

## TEC SERMON WRAP UP – Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2018

**Series:** STRONGER TOGETHER (Psalms 133:1-3)

**Topic:** Loving Our Differences

**Text:** I Corinthians 12:12-25

**Teacher:** Pastor Godman Akinlabi, – Lead Pastor, The Elevation Church, Lagos

It is God's primary desire that humanity stays connected one with another. Strong connections are like a converging lens that harmonises rays of sunlight into a powerful and pointed flow capable of setting things alight. So in spite of the varying shades that humans come, there is always that tangible or intangible factor that draws us all other. A problem however arises when we cannot reconcile our differences.

Diversity exists in all spheres of life. Life in itself is a composition of diversities which somehow functions effectively and there's no better representation of that diversity than Man. We are all distinct from one another on the basis of simpler issues like gender, age, sex, tribes, etc., to more intricate ones like temperaments, perceptions, belief systems, cultures and values. These variances exist for a number of reasons but mostly, they are borne from who we are and how we were created (Colossians 1:16 – 17)

God created us as a diverse people and He wants us to unite. That's why he gave us different skills and strengths so that we would recognise our need for one another and appreciate our individuality. And His love for variety is not just visible in us but in all aspects of His creation. Look at the many species in any ecosystem all living in synchrony, or the changing seasons, each allowing for growth and harvest.

The Word of God encourages us to recognise, accept and empathise with diversity and to avoid discrimination in any form. Though we are often tempted to judge others on the basis of their economic class, mode of dressing or physical appearance (largely as a by-product of our ingrained prejudices), we are admonished to bear in mind at all times that in the midst of our diversity, we are all one in Christ (Colossians 3:11). We particularly draw reference from the church which is expected to be a place of refuge from our badly troubled world. If there is a schism inspired by individual prejudices within the Body of Christ, what hope is there for us (Ephesians 4:32)?

Jesus Christ taught us all an invaluable lesson on diversity in the selection of his disciples. The Twelve were possibly the oddest assortment of men that could have been assembled for the purpose which they were ultimately to serve. Simon and Andrew were fishermen. Matthew was a tax Collector in the service of the Roman Empire and must have had a predictably difficult experience with Simon the Zealot, who was by his belief system, violently opposed to anything associated with the Roman Empire. Thomas, who though was under the tutelage of the greatest Miracle Worker the world has ever witnessed, is eternally etched in history as a veritable epitome of doubt. Judas Iscariot was not a Jew unlike the others. Despite these wide disparities in backgrounds and dispositions, Jesus successfully groomed them for three plus years and the eternal message of Christ was eventually hinged on their shoulders and propagated through them.

Do we consciously or subconsciously judge others based on looks, tribes or idiosyncrasies? We need to learn to manage our differences effectively. We need to accept the fact we are all different and there is absolutely nothing that we can do about it except to embrace diversity. A hatred for diversity doesn't reflect a love for the one who created it. We should celebrate the differences that we have because of their beauty, usefulness and because they are the work of our Father in heaven (*Romans 12:16, Malachi 2:10*).

You need to critically assess yourself and ask the following questions: "Why do I have a problem with people who are different?" "Am I critical or judgmental of this person because I do not understand him or her?" In our world, our differences are often used as a means to create distance between us. But God intends His people to come together. He didn't make us different so that we could be subjugated because of our race, ability or experiences. He therefore demands that we love others unconditionally – their perceived flaws nonetheless (1 John 4:7). We are intended to leverage on the other persons' strength and shore up their weaknesses.

### How Do You Embrace Diversity

- **Seek understanding** – When you are accepting of people and their differences, you can become a blessing to them and they to you. Learn to understand the reasons why the other person appears to be so different and learn to not condemn or criticise.
- **Manage Your Bias** – The fact that people are different from you does not make them inferior to you. Do not succumb to the temptation of judging people on the basis of material or intellectual possessions. Do not adjudge others inferior on the basis of economic class.
- **Appreciate the uniqueness of each other's purpose** – We all have a part to play in God's divine plan. Don't overestimate your own strength or underestimate other people's value. It is arrogant for you to assume that someone cannot amount to anything much in life.
- **Recognise** and deal with the knowledge that you are not intended or expected to do everything.
- **Learn to forgive and forget present and future wrongs** – Do not let past hurts lead you into bigotry

### To-Do List for This Week

1. Refrain from interpreting different as bad
2. Esteem Differences – show love to people who are different from you
3. No more hate speech