

No Christian Is an Island
1 Corinthians 12:12-31a
January 24, 2016

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. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 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. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

When I as a teenager, there was a very popular song by Simon and Garfunkel titled *I Am a Rock*. The last two lines in the song are: *And a rock feels no pain; And an island never cries*. The song speaks about a person who wanted to separate himself from the rest of society.

Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church deals in large part with the problems the church was experiencing. There were divisions, factions, quarreling, and jealousy, just to name a few. If the Corinthian church was to survive, these problems had to be resolved.

However, to resolve their problems, the first thing the people needed to accept was that the Church of Christ must operate as a single unit. There can be no islands, whether those islands are individuals or groups.

We are going to examine today's text in short pieces. As we do this, I want you to be thinking about what you hear in two ways; how these things apply to you as an individual, and how they apply to Prince of Peace Lutheran Church as the body of Christ.

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 (1 Co 12:12 ESV).

Paul uses the human body to make his point. Our bodies have many different parts, but all the parts fit together perfectly and they all function together perfectly. Every part of the human body has a useful purpose.

Medical science used to believe that certain body parts like the tonsils and the appendix were useless and therefore expendable. That false notion was generated by a belief in evolution. However, medical science now recognizes what God's Word states in today's reading – every body part has a purpose.

The church, as the body of Christ, functions much like the human body. The church must function as a single unit or it will not function at all. Schisms and factions and division cannot exist in the church, just as they cannot exist in the human body.

Paul stresses the oneness of the church in verse 13: *For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit* (1 Co 12:13 ESV).

It wasn't just the Corinthian church Paul wanted unified. He said this to the Galatian church: *In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Ga 3:26-28 ESV).

He told the Ephesian church: *There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all* (Eph 4:4-6 ESV).

Over and over Paul reminds us that the sacrifice of Christ was universal. Christ died for all people without regard to earthly position. All Christians receive the same Spirit. This is what Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well: *Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life* (Jn 4:14 ESV). The key word in that sentence is "whoever." Not a few, not some, not just certain ones, but whoever. We are all equal in the eyes of God.

Verse 14: *The body does not consist of one member but of many* (1 Co 12:14 ESV).

The human body has many different parts. The body of Christ has many different parts. There is great and wonderful diversity to be found in the church. And, unless this truth is widely accepted, the church is doomed to exist forever in turmoil.

Different does not necessarily mean wrong or inferior. Many of the problems that exist in Christian churches stem from the fact that the people refuse to accept legitimate differences. We must let the Word of God be our guide, and push aside human traditions and personal preferences.

Paul continues: *If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body* (1 Co 12:15-16 ESV).

Paul personifies the parts of the body to show how ridiculous it would be for parts of the body to be jealous of each other. Feet and ears don't have the ability to think or be jealous or talk. Feet aren't jealous of the hands, and ears aren't jealous of the eyes. The human body doesn't work that way. It operates as a whole.

Little children arguing on the playground can take their ball and go home, but the body parts can't. Even if body parts could be jealous of each other, nothing would change, because they would still be parts of the body.

A pastor doesn't have to be in the ministry very long before he encounters people who have quit coming to worship, quit giving financial offerings, quit volunteering their time, or just quit the congregation altogether, because they didn't get their way on some issue. Almost always, the issue in question has nothing to do with theology and faith. They refuse to abide by the will of the majority so they just sit at home and pout.

Verse 17: If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? (1 Co 12:17 ESV).

You never see giant eyeballs or giant ears moving around. You don't see that because without the function of the other body parts, eyes and ears would never survive. So it is with the church. There are many different people and many different roles. Some roles may seem more important just as an eye may seem more important than a toe, but all parts are necessary and vital.

Paul uses this to show how ridiculous the Corinthian Christians were acting by being jealous over who had which spiritual gift. If everyone had the showy gifts, like preaching or teaching, who would tend to the widows and orphans? The church cannot function with all showy gifts. Church leaders are necessary, but without followers there is no one to lead. An army needs both generals and privates.

The text continues: *But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body* (1 Co 12:18-20 ESV).

God, not evolution, has arranged the parts of the human body in exactly the right positions. The eyes, ears, arms, legs are all put together for maximum efficiency. The human body was put together according to a godly plan.

The church, the body of Christ, was also put together with a plan. God gave specific people specific talents in order to make the church grow and prosper. If you are ever

tempted to dispute your place in the church, remember verse 18: *But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, every one of them, just as he chose.*

The Corinthian church had been blessed with an almost overabundance of spiritual gifts. However, if the people didn't learn to function as a single unit, it all would be for nothing.

Let's move up to verse 21: *The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you"* (1 Co 12:21 ESV).

Paul returns to personifying the body parts in order to show their common relation to each other. The "higher" body parts like the eyes and head don't despise the "lower" parts like the feet and hands. That kind of snobbery would be disastrous. Without the hands, who would remove a bit of debris from the eye? Without the feet, who would take a sick head to the doctor?

The Valentine dance, the car show, the 5k run, Sunday school class, Monday night dinners at Family of God, and other things are all operated by volunteers. If everything were up to the pastor and his wife, or the congregation president, or the church secretary, these things would never happen. Much of the important work of the church is carried on by unseen individuals working behind the scenes.

Fast forward to verses 26 and 27: *If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it* (1 Co 12:26-27 ESV).

One day, when my daughters were young, I attempted to walk passed them as they were wrestling on the floor. My youngest daughter rolled directly in the path of my next step. To avoid stepping on her, I dodged to the left. In doing so, I jammed the leg of the sofa between my little toe and the one next to it. That dislocated my little toe. You can't imagine how much your little toe can hurt.

We cannot assign value to the parts of our body. They are all valuable. When one part, no matter how small, is hurt or in trouble, it affects the entire body.

The body of Christ is the same. When one Christian suffers, all of Christianity suffers. When one Christian rejoices, all Christians should rejoice. We are all in this together. We are all part of Christ's church.

No matter who you are, in the church of God, you are important. No matter who you are, at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, you are important. God has given each of you a gift so you can do your part to make this church prosper and grow. Whatever your gift might be, singing, cooking, caring, helping, use what God has blessed you with so you might be a blessing to others.