

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Marks of Spiritual Unity

Scripture: Philippians 2:2

Code: 50-13

Well let's open our Bibles now to the second chapter of Paul's letter to the Philippian church...Philippians chapter 2 and this comes, this morning, to our attention again as it did last week. We'll be focusing on the first four verses, the formula for spiritual unity...the formula for spiritual unity.

And as I said last time, and I reiterate to you again, the thing I most fear in the church is disunity, discord, disruption, division. And I really believe that that at this particular time in our church and in many other churches in our country is the major thrust that the enemy is making against churches like ours.

In Acts chapter 4 Luke wrote these words, "The multitudes of believers were of one heart and one soul." Acts chapter 4. And then he said a little later in that same chapter, "As a result of that unity they had power and great grace was upon them all." The multitude of believers were of one heart and one soul, they had great power and great grace. Power and blessing are related to unity.

Jesus, of course, made priority out of the unity of the church and so does the Apostle Paul. It is a great concern to his heart and thus he writes these opening four verses in the second chapter and I draw them to your attention. "If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there's any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself. Do not merely look out for your own personal interest but also for the interest of others."

It's my conviction that in those four verses you have the most concise and practical understanding of unity that is given in the New Testament. This explanation, as you know, flows out of the exhortation in chapter 1 verse 27 where he said I want to hear that you are standing firm in one spirit with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel. Having called for unity he now explains it. He now defines it. And as you'll remember from last time, he focuses on three aspects of unity: the motives, the marks and the means. That is the why, the what and the how. Why is unity so vital? Why should we have unity in the church? What is that unity? How is it defined? And how do we attain it? Or how do we maintain it?

A passage that has to be considered also in concert with Philippians 2 is Ephesians 4, and I would draw your attention to it just as a supporting background to the thoughts that Paul will give us in this section of Philippians. In Ephesians 4:1 he writes, "I therefore the prisoner of the Lord entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." In other words, he says act like a Christian, act like a believer. How does a believer act? "With all humility and gentleness, with patience showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." A Christian acts this way toward his fellow Christian, humbly, gently, patiently, forbearingly and lovingly and does everything he can to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. That's how a Christian is to act. The reason is given in verse 4. There must be unity because there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were also called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all and because of all that inherent supernatural oneness, the church then is to maintain its oneness as the outworking of its very calling. So we are called to unity and our unity is based upon a great profound theological unity within the very trinity itself.

Now back to Philippians chapter 2 and we focus specifically on the text before us. Last time we looked at the motives for unity and we posed the question why, why is unity called for, why unity in the church, what are the strong reasons? And we noted last time that there are four of them given in verse 1. And the word "if" because it is a first-class conditional is best translated "because" and so it would read this way, "Because there is encouragement in Christ, because there is consolation or comfort of love, because there is fellowship of the Spirit, because there is affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind." In other words, your unity is motivated by these things.

The first one is encouragement in Christ. Because Christ has encouraged you, exhorted you, helped you, faithfully come alongside to enable you...in other words, because of the work of Christ in your life past and present, because of all that Christ has done to encourage you. Secondly, the consolation of love follows up because all of Christ's love and tender mercy and pity and sympathy and grace and forgiveness and care and comfort has been bestowed on you, be of the same mind. In other words, having received so much from Christ, can you not give back that which is dear to His own heart? He who prayed in John 17 to the Father about the church that they may be one desires unity in His church and he is simply saying in view of all that Christ has done for you by way of encouragement and comfort, in view of all that Christ has done for you by way of exhortation and sympathy, by view of all that Christ has done for you by way of enabling help and mercy and pity and grace, can you not give back to Him that which is dear to His own heart? And we pointed out that you must see disunity and a bitter spirit, you must see your antagonism to the unity of the church as a direct act of defiant rebellious ingratitude to the Christ who has given you everything and to whom you desire to render nothing. And you must see it for what it is. It is a sin against a relationship, not an ethical code. It is a sin against Christ.

And then he moves to the Holy Spirit for the next two and he says, "Because there is fellowship of the Spirit." In other words, because of all that the Spirit who communes with you from within you has done for you, regeneration, sanctification, gifting, sealing, enabling, interceding, filling, making fruitful, strengthening in the inner man to resist temptation, providing power for witness, because of all that the Spirit has done in His communion with you and then he says, "Because of affection and compassion." And goes to a second dimension of the Spirit's ministry and that is sympathetic kindness. Not only has He granted you power but He's granted you sympathy. Not only has He granted you ability to serve but He has granted you tender compassionate care and intercession on your behalf. And so he says not only the work of Christ but the work of the Spirit is motive enough. Why? Because it is the Spirit who longs for the unity of the church. It is the unity of the Spirit, Ephesians 4:3, that is the bond of peace. And since the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit have done all of this for us who are unworthy sinners, is that not motive enough for us to give back that which is dear to their hearts? Can we say to the Holy Spirit, "I take everything You give, I give nothing in return? I take everything You give, I do not give back to You that which Your heart desires, the unity of the Spirit?" See sin for what it is. It is a quenching of the Spirit, it is a doing despite unto the Spirit of grace. It is an abuse of a relationship in which the Son of God and the Spirit of God give all to you and you give back nothing.

And then Paul adds one more motive in verse 2, he says, "Make my joy complete." Not only should we be motivated by the relationship with Christ and the relationship with the Holy Spirit but with the relationship with the pastor as well. Paul says if you can't do it for Christ's sake the Holy Spirit, then do for my sake. In Hebrews chapter 13 verse 17 you remember that the writer of Hebrews calls upon the believing community to be sure that they respond to those that are their leaders. And he says that you are to obey them and submit to them and you are to do this so that their work will be with joy and not with grief. In other words, you're to bring joy to the heart of your shepherd.

In 1 Thessalonians 5 it says, "We request of you, brethren," verse 12, "that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you who have charge over you in the Lord and who give you instruction," that's your shepherds, your pastors, "and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work." And what is the outflow of that? You live in peace with one another. And you admonish those who are unruly. And you see that nobody repays evil for evil, but that everyone seeks what is good for one another and all men, unity. If you want to please your shepherd, seek unity in the church. So, it's a pastoral plea as well.

The motives then are clear. Because of your gratitude and love for Christ, because of your gratitude and love for the Spirit, because of your gratitude and love for your shepherd, be of the same mind, be of the same mind. And understand, please, that if you bring discord to the church you have sinned against Christ, you have sinned against the Holy Spirit and you have sinned against your God-given leaders. So see it for what it is. It is the violation of a relationship, not just a code, not just an ethical

standard, not even just a biblical principle, it is the violation of a relationship. That should be motive enough.

Now for this morning I want us to look at the marks of unity. Going one step beyond motive we ask the question what. What is unity? What does it look like? How are we to view it? What is its nature? What is its essence? How is it defined? And he will give us four statements in verse 2 that define the marks of spiritual unity. They are very rich, they are somewhat overlapping and yet they have each of them a distinctiveness which can be noted as we examine this great verse.

Look at verse 2, he says, "Make my joy complete..." Here's how and he gives us the four marks of spiritual unity. "By being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in Spirit, intent on one purpose." Four great truths. They are the marks of spiritual unity. And I want you to understand them and I want you to understand the sum of them as well as the parts, so listen carefully.

The first mark is this, being of the same mind...being of the same mind. The Greek verb phroneois used here and it basically means to think the same way. That's what it means, to think the same way. By the way, 10 of the 23 occurrences of this verb are in Philippians which means it's a major issue here. A key to unity is thinking alike. Unity(?) of thought is essential to true spiritual unity. We have to think alike.

Go back with me for a moment to a comparative verse in the first chapter of 1 Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 1, Paul writing to a church that obviously was disrupted terribly. All kinds of factions and schisms. In fact, so many of them that he said I have to speak unto you in chapter 3 as unto carnal and not unto spiritual because there are so many divisions. But his prayer for them in chapter 1 and verse 10 is this, and he launches right into it after his introduction, "I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree." Now that is an amazing statement. You mean he's asking a church to agree? "That there be no divisions among you, that you be made complete in the same mind," that means thinking the same way. It's the very same idea. "And that you have the same judgment."

All agree, no divisions, same mind, same judgment. And then he says right after that, "It's so sad that you're so divided and quarrelsome." You're to have the same mind. This is not an arbitrary thing, this is something Scripture repeats. We are to think the same way. Now listen to me, unity comes when believers think alike. Now listen carefully. I'm not talking about doctrine, and neither is Paul. This is not just cold hard facts, we're all here, we could all sign the same doctrinal statement. That doesn't mean we think alike. This is something beyond that.

What he's really talking about here is attitude. Having the same attitude, the same mindset, the same disposition. In fact, you will notice in chapter 2 and verse 5 he speaks of having this attitude in

yourselves which was in Christ. In chapter 3 verse 15 in the New American it talks about having this attitude again. In verse 19 he says regarding the ungodly that they set their minds on earthly things, their attitude is controlled by the earth, the world and the system around them. So he uses this concept of mind and attitude interchangeably and that is a proper understanding of the term. We're not here talking about the same facts, we're talking about the same feeling, disposition, attitude, common thinking pattern, common...to use another word...concern, common understanding.

You say, "How do you get that?" It's a challenge and it does not come by human means. That is, it cannot be engineered, it cannot be orchestrated. I have watched for a number of years and even presently am watching the inability of human beings to orchestrate unity. It can't happen. It can't happen on a fleshly level, it can't happen on a human level, it will happen only on a divine level. We will never think alike until we have understood the spiritual realities that make for that. And we will never know and do whole-heartedly and unanimously the will of God until we think alike. You have conflict when people don't think alike. The Spirit of God is not saying, "Get your doctrine together," that's not the issue. Philippians didn't have any doctrinal problems, there's not even an allusion to one in this entire epistle. He isn't saying get your ethical standard worked out. They didn't have any problem with that. There is no glaring sin in that church to which he directs any verse. The problem was attitude. And that is the thing that is so elusive. You can identify heresy, it's very clear when it's spoken. You can identify sin, it's very clear when it's done. What you can't find is underlying attitude and that's why it's so devastating. That's why it's so destructive.

And so, Paul is right on target when he says, "You have to think the same way. Your attitudes have to be in perfect harmony." You say, "Well how in the world can we do that?" Well I'm going to show you how...I hope. Taking the term that's used here, the verb phroneo and finding it in a few other places, I want you to follow how it's used and see if we can't build a little theology of thinking here that will help us know what it means to think the same way. Let's go back to Romans. And I will point out to you several usages that I think are applicable.

In Romans chapter 8 I would draw your attention to verse 4. It says at the end of verse 4, "Do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit," that's really the end of a sentence but that introduces us to a contrast between flesh and Spirit. Then verse 5, "For those who are according to the flesh set their mind on the things of the flesh." Same word we saw in Philippians 2. "But those who are according to the Spirit...implied...set their mind on the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace."

Now you have two possibilities. You can either think with the Spirit or you can think with the flesh. If we are to think the same, then we must all think in harmony with the Holy Spirit. So the first principle is that if we are to be of the same mind we must think on the things of the Spirit of God. We must have spiritual thoughts. We ascend beyond our own realm, our own agenda, our own flesh, our own unredeemed humanness, that which the Puritans called remaining sin that must be mortified in us.

And we must realize that the conflict is between the Spirit and the flesh, note this, never the Spirit and the Spirit. You understand that? You don't have two people thinking with the mind of the Spirit in conflict. If there is conflict, somebody is thinking in the mind of the Spirit, or no one is, and someone else is thinking in the flesh. And so he says if we are according to the Spirit, then we think the things of the Spirit. So if we're to have the same mind we must be thinking on the things of the Spirit of God.

Chapter 12 verse 3, and we'll come to a practical conclusion of what all this means in a moment, let me just build the blocks a little higher. In verse 3 of chapter 12, "Through the grace given to me I say to every man among you...please note this...not to think...same term...more highly of himself than he ought to think, but to think so as to have sound judgment as God has allotted."

Now stop at that point. Second thing, we're to think with sound divine judgment. That means objectivity. Where we get into trouble is when we think subjectively. We have discord at all different levels of relationships because, first of all, we're not thinking the things of the mind of the Spirit. And secondly, we're not thinking objectively. It's not sound judgment, it's subjective. We've got our own agenda. We've got our own priorities. We've got our own little enterprise. We've got our own little turf. We've got our own personal ambition. We've got our own little fortress to maintain and defend. We've got our own pride that compels us to whatever ends its evil longings pursue. And so we have not objectivity, we are the victims of our subjectivity.

Paul says, "Think on the things of the Spirit and think with sound judgment, with God as the source." Have not only the mind of the Spirit, if you will, but have the mind of God. Look at Romans chapter 15 verse 5, "Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you...here's the same term...to be of the same mind. Think the same, have the same disposition and attitude and concern with one another...here it comes...according to...whom?...Christ Jesus." Now we have Christ in the picture. We think the things of the Spirit. We think the things of God which give sound judgment. And we think the things of Christ. Pretty simple, isn't it?

You see, what we have to do is get lifted out of ourselves. Let me say it again. Conflict in this church I have never known to be a conflict over doctrine or over moral principle, conflict is always a result of sinful attitude. It is the collision of the mind of the Spirit and of God and of Christ with the mind of the flesh, always. We are to have the mind of Christ.

You say, "Is that possible?" Yes. Absolutely possible. In 1 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 16 it says, "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he should instruct him, but we have the mind of Christ." You have the mind of Christ. You can think the thoughts of Christ. You can have a Christ-like attitude. You can know the will of Christ, the will of God, the will of the Spirit. You can mind spiritual things. But Paul says in the very next verse, chapter 3 verse 1, "I can't speak to you as spiritual because you're so fleshy." And how does it come out? "By your divisions and jealousy and strife and you're walking like mere humans." What does that mean? You have the mind of man, not the mind

of God, not the mind of the Spirit, not the mind of Christ. You're fleshy.

At the end of 2 Corinthians chapter 13 and verse 11 Paul adds a further plea to the Corinthian church in his last shot in the second epistle to them. He says, "Finally, brethren," verse 11, "rejoice," then he says, "be made complete or mature, be comforted, be like minded, live in peace." Be like minded, think the same things. And here he reflects on the fact that it's part of being mature. He says be made mature and think the same thing. It's part of spiritual maturity. If you're fleshy, spiritually immature, you're going to collide with the mind of the trinity. No question.

Colossians chapter 3...Colossians chapter 3, this sums it up for us. It says in verse 2, "Set your mind on the things above not on the things that are on earth." Think heavenly, folks. Think the Spirit's thoughts, think the Father's thoughts, think the Son's thoughts, think mature thoughts, think spiritual thoughts, think heavenly thoughts.

You say, "But, John, how can I know that I'll have those spiritual thoughts? How can I think like the Spirit and think like the Father, think like the Son, make sound judgment? How can I not be victimized by my flesh? How can I think with maturity? Objectivity? How can I think heavenly thoughts? Be concerned about the Kingdom? Be concerned about the trinity? Be concerned about them and not me? How do I get translated up into that level?" And the answer comes while you're in Colossians 3, if you please, would look down into verse 16. Go back to verse 12 and we'll move into this one. "So as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion." Listen, everyone of these things here talks about relationships in the church. "Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another, forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone, just as the Lord forgave you so also should you and beyond all these things, put on love which is the perfect bond of unity and then let the peace of Christ rule in all your hearts to which indeed you were called in one body and be thankful." That's all about unity, every bit of it...every bit of it. All the right attitudes for unity are there.

You say, "Well how do you get to that?" Verse 16, "Let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you." Now listen carefully. What is the Word of Christ? It's the Scripture. "Oh," you say, "I know the Scripture." Yeah, right, that's not what it said. It didn't say know the Scripture, it said let the Scripture...what?...richly...what?...dwell in you. Let it be the residing presence, the dominant occupant, the energizing force of thought, that's the idea. He didn't just say know the Scripture, he said let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you. You can think the thoughts of the Spirit and you can have the sound judgment of divine wisdom from God and you can express the mind of Christ and you can think mature thoughts and you can think spiritual thoughts and you can think heavenly thoughts if you're thinking processes are energized by the dominant and richly dwelling Word of Christ. And I said this to you many times, so that your instincts are spiritual, so that your involuntary reactions are right because you are dominated by the Word of Christ. It isn't just that you know it, it's that it occupies the reigning and compelling area of your life. So, there's no mystical thing here,

there's no sort of esoteric approach to this, it's a matter of letting the Word of Christ dominate you and it becomes the controlling force in your life that pushes you ever upward and out of this earth and out of yourself.

In Ephesians he says, "Do not get drunk with wine for that is dissipation but be filled with the Spirit...filled with the Spirit." By the way, in both of those passages the results are the same. If you're filled with the Spirit you'll speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, you'll sing, make melody in your heart and you'll give thanks. Well in Colossians 3 it says the same thing. If the Word of Christ dwells in you richly, what happens? All wisdom, teaching, admonishing one another, psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Same exact result, therefore they must be the same thing. So on the one hand, let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly. On the other hand, be filled with the Spirit. Controlling influence in your life is the Word of God by the Spirit of God.

Okay? Now you understand that? That's back to the basics, isn't it? Back to the basics. I say it again, when you have conflict at Grace Community Church, I do not believe it is conflict over doctrine and I do not believe it is conflict over principle, I believe it is conflict and the collision of attitudes. And there are no collisions in the trinity. God is not in conflict with Christ and Christ is not in conflict with God and Christ is not in conflict with the Spirit and the Spirit is not in conflict with Christ. They have one will and one design. And we have to see conflict for what it is. It is an attitude problem. It is a failure to think on a divine level. It is a rushing in to the process of relationships with your own agenda. It is quick to speak, slow to think and slower to pray and slower to meditate and slower to search the mind of God. And it is compelled by the flesh which longs for what it has established as its priority agenda. See it for what it is.

Second principle, the first one is to be of the same mind, the second one flows out of it, maintaining the same love...maintaining the same love. The main verb in the verse is to be of the same mind, this is a participle that in a sense flows out of that main verb. If you are of the same mind you will maintain the same love. That is also a mark of spiritual unity. What does it mean to maintain the same love? It means to love everybody the same. And that tells me right away that we're not talking about emotion because I can't emotionally be attracted to everybody. Not that at all. It's a mutual sacrificial service, that's how the New Testament defines love. In Romans 12:10 it puts it this way, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love." Be devoted to one another means to meet one another's needs, "Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends." First John 3 says that if you look on your friend and he has needs and you close up your compassion to him, it's questionable whether the love of God even dwells in you. Love acts in behalf of someone else's need. God so loved the world that He gave what man so desperately needed. This is an element of unity. Loving everyone the same.

Now let me make it as clear as I can. When you think the things of the Spirit, when you have the sound spiritual objective judgment of God, when you think with the mind of Christ, when you think with maturity, and when you think spiritually, and when you think heavenly, you will maintain the same love. Because Christ and the Spirit will be loving through you and love for one another will be the outflow.

And I'm back to the same point I'm trying to get across to you, the problem is attitude. I would venture to say that when there is a collision of attitudes it rises out of a failure to maintain love. And conflict comes, and I say it again, not because of doctrinal problems and not because of ethical problems, because of attitudinal problems and the collision very often comes because someone has a grudge against someone else. I don't care whether it's at the level of lay people in the church or at the level of leadership in the church, it comes because somebody feels in their heart something other than love for someone else. Bitterness, envy, jealousy, personal ambition, protectionism, possessiveness, sometimes hostility. And it is out of that attitude, that loveless attitude, that the conflicts come. That's what grieves me. And I have asked the Spirit of God to fill my heart with a surpassing spiritual love for all who are a part of the body of Christ. I can't do that in my flesh. My flesh refuses to do that. And the Spirit refuses not to do that. So it's easier for me to tell where I am by getting in touch with my attitudes. That's where the collision and conflict comes.

Third principle...united in Spirit, this is an interesting word, sumpsuchos used only one time in the whole New Testament, Paul probably made it up. It means one-souled...s-o-u-l-e- d...one-souled. And he said back in verse 27 that I want you to have one Spirit, now he says I want you to be one souled, psuche. What does that mean? Well I love the word "soul brother" and that's this idea. Knit deeply down in the harmony of the soul. What does that mean? Well you're talking about passion here. You're talking about desire. You're talking about ambition and it's all the same. You see, if we all have the same passion, same desire, same ambition we're going to be united in Spirit. It's when one person's got a desire and a passion and an ambition for the Spirit of God to control the work of God and somebody else has got a passion and a desire and an ambition to be prominent that you have collision. That's collision. When somebody has a desire and a passion and a heart-felt hunger to see Jesus Christ's church united and somebody else wants the whole world to know that they've been offended you have collision. And, man, they're going to spread that everywhere they can. And you ask them what the offense was and they probably couldn't even tell you but it's a...basically it's giving way to the flesh and the flesh is a liar and the flesh will deceive you and it will conjure in your minds things that aren't even true and destroy the unity of the church with a lot of stuff that isn't even related to reality.

If there is one driving passion for the glory of the church, then there's one driving passion for the unity of the church. Is that true? Has to be true. If there is one driving passion for the exaltation of Christ, there is one driving passion for unity. If there is one driving passion for the unity of the Spirit, that's what will happen. If there's one driving passion for the glory of God, that's exactly what will bring

about the unity of the church. It's when somebody in the mix is driven by another agenda...protectionism, possessiveness, personal ambition, envy, jealousy, pride, illegitimate offense, morbid feelings of persecution, whatever else. And we need to be one Spirit, one soul.

There's a fourth principle. He says "intent on one purpose." And this is where the passion fleshes out. If we have one passion we're going to have one purpose. Have you ever asked what's your purpose? People in conflict all have their own purpose. You get a whole lot of people together with an all different...having all different purposes, you've got a lot of problems...a lot of problems. This, by the way, is the second participle modifying being of the same mind and uses the same word, phroneo uses it in a different way. Literally it means minding one thing, that's the literal translation. So we went in a full circle. Be of the same mind, minding one thing. Okay, we're all together and we've got our focus together and we're all with this same intent...advancing the Kingdom.

Starting with one mind is release...that one mind is released in one great love. That one great love is wonderfully accompanied by a single passion for unity with no personal agenda which results in one great group of people moving toward one eternal glorious purpose. That's what he says. And that purpose is the glory of God...the glory of God, the advancement of the Kingdom.

Really, Paul is saying the same thing in four ways. I told you there was overlap. But he says it in four ways to bury it deeply in our minds and in our hearts. Unity is evidenced in a group of people who think alike. What do you mean they think alike? They all like the same furniture? No. They all have the same hobbies? No. Not that. But they all are controlled by a deep knowledge of the Word of Christ that is energized in them by the power of the Spirit because they walk in the Spirit, they maintain the same spiritual attitude. There can't be any collision there.

Secondly, unity is evidenced in a group of people when they love each other equally. When they don't have grudges and they're not angry at someone because of some thing that they think was an offense against them. Unity is evidenced in a group of people who feel the same passion in their heart for the same holy principles, for the same holy goals, for the same divine ends. And they are driven and compelled from the inside to accomplish things that are utterly unrelated to themselves. These are the marks of unity. Pretty simple, basic.

And the question that comes into my heart and yours at this particular point is that's wonderful, how...how do I live like that? And the answer is in verses 3 and 4 and you better be here next week. It's been pretty straight stuff today and it's going to be the same next time because I believe the Spirit of God is speaking directly to us.

Let me close with personal comments. I am deeply concerned about the church because I believe that our society, the culture in which we live, has created monsters, selfish, self-indulgent, egotistical, introverted, consumptive, materialistic people who can think only of their own things. And the spill

over of this is literally devastating the churches. We are hostile. We are angry. We have had so much of this "do your own thing" philosophy embedded so deeply into us that we know very little of what it is to seek oneness and to give ourselves away for one another. And the legacy of this warped pagan godless culture is to produce monsters of self-indulgence. It's very difficult to stay separated from that. And the threat that it is to the church is frightening...frightening.

I can only pray that somehow God will put a halt to it for the sake of His own name and the purity of His own church. But there is no excuse, no matter what the culture does, right? This isn't the first culture like ours and it won't be the last, if Jesus tarries, and the Word of God still binds us to responsibility to the truths that He has given us there. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, we know that You have granted us Your Spirit and Your Word and You have given us all things that pertain to life and godliness and that we have no excuse. No excuse for our pettiness, no excuse for our selfishness, no excuse for our pride, envy, personal ambition, jealousies. We have no excuse for the discord we cause, no excuse for a bitter attitude, grudge, no excuse. It's just our ugly sinful flesh.

Father, point out to us that these issues are not issues of moral and theological truth but attitude and forgive us. Forgive me for those times when my flesh reacted and give me the mind of the Spirit and give me Your mind and sound judgment and give me the mind of Christ and help me to think in a mature way, help me to think in a heavenly way. Give to us all that one mind, that common attitude that only can be produced by the Word and the Spirit. Give us that love. Give us that harmony of soul that drives us with one passion to one goal, the glory of God.

Lord, help us to be counter-culture. Help us to be radically different from the society around us. This we ask in the name of Christ and we know consistent with His own desire for us. Amen.

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