

Series: All Peoples	Reference: <i>Various Passages</i>	Title: Unity Cont.	Date: 07.12.2020
Website Writeup: As we reenter gathering together (at least some of us) it's good to continue our thoughts on how the church operates in continued unity.			

As we seek to come back together in the building next week I thought it apropos to continue this idea of unity. There's a top ten list of things people want to see in their pastor out there on the internet...(10) Demonstrates evangelism (9) Transparent (8) Doesn't yield to critics (7) Joyous (6) Demonstrates healthy leadership (5) Casts vision (4) Good work ethic (3) Strong character (2) Effective preaching (1) Loves the congregation. You guys are blessed that I'm so amazing in all these areas! But seriously, a leader's job is to equip the body for the work of the kingdom, in order that we all do it together.

Ephesians 4:11-12, 15-16 speaks of this in order that the local church can grow in health - *"He is the one who gave these gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors & teachers. ¹²Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work & build up the church, the body of Christ... ¹⁵...we will hold to the truth in love, becoming more & more in every way like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. ¹⁶Under his direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love."*

1 Corinthians 12:12-26 speaks of these things...*The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. ¹³For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*

Diverse people together as a unit, one body, drinking of the same Spirit. He gives the very necessary nod to the cultural & class differences which might divide a community. We don't want to focus on diversity of culture, or class today. However, let it be said Scripture calls God's people to look past differences embracing every tribe, nation & people. When we look down on, or exclude due to any of these issues, we act outside the Will of God. Today I want to look at interpersonal relationships, gifting & personal holiness which play into unity for the local church.

Continuing with 1 Corinthians 12...*¹⁴Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them*

to be. ¹⁹If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

Tents include poles & stakes without which it wouldn't act as an intended shelter. Your salvation & the local church are a package deal. Relationship with Jesus means a relationship with the local church. Denying that fact doesn't make it untrue - your salvation & spiritual formation intimately linked to your connection to your local church. When you open the package of salvation, there are poles, maybe one's Church fellowship, another the Holy Spirit & the stakes are the Scriptures to hold it down in all weather. Christianity's a communal life, it can't be lived outside of the diverse Body of Christ with our unique roles to play.

V21...²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" ²²On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Community means you can't deny your interdependence on the local church. We're not independent of it, neither totally dependent on it, but rather interdependent in it. Every part honored & important while issues are addressed, character, integrity, attitude, sin, etc. If one part suffers, all suffer. If one part falls, all are hindered. So personal holiness & spiritual formation of individuals is important - even in our inner thoughts. If one isn't given to Jesus 100%, they aren't operating as a hand, foot or eye at 100%.

Aesop wrote a fable to this end: *One day it occurred to the members of the body that they were doing all the work and that the belly was having all the food. So they held a meeting and after a long discussion decided to strike work until the belly consented to take its proper share of the work. So for a day or two the hands refused to take the food, the mouth refused to receive it and the teeth had no work to do. But after a day or two members began to find that they themselves were not in very active condition. The hands could hardly move, the mouth was all parched and dry, while the legs were unable to support the rest. Thus they found that even the belly in its dull quiet way was doing necessary work for the body and that all must work together or the body would go to pieces.*

The body doesn't exist to meet the needs of the hand. The hand exists to meet the needs of the body & in doing so gets its own needs met. The hand isn't concerned about the body feeding it, but in its feeding the body it's fed. The local church doesn't exist to meet our needs. We exist to carry out the work of the Head (Christ) guided along by His thought. In so doing, personal needs are met in Christ. What's your passion & gifting? Everyone gets to play. God's equipped you for your role in the Body.

“An organizations success is determined by far more than skill & talent of individuals within it. Ultimate success is a result of the degree to which people transcend their individual ability to create synergy addressing their collective purpose. Success has more to do with how the people work in relationship with each other than with how perfectly they function individually in their roles.

Unity is the collective cohesiveness, alignment & sense of oneness which permeates an organization. It's the beginning point & ultimate power behind any organization's performance, church or otherwise. Organizations need unity. Many survive & even profit without it. But without it, none come close to full potential. To succeed at their best, unity must be adopted as a pragmatic requirement; an imperative requiring committed attention. What inhibits organizations from performing at their best are the dysfunctional dynamics between people within it.

Without unity, energies become focused on myopic conflicting objectives for personal gain & control. Without unity, organizational dynamics don't contribute to, but detract from, and override commitments, concerns & efforts towards ultimate calling.

Disunity reveals itself in finger-pointing & gossip. Drawing lines & choosing sides with a 'we/they' mentality. In conflict, objectivity & neutrality is lost. People become dogmatic, judgmental, critical, fault-finding & blaming. They diminish others, see them as less than, wrong, uncommitted, selfish, disloyal, etc.. Others become 'them', and are stereotyped, excluded, diminished & marginalized.”¹

Once a culture of disunity is allowed to thrive in a church, things like gossip are a spark in dry brush. But in a healthy church, with a strong discipleship culture, gossip dies; a spark hitting wet leaves, as opposed to dry.

Zig Ziglar said; *"You can have everything in life you want if you will just help enough other people get what they want."* I'd say it differently; *"You can have everything in life you need if you will just help enough other people get what they need."* And getting what you need is the only true step towards truly enjoying what you want, because when needs become wants internal conflict is extinguished. Selfishness diminished, as selflessness reigns. More God-ness = more goodness.

Our great central need is Jesus, meeting with Him in the Inner Sanctum. Pursuing his kingdom, first & foremost, and all else falls into place (Mt 6:33). If you want your needs met, go to Jesus while serving humanity outwardly through the church. And we'll find our needs change, as we become more Christ-like. This is why your private pursuit of Jesus is influential to the whole body even when you don't see direct correlation. If I'm secretly not pursuing Jesus, but increasingly steeped in private sin, or simply indifferent, I may ride a wave of talent for a time, but there'll be no power - having a form of godliness, but denying its power (2 Tim 3:5). Eventually, I'll crash & burn - my lack of integrity exposed.

¹ <http://www.mawebsite.com/unity---the-organizational-imperative.html>

Colossians 3:15-17 speaks of these issues as well, instructing us to do everything as a representative of Jesus - *“And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are all called to live in peace. And always be thankful. ¹⁶Let the words of Christ, in all their richness, live in your hearts & make you wise. Use his words to teach & counsel each other. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. ¹⁷And whatever you do or say, let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus, all the while giving thanks through him to God the Father.”*

So we respond to each other out of a proper image of God, self & humanity. They say life is the sum of all our choices & we're urged to make incremental right choices all along; live in peace, be thankful, open yourself to Jesus, teach, counsel, praise, represent Jesus well. All those little choices add up to a great life. Participate in your spiritual formation, build something, don't just let life happen. Since a void will be filled, and most likely not by anything good & sets you back in your journey. Although we do know that even when we don't follow well, Grace dictates God intervenes in protective ways for his children. Your heart may be broken, looking for solidity & answers in this difficult time. God's grace searches us out & pulls us along, and Jesus leads us back to himself, not allowing us to fully go down errant paths.

Vince Lombardi tells what it takes to make a winning team: *“There are a lot of coaches with good ball clubs who know the fundamentals and have plenty of discipline but still don't win the game. Then you come to the third ingredient: if you're going to play together as a team, you've got to care for one another. You've got to love each other. Each player has to be thinking about the next guy & saying to himself “If I don't block that man, Paul's going to get his legs broken. I have to do my job well in order that he can do his.”*

The difference between mediocrity & greatness is the *regard* these guys have for each other. In the healthy church, each Christian learns to care for others. As we take seriously Jesus' command to love one another, we contribute to a healthy body & strong witness. Sometimes that's simply to bear with one another in love (Eph 4:2, Col 3:13).

Galatians 6:1-5 says, *“Dear friends, if a Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself. ²Share each other's troubles and problems, and in this way obey the law of Christ. ³If you think you are too important to help someone in need, you are only fooling yourself. You are really a nobody.”*

How do you think a football team would react to someone who thought they were better & didn't need the team? How can a team operate well if a team member won't take direction, be corrected, work together, or follow the playbook? How can a team win if the members don't show up to practice? Lots of good happens when you show up. If you think you're too important to need the team you're fooling yourself. Acting as a team member makes you stronger.

Consider yourself as a piece of the puzzle in this local church. Without your piece it's not a complete image. It'd be a boring picture if all the pieces were the same. The picture

wouldn't come together. Have you ever put together a puzzle finding one or two pieces missing. You throw it out, since missing pieces destroy the image!

Each piece has a unique shape, its place in the puzzle & adds to the overall image. Although the pieces are different, they're imprinted with a small part of the greater image. In the local church, that larger picture is Christ to the world. But we have missing pieces to our puzzle God's called us to reach (Mt 28:18-20). The average annual membership gain in churches in America right now is less than two new members for every five churches.² Six:Eight has typically been far above that, but we have attrition; people moving, or leaving since they're not fully unified in the message. We pastor thousands of people 100 at a time.

Church historian Martin Marty says one word defines the difference between churches which grow & those which don't: *Invite*. But invitation is too simple, since it has to come in the work of relationship. It means self-denial & serving others. Someone once said; *'Church people think about how to get people into the church; kingdom people think about how to get the church into the world; church people worry that the world might change the church; kingdom people work to see the church change the world.'*

Atrophy is *a decrease in size & strength of an organ caused by disease or disuse*. The corporate church has experienced some atrophy in its Kingdom building purpose. The Consumer Church has catered to the question, "How are you going to meet my needs?". Instead of the Kingdom Church question, "How do we live out our kingdom call in The Great Commission?" And we're still shedding those old dirty clothes.

Hebrews 10:24-25 urges us to provoke one another on to love & good works - *"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love & to good works: ²⁵Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as you see the day approaching."* We can't rely *Someone Else* to do it.

Acts 2:46-47 *"They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy & generosity - ⁴⁷all the while praising God & enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved."*

Proximity. Community. Love. Care. An attractive powerful image! The church made up of many parts with Christ as head. The body made up of hands & feet, fingers & toes, stomach & brain, bone, sinew & skin. All made up of different cells with various form & function, imprinted with the DNA of a person. Like puzzle pieces fitting together adding to the larger image, adding daily to grow & develop a mature healthy body. You can't see the picture looking at one piece of the puzzle, likewise Christ comes into focus to the outside community by way of the local church; His Body. Each of us imprinted with the DNA of Jesus coming together as a living concrete image of Him.

² (1997 Yearbook of American Churches, In Pastor's Weekly Briefing, Mar 21, 1997, p. 1.)

Galatians 5:13 *“For you, dear friends, have been called to live in freedom - not freedom to satisfy your sinful nature, but freedom to serve one another in love.”*

General Eisenhower once rebuked one of his Generals for referring to a soldier as "just a Private." He reminded him, the Army could function better without its Generals than it could without its foot soldiers. "If this war is won," he said, "it will be won by Privates." In the same way, the common, ordinary, one-talent Christian is the backbone of the church. If the Kingdom of God is to be built, it'll be the everyday Christians who do it.

Find a puzzle piece & keep it in your pocket. Whenever you pull it out with a handful of change, think about your role in this local body. Ask yourself, "How I can meet the needs of others?" "Where do I fit?" "How can I serve better the vision Jesus gave our church?"

Your role's here, it'll be different than others & just as vital. It may not be a leadership position, but that doesn't matter, the Eastern Main Line will be won by foot soldiers, not Generals, as we love each other well, stepping out in risky faith together.

Prayerfully consider that challenge. Churches are full of the 'well-intentioned'. People who say they'll live the Kingdom, but get too busy, or shy away when it gets difficult. The funny thing is, those 10 things listed in the beginning, are what we're all called to exhibit; (10) Evangelism (9) Transparency (8) Not yielding to critics (7) Joy (6) Healthy leadership (5) People of vision (4) Good work ethic (3) Strong character (2) Effective preaching (1) Love of congregation.

Leaders simply equip. They look at the greater image of the local body & place pieces here & there, helping them to find their place. But all those pieces need to engage as listening followers. Followers of integrity who engage Jesus personally & regularly, gaining the power they need to step up & follow through in this kingdom call of the local body of Christ. Initiative takers who grow to not have to be led by the hand as they follow Jesus to serve those within & outside our church. Let each one of us put ourselves in the position of being formed well spiritually & work together to serve each other, this community & the world well.

Community Group Questions

Ice Breaker: In the spirit of the sermon, begin by reading a poem by Rudyard Kipling titled, *We & They...*

Father and Mother, and Me,
Sister and Auntie say
All the people like us are We,
And every one else is They.
And They live over the sea,
While We live over the way,
But-would you believe it? --They look upon We
As only a sort of They!

We eat pork and beef
With cow-horn-handled knives.
They who gobble Their rice off a leaf,
Are horrified out of Their lives;
While they who live up a tree,
And feast on grubs and clay,
(Isn't it scandalous?) look upon We
As a simply disgusting They!

We shoot birds with a gun.
They stick lions with spears.
Their full-dress is un-
We dress up to Our ears.
They like Their friends for tea.
We like Our friends to stay;
And, after all that, They look upon We
As an utterly ignorant They!

We eat kitcheny food.
We have doors that latch.
They drink milk or blood,
Under an open thatch.
We have Doctors to fee.
They have Wizards to pay.
And (impudent heathen!) They look upon We
As a quite impossible They!

All good people agree,
And all good people say,
All nice people, like Us, are We
And every one else is They:
But if you cross over the sea,
Instead of over the way,
You may end by (think of it!) looking on We
As only a sort of They!

Discussion:

1. Can you name examples of Christians who embody the attitude of this poem? How is God challenging you towards this?
2. Our central passage was 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, we also looked at many other passages. They're all listed on the last 2 pages of this document, along with two additional passages from Romans & Ephesians. Familiarize yourself with these, and bring copies for your group.
3. Look at Ephesians 2:11-22 (listed on the last page) the writer speaks of unifying different peoples in Christ.
 1. What is the central thing which unifies peoples?
 2. What is peace? And, in what is it found?
 3. If we are unified under Christ, what does that look like with all our various differences & preferences? Do they all change? Do some? How does peace come in the midst of diversity?
 4. How are divisive sinful attitudes & behaviors dealt with under the headship of Christ?
 5. How does the church celebrate the diversity of its members, but find unity under Christ? Can you give examples? What do we share under him, and what can be personal preference?
4. *If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.*
 1. Think about outward circumstances, injustice, loss, sickness, etc. Or, victories in prayer, evangelism, care of others, etc.
 2. How does our personal journey of spiritual formation affect the community even when we cannot see direct correlation?
 3. In which of the areas in that top ten list do you excel, and can you illustrate them from your experiences? Which are difficult & why?
 1. (10) Demonstrates evangelism (9) Transparent (8) Doesn't yield to critics (7) Joyous (6) Demonstrates healthy leadership (5) Casts vision (4) Good work ethic (3) Strong character (2) Effective preaching (1) Loves the congregation.
 4. Where do you fit with your gifting & passions?
 5. Use your imaginations together, how can our church reflect Acts 2:46-47?
 6. Or, how do we live out our kingdom call in The Great Commission? What are the implications of this on individuals & the church body? What are some creative ways we can do this?

Verses Used in the Sermon (and then some)

1 Corinthians 12:12-26, *¹²The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. ¹³For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*

¹⁴Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

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Colossians 3:15-17, *"And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are all called to live in peace. And always be thankful. ¹⁶Let the words of Christ, in all their richness, live in your hearts and make you wise. Use his words to teach and counsel each other. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. ¹⁷And whatever you do or say, let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus, all the while giving thanks through him to God the Father."*

Galatians 6:1-5, *"Dear friends, if a Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself. ²Share each other's troubles and problems, and in this way obey the law of Christ. ³If you think you are too important to help someone in need, you are only fooling yourself. You are really a nobody."*

Hebrews 10:24-25, *"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: ²⁵Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as you see the day approaching."*

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Galatians 5:13, *"For you, dear friends, have been called to live in freedom - not freedom to satisfy your sinful nature, but freedom to serve one another in love."*

Romans 12:3-16, *"As God's messenger, I give each of you this warning: Be honest in your estimate of yourselves, measuring your value by how much faith God has given you. {4} Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, {5} so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of his one body, and each of us has different work to do. And since we*

are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others. {6} God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well.

So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out when you have faith that God is speaking through you. {7} If your gift is that of serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, do a good job of teaching. {8} If your gift is to encourage others, do it! If you have money, share it generously (also see 2 Corinthians 8:7). If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

{9} Don't just pretend that you love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Stand on the side of the good. {10} Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. {11} Never be lazy in your work, but serve the Lord enthusiastically. {12} Be glad for all God is planning for you. Be patient in trouble, and always be prayerful. {13} When God's children are in need, be the one to help them out. And get into the habit of inviting guests home for dinner or, if they need lodging, for the night.

{14} If people persecute you because you are a Christian, don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. {15} When others are happy, be happy with them. If they are sad, share their sorrow. {16} Live in harmony with each other. Don't try to act important, but enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!"

Ephesians 2:11-22, 11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)— 12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.