

1 Corinthians 12:14-31 ⁴ Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁶ 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 cease to be part of the body. ¹⁷ 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? ¹⁸ But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body. ²¹ 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!" ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honour to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. ²⁸ And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? {30 Or other languages} Do all interpret? ³¹ But eagerly desire {31 Or But you are eagerly desiring} the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way.

“One Body, Many Parts”

King David wrote in Psalm 139:8, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Do you ever take a moment and consider the human body and how works and its relationship to the mind and self and others? God really has done something wonderful. Take my banjo playing for instance. To play the banjo I have to know music. I have to hear. (It's amazing that Beethoven composed all of that beautiful music when he was all but stone deaf.) To play the banjo it is necessary that I have hands and fingers and a neural network that have had to learn the mechanics of fingering notes and pounding out rhythm. I'm right handed. If I lost my right hand, I could still banjo. I'd have to strum instead of thump. On the other hand (pun intended), my left hand is probably the weakest, uncoordinated part of my body. Yet when it comes to playing music, the skill that I've developed could not and can not be done with any other part of my body. I could lose the thumb on my left hand and still manage to play music and even a finger or two. But if I lost my left hand, this otherwise clumsy and awkward and weak part of my body, I could not play music anymore and that would darn near kill me. It would be devastating to who I am as a person. I'd have to become a harmonica player. It is amazing how important this left hand is to who I am...and I haven't even addressed the notion of what the loss of this left hand would mean to certain senior citizens who come to life to the music...or, the effect it would have on William, Alice and Dana if I couldn't play music anymore.

Paul says here in Corinthians that God has made, established the human body just as he chose to and he made it so that it consists of many parts and those parts need each other. A hand cannot be a hand without a brain and what good is a brain with no hands. If a part of the body is lost, no matter how insignificant it might be, like a toe, the impact on the rest of the body and the human person and the community of that person is...amazing. I once saw a video of an armless man playing a guitar with his feet. If he lost a toe on his left foot...well, let's just say even our toes are priceless.

Well, so it is with the church. We are the body of Christ and individually we are members of his body. Paul wants us to think of church fellowship as a body, like a human body, that God has fashioned and is fashioning in such a way that we each are an indispensable member of the body and that even if we were to lose what would seem to be an insignificant part or person, the effect it has on the whole body is dramatic, even traumatic.

Paul says this within the context of teaching the Corinthians about spiritual gifts. If you remember last week, we heard that everyone in Christ has been given by the Holy Spirit special giftedness for particular ministry. These spiritual gifts are given to us not so much for our own individual edification, but rather for the common good of our church. So, we are the body of Christ and each one of us is an individual member of his human body with specific gifts for ministry crucial to the whole congregation in our kingdom bringing ministry that began with Jesus' earthly ministry. Also, if you remember, I indicated that a good bit of that ministry in the early church happened around the dinner table as they carried on Jesus' tradition of sharing a welcoming table and ministering in whatever form that might take whether it be teaching or healing or changing water into wine. Today, God has fashioned us, the body of Christ to carry on Jesus' ministry with him present with us in the Holy Spirit and that same Spirit, the Holy Spirit, enables us with gifts for ministry to one another and the community around us that gives witness to the fact that he is alive and establishing his kingdom.

Towards the end of our passage, Paul gives one of his lists of spiritual gifts, a list ranging from offices of ministry like apostle or evangelist to actual manifestations of Holy Spirit ministry like miracles and healing. He tells us to eagerly desire that our congregation be gifted with the more significant gifts like apostles, evangelists, pastors, and prophets because there was a contingent in Corinth that was seeking to control the whole because they spoke in tongues a lot as if they were pagan oracles and if that was the case, they were therefore more "spiritual" than the rest. Paul essentially told them to set their hearts on being firmly equipped for real kingdom ministry rather than just being a show.

Anyway, back to the main point of the day, we are the body of Christ and each of us are individual members of *his* body gifted by the Holy Spirit with abilities for specific functions of Jesus' own ministry to the world and therefore, we are each

indispensable in his body and his ministry. Another way of saying this is that we share New Creation union with Christ Jesus and one another in the Holy Spirit and are in unity in his kingdom bringing ministry. So, Paul brings out three threats to that unity in this passage: isolationism, individualism, and for lack of a better word elevationism.

Isolationism is when we say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body." In real life that sounds like, "I come to church here because I like what the minister has to say (riiiiiight), but I really don't feel like I have much in common with the people here and those I've talked to, I don't agree with all that much on stuff. I'm not so much into the *things* that the church offers for us to do. I don't really belong here, but I come because I'm a Christian and we're supposed to go to church and this place is convenient and..." That's sitting in the pew and avoiding fellowship. It's the risk free way to go. It keeps you in control all the while checking you out from the mandate to love and share in ministry *together*.

Individualism is when we look at our brothers and sisters in Christ and say, "I don't need you for my Christian walk. It's me and Jesus, thank yuh." Yet, "the eye can not say to the hand, 'I don't need you.' And, the head cannot say to the foot, 'I don't need you.'" The Christian faith is not about beliefs, rituals, ideas, and certainly not metaphysics and our individual espousal to them. The Christian faith is New Creation humanity beginning to live together NOW in the way life will be when Jesus returns and God makes all things new. In the Book of Acts we see that in the early church they did everything together as if they were a L'Arche community. They constantly worshipped together, prayed together, and ate together. Moreover, they shared all things in common...*they shared all things in common!* There was no such thing as pew sitting back then. They didn't have pews! Individuals compose the body of Christ but individualism has no place in it.

Lastly, elevationism says, "I am an important and powerful person outside the church and therefore, I should be important and powerful inside the church. And, if I'm going to give the big bucks because I can, I'm going to say how they're used." Others might say, "I've done everything there is to do around here. I'm here all the time. *I am* this congregation. Therefore, it will do what I want it to do or I will make life miserable for them." 'What swill we swaller.' Just as God has fearfully and wonderfully made it so that the loss of any part of the human body profoundly affects not only the person losing it but also those close to them, so God has made the church so that the weaker members are elevated and all are equal in care for one another. The church is the only human community where rich and poor, powerful and impotent, successful and failing, black and white, red and yellow and brown, rural and city, Brit and Scot, Yank and Arab...whatever the boundary line of status we draw...we all gather around the same table, drink the same Holy Spirit, eat the same body of Christ, and share in the same ministry of Jesus Christ. In the church, those who seem of little importance or status out there in the world become elevated and honoured just the same as the worldly honourable. It's because we share the Holy Spirit and the same ministry Jesus. We love because he first loved us. Therefore, we build one another up in love.

Friends, we are the body of Christ...THE BODY OF CHRIST. Each one of us individually are members of his LIVING BODY...eyes, ears, hands, feet, heart, mind, follicle, phalange...and this is by God's doing and design and not our own. We are New Humanity. Dive in. Enjoy the ride. Discover what LOVE is all about. We each have been gifted to be a particular part of the Body of Christ as it exists in this historical remnant of a town called Claude in the township of Caledon, Ontario. Through the churches of this community the kingdom of God is breaking into this fallen world and WE are an integral part of what God is doing here. Dive in. Go for it. Give 'er. We are and we each are fearfully and wonderfully made by God to be New Creation therefore, praise be to God. Amen.