

1 Corinthians 12:12-21,26,27 you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

So if you had to pick one part of the body to be – you could only be one part, nothing else – what would it be? Now I know, this is a risky exercise, after all, just talking about the body makes a lot of people uncomfortable. But keep in mind the verses of 1 Corinthians 12, verses we skipped earlier when we read the lesson, verses 22-25: ***those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unrepresentable 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 honor 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.***

So, keeping in mind that the entire body is made and designed by God the Creator, I'll ask it again: If you had to pick one part of the body to be – you could only be one part, nothing else – what would it be?

Would it make a difference if you could be a part of anyone's body? I mean, would you want to be the brain of Einstein or the heart of Mother Theresa or the shoulders of Michael Phelps?

Would it make a difference if you had to pick just one part of your own body? Stinky feet, weak eyes, beautifully hairless scalp?

I think it would. I mean, if we were to pick a part of the body in general, we would tend to think of the **function** we value most and at the peak of its powers: The command and control of the mind, the life-sustaining pump of the heart, the data-collecting and guiding sight of the eyes.

And I think that if we were to pick a part of someone else's body, we would tend to pick a stand-out strength like I mentioned before: the brain of Einstein or the heart of Mother Theresa or the shoulders of gold-

medalist swimmer Michael Phelps. This is all positive stuff.

But if we had to pick the part of our own bodies to be, well, then I think we would have a hard time picking something. It would be much easier to rule out parts of our *own* bodies. In fact, most of us would rather not choose at all. "Do I have to...?"

And that's understandable. After all, we know ourselves better than anyone. We know our faults, our failings, our weaknesses, our inabilities. In his book, *Prepared to Answer* author Mark Paustien wrote that if we knew what was in his heart and mind, we would want to kill him! And isn't it the same for all of us? If you knew what thoughts run through my mind and heart, and if I knew what thoughts run through your mind and heart, it isn't just that we wouldn't want to be any part of each other, we would want to kill each other. The truth is that we *can't* see into each other's minds and hearts and history is *still* full of people killing each other.

So now along comes Paul and, under inspiration from the Holy Spirit, he writes, ***You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*** You've got to be kidding me, Paul. Do you see what happens when people come together? This is a recipe for disaster. And the truth is, it would be a recipe for disaster, were it not for the body in which we have been made a part.

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-- whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-- and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. And this has made all the difference. Through baptism our old sinful selves were killed, drowned. As Paul wrote to the Romans, ...all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Romans 6:3,4)

So take a fresh look at yourself. Don't look at your faults, your failings, your

weaknesses, your inabilities. If you're looking through eyes of faith, you won't see them. No, look at yourself through the eyes of your heavenly Father, who sees you as the body of his one and only Son ... through baptism, you have been cleansed, purified, nourished, strengthened, clothed and presented before your heavenly with the spiritual essence of Christ our brother and Savior. God the Son steps before God the Father and in presenting himself, he is literally presenting you and me. Again God assures through Paul, ***you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.***

That means that all of those faults are fixed, those failings are forgotten, those weaknesses are strengthened, and those inabilities are empowered. You have become an essential part of Christ himself, ***a new creation; the old has gone the new has come.*** (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Now I know what some of you are thinking, c'mon, Pastor, what part could I possibly play? Here's is God's answer through Paul, ***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!"***²⁶ ***If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.***

Over the last few months, we have been engaged in a congregational planning process called the SAA – the Self-Assessment and Adjustment Program. It began with what was called a Pulse Survey – seeking to get the pulse of the congregation: how are things going, what are we doing well, what could be done better, what opportunities do we have to witness, serve, and grow in God's grace.

It was interesting to me that throughout those surveys, there was a lot of "we should's." We should do this, we should start that, we should offer another. I even saw quite a bit of "I am's." I am doing this, I am participating in that, I am giving to this degree. (And truly, there is a lot to be thankful

for there.) But for all of the "we should's" and even the "I am's" I didn't see a single "I will's." I will do this. I will do that. I will seize this opportunity.

Now I know that for many, that kind of commitment is implied. But perhaps it also speaks to an absence of purpose, a confusion over direction, or even a lack of understanding of how each of us fits into the body of Christ...

...hence, the questions this morning. This manifestation of the body of Christ called New Life congregation needs all of you, just as this section of Scripture declares. I'm not asking you to choose which part you *want to be*. I'm not asking which part you *want to use*. I'm asking you to recognize that you *are* a part of the body of Christ. You *do* have function and purpose and *importance*. You *are essential* to the body of Christ, each and every one of you, just as God created you to be. And it is ***in him that we [truly] live and move and have our being.*** (Acts 17:28)

Now at next Sunday's forum, we'll be presenting the findings of that Pulse Survey, the data collected and compiled by the Elders and BLM, as well as the recommendations for what we, with the Lord's help, will seek to accomplish over the next year. As the body of Christ, please plan to attend and see how *YOU* fit into the future of New Life congregation. If, perhaps, you are wondering what gifts you have to offer, please see me. I can provide a spiritual gifts assessment that you can take as well as connect you with other resources to find out. Don't let a lack of understanding or a lazy sinful nature keep you from being a part of what God has in store. And in the meantime, search the Scriptures, meditate on the Word, receive the body and blood of Christ, share with your heavenly Father in prayer, all in the confidence that *you* are the body of Christ, *we* are part of him together, and together in him we can accomplish what he wills. God grant it. Amen.