

Wind-Powered Unity in Diversity

Lesson 4

1 Corinthians 12:12–27



Big Idea

As the COVID-19 pandemic began, thousands upon thousands of sacrificial first responders, nurses, doctors, hospital administrators, researchers, technicians, hospital chaplains and many, many more people worked together to save lives and comfort the dying. These remarkable and courageous individuals represented different ethnicities, backgrounds, family units, neighborhoods, career tracks, etc., yet they were a unified and powerful force for a common cause. Their unity amidst diversity is a picture of God's heart for the Church.



Background

A key verse in the book of 1 Corinthians is **1:10**: *"I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose."* Paul emphasized unity because the unity of the Corinthian church had been greatly compromised. One of the many problems¹ in that church was competition about which spiritual gifts were most important or most spiritual. Paul was deeply concerned, so he insisted in his letter that spiritual gifts were assigned by Holy Spirit and all of them were equally important.² Paul used the metaphor of the human body to illustrate this critical point.



Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–27

¹² *The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ.* ¹³ *Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.*

¹⁴ *Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part.* ¹⁵ *If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body.* ¹⁶ *And if the ear says, "I am not part of the body because I am not an eye," would that make it any less a part of the body?* ¹⁷ *If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?*

¹ Other problems in the Corinthian church are discussed in **1 Corinthians 1:1–4:21** and **11:17–41**.

² **1 Corinthians 12:4, 11**

¹⁸ But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. ¹⁹ How strange a body would be if it had only one part! ²⁰ Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. ²¹ The eye can never say to the hand, “I don’t need you.” The head can’t say to the feet, “I don’t need you.”

²² In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. ²³ And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, ²⁴ while the more honorable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. ²⁵ This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.

²⁷ All of you together are Christ’s body, and each of you is a part of it.



Dig In

1. As Paul continued his teaching on spiritual gifts, he compared the Church to the human body. What points did he make about diversity in the body of Christ? (**1 Corinthians 12:12–13**)

a. Underline how Paul emphasized this same truth in his other letters.

i. **Galatians 3:26–28**¹

²⁶ For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

²⁷ And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. ²⁸ There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.

¹ The baptism referenced here is baptism of Holy Spirit, just as John the Baptist said would happen in **Matthew 3:11**. *I baptize with water those who repent of their sins and turn to God. But someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not worthy even to be his slave and carry his sandals. He [Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.*

ii. **Colossians 3:11**

In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.

- b. What does **Acts 2:4–8, 41** below further reveal about God's heart for diverse ethnicities and nationalities?

⁴ And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability. ⁵ At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. ⁶ When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers. ⁷ They were completely amazed. "How can this be?" they exclaimed. "These people are all from Galilee, ⁸ and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages!"

⁴¹ Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.

- ②. What specific principles about the value of every Christian did Paul drive home in:
- ①. **1 Corinthians 12:14–17**
 - ②. **1 Corinthians 12:18–21**
 - ③. **1 Corinthians 12:22–24**
 - ④. **1 Corinthians 12:25–26**
 - ⑤. How do these verses speak to unified diversity in the Church today?

i. When we live in unity as a diverse people, others see the character and breadth of God who loves all. Please comment on this important concept and discuss with your group.

ii. As we think about diversity in the Church body, do you think the human body metaphor found in 1 Corinthians 12 is a good metaphor? Why or why not?

f. Describe a time when you have seen diverse people with a variety of gifts work together to accomplish their goal (i.e. a retreat, a worship service, a service project, etc.).

3. As noted in the Background section of this lesson, a key theme of 1 Corinthians was harmony and unity among Christians. God's heart for unity was also strongly proclaimed by Jesus. As you read the verses below, underline what impacts you:

a. **John 17:9, 11**

⁹ My prayer is not for the world, but for those you have given me, because they belong to you.

¹¹ Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, you have given me your name. Now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are.

b. **John 17:20–23**

²⁰ “I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. ²¹ I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. ²² “I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. ²³ I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me, and that you love them as much as you love me.”

c. Summarize your thoughts on Jesus’ prayer for unity.

4. Not only did Jesus’ prayers model unity, His life modeled it. One of the ways He modeled unity was by embracing diversity. Record your observations about the following examples from Jesus’ life:

a. **Mark 2:13–17**

¹³ Then Jesus went out to the lakeshore again and taught the crowds that were coming to him. ¹⁴ As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at his tax collector’s booth. “Follow me and be my disciple,” Jesus said to him. So Levi got up and followed him. ¹⁵ Later, Levi invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. (There were many people of this kind among Jesus’ followers.) ¹⁶ But when the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees saw him eating with tax collectors and other sinners, they asked his disciples, “Why does he eat with such scum?” ¹⁷ When Jesus heard this, he told them, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners.”

Your observations:

b. John 4:5–10

⁵ Eventually [Jesus] came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. ⁷ Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink." ⁸ He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food.

⁹ The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?"

¹⁰ Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water."

Your observations:

- c. Can you think of any other examples of Jesus embracing diversity? If so, note them here.

- ⑤ Underline what you discover about protecting and working for unity in the following Scriptures:

① **Romans 12:16**

Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!

② **Ephesians 4:1–4**

¹ *Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God.*

² *Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.*

³ *Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.* ⁴ *For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future.*

(c.) Philippians 1:27

Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News.

(d.) What grabbed your attention, and why?

6. After listing several spiritual gifts in **Romans 12:6–8**, Paul recorded numerous attitudes and actions that were critical to protecting harmony and unity. As you read through the attitudes and actions in the list below, paraphrased from **Romans 12:9–18**, choose three and note your thoughts about WHY they're so important to living in unity and harmony.
- a. Love others genuinely
 - b. Take delight in honoring each other¹
 - c. Work hard; don't be lazy; serve enthusiastically
 - d. Rejoice in your confident hope
 - e. Be patient in trouble
 - f. Bless those who persecute you
 - g. Be happy with those who are happy; weep with those who weep
 - h. Keep on praying
 - i. Help God's people in need

¹ We can honor others in one of two ways; one involves ulterior motives. We honor our bosses so they will reward us, our employees so they will work harder, the wealthy so they will contribute to our cause, the powerful so they will use their power for good and not against us. God's way involves love. As Christians, we honor people because they have been created in God's image. *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, 2004. 1917

- j. Be eager to practice hospitality¹
- k. Never pay back evil with more evil
- l. Be honorable in all you do
- m. Do all you can to live in peace with everyone

With your life and spiritual gifts in mind, which of the above attitudes and actions particularly speak to you or challenge you? In what ways?

7. Which word(s) would you use to complete this sentence?

“Dependence on the Wind is _____
in order to live out these attitudes as I serve God, my family, my church and my community.”

- a good idea
- helpful
- wise
- essential
- _____

Why did you choose those specific words?

¹ Christian hospitality differs from social entertaining. Entertaining focuses on the host: The home must be spotless; the food must be well prepared and abundant; the host must appear relaxed and good-natured. Hospitality, by contrast, focuses on the guests' needs, such as a place to stay, nourishing food, a listening ear, or just acceptance. Don't hesitate to offer hospitality just because you are too tired, too busy or not wealthy enough to entertain. *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, 2004. 1917

Wind-Powered Unity in Diversity

1. Meditate on Paul's tremendous encouragement about the indwelling power of Holy Spirit who empowers us to live in unity, especially amidst diversity.

Ephesians 1:19–20

¹⁹I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power ²⁰that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms.

2. Be blessed by the words of this worship song.¹ Consider listening to it while you read these lyrics.

The same power that conquered the grave
Lives in me, Lives in me
Your love that rescued the earth
Lives in me, lives in me

¹ *You Are Here (The Same Power)*. Copyright © 2007 Hillsong Publishing. Writer(s):David George, Grant Pankratz. CCLI #:5065925

