

## Unity in the Body of Christ

God's Call To Unity Among Believers

March 08, 2020

- I. What does the scripture say about unity within the Body of Christ?
  - A. As a followup to the nine weeks we spent on conflict resolution, we are going to look at what God's word says about unity within the Body of Christ – be it unity within the church universal or among a local group of believers – like our church.
    1. We are going to begin our study with a statement from Jesus, found in **John 13:34-35**, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another – even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, **IF** you have love for one another.”
    2. I want to point out three truths from these two verses.
      - a. **First**, before leaving His disciples to return to His Father, Jesus commanded His disciples – and in so doing commands us – to love one another. In other words, loving one another is not an option, it's a requirement for all who are a born again believers in Jesus.
      - b. **Second**, we are to love each other in the same way and to the same extent Jesus loves us.
      - c. **Third**, the outcome of loving one another as we ought is being known as disciples of Jesus Christ by those who observe or learn of the way we love one another – be it the love we have for each other in this local gathering of believers, or the love we have for believers all over the world.
    3. This commandment from Jesus, “loving one another as Jesus loves us” is the foundation for today's teaching. So with this in mind, let's look at what God has to say in other portions of scripture about unity within the church – be it the universal church or our small group of believers.
  - B. Pray
- II. Unity is built on humility
  - A. As I just pointed out, the foundation for unity within the church is loving one another as Christ loves us. However, for unity to survive the challenges of church life, we must build on this foundation. And the first essential building block is the character quality, the mindset, and the attitude humility. Paul makes this clear in his letter to the church in Philippi and to the church in Rome.

- B. Therefore, we will begin by looking at **Philippians 2:1-4** . . . Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, [2] make my joy complete by being of **the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose**. [3] Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but **with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves**; [4] do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.
1. Paul points to four areas that we must pay attention to if unity is to prevail and disunity or division is to be avoided.
    - a. **Being of the same mind** – that is, being united in how we **think** about God, the things of God, the ways of God, and the word of God.
    - b. **Maintaining the same love** – that is, **loving** one another according to the standard set by Christ’s love for us so that all are loved as they ought.
    - c. **United in spirit** – The Greek word used here does not appear anywhere else in the NT. According to how it is used in other places, it means to be of one mind or to have one focus. In the most basic way, our one mindedness or our focus is to be the glory of God, doing the will of God, and living according to the word of God – all of which will result in living a godly life, building the church, and evangelizing unbelievers.
    - d. **Intent on one purpose** – The Greek word used here is the same Greek word used in the first statement, “**Being of the same mind**.” In other words, this list of four items begins with an exhortation to unity in how we think and ends with an exhortation to unity in how we think.
  2. The fact that the NASB translators translated this same word in two different ways may be because they wanted to avoid redundancy. However, I submit to you that redundancy is important here because **how we think** is vital to having the kind of **humility** necessary to promote and maintain unity within a group of people whose differences go far beyond some being male and some being female.
- C. In fact, **how we think** is so important to the kind of humility that protects unity, that Paul presents Jesus as the supreme example of a **humility** – preserved by **right thinking** – that protected His **unity** with the Father.

1. And so we continue reading in **Philippians 2:5-8**, “Have this **attitude** (*This is that same Greek word as used in the first and the fourth item in Paul’s list in vs 2. In other words, Paul is urging us to have the same mind or use the same way of thinking about these things as Jesus did.*) in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, [6] who, **although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped** (*here His humility is manifested in His not having to be important*)
  2. [7] but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond- servant, and being made in the likeness of men (*here His humility is manifested by His taking on a lessor position and form than He already had*).
  3. [8] Being found in appearance as a man, **He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death**, even death on a cross (*here His humility is manifested by submitting to God and obeying God, even to the point of losing His life when losing His life made no sense from a human/worldly wisdom perspective*).”
- D. Paul addresses this same way of thinking and attitude in his letter to the church in Rome, as recorded in **Romans 12:3-4** . . . For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you **not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think**; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.
1. In these verses, Paul is talking about the fact that God, by His Spirit, has blessed the Body of Christ with people who have various gifts. And though these gifts are intended to be a blessing to the church, they have also been a cause for division within the church.
  2. And sadly, these divisions are the result of believers going the way of pride as they seek to be seen as superior because of their gifts (*prophecy, tongues*), or seek to be seen as superior because of the group they identify with (*I’m of Paul, Apollos, Peter, Christ*), or they seek to grasp power through leadership type gifts.
- E. Going further in urging unity within the church, Paul says in **Romans 12:10-11**, “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; **give preference to one another in honor**; [11] not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, **serving the Lord**.
1. To be **devoted** to one another is to be loyal or faithful in our dedication to seeking the good of each member in the church. And examples of that include paying attention to and caring for the needs of each member in the church – with an emphasis on doing so in a gracious, sympathetic and tactful way. **Notice the emphasis on love here – which is the foundation of unity!**

2. To give **preference in honor** is to promote the honor of others before ourselves. In other words, we are to act as if everyone else deserves honor, while we are the ones who are to show them the honor they deserve. **Notice the emphasis on humility here!**
- F. Continuing on in **Romans 12:16**, Paul says, “Be of the same mind toward one another; **do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly**. Do not be **wise in your own** estimation.”
1. To be of the same mind is to be in harmony with one another as you work together toward a common goal. For harmony to exist, there must be unity. For unity to survive in any group, it must be built on humility – so that there is no conceit, no competition for position or power or honor, no discrimination, and no partiality.
  2. To be **haughty** is to be arrogant and condescending. This is not only pride at work, it works against unity by intentionally promoting discrimination and division within the group.
  3. And in this context, to be **wise in your own estimation** is to think God looks on you with special favor because of your faith or gifts or alignment with a specific teacher or group or theology.
- G. Finally, in **Romans 14**, Paul urges a humble unity between mature and immature believers, or between the strong and weak believers – and he does this without using the words “pride” or “humility.”
1. **Romans 14:1-3**, “Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. [2] One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. [3] The one who eats is **not to regard with contempt** (*an ungodly expression of pride*) the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat **is not to judge** (*an expression of superiority*) the one who eats, for God has accepted him.
- H. The point of all that has been said to this moment is that for unity to survive within the church, there must be humility. Why? Because without humility, a longing for superiority will arise in one form or another, which in turn will breed division among God’s people.

### III. Unity is built on right thinking

- A. As I’ve already pointed out, the foundation for unity within the church is loving one another as Christ loves us. And as we have just seen, for unity to survive and thrive, we must build humility on the foundation of love. However, according to God’s word, humility is not enough. To humility, we must add **right thinking**, for right thinking is essential if love is to remain love and humility is to remain humility.

B. Paul addresses our need for right thinking in **1 Corinthians 2:1-8, 14-16**

. . . I did not come with superiority of speech or [with philosophical] wisdom, [when] proclaiming to you the testimony (*or mystery*) of God. [2] For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. [3] I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, [4] and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom (*or in other words, Paul did not use well-crafted arguments or slick salesman techniques to sway his listeners*), but [rather, my message and preaching were] in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, [5] so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

1. *Before moving on to vs 6, I want to make the point that Paul, though refusing to use well-crafted arguments or slick salesman techniques, is in no way abandoning **right thinking**, and we will see the truth of this in the rest of this section. So let's continuing on with vs 6:*
2. **[6] [And] Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature** (*that is, those who are able to hear and understand it*), **a wisdom**, however, **not of this age** nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away (*because they are mere mortals*); [7] but we speak God's wisdom (*as opposed to the world's wisdom which changes with the times and cultures*) in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; [8] the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; **for if they had understood it** (*or if they had right thinking in relation to God's wisdom*) **they would not have crucified the Lord of glory**;
3. *Are you beginning to see the connection between humility and right thinking? Let's move down to vs 14.*
4. **[14] [For] a natural man does not accept** the things of the Spirit of God, for they are **foolishness to him** (*they make no sense to him*); and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. [15] But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. [16] For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct [the Lord]? **But we have the mind of Christ.**
5. Do you see how essential right thinking is to almost all of life, and especially to understanding God, God's ways, God's word, love, **humility**, and here in this context, unity within the church?

C. In **1 Corinthians 1:10-12**, Paul gives us an example of **wrong thinking**, which in turn feeds pride, which than causes a failure to love one another as we ought, and that results in disunity within the church.

1. [10] Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that **you all agree** (*be of the same mind*) and that there be **no divisions** among you, but that you be made complete (*mature, perfect*) in the **same mind** and in the **same judgment**. [11] For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. [12] Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."
  2. These Christians were using worldly thinking and reasoning instead of right thinking. How do we know? Because they had abandoned love for one another and cast aside humility in their quest to be superior to everyone else – or at least some others – in the church. And they gained their sense of superiority by claiming to belong to the most spiritual group with the most respected teacher.
- D. What I am hoping you can see from these scriptures is that **unity** within the church is dependent on **right thinking** which in turn preserves **humility** and keeps **love for one another** alive and well. Therefore, these three qualities – love, humility, and right thinking, are the structure required for unity within the Body of Christ.

#### IV. Why is unity so important?

- A. **First**, unity brings the presence and blessing of God
  1. **1 John 4:12**, “No one has seen God at any time; **IF** we love one another, **God abides in us**, and His love is perfected in us.”
  2. **2 Corinthians 13:11**, “Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace **will be with you.**”
- B. **Second**, unity strengthens the individual believer and the church as a whole for the purpose of remaining faithful in the face of persecution.
  1. **Philippians 1:27-28**, “Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm **in one spirit**, with **one mind** striving together for the faith of the gospel; [28] in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God.”
- C. **Third**, unity brings unified praise and glory to God from the assembly
  1. **Romans 15:5-6**, “Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the **same mind** with one another according to Christ Jesus, [6] so that with **one accord** you may with **one voice** glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- V. Unity must be taught, encouraged, and helped along
- A. Sadly, the reality is that unity built on love for one another, humility, and right thinking is not a natural product of our human nature. Therefore, for unity to exist within the church, it must be taught, encouraged, and even helped along. Why? Because the church is made up of believers who are at various stages of life, and various stages of spiritual maturity, and who are experiencing various situations in life,
  - B. Paul gives us an example of this sad reality in **Philippians 4:1-3**, “Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. [2] I urge Euodia (*yoo OH dih uh*) and I urge Syntyche (*SIN tih kee*) to live in harmony in the Lord. [3] Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.
    1. Interestingly, Paul does not present Euodia and Syntyche as bad Christians who are to be disciplined, and in so doing, put out of the church.
    2. Rather, Paul reminds the group that these two ladies have been instrumental in the spread of the gospel. And though they have forgotten humility and right thinking, what they need is help to return to the unity they ought to have and probably had.
  - C. My point here is this – when you see disunity – regardless of the numbers involved, remember that unity must be taught, encouraged, and helped. Therefore, humbly and graciously call and help those who have forgotten love, humility, and right thinking back to unity.

## VI. Conclusion

- A. I want to end our study where we began, with **John 13:34-35**, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another – even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, **IF** you have love for one another.”