

One But Different

by Anton Bosch

This sermon delves into the importance of unity within the body of Christ, emphasizing that despite the diversity of gifts and backgrounds, believers are all part of one body through the Holy Spirit. It addresses the issue of individualism prevalent in society and the church, highlighting the need for each member to embrace their unique role as ordained by God, rather than seeking personal preferences or societal standards.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12, Ephesians 4:4, Romans 12:4, John 17:20, Colossians 3:11

Topics: "Unity in Diversity", "Embracing God-given Roles"

Description

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Transcript

First Corinthians, chapter 12, and I'm going to take a long reading from verse 12 through 31. First Corinthians, chapter 12, reading 12 through 31. For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body being many are one body, so also is Christ.

For by one spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and have all been made to drink into one spirit. For in fact the body is not one member, but many. If the foot should say, because I am not a hand, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, because I am not an eye, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them in the body, just as he pleased.

And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. 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. No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.

And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on those we bestow greater honor, and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty. But our representable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism

in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.

And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. Or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ and members individually.

And God has appointed these in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers. After that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, and varieties of tongues. Are all apostles, are all prophets, are all teachers, are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts, and yet I show you a more excellent way.

We have a problem in churches today with a thing called individualism. It's part of the American mindset, or really the Western mindset, and it is becoming more and more entrenched as we find the world becoming more and more hostile. Particularly during COVID, people have been isolating, and many people withdrew from going to church and other public activities and confined themselves to home.

And as we are coming out of COVID, I guess we can't say we're out of it, but we're coming out of it. Many of those who have become even more isolated, have become even more isolated, and don't leave home. We're able to do all sorts of things online these days.

You can buy your groceries online. You don't have to go to the store for almost anything anymore. You can visit with your doctor online.

You can do your banking online. You can go to church online. And so people are becoming more and more isolated.

And this is one of the major threats against the church today. And so we want to see what the Scripture says about that. But the problem with that is that this results in a situation where individual rights trump corporate rights.

Now, you say, well, of course, my rights are more important than the rights of the community. And we know, of course, that there's a difference between the Eastern and the Western mindset. People who are maybe in China, Japan, those kinds of countries, the emphasis is on the whole, on the community.

My rights are subject to the rights and the value of the group. Whereas in the West, it's the other way around. And so we have cultural issues.

We have issues to do with the time in which we're living. And this results in a situation where we're back in the book of Judges, where it speaks about the fact that every man did what was right in his own eyes. Every man did what was right in his own eyes.

And so there was no ruler. There was no prophet. There was no king at that time.

God sends judges from time to time to help them. But basically, everybody is just doing his own thing. And so we find that this has become the mentality in much of the church today.

Nobody is listening to advice. Nobody is seeking out counsel. Nobody is seeking out fellowship.

Nobody is looking to try and help anyone else. It's every man for himself. And this is not the biblical pattern.

And so I want us to reinforce and to re-establish exactly what is the pattern that God has established. And we, of course, have this in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. Now the beginning of 1 Corinthians 12 speaks about the nine gifts of the Spirit.

Not going to get into those, because that's not the emphasis this morning. But verse 11, which we didn't read, the verse before where we began, it says, But one in the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as he wills. So the point is that there are many gifts, not just the nine that we have in 1 Corinthians 12, but there are many other gifts that are listed for us in Ephesians chapter 4, in Romans chapter 12, and elsewhere.

And so God gives different gifts to different people. That's where he begins. Now he's going to speak about the body.

As the body is one, and of course he's now comparing the human body, the physiological body, to the body of Christ. This is an image which we find right through Scripture, and we know in that picture Christ is the head, and we make up the rest of the body. And so as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that body being many are one body, so also is Christ.

And so this verse on its own deals with this issue of individualism. The body is one. There is no division.

There ought not to be any division in the body of Christ. That means there shouldn't be division in the local assembly, but in fact there shouldn't be individual in the global, the worldwide body. And yet we know that we have tremendous divisions.

Every church has its own name, has its own statement of faith, has its own form of governance. Everybody does their own thing, and in many cases there's open animosity between churches. And even within denominations there are major divisions going on right now.

The United Methodist Church is busy splitting apart. The Anglican Church or the Episcopalian Church has gone through several splits in recent times, and the list goes on and on and on. Now, having mentioned denominations, I don't believe that denominations is the answer.

That was because that just further entrenches the divisions. The very fact that you have a name and we say, well, we're non-denominational. We say we're non-denominational.

In other words, we're autonomous or independent. But we have a name on the side of the building, says Sun Valley Community Church. That by definition makes us a denomination.

What is something that is nominated? It is given a name. And so the moment you give something a name, it by definition becomes a denomination. Now we understand, obviously, when we speak about denominations, we're talking about groups of churches who work together, who run some kind of common governance, who have some kind of common statement of faith between them, and so on and so forth.

But even those who say that they are agreed are not agreed. So we have divisions. But as the body is one and has many members, all the members of that one body being many are one body, so also is Christ.

You see the emphasis on one. Let's confine ourselves to the local church, because we really can't do anything about what happens outside there. But the church is not many members, primarily, first of all.

It is one, but it's made up of many members. Now, of course, this is a difficult thing for us to understand, because we say, well, you can't be one and be many. And yet this is what we have to get our heads around.

This is not being a cult. Cults expect everybody to be exactly the same. Everybody has to dress the same.

Everybody has to speak the same. Everybody has to think exactly the same. You can't think slightly differently on any point, because that becomes a threat to a cult.

That's one of the things that defines a cult, is this mind control so that everybody is a clone of the next one, or of the leaders. Now, he's not saying that we're one in that way, but at the same time, so we are many, but we're one, and in this we're reflecting the Godhead, who is three, and yet one. Jesus says, I'm praying for my disciples that they may be one, even as we are one.

So we must look at the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Not three gods, one God, and yet three persons. And as we go through scripture, we can see how that each one acts independently, yet at the same time in complete harmony, and in complete unity with the rest of the Trinity.

So Jesus isn't off there doing his thing, and maybe occasionally reports back to the Father and says, well, you know, I'm doing this over here. Jesus says, if you've heard me, you've heard the Father. If you've seen me, you've seen the Father.

In other words, each one reflects exactly the other one, and yet each one is different. The Father has a different function, the Holy Spirit has a different function and ministry, and the Lord Jesus has a different function and ministry. And yet they are so one that you cannot divide between them in the sense that what one is, they all are.

And Jesus is saying, I'm praying for the church, that the church may be one in that way. The same is true of marriage. The two will be one flesh, will be one flesh.

In the ideal marriage, there is no division between the two. While they are different, you know, again, we have eHarmony and Tinder and I don't know, all these things where you can go and find a compatible mate. And we say, well, you know, I've got to find somebody who's exactly like me, and if they're not, here's one of the problems of marriage.

We try and make the other person into our image. We try and make the other person to be exactly like I am. No, that's not what he's talking about.

That's not what the Father, Son, and Spirit are different, have different functions, different ministries, and yet they are united in their purpose. They are united in every way. And the same is true of marriage.

In marriage, we must allow for the differences. Last night, Ina and I watched the Home Improvement Program. As you probably know, we find these things somewhat safe in comparison to some of the other stuff, and yet even those are not always safe.

But there was this couple, and he is OCD, and he is a neat freak. They opened his drawer where his socks are, and they're not just graded by color, they're graded by thickness, and they're also graded by purpose. Jason seems to like that idea.

She, on the other hand, is a total slob. There's stuff everywhere. There's baskets of laundry, clean laundry, dirty laundry.

It's just a mess. I don't understand how two people who are that different are able to live together, and yet somehow they have their issues but seem to be able to keep it together. Now, we're obviously not saying that the Church allows for such extreme differences, because at the end of the day, there must be a coming together, there must be a meeting of the minds.

The problem is, how do we find that meeting of the minds? Well, if everybody thinks the way I think, we'll be fine. As long as you agree with me, we're good. But that's exactly the problem we have today, because everybody is saying, if you have 50 people, each one is saying, as long as you think like I think, we're good.

So what have we got? We've just got division on a massive scale. So there needs to be a common purpose, and that purpose is to have the mind of Christ. And Paul, in writing on the issue of division, says that I want you to have the mind of Christ.

Don't have your own mind. And if we all begin to think more like Jesus, we'll begin to think alike. Not because we have convinced one another, or because we've manipulated one another, or we've forced one another to be like I am, but because we have come to be like Jesus.

We've come to think like him. We've come to have his values. And of course, that's the blessing of a Christian marriage, that if indeed the partners in the marriage are committed to being Christ-like, the closer each one becomes to the Lord Jesus, the closer they get to one another.

And so the differences are there. We are different, but we are one. And we need to hold these truths in tension, the same way as we cannot say there are three gods.

There's one God. And yet we cannot say that there is only one person, there is not three. How can three be one? I don't understand it.

These are things we cannot explain with a rational mind. But we know they are true. We know they are three.

We know they are one. And we have to hold these things in tension. How can the church be made up of many members and yet be one? It's hard to understand.

And yet this is the will of God for us. Now verse 13, For by one spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, all being made to drink into one spirit. He's picking up on a theme which he has in Ephesians chapter 4, where he gives us seven reasons why we are one.

And I'm not going to deal with Ephesians 4 this morning. One of those reasons he gives in Ephesians 4 is the fact that we are baptized by one spirit. Now, he's not talking here about water baptism.

Here's one of the problems we have. The moment we see the word baptism, we say, well, this is water baptism. No, remember there's four different baptisms.

This is baptism into Christ. If any man be in Christ, he is immersed, he's placed into Jesus. So when we get saved, we are placed in Christ.

We are immersed in him. The same way as in water, we're immersed in water. So by one spirit, we are all baptized into one body.

We are not saved, because this is talking about salvation. We're not saved, we are not baptized into the body of Christ by different spirits. You don't get baptized into the body of Christ by the spirit of Paul and by the spirit of Apollos.

We're baptized into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit. It's only one spirit who puts us into the church, into the body of Christ. So that's one of the first reasons why there has to be unity.

You don't get to put yourself into the body of Christ. You cannot join the church like you join a club. You're put into the church when you surrender your life to Jesus Christ, and he takes you and he makes you a part of the body of Christ.

Now, the Holy Spirit is not divided within himself. So the Holy Spirit is not going to put some people into here and some people into there. Now, we understand there are local assemblies.

There were local assemblies in the New Testament for practical reasons, and yet we need to be one. So there's one Holy Spirit, and he puts us into one body. There is one universal church.

The Creed says one apostolic Catholic church. Catholic in that sense does not mean Roman Catholic. It means universal.

And so there are not different—while we have different churches, we have different local churches, we have denominations here on earth. All who are saved and born again are part of one church. There's one heaven.

There's not a heaven for these kind of people and those kind of people, whether they're on theological basis or any other basis. There's one heaven. There's one salvation.

There is one Spirit that puts us into one body. Now, if you're a member of this local assembly, and I'm not talking about whether you took out membership. This is not the point.

The point is whether you're here because you believe God has put you here. Then God has put you here. And therefore, we must be one.

You see, you can't—even in the world, you can't join an association or a club, and the first time you go to a meeting or at any stage, I'm against everything this club stands for. Well, why did you join? You joined because you believed that there was some agreement. And so, by one Spirit, we're all baptized into one body.

Now, he says, whether we are Jew or Greek, in other words, Jewish or Gentile, whether slaves or free. So, our social and ethnic status makes absolutely no difference. Now, remember in the Church of Corinth, because he's writing to the Corinthians or to the Californians, so the problem they had was that there was division.

Remember the previous chapter, chapter 11, which deals with the Lord's Supper and which we read a part of every time we have the Lord's Supper? In that, he speaks about the fact that there are divisions among you. The book begins in chapter 2 or 3. How is it that you, he says, you are carnal because there are divisions among you. They were divided on theological grounds.

They were divided on the men that they followed. Some followed Paul, some followed Peter, others followed Apollos. They were divided on economic grounds.

They would come to the Lord's Supper and the rich wouldn't eat with the poor. They were divided on ethnic grounds. And Paul is saying to them, and he's saying to us, because remember, these letters to the Corinthians, as I've said when we dealt with these letters a long time ago, could just as well have been numbered First Californians and Second Californians.

Because the social situation in which, and the moral situation of the Corinthian Church, or the environment in which they were, is exactly the same as the one we find ourselves in today. There is very, very little difference between the two. And so, he says, it doesn't matter who you were before you came to Christ.

He says there's only one in Christ. There is no Jew or Gentile. There is no rich or poor.

There is no slave or free man. In fact, this needs to become a reality. The world cannot find this unity.

We've just seen the absolute disaster in the city council this last week. All about ethnicity, all about control, this group wanting to control that group, this group being threatened by that group. But the church needs to be different.

And yet, many times the church is not different. Because we will only associate with those who are like us, either ethnically or intellectually or education-wise or culturally or whatever. And Paul is saying, and the Lord is saying, when we get born again, we stop being who we were before.

We do not come together when we come into these four walls. We cease to be white or Hispanic or black or whatever else. We cease to be educated and not educated.

We cease to be literate and illiterate. We cease to be rich. I don't think we have any rich, but middle class and poor, whatever.

We are one in Christ. Now, this is something the world cannot get right, as we've seen in the dysfunction in the city council this week. But this is something the church must get right.

Because otherwise, what message have we got to the world? What right do we have to... And I'm sorry for those who are overseas who don't understand what's happened in the city council, and yet it's relevant to us here. And I'm not going to rehash the whole story. But what right do we as Christians... Just think about this.

Do we have to call out the city council for their divisions and their hate speech and whatever else they do, when we are no different? When the only basis of our unity is because we all like motorbikes or we all speak the same language or we all have the same ethnic background? No, there is one thing that binds us together, and it must bind us together, and it must supersede every other difference. And that is that we have been baptized by one Holy Spirit into one body. There is not a different body for Greeks and one for Gentiles.

And we must reflect that in the church. In the time we've been in this church, one of the problems we've had and one of the challenges we've had is that visitors come and they look over the congregation and they say, oh no, the congregation is mainly made up of a particular ethnic group. Oh no, I'm not going to join that church because I'm not part of that ethnic group.

Folks, that should never even be a question. When we're looking for a church, because that has absolutely nothing to do with it. And if you're looking for a church, and I hope nobody here is looking for a church, but if you're looking for a church and you're looking for a church based on ethnic grounds or based on educational level or based on some socioeconomic measure, I question whether you're born again.

Because all you're looking for is a social club where you can meet with others who are just like you. But if we're born again, we are one body. It doesn't matter whether we're Jews or Greeks, slaves or free.

And folks, I believe that this was so real in the New Testament, maybe not in Corinth, but in some of the other churches. This was so real that you could have, and we don't have an example, but I believe that this is a very possible example, that you could have a slave and his master in the same church. Was that possible? Yes.

Do we have an example? Yes, the letter to Philemon. So the slave got saved, the master had been saved, he's now sent, the slave is sent back to the master, back to the master and to the church, and he says, receive him as a brother. So we have that.

But what happens if the slave has a ministry, let's say, of being an elder, and the master doesn't have a ministry? Is that possible? Of course it's possible, because we read that God gives the gifts as he wills. So could you have a situation in the church where the slave is an elder and the master is not? Yes, you could. Because it's not based on what you are outside there.

It's based on what you are here. Then he says, for in fact the body is not one member, but many. So he's emphasized the oneness.

Now he's going to emphasize the diversity. You see, there's a difference between division and diversity. Diversity means that there are differences.

And when you're looking for a spouse and you're trying to find someone who's a clone of yourself, well, you're looking for the wrong thing. We must recognize that there are differences. Just the fact that we are men and women means we're different.

It's a concept the world is not quite grasping anymore, but men and women are different. And no two people are identical. But those differences don't mean division.

And so the body, now he's speaking here about the human body in verse 14. The human body is not one member, but many. In other words, my human body is made up of many different parts.

I don't even know how you count them. Then he says, if the foot should say because I'm not a hand, I'm not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? Simple question. Which part is more useful, the hand or the foot? Well, I think the hand.

I can do that. Many things I can do without being able to stand or being able to walk, as long as I've got hands, much harder if I don't have hands. But you see, that's the way that we think.

We say, well, who's more important? But because I'm not the hand, I'm not like that part, I'm not part of the body. Then he says, if the ear should say because I'm not an eye, I'm not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? So each one is different. Each part of my human body is different.

Even my eyes are different. You don't go to the optometrist and have them test one eye, and then he says, okay, now here's glasses, you know, same glasses for both sides. No, each eye is different.

Each ear is different. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? So it's simple. The human body cannot just be one big ear, because the point he's going to come to is verse 19.

If they were all one member, where would be the body? In other words, if the whole body was an ear, do you have a body? No, you have an ear. So in order to have a body, you have to have different members. And if you are to have a church, there are different members.

And each one has a different function. Each one, yes, has a different background, has a different culture. But these things come together in Christ.

And this is one of the things that tells us that this Bible is inspired. So how do we know the Bible is inspired? Well, one of the reasons we know is that you have 66 books written over a period of 3,000 years by a forgotten how many authors. Several dozen authors living 3,000 years apart in very different cultural environments.

And yet their message is exactly the same. There is no contradiction between Job, happens to be the first book written, and the book of Revelation, happens to be the last book written. There's no difference between them.

There's no contradiction between them. Yes, they're different. When you read Job, you're not reading Revelation.

That's why we read them all. When you read Genesis, you're not reading Revelation. Yet there is no contradiction between them, because they're giving us different aspects of the same God, of the same plan of salvation.

Now skip over verse 18. But now God has set the members, each one of them in the body, just as he pleased. Here's one of the important things for us to understand if we're going to find that kind of unity.

And that is, and that God sets the members as he pleases. Now what he is speaking about is one is an ear, and one is an eye, one is a foot, and one is a hand. In other words, you don't get to choose what you are in the body of Christ.

Our selfish ambition says, I want to be that. I want to be that. You don't get to choose.

I never got to choose. And this is something that has permeated my ministry and controlled my life. I never got to choose whether I would preach or not preach.

There are many, many, many times I said, I want to do something else. Preaching is too hard. No God called me to preach.

And as Paul says, woe is me if I don't preach the gospel. I never had a choice in it. And neither do you.

You don't get to choose and say, I want to do or be that in the body of Christ. If God has made you a foot, he's made you a foot. Now he's going to come to the point that there is no division.

In a healthy body, I suppose in an unhealthy body, in a sick body, there would be a problem. But I don't see any arguments going on in my body. I mean, I know some parts are not wanting to work too good anymore.

But I've never had my foot fight with my hand. My foot is my foot, and it does what a foot does. And my hands do what my hands do.

And yet in the body of Christ, there's always conflict. Oh, I want to be that. I want to be that.

I want to do this. I don't want to do that. But God has set the members.

Now, folk, we either believe that God has ordained this church, or he has not. And if he has, and if you are here by his design, then he has a job for you. He has a part that you need to play.

And you don't get to choose and say, I don't want to be that. I seriously would love just to be an elder in this church, or any church, and not have the responsibility that I have. But right now, where we are at this point in time, I don't have a choice.

Neither do you. God sets the members, each one of them in a body as he pleases. So, what do we need to do? Find out what your job is.

Find out where you fit. And that's not so easy sometimes. Let me also, just while we're on this point, bring a word of warning against psychosymmetric tests, which is very popular in many churches today.

Myers-Briggs and that kind of thing. These tests are psychological tests of your psychological profile, and you answer all the questions, and I've done them several times in the business world, and also in the military. And once they analyze the tests, they say, okay, you're this kind of individual, and these are the kinds of jobs that you're suitable for.

Or if you're applying for a job, you're either suitable for that job or you're not. These things have been brought into churches, and churches are actually running these programs, and you do the test, and the test says, okay, you're a foot or a hand or an eye, you're a this or that or the other thing. But we're not talking about natural gifts here.

And that's one of the reasons I use the example of saying that you could have a church where you have a slave as an elder and a master who is not an elder. Because it has nothing to do with your success out there. This is the problem, is that because we have some kind of success in the world, we have some kind of fancy job or position in the world, we have some kind of education in the world, we want to translate that into the church, and we say, because I have a degree, because I have this or that or the other thing, therefore I must have some kind of seniority in the church.

It has nothing to do with it. These are spiritual gifts. And that's why I started in verse 11.

But one and the same spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as he wills. I've never done a Myers-Briggs or a psychosomatic test as to whether I'm suitable to be a preacher, but I'm pretty sure I'm not, because I'm not eloquent, and I'm not good in front of people, and yet God has called me. And you can go through the disciples, each one of them.

Not one of them—if you were to set up a cabinet of 12 men on whom you're going to build a kingdom, on whom you're going to build a church that would last for thousands of years and comprise of millions of

followers, those 12 guys are the last guys I would choose. We can go through them one by one. Every one of them had their issues.

But they weren't chosen based on who they were. Most of them illiterate or semi-literate, uneducated. With bad backgrounds.

And yet God chose them. Because it's not about who you are in the natural. It is about what God can do with you.

It's about the gifts that he can deposit in your life. And so God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as he pleased. Let me draw a line there, and we'll come back to this next week.

So the question simply then is, if I'm here by God's design, what do I do? What is my function? You see, because one of the problems, one of the things about the body—and we'll see this as we continue next week—is that there are no spare parts. I mean, we understand there are some people who have six fingers or, you know. But in the normal body, there's no spare parts.

I know we say, well, you know, the tonsils, you know, you can do without them, so we take those out and, you know, there are other—but they all have a job. They maybe, you know, become dysfunctional and have to be removed, and we can get by with one kidney, but we really need both kidneys. I don't believe there's spare parts in the body of Christ.

That's the whole point that he's making in this chapter. There is no ministry like pure warming. There's no ministry of just sitting there, being there.

We all have a function, and we need to find out what that function is, because God has saved us for a purpose. He's not—you see, again, here's the thing. We come back to this individualism.

There's this thinking today that God saved me just so that he can save me, because I'm that important. No, God didn't save me just so he can save me. He saved me because he has a job for me, and I need to find out what it is that he wants me to do.

Father, we pray that you'd help us to understand, Lord, we're speaking about things that are culturally and socially unacceptable today. Lord, the emphasis is on me and I and myself, and yet, Lord, we know that in the church, the emphasis is on the body of which Christ is the head. And Lord, we pray that you would help us to find that unity amongst ourselves, Lord, that we may be a functioning, healthy body of believers, each one fulfilling the ministry and the calling that you have placed upon their lives.

Lord, I pray that you'd help us to be able to somehow get away from the world's way of thinking and begin to think about these things the way that you do. And so, Lord, as we struggle, Lord, and we know, I know that there are some who say, well, I really don't know what I can do. I really don't know what my job is.

Lord, we pray that you would help us to wrestle with those things and to figure out what it is that you want us to do, and we might be useful in the body of Christ. And Lord, that on that day, we may hear those words, well done, good and faithful servant. So, Lord, we pray, help us to understand, help us to come to some kind of conclusion concerning our own hearts and lives and our own position in the church.

We ask this in Jesus' name. I pray that you'd go with us now, keep us, protect us, bring us together again on Thursday, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/lwskQvUzaT4.mp4>
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