



1 Corinthians 12:12-27

It doesn't take much guessing that this morning's service is about: Diversity.

UNITY OR UNIFORMITY

Last time I preached in this series was a couple of Sundays ago and we looked at the whole idea of unity. What we found is that unity is not uniformity. God has made us and called us together as His people, not because He wants us to be forced into a mould, but that He calls us to be what He's like – holy – different!

D&G

The world wants to force us into its mould. So uniformity – or maybe conformity – is the way of our world. God calls us to unity and that's different. Let's remind ourselves of what we learnt last time.

BE COMPLETELY UNITED

As God's people, we are called to unity as the people of God and this was the verse we looked at last time from 1 Corinthians 1. As we saw last time, that isn't a call to be uniform. God doesn't require from us the uniformity of the military, or of MacDonalds, or of politics – all models of uniformity the world uses and Christians have used. But as we found out, all these models are based around having something in common but excludes those who are too different for our liking – so we get uniformity but not necessarily unity.

We know even from our own denomination or our own church, too often we talk about those things that divide us because we are different from one another. And difference divides doesn't it? That's how it works in society – people divide from one another because of race, class, language, disability, politics, religion.

But we are called to be completely united in thought and purpose. Let's have a closer look and see how God understands unity.

SO WHAT IS THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN UNITY?

We started to answer this last time, and it's much better developed in 1 Corinthians 12. It's a unity that comes only from the Spirit of God. It isn't a unity that we decide or we arrange. It is a unity that is of the Spirit of God. Let's go to verse 12 of our reading this morning.

VERSE

This picture of the body is one of the most significant pictures of the church of God.

UNITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Paul uses the picture of the body to describe the unity that the Spirit brings.

1. *We were all baptised by one Spirit into one body*

The Spirit it has immersed us into the body of Christ. You'll find lots of stuff around

about the different baptisms of the Spirit but switching it to its correct translation of immersed gives us the idea of what the Spirit does to us. He makes us part of the body. He immerses us into it. Immersion means we are dipped like a cloth into a dye – we become part of it and it becomes part of us.

I wish Christians would stop thinking of being part of church as an optional extra – something we'll be part of if it suits, and knocking it if it doesn't. We are immersed into it. We are part of it because the Spirit has made us that way. And as being part of it is something that is God-ordained, then we are responsible to one another and responsible collectively for our failures.

So therefore if you think church is bad, what have you done to contribute to it, what have you done to change things? That's a really important question. More on that in a minute.

2. *We were all given the one Spirit to drink*

Paul gives us another perspective of the Spirit. We were all given the one Spirit to drink. This idea of drinking is important. Water helps things grow. I've got a new area of grass growing. In the last week I've had to water it to keep it growing properly. The Spirit refreshes us. He makes us grow. Paul is addressing the church here. It's the Spirit who causes us to grow, both personally and as a fellowship. He gives the increase. He produces the unity. When disunity happens, it's because someone starts behaving out of the mind and will of God.

UNITY IS ABOUT DIVERSITY

I said a few moments ago that difference often divides people. But when we come to talk about the unity of the Spirit, everything gets turned on its head. The picture of the unity of the body is about diversity – we gain unity by understanding and embracing our diversity. Let me illustrate this. Last week I spoke about the disciples of Jesus. I you remember they were all different. From all backgrounds and walks of life. From different social strata. Different in their political views. Different in the respect people gave them. And Jesus forged them into his team not because they were the same but that they all brought something different that was greater than the sum of the parts.

Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. Have a think about who we are as a church. If it wasn't for Christ, would we mix in one another's social circles? But the bond that joins us together is Jesus Christ. One of the amazing things about being a Christian is that it doesn't matter where we go in the world, when we find God's people, we have an instant bond with them. We are part of the same body – they are therefore our friends, our family. They may speak a different language, have different customs, worship differently. But they are us.

A body is naturally diverse. It's built to be. If we look at our own bodies, we find that even though the DNA of each of our cells is identical, we are made up of different parts, organs, bones, muscle. The fact that our bodies are made up of so many different parts makes us work.

So what does Paul say about the diversity we have?

DIVERSITY IS INTENDED

It's intended. We're supposed to be different.

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!"

God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. We are all different. We often look at this passage in terms of gifts and abilities. That's true. But we're more than that. We come bringing different temperaments, different life experiences, different experiences of walking with God, different cultures and as a local church God has brought us together because it is the combination of what we are that is going to cause us to grow and thrive. And what results is greater than the sum of the parts.

Diversity is what makes every local church have a different character. Although we talk of different churches being of different traditions, actually the look and feel of any fellowship is going to reflect both that but also the people that God has brought together.

I've often found in all the churches I have ever been part of that there is always someone who feels that they don't fit. They can't see their role. Or worse, that others can't see a role in them. Is that you?

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.

If God has called you here, then you fit. If you don't feel you fit doesn't mean that God hasn't called you. It's a matter of discerning where your piece of the jigsaw fits. Maybe it's because you've never had an opportunity or not had the confidence. We want to encourage you because in achieving your potential as part of the church, you build yourself up and build the church. To do nothing means we all lose something. *18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.*

Which moves us smoothly to the next point.

DIVERSITY IS STRENGTH

We all know people who have lost a sense, seeing, hearing. We know how that disables the person. God has called us to be part of the church. By being part the fellowship becomes stronger.

The challenge we have as a fellowship is how we minister to one another and to this community as we walk into the future together. Ever since I came to this church, people have lamented how we've always had too few people to do all the things we would like to.

Let me turn that on its head and quite categorically say this based on what God says through His word. We have all the people we need to do what GOD wants us to do.

Our responsibility is to discern what God wants and what He wants each and all of us to play. As we go into the autumn this is going to be our challenge. I believe that God wants

us as a fellowship to build our confidence in this respect.

DIVERSITY HONOURS ALL

One of the biggest problems I find when it comes to this subject that there are always those in the fellowship that other people don't think of as important. Maybe they say very little, or don't seem to do very much, or don't come much, or have challenging lifestyles or personalities.

Let me tell you of something I've learned over the years. Never be quick to judge or write off someone because things are not always how they seem. Before we criticise, ask ourselves and then the person "how can I help"?

Let's continue with this passage: *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 un-presentable 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 honoured, every part rejoices with it.*

Go down on the beach on a fine day and you'll see people enjoying the sunshine. It's where we find people of different shapes and sizes. You find that people who feel that they have fine bodies will be lying there frying their bodies in suntan oil. There will be others like myself who tend to save myself and others by keeping covered up! And of course there are parts of the body that we always keep covered. But Paul points out something here. When we cover the un-presentable parts, we never put a sack over them, we cover the less presentable parts of our bodies with nice clothes to make ourselves look nice. We honour the less desirable parts of our bodies with clothes.

Our problem is that we so often tend to rank people in terms of importance in the church. There are those who are prominent, speakers, organisers, have up-the-front gifts, people who are able to give time to the church. And we think they're important. But what about all those who spend time doing things we take for granted but never see them doing it – flowers, cleaning, gardening, praying. Or what about those involved in confidential ministries – pastoral, counselling – we never see quite what they do or even know sometimes. Are all these people less important? Surely we need to honour them more for serving God in "invisible" roles. The body needs to be covered in fine clothes. So then and honour them because we can't be church without them.

How many times have you turned something down because we didn't think it was an important enough job. When we fail the call we miss the blessing. We'll never know how God was going to work in our life or someone else's because we thought something wasn't important to give our attention to it.

We are all called to be members of the body and He calls us to be part of it. God's work is equally important whether it be preaching a sermon or pruning the roses. We are all indispensable to one another. And it's actually the little things, the practical things that are the most difficult things to find someone to do or help with.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO BE?

If God has called you to be part of this church fellowship, then what part has He called you

to play? Do you know what that is? Are you reaching your potential in it? Maybe you're frustrated because you have gifts that don't seem to fit.

The talk about it with someone – your small group leader, one of the leaders, me. Ask someone to pray with you this morning. This is all about growth, your growth and the growth of all of us as a fellowship!

TITLE

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

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