

Unity Through Humility

2 Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ² fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. ³ Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

The Humbled and Exalted Christ

⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. ⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:1-11, NKJV).

Let's pray.

It is amazing what can get done in our lives and in this church when we get ego out of the way. This piece of scripture also contains the oldest hymn known to the church, but we won't get to that second part until Sunday. Paul told the church: "fulfill my joy by being like-minded." He loved this little church and he just wanted the people in it to walk in one mind as they walked in the Spirit. He is telling us how to live our lives in a way that is not ego-centric (self-focused), but rather to walk in a way like Jesus who humbled Himself to the point of being obedient, even obedient unto the cross. We are to walk in unity. That is the essence of being a community of faith. It is easier to talk about being one as a Church body than actually doing it. Our own interests and our own agendas can get in the way.

Notice that Paul starts all of the short phrases in this paragraph with "if." It could probably be better translated as "since." Since, Jesus has done this, then you can do that. Church splits happen because peoples' egos get in the way. Their agendas become preeminent. Sometimes it is a pastor that starts preaching weird doctrine and refuses to be corrected. Or, in selfishness, he might feel he deserves more than he's getting, and he runs off with a woman in the church. Factions happen, and the church splits. It can also be a group in the church that just feels it has a better understanding of what needs to happen, so they form a hatchet committee to tear up this and replace it with that. It is difficult to walk in unity. I

went to a meeting recently where a pastor here in town stressed with great emotion that he felt we should all meet each Sunday and worship together. I don't think that is what Paul is talking about. He is telling us that we are all one in Christ when we come to know Him. We come to Him by faith, and we are all His children, but all of His children don't have to live in the same house. The Lord wants us to have unity of Spirit.

Paul is talking about the fact that in our individual churches we should treat one another like we are truly family. And I mean treat each other as a family ought to treat one another. This means each of us being concerned about the welfare and betterment of each other. Jesus added this desire for unity to His prayer for the disciples when He prayed for the Church and His desire for us to be one.

⁹ *"I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. ¹⁰ And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them."* (John 17:9-10, NKJV). Jesus desires unity. He continues in verse 20.

²⁰ *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹ that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²² And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one:"* (John 17:20-22, NKJV).

He is saying that our unity is what will cause the world to believe that Jesus truly was the Messiah sent by the Father. Unity is precious to the Lord. I remember in the first year that I was at the Grove a group of Amish believers came from Wisconsin to help us put a new roof on the Fellowship Hall. They only asked that we pay for the tickets for 4-5 workers to come to Texas, AND they asked me to give them a Bible teaching every morning. The first morning I gave a teaching on the unity of the Body of Christ. Even though they looked very different from us, we were to dwell together in unity. The first teaching that I gave them was Psalm 133.

*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brethren to dwell together in unity!
² It is like the precious oil upon the head,
Running down on the beard,
The beard of Aaron,
Running down on the edge of his garments.
³ It is like the dew of Hermon,
Descending upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the LORD commanded the blessing—
Life forevermore. (Psalm 133, NKJV).*

I am not sure what was so incredible about the incident when oil ran down Aaron's beard, but it describes unity as being like that oil. I did a study on this oil, and I discovered that the holy oil prescribed by the Lord had different substances contained within it that made it holy. There were literally different proportions of different oils and spices that made it acceptable to the Lord (Exodus 30:22-25). Without all the different varying parts, the oil could not be considered holy. It is the same thing with the Church. The Lord desires that many kinds of people come together and dwell as one in Him. They are holy, set apart, and pleasing to the Lord. Paul talked about this in Ephesians chapter 4.

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ² with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³ endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Ephesians 4:1-6, NKJV).

In that first paragraph, Paul tells us exactly how that kind of unity is achieved. We will never have more unity by just saying, "WE'RE GOING TO BE MORE UNIFIED." It is not something that we work up into. Paul gives us the perfect formula of what brings about unity and it is not all about me (nor is it all about you).

³ Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4, NKV).

It is costly when we truly begin looking out for the interests of others in our church body. We should all keep a check on things that might be done out of self-ambition or conceit. Conceit means "excessive pride in oneself." I am always careful to never refer to Union Grove as "my church." I say that to remind myself that it is not "my church." It is not "my work." It is God's work. It is His church. I just happen to be one of the pastors that He has called here at this point in time. It is God's pulpit. You and I are just the parts and pieces that He has called together to do a work in our time.

"...in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself." ⁴ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." (Philippians 2:3b-4, NKJV).

OUCH! Paul is telling us to never overestimate our importance. We are all expendable. He is giving us the formula for success as a church body. This is the exact opposite of what the world teaches us to do. Being a child of the world is WAY DIFFERENT from being a child of God. We should never demand our own way or "toot our own horn." I once had a partner who told me, "I've learned to toot my own horn because nobody else will." This is the

EXACT OPPOSITE of what we're to do as followers of Jesus. Our unity in Christ is most threatened when WE GET IN THE WAY. **Paul is telling us here EXACTLY what is needed. We must love one another like Jesus loved others. We must treat others like THEY ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN WE ARE. This is very difficult to do. It goes against everything in our minds as humans.**

It is natural to think of ourselves first. It is natural to think that our ideas are better than the ideas of others (in running the church, etc). We think about our own wants and needs. That is what we do to survive. The Bible tells us to "consider others as more important than ourselves" so that we will begin to walk humbly. If we want unity, we must remember that LOVE IS AT THE CENTER OF IT ALL. John talked about this overriding spirit of love that takes heart in the believer who has truly experienced God's grace and shares it.

Knowing God Through Love (think Agape and Chesed kinds of love). It is love that is unselfish and loyal.

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 John 4:7-11, NKJV).

TRUE LOVE NEVER LOOKS FOR "A RETURN." THAT IS NOT LOVE, IT IS AN INVESTMENT. GOD LOVE, AGAPE LOVE, GIVES WITH NO EXPECTATION. CHESSED LOVE IS A LOVE THAT IS LOYAL. IT NEVER GIVES UP.

WE CAN ONLY EXPERIENCE THESE KINDS OF LOVE WITH ONE ANOTHER WHEN WE ARE EMPOWERED, LED, AND CONTROLLED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT OF ALMIGHTY GOD.

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