

Parts: Following Jesus

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

September 9, 2018

Please turn in your Bible to 1 Corinthians 12:12. Today, we are beginning a brand-new sermon series on Following Jesus.

1) Following Jesus means being part of His body. We are not really given a choice about this. Today's passage begins with 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." Paul is talking here about the universal church but also local churches; aka the "body of Christ." It is ONE body made up of MANY parts, many different people, all of us unified by the Holy Spirit. The Christ-followers in our local church, Efree Bemidji, make up the body of Christ. What an honor; what a responsibility; and what an opportunity to be part of God's wonderful plan!

The context for the verses we are focusing on today is chapters 12-14, and really the entire book of 1 Corinthians. The church in Corinth had its share of struggles! Corinth was a church plagued by quarrels and divisions. That explains why chapters 12-14 are so adamant that these brothers and sisters in Christ focus on serving one another rather than serving themselves or jockeying for position. This is why chapter 13 is so profound. And, it's why Paul puts chapter 13 smack dab in the middle of his fairly thorough discussion of spiritual gifts. The proper approach to spiritual gifts is summarized well in 1 Corinthians 14:1, "Follow the way of love AND eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit..."

Beginning at 1 Corinthians 12:15, Paul begins to illustrate why it is SO important for Christ-followers in the church to get along and to work together as parts of this body, called the church.

2) Each part belongs to the body. Whenever I hear 1 Corinthians 12, I can't help but think of Mr. Potato Head. He has been around a long time and then he was popularized all over again by the movie Toy Story and Toy Story 2 and Toy Story 3....¹ What a great illustration for the parts that make up the body of Christ. Let's see what Mr. Potato Head can teach us about the church: 1 Corinthians 12:15 says, "Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body." Some people are pretty good at walking on their hands. And, some people can do some pretty amazing things with their feet. I once watched a guy solve a Rubik's Cube with his feet. But, for most of us, our hands and feet serve us best when they function as they were originally designed. 1 Corinthians 12:16 says, "And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body." Our ears are incredibly important to our vision; we see with our ears all the time. When someone honks their



¹ I couldn't tell from my research if it's a gimmick or not, but they may also make a Toy Story 4!

horn in traffic, the eye then knows where to look. When we are deer hunting and we hear footsteps, we know which direction the deer may be coming from.

Now, perhaps some of you may be thinking this Mr. Potato Head thing is ridiculous, even a little out of place or inappropriate for a Sunday sermon. But, let me remind you that Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was the one who came up with this ridiculous illustration in the first place: **talking feet and talking ears!**

1 Corinthians 12:17-20 goes on to say, “If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? **If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?** But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be?

As it is, there are many parts, but one body.” I was thinking how truly sad it would be if indeed the whole body was just one big ear. Yes, we’d hear really well but we would have no sense of smell. Even worse, we’d have no mouth to eat food with. How unfortunate to just sit and listen to a good burger sizzling on the grill, but not be able to smell that delicious aroma wafting through the air, not to taste that incredible flavor! Yes, indeed, God has designed the various parts of the body just right! There is an intentional, unified structure and interplay between all of the various parts of the body. Paul is warning the church that unless we all play the various parts that God has assigned to us, we will just be “a chaotic array of conflicting forces, without focus or coherence.”² In other words, we can’t be a productive, thriving church that effectively blesses our community until each part of the body is active in his/her role. So, our staff is working hard to get us there. For example, just this week Pastor Eric began pulling together plans to update and enhance our welcome ministry. As he did that, he gathered the names of everyone helping as an usher, greeter, welcome table, and prayer area. Just in those four areas alone, he came up with 71 different names – now that is a LOT of parts!

Paul goes on to explain how...

3) Each part is needed in the body. 1 Corinthians 12:21 tells us, “The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” Again, by way of illustration, the eye needs the hand. How else would we be able to put on our glasses on or put our contacts in? And, as important as the head is in controlling just about every other function in the rest of our bodies, it would be pretty isolated from a good and full life if it didn’t have the feet, to carry it around to the different places it needed to go! 1 Corinthians 12:22-23 goes on to say, “On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty.” Some people are kind of embarrassed by their feet; they may think they are ugly or smelly. And yet, the Bible calls our feet beautiful when they are used to bring the Good News about Jesus. Romans 10:13-15 declares,³ “for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be

² “Paul means that unless the many [parts] perform their assigned functions, however diverse, the one body would not exist as a single entity but as a chaotic array of conflicting forces, without focus or coherence.” Anthony C. Thiselton, *NIGTC: 1 Corinthians*, Eerdmans Grand Rapids, MI, 2000, p. 1002.

³ See Isaiah 52:7.

saved.' How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the FEET of those who bring good news!" (I like to call this a "Theological Pedicure.") This concept is true for any part of the body. Any time we are aligned with God's gospel purposes, something beautiful and powerful happens. And, once all of the parts are aligned with God's purposes, they are then automatically aligned with one another, and there is an incredible synergy and effectiveness: **A body that is now pulling together in the same direction, on mission with God, just the way God designed His church to work!**

Each part is NEEDED in the body. So: Pastor Jerry can't say to the sound guy, I don't need you. How would we hear the sermons or songs and instruments without our sound operators? You can't say to a Sunday School Teacher, I don't need you. How would others be blessed with learning Christian truths in Sunday School or small group if not for the many teachers who prepare and teach each week? Take a minute to think about the Christ-followers around you and in your life. God's Word says that YOU need them. AND, that THEY need you! That's God's good design; a mutual interdependency. In America we like our independence, but God has designed His church in such a way that He doesn't give us that option. No solo acts and no lone rangers are allowed.



1 Corinthians 12:24-26 teaches us, "...But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it." Therefore, as the body of Christ, let's make it our priority to care for one another. When someone in our church is suffering, let's come alongside and suffer with them – let's give them a shoulder to cry on and shed our own tears as well. When someone is honored, let's rejoice with them – let's throw a party and laugh out loud with sincere delight!

In case we somehow missed it, in 1 Corinthians 12:27, Paul repeats it AGAIN, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." Paul then goes on the talk about specific spiritual gifts and the various roles each part plays. We don't have time today to dig in to all those details. However, I do want to remind everyone about our church's "Find Your Fit" form. It is of significant importance that we each find our fit in this church family. Let's not allow Efree Bemidji to look like Mr. Potato Head trying to walk around on his hands. Or, trying to smell without his nose. Or, trying to hear without his ears. Each part needs to play its vital role so that we can be a healthy church. This will ensure that we all grow together in Christian maturity so that, together, we can effectively present the gospel to a lost and dying world.

The Apostle Paul spends 3 entire chapters in 1 Corinthians trying to make sure that each one of us understands our purpose clearly:

4) The purpose of each part is to edify the whole. 1 Corinthians 12:7 sets the framework: “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” 1 Corinthians 14:5 gives a specific example, “...The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified.” The focus is not on whether your gift or my gift is somehow better than someone else’s gift. The focus is on how each person uses his/her particular gift to EDIFY the church. That word “edify” isn’t one we use commonly. Edify = building, constructing.⁴ Not building the walls/ceilings of our church building, but rather building up the PEOPLE, who make up the church body, you and me. Therefore, my concern should be how can I best use my gift in this particular church body, to build up Tom or Linda or Frank or Maria?

Spiritual gifts had become divisive in the church body at Corinth, which is the exact opposite of God’s purpose for them. The parts that were designed to build each other up were tearing each other down. This would be like your own hand choosing to poke yourself in the eye rather than to remove the speck of dirt that is irritating it. It would take an entire sermon series to adequately cover all that Paul teaches about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14. But, a key point that runs through these three chapters is that we measure the greatness of any particular person’s spiritual gift, not by the gift itself,⁵ but rather by how they use it, to build up Christ’s church.

It’s interesting that Paul never chastises the people in the church for being eager to have gifts of the Spirit.⁶ But, if you read all of 1 Corinthians 14, it becomes evident that many believers in the church at Corinth had an unhealthy interest in the gift of tongues, for their own sake.⁷ They seemed to be drawn to this one particular gift for the wrong reasons. Paul makes an interesting declaration in 1 Corinthians 14:18-19, “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.” Personally, I admit I sometimes feel a little jealous of Paul when I read this. I think it would be pretty neat to speak in tongues. I suppose that there may be times when all of us may wish we had someone else’s spiritual gift or that God had assigned us with something different. But rather than waste our emotional energy worrying over why we are an eye or an ear or a foot, let’s focus on how we can build someone else up, even if it’s just speaking 5 intelligible words like:

“God loves you SO MUCH!” or

“Can I pray for you?” or

“I would LOVE to help” or whatever else it may be.

Whatever part we have in the body of Christ, whatever spiritual gifting we have, let’s keep our focus on edifying and building one another up!

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on September 9, 2018 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson

⁴ οἰκοδομή = “process of building...construction.” See Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). [A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature](#) (3rd ed., p. 696). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁵ However, note 1 Corinthians 14:12, “...Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church.”

⁶ Note 1 Corinthians 14:1, “...eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit...”

⁷ Note how 1 Corinthians 14:4 begins, “Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves...” See also 1 Corinthians 14:16-17.