

Unity in the Church (3)

Specific HEART ATTITUDES Necessary to Preserve Unity

Philippians 2:3

****READ THE TEXT****

INTRO-

Introductory Illustration

- In the early Christian centuries, someone approached Augustine, the 4th century Christian theologian & writer, and asked him: "*What is the most important quality in the Christian life?*" He said: "**HUMILITY**". Then they asked: "What is the 2nd most important quality?" "**HUMILITY**" (he said). And still again, he asked, "What is the 3rd most important quality in the Christian life? Augustine repeated: "**HUMILITY!**" (Mack, 20)
 - He's right! It's the A,B,C of Christian living.
- God commands us to be humble.
 - The Bible warns of serious consequences of pride. [Prov 16.18 - pride goes before destruction]
 - God promises to bless those who are humble in heart. [Prov 29.23 a humble one obtains honor.]
- Questions we can ask to PROBE our hearts and get at some REAL-HEART ATTITUDES REGARDING PRIDE // HUMILITY
 - ✓ how do I respond when others point out my sin?
 - ✓ how do I react when others provide a different opinion or plan than what I suggest? How do I respond when another's plan is chosen over mine? What's festering in my heart in those moments?
 - ✓ how do I treat others different than me? With different opinions? Thoughts? Persuasions?
 - ✓ what do I think and say and do when a decision is made that I may disagree with?
 - ✓ do I have a committed heart and attitude toward my church that shows itself in my committed service?
 - ✓ do I find myself reacting in church in 'me-centered ways' (I don't like it, I'm not being fed, no one is reaching out to me, no one is inviting me over, they don't have a ministry for me, I can't plug in, they just don't care for me = all *me-centered attitudes*).
 - ✓ how frequently do I *deny my desires, pleasures, and needs for the sake of others?
 - ✓ are there times (in the last few weeks or few months) where I've been tempted to be selfishly ambitious or greedy of honor/fame/recognition?

- ✓ have I been tempted to show off around other people, or when I've tried to impress people with my greatness or abilities or achievements?
- A HUMBLE person "has an abiding sense of his natural insignificance, as compared to God and His magnificent *significance*."
 - ➔ **PRIDE** - an anthropocentric mind-set; self is center; self on the throne; thinks of self first
 - ➔ **HUMILITY** - a theocentric mindset; God is center; God on the throne; thinks of God & others first

The issue here is **attitude** (=heart, inner thoughts, drive, motives).

- **James 4:1-10 drives all this home!**

- ❖ V.1 - the question: the source of quarrels/conflicts/fights/strife
- ❖ V.2 - **source** = your pleasures [longings/ήδονων]
- ❖ V.3 - you **desire** [ἐπιθυμείτε] & don't get > so you fight. **Strong desires**/selfish
- ❖ V.4-5 pieces of counsel & help
- ❖ vv.6-10 - be humble > not proud. Draw near to God; don't destroy self in pride!

Moises Silva provides such a helpful *reminder*: "The true obstacle to unity is **NOT** the presence of legitimate differences of opinion (preferences) but **SELF-CENTEREDNESS**!"

Background to Phil 2:3

- ❖ The Apostle Paul, writing from prison in Rome, pens this magnificent Christ exalting letter to the Philippian church exhorting the believers to live in unity, with humility, with joy and togetherness. In a word the theme is: **Unity thru selflessness.**
 - Ch.1 - keep the gospel your priority in ALL of life
 - Ch.2:1-4 - the key hub (nucleus, central nervous system, the vital arteries, etc.)
 - V.1 - foundation for unity - **God's work**
 - V.2 - ingredients for unity - love, harmony, gospel focus
 - V.3 - heart-attitudes (v.4 also).
- ❖ A mark of the Bible is a constant PUT OFF // PUT ON theme
 - Rom 13.14 -- put on; Eph 4.22 -- put off.

THESIS — Christ, the Head of His Church gives us 2 specific LESSONS and HEART ATTITUDES to preserve UNITY.

How do we think? How do we act? What must be done?

I. LET US DILIGENTLY PUT OFF SELFISHNESS! (3a)

μηδὲν κατ' ἐριθείαν μηδὲ κατὰ κενοδοξίαν

These are world-shaking, life-enriching, Christ-emulating virtues.

Remember: nonbelievers **cannot** do this. **Only believers can (2:1).**

- A. We should strive to NEVER be selfish
- B. We should strive to DILIGENTLY MORTIFY selfishness
- C. We should strive to REFUSE EMPTY CONCEIT
- D. We should strive to CLING TO GOD'S LAVISH GRACE toward us
- E. Note a few features to note in this verse:
 1. The **clarity** (do...; *negative: not anything > urgent!*)

2. The **comprehensiveness** (nothing)

3. The **corruption** (selfishness)

a) ἐριθειαν - "Selfish ambition", or "selfishness," or "base self-seeking" or even "rivalry". This word marries 2 concepts = (1) EXALTATION OF SELF-PLEASURE AND (2) THE EXALTATION OF SELF ["A WORLDLY-SPIRIT generated by SELFISH AMBITION"]

a) Remember: individuals in Philippi's highly stratified honor culture were DEEPLY embedded in patronage (honor/status) networks.

b) In the ambitious, status-seeking, pride-renown city of Philippi, **let us remember** preoccupation with ONE's OWN social advantage naturally led to factions and rivalry, conflict & divisions.

a) This is the root of every other sin; the mother of all sins!

2. The **conceit** (pride)

a) κενοδοξίαν - vain or exaggerated self evaluation > not only conceit but VAIN/empty/worthless conceit.

c) Any grounds for boasting, bragging, pride, and arrogance are altogether baseless & vain. This guy has an overinflated self-image; this guy sees himself as *always right* and even expects all others to agree with him.

1. What is pride? Pride Exalts Self, Deceives Self, Enthrones Self, Worships Self, Prioritizes Self, Blinds Self. And PRIDE births many other sins.

B. Let me provide some Ways to DESTROY unity and bring TURMOIL, CONFLICT, ANGER, DIVISIONS. **5 things NOT to do...**

1. live selfishly and preserve self -- to make sure that at all costs you are happy with the way you think things should be
2. demand your rights and ensure you get your way [& fight till you get your way.]
3. if others disagree with you, reject them, refuse them, and speak ill of them (and refuse to reconcile w/ them)
4. live puffed up with self-styled & self-saturated conceit --- and arrogance
5. question others' motives when they question you, point out a sin in you, and provide counsel to you. [label them as legalists or those quick to judge or hypocrites.]

A. But of course: the apostle Paul tells us to **put off** these sins.

1. Also, did you notice = There is NO excuse, or exceptions; There is no option here -- it's a command; There is no allowance for SELF-LOVE and SELF-prioritization/preservation.

[1] *Let us diligently put off selfishness.*

II. **LET US DILIGENTLY PUT ON SELFLESSNESS! (3b)**

ἀλλὰ τῇ ταπεινοφροσύνῃ ἀλλήλους ἡγούμενοι ὑπερέχοντας ἑαυτῶν
Absolute (stark attitude) contrast - ἀλλὰ

A. Let us Be Humble -- lowly of mind. Internal *way of thinking*

B. Let us consider others as more important

C. Regard one another as more important than yourself.

D. The main word in this phrase is: “humility of mind” - *ταπεινοφροσύνη* - this is a mindset -- a way of thinking that is dominated by *lowliness, humility, selflessness & Christlikeness*. ***This is others-centeredness***.

1. This mindset is fleshed out in 2:5ff with Christ.
2. When PAUL uses this word, it is a virtue that puts humility preeminently in the mindset and behavior of Jesus Christ.
3. The big point, however, is that THIS KIND OF HUMILITY is NOT the same as the lowliness scoffed at by the ancient Greeks, or that of a slave who assumed the lowest social rank in the Greco-Roman world Or the crucified ones which was the most degrading act of public humiliation conceivable.
4. **No! But** THE BIG DIFFERENCE here is that the HUMILIATION (humility of mind) of Christ is that it did not come from PASSIVE INABILITY >> but Christ **actively**, willingly chose weakness, service, and subjection >> and he did so for the benefit of others.

2 helpful ways of thinking of this selflessness...

E. In your **inner attitude** (*with humility of mind*)...

F. In your **outer relationships** (*regard one another as more important...*)

1. To value/consider others as MORE IMPORTANT than yourselves means: “to place the needs of others **first** on your personal agenda. **SO** - Give others first place; give them the place of honor; respect them; listen to them; speak about them; serve them; strengthen them; encourage them; help them thrive and be a success; encourage them; give them benefit of the doubt; believe the best!

G. ****HOW TO DILIGENTLY PRESERVE UNITY - 5 helps.**

1. **daily** excavate your heart and plead for God's grace
2. **diligently** kill (strangle) the selfish cravings of your heart
3. **doggedly** pursue humility that resembles Christ's mindset
4. **deliberately** view others (opinions, pleasures, wants, feelings) as more important than your own.
5. **delight** in obedience to Christ & His Word which brings super-abundant joy.

H. **See Isaiah 66.1-2 = God dwells with humble!**

A helpful survey comparing/contrasting pride & humility:

PRIDE

- makes self the focus
- they think about their needs, their wants, their reputations
- they expect (almost demand, even though unspoken) praise from others, and are blind to their own faults
- they are easily offended.
- prideful people do not admit to or confess their mistakes
- they don't ask to be forgiven
- they don't submit to authority; they can be disrespectful, slanderous, and rebellious.
- they refuse to forgive others who have wronged them and bring up old faults
- they blame others and justify themselves.
- they reject instruction and correction and do not listen well.
- they are self serving and expect to be served by others.
- they have a distorted view of reality because they think they're SUPERIOR to other people and that they can understand other people's thoughts and heart-motives (which is a proud person playing "GOD")

- a prideful person lashes out at others and they hurt others by their gossip, quarrels, divisive spirits
- they have no joy or peace or usefulness for Christ because PRIDE strips them and robs them of these qualities.

HUMILITY

- God is the focus
- think about what pleases God and they do what God's will is
- they are willing to be attacked, critiqued, injured
- they overcome evil with good
- they desire above all to magnify Jesus and for themselves to be diminished
- they seek Godly counsel and seek correction and instruction.
- they are quick to admit and confess when they are wrong
- they are quick to affirm their sin and ask specifically for forgiveness
- they grant forgiveness to others when others have sinned against them & ask for it
- humble people submit to authority
- humble people strive immediately and gently to resolve conflict and listen to others
- they are thankful when rebuked
- they speak softly, gently, patiently, lovingly and encourage others
- they view OTHERS than better than themselves.
- humility is a blessing -- they grow in grace and are spiritually joyful, useful, fruitful.
- they are transformed into the image & likeness of Christ -- noticeably, evidently.

O let us run to Christ! He gives **grace** to the humble!

The grace of the Lord is more than abundant (1 Tim 1.14-15!)

Rest in his grace & His mercy!

Romans 7.21-25 - wretched man I am! Christ rescues me! & 8:1!!

CONCL-

Concluding Illustration

- ❖ Lest we lose heart, we must grab & hold on tightly to our ***theology proper (our doctrine of God)***. >> Our God is...
 - Powerful, Mighty, Sovereign, ever-present, Helper, Forgiving, Sanctifying, Compassionate, Glorious, Faithful
 - be encouraged that as impossible as this may seem> GOD IS ABLE.

Why is all this important?

- because the GOSPEL is itself a very *visible, ultimate display of HUMILITY*. JESUS descended from heaven > to earth > to the cross > to bear God's wrath. ***Consider the cross of our Divine Christ -- see His humility! And that shall humble us!***