

# “Unity”

Psalm 133 & 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

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As a man was driving down the freeway, his cell phone rang. Answering, he heard his wife urgently warning him, “Herman, I just heard on the news that there is a car going the wrong way down the freeway. Please be careful!” “It’s not just one car,” said Herman. “It’s hundreds of them!”

The apostle Paul used the metaphor of the human body to illustrate how each one of us has a unique function, gift, and ministry in the body of Christ; yet, we all are one body, interconnected and united. Regarding, our friend, Herman, it is good that he and his car are different from all the other people and cars on the freeway as long as he is united with them in traveling in the same direction. Different perspectives and solutions are beneficial, however whenever we go against others the result is chaos.

Our scripture begins. **1 Corinthians 12:12 “For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.”** Baptism reveals God’s grace to wash away our sins and welcomes us into the family of God. We declare Jesus as Lord and Savior promising, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to repent, to turn from sin to God, to reorient our life with God at the center. In baptism, we become one with Christ and one with all believers.

Biblical Scholar Paul Sampley points out we often get all confused right from the start. Sampley says, “Modern Christians sometimes wonder how they might more fully become the body of Christ. That is not Paul’s notion. Paul considers that believers are already the body of Christ, and he exhorts us to relate to one another in a manner appropriate to **what we already are.**” God has already given each person a unique role in God’s family. By God’s grace everyone belongs. It is our calling to figure out how to live, serve, and love together.

Unfortunately, most people can’t even accept the beginning premise that by God’s grace everyone belongs. Some people spend a lot of energy debating, lobbying, and fighting over who belongs, who can be a part of this group or that group, who can be a part of this church or that church and what they can or can’t do. Some people live in gated communities. Some countries build walls at their borders. For hundreds of years churches have split. Unique religious perspectives have caused numerous wars. Scripture is crystal clear that we all belong to God’s family. We all belong, because God loves us and every one of us needs God’s grace to cleanse us of something. This is an almost incomprehensible truth to believe and even harder to live. The greedy corporate executive, the homeless person, the famous actress, the person addicted to drugs, the athlete, the aids orphan, the refugee; we are interconnected, we are all a part of one body, God’s family. People from different groups, schools, communities, countries, churches, and religions, even the ones that say and do things you utterly disagree with, are part of the one body. Your enemies, a serial convict, and a terrorist are part of the one body. They are of equal value to you and have something special that you need to be complete. Paul states in Ephesians. **Ephesians 4:1-6 “I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Parent of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”**

I have often wondered why a difference in opinion can cause a person to get so defensive, sparking a great fire of anger, which often leads to years of dark thoughts and fighting. I am not just wondering about other people; I am wondering about myself. Why is it that even with the people I love the most I can get agitated when we see something differently? Why do I try to get them to see my point of view, instead of listening to better understand their point of view? Why do I try to vindicate my point? Why am I driven to keep debating until I feel that I am right instead of either seeking a consensus solution or agreeing to disagree with love and appreciation for each other? Why do we let past altercations color our current debates?

Everywhere we look we see great variety, an abundance of diversity. Different colors, shapes, and textures. Different plants, animals, and matter. Even if you take a small category like a flower, there are many different sizes, shapes, and colors. Even within a species, each one is different.

Creation proclaims that God loves diversity and uniqueness yet also unity. Every animal and plant, all of creation is interconnected. Science illustrates this with the concept of the “Butterfly Effect” a seemingly insignificant factor like the movement of a butterfly wing may result in a tornado developing on a clear sunny day depending on all the factors in play.

God loves each of us so much that God took the extra time and effort to create each of us unique. No two people are the same. Yet, all of us are united, for we all belong to one family. Most people agree that variety is good. If we were all identical, thought the same, liked all the same things and lived in a one dimension, one color world, life would be boring. The dilemma is on one hand diversity enhances life; but, on the other hand we use our diversity as an excuse for strife.

The church in Corinth was diverse with many strong-willed people of different views of how the church should be and what the church should do. There were Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, male and female. This led to fighting, disorder, and division, so they wrote the Apostle Paul, sending him a list of questions. Paul does not take sides. Paul upholds everyone’s unity in God. We are all one. Coffee and water drinkers are one. Refreshments before or after worship are one. Hymns and praise song singers are one. Paper plates or fine china are one. Liberal and conservative are one. Democrats and Republicans are one. We are interconnected and dependent on each other. Each of us is a beloved cherished member of God’s family.

Paul invites us to appreciate and celebrate our diversity, our uniqueness for this is God’s plan. Each person fulfilling a different role, contributing a different perspective, reflecting a different facet of God’s image which is within each of us; shining out a different aspect of God’s light. Only when each person is true to their uniqueness and shares their gift is the whole body complete and able to do its work perfectly. Unity is our goal not uniformity.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of all members. **1 Corinthians 12:15-17 “If the foot would 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 would 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 the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?**

We can substitute into this scripture any of our categories. If the Presbyterian would say, “Because I am not a Roman Catholic, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make them any less a part of the body. And if the conservative would say, “Because I am not a liberal, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make them any less a part of the body. If the whole body were traditionalists, where would new ways of experiencing God be? If the whole body were contemporary, where would our traditions be?

This scripture can be read even more personal. If I would say, “Because I am not Martin Luther King Jr., I do not belong to the body,” that would not make me any less a part of the body. If the whole body were me, where would most of the wonderful things of life be? Take some time today and fill in the scripture with yourself and the people with whom you compare yourself to.

This scripture gets even harder to live. If we would say, “Because someone is not something, we do not belong to the body,” that would not make us any less a part of the body. More often we flip it around saying, “Because someone is not something, then they do not belong to the body, or because someone votes this way, promotes this view, or behaves this way they do not belong to the body.” Scripture declares differences does not make them any less a part of the body. But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as God chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. **1 Corinthians 12:21 “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.”** Take a moment right now and substitute in the people, groups of people or characteristics of people you would like to exclude into this scripture. ///Pause/// **You** should never say to anyone, “I have no need of you”

As a society we love to grade, determine a pecking order, rate, and crown someone number one. Scripture says, **1 Corinthians 12:22-27 “On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for**

**one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”**

We are all of equal value. No one is less important or more important. No one brings less or more to the body of Christ. God created you special, unique and with a specific role that only you can fulfill in your family, community, work or school, this church and the world. Being true to our identity is both cherishing our uniqueness and cherishing our unity with all people; respecting our differences and seeing every person as a vital member of God’s family.

Paul is urging us to live with an attitude of humble significance. You are needed and wanted. No matter your age, ability, status, or circumstances you have a special attribute the rest of us need. Significance that stirs you into action not allowing you to sit on the sidelines, staying uninvolved, unengaged and making up excuses. Humble with a sense that your idea, gift, position, work, contribution, responsibility or self is no better, is of no more value, than anyone else’s. No better than the person you dislike or can’t stand or drives you crazy.

Each and every person has a purpose, has a place ordained, designed uniquely just for them by God. God wants you here. You are here, at this time, at this place for a purpose. There are no inferior people, spare people, excluded people or duplicate people. Every person is needed, valuable, and necessary. Together we get a fuller glimpse of God. Some say walking on water is a miracle. A greater miracle is walking in peaceful unity with everyone.

Let us pray. God help us to truly be united with all people celebrating each person’s uniqueness, respecting each other’s differences, and fulfilling our role so we can live, work, be and love all people. Help us to truly be one interconnected body where everyone is included, and no one is excluded. Amen