

UNITY

Phil. 1:27 - 2:4

Today we bring this series on CHURCH to a conclusion. We've dealt with a whole raft of really important matters over the last few months. The intent of this series has been to encourage us in what is church. What does it mean to be church? What are our priorities as the body of Christ, of which Jesus is the head? What is your contribution and your participation with your gifts and your time as you serve in the church? I trust we've addressed a lot of these questions. All the message scripts and audio is on our website in the event you have missed any.

I've left to this concluding message what I consider to be one of the most important and overarching aspects of church life, that without, makes most of everything else mean very little. *UNITY*. Unity we have with one-another, even though we are wired differently, when there are points of difference, when there is disagreement, even though we have unique gifts, and we're ethnically and culturally different. We don't all think the same, we don't relate with each other the same.

Despite all this, the one thing insisted upon by God we have (not aim at, or wish to have, or intend to have) but have, is unity. In Jesus. Through Jesus. At all costs, for Jesus.

There are and will always be relational challenges in God's church. No church is perfect.

What Jesus has done for us must be enough, our motivation to honour him must be such, that, that is behind our commitment and determination for¹ unity with brothers and sisters in Christ, despite the hardest of relational challenges.

That's what we'll see today in the scripture. As we serve in the church, give in the church, relate with others in the church, deal with issues in the church, for the *sake of having unity*, we do all this looking to Christ, first. Through the eyes of Christ. With the same attitude as Christ. (P) This is the only way to mitigate against destructive non-unifying actions and attitudes about and toward others.²

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters live together in unity...for there the Lord commands his blessing" (Ps. 133) The Lord's blessing, poured out, happens when there is unity.³

(Phil. 1:27-2:4) **Therefore**, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

I think this is great text to talk about unity. Why? The way Paul explains it isn't a case of 'I think Unity's a good idea, give it a go, doesn't matter if it doesn't work, take it or leave it'.

¹ To keep

² Unity among Elders, staff and leaders...

³ No unity, no blessing...

Paul explains that our relationships with one another and church unity are in direct relation to Jesus, and what Jesus did, and who Jesus is, and that our attitude ought to be the same as his. This is a letter, in the bible, but written to real people, a real church, with the same sorts of challenges that any church would face.

In fact, Paul highlighted one relational challenge between two women: Euodia and Syntyche, Paul pleaded with them to sort there issues out (Phil. 4:2).

Such situations in scripture don't give permission for not sorting out issues for the sake of unity. I'm not aware of any biblical teaching that supports non-unity or non-reconciliation. Because that's not the character of Christ. The emphasis is always doing what must be done in order to reconcile. *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.* (Rom. 12:18)⁴

Scripture is plainly clear to us. When each one of us know Christ, we have received the most valuable unimaginable gift. The message is: that gift of grace expresses itself over, above and beyond any relational challenge, in the form of unity. When Christ has made right relationship with God possible for me, that expresses itself in *wanting* to have right relationship with others. *Unity*.

Christs love and grace evidenced in unity and love for each other was Paul's end game.

What is the personal cost I am willing to make for the sake of having unity?

What was the cost for Jesus? He gave his life. It follows then that unity is loving at great cost, all costs to ourselves.

Let's look first at...

1. OUR MOTIVATION FOR CHURCH UNITY (v.1)

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion...

The church at Philippi had their share of issues, points of difference, disagreements, relational challenges, including the one pointed out specifically by Paul between Euodia and Syntyche. *"I plead with you...help these women"* Pauls says (4:2). V. 1 is Pauls response to what's going on, and the right way for the church to handle things.

*"...**if** you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, **if** any comfort from his love, **if** any common sharing in the Spirit, **if** any tenderness and compassion..."*

If what you and I have received from Christ means anything to us, nothing will get in the way of being motivated to unity. That's our motivation as we relate with each in the church and particularly as we deal with relational challenges when they occur.

When we weigh all this up, Paul is actually saying you guys are dealing with so much relational difficulty and conflict from the unbelieving world, you don't need to carry on like this in the church. Don't make it harder. *But we do...*

⁴ If at the end-of-the-day, there is an unwillingness to abide by scriptural truths and processes (i.e. Matt. 18) and the preference is to ignore rather than resolve for the sake of unity, only then can a relational challenge be left to the sovereignty of God. Sometimes relational challenges are unresolved. This is not because they can't be or that God doesn't give the power to resolve. But because the people involved have not made it possible (they're unwilling, etc.).

The way we relate as Christians and the issues that arise sometimes – like they obviously did for Euodia and Syntyche – things said and done toward each other – we’re copying the world, not Jesus. (John 13:34,35). “Oh but such-and-such is too hard to get on with. Oh but they said this. I was offended, it’s just too hard to work it through” The one thing insisted upon by God, in and through and over these, is we have unity, “*if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ*”. And btw, issues between individuals is never a private thing in the church, we’re a body...*when people are hurting, the church is hurting*...

We’re not talking necessarily here about people being temporarily grumpy with each other. Paul is addressing unity in the face of potentially divisive and destructive issues. Where people are angry, there’s a stand-off, no one’s budging, little desire to reconcile...⁵ Quoting the band Chicago, “it’s hard for me to say I’m sorry”...

The only way we can deal with the imperfections of others, others actions towards us and ourselves toward others is this way: Jesus went to the cross for you, died for you, buried for you, rose again for you...did this so yours and my sin are forgiven. **If** what you and I have received from Christ means anything to us, nothing will get in the way of being motivated to unity.⁶ That’s what v.1 is teaching.

If what Christ did for us is sufficient and it is, then it is sufficient enough that we are able to get on with Gods work for us, getting on with each other, working through relational challenges for unity sake. Deep gratitude for/in Christ will express itself in unity.

Unity is only ever Christian Unity when the source of that unity is the person of Christ and the outcome of that unity gives Jesus glory.⁷ Anything less, is not biblical unity. This sort of unity can’t be faked or wishful thinking’d, up. Yes, it is unity we have in Christ, but, it requires effort on our part. Paul said (Eph. 4:3) “*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace*” There’s a cost associated with Christ-honouring unity, our sacrifice our effort, but the fruit is worth it.

Our motivation for unity is what Christ has done for us. That means we’re to be committed to unity, whatever the cost! So important, that Pauls says...

“...then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind”

2. THE NATURE OF OUR CHURCH UNITY (v.2)

‘You know what church’, Pauls says, ‘there’s a lot of things that give me joy, but if we can do this, have this sort of unity, love Christ in this way, relate with each other in this way, my joy will be complete’. What does this *joy completing, joy producing* unity involve, from each one of us?

a. “being like-minded...”

The only way we’ll be like-minded is if we’re all attached to the same reality, the same truth, same person, same LORD!

⁵ Biblically I don’t accept there’s ever an occasion where God is permissive on intentional dis-unity...

⁶ Or do we receive all the benefits and keep going down the path of pride?

⁷ Churches, right here in NZ have made some really poor decisions, in unity, on biblically questionable moral matters. Though there has been some agreement, this has also resulted in splitting...

(Rom. 8:5) *Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.* In the 4th chapter of Phil. *"whatsoever is right, true, holy etc...think about such things..."* Col. 3:2 *"Set your minds on things above..."*

You'll recall Paul asked the Corinthians in response to their relational challenges *"Is Christ divided?"* (1 Cor. 1:13) What was Paul's response? Have *"no divisions among you"* that we be *"perfectly united in mind and thought"* (1 Cor. 1:10).

Everyone thinking Jesus, everyone thinking his glory, everyone thinking holy, everyone thinking his purposes...everyone committed to biblical truth. If your reality doesn't involve that, there'll never be like-mindedness. If you take a magnet to the beach at Raglan, and walk along and pop it in the sand, *grains of iron* will attract to the magnet....

Unity Christ died for and wants us to have, that the word of God would urge us to have, must be greater than our felt need to harbour issues and any resistance to doing what we must do. Unity is so important when the pursuit of our rights and issues is superior to our desire for unity, it becomes a contradiction of Christ. It is in fact, disunity, and undermines the work of the cross, because Christ died *for unity*. His death, sacrifice and grace given must be enough for us for unity. **Unity must win out.**

b. ...having the same love

Yes, we're not perfect, yes we're sinful, yes, we have some pretty major issues from time-to-time to sort through, however the church, because of who Christ is ought to be the closest, most strongly bonded, unified group on the planet, where unity and love for one-another must always win through. *"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, (how?) because of your love for one-another"* (John 13:35) Unity and love has missional power. Unity and love communicates to the world, Jesus is real.

Spurgeon - Where the Spirit of God is there must be love, and if I have once known and recognized any man to be my brother in Christ Jesus, the love of Christ constraineth me no more to think of him as a stranger or foreigner, but a fellow citizen with the saints. Now I hate High Churchism as my soul hates Satan; but I love George Herbert, although George Herbert is a desperately High Churchman. I hate his High Churchism, but I love George Herbert from my very soul, and I have a warm corner in my heart for every man who is like him. Let me find a man who loves my Lord Jesus Christ as George Herbert did and I do not ask myself whether I shall love him or not; there is no room for question, for I cannot help myself; unless I can leave off loving Jesus Christ, I cannot cease loving those who love him.⁸

...joy completing, joy producing unity involves....

c. ...being one in spirit

I have huge admiration for coaches of elite level teams. Take Ian Foster for the All Blacks. He's got to get those 15 players, and their ego's, all heading in the same direction. That's what Paul's encouragement is: not working as separated individuals pursuing your own goals, but working together, *"one in spirit"*, complementing each other with our gifts and abilities...

⁸ Priest of the Church of England. Adapted from: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-is-christian-unity>

d. ...of one mind"

"Of one mind" speaks to our united purpose. Working toward the same ultimate goals, with the same intentions. Unity answers Jesus' prayer in John 17:21, "*Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*"

Us being united and of "one mind" in Jesus helps the world believe! So what then does the absence of Christ-like love and unity among Christians say to the world!?⁹ We show the worth of the gospel to others by: "*being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind*"

3. THE ATTITUDES NEEDED FOR OUR UNITY (v.3,4)

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Attitudes are the 3rd part of Pauls equation for church unity. Here we've got attitudes **not needed** for church unity, and attitudes **needed** for church unity. The first, not, of the Spirit and not at all good for relationships, the 2nd of the Spirit and good for relationships.

Let's talk first about the attitudes **not needed** for church unity...

The first thing we notice about these attitudes – and why I think Paul picked on these two – "*selfish ambition, vain conceit*" is they're the same 'attitudes' Satan had that led to his demise (see Isa. 14¹⁰). Satan, full of pride, wanted to exalt/elevate himself to be like God.¹¹

We know these are attitudes of the heart, mind and spirit because Pauls says "*Do nothing out of*" And when these attitudes are in us, in our well, what comes up in the bucket from that well will cause relational challenges, will be divisive, will not lead to Christ-honouring unity.

(James 3:14-16) ...if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "*wisdom*" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice *

The attitude not needed is, **selfishness**. Selfishness (being selfish) will not lead to, or endear unity. Selfishness is the complete opposite to selflessness – which is, putting others interests above my own. Being a selfish Christian¹² is at odds with the work of the cross.

Do I have a selfish attitude? Think about how you think about yourself compared to others. Think about what you spend your money on. Think about the time you give to others.

Think about your reasons for serving, or in this case not...¹³

..."do nothing out of/from selfish ambition...", selfishness is at odds with church unity.

The other attitude not needed is, **vain conceit**...what is this? It is when a person has an exaggerated view of their own importance. Like "Man I'm awesome, I'm so important everyone else is less important than me".

⁹ Infighting, bickering and not reconciling issues is not indicative of the unity that commands a blessing, is not unity that answers the Lord's prayer.

¹⁰ "Morning star" = Lucifer

¹¹ Pauls saying your attitudes can't be any worse.

¹² Oxy-moron- like waterproof tea bags!

¹³ We live in a day where it's very easy/tempting to give ourselves an excessive amount of attention, me, myself and I, first, look after number-1 mate, instead of others. Is that we want? Do we want our children/young people learning selfishness?

Message version says *"don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage"* That's a conceited attitude. Status and title are important to some people. Title means nothing to God. Your heart attitude and your function do. Let me say this, the lower we are, the higher we are. If we exalt ourselves, we...will be humbled! Listen to what Paul wrote to Timothy on such matters...

*"Mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves...unholy, without love, unforgiving...not lovers of the good...**conceited**...Have nothing to do with them"* (abb. 2 Tim. 3:1-5).

What level of importance does Jesus give us? Flick back in your bible to Phil. 1:1, what does it say? *"Paul and Timothy, **servants** of Christ Jesus..."* Servants of Jesus, serving others.

What about the attitudes **needed** for church unity...?

We've just looked at *"do nothing out of"* in terms of the not-needed attitudes. Note what Paul says here: *"in humility, value others above ourselves",* how, *"not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others"*, which means that humility is required, first, in order to value others. Humility is the counter-attitude to selfishness and conceit. Why was this important to Paul? Because he knew that it wasn't healthy for the church when people had a selfish agenda, or were arrogant, mean and unkind toward others; these are a contradiction of Christ.

Now humility, is not being self-critical or thinking negatively of yourself. It is thinking of others above self. When you've got 150 people with an attitude of humility, no agenda apart from putting others above themselves, what do you have? *Unity. **Humility, actually, is the key to unity!***

God takes this humility thing very seriously. How do we know? In James 4:6 *"God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."*

1 Peter 5:5-6 *"All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."*

God opposing pride, or God favouring humility?!

I don't know if you've heard the name Leonard Bernstein. He was the first American-born conductor to lead an American orchestra. In fact, he was the conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. He wrote the musical score for many Broadway plays like *West Side Story*. Bernstein was asked one day, what is the hardest instrument to play? To which he said, the second fiddle. The second fiddle. And he explained. He said, I can get plenty of first violinists but to find somebody who can play the second fiddle with enthusiasm, that is a problem. That is a problem.¹⁴

¹⁴ Adapted from: http://skipheitzig.com/teachings_view.asp?ServiceID=4220&transcript=1&AcceptsCookies=yes#transcript and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonard_Bernstein

A constant attitude of valuing others above ourselves is seeing others as worthy to be served, by us, in our relationships, our conversations, in our ministry, in our small groups, in our care for one-another. That's humility! We set aside any sense of rivalry, entitlement, status, of selfishness, in humility, *for unity*. Humility recognises I'm no better than anyone else. And we draw this dynamic from Jesus himself who did this very thing. Note what Paul says in v.5, your attitude could be the same? No. Your attitude might/maybe be the same? No. If you want to try and have this attitude? No. *"Your attitude **should be** the same as that of Christ Jesus"*.

This is the humility of the cross, it is having the same mind-set of Jesus, adopting his attitude, thinking and acting in all things the way he would want us to. It is grace shown to us, becoming grace shown to others, by us.¹⁵

Paul says about Timothy, (2:20-22) *"I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself..."* **He proved himself!**

I read about a lady who works in a nursing home. She made it her mission to sit with people who are dying if there is no family member present. She feels that life is sacred, a gift from God, believes that nobody should die alone, and she wants to demonstrate that love for the dying so that they leave the world in the presence of somebody who cares and loves them. That's powerful. *If Jesus is in us, his love will shine through us.*¹⁶

You know we're going to head out for a cuppa shortly then go home, head into our week, we'll get busy. But I want to encourage you to take this on board, because our church unity is at stake. This humility stuff and dealing with our attitudes doesn't come naturally. Preferring others interests above our own, doesn't come naturally....

"If we have any encouragement from being united with Christ...", when our gaze is on the person of Jesus, when we are being transformed by the renewing of our mind, when we are surrendered to Holy Spirit, when we see the attitudes not needed and deal with those, when we have the courage to deal with our blindspots, when we adopt the right attitudes, Christ-like attitudes, when we have the humility to put others' needs above our own. *That's unity.* Grace shown to us, is grace we are to demonstrate to others.¹⁷

That's the sort of unity where God will command his blessing!

¹⁵ Like, for the Lord Jesus, regardless of who the person was, he served them.

¹⁶ http://skipheitzig.com/teachings_view.asp?ServiceID=4220&transcript=1&AcceptsCookies=yes#transcript

¹⁷ Britain's Derek Redmond recalls the semi-final of the 400m at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics when, following a hamstring injury, his father helped him over the line. The injury occurred 250 metres in, forcing Redmond to collapse to the track. Determined to finish the race, he got up and hobbled round before his father came out of the stands to help him complete the race.

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=video+of+runner+going+back+to+help&view=detail&mid=DD9DCAA311FC3D3306F2DD9DCAA311FC3D3306F2&FORM=VDRVRV>