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**We Need Each Other**  
**John 17:20-23, 1 Corinthians 12: 12-27**

<sup>20</sup> “For just as the body is **one** and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are **one body**, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For in the **one Spirit** we were all baptized into one body—**Jews** or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of **one Spirit**. <sup>14</sup> Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup> But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup> **If all were a single member, where would the body be?** <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many members, yet one body. <sup>21</sup> 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.” <sup>22</sup> On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup> and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; <sup>24</sup> whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, <sup>25</sup> that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the **same care for one another**. <sup>26</sup> If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are **the body of Christ and individually members** of it.

**John 17:20-23**

Jesus prayed: I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup> that **they may all be one**. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, <sup>21</sup> so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup> The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that **they may be one, as we are one**, <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, **so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me**.

**UNITY.**

Is that even possible anymore? In our world? Or in the church?

**Is it possible** to have unity when we don't agree—

Socially? Politically? Theologically?

Allen Hilton, in his book *“A House United: How the Church Can Save the World”* makes a compelling argument for unity within and beyond the church.

But first, the **challenge**.

We live in some of the most polarized times ever, don't we?

The Civil War saw intense division, so did the 60s and the Civil Rights era.

But today—we're not just divided,

people everywhere are **throwing gasoline** on the fire of our divisions!

**Prejudice and bigotry are rampant** in this age of social media, and it's not just prejudice based on race or ethnicity or gender— it **ALSO includes social, political, and theological opinions** as well.

**We are so deeply divided** along lines of Left and Right, Liberal or Conservative, *Urban or Rural, Evangelical or Progressive!*

Society is divided, and **so is the greater Church**.

There are at least 33,000 Christian denominations in the world, and 29 of those are some version of Presbyterian.

Allen Hilton, *A House United: How the Church Can Save the World*, Fortress: Minneapolis, 2018, pg. 35-6.

And Christians have been divided over social, political and theological views **since the beginning of the church!**

Take a look at the **Book of Acts**.

They argued and fought over including Gentiles, non-Jews, within the church, and how to treat them if they did join!

There were also **heresies that divided the early church**, Like **Marcion**, who wanted to dump the Old Testament, Or the **Gnostics, who** sought secret knowledge of Jesus.

Christians have always been divided!

The Catholic church split when **Martin Luther** nailed his 95 theses against on the door of the church in Wittenburg in 1517!

Prominent theologians took sides in the great **Fundamentalist/Liberal divides** of the late 1800s.

Allen Hilton, *A House United: How the Church Can Save the World*, Fortress: Minneapolis, 2018, pg.

Today one of the biggest divides is between **evangelical and progressive Christians!**

We did not invent division, but we sure have given it a lot of power!

**WHY is this going on?**

Well, as human beings we are naturally **drawn to groups!**

We naturally **differentiate** between different kinds of people, and flock to those who appear to be like us.

And because we want to **belong** to a group,

We learn to **exclude** those outside our group!

This flocking to 'our' group is called **homophily**.

Allen Hilton, *A House United: How the Church Can Save the World*, Fortress: Minneapolis, 2018, pg.

**Homophily** is the tendency to form strong social connections with people who share one's defining characteristics, as age, gender, ethnicity, etc. ... Dictionary.Com  
And it's **part of a vicious cycle**, isn't it?

It's **not that groups are bad**—

We all need our groups

**The Church is a group** of people following Jesus Christ!

It's the **divisiveness**, and the **harsh rhetoric of hatred and prejudice and bigotry** that causes us to grow further and further apart---that's what's bad.

**Homophily**—can be a neutral thing.

But we live in a world, especially a social media world,

that takes that desire and can twist it into something **dark and hateful**.

And frankly, we forget that **social media is just that**---

It's primarily opinions out there, for social consumption.

It's not necessarily fact, or news, or truth.

And all too often, it's **hateful**.

Hilton says that we live in the "**Age of Anger**"—especially through media outlets like FOX News and MSNBC, that often fan the flames of **suspicion, division, and hatred** of the 'other' group. Allen Hilton, *A House United: How the Church Can Save the World*, Fortress: Minneapolis, 2018, pg.84

We also live in a "**Big Brother**" world online.

Notice how often Google or Facebook or other search engines actually **populate your newsfeed** with advertisements based on something you bought, or maybe just something you searched for on the web? Kind of scary, right?

**Well, these are real algorithms,**

used to sell us things and put us into---groups.

In fact, the news that pops up on our computers and phones is also led by algorithms, so that whether we lean more to Fox or MSNBC,

**we tend to only see the news that matches what we already watch,**

So we just keep **seeing only one perspective!**

This is pretty **serious**, considering over 50% of Americans say they get their news online today. Allen Hilton, *A House United: How the Church Can Save the World*, Fortress: Minneapolis, 2018, pg. 87

**So good grief—what can we do?**

We may not have the answers, but I believe **God sure does.**

What if we took a step back from our 'side',

and stop looking at those who are different as the 'other', or the enemy?

What if we **saw all people as our brothers and sisters** on this earth?

What if we considered everyone to be **our neighbor**, worthy of love, a **beloved child** of God?

**How on earth would we do that?**

And, how do we come to realize that **we actually need each other?**

I want to believe we can go back to some **BASICS**, from God. From Jesus.

Back to what **Jesus** is praying for in John 17.

And what **Paul** is talking about in 1 Corinthians 12.

Back to the ***Greatest Commandment***—to love God and neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22).

Where would all that take us?

Well, let's look at ***1 Corinthians 12***—

describing all of us as body parts in the one body of Christ, the church.

Each of us with a part to play in the community, for the common good, regardless of whether we are an eye, an ear, or a toe!

Everyone's gifts and talents are needed,

and the ***diversity is actually what creates the unity!***

Let me say that again—

***the DIVERSITY in the body is what makes it ONE whole body.***

If everyone was an ear or an eye, there would be no body.

Unity comes ***from the diversity***—not without it.

Think about that for a minute. We usually want a body---just like us!

What if we believed that---unity comes from diversity---

talk about a ***revolutionary thought*** for 2020!

***What if this is where Jesus' prayer comes in?***

Jesus prays that God would dwell in us, as God dwells in him, and he dwells in us.

***Why is this so important?***

That God infused life is like the ***kindling for unity***—God and Jesus are one,

And they give us the power to become one!

And that unity---- it's what can change the world!

Jesus says In his prayer that being one

is a powerful witness to the rest of the world.

Remember what He prays? That we would be one,

***so the world will believe God sent Him.***

***And, the world will know God loves us just as God loves Jesus!***

Amazing!

Think of that for a minute!

What do ***people outside the church usually HATE*** about church?

The hypocrisy! The fighting! The division!

Why can't those Christians get along? Who wants to be a part of that?

***So finding unity can truly change the world,***  
and ***change people's minds*** about the church and Jesus Christ!  
That's a call to action for us if we want to share the Good News all around us!

***Diversity is not bad, it's an ASSET.***  
Especially in the kingdom of God.  
Diversity brings ***gifts—for the common good.***  
It helps us live out our calling as Christians,  
and it can change the world!  
This is what we pray for in the Lord's Prayer:  
*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as in heaven!*

Hilton points out that ***business and military leaders already know the power of diversity!***

Business leaders know that a ***diverse*** group of people working on a project leads to more productivity and greater innovation!  
More minds, different minds, are so much better than one!  
When have you seen that at work?

And ***military leaders***—have seen this principal at work for years, watching people from all different perspectives and backgrounds work together to solve problems, fight wars, and help one another. They don't put the Republicans in one group and Democrats in another. They don't separate folks based on their backgrounds or ethnicity or even gender anymore—everyone is required and expected to work together. And what they've found is that this makes great teams. Diversity is an asset. A strength.

Allen Hilton, *A House United: How the Church Can Save the World*, Fortress: Minneapolis, 2018, pg.

The Bible agrees.

***Scripture is clear that we need each other.***

Proverbs 27:17 says: *As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.*

***Jesus and Paul*** are so passionate about unity—***because it's God's will for us.***

In ***Ephesians 4:1*** Paul says: *I .. beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing*

with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> making every effort to **maintain the unity** of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is **one** body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

We may not agree on much—**but can we agree on that?**

That we are part of **ONE body of Christ?**

I know someone who says that the ONLY thing that brings people together is a **natural disaster or some horrible tragedy.**

And we do come together after disasters, right?

But do we really need a disaster?

What about leaning into our **faith?**

What about looking to **Jesus?**

**If Jesus really dwells within us, don't we have the power to find true unity?**

**Jesus himself shows us the way to unity.**

Do you realize how diverse his 12 disciples were?

Jesus purposely chose religious and political opposites!

Matthew was a tax collector, who would have been working alongside Rome,

And Simon was a Zealot, a sworn enemy of the Roman empire.

Talk about opposites!

**If those two could serve on the same team, why can't we?**

Jesus had **women** followers in Luke 8, in a time when women were just property.

Jesus reached out to **every kind of person**, especially those who were

marginalized and ostracized—prostitutes, lepers, the sick and demon possessed.

And he literally **touched** these people.

He **ate** with them.

**Jesus is our model for tolerance of our differences,  
and an EMBRACE of diversity and inclusion.**

Unity, tolerance, inclusion is **not easy**, to be sure.

Anyone who has ever gathered around a table of relatives with different political views knows that!

But unity is **possible**.

Because with God, ***ALL THINGS are possible (Luke 1:37)!***

How does this unity work in practical terms?

It happens when we join together in ***mission, and service***, alongside one another.

It happens when we join in ***advocacy on behalf of others***.

One of the things I loved about the ***OpenTable Community Café*** was that we Presbyterians were working alongside Southern Baptists, Unitarians, Mormons, and more—because we ***all had the same goal:***

***to feed people*** in need!

A ***common mission*** can bring diverse people together in amazing ways.

And you know the ***most powerful thing*** that unites us?

***LOVE.***

We can be united through our ***love of the whole body***.

***Our love for Jesus Christ.***

We can let our ***love be more powerful*** than our different opinions.

Because ***God IS love***, this ***IS possible***.

***Friends, hear the Good News of the Gospel for you today:***

***We need each other.***

We need our differences, and our diversity.

It's what makes us one.

It's what Jesus prayed for and what Paul lifted up.

It's what can change the world.

And for this gift, all God's people say, Amen.