

# Diversity, Gifts and Unity in the Body Of Christ

by Zac Poonen

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*This sermon delves into the distinctions between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, emphasizing the transformation brought by the New Covenant, including the seriousness of sin, forgiveness, the role of the Holy Spirit, loving Jesus supremely, taking up the cross daily, detachment from possessions, unity in the body of Christ, and the importance of fellowship and joint functioning within the church. It highlights the need for believers to have a burden for building the body of Christ and to cultivate intimate relationships with Jesus akin to a bride with her husband.*

**Scripture:** Hebrews 8:6, Colossians 3:10, Matthew 18:20, Ephesians 4:11, Ephesians 4:16, Revelation 19:7, John 15:14, 1 Corinthians 12:12, Romans 12:4, 1 Peter 4:10

**Topics:** "Covenant Transformation", "Unity in Christ"

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## Description

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## Transcript

So, this is going to be the 12th study in the New Covenant. Just to review quickly what we've already looked at, the New Covenant was established only on the day of Pentecost. Before that, even right up to the time Jesus ascended to heaven, they were under the Old Covenant.

In the New Covenant, we saw, first of all, God shows us the seriousness of sin. I mean, this is how you can know whether you've begun to enter the New Covenant. Have you seen the seriousness of sin? And secondly, he gives us an assurance that he not only forgives us, but does not even remember our past sins.

This is in contrast to the Old Covenant. And the third, the Holy Spirit reveals God is our Father. And fourth, God gives us both the desire and the ability to do his will, which is not there under the Old Covenant.

And fifth, the main thing in the Christian life is to love Jesus supremely, and the Holy Spirit comes within us to do that. And number six, to take up the cross every day and bear the dying of Jesus constantly, which is

unheard of in the Old Covenant. And number seven, to be detached from the love of possessions and money.

In the Old Covenant, money was an indication of God's blessing. Number eight, the Holy Spirit keeps us constantly in the presence of Christ, as they never had in the Old Covenant. And number nine, Satan's been defeated, and God gives us light on Satan's tactics.

We can always overcome Satan. Number 10, we learn to worship God in spirit and truth. And number 11, God enables us to build a godly family, parents and children.

So the last thing we want to see today is that unlike in the Old Covenant, where there were a congregation. A congregation is a group of people, and it's very easy for this group also to be a congregation. In the New Covenant, it is a body.

Christ builds a body. There's a lot of difference between a congregation and a body. In a medical college, when they study anatomy, which is the study of the human body, in the laboratory, they'll have a dead body with all the hands.

Every part of the body is there, and you can study it. A church can be like that. Hands, eyes, legs, every part of the body, but no connection.

So if you're a part of a church where you're not connected in love with others, it's like a husband and wife. They can live together for years and not connected in love. In fact, most marriages in the world are like that.

The husband and wife never become one. They live in the same house, constantly fighting, arguing, and so on. They never become one, and most churches are also like that.

People don't become one with each other. They come and sit in the same meeting, but they have all types of wrong attitudes and everything else against each other, and there are prejudices, and they don't like certain people. So they all sit in the same church.

It's hypocrisy. That's not the body of Christ. That's an Old Covenant congregation.

It can call itself the Church of Jesus Christ, but it's not the Church of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, all men will know you are my disciples when you love one another, not when you come together and sing certain songs or preach certain messages. It's that connection, and the other wonderful thing in the New Covenant is when Christ builds the church, in the Old Covenant, everybody was a Jew.

Everyone was a descendant of Abraham. They were all Jews, and it's very easy to love people of the same race, and everybody is the same race, same color skin, same language. That's how it was in the Old Covenant.

You looked around, and everybody looked the same, and very easy to love one another, but when it came to the New Covenant, we read in Colossians in chapter 3. Now these are practical truths, and if we don't apply them, this can be New Covenant Christian Fellowship, but actually an Old Covenant church. It's not a name that makes it New Covenant. Colossians 3 says, it says here in Colossians chapter 3 in verse 10, you have put on the new self, renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the one who created him, and listen to this.

In this renewal, there is no distinction between Greek and Jew. The word Greek means Gentile, which means a non-Jew. The Jews used to get up.

I've heard that they used to get up in the morning and say, Lord, I thank you that I'm not a Gentile, and I'm not a slave, but I'm a Jew. They were so proud of their ancestry, and there are Christians who come to church. I've seen this in India.

I've seen it in every part of the world. They are proud of their ancestry. They are proud of their particular race.

I belong to this race, which is superior to other races. Such people are a poison in the body of Christ. Here, there is no distinction between circumcised and uncircumcised.

Barbarian, Scythian, no, the barbarian is an uncultured person who most of us here are all cultured. We know how to behave. We know how to conduct ourselves in society.

We know how to say thank you, sorry, and all these things. A barbarian is not like that. He's very crude in his behavior, and you can be easily offended with his conduct.

We all prefer to be with people of our similar type. It makes it much easier because I don't have to deny myself. If you had to live with a barbarian and fellowship with a barbarian, you'd have to deny yourself in a number of areas because he's so completely different.

He's uncouth and uncivilized and has all types of habits that can provoke me to disgust. God puts them in the same church, barbarian. And then it speaks about Scythian.

You know who the Scythian is? I never knew that. The Scythian is the one whom a barbarian thinks he's a barbarian. That's a Scythian.

God puts such people together in the church with a cultured, educated Greek. If you're a church full of only Silicon Valley people, educated, highly educated graduates, it's not the Church of Jesus Christ. The Church of Jesus Christ, there is no distinction between a cultured, educated Greek and a barbarian.

And you long to fellowship with all of them. If you're the type of person who only likes to fellowship with people of your own type, your own race, your own intellectual level, your own culture, I would say you're a hindrance to the building of the body of Christ. Because the Lord has put slaves and freemen.

Think of that. In those days, they had slaves, and slaves were not even allowed to sit at the table with the masters. They were a lower level of society.

And God has put all of these together and says there's only one thing that unites them, verse 11, Jesus Christ. I thank God that in India, we've had this tremendous privilege. A lot of people think of India as a country.

India is a continent of people of 22 languages, many cultures. You go from one state to another, you can't speak the language. It's another state.

You go north to another state, there's 22 languages. Oh, it's a continent. And not only is it a continent, it's so many different levels of society.

There are people who live, their entire house is one room. A lot of our brothers in the villages live in a room like that. That room is dining room, bedroom, everything.

And they all sleep there. And then there are others who live with houses with many rooms. And God puts all these people together.

He doesn't change our social level, or our income level, or standard of living when we come to the church. But he brings these people together who are so completely different and makes them one. And for me, it's been a tremendous blessing in my life to mingle with people of all different levels.

It's one of the privileges which I have, which you don't have here in the United States, because here the standard of living, even though the people sitting here, I mean, there's not much difference between the way the poorest person here lives and perhaps the richest person lives. It's about the same. Very minor differences.

You all own a car, for example. But in India, it's so different, very, very different. And social levels, economic levels, different languages.

And when God brings them together and makes us a body, it's been a tremendous blessing to us, for me anyway, to be a blessing to all of us to mingle with people are completely different. I would encourage you, my dear brothers, if you understood the new covenant or you want to understand it, be eager to fellowship with the people in this church who are not at your social level, who are not at your intellectual level, who are not of your race, who are completely different. Then you will understand something of the wealth there is in the body of Christ.

Otherwise, it will all be theory. You can hear these messages and make all your notes. It won't make the slightest difference next year than it was in the last few years in your life.

So this is very practical. That's the first thing I want to say about the body of Christ, which is not true in the Old Testament. Everybody was a Jew.

The synagogue of 150 people like this, everybody was a Jew. They all spoke the same language. Very easy to fellowship.

That is Old Covenant. So when we move in that direction, we are in Old Covenant. The other passage I want to show you is from Ephesians chapter four.

Ephesians four, it speaks about how Christ builds the body as opposed to a congregation. There's a difference between a congregation, which is a group of people. The Old Testament had two million people, Jews, but it was a congregation, a body.

What is the, before I come to Ephesians, what is the size of a true church? What makes a church? Twenty people? A hundred people? When do we call it a church? Well, Jesus told us that in Matthew chapter 18. Matthew chapter 18 and verse 20. This is the minimum size of a church.

Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I'm there in the midst. Now, there are a number of things in that verse. If Christ himself, the person of the risen Christ, is not in our midst, this is not a church.

We have to make sure that Christ himself is welcome here, that the leadership of this church ensures that this church is run in such a way that Jesus Christ feels perfectly comfortable here with everything that

goes on. And the primary thing he looks for is that everyone seeks to live with a clear conscience, even if it's a new Christian or a very mature Christian. He must keep his conscience clear.

It's a minimum requirement. I am in the midst where two or three are gathered together. Now, people tend to read the Bible carelessly, not only here.

It's not where two or three people gather together. It's easy to misunderstand that. That is how most people read it.

Anywhere two or three people gather together, you know, somewhere in a house, people say, we are gathered here together, Lord, you're here. No, he's not there. It's not you gathering together.

What does it say? Where two or three are gathered, that means somebody else has gathered you together. Who's that? The Holy Spirit. It's when the Holy Spirit gathers two or three people together and they gather not in the basis of race or language or culture or education, but in the name of Christ, making absolutely no difference like we considered earlier, that is the church.

You need only two or three. But if you had 2,000, 3,000 people who just come together to sing together and praise the Lord, it's not a church if they're not gathered by the Holy Spirit, if Christ is not the center thing there, center person there. That's the first thing I want you to see there.

And it speaks here about two or three gathered together in his name in fellowship. Now we can move to Ephesians 4, where it speaks about the body of Christ again. See, some of these things are all written here, but we haven't read them carefully.

A church cannot be built. I believe the church is born. You know, the difference between being born, a building can be built.

That's also a picture of a church. But a real church is something born, and usually somebody has to have a burden for it. You know, when the church is a body, how is a human body born? You can't build a baby.

A baby has to be born. And they come just like Jesus said, two or three are gathered together. A husband and a wife, two come together and a baby is born.

And that it comes through a baby born in the womb and comes forth to birth. So I've seen through the years in different places that where God gives one or two people a burden, that's like a baby in the womb. A burden is like a conception.

I remember when I was 25 years old and I read the New Testament, I'd been born again for about five or six years. I had a burden to see a New Testament church. There were so many churches of different denominations, but as I read the Bible, I found this is not a New Testament church.

These are all paid salaries, paid workers who are paid a salary, and somebody is preaching there for a salary. And how do you know? Fathers and mothers don't become fathers and mothers for salary. A father and mother never gets paid a salary.

So if somebody is paid a salary, that's not a church. That's an organization, a club or an office or something. A father and mother have got a burden to bring up their children in the fear of God.

And that's the true type of leadership in any church, where they have a burden, where no father and mother works for pay, completely free. They have a burden to bring up their children in the fear of God. So I remember I had this burden and I had carried that burden in my heart for 10 years from the age of 25 to the age of 35, frustrated with everything that I saw around me, till finally, when I was 35 years old, I saw the birth of the first CFC church.

And since then, many, many in different places. And I don't know how many of you have a burden. If you have a burden, God will lead.

And as that burden increased, God planted other churches in India. And in other countries. But I believe every one of us should have a burden.

That the truth that you receive here should be shared by many, many Christians who have not understood it in different places. And that burden is something you carry in your heart. It'll come forth.

If you don't have a burden, I would say you're a very selfish type of Christian. You only think of yourself. I've got something.

I'm in a wonderful church. But dear brother or sister, if you're newly come here, you've just been here four or five years, OK, forgiven. But by now, you should have a burden that we've got to share this truth with other people who have not understood the church as a body of Christ.

And if God transfers you to another place, that's what we've taught in CFC Bangalore. God transfers you to another place. Perhaps he wants to start a church there.

Do you have a burden? Ephesians chapter four, it says here about the Lord building his church, and it begins with certain people whom he equips. Ephesians 4.11, he gave some apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of service to build the body of Christ. That was not there in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament, there'd be an occasional prophet like Moses or Elijah or Elisha would come up and then disappear. Then after some years, some other prophet would arise. The entire Old Testament was like that.

And there were kings who were sort of, so many of them were wayward. And that was Old Testament, the Jewish nation. But in the New Testament, God raises up godly apostles, prophets, five gifts to build the church, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers.

There's no such thing in the Old Covenant. An apostle is one who plants churches, and a prophet is one who is a spokesman of God, and an evangelist is one who goes out and brings non-Christians to Christ. A shepherd or a pastor is a gift.

It's not an office. It's a gift, like apostle, prophet, et cetera, who shepherds, just like takes care of the sheep, and teachers who teach and explain God's word. Now, these are not titles.

There are people today now, particularly in Africa and all, who call themselves apostles, so and so. It's ridiculous. It's not a title.

It's a gift. A true father doesn't go around with a badge saying, father. He's a father.

His children know it. He doesn't need a badge. He doesn't need a title.

And a true apostle, a true prophet is like that. A prophet is one who speaks forth, and God reveals to prophets the need of people sitting there whom he doesn't even know. And when a prophet speaks, you'll find the secrets of your heart are made manifest.

He'll probably irritate you, because something you love very much is against God's purposes, and he'll provoke you, and he'll comfort you. That's what a prophet does. And then, but there are people who go around saying prophet, so and so.

It's not a title. It's a function. The same way with evangelists.

There are people who call them evangelists. These are not titles. It's a function.

At present, there are some people who have a tremendous gift to reach out to new people and bring them to Christ. We're always seeking to witness the people. It's wonderful.

Thank God if you have people like that in this church. And then a pastor. Pastoring is a shepherd.

It's not a title. A person who has a care for the lambs and the sheep in the church, and it doesn't have to be one of the elders. You can be a shepherd.

You can be a pastor, a shepherd of people in your locality, of people whom you have a burden for in this church. You should have. You should not be one who just comes and warms the seat on Sunday afternoons and goes away.

You say, Lord, have you got some function for me to build this church, to encourage and finally, teachers. The Bible says don't be many teachers. That's a special gift that God gives to some people to explain the scriptures.

Don't try to be a teacher if God has not called you to be one. And I want to go on from there to say these are people who equip the saints to build the body. So notice here it says these are not the people who build the body.

They equip the saints, verse 13, sorry, verse 12, to build the body. So every one of the saints is to build the body, and these five gifts are the ones who equip the saints to build the body of Christ. Every one of us have a responsibility to build relationships with each other.

Whenever you see a relationship broken between you and somebody else, you must restore it as soon as possible. We'll come to that in a moment. Until we become totally one, the unity of the faith to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Now there's a lot concerning the body here, but I just want to mention one thing. It says in verse 16, the whole body being fitted and joined to get held together by that which every joint supplies. Do you know the importance of joints in the body? See, this arm has got a joint up here, the shoulder, another joint at the elbow, another joint at the wrist, and each of these fingers have got one, two, three joints here, one, two, three joints here, one, two joints here.

There are so many joints in just this one hand, and the joints are fellowship between two people where they can work together. For example, you can have a very strong lower arm and a very strong upper arm,

but if the joint is not working, you won't be able to do anything with his arm because the joint does not bend. So how does this joint function? Think of you with another brother.

You are a strong brother. He has another strong brother. That's good.

But if these two strong brothers don't have a joint between them, they are useless. It speaks of that which the joint supplies. It's not just the arm and not the two strong brothers, but the fellowship between them.

How does this joint work? When this side, the muscle pulls, the other muscle is yielding, and when this muscle pulls, this is yielding. That is fellowship where you're willing to yield to someone, and he's willing to yield to you. That's how a good husband and wife work, and it's when joints are not functioning.

You can be a very strong brother with a fantastic knowledge of the Bible, but if you don't have joints with other brothers, you don't have that type of fellowship, whether it's a home or a church, it'll be a stiff body that can accomplish very little or nothing for the Lord. So fellowship is the main thing in a church. You know, I just took one arm, but think of the number of joints in the neck.

There are joints in the knees. There are joints in the toes. There are joints in the other arm, and it's joints that make this body function together, and joints speak of fellowship.

So you can be a very strong brother, but if you can't build fellowship with others, you're pretty useless in the body of Christ. You can glory in the fact that I did this or I did that for the Lord. A church is not a congregation.

A congregation, it doesn't matter if the people sitting there don't have fellowship with each other. A true church is where every part is in function and fellowship with the others who have been willing to become integrated into that body. And finally, in the book of Revelation, the church is also called the Bride of Jesus Christ.

And that speaks of an intimate relationship with Christ like a husband and wife. So every brother and sister here, the Lord Jesus wants you to have an intimate relationship with Him just like a wife has with her husband. There it is physical, here it is spiritual.

And one mark of that intimate relationship is if you go to a husband and wife the day after they were married and you ask the wife something like, what do you think your husband will do in this complicated situation? She'll say, I don't know. And she got married yesterday. You go to that husband, if they're really living in good fellowship, you go to that wife 10 years later and someone comes, what do you think your husband will do in this situation? She'll tell you, I'll tell you exactly what he'll do.

That's a wife who's got to know her husband. I want to ask you, have you got to know Jesus like that? Every one of you, when you come to, when you're newly converted, okay, you can be forgiven. I don't know what the Lord will do in this situation.

But if you've been walking with the Lord more and more, the evidence will be, you'll be able to say, I know what Jesus will do in this situation. I know what Jesus will do in this complicated situation. So I pray that that'll be true more and more in our life.

And that all the things, there's a lot more in the new covenant. I pray that it'll become really true in us so that we are not just called new covenant Christian fellowship, but we actually become the new covenant

church. Amen.

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