Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body?" How is abortion similar to the eye saying to the hand, "I have no need of you?" How does foot amputation or a hand injury affect and endanger the rest of the body?
8. What proves that invisible doesn't mean unvaluable (1 Corinthians 1:27-30)? What superpower saves us and heals humanity even from each other (1 Corinthians 1:23-24)? What about this is hidden, invisible, and mysterious?

1:27-30 *But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.*

1:23-24 *But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

9. To whom do our bodies and our lives belong (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 12:12)? How does this give comfort to our sufferings and afflictions (1 Corinthians 12:25-26; 15:20-22, 49)?

6:19-20 *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*

12:12 *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.*

12:25-26 *... that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.*

15:20-22, 49 *But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive ... Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.*



10. Which invisible parts of our bodies can we not exist without? What about an unborn child makes him indispensable to humankind (1 Corinthians 8:11)?

8:11 *And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died.*

11. What about a person of advanced age, a person with a disability, and a person suffering from a terminal diagnosis makes them indispensable (1 Corinthians 12:7)? What blessings do we receive from each (1 Corinthians 12:4-6)?

12:7 *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

12:4-6 *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.*

12. In what places and what ways do they need us to speak of them as gift and privilege? What actions may we take to treat them as brother and sister?

13. How does this courage and compassion extend even to those who permit, promote, or participate in abortions and assisted suicides? What alternatives can we provide to abortion and assisted suicide?



NOTES



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1 Corinthians 12:12-26

Abortion and physician-assisted suicide pull quite a sleight-of-hand trick. With the smoke of “quality of life” and the mirrors of “personal choice,” they pretend to relieve pain and resolve problems. But beneath these illusions, they really just remove persons. And then they persuade bystanders to “pay no attention to that life murdered behind the curtain.” While we’re not looking, they filch from us more than merely wallet and watch. These evils steal humanity and sanctity from us all.

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1. Paul compares community to a person’s body in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26. What differentiates one part of a person’s body from another? What characteristics do all the parts of a body have in common?

Different body parts have different shapes and sizes. They perform diverse operations in various locations. And they consist of separate cells and tissue types.

However, they all live and move. They connect to each other and have the same DNA. And they work toward the well-being of a single organism.

2. Which people are the Corinthians ignoring and treating as invisible (1 Corinthians 5:1; 6:1; 7:4; 8:10-11; 11:20-21)? Which persons do assisted suicide and abortion treat as though invisible?

5:1 *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father’s wife.*

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11:20-21 *When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk.*

5:1 The son is turning his back on his relationship to his father and his vocation to his stepmother. The entire congregation is ignoring him by dismissing his sin. 6:1 The aggrieved parishioners, plaintiff and defendant, are failing to see the other as brother and sister. 7:4 Husbands and wives are overlooking one another to pursue celibacy. 8:10-11 The ones who openly eat the idol sacrifices are closing their eyes to their fellow saints who have sensitive consciences. 11:20-21 The communicants are taking no notice of either the Lord Himself present in the sacrament or the people around them as partakers of His body and blood.

In the same way, abortion treats embryos and unborn children as invisible, along with the real needs and feelings of their fathers and mothers and the effects on the wider society. Assisted suicide deals with elderly persons, those with disabilities, and those with terminal diagnoses as if they don't qualify as real people or whole lives. And it likewise marginalizes other sufferers in similar situations as well as their loved ones and caregivers.

3. What justification are the Corinthians offering for it (1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23)? What justifications does our culture offer for abortion and for assisted suicide?

6:12 *"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything.*

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It seems that the Corinthians are appealing to independence, liberty, and personal autonomy to justify their conduct toward their neighbors. They apparently assert that the Gospel's grace and forgiveness excuses and covers for evil (1 Peter 2:16).

Common excuses for abortion and assisted suicide in our context include "my body, my choice," "maintain separation of church and state," "embryos or incapacitated patients aren't entirely human," "Scripture stays silent about abortion and assisted suicide," "abortion and assisted suicide represent the best solutions to certain sufferings," and, "for-life folks lack credibility."

4. What is really motivating the Corinthians to behave this way (1 Corinthians 4:6-7; 5:6; 1:29; 3:21)? What real reasons for abortion and assisted suicide lie behind our culture's excuses for them?

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They're locating their worth as persons in their superiority to others. They're trying to justify themselves by comparing their decisions, accomplishments, and lifestyles against those around them. This causes them to puff up with pride for themselves and spite for one another.

Our culture similarly uses abortion and assisted suicide to find a kind of salvation. It deceives our people into seeking fulfillment in sexual license and gratification, or in economic equality at the expense of all else, or in escaping from pain by eliminating sufferers, or in competing according to age or appearance or abilities.

5. What harms does Paul warn are resulting from this blindness (1 Corinthians 6:9; 8:11-12; 11:29-30)? What constitutes the ultimate threat to humanity (1 Corinthians 15:56; 3:17)? Who brings this risk to the body (1 Corinthians 2:14; 15:22)?

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Paul cautions the Corinthians that the consequences of their conduct include damaging each other's hearts and destroying one another's faith, as well as rendering themselves spiritually weakened and physically sickened and risking rejection of everlasting life in the heavenly kingdom of Almighty God.

The greatest threat comes not from temporary inconvenience or bodily discomfort or even missing out on earthly opportunities and pleasures. Rather, eternal condemnation and destruction outside of God's grace in the new creation bring



about the most severe and comprehensive harm, as the Law of God convicts them of sin, and sin delivers to death and hell.

6. Tumors also attach to a body, and parasites also occupy the body's space. Yet neither of these belongs to the body. What makes a tumor or a parasite different from a body part? What identifies an embryo or unborn baby as unlike a tumor? What defines a person of advanced age, a person with a disability, or a person suffering from a terminal diagnosis as unlike a parasite?

A parasite invades its host as a different species and sustains itself as an independent organism. It also often causes harm or at least competes for resources with the host. A tumor does not develop toward a defined form and function or coordinate with other body parts to serve the well-being of the whole organism.

An unborn baby or embryo, however, has its own DNA from the moment of fertilization. She (or he) does not just grow or enlarge but develops toward maturity and adulthood. She coordinates all her own processes and functions, collaborating rather than competing with her mother's body.

A person of any size, with whatever skills, and in all circumstances, still constitutes a person. He (or she) belongs to the same human race as the rest. His existence may depend on others around him, but even this represents a fully human quality, and he does not inflict direct harm on the body of anyone else.

7. How is assisted suicide like a foot saying, "Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body?" How is abortion similar to the eye saying to the hand, "I have no need of you?" How does foot amputation or a hand injury affect and endanger the rest of the body?

Physician-assisted suicide tempts (and even pressures) a person to believe, "Because I am not young, or because I am not independent, or because I am not comfortable, I do not belong or matter to my community."

Abortion amounts to a father and/or a mother saying to their child, "I have no need of you," and a community saying to their little ones, "I have no need of you," and humankind saying to our Lord, "I have no need of your wisdom and gifts."

A foot amputation or hand injury causes pain to the rest of the body and compromises it. The body cannot carry out its functions as well or defend as effectively against danger. The recovery and healing strains every other part, and blood loss or secondary infection can lead to death.

8. What proves that invisible doesn't mean unvaluable (1 Corinthians 1:27-30)? What superpower saves us and heals humanity even from each other (1 Corinthians 1:23-24)? What about this is hidden, invisible, and mysterious?

1:27-30 *But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even*



things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

1:23-24 *But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

God Himself proves that invisible doesn't mean unvaluable. He has created and sustains the whole universe with the unseen power of His Word.

He also came into our world as an embryo hidden within the womb. And He conceals His might behind sacrifice and forgiveness.

The unrestrained grace of belonging to Him and believing in Him saves with a force our sinful selves do not deserve and our senses cannot perceive.

9. To whom do our bodies and our lives belong (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 12:12)? How does this give comfort to our sufferings and afflictions (1 Corinthians 12:25-26; 15:20-22, 49)?

6:19-20 *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*

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15:20-22, 49 *But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive... Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.*

Our lives, our selves, and our bodies belong not simply to ourselves but to the God who gave them—and to one another as both neighbors in the human race and as fellow brothers and sisters in the body of Christ.

This means we never have to suffer alone, nor do we have to rejoice alone. And since Jesus has united Himself to our flesh and nature, we will heal from every affliction and arise to everlasting life in the body just as He already has. This promise and delight enable us to endure and overcome surprise pregnancies and terminal diagnoses.

10. Which invisible parts of our bodies can we not exist without? What about an unborn child makes him indispensable to humankind (1 Corinthians 8:11)?



8:11 *And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died.*

Some of the most invisible members of our body matter the most to our survival. These include many of our internal organs, and some of their components are very small indeed. In addition, each of us has a mind, memories, and personality that animate us, and they don't occupy any space at all.

In the same way, every unborn child, however large and for however long, brings to us gifts and privileges as a unique individual created, redeemed, and called by Almighty God as a precious treasure. We cannot endanger this little one without undermining our own worth and purpose and endangering the humanity of us all.

11. What about a person of advanced age, a person with a disability, and a person suffering from a terminal diagnosis makes them indispensable (1 Corinthians 12:7)? What blessings do we receive from each (1 Corinthians 12:4-6)?

12:7 *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

12:4-6 *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.*

Neither age nor appearances nor abilities can either impair or improve any person's humanity, dignity, or sanctity. God Himself comes to us in our relationships to the least of these and our experiences with them to affect and improve us in unduplicated and irreplaceable ways.

(Leader may invite participants to remember someone they have known of advanced age, with a disability, or suffering from a terminal diagnosis, and share how these individuals made their lives better.)

12. In what places and what ways do they need us to speak of them as gift and privilege? What actions may we take to treat them as brother and sister?

We advocate for the respect and protection of anyone endangered by death viewed as a solution to difficulties. We proclaim it in church and culture, in public and government, and in our conversations and interactions with them and with other neighbors.

We notice them, accompany them, listen and assist, embrace and celebrate them. And we identify and receive with appreciation the blessings they deliver to us from God as He ministers to us through them. This also means sacrificing of our pride, our priorities, and our possessions to secure their civil rights and serve their material needs.



13. How does this courage and compassion extend even to those who permit, promote, or participate in abortions and assisted suicides? What alternatives can we provide to abortion and assisted suicide?

God's redeeming grace and forgiveness value the lives of those who take part in abortion and assisted suicide just as much as the lives that have been lost in them. He died also for that, and He loves them too.

We bring the joy and the hope of the Gospel's abundant and everlasting life into the complicated situations. We offer our emotional support and our material resources. We help facilitate parenting, marriage, or placing for adoption in the case of surprise pregnancy. And we arrange presence, palliative care, and purpose in the case of terminal diagnosis.

