



PARTNERS UNIFIED – Philippians 2:1-11

When a band plays as individuals all you get is noise rather than music. When Christians are not unified all the world sees is 'noise' not the music of the Gospel message.

When asked what were the three most important Christian virtues, Augustine replied, "Humility, humility, and humility." John Stott says that pride is the Christians greatest enemy and humility our greatest friend.

Last week we looked at Partners for THE Cause of Christ. This week we are looking at 'Partners Unified.'

1. The importance of unity

Read: 1

In the first verse we see the **basis of unity** and in the second verse we see the **call to unity**.

a. The **basis of unity** v.1

Although the word *if* is used throughout the first verse— *if there is any encouragement in Christ, if, if*—Paul is speaking of qualities that are **real not uncertain**. The '*if*' clauses here could actually be translated *since*. Paul mentions things like encouragement in Christ and comfort of love in a way which suggests to us that they should all be obvious parts of the Christian's experience; to make his point, he could have just as easily said, "if water is wet, if fire is hot, if rocks are hard if L-T is skinny, if L-T has a big nose, If L-t's sporting hero is Lance Armstrong. . .

The qualities that Paul mentions in the first verse are real to the Christian. There is encouragement in Christ, there is comfort of love, there is fellowship of the Spirit, there is tenderness and compassion. All of these are very real in the life of the believer.

We have experienced such wonderful blessings from our relationship with Christ and out of gratitude for all He has done for us should flow a desire to be unified with our fellow believers. Paul lists all of these blessings that are ours in Christ to motivate us to the unity he calls us to in verse 2. The basis for our unity is our relationship with Jesus Christ.

b. The **call to unity** v.2

Paul moves on in verse two and calls the Philippians to be like-minded, having the same love, being of one spirit and purpose. He is calling them to unity. He is calling them to unity with each other at Philippi. He calls them to be like-minded.

Paul also calls the Philippians to have the same **love**. We need to love one another equally in the body of Christ. We can't choose to love a few of our favourite people while being unloving toward others. We are called to love one another. Our love can't be selective. We've been commanded to love each other. Not just the ones we prefer but all of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are a family.

Paul also calls the Philippian church to be of **one in spirit and purpose**. The idea here is living in harmony with each other. We shouldn't let our differences of opinion or preferences hinder us from being unified with each other and working together for the Lord. We may not see eye to eye on everything with fellow believers but we

shouldn't allow petty differences to destroy our unity. We should have relationships that are harmonious as we work together for the cause of Christ.

Paul outlines for us some wonderful incentives for **unity**. He gives us a solid basis for striving to be a church that is marked by unity. Just as Paul calls the Philippian church to unity, so we are called to unity today at Lakeshore.

There's always a sense of uncertain peace in a hen house. It's really an interesting thing to watch. There is a senior hen in most hen houses, and that's not based on a loving attitude shown by Mrs. Big. She comes by her title and position in life by sheer grit and aggression. She literally pecks the other hens into submission. And each hen down the line establishes her position in the pecking order by pecking and intimidating every other hen that she can.

I think there's something in fallen human nature that is faintly similar to the pecking order of chickens. Take the school yard bully, for instance. He bullies everyone into submission; until the teacher comes of course, and the teacher is automatically considered to be a potentially better bully.

It seems a lot of people have their eyes on the top rung of the ladder. And it's amazing the lengths to which some will go to establish their superiority.

We use all sorts of categories – jobs, clothes, school, where you live

Are your relationships in the church marked by unity or would you have to admit that there are some rifts that you need to repair? Discord and broken relationships in the church will weaken or even destroy our effectiveness for Christ. We must strive together to be like-minded, having the same love, being of one spirit, and purpose.

2. The secret to unity = humility. The way we will achieve unity is by being humble. It's easy to be the opposite – proud.

Read: 3-4

Jonathan Edwards says - *The proud man, that has a high opinion of his own wisdom, or strength, or righteousness, is self-confident. But the humble are not disposed to trust in themselves, but are diffident of their own sufficiency.*

The humble man is further disposed to renounce all the glory of the good he has or does, and to give it all to God.

We'll be looking at three ways we can practice humility, which in turn will promote unity in the local church. If we want to experience real joy and see unity in the church we'll need to...

1. Reject Selfish Ambition and Conceit v3a

In the first part of verse 3, Paul instructs the Philippians to do nothing through selfish ambition or conceit. The Greek word translated, *selfish ambition* refers to a desire to put one's self forward even by unfair means. It originally referred to seeking political office by unfair means.

If I seek gain for myself at your expense, I'm guilty of selfish ambition. It's an attitude of "I'm going to do what's best for me even if it costs you." You can see why Paul warned against this. If selfish ambition is prevalent in a church there certainly won't be unity. It might seem obvious, but selfishness is at the root of selfish ambition. And if we're promoting ourselves instead of Christ we're not going to experience unity.

Hudson Taylor said of Robert Morrison:

"When as a young man Robert Morrison had first sailed to China, he was asked, "Do you really expect to make an impression on the idolatry of the great Chinese empire?" In reply, Morrison spoke more prophetically than he knew: "No, sir, but I expect God will."

We need to reject *selfish ambition* and we also need to reject *conceit*. We shouldn't be conceited. We shouldn't think too highly of ourselves. Have you ever been around someone who is "always right"? They think so highly of themselves that they can never admit when they're wrong? We need to be careful that we aren't conceited. This is destructive of true community life.

2. Regard Others Higher Than yourself v.3b

in humility - Lowliness of mind refers to having a humble opinion of yourself or a deep sense of your low position before God.

Matthew Henry says *we must, be severe upon our own faults and charitable in our judgments of others, be quick in observing our own defects and infirmities, but ready to overlook and make favourable allowances for the defects of others. We must esteem the good which is in others above that which is in ourselves; for we best know our own unworthiness and imperfections.*

George Washington Carver, the scientist who developed hundreds of useful products from the peanut: *"When I was young, I said to God, 'God, tell me the mystery of the universe.' But God answered, 'That knowledge is*

reserved for me alone.' So I said, 'God, tell me the mystery of the peanut.' Then God said, 'Well, George, that's more nearly your size.' And he told me."

Essential to regarding others higher than your self is having a right view of yourself. In humility consider others better than yourself.

3. Recognize Others Interests v.4

Are you concerned with the welfare of others? Notice the first part of the verse. *Let each of you look out not only for his own interests.* Taking care of ourselves and looking out for our own interests is not wrong. But if we only look out for our own interests and not the interests of others then we are wrong. We need to notice the needs of others and be ready to do what we can to help.

On a visit to the Beethoven museum in Bonn, a young American student became fascinated by the piano on which Beethoven had composed some of his greatest works. She asked the museum guard if she could play a few bars on it; she accompanied the request with a lavish tip, and the guard agreed. The girl went to the piano and tinkled out the opening of the Moonlight Sonata. As she was leaving she said to the guard, "I suppose all the great pianist who come here want to play on that piano."

The guard shook his head. "Padarewski [the famed Polish pianist] was here a few years ago and he said he wasn't worthy to touch it."

The key to humility is a right view of yourself when you stand before greatness. The greatness and goodness of God to you in Jesus.

The secret to unity is humility.

3. The example of humility is Jesus.

We can learn about humility by looking at the man who was the ultimate example of humility. Jesus Christ taught us about humility when he came to earth as a man. We'll see how Christ modelled humility for us and as His followers how important it is for us to follow His example. There are 3 key ways he modelled humility.

Read: 5-11

In v.5 Paul clearly states that we are to have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had when He came to this earth as a man.

a. Surrender v.6

The NRSV says Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be exploited. Equal with God and he didn't use to his own advantage. He gave up what he had. He surrendered that position.

In the summer of 1986, two ships collided in the Black Sea off the coast of Russia. Hundreds of passengers died as they were hurled into the icy waters below. News of the disaster was further darkened when an investigation revealed the cause of the accident. It wasn't a technology problem like radar malfunction--or even thick fog. The cause was human stubbornness. Each captain was aware of the other ship's presence nearby. Both could have steered clear, but according to news reports, neither captain wanted to give way to the other. Each was too proud to yield first. By the time they came to their senses, it was too late.

2 captains who were not willing to give up their position.

b. Servanthood v.7

In this verse we see that Christ who was fully God became fully man. The phrase *made Himself nothing*, is literally "emptied Himself." He didn't empty Himself of His deity. He didn't stop being God but He did empty Himself of His self interests and His privileges to take the form of a servant to become a man. He was fully God and fully man. There are those who have wrongly interpreted "emptied Himself" to mean that Christ lay aside some of His deity but that clearly is not the case.

b. Sacrifice v.8

Jesus Christ made the ultimate sacrifice on our behalf. He willingly laid down His life to pay the penalty for our sins. He suffered death on a cross which was punishment reserved in Rome for those who were non-citizens and the worst of offenders. Death on a cross carried much shame. And it was on a cross that Christ suffered. His sacrifice makes it possible for those who believe in Him and trust Him to be forgiven of their sins and to inherit eternal life. Our salvation came at a great cost to our Saviour, Jesus Christ. There was nothing cheap about it. vv.9-11 Remind us the only way is down.

As followers of Christ, we must *follow* the example He set. He was willing to sacrifice so much for us. But are we willing to sacrifice for the sake of others? Are we willing to sacrifice our time or maybe some of our earthly goods to *serve one another in love*?

Are you following His example? If we'll follow His example of **surrender**, **servanthood** and **sacrifice** we're going to be unified. We'll experience the joy of unity through our humility. May our attitude be like the Lord Jesus Christ and may we follow His example of humility, as followers of Christ.

Do you remember how we started? With that item from the band. That's what we will sound like to the world. Instead of a symphony of unity we will be a cacophony of disunity.

This week I leave you with JOY. Jesus, others yourself. If you live life with these priorities you will experience the word the letters make up. JOY.