

We're Different, We're Needed, We're One

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everybody. Good to see you. Shall we just take a moment before we start to pray?! Let's do that. Lord God, we thank you that in Jesus we have a living head. We don't need to self-start spiritually. We don't need to lead. We can rely on you.

We can trust you. You will sustain us. You will keep us. Father, we thank you that out of the life that you have given us in Jesus flows everything else.

We don't have to achieve it. We don't have to earn it. We just have to receive it. Lord, please help us then to receive, along with that amazing gift, all of the other good gifts you have given us.

The gift of your word. The gift of this time. The gift of one another. We pray that in Jesus' name.

Amen. When we lived in London, I used to play badminton with some school dads most weeks. We'd book out of court. We had fun. Chatted a bit afterwards. Sometimes go for a beer as well. And we were pretty committed because it was a lot of fun and we realised that we had to do something to stay in some sort of shape.

[1 : 31] Shape, we'll come back to that word. But if you'd asked us, are you family? If you'd asked us, are you guys bound together as one?

Are you as close as a hand is to an arm? I think we probably just would have looked at each other and said, no?

We all like badminton? We're all sort of the same level so nobody gets whipped too badly and it stays kind of fun. And we occasionally like to have a beer.

But that's about as far as it goes, right? Is church like badminton club? I guess we all do have places like that, right?

Where we have something in common with people and we don't mind going and sometimes it's quite fun. You know, work, obviously. Maybe the neighbourhood. Maybe the gym.

[2 : 34] Football. Community centre. But is church like that? You know, we all like God. Don't we?

We kind of have that in common. And I come to the same place as you to learn more about him.

Listen to him, hopefully. And most of the time we don't totally wind each other up.

Is that the limits of the connection though? I don't think we're like that at Bethel. I don't think we're like the badminton club.

There's more going on. I see it happening. We're not like that. It shouldn't be like that. Why isn't it like that? 1 Corinthians 12 tells us we're one body with many parts.

Whether we know each other. How well we know each other. Whether we even like each other. We haven't joined a club for fun, have we?

[3 : 42] We are family. Jesus tells us we are all one. We are all different. We are all needed. That's what 1 Corinthians 12 says. What does that actually mean?

Well, let's start with this. We're one. Look back to verse 3 with me. Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, Jesus be cursed.

And no one can say, Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit. We are one with Jesus when we say, by the Spirit, Jesus is Lord.

Did you get that? That unites us to Christ as the Spirit works that in us. Then go down to verse 13. For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free.

And we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Paul says we were all baptised by one Spirit. That is, we were all saved when one Spirit came into us, came over us, enabled us to say, Jesus is Lord.

[4 : 57] We became one with the same person. We became one with him in the same way through the Holy Spirit. And so we're one with each other. And then Paul tells us, quietly, so we have to listen well, what is behind this.

Let's look at verse 4. There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Holy Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord Jesus. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them, and in everyone, it is the same Father God. At work. Here is the Trinity.

You see that? At work is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. And he's one God. That's what the Bible says. So when you look around, it's obvious that we're different. Isn't it? But our oneness, our unity in that difference, in that diversity, reflects the nature of the one God who is three.

[6 : 09] And it's the same Spirit who works in us now. Just like my Spirit, your Spirit, animates the parts of our body, the Holy Spirit lives and moves in us all as a church.

His body. Here's an amazing thing to think about. I really only was struck by this this week. When Jesus came down to carry out his mission, he had a body on earth.

Didn't he? Now he's ascended and to carry out his mission, Jesus has a body on earth. That's us. And it looks like our picture here, a stained glass window. That's what it looks like. Stained glass window. Think about that for a minute. It needs different pieces of glass, doesn't it? Different colours, different shapes.

But it needs more than that. They need pulling into a form, don't they? They need pulling together into a shape, an outline, an image. Because otherwise, they're just random bits of coloured glass. But that isn't enough either.

[7 : 20] because the point of a stained glass window is to do what? Transmit light. Isn't it? The point of the stained glass window is to admit the light, to let the light shine through it.

And when the light passes through, each individual piece, assembled into that shape, then it's a stained glass window. That's the church.

Different pieces, different shapes, different colours brought together in the image and outline of Jesus, sharing light because of the light and life of the Holy Spirit shining through it.

That's how we're one body. Do the parts of the body always work well together? There's a question. Do you ever kneed yourself in the face while you were bouncing on the trampoline?

Okay. There's your answer. The parts of the body do not always work perfectly together, do they? But the fact is they are one. It's your knee that kneed you in the face on the trampoline.

[8 : 32] That person you like the least in the church. The wonderful upside down Bible truth from God is that you are inextricably, irrevocably, eternally joined to that person on the deepest level of reality.

That's a thought, isn't it? What do we do with that? What does God intend for us to do with that truth that we are one? Let's look at verse 25.

Why has God done it? So that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.

Here's God's plan, here's the reason he's made us one, put us together, even with the least likely looking person, because he doesn't want any divisions in his body.

Because he wants the parts of the body to have equal concern for each other. In other words, we're to love each other, aren't we? We are to love each other with the love that he then goes on to talk about in chapter 13.

[10 : 04] Read it. It's amazing. We're to suffer together. We're to rejoice together. If you cut me, she bleeds.

That's what we're talking about. That's what God has in mind for us. And that is so against what we hear out there, isn't it? The culture we swim in says, you as an individual, that's what matters the most.

It teaches us to say, I am one. I am the basic unit. And there's only one of me. Jesus teaches us, you all are one.

You are one. And if we are his church, we say, in response, we are one. That has some implications, doesn't it?

That means we have to know each other well enough to see the suffering, to see the rejoicing in each other's lives. We have to love each other well enough to be aware of those things, don't we?

[11 : 18] Then we can do it together. That's why we're so interested, we talked about this year, deepening our relationships together, so that there's more of that at Bethel. That's why I'm so

thankful when, you know, for instance, Will comes up to me after the service and he says, yeah, you're looking a bit tired.

Are you okay? I love that. Do you know why? Because he knows me well enough to know my tired face. Because we're one.

Jesus is amazing, isn't he? He doesn't set us a ladder and say, climb it. He just says, try to be what I've made you. He doesn't ask us then to get along with each other like good children because good children get rewards.

He says, I've made you one. So be one. Learn to know each other. Learn to love each other.

So we're one. But also, we're different. Look, you remember, we've already seen, haven't we, flick back over the page to verses four, six, that God is at work in us in different ways.

[12:35] Look, there are different kinds of gifts, verse four, different kinds of service, different kinds of working. And he moves on and he makes that even clearer, verse 14. And so the body is not made up of one part, but many.

Many different parts. We're different. Different talents, different strengths. But you know, God knows what we tend to do with differences.

Do you know what we do with differences? We rank them. That's what we do as human beings. From the ones we like best to the ones we don't like so much. So suddenly, people who heal are better than those who help wash up.

Preachers are more important than welcomers. When a musician walks into the church, we mob them. Right?

But when an old prayer warrior walks into the church, do we recognize their value? And then we think, if I don't have one of those better gifts, talents, whatever you want to call them, then we think, well, do I really belong?

[13:56] Am I really a part? You know, I don't have Bob's way of praying out loud. I don't have Alison's insights into human beings. I don't have Tasha's gift of encouragement or Gareth's joyful way.

I can't sing or play like Andy. Sooner or later, they'll find me out. I don't really belong. God knows what we like.

So he has Paul say these words, verse 15. Now, if the foot should say, because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body, it would not, for that reason, stop being part of the body.

And if the ear should say, because I'm not an eye, I do not belong to the body, it would not, for that reason, stop being part of the body. If 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? In other words, what's the point of an ear if there's no foot to carry it to the person who needs to be heard?

[14:59] Where's the preacher going to be if the person who unlocks the doors doesn't turn up? Where would the Sunday school teacher be without the table mover?

Where would the left brain be without the right? Where would the creative type be without the organiser? What is the evangelist without the person who makes the new believer feel at home? Just a mouth without a heart. Right? We belong. Each and every one of us, we're different, we belong together.

In fact, read on to verse 18, but in fact, God has placed the parts of the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. In the original it says, it pleased God to do it like this.

It pleased God to make you the way he's made you and to make you the part of his body that he's chosen for you to be. He's pleased with that.

[16:03] That's what he wants. See, we think difference is deficiency. Better and worse.

Jesus says, difference is my design. So we can't say, well, I'm nowhere near as good as that person, so I'll just watch.

Because then we don't use our gifts. And so we deprive ourselves and other people of the joy that can be created when we serve with our gifts. And we also can't say, well, it's always worked when I did it this way, and then just expect everybody else to copy us.

We can't say that. Because they're not shaped and called to be like us. They're shaped and called to be like Jesus in their own way. We're different.

And we actually need diversity, the biblical kind, to be whole. Do you do jigsaw puzzles? We did one on holiday.

[17 : 13] They're supposed to be relaxing. Until you say, but we need to finish it this week because then we have to pack up and go home. Yes, I can make even jigsaw puzzles a stressful experience for you if you let me.

I'm working on it. Puzzle pieces, they all look so similar. Sometimes it drives you nuts, doesn't it? Especially with the big ones. They're so similar.

But they're all different. And if even one of them is missing or duplicated, the picture is not complete. We need to be different to picture Christ fully.

And actually, if you think about it, that frees us. It doesn't constrain us. It frees us. Have you thought about what being truly independent means? I don't need anybody else.

It means the pressure is on you to be good at everything. Because otherwise, you're dependent on someone else. And do you know what happens?

[18 : 16] Have you noticed what happens when we encourage everybody to be a unique, one of the kind, never copy anybody else, don't listen to others, look at what they're doing, be a true original? Do you know what happens?

They all end up dressing the same. Buying the same gear, watching the same TV shows, talking about the same things. But when God says, I am one with others and I can be different, that's freedom.

Because now I can be me, but I don't have to be good at everything. I don't have to do everything other people do. And even when God asks us all to do the same thing, caring for others, sharing the good news about Jesus, I can do that in my hand-shaped way.

And you can do it in yours. Think about it another way, we are tools in the hands of the master craftsman. And he's recreating and shaping children for himself.

And he doesn't need to use a needle to do a hammer's job. You don't send in a gardening hand when a listening ear is needed. That's why you don't ask me to create works of art for the old chapel.

[19 : 29] And you don't ask Kez to preach. Yet. No. Did I say that? No. Thanks. This is good news, isn't it?

But it's really good news if we know what shape we are. Do you know? Do you know what shape you are? What kind of tool are you?

What kind of tool Do you know where and how God wants you to serve his family? Do you know how you're not like that brother or sister?

Could you find out what they are like so you can encourage them in their shape? Their gifts? That's why we're doing this thinking together in the next coming weeks. Helping each other figure out what shape we are.

Where we fit best. So we as a church family can get that right together. So we're one. We're needed. We're different.

[20 : 34] There we go. We're needed. The last thing. There's one other thing we tend to forget when we don't realise that we're one in Jesus and we just look at our different gifts. Right?

We start thinking that we don't really need certain people when we do that ranking. We need the leadership team. They're probably essential.

Aren't they? We need the Sunday school teachers. Couldn't really worship without that. But apart from them others or do we really need them?

Or maybe we don't really need we believe anybody. We're just back to being part of the badminton club. It's not about needing people. I'm just here for the fun. Let's look at verse 20.

As it is there are many parts but one body. And Paul goes on the eye cannot say to the hand I don't need you. And the head cannot say to the feet I don't need you.

[21 : 44] On the contrary those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. And the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unrepresentable are treated with special modesty while our representable parts need no special treatment.

But God has put the body together giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it. We need every part of the body.

What? Even the appendix? Well let's think about the appendix for a moment. What's the point? It just sits there doesn't it? Using up energy oxygen not doing very much and then occasionally it gets very inflamed and angry and tries to kill you.

Until recently it was thought of as basically redundant useless sort of left over from some stage of evolution that we've outgrown. Someone should just come up with a way to give us all an appendectomy at birth shouldn't they?

That would just save a lot of trouble. further down the line. Spoiler alert. Science got it wrong. It turns out that the appendix functions as a storage centre for the good bacteria that needed to help your gut recover when you've been sick.

[23 : 07] It actually supports the immune system. Without it immunity is much harder. and here I was ready to surgically remove all of yours.

That's the point isn't it? What we think of as weak and inconvenient maybe even a liability God says is indispensable. There are no redundant parts of God's body.

and that means of course that we need everybody to play their part. Look back to verse 7. Now to each one the manifestation of the spirit that is our gifts and abilities are given for the common good. we all have something and all of it is needed. See we think if someone's weaker than me I don't need them.

Jesus says you are weak and what looks weak to you I will use to make you healthy. Do you know who orders the biscuits around here?

[24 : 24] Who opens the building? Who puts away the tables? Who unblocks the toilets? Who drains the baptistry? Who puts together the slides? Do you know who faithfully prays for every sick person in this church for every child who comes through the doors?

Can we do without them? Can we even measure the impact they've had? We are all needy.

We are all needed. Our culture says be independent. Don't be tied in. Don't be obliged by anybody. Jesus didn't come to baptise our culture. He came to baptise us into one body so that we will love and serve each other and him. And for some that's going to bring attention with those outside who don't live that way.

And who don't understand it. We know that, don't we? This is so different. But for all of us it means admitting we are needy. So let me start.

[25 : 34] I need extra help understanding people who are different to me. I know it. Let's think though. This really helps us understand how to treat people well, doesn't it?

This is why we don't put everybody up front. Because we know that for some people that would be super stressful and uncomfortable.

They would really, really not want to be here. They're not high profile. They are treated with, if you like, modesty.

from the outside, that might look like they don't get a fair share. They don't get equal opportunities. They're pushed aside. But it's the right thing to do because it reflects their shape and respects that. And it shows them love. On the other hand, there are members of our church here for whom we do far more than is normal because their needs and their shape demands it.

[26 : 38] in one sense, we give them greater honour that way, don't we? From the outside, you can say, well, that doesn't look fair. What about me?

Don't I need more help? Why do they get more? This is Christ's way. Thank God for it. Because any one of us could be that greater need, couldn't we?

At any time. So the antidote to the I don't need you thinking is I admit my own need. Isn't it? Let's look around you for a moment.

I really mean it. Look around you for a moment. These are the brothers and sisters with whom Christ has made you one, if they are committed to this church.

I'd love you to just say to yourself, out loud if you like, but you don't have to, say to yourself, I need these people and they need me.

[27 : 44] I belong here. If you don't belong to Jesus Christ, you're here today, you are welcome. Doesn't this sound good?

A little bit scary maybe? ask that Holy Spirit to show you your need and to show you what the cross of Jesus Christ means.

Ask the Holy Spirit to bring you to say, Jesus is Lord. God so friends as a church as we enter a time of thinking about our shape, reflecting, trying to figure out what that means for us, I want you to hear this.

You have insights and gifts that nobody else has. Share them. You have abilities and talents that nobody else can bring.

Figure out what they are, use them. You are one with every single person who is committed to this church. Learn to know them and love them.

[29 : 03] We're tuning those things over at Community Group this week, going deeper, learning how to do this. Please be there if you can. If you can't, that's okay. We'll make sure those materials get sent to you.

I think the Lord wants us to know we're all different, we're all needed, we're all one in Christ. Isn't God good that he has put us together, made us together, his image and his body?
Let's praise him and thank him for that. And then be who God has made us to be. Amen.