

Several years ago my wife called the hardware store in Essexville, MI about fixing our snowblower. The man on the other end of the line said, "Mam, can I talk to your husband." She then said, "No, you need to talk to me, I am the mechanically inclined person in this family." She then got the necessary information and fixed our snow blower. Now I could be all upset with not being your fix-it husband type. I could feel worthless. But I'm not going to get upset, because as my wife has said, "My husband has gifts in other areas."

As I look out in this congregation today, I see a lot of talented people. Many of you have served on various boards and committees in various churches over the course of the years. Some of you may not have served on boards or committees, but you have been regular in your worship life, and humbly looked for ways to serve others. Each one of you is uniquely gifted to serve God. Just prior to our sermon text we hear scripture declare that the Holy Spirit imparts spiritual gifts to God's people. Spiritual gifts are special abilities given by the Holy Spirit for the upbuilding of Christ's church. The Bible mentions some 18 plus different spiritual gifts. Every Christian has at least one. And it is important that even though someone here may not have the exact same gifts as you, that you appreciate that person, and their gifts at Open Bible. That's our theme today: "Appreciate Every Part of the Body!"

The Apostle Paul could've written to the Corinthians some really flattering words. "Corinthians, you are marvelous. You are talented people!" But Paul didn't because there was some discord going on in the Corinthian Church. You see there were members in the church who wanted power and control. They wanted things to go according to their way of thinking, and if they didn't, they caused a stink. The members in Corinth were jockeying for glory and they were using their Holy Spirit given gifts as leverage against other believers. "You only hand out food to the poor widows, but I host the worship services in my house." "You only open up the scrolls of scripture to the correct place, but I lead the congregation in prayer and Bible study." They twisted the use of their gifts to create an artificial hierarchy that was tearing the unity of the church apart. That's why Paul came up with this analogy for the Corinthians, "The [human] 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. Paul penned these words to help the Corinthians realize that God wanted them to work together to advance the body of believers. God gave them all distinctively individual gifts.

But rather than using them to God's glory they were waving them in each other's faces childishly thinking, "Nanna, nanna booboo, my gift is better than yours." "I'm more important than you." "I do more than you." "I think things through, you just run ahead trying to do things willy nilly! Ridiculous! Could that that temptation be here at Open Bible? Oh, you better believe it is! The devil is constantly trying to fluff up our pride. He wants to rip apart our happy, growing church like he did with Corinthians by creating disharmony through haughty arrogance. Isn't the devil a sneaky scumbag? He finds out what believers' strengths are and then he uses those strengths against them. So, rather than letting believers just quietly serve the Lord and his church, the devil tries to lead believers to make condescending comparisons. "I did this. Oh, AND I did that. What did you ever do?" "I'm the only one who cares enough." "This would

never get done without me.” “Look at me; I’m a pretty important person!” Is this true of you and your service to the Lord?

Have you fallen, if only for a moment, into thinking those misguided, good-worksnullifying thoughts? “I have done so. I have craved praise and recognition.” From time to time, I’m sure you have. This is a strong temptation for anyone who regularly serves in the church. Paul warns against this sinful self-glorification by explaining that all gifts, all jobs within the church are needed for the church to function properly just as all the parts of the body are needed for the body to function properly. The “higher” body parts like eyes and head (in Paul’s analogy) don’t despise the “lower” body parts like hands and feet. The eye needs the hand to remove foreign particles from the eye. When the head is sick, it needs the feet to take it to the doctor. They work together. And so God calls us, the members of this body of believers, to always work together.

A youth pastor was trying to teach his youth group about the body of Christ and how it works together from these words of 1 Corinthians 12. He took a football, painted it to look like a large eye, and wrapped it into a baby blanket. During the class, he paused and said, “Would you like to see my baby?” Then he opened up the blanket and from the blanket this large eye was looking out at the group. One girl said, “Gross. That’s terrible.” Then he said, “What if you had a girl friend and took her out to lunch and she was just this big eye, sitting on the table, staring at you?” Gross. That’s terrible. How ugly the body of Christ would be if it were not made up of carefully created parts, people like you and me, with a variety of different spiritual gifts, different backgrounds of life, different circumstances of life, all coming together and creating one beautiful body.

Self-glorification is one way the devil tries to get us to misuse our spiritual gifts. The tendency to look down on people who don’t think or act like us. Satan doesn’t just tempt you to wave your hands saying, “Look at me and great things I’m doing. I’m a pretty important person!” The devil also tempts you to sit on your hands and complacently not use your God given gifts. Both are wrong.

Is this true of you? Are there areas where you could be serving the Lord but you are purposefully holding back? “I served on church boards and committees years ago. I want a break down here in Florida. I am too old, done things for too many years”. Are there areas that you could be serving but you have made excuses and refused? The answer, of course, is “yes”. We all could do more, myself included. Just imagine if every Christian worldwide stopped making excuses and started using their gifts to their fullest potential.

I really meant it when I said, “You are talented people!” I see a goldmine of talent sitting before me but so much of that talent is still buried. It’s been said that ten percent of people do ninety percent of the work in churches. Just think what would have happened if God the Father took on that same attitude of holding back from us. Rather than John 3:16 reading as it currently does, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” It would instead sound more like this, “For God so loved the world to a point that he thought about giving his Son but because his gift might not be

appreciated he didn't and so whoever counted on him will perish and not have eternal life." Just think if Jesus took on that same attitude. "I know I have the ability to die for the sins of the world, but that's a big commitment. I'm not sure if I'm really up for that. I have so much more going on right now." What? Huh? That's not how the Bible set it up to work. Don't you think God looks at us and our excuses and says, "What? Huh? That's not how it's supposed to work!" When we hide our God given talents from service to the Lord, we sin. But don't take my word for it. Take God's Word. "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins" (James 4:17) Heavy, heavy words. But have good cheer! For anyone, who knows the good work of salvation Jesus did on the cross and believes it, is saved. God the Father didn't hold back. He did send his one and only Son that whoever believes in him (that's you) shall not perish but have eternal life! God the Father saw you as a very important person—important enough to send his Son to die for your sins.

Have good cheer! God the Son did not hold back. He knew he had the ability to die for the sins of the world, and although it was a big commitment, he did it. God the Son saw you as a very important person—important enough to go through hell on the cross so you'd never go there yourself. And God's not done yet! God the Holy Spirit did not hold back either. He saw you as a very important person—important enough to work faith into your heart making you a dear child of God. And he wasn't done yet. The Holy Spirit has given you (just as we heard at the beginning of this sermon) wonderfully unique gifts to use for God's glory. We are now called by God to use our gifts of time, talents and treasure to advance the gospel ministry here at Open Bible Lutheran Church.

One thing I love about Open Bible is the Kneemail that you have started here, where our members are notified by email as to who is sick and needs prayer. And if you read your kneemail, doesn't your heart go out to the member of our congregation who is suffering. You hurt for them, when they hurt. You want to help them. So you pray for them, and when you see them you try to give an encouraging word. Likewise, when you see the name and picture of a member of Open Bible in the Village Sun Paper, you feel so good. Recently, I saw a picture of Walt Farnsworth in the paper as he starred for his softball team. I was going, Yea Walt! Hey, he is a member of Open Bible. Or when Jack Affeldt recently published a book, I was going, Way to Go Jack. He's a member of Open Bible. We all were honored, because we are part of one body.

Our text supports this type of spirit. IT says, "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it." A famous football player Gene Stallings from Alabama was asked what he thought was the greatest moment in sports. He told about a time he attended a Special Olympics sports meet. The gun went off, the runners took off. Half way down the track one of the boys fell down. One by one the other runners stopped running, turned around, and helped the boy who had fallen. They held him up and all together they crossed the finish line. Dear Christians, you are the body of Christ. Great opportunities are waiting for you this week. Let's appreciate what we have here at Open Bible! Appreciate Every Part of the body! Amen...