

Joel Breidenbaugh

(1 Corinthians 12:12-26)

**Intro.** A few weeks ago, there was flooding in portions of the South and up in West Virginia. One lady was in her car when it got swept up in floodwaters about 2-3 feet deep & she was about to be washed down the street & into a river, where she would have certainly drowned. A group of locals had taken shelter in a nearby store & while one man tried to go out to rescue her, he about got swept away. Then several men got out and one held onto a pole and they formed a human chain to reach her & carry her to safety. They saved her because they worked together in unity. As I continue the series on areas to strengthen our church & move from a “Good to Great Church,” today we look at 1 Corinthians 12 on the subject of “Unity.”

Theme: Unity

Background: When the Apostle Paul wrote this 1<sup>st</sup> letter to the church of Corinth, which he had planted a couple of years earlier, he addressed a number of questions they had asked him, but the first issue he dealt with was division in the church—chapters 1-6 deal with divisions of different kinds

- The way I see it, we have 5 main groups of people in our congregation on any given Sunday: long-time members (who have never taken Discover Sweetwater—more on this later), more recent members (last 8 years), those praying about joining our church (here a few months), guests (attended only once or a few times—potential to move toward joining), & moochers (those who don’t plan to join but take advantage of what we offer)—I don’t say this to offend/hurt you, but to help you think about why you are here & what God has called you to do

Illus: In a Peanuts cartoon Lucy demanded that Linus change TV channels, threatening him with her fist if he didn’t. “What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?” asks Linus. “These five fingers,” says Lucy. “Individually they’re nothing but when I curl them together like this into a single unit, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold.” “Which channel do you want?” asks Linus. Turning away, he looks at his fingers and says, “Why can’t you guys get organized like that?” (Charles Schultz)

➤ I’ve got one big truth to drive home today & the answers to a couple of key questions about it:

➤ **Seek unity in the church**

- One cannot miss the emphasis on unity in this chapter—references to unity include the terms “one” occurs at least 8x; “same”—7x; “whole”—2x; “body”—13x—thus, there are at least 30 references to unity in this chapter

**1. Why?**

Illus: If you have ever had a toddler, you have heard the question “why?”—pick up your toys (why?), time for bed (why?), bath time (why?), let’s brush your teeth (why?)—have you ever answered, “Because I’m the parent & I said so!”?—in a similar way, God is Lord & He has told us to live in unity

**a. Seek unity in the church, because the Triune God expresses unity (12:4-6)**

- Before Paul gets to the section I just read, he reminds us of the unity within the Godhead—same God, same Lord, same Spirit
- The local church is called to reflect the unity of the Trinity—together in purpose, relationships & mission—we can do this through common belief & practice

**b. Seek unity in the church, because Christ is unified with His body, the church (12:12-13)**

- Christ has one body—His church—not many bodies—in light of this truth, we are to be united as His body (common beliefs & practice)—not necessarily believing all the same thing about every single doctrine, but being together on core doctrines of who God is, who Jesus is, how one is saved, eternity & the like

**2. How?**

**a. Seek unity in the church, while recognizing our diversity (12:7-11, 14-25)**

- When we see how God has gifted each of us differently as believers (v. 11) & that we each perform different functions (like ears, hands, nose, eye), we may forget to seek unity because of our diversity

Illus: How many of you will not eat a certain type of food? Some of you know of my aversion to rice—it reminds me of maggots & I was tortured with it as a kid when my mom would make me eat everything, only to watch me throw up afterwards. She & my grandmother would tease me & tell me we were having rice for supper,

even when we weren't, just to watch me gag & complain. I say that because my dislike of rice makes me different than most—some people say I'm weird, but it may be everyone else likes the taste of maggots!

- We are diverse, but we are not to be divided (12:25)

**b. Seek unity in the church by carrying out ministry (12:14-26)**

- If you aren't really connected to the body or minimally connected, the body cannot show care for one another & suffer with you when you suffer or rejoice with you when you rejoice (12:25-26)
- This aspect of unity & ministry is best done in larger churches through the SS class, which are like smaller churches, built on fellowship, discipleship & ministry
- All are called to carry out ministry—you have been gifted by the Spirit to function in some way to affect the whole body

Illus: Have you ever seen someone experience a stroke & lose the ability to do something, like walk or talk? I've seen them lose the entire side of their body, like the left side. The church which has members who serve & members who don't serve is like a person recovering from a stroke—they aren't healthy & they are in danger unless they go through serious rehab to get better. Part of our church family keeps us from being healthy & the dangerous thing is they may cause others to become complacent & not serve

- Now, there are many service opportunities listed in your bulletin today—if you have a passion somewhere else, we may need to start more ministries, but don't walk away from here not caring about serving or thinking we don't have a place for you to serve

Illus: Do you view FBS as a hotel or a home? If you view it as a hotel, you may give a few \$\$ & expect room service to change the towels & make the bed & have an all-you-can-eat breakfast & wait on you hand & foot if there's something wrong (like the TV or AC), but if you view it as a home, then you take responsibility to serve & if you cannot do it or you need help, you seek advice from others—if it's your home & something's broken, you either fix it or notify someone to fix it

**c. Seek unity in the church, though diversified, & carry out ministry with charity (cf. chapter 13)**

- The end of chapter 12 introduces a multitude of gifts we've been given by the Spirit of God to do ministry throughout the whole body & chapter 13 says if we don't do it out of love for God & for people, we do it for naught

Illus: Have you ever visited a church & were greeted with a scowl? Or maybe an usher sat in a chair & lazily handed you a bulletin. Or maybe no one said a word to you personally (now, if you are a believer, it works both ways—even if you are visiting, you should greet others—but the greater responsibility is on the host church)—we want unity & ministry, but we must utilize charity or it doesn't represent Christ & His love for others

➤ One simple way to seek unity here at FBS is getting on the same page together—we have a group that has joined the last 8 years & were required to take Discover Sweetwater & another group who were grandfathered in (though the by-laws said they had to take a new members class)—I'm encouraging everyone who hasn't taken DS to take it & you can sign up for an upcoming class & we still have some room this afternoon, but come & let me know you are coming, because we will cut it off at 30

**Conc.** Tonto and the Lone Ranger were riding through a canyon together when all of a sudden both sides were filled with Native American warriors on horses, dressed for battle. The Lone Ranger turned to Tonto and asked, "What are we going to do?" Tonto replied, "What you mean 'we,' Whiteman?" (Edward Dobson, *In Search of Unity*, 20-27). The most successful countries in the world were those who united—France under Napoleon, Germany under Hitler, the American Colonies under Washington, but the further they got away from their core beliefs, they eventually splintered (that's what we are seeing in America today). Let that not be the church & let that most definitely not be FBS. We are called to seek unity, but not at all costs. We must not unify around false teaching about God, Jesus or salvation. We must not unify & accept sin which the culture deems acceptable. Our unity is around the truth in both belief & behavior. We want you on board with us, but that may mean you need to repent of the sin in your life to come to God on His terms, not your own. For others of you, it's time to join. Let's serve the Lord together in unity.