

Union Baptist Church  
31 Manhattan Avenue  
White Plains, New York 10607  
*Pastor Verlin D. Williams, D.Min.*

**Day 3: Unity and Community**

Lesson Title: "Building Bridges, Not Walls"

*12 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. 14 For in fact the body is not one member but many."*  
*1 Corinthians 12:12-14 NKJV*

Biblical Context

The church at Corinth was a diverse community facing various issues, including divisions and misunderstandings about spiritual gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul addresses these issues by emphasizing the unity and diversity of the body of Christ. Earlier in the chapter, Paul explains that while there are different spiritual gifts, they all come from the same Spirit and are intended for the common good.

*Verse by verse*

1 Corinthians 12:12: "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.

Commentary:

Paul uses the metaphor of the human body to illustrate the unity and interdependence of believers in Christ. Just as a human body is made up of various parts that function together as a whole, the church is composed of diverse individuals with different gifts and roles, yet all are unified in Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:13: " For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

Commentary:

Paul highlights the inclusivity and equality within the body of Christ. Regardless of ethnic, social, or cultural backgrounds, all believers are united by the Holy Spirit. The baptism by one Spirit signifies the spiritual unity and equality of all members within the church.

*(It's important to acknowledge that during the time of Paul's writing, slavery existed in various forms within the Roman Empire. However, there is a stark difference between that historical context and the horrific*

*enslavement of Africans in America. In the Roman world, slavery was often not based on race and could include paths to freedom. Conversely, the enslavement of Africans in America was brutal, dehumanizing, and legally codified, considering enslaved individuals as mere property or even fractions of a person, as reflected in the notorious three-fifths compromise in the U.S. Constitution.*

*Paul's mention of slaves and free people being united in the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:13 is not an endorsement or affirmation of slavery. Instead, it emphasizes the radical equality and unity that faith in Christ brings, transcending social, ethnic, and economic barriers. The message of the Gospel seeks to dismantle the divisions that enslave and devalue humanity, calling believers to recognize the inherent dignity and worth of every individual, ultimately highlighting that all are equal in the eyes of God.)*

1 Corinthians 12:14: "For in fact the body is not one member but many.

Commentary:

Here, Paul reiterates the diversity within the unity of the body. The church's strength and functionality come from its diversity, as each member contributes uniquely to the whole. This diversity is not a weakness but rather a vital aspect of the church's design.

The primary lesson of 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 is about unity in diversity within the body of Christ. Paul emphasizes that, despite differences in gifts, backgrounds, and roles, all believers are essential and interconnected in Christ. This passage encourages believers to value and appreciate each other's unique contributions and work together harmoniously for the common good of the church and the advancement of the Gospel.

In 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, several key concepts can be emphasized:

**Unity in Diversity:** The passage highlights the concept of unity within the body of Christ, emphasizing that although there are many members, they collectively form one body. This underscores the importance of unity despite the diversity among members.

**Interdependence:** Each member plays a unique role, and the health of the body relies on the cooperation and contribution of all its parts. Each individual has a vital role to play, and their contributions are valuable to the whole community.

**Inclusivity:** The text emphasizes inclusivity by stating that all people, regardless of background (Jews or Greeks, slaves or free), are part of the same body through baptism by one Spirit. This highlights the breaking down of social, ethnic, and cultural barriers within the community of faith in Jesus Christ.

**Spiritual Unity:** The passage underscores that it is through one Spirit that all members are united, pointing to the shared spiritual foundation that binds the diverse members together in Christ.

By focusing on these concepts, a congregation can reflect on the importance of promoting a sense of unity, embracing diversity, valuing every individual's contribution, and nurturing a communal spirit rooted in shared faith.

*Bridging The Divide*

At Harmony Baptist Church, differences in perspectives emerged as newer members joined the congregation. Long-standing members, who had been part of the church for many years, had grown accustomed to their traditional roles and cherished the familiar customs they had upheld. Meanwhile, new members brought with them fresh ideas and enthusiasm, eager to contribute to the church's growth.

Sarah, a newcomer, had exciting suggestions for the community worship night, aiming to bring a new dimension to the cherished event. However, she noticed that the church often followed its established routines, making it challenging for her ideas to gain traction. As a result, she began to feel less motivated, wondering if her contributions were being truly heard.

Pastor James detected a pattern in the church's modest progress and decided to address it. Drawing inspiration from 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, he emphasized the value of each person's unique gifts and how integral they are to the church's mission. His sermons highlighted the concept that, just as the body is composed of many parts that work together as one, so too is the church community. By fostering a culture of collaboration and openness, the church began to embrace change and innovation more readily. This shift led to meaningful conversations and a stronger, more inclusive ministry environment where everyone's contributions were recognized and celebrated.

*Discussion questions:*

1. Reflecting on 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, how can we better recognize and integrate the unique gifts and talents of all our members, both longstanding and new, to further the church's mission?
2. In what ways can we create a more inclusive environment that encourages open dialogue and values contributions from every member, regardless of their tenure with the church?
3. What steps can we take as a church community to ensure that traditions are respected while also being open to innovative ideas that may enhance our ministry efforts?
4. How can we actively involve new members in decision-making processes to ensure that their fresh perspectives and enthusiasm are effectively harnessed and appreciated in our church activities?