

“The Power of Unity” – Pr Jim Sprenkle – Epiphany 3 January 26, 2025

- I. **1 Corinthians 12:12** – ¹²For 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.
- II. **Have you ever known anyone** who thinks they are from the best state ever?
 - a. You know, they come from the great state of Alaska, or Texas, or maybe Illinois... or Oregon... and they can't see much value in any other place?
 - i. I saw a map that was a joke showing Texas as this giant state in America, stretching from coast to coast and all the way north to the Canadian border... and all the other states were wedged into what was left.
 1. It was supposed to represent how Texans see America.
 - b. Usually states have some good things to offer, but many of the people who live there would be the first to say they would live somewhere else if they could...
 - i. I won't name any names, but some states are all sagebrush and wind... others are very small and get little attention... and others are just cold and flat...
 - c. As we consider the Corinthian church today, we see how they had a strange view of the Body of Christ and how it operates with God's creative power.
 - i. Many scholars would say that 1 Corinthians is about unity.
 1. This church was struggling to get along, and much of it had to do with their understanding of each individual's part in the whole – and how much they affected one another.
- III. **The Corinthians needed a reminder to live under God's design.**
 - a. So, Paul begins our lesson telling them that God has made many individuals, but they are one body.
 - i. Notice how many times this passage points this out in the first two verses... “body is one”, “one body”, “one Spirit”, “one body”, and “one Spirit.”
 - ii. Do you get the point?
 - iii. It seems that people were seeing themselves as a giant Texas that all the others had to figure out how to squeeze around... or a little spot that no one wanted anything to do with.
 - b. The problem we have in living out our shared lives in Jesus, is to look at our gifts, talents, and abilities as superior to others... or inferior to others.
 - i. Either way it's wrong, and God needs us to hear His word from 1 Corinthians on the matter.

- c. Just a reminder... we are all given spiritual gifts, talents, and abilities by the Holy Spirit in God's will – and God expects us to use them for His glory... which many times leads to our own fulfillment and growth in Christ as well.
- d. On one level, many who have a spiritual gift or talent that seems "important" will look down on the other gifts... or with superiority.
 - i. Maybe it's public speaking or teaching... maybe it's music or voice... or maybe it's the ability to step into leadership positions.
 - 1. Sometimes these people will make a big deal out of their importance... and then others feed into that by saying things like... "Oh, without that person our church would die for sure."
 - ii. The amazing part of God's plan for the Body of Christ is that no one is superior to another, but all are given gifts to complement and create an interdependence on one another.
 - iii. Let's just say the nose thinks they are the most important part of the body... or the heart... or the lungs... what would you look like if you were mostly a nose or a lung?
 - 1. Talk about a monstrosity.
 - iv. No, God does not make "superior" parts to the body, but gives each person the ability to carry out His will.
- e. On the other side of the spectrum are those who do not believe their gifts and talents are important at all... they see things from a perspective of inferiority.
 - i. The people who don't see the value of their spiritual gift or gifts will often consider them less than or not useful at all.
 - ii. They might be uniquely gifted for acts of mercy... for prayer... for support behind the scenes... or what others might not see as flashy and important... and they just don't bother because they believe using their gifts won't amount to much anyway.
 - iii. Once again, what if any part of our human body acted that way and just decided it wasn't worth the effort given how small they are?
 - 1. Like the little bones in your ears that help you hear?
 - 2. Like the little pituitary gland that controls tons of your hormones?
 - 3. Or, like the little flap called the epiglottis that allows air to go into your lungs and food and drink to go into your stomach – not the other way around?
- f. Regardless of the spiritual gift and talent, each person is a part of the body of Christ and an integral part... because God made it that way!

IV. **We might not see the value or the end result, but God does.**

- a. I've used this example on many occasions, but it's like a mosaic... with thousands of little broken pieces coming together to make something beautiful.

- i. If we were all to come together to create a mosaic after an artist made the larger design, we would only do a small part.
 - 1. In fact, we might look at our little part and think of it as a mess – without any rhyme or reason.
 - 2. That is, until the rest of the people come to add their gifts and work... and pretty soon the entire thing becomes an awesome piece of art.
 - 3. One person couldn't get it done no matter how important or talented they are... and it couldn't get done if a bunch of people stayed home because they didn't think their participation mattered that much anyway.
- b. I realize it's easier said than done when it comes to seeing our gifts as less desirable or more desirable... but that is why we need to hear God's instruction on the matter...
 - i. If you are arrogant and think your gift and talent is better than everyone else's – knock it off.
 - ii. If you have an inferiority complex and you think God can't use you because your gifts are worse than everyone else – knock it off.
- c. God says we are one in the Spirit through our baptisms, and we are all a part of the unity of the body – the unity of Christ.
 - i. Not one of us can claim we are a better part of the body – or a worse part of the body – because God knows what He is doing... and He claimed us out of the waters of baptism for life together.

V. **Strangely**, it was Jesus who gave up His body so we could belong to His body... the body of Christ.

- a. He was willing to go to the cross and pay for the sins that tear us apart with our delusions of grandeur, our pride, our shame, our insecurities, or anything keeps us from loving God and our neighbor.
 - i. We cannot have unity without the power that Jesus Christ gives to us in the forgiveness of sin and the gift of baptism which incorporates us into His body forever.
 - ii. God chose each of us in baptism... and now we are a part of His creative genius and power in joining us together.
- b. Each of us has a unique gift that may be used to God's glory... not because we have to... but we get to.
 - i. It fills me with joy when I see a person figure out that they can serve God in numerous ways and how they grow in the process.
 - ii. It's one of the reasons our Stewardship Board has worked hard to get information into your hands about the various ministries and opportunities to serve at Ascension.
 - 1. Go check out the different boards and ministries we have – they are located on the bulletin board across from the mailboxes.

2. The idea is to find a place of service, because God has made you for it... He planned it long ago as it says in Ephesians 2:10 - For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago. (Ephesians 2:10 NLT)
 - iii. God is amazing at bringing people together for a certain time and place, and then big things begin to happen.
- c. Rejoice in the power of unity – as God never makes a mistake – we are all important parts of the body, and serve together as one in the Spirit. Amen.