

Understanding diversity in the church, part 2

It is Scripture that should correct, refine, or confirm our understanding of diversity in the church. God's Word directs us to understand diversity from a divine, heavenly, eternal perspective. There are joys and challenges in diversity on the earthly level, but the higher priority is the heavenly perspective. Two areas of diversity conclude this two-part analysis: the especially challenging area of doctrinal diversity and the God-ordained, purposeful diversity in spiritual gifting.

V. *Doctrinal diversity*

1. *Preliminary thoughts:* For this sermon we limit this to the meaning of the written text and not significance or application and affirm from the start that all Scripture is profitable (2 Timothy 3:16), but doctrines are not necessarily of the same "weight."
2. *Analyzing diversity in light of a heavenly and eternal perspective:* When you stand before Christ will He say that you have done well to hold to doctrinal diversity and not to strive for doctrinal unity? I believe not.
 - a. A few select reasons not to strive for doctrinal diversity: 1) Doctrinal diversity diminishes the divine attribute of truth (John 14:6; 17:17; Isaiah 65:16). 2) Jesus rebuked the Sadducees for not knowing the Scripture (Matthew 22:29). 3) To stand approved and unashamed before God requires rightly handling the Word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). 4) God gifted the church to strive toward unity of the faith, to avoid being driven about by various doctrines, and to grow up into Christ—who is the truth (Ephesians 4:13–15).
 - b. Select "tips" to handle doctrinal diversity: 1) Ask such questions as to the 'weightiness', the certainty, and the comprehensiveness of the doctrine. 2) Maintain humility of mind. 3) In all disagreement avoid quarrels, be patient and gentle, reference Scripture, and rely upon God to change hearts and minds (2 Timothy 2:24–26).
 - c. The value to doctrinal diversity lies in the challenge to continually evaluate what we believe in light of Scripture (cf. Acts 17:11).

Remember the heavenly, eternal consequence of being approved by God (or not).

VI. *Diversity in spiritual gifting (1 Corinthians 12:14–30)*

The Corinthian believers were not handling well diversity in spiritual gifting. Paul corrects their misunderstandings using the physical body as an illustration to develop two principles and then applying it to them as the body of Christ.

1. *The body needs diversity to function normally (12:14–19).*

'Lesser' functions do not remove that part from the body (vv. 15–16) and every function is needed for the body to be what it should be (vv. 17–19). Every believer is challenged to consider and value their function in the Body of Christ. You are gifted to contribute to the body; you receive from the body in order to give back to the body.
2. *The body is joined as one even though it is diverse (12:20–26).*

Diversity in the body is subordinate to the unity of that one body. A supposed "greater" function does not remove dependence upon the rest of the body (v. 21). The "lesser" or "weaker" functions are still indispensable and are compensated by God with special honor (vv. 22–24). Interdependence avoids division and leads to mutual concern (v. 25–26).
3. *The Body of Christ has the same unity and the same divinely appointed diversity in its members as a physical body (12:27–30).*

Believers relate to one another as in a physical body (v. 27). God appoints the believer's function in the Body as in a physical body (v. 28). No one gift is possessed by all (vv. 29–30), so we need to value all the members.

You need the diversity which God has created in the church, the Body of Christ, but that diversity exists for the proper functioning of the one Body and should not divide you from other members. God intended your diversity as gifted believers to bring you together. Working together reveals Christ and brings Him glory.

Understanding diversity in the church requires of us a heavenly, eternal perspective. God's Word guides us in the evaluation and response. Our concern should be for God's glory and what pleases Him. Jesus' ultimate goal is a spotless church (Ephesians 5:27) and that should be our desire, too.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- Pick a doctrinal difference that exists in churches. What might be the consequences of it? How would you evaluate the 'weight' of the doctrine? Why? How certain can a person be? Why?
- Can you defend biblically some teaching you hold to that has recently been challenged?
- How do you personally evaluate a person's involvement in a local church? Does your basis for evaluating align with the teaching of 1 Corinthians 12?