

Shown in Unity

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

Introduction

Last week, we talked about how Christ is shown or revealed to the world through the church by the gifts of the Spirit. In **verse 12** of our Epistle reading today, Paul says: *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.* Paul is clearly referring here to the way Christ manifests Himself by the Spirit to the world through His church, for the body of Christ is the church. Just as Jesus accomplished His work on earth through a human body, He accomplishes His work today through a body that consists of living human beings, the church. Today, we will see how Jesus is revealed to the world through the church by the unity of the church.

Unity of Faith

What attitude do we first think of when we hear the word “unity”? Most of us would say “love”, for how can we have unity without love? (Read **Ephesians 4:11-15**) St. Paul says in **verse 15**: *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.* In **verse 13**, Paul says that the goal is to reach *the unity of faith and knowledge in the Son of God.* Unity in the church means to be united in faith. We cannot have unity of faith without truth and love. Truth without love tends to be dogmatic and judgmental. But love without truth is vague and ineffectual. This is why the second generation of Lutherans wrote the **Formula of Concord**. People calling themselves “Lutheran” were all over the place in some theological issues. The **Formula** looked back to the original confessions, primarily the **Augsburg Confession**, to get people back on track. Today, we still have many people calling themselves “Lutheran” yet, they are all over the place theologically. But we only have Altar-Pulpit Fellowship with synods that hold to the **Formula of Concord**, who believe like we do. That is unity of faith.

Unity—What It Looks Like

A similar passage on Christian unity in **Romans 12** says this: *So, we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another (Romans 12:5).* When we see unity spelled out, there are three facts to remember: we need one another; we differ from one another; and we are to care for one another.

We Need One Another

There are two types of independence found in the church that shouldn't be there. One is based on feeling unimportant. **Verses 15-16** talk about this. Sometimes people don't act like part of the body because they feel inadequate. They may resent others who they perceive as being gifted better. They develop the feeling that they are unneeded and fade into the background. The other independent attitude is brought out in **verse 21**, an attitude of superiority. Both hurt the body as a whole. Even if the foot doesn't consider itself a part of the body, it still is. It is a hurting part of the body. And if the hand thinks it doesn't need the foot, how will it get where it must go to do the work? In both cases, individuals are suffering and the whole body is suffering.

We Are Different from One Another

In **verse 20**, Paul says that *there are many parts, yet one body*. The parts that make up the body are different. We are still individuals, though we are incorporated into the body. We are different in many ways—appearance, interests, income levels, politics, etc. But primarily, we differ in function. We all differ in function while we are united in purpose. There is a unity of outlook which cannot be separated.

We Are to Care for One Another

In **verses 22-26**, Paul tells us how we are to care for one another. First, we pay particular attention to “weaker” brothers and sisters, those who might feel dispensable but are in fact vital to the church. Second, this care is to be expressed by *suffering together and rejoicing together (v. 26)*. This is not always easy to do. It can be difficult to rejoice with others when you aren’t the one being blessed. Likewise, it’s not easy to commiserate when you **are** being blessed. This is not accomplished by “putting on the right face” and pretending. But in both cases, it’s about being present in the other’s life and entering into their life with them. By the way, this cannot be accomplished in a virtual world. It is another deficiency of the virtual church, which has gained so much popularity in the last two years. So, how do we achieve this unity?

Unity Wrought by Christ

The answer is in **verse 13**. We were all *baptized into one body* and *made to drink of one Spirit*. While we may think in terms of joining a church, God has made us into a body. In the waters of Baptism, we are placed into the body of Christ. At the same time, Jesus *baptizes us with the Holy Spirit (John 1:33)*. As Paul says, we *were made to drink of the one Spirit*, it is proper to say that we are in the Spirit and the Spirit is in us. Just as we are in Christ and Christ is in us. When we receive the Sacrament of the Altar, Christ strengthens that unity so we can show the world that Jesus is the Son of God.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
