



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?