

Building Better Relationships
Pt 2: It's OK to be Different!
1 Corinthians 12:14-20

How would you feel about having one simple meal that you ate all the time?
And you never, ever ate anything else.
One simple meal, the same simple meal, that you ate for breakfast lunch and dinner, over and over and over. Day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year.
Let's say it's a baloney sandwich. And that's all you ever ate. Nothing else, ever!
No lasagna, no pizza, no steak, no salmon, no pies, no cakes, no fruit, no salads, no vegetables...
No side dish of any kind, no salad of any kind, no desserts of any kind....
How long before you got sick and tired of baloney sandwiches?
Most normal people appreciate a variety in their meals.

Why is it that many of these same people don't like variety among other people?
Why is it that many of these same people are so uncomfortable around those who are "different" in some way than they are?
Whether you are talking racial difference, or social economic difference, or nationality difference, or age difference, or political difference, or cultural difference.....
Many people are extremely uncomfortable around someone who is "different" from them.
Why is that?

This morning we want to discuss the fact that in regards to relationships, it's OK to be different.
It's OK for YOU to be different than someone else.
And, it's OK for someone else to be different than you.
Let's take a look at our key verses:

1 Corinthians 12:14-20

- 14 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.
15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.
16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.
17 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?
18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.
19 If they were all one part, where would the body be?
20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

The Apostle Paul is talking about members within a church. His point is that members within the body of Christ are all different. And that difference is a good thing.

We have different spiritual gifts.

We have different talents.

We have different abilities.

We have different skills.

And those difference are OK. In fact, those differences are good.

It's that very diversity which makes everything happen.
Not all of us can sing like Mark Nottingham.
Not all of us can play the guitar like Rob Jones.
Not all of us can teach like Jim Thomson or Ben Clevenger.
Not all of us would do very well working in the nursery.
Not all of us could survive working with the teenagers.

Not everyone feels comfortable visiting people in the hospital.
Not everyone is organized enough to plan social activities.
Not everyone has the technical know how to run the sound system.
...the list goes on and on and on and on.

God has made all of us different. We all bring something unique to the table. And when all the parts of the body function in a healthy way, we can accomplish great things for the Lord.

Unfortunately, sometimes it's those very differences among us that become barriers in our relationships.

God doesn't intend for that to happen.

We have to learn that it is OK to be different.

In fact, it's more than OK. Being different is part of God's plan.

Therefore:

1. Accept your difference.

Don't ever, every wish that you could be someone else.

God is the one who made you. Simply focus on being the very best you, that you can be.

Nobody else can be as good of a you as you can be.

So don't ever be envious of others. You can't be them, they can't be you.

Just be the very best person that God created YOU to be.

Let's look again at our key verses; verse 18:

1 Corinthians 12:18 "But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be."

You are who you are because that's how God made you!

As the children's song says, "Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight..."

You are precious in God's sight.

Psalms 139:13 "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb."

First of all this verse tells you that God "knit you together" in your mother's womb.

A. God Himself created you from the moment of your conception.

That's where life begins. Life begins at conception.

From the moment of your conception God has been involved in your creation.

God is intimately aware of every detail of your life.

There is not a single detail about you that he doesn't know.

He is ultimately the One who grants you life.

The very next verse is equally incredible:

Psalms 139:14 "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."

This verse says that you are "wonderfully made."

Your life is a wonderful thing. YOU are a wonderful being.

To make sure you understand this, the psalmist uses that word "wonderful" twice!

B. You are wonderful!

Don't take your life for granted. YOU are wonderful!

You are unique. There is not another person in all of creation who is exactly like you.

There never has been, there never will be.
Accept and appreciate that uniqueness.
Embrace the fact that you are different.

You are a creation of God!

Psalm 100:3 "Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture."

Ephesians 2:10 "For we are God's workmanship..."

Never, ever forget that you were "custom made" by God Himself.
He didn't use an assembly line to make you.
He didn't use a cookie cutter to make you.
He didn't use a sewing pattern to make you.
He "knit" you together, you are his "workmanship", you are "wonderfully made."

Don't ever be ashamed of your uniqueness.
Accept your God given, God designed, God created difference.

And never forget that:

C. Jesus knows you individually.

You're not just a number to Jesus.
You're not just another person to Jesus.
You're not some unknown stranger to Jesus.
Jesus knows you individually.

John 10:14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me."

John 10:27 "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."

2 Timothy 2:19 "...The Lord knows those who are his..."

You are way too special to be overlooked by Jesus.
You are way too unique to be missed by Jesus.
Jesus sees how different you are from everyone else.
Accept your God given, God designed, God created difference. Likewise:

2. Accept the difference in others.

You are unique. That does not make you better than anyone else, nor does it make you worse than anyone else. It does, however, make you special.
Furthermore: Everyone you know is unique. That does not make everyone you know better than you, nor does it make everyone you know worse than you. It does, however, make everyone you know, special.

Therefore, accept the difference in others. Look again at our key verses:

1 Corinthians 12:14, 19, 20

14 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.

19 If they were all one part, where would the body be?

20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

It's God's plan that we would all be different. Therefore:

A. Don't let differences create prejudice.

Prejudice manifests itself racially, economically, socially, educationally, physically.....
Others are treated worse or better based upon prejudices that people have.

Unfortunately, that's just the way our society is. James addresses this issue in his epistle:

James 2:1 "My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism."

I want you to dream with me for just a little bit.
What would you think of a religion which would not only welcome, but truly embrace every single person in the world? A religion in which no one is forced to join, but anyone and everyone is welcome to join.

Regardless of their nationality. Regardless of their ethnicity.
Regardless of their socioeconomic status. Regardless of their political ideology.
Regardless of their age. Regardless of their gender.
Regardless of their education or intelligence.....they are all welcome!

Is that too idealistic? Is that merely a dreamers utopia? Is that the stuff of fairy tales?
Is it nothing more than a philosophical wish?

The fact of the matter is, such a religion does indeed exist: if you would call Christianity a religion.

Christianity embraces all humankind.

Of all the religions of the world, throughout history, Christianity has by far been the most all encompassing, all embracing, all accepting, all admitting religion that has ever existed.

That's why the Apostle Peter could say:

Acts 10:34-35

34 Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism
35 but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right."

God doesn't show favoritism. But sometimes we do. Unfortunately.
The most obvious is when we judge by external appearances.

B. Don't let differences create division.

Most of the people in the world are going to look different than you.
That's OK! It's OK to be different. It's OK for others to be different than you.
It's OK for others to look different than you. It's all part of God's plan.

Don't let those physical differences create division.

Don't let those physical appearances create division.

Embrace the fact that God has created people differently. Celebrate our diversity.

Unfortunately, too often around the world differences in appearance create division in relationships.

Kate Lorenz of CareerBuilder.com writes,

"Studies show attractive students get more attention and higher evaluations from their teachers, good-looking patients get more personalized care from their doctors, and handsome criminals receive lighter sentences than less attractive convicts.

A survey of 11,000 33-year-olds found that unattractive men earned 15 percent less than those deemed attractive.

According to Dr. Gordon Patzer, human beings are hard-wired to respond more favorably to attractive people. 'Good-looking men and women are generally judged to be more talented, kind, honest and intelligent than their less attractive counterparts, controlled studies show people go out of their way to help attractive people because they want to be liked and accepted by good-looking people.'"

Too often, people are judged by external appearances.
That's not the way God wants you to treat others.
It's not the way God treats you or anyone else.
Just before David was anointed to be the next king of Israel, God made the following statement:

1 Samuel 16:7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height...
The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but
the LORD looks at the heart."

There's an old saying, "You can't judge a book by its cover."
Judging people by their "cover" is a terrible thing to do.
God doesn't do it, you shouldn't either.

C. Don't let differences keep you from loving others.

What it all boils down to is to love without prejudice.
Do we love others?

James 2:8 "If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself,"
you are doing right."

Loving others is the right thing to do!
(I've shared this with you before, but I want to bring it up again)
Do you remember the theme song from the TV show, Cheers?
I always thought that would be a great theme song for a church.
Listen to the lyrics:
"Making your way in the world today takes everything you've got.
Taking a break from all your worries, sure would help a lot.
Wouldn't you like to get away?
Sometimes you want to go, where everybody knows your name,
and they're always glad you came.
You wanna be where you can see, our troubles are all the same
You wanna be where everybody knows your name.
You wanna go where people know, people are all the same,
You wanna go where everybody knows your name."

I just think that would be a cool theme song for a church.
Because it's about treating everyone equally. Welcoming everyone equally.
It's about loving without prejudice. Which, by the way, is the way God loves you.
God loves your uniqueness. It's the way he created you.
Accept your difference. Accept the difference in others.
God loves those differences.
Because of love, He came here in the person of Jesus Christ and gave His life on the cross for
your salvation. Have you responded to God's love? Have you surrendered your life to Him?