

Time of Grace Ministry
Some Assembly Required: Unique but United
1 Corinthians 12:12; Romans 12:4, 5; Ephesians 4:4-6
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Pastor Mark Jeske

So which is more important - celebrating the essential unity that all believers in Christ have with one another? Or paying attention to our uniqueness; each individual? Pastor Mike Novotny has a Bible study that is going to help us embrace both of those two important things.

Pastor Michael Novotny

There are a few things more dangerous than putting two Christians into one room. Anyone know what I'm talking about? There's a few things more dangerous for our hearts than putting two people who are different and unique and wired by God in completely different ways into the same space. There are a few things more dangerous for your heart and mine that tempt us to despair or to pride, to be annoyed or to feeling insecure, to wanting to change people or desperately wanting to change ourselves than putting two very different people into the same place.

Just ask John. John was actually having a good Sunday as he drove to church. He turned up the Christian radio station, was singing to his favorite songs, life was good, all was well, but then he made the vital mistake of walking inside the building. And the first person that he saw was Emily and he tried to avoid eye contact but he couldn't. He used to be in a Bible study with Emily; with an emphasis on the "used to." And she was really smart and she would have incredible things to say but she talked so much and she cried so often, which wouldn't have been the worse things but every single time they couldn't get to the end of the assigned chapters that John had worked so hard on studying and preparing for. It drove him crazy and he just couldn't go back. And so, John faked a smile with Emily and he ducked into the bathroom before church and that's where he ran into Adam, the guy he used to volunteer with. With an emphasis on the "used to." Adam was friendly, he had a great personality, people loved him, but as a leader of the church band, John could not stand him. He thought that life should be lived in the moment and the plans and the chords that John had practiced all week, Adam just threw them out the window. He would change the song selection, change the order, and John's brain simply couldn't handle it. Adam was insistent that you should follow the leading of the Spirit - which wasn't plans and procedures and policies and order - and it drove John nuts every time he crossed paths.

And finally, John made his way into church. He found his favorite seat in the back, third row, two seats in, and he watched as Pastor Dave got up to speak. Ah, Pastor Dave! Some days, John loved him and other days - well, how do Christians say it when they want to insult somebody? "Bless his heart, but," Pastor Dave had this gift - when he would pray, it didn't matter the topic, it didn't matter the time, it didn't matter the place. You could put him on the spot, he would close his eyes, and these incredible prayers would come out of his heart. They were laced with Scripture and they were personal and they were emotional and people would open their eyes with

tears in them after he prayed. When John tried to pray on the spot, he sputtered and stuttered and sometimes cursed and the "Amen," came like a drastic crash landing.

But there's another part of Dave's personality that wasn't so impressive. He was always telling the congregation to "think about this" and to "meditate on that." He would suggest and he would offer, but you know, there was never a call to action. And John was a man of action. There was a time to think but there was also a time to act. A time to do. A time to come up with a task and to pursue and to run the race and John always felt like something was missing in the church.

By the time he made it back to his car when everything was said and done, something was wrong in John's heart. This strange mixture of annoyance and insecurity; of wanting to change people in the church and of wanting to change himself. Has that ever happened to you before? You walk into a room and it takes about 1.2 seconds to notice what's unique, what's different. It happens in Bible studies, it happens on worship teams, it happens when people volunteer together, it happens with the pastor, it happens with a life group. Wherever you go, whether you're a Christian or not, you notice sometimes things are really, really different. And sometimes, people are so different it just annoys you and you wish there was a big button you could push to change them and sometimes people are really, really different and it impresses you, you wish you could push that button and change yourself.

That's why for the next few weeks, I want to talk to you about differences. I want to talk about what makes you and I unique and why that's not a problem that needs to be fixed. I want to talk about God's role and how he wired every single member of his church because here's what I know: Wherever you go, people are going to be different. You come to this church and people will be different. Or you go to another church and people will be different. You sign up for this Bible study and the people you study with will be different or you drop out and go to that Bible study and the people will be different. You can play with this band or that one, you could volunteer with this service team or another, and people will be different. You can date a Christian guy or Christian girl and this one will be different and so will that one. And you can have kids and raise them in the Christian faith and guess what? They're going to be very different than you, mom and dad. And if you have more than one, they're going to be different than one another.

And if you don't know that, if you don't expect that, I would suggest if you don't appreciate that, it will drive you nuts. Your life will be this emotional roller coaster of comparison. And some days you'll be way up here looking down at these people, frustrated, wondering why they just can't change and other times, you'll be in the pit looking up at those people wondering why you can't change and be just like them. So for the next few weeks, I want to talk to you about what's unique and yet, what unites us. Because what if we could get this right? What if after the end of the next couple weeks you could end this foolish and fruitless obsessive comparison disorder? What would happen if we'd stop competing and we could start completing each other in the church? What if when we ran into people who were ridiculously intelligent and full of faith, instead of being jealous and envious and just wishing we could be like them and feeling stupid, we could realize that God made them to be them and he made us to be us? Maybe if that would happen, the church could be the church and we could celebrate one another and we could lose the insecurity and we could be the kind of people that God longs for us to be.

Well, if you're going to be here, that's the goal for the next few weeks. But today, I want to lay a foundation that's not about what's necessarily unique but what unites us. In fact, if you're taking notes on your app or in your program, I'd love for you to write this down: That Christians are unique but Christians are also united. I suppose that's true of the whole human race. There are things that unite us but especially, I want to zero in on what the Bible says. When you walk into the Christian church, when you look at any brother or sister in the family of God, you may be very, very unique and that might be very, very obvious but you are absolutely united.

That's what Peter and Paul want to teach us tonight. Whenever you're struggling with comparisons and you notice the differences, there are four sections of the Bible that you need to memorize and turn to. They're pretty easy to remember; they're two chapter 12's and two chapter 4's. Now, if you're still taking notes, I'd love for you to write that down and plant that seed in your heart and your mind. In Romans 12, in 1 Corinthians 12, in Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4, God unpacks this idea that his people might be very, very unique but in Jesus, they're absolutely united. So let's begin that study with a deep dive into 1 Corinthians 12.

An apostle named Paul, about 2,000 years ago, wrote these words to a church he loved dearly. He said, "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ." Paul knows that his friends are going to rip each other apart with their changes and their nitpicking and their insecurities so he wants them to know exactly what God was up to and he kind of gives us this little tongue twister, right? A body is just one but it has many parts. And apparently, it's so important he has to repeat himself: But all its many parts form one body, which I think is the perfect analogy, right? Cause we all get it. You know that your body has all different kinds of parts and yet, you don't have two bodies; you have one. This is why you never take your fist and punch yourself in the face because your fist doesn't say, "ha ha!" Instead, your whole body says, "Ouch! That really hurt." Your hands can't decide to take a nap and take the evening off while your feet go on a walk because they're connected; it's just one body. And Paul says that is exactly how it is with Jesus Christ. The people might be different but there's something that glues them together; there's something that unites them. Many parts but united in one.

It kind of reminds me of this guy. Anyone remember Mr. Potato Head? Do you know the story of Mr. Potato Head? Way back in 1949, a man named George Lerner came up with this idea to use push pins and stick plastic body parts into an actual potato. Give it to the kids, they'd be entertained, except they found out the potato started to rot, which wasn't so pleasant for the children. So in 1964, the Hasbro toy company patented this: A plastic potato head with all these different parts. And every kid, no matter how young, knows that the parts are different and they're supposed to be. No one mistakes the eyes for the hands, even if you're messing around and switch places on the potato head. Everyone knows this is the hat and these are the ears and that's the tongue and these are the feet. We expect the parts to be different. In fact, we would say if just one part is by itself, it wouldn't be complete. And when the toy maker put together this potato head, it made sure that each part had one of these: An intentional connection where it would be incomplete until it found its spot altogether with the other parts.

And obviously, the apostle Paul didn't know much about Mr. Potato Head but he knew exactly about that idea. That Christians, by themselves, would be incomplete. That they were wired with this little tab in their heart and in their soul that was meant to plug into Jesus. Just like every other Christian, no matter how unique, different, no matter the size, the shape, they all belong to one spot. That's why Paul says in this verse: So it is with Christ. That's actually why we call the members of our church family not just family, but members. It's not like a gym membership where you give an offering later in the service and you become an official member. It's because as a member, you're like a part. If you looked at Mr. Potato Head without his arm, our minds would say, "No, no, no. Something's not right." And that's the way it should be in the church. When one person is missing, when one person doesn't show up, when they're not at Bible study, they don't serve, they don't come to worship, our minds should instinctively say, "Something's not right." Now maybe I'm here connected to Jesus and he is and she is and they are, but what about him and what about her? Because this person might be very unique for my part but they were created and made to be united. In fact, this idea is so important the apostle Paul doesn't just say it to the Corinthians. If we jump on the screen to the other chapter 12, he says the same thing to his friends at Rome. He says, "For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

And I wonder if for the Christians at Rome this was powerful because if you know much about Rome in the first century, you realize that Christians were not the majority. Christians were not like 2017 America where the percentage of people who say they trust the Bible and follow Jesus are just massive, even if they're not as massive as they were before. And when you walk down the street in Rome, how often do you think it would be on a given day that you would even see another person who believed in Jesus? It makes me think of what it must be like to live in Yemen as a Christian. Let me show you a picture. You know Yemen; it's a country just south of Saudi Arabia where .2% of the population professes faith in Jesus. Out of 1,000 people, two are plugged into Jesus Christ.

Can you imagine if a work trip took you to Yemen? And you were in this massive crowd of 1,000 people and you asked the question, "Hey, does anyone here worship Jesus?" And you raise your hand and you look at all these blank faces until way, way, way in the back of the crowd a hand slowly starts to raise. Just two of you out of a thousand. Do you think if you made your way through that massive crowd, if you found that person, sat down for a cup of coffee, do you think at the end of the conversation you'd say, "You know what? I don't know. You're kind of quiet." No, you wouldn't. You'd say, "What? You believe in Jesus? You pray the Lord's Prayer. You sing these songs. You trust in him for the forgiveness of your sins. What's unique about you?" It wouldn't matter in that moment. What unites you would be so much more powerful!

And I'm pretty sure that none of you here today live in Yemen but the same thing is true. It's a miracle when you meet someone on the streets, in your family, at your work place that trusts in Jesus. If all of us were born with these broken hearts, dead in sin, it is nothing less than a miracle that the Holy Spirit changed anyone who could raise their hand and say, "I believe in God's grace, too." This is such a huge high. Paul says, "Corinthians, you've got to get this." He says, "Romans, you've got to get this." And in fact, he's not done because in Ephesians 4 he says

almost exactly the same thing. Paul says, "There is one body and one spirit. Just as you were called to one hope when you were called, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all." Now, even though it's your first time in church, you kind of get what Paul's getting at, right? He says, "One, one, one, one, one, one, one." Seven times in this little section. He says the word "all, all, all, all," four times. And I think he's trying to tell us that all of us, despite our differences, might just be one. And the person next to you that might be so unique, that might be so impressive, that might be so annoying, for a second, Paul just says, "Remember that all of you in Jesus are one."

In fact, I want us to practice today. I want you to think in your head right now of someone you know that goes to church and believes in Jesus that's really annoying and I want you to think of someone that you know that goes to church and believes in Jesus that's really impressive. Now, can you think of that? Make sure you don't look at the person next to you during this exercise, by the way. They're going to try to guess whether they're the annoying one or the impressive - or maybe you should and just give them one raised eyebrow and see what they think. And now let's just imagine that you sit down with the annoying person and the impressive person and the annoying person says, "You know, I love being part of the body of Christ. I just love being plugged into Jesus. I can't imagine - I can't imagine how guilty I'd feel if I didn't know grace and forgiveness and the cross and what Jesus did." And you listen and you say, "Me, too."

And then the impressive person says, "Man, I'm so thankful for the Holy Spirit. Like, what would I be doing if the Spirit wasn't producing fruit and good stuff in my life? What would I believe? How would I behave if it wasn't for the Spirit? The fact that he lives in my heart and I'm never alone and I never have to go through life by myself, that is so incredible to me!" And you listen to that impressive person and you say, "Yeah, me too!"

And then the annoying person jumps in, like they always do, and they say, "You know what I love? I love having hope. I don't mean like where, 'I really hope this works out.' I mean like Bible hope that there are things coming in my future that nothing can touch and cancer can't touch and my deadbeat dad can't touch and my boss who drives me nuts can't touch. Like there is hope for me and a future that for all eternity, I'm going to celebrate and dance and there will be no mourning or death or crying or pain," and you start nodding your head and you say, "Yeah, me too."

And the impressive person says, "You know what I love? I love that Jesus is my Lord. Like he gets the last word. Because if my feelings got the last word about me, I'd be a mess. Sometimes I feel unlovable, unforgiveable. Sometimes I feel like God is not with me; that this suffering is pointless. But Jesus steps up as Lord and he says, 'No. You are loved and God has great plans for you. None of your suffering is pointless.' I love that." And you say, "Yeah, me too." And the impressive person says, "I love having faith. I just don't get how people go through life without faith. How do you deal with tragedy without faith? How do you go through suffering without faith? How do you go to a funeral without faith? Without a Jesus who rose from the dead so that we don't have to fear death itself?" And you say, "Yeah, me too."

And then the annoying person says, "I love baptism. Isn't that crazy? I was baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Like God put his name on me. I'm one of his kids

and Jesus is not ashamed to call me his own and the Holy Spirit says that's where I'm going to live; in that heart. That is so amazing to me and you know what? I did nothing to earn or deserve it." And you start saying, "Yeah, me too." And both the annoying and the impressive person together they say, "You know what's so crazy? The Lord's Prayer. That God is not just God; he's our Father in heaven. You think about what a father's supposed to be, my father wasn't that but just present and kind," and they start sharing their stories and a father who's full of compassion and a father who's full of forgiveness and a father who's full of love except he's not our earthly father who's going to die or walk out or go off the deep end. He's a heavenly father who's the same yesterday, and today, and forever. And then you start nodding your head and all three of you together say, "Amen." And just for one conversation, just for one moment, you forget what's annoying about him and impressive about her and you remember that you are one body in Jesus.

Now, I want you to remember that today. Because the annoying and impressive people aren't going to say that. They're not going to sit down the next time you run into them at church or at the office, in your family, and say, "Hey, let's talk about what we have in common! Baptism and hope and the Lord Jesus Christ and our Father in heaven." They're not even going to mention that so you have to remember it. That what's so annoying about him and so impressive about them is so secondary compared to what you have in common; the statements that make you both say, "Amen."

And I need you all to remember that because the moment is coming soon when you notice the difference. It might happen before you leave this building. You're going to run into that guy who is so impressive, right? His personality; he's going to crack the joke and crowds of people laugh and your heart will just wish you were like that. Or maybe you're going to end up in the conversation over a cup of coffee with that person who's so quiet like the serial killer of conversations and you don't know how many more questions you can ask and get back one-word answers and it's going to drive you kind of crazy in your heart. And maybe this week, you're going to go home to that person in your family who's so focused like, you just can't - they're in a zone and don't you dare talk to them and it's going to be really frustrating. And then you're going to run into those people who are just like butterflies in the wind; wherever the Spirit and the Lord takes them. And you're going to want to shout, "Focus! We've got to get some things done." And there are people at work who are going to stop by your office and chat, chat, chat, chat because that's all they do and there's people who won't even stop to chat because they're so focused on their work. You're going to notice the difference.

So what are you going to do? Well, Paul would say, "Remember." Remember that they may be very unique but in Jesus, you are very united. In fact, that's so important, I want you to write that down today. When those moments come, when you notice that they're unique, they're different, I want you to remember that you are united. The people that annoy you the most in the church, they have the exact same problem: Sin. The people that impress you the most in the church, they look to the exact same Savior, the exact same cross, the exact same Easter morning. We may be very different but in Jesus, we're so united.

Or maybe you can do what I do and watch people at communion. Would you think of me as kind of creepy if I would tell you that I watch people during communion? Because I do. But I'm

not embarrassed of it because here's the crazy thing about being a pastor: You know how different people are. And all week, you've been hearing confessions and getting texts and emails and you've been counseling and you know that their family is fighting and it's hard and they feel so guilty and ashamed. And that he's been controlling and trying to get his way for too long in the marriage. And she ran off and she broke the covenant that she made with God and kissed another man. You see these teenagers who know nothing about the world out there but they struggle with this sin. And then there's parents who know so much about the world and they struggle with a very different sin. And the woman who struggles even coming to church because she has so much anxiety. And the guy who's battling depression and his medication is all wrong and the people are so different. And if you made them check boxes, "What are your sins?" they'd be so different. And if you gave them a personality test, they'd be so different. But when they come forward, nothing is different. They come forward for the exact same reason: That all of us have messed things up and they come forward for the exact same grace. Same gift. Same God. Same bread. Same wine. Same body. Same blood. Same forgiveness. Same go in peace; he remembers your sins no more.

So maybe the next time you celebrate communion you could watch people, too. And before they're so impressive that you want to be like them, and before they're so annoying that you wish you could change them, maybe you could watch them going to the exact same place that you do. So brothers and sisters, you unique people in the body of Christ, whenever you notice that you're unique, just remember that because of Jesus we are all united.

Pastor Mark Jeske

So how are you doing making sense out of this paradox; out of this puzzle? Thanks to Pastor Mike, we know we need to embrace both of these things. I hope that you learn to love and accept, identify and celebrate your own unique gifts. You really do matter and you were made to be you. You are important to Christ's body; to the network of all believers. But I hope that you also love and celebrate the fact that other people bring what you might be missing and that it's by being together that there is fullness and completeness and the agenda of the Holy Spirit to bring the gospel so all can be realized.

Let's pray together, shall we?

Lord Jesus, we thank you and appreciate you that you have gathered together all of the believers into one body. What a comfort it is to know that there is everything that is needed by being together. We celebrate also the fact that we - each of us, individually - bring things that matter and both of these things together, our unity and our uniqueness, really are important parts of the functioning of the body of Christ. May all of us enjoy our own unique gifts and bring what we have so that the gospel can go forward that more and more people will see and believe in you as their Savior and that forgiveness and life and immortality will flow to all of us through your wonderful word. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

For Time of Grace, I'm Pastor Mark Jeske, celebrating our Lord Jesus' amazing grace with you and it all starts now.



TIME OF GRACE®

Some Assembly Required: Unique but United

Study Notes

Summary

As Paul begins his discussion of the “body of Christ,” he reminds us of the big picture. Baptism. Spirit. Spiritual thirst quenched by the gospel. What the church has in common is exponentially bigger than our differences. He does the same in Ephesians chapter 4, repeating the unity we have in Jesus—one Lord, one faith, one hope, one God. Therefore, before we talk about our uniqueness, we celebrate our unity in Jesus, no matter what our diverse wiring, quirks, or personalities.

- Christians are _____ but _____.
- Four Key Sections:
 1. Romans _____
 2. 1 Corinthians _____
 3. Ephesians _____
 4. 1 Peter _____
- **1 Corinthians 12:12:** Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.
- **Romans 12:4,5:** For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.
- **Ephesians 4:4-6:** There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
- **Challenge:** When you notice they're _____, remember you're _____.

Points to Ponder

1. What personality differences have you noticed in the church? In your Bible study group? Among other Christians in your family?

2. Which is a greater struggle for you—pride or jealousy? How is Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 4:1-6 the remedy for both?

3. **Challenge:** Take the StrengthsFinder 2.0 test (online or buy a book) to maximize your understanding of yourself and others.

Homework for Next Week

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-14.

*“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”
—The apostle Paul*