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The Blessings of Diversity

Being unified in Christ doesn't mean we all must be the same.

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The 10th chapter of Acts gives us a series of events that dramatically altered the mission and scope of the early Church and further established the principle that all people—across socioeconomic status, race, and nationality—are invited to come unto Christ and “partake of his goodness” (2 Nephi 26:33). No longer would the gospel be preached only to the house of Israel (see Matthew 15:24). Now the glorious news of Christ and the Resurrection would be taught to all God’s children, an effort that has created the rich tapestry of diversity we see in the restored Church today.

Unity in Diversity

By the end of Acts 10, we find that Peter has come to realize that “God is no respecter of persons” (verse 34), meaning that ultimately God will invite everyone to receive His gospel. Like the prophets in the Book of Mormon before him (see 1 Nephi 17:35; Alma 26:37), Peter now understood the universal reach

of the gospel—that when the Savior commanded his Apostles to “go ye therefore, and teach all nations” (Matthew 28:19), the Savior sincerely meant all nations and everyone in them, Jew or Gentile.

Today, missionaries from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints serve in more than 400 missions worldwide. Church publications are printed in 188 languages. Over 30,000 congregations meet each Sunday in North and South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and throughout the Pacific.

Latter-day scripture teaches us that the diversity of Church members should enhance our united work in preparation for the Lord’s Second Coming. This distinctiveness includes racial, ethnic, gender, and language differences, as well as our varied gifts, perspectives, and experiences. Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that “the diversity of persons and peoples all around the globe is a strength of this Church.”¹



Yet, in my teaching at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, I find that students sometimes struggle to reconcile their notions of diversity and unity. For many, these two ideas can feel incompatible. Thankfully, through class activities and discussions, many students come to understand that Christ's version of unity is about togetherness, not sameness.² As conveyed by Paul's "body of Christ" metaphor for the Church (see 1 Corinthians 12:12–27), our differences enhance our ability to work together in harmony to accomplish the divine mission of the Church and to help build God's kingdom on earth.

The World's Definition of "Different"

Outside the gospel of Jesus Christ, the word *different* can have a negative and isolating connotation. To the world, *different* means "unlike the norm," "incompatible," or "separate." But within the gospel of Jesus Christ, there is no norm—other than a unified desire to follow the Savior. No one person is

valued more than the other. There is nothing better or worse about being a woman or a man, Argentine or American, tall or short, black or white, impoverished or wealthy, because "all are alike unto God" (2 Nephi 26:33).

We may differ in our obedience to the commandments given to us by our Father in Heaven. But our choices do not diminish God's love and hope for us. And even though we may differ in our commitment, we are taught to love and refrain from judgment³ and to serve in the Church notwithstanding differences in our obedience because, after all, "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Additive Unity

Bishop Gérald Caussé, Presiding Bishop, taught that "unity is not achieved by ignoring and isolating members who seem to be different."⁴ Christ's unity is not subtractive, whereby we disregard the significance of our differences. It is



additive. We strive to understand, to appreciate, and to integrate our differences in order to carry out the Lord's work. Our efforts to acknowledge and incorporate what makes each of us unique further unite us in Christ. Thus, our differences bring us together just as our doctrinal commonalities do.

Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has said that “the diversity we find now in the Church may be just the beginning.” He continued: “It’s not just diversity for diversity’s sake, but . . . people can bring different gifts and perspectives. And the wide range of experience and backgrounds and challenges that people face will show us what really is essential in the gospel of Christ. And much of the rest that’s been, perhaps, acquired over time and is more cultural than doctrinal can slip away, and we can really learn to be disciples.”⁵ Our differences, in other words, should help us better understand and live the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

Becoming Disciples Together

Being united in Christ with our differences requires concerted effort. Consider the following three personal commitments as you seek to achieve greater unity in Christ in your ward or branch and within the global Church.

1

Seek regular and meaningful interactions with those who differ from you. This can be difficult when we live in isolated communities. At the “Be One” celebration in June 2018, President Dallin H. Oaks, First Counselor in the First Presidency, indicated that it was not until he moved from Utah as a young man and lived in Chicago and in Washington, D.C., that he became aware of “the pain and frustration experienced by those who suffered [priesthood and temple] restrictions.”⁶

Elder John C. Pingree Jr. of the Seventy described the experience of a Latter-day Saint family that moved to a new city: “Instead of finding a home in an affluent neighborhood, they felt impressed to locate to an area with considerable social and economic needs. Over the years, the Lord has worked through them to support many individuals and to build up their ward and stake.”⁷ We may need to go out of our way to have meaningful interactions with those who differ from us.

2

Talk openly about differences. Listening closely to and learning from the perspectives and experiences of others can be uncomfortable. However, doing so helps us realize just how much we see the world as we are rather than as it is. When we prayerfully allow ourselves to be open to learn from our differences, we can identify and change our misconceptions and unintended biases. We develop meekness, “the principal protection from the prideful blindness that often arises from prominence, position, power, wealth, and adulation.”⁸

3

Speak up on behalf of your sisters and brothers. The scriptures teach us that “of him unto whom much is given much is required” (Doctrine and Covenants 82:3). The Lord identifies himself as our “advocate with the Father” (Doctrine and Covenants 29:5) and expects us to advocate in Christlike ways on behalf of our sisters and brothers. This should be done in private ways, such as when correcting individuals who make “jokes that demean and belittle others because of religious, cultural, racial, national, or gender differences.”⁹ It should also be done at times in public ways—for instance, when the Church released a public statement in 2015 to defend the religious liberty of all people, including our Muslim sisters and brothers.¹⁰ We should reflect the meek certitude of our Savior and “speak up . . . without speaking down.”¹¹



Our Heavenly Father truly is no respecter of persons. He made us different for important reasons. Increased diversity in the Lord’s Church is not coincidental. These differences serve the purposes of God. I pray we will be the people God wants us to be—united in Christ, with our differences. ■

NOTES

1. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Come, Join with Us,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2013, 23.
2. See John K. Carmack, “Unity in Diversity,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1991, 7–9.
3. See Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “The Merciful Obtain Mercy,” *Ensign*, May 2012, 70, 75–77.
4. Gérald Caussé, “Ye Are No More Strangers,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2013, 51.

5. D. Todd Christofferson, “Is There a Place for Me?” (video), *Unity in Diversity* series, ChurchofJesusChrist.org/media-library.
6. Dallin H. Oaks, “President Oaks Remarks at Worldwide Priesthood Celebration,” June 1, 2018, newsroom. ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
7. John C. Pingree Jr., “I Have a Work for Thee,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2017, 33.
8. David A. Bednar, “Meek and Lowly of Heart,” *Ensign*, May 2018, 32.
9. John K. Carmack, “Unity in Diversity,” 9.
10. See “Church Points to Joseph Smith’s Statements on Religious Freedom, Pluralism,” Dec. 8, 2015, newsroom. ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
11. Neal A. Maxwell, “Meekness—A Dimension of True Discipleship,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1983, 73.