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

**The Means to Spiritual Unity**
Scripture: Philippians 2:3-5
Code: 50-14

Let's open our Bibles to Philippians chapter 2...Philippians chapter 2. We are looking at verses 1 through 4 and this will be the third and last message on this brief text of Scripture. Let me remind you of it by reading it for you beginning in verse 1. Paul writes:

If therefore 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, 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 interests but also for the interests of others.

Now in verse 1 we remember in this passage the Apostle Paul in speaking on the formula for spiritual unity gives us the motives for unity. He answers the question why, why unity, and he says, "Because Christ has given us so much encouragement, because Christ has given us the comfort of love, because the Holy Spirit has come to fellowship with us, because the Holy Spirit has dispensed to us affection and compassion, for those four surpassing reasons we ought to honor Christ and the Holy Spirit by fulfilling a very deep desire of their heart, and that is the unity of the church." Christ prayed for that unity. The Spirit produces that unity. Because of all that Christ and the Spirit have done for us, we certainly should be of the same mind, maintaining that same love, united in Spirit and intent on one purpose. We should manifest unity motivated by the goodness of Christ and the goodness of the Holy Spirit on our behalf.

And then he adds that other motive, verse 2, "Make my joy complete, not only for the sake of Christ and the Spirit but for the joy of the shepherd, the pastor who has given so much of his life to them." That's the motive.

Then last time we looked at the marks. What are the defining characteristics of unity? He says them in verse 2, "Being of the same mind, thinking alike, being spiritually minded, knowing the mind of Christ, the mind of God, the mind of the Spirit, as revealed in the Word." And then he says, "Maintaining the same love." It is not just what we know, it is how we conduct ourselves with one another and having the same love means equal sacrificial service to those in need, no matter who they are and no matter what personal human emotion we might have toward them or not have. We are to love each other the same.

Then he says we are to be united in spirit, one-souled, that means having one compelling driving desire and passion. We are to live for the Kingdom. We are to be consumed by the Kingdom and the Lord of the Kingdom. And then intent on one purpose and that is that God would fulfill His will and be glorified. And where we think alike and love each other the same and have that one driving passion intending to fulfill that one great purpose of glorifying God, we will have the marks of unity. That's the question what. That describes what unity is.

Now we come to the third point in verses 3 and 4 and the question is how. How do we get that unity? What is the means of unity? The motives, the marks and the means. What is the means to unity? How does it practically come about?

Now let me say to you that this is obvious. Knowing what you know now in verses 1 and 2, you need only to read verses 3 and 4, they are so clear, so simple, so direct. And I feel a little bit like gilding a lily this morning in even talking about them but I'll do my best to help you to understand them and focus on them for a few moments. There are five of them, five practical principles given here. They are inter-related and inter-connected but we can sort of pull out five points, three of them are negative and two of them are positive. There are some things to exclude and some to include. Obedience always has a negative and a positive side...what we must not do and what we must do. And here's where we can do personal inventory in our lives. Here's where we examine our internal process of thinking and motivation.

All right, let's look at these five. Number one, and these are the means to unity. First one, do nothing from selfishness. Stop at that point. Do nothing from selfishness. Eliminate that from your motives, do nothing from selfishness. There's no verb here in the original, but nonetheless the form of it takes the force of a negative command. He's saying never act out of erithion. Now that word means selfish ambition...selfish ambition. It refers in some uses to strife because that's tied in. As soon as you become selfish you are literally at war with everybody else. It can be used to refer to a party spirit, factions, rivalry, partisonship, that's the idea. It's the kind of self-seeking that leads to quarreling, hassling, haggling, fighting, arguing, contending. And by the way, it is listed in Galatians 5:20 as a work of the flesh. It is not a work of the Spirit, it is a work of the flesh. Aristotle used it, I think, in a very appropriate way. It fits right in to where we are in America now. He used it as the word to describe the self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means. It is that ugly self-promotion that pushes oneself up in the eyes of people by stepping on the neck of someone else...which is basically the format for all political campaigning, as you well know. You win by destroying someone else and you fulfill your selfish ambition.

It is egotism. Egotism that is intent on advancing itself, egotism driven by personal desire which is always destructive and disruptive. And that's where you have to start..with slaying the giant of selfishness, getting rid of that consuming and destructive pride that is rooted deep in our fallen flesh

that makes us want to push our own way and our own course, personal ambition with the idea of focusing mostly on our own agenda. The next word focuses a little more on self than this one. This is my cause, my faction, my group, my objective.

You look at a church like ours that's as complex as we are, with so many classes and groups and ministries and it's so easy for this to come to the surface. Where you think your little group and your little class and your ministry or your flock or your prayer group or your enterprise is everything. And you become a monkey wrench in the machinery because you will not move. You establish your turf and you set that in place and it's little concern to you how everything else functions as long as you get what you want. It can be such a disruptive thing.

It happened in Corinth. First Corinthians 1 verse 10, we mentioned it last week, I'll read a little further. Paul exhorts the Corinthians brethren by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to all agree and says there should be no division among you. Now there was division among them and it was basically over this kind of faction orientation. He says each one of you is saying in verse 12, "I am of Paul, I of Apollos, I of Cephas, I of Christ," they divided themselves into little factions. "Well, we're the Paul group, we're the Peter group. Ah, well we're the Apollos group. Well we're the Christ group." I don't know particularly what divided them up. You could speculate on what the significant issues in the teaching of Paul, Peter, Apollos and Christ were on which they sort of camped with their isolationist mentality. But the point is, they had divided into little factions. He says to them in chapter 3, "You're men of flesh, I have to speak to you as to men of flesh. You're not spiritual." As I said in Galatians 5:20 this is one of the works of the flesh. You're fleshy. And it all stems out of the flesh and he says in verse 3, "Jealousy and strife." And that's why you're saying...I'm of Paul and I'm of Apollos...and so forth.

The flesh produces selfishness and one becomes consumed with his own little enterprise...it may in itself be a good one, certainly nothing wrong with Paul, Apollos, Peter and Christ. The agenda in itself may be valid. But one selfishness takes over the agenda then jealousy rises and out of jealousy comes strife and out of strife comes conflict and the loss of unity. So, you have to start with selfishness, personal ambition for your cause. Your cause isn't all there is.

One of the most difficult things that the elders have, bless them in this church, is to try to juggle all the causes about which so many people feel so passionately. That's why I said two weeks ago that in a church that is especially mature and zealous and passionate, you don't eliminate discord, you may find it heightened because people feel so passionately about that in which they are engaged. But it's extremely difficult to deal with when people are consumed by their own agenda, their own ministry, their own goal and objective. And so he says, "Look, first of all, do nothing with that kind of motive, absolutely nothing, eliminate it from your life."

Secondly he adds to it, and there's really a lot of overlap in the two, but he says, "Do nothing from selfishness," and then says in the Greek text, "Nor according to vain glory," kenodoxia, according to empty conceit is a good way to translate that. By the way, it's used only here. It is used in the Greek Old Testament but never in the New Testament. It is a state of mind that seeks personal glory. The first word, ambition, ties a person in with an enterprise, where this is purely personal glory, being emphasized. As I said, there's an overlap. But I would just like to draw out the idea here that this seems to focus on personal glory. If you look at the word more deeply, you see here a person who assertively, arrogantly claims to have the right opinion, who is in fact in error, that's kenos, he has erroneous opinion. He has an erroneous opinion of himself. He is conceited without reason. He is deluded. He seeks self- promotion and self-glory. He will fight to prove himself supreme. And wherever you have that kind of attitude you have discord. This is personal vanity. The first word is the factionalism that comes from an enterprise that is selfishly held and this is that personal self-advancement emphasis. So you eliminate both those things. You eliminate that possessiveness of your own little theater of activity and you eliminate that personal self-aggrandizing mentality that seeks to promote oneself.

Then the third principle is a positive one. "But with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself." In a sense, this is the corrective for the two negative ones. Instead of being personally ambitious and personally vain, on the other hand, rather than being proud which both of those things reflect, maintain humility of mind. That's where unity always begins. We've said it over and over and over again. Unity is born out of humility. "Humility of mind" is one word in the Greek, and apparently...as best we can tell...it is not found in any Greek writing before the New Testament which means that the New Testament...really the New Testament writers invent this word. The adjective form, tapeinos, was often used to describe the mentality of a slave, to convey the idea of being base, shabby, scummy, unfit, low, common, valueless, useless. So it wasn't a virtue. It was a term of derision. Humility was never seen in the pre-New Testament pagan world as a virtue, it was always seen as something ugly, never to be sought, certainly never to be admired.

In the Old Testament, God did hail the virtue of humility. If you read the Old Testament, you find that he chose the insignificant and the humble for His work. You read that He saved the lowly and He saved the meek and He saved the humble and He heard the prayers of the downcast. And He gave grace to the lowly. So it was there all the time in the Old Testament, but paganism never picked it up. And in paganism, to be humble to be humble was to be base, common, useless, valueless, worthless. And all of a sudden, when you come to the New Testament it gets turned into a virtue. And he defines it. Humility of mind here is regarding one another as more important than yourself, that's it, very simple. "More important" could be translated superior, superior.

You say, "How can I do that? How can I think of others superior to myself?" I mean, we don't do that very often. In fact we usually think of others as less than ourselves. We gloat, don't we, over talking about other people's failures? How can you consider, from hegeomai, how can you consider others

superior to yourself? I mean, honestly, how can you do that? How can you deal with that issue? Let me give you a suggestion.

Do you know the heart of any other person? Do you know what's in the other person's heart? Do you? No. Do you think you do? Sometimes. You may be right, you may not. I mean, a wife may say to her husband, "Ha, I know what you're thinking." She may be right, she may not. If she's not it's very frustrating for him, if she's right it's even more frustrating. But basically we don't know what's in somebody's heart. The only sin that I know in another person is what I can see or hear. That's all I'm going to know. So I can't really know what's in their heart. I can't know what sin torments them. I can't know what grace is abound within them. But there is one heart that I do know, mine. And I know my own heart so very well that I know the sin of my own heart.

Now think about it this way. You know more sin about your own heart than you do about anybody else's, right? So if we're talking from the level of first-hand information, who is the worst sinner you have ever met? Who is it? Come on, be honest. You. I'm talking first-hand information. Who's got the most corrupt mind you know of? If you're honest you're going to say me because you don't know what's in somebody else's heart. Now what I'm saying to you, dear friend, is you've got enough personal information to put yourself in a position where you can consider others superior to you. Did you get that? That's a pretty practical way to view it. Every man knows his own heart first. And every man who knows his own heart and every woman who knows her own heart knows what is there. And you have enough information to give yourself a low estimate of what you really are. So do I. So it shouldn't be any major issue for me to look at someone else as superior to myself. We can assume people are superior to us spiritually if all we can see is what's on the outside.

I can assume that about all of you, I mean, I see you, you're all dressed up nice, you've got your Bible under your arm, you're here in church. That's all I know. And I look at my own heart, I know more than I wish I knew. What makes Paul say the things that he says? You look at Paul and you say, "Oh, Paul, I mean you're the greatest Christian that ever lived." This is what he said, "I'm the least of all the Apostles who am not fit to be called an Apostle." You say, "Is that false humility?" No, that's because the person he knows best is whom? Paul.

Now why does he say this? First Timothy, "It's a trustworthy statement...chapter 1 verse 15...deserving full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am chief, foremost," past tense...present tense. Now how in the world can Paul say he's the worst sinner in the world? From personal information, he is. That's right. And from all that you know personally, so are you, so am I. Now that perspective ought to help us to look at others with a different view.

I love the story of Dr. Alexander White of Edinburgh. A man came to see him to report on a meeting that was held in Edinburgh. A certain preacher came into the city to preach and it was his habit of

preaching to attack the other preachers.  And this friend said to him, and I'm quoting from this biographer, this friend said, "Do you know what he said, Dr. White?  Dr. White replied, say on.  He said that Dr. Hood Wilson was not a converted man.  Dr. White was indignant.  He leaped from his chair, his face was dark with indignation, `That rascal,' he said, `That rascal.  Dr. Wilson, not a converted man.'  And he was outraged.

"The visitor amazed to see the man of God so flamingly indignant went on.  `That wasn't all he said, Dr. White.  He said that you weren't a converted man either.'

White's pacing suddenly stopped.  The flame in him subsided.  Slowly returning to his chair, he put his face in his hands and remained a long minute in silence.  And then looking up he said to his visitor in a voice of pleading, `Leave me, friend, leave me.  I must examine my heart.'"

Now there's a man of character.  Problems of discord and problems of division and faction end when we hold others as more worthy of respect and honor and a right to be heard and followed than we do ourselves.  And you shouldn't have any problem doing that because of the information you have about your own heart.

A fourth principle, verse 4, "Do not merely look out for your own personal interests."  Oh, what can we say about this?  We live in a society where that's all anybody cares about, their own personal interest.  And no wonder, we're fed that.  I picked up a book of poems this week.  I don't even know why I picked it up, maybe the Lord wanted me to share these with you.  Couldn't believe what I read, this is contemporary poetry.  "Give up thinking of others.  If you want to think of others, think of your own self in them.  Give up looking at others.  If you want to look at others, look at your own self in them.  Look at your own self and become immersed in your own ecstasy."

Here's another one.  "There is nothing but you.  Nothing different from you.  Nothing to attain other than you.  Nothing that can be taken from you. That is all you need to understand.  There is nothing to know other than you."

Here was my favorite.  "Meditate on yourself.  Worship yourself.  Kneel to yourself.  Understand yourself.  God dwells within you as you."

That's where our world is, our society.  Boy, does that pour gas on the fire of fallen pride.  And Paul says, "Do not merely look out for your own personal interests."  The opposite.  You need to be responsible for the conditions and matters of your own life, but don't merely be concerned with that.  The idea here of that verb "look out for" is to regard as your aim or your goal.  Don't regard as your aim or goal or purpose in life to take care of only your own personal enterprises.  How can we communicate how desperately important it is for us to get passionately involved in the causes of others? That's why we have conflict, even in the church, because we only own our own little piece of

the pie.  We don't see the big picture.  We don't even care about someone else's enterprise.  Oh, and this fleshes out in such pitiable minutiae in the church.  You need to give attention to your own personal interests.  And the idea here, I believe, has to do with legitimate interest, ministry interests, things that would honor the Lord, things that are part of our responsibility as Christians.  But don't merely do that.  But also for the interests of others.  The word "interest" by the way is things, very generic.  And there's a whole lot, page after page of discussion in commentaries about what the "things" means.  And if the Lord had been as generic as He has been here in inspiring Paul, we can assume that He wanted our understanding to be a bit generic, too.  So it leads me to say that he isn't trying to be specific, he is just saying while you're busy attending to the matters which are on your own heart and are your own responsibility, be equally concerned about the same matters in the lives of those around you.  That's the idea.

You want to encompass their interests, and their enterprises, and their needs, and their tasks, and their goals, and their gifts, and their spiritual character, and their ministries, and their qualities, and their strength, and their significance to the Lord and to the body, should be equally important to you as your own.  Boy, this is a high standard, isn't it?  You know, our fallenness has a difficult time in literally giving all of its energy, all of our energy to a cause and pouring our soul into that cause and being equally concerned about everybody else's cause.  That's not easy but that's a high standard.  I mean, I look at the Christian community and it is tragic to see all of the conflict and competition, really tragic, just unbelievable.  And I see it every week of my life, competition, making sure that you don't horn in on their territory or talk to somebody who might be interested in their ministry rather than your ministry and tremendous conflict at the highest levels and all the way down to the even personal matters in the church.

Simple principles, aren't they?  High standard.  Eliminate selfishness, that's that personal ambition that ties you into your little piece of turf.  Eliminate empty conceit, that's the driving passion to see your name exalted and your person lifted up.  The corrective for that is the third principle, look at others as superior to yourself and that will allow you to give to them more attention than you give yourself...more trust, more confidence and to think more highly of them.  And then the fourth principle in verse 4, again a negative one, "Don't merely look out for your own personal interests."  Don't get caught in that particular trap where your life is consumed with your own things.

Finally the fifth, but also be concerned with the interests of others who have every right to your concern and your prayers.  As I said, this is a tremendously high standard.  And we would expect it.  Would we expect anything less?  If we can live out these things, we can eliminate competition and we can eliminate collisions in the church and in the body of Christ.

There's one more point and I close with this...the model.  Who do we look to to show us how to do this?  Verse 5, Paul says, what I'm asking for is this attitude, "That was in Christ Jesus."  Christ is our model.  He says have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.  He had it.  Really?

Yes.  He did nothing from selfishness.  Everything He did really was fulfilling the Father's will and the Father's will was being expressed for our sake.  He did nothing for empty conceit.  Not hardly, they spit on Him and killed Him.  With humility of mind, He regarded others as more important than Himself.  You say, "Did He really do that?"  Yes He did.  He regarded others more important than Himself, in what sense?  Verse 6, "Although He existed in the form of God, He didn't regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but He emptied Himself taking the form of a bondservant, being made in the likeness of man, being found in appearance as man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."  He did not look on His own things, on His own interests, but on the things of others and He set aside His own importance and looked at others as superior in the sense that He died to give them life.  He is the living model of the principles in verses 3 and 4.

That wonderful passage starting in verse 5 will unfold to us in the weeks to come as we see the beauty of Christ revealed there.  He is our model.  So I said, the standard is high.  The only one who ever lived it to perfection was Jesus Christ.  But it is ours to pursue.  Let's bow together in prayer.

Thank You, Father, this morning for the joy of the Word of God.  We feel like Jeremiah who when he read the Scripture found his heart rejoicing.  And, Lord, that's the way we feel.  Even though we are confronted and even though we are faced with our sin and our fallenness, we still rejoice because our heart longing is to do what is right, to be delivered from sin and to walk a path of righteousness.  Father, I ask that You would confirm to our hearts all of these things, to my heart as well, that we may be more like Christ who never was moved by selfishness, empty conceit, who regarded others as even more important than Himself, though that's unfathomable to my mind.  So much that He regard us that He gave up the prerogatives of His own deity to humble Himself for our sake. That's how important we were in His eyes.  Who was not consumed with His own interests alone but continues even now to be consumed with our interests so that He ever and always attends to us graciously and has provided through His sacrifice all that we need to supply every necessity of life.  Help us to be like Christ, consumed with those things that please You and that bring about the unity of Your redeemed church, we pray in His dear name.  Amen.

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