

## INTRODUCTION

The subject of today's message is the unity that we have in Christ. Unity is one of those words that the definition doesn't turn you on. You have to experience unity rather than just knowing the meaning of it. It's like the word "kiss." Have you ever read the definition of a kiss? "A compression of the closed cavity of the mouth with a slight sound when the rounded contact of the lips with another is broken." Doesn't that sound exciting? If you have been a kisser or a kissee, you know a kiss is a lot different than the dictionary definition. You've got to experience it to know what it is. Only when you experience unity can you know its beauty and wonder.

In Philippians 2, Paul is writing to a church with some problems. He pleads with them to have unity. He talks about how humility is that which maintains unity and he gives four examples of unity and humility in the Bible.

Philippians 2:1-5. "If you have an encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."

Unity is essential for any organization. There must be unity in marriage or you won't have a good marriage. There must be unity in a family. A house divided against itself cannot stand. There must be unity on a football team to be successful. There must be unity in a business for it to be successful.

I'm really excited, because tomorrow night I'm going to have the privilege of attending my very first Dallas Cowboys football game. And I'm going to go watch Dallas beat up on the Washington Redskins. I don't know everything that's gone on during preseason practices, but I do know that if Jimmy Johnson is a good coach, he has stressed how important it is for the team to be unified. What is it that makes a team unified? Their goal. They have said unequivocally that their goal for the season is to win a Super Bowl. And although there are different personalities, different talents, different backgrounds, they come together united to accomplish one purpose, one goal.

That's really what unites a church: Our goal, our purpose to reach this world for Jesus Christ. Who wins the Super Bowl is not very important in light of eternity. But what a church does for Christ will mean something a million years from now. So it's important for us to be unified as a church, as a family.

Disunity creates pain. Even when a nation loses its unity there's pain. I suppose the darkest time in the history of our nation would have to be the Civil War. What caused that war? Some say it goes much deeper than the issue of slavery and I tend to agree. Carl Sandburg in his treatment of Abraham Lincoln, said he believed the war between the states was fought over one verb: IS/ARE. The Southern states said the United States ARE, plural, states' rights. However, the

Northern states, the Union said, "The United States IS." And even the tense of that verb revealed the difference between states' rights and federalism, or the unity of our nation. Wars have been fought over differences like that. More than a half a million Americans, some of them brothers fighting against one another, died because of this disunity of our nation.

Paul is writing to a church. He's saying a church must maintain unity to be used by God. There are three things I want to say about unity.

## **I. THE BASIS OF UNITY**

What is the basis of our unity? It is found in verse 1, where Paul asked those four questions. In the Greek language, whenever a question is asked that has a yes or no answer, the answer is anticipated in the text itself. We don't have that in English. Other languages do. Have you ever heard someone whose primary language is not English ask a question? "You want some more water, yes?" They answer their question. "These are not your suitcases, no?" The answer to all four of Paul's questions is "yes." You could even take the word "if" and substitute the word "since" or "because of."

Look at who we are in Christ, the basis of our unity. Since we have encouragement from being united with Christ, we are united in or with Jesus Christ. There is comfort because he loves us and we have fellowship with the Spirit and because there is tenderness and compassion, that's the basis of our unity. We never create unity. A pastor cannot create unity. Deacons cannot create unity. Holding hands to pray or to sing does not create unity. Only the spirit of God can create unity; we can only maintain the unity.

### **A. Jesus prayed for our unity in Him**

Where does our unity come from? We see that Jesus prayed for our unity in Him. Jesus prayed to the Father, "I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (John 17:23) Why did Jesus pray that we might be unified? So the world could see that there is something supernatural about the Christian life. The world is used to arguing and fighting, but when they see Christians dwelling together in unity, the world feels a need to check it out.

### **B. The Holy Spirit creates our unity**

It is the Spirit who creates unity. That's why we call it the unity of the Spirit. God creates our unity. "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:2) The word "keep" in that verse is a picture of a Roman soldier on sentry duty guarding something valuable. Our job as Christians and members of Green Acres Baptist Church is not to create unity. The Spirit does that. Our job is to stand guard and try to maintain that unity and make sure we would bite our tongues before we would say something that would cause a rupture in the unity. We should do everything we can to lovingly deal with those who may be disrupting unity.

Paul explains why we have unity in Christ in Ephesians 4:5-6. "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." That's a lot of ones. When you and I became a Christian, the Holy Spirit of God baptized us into the body of Christ. We don't have to create unity. That unity was created when the Holy Spirit did that. We are to guard that unity.

## II. THE BREAKING OF UNITY

There was division in the church at Philippi. The unity wasn't as it should have been. Paul was pleading with them to agree and be unified.

Philippi was a great church, but it wasn't perfect. Have any of you ever heard of a perfect church? Several years ago I spoke with a man who said, "I don't like this church. I'm looking for a perfect church so I can join it." I said, "Don't join it, because then it won't be perfect for sure!" There's no such thing as a perfect church. Philippi was a great one but it had problems. Part of the problem was members disagreeing with each other. Paul even named names. "I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord." These two women were opening fussing and everyone knew about it. He told Euodia, whose name meant "sweet fragrance," that she was stinking up the church. Syntyche, whose name meant, "blessing," was being a blister. He called on these two ladies to get with the Lord to repair their unity.

### A. A selfish attitude destroys unity: "I am most important!"

What breaks the unity of a church or any group of Christians? There are two attitudes that destroy unity and they're both listed in Philippians 4:3, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit."

There's nothing wrong with ambition, it's okay to set goals and strive to reach them, but when ambition becomes selfish, that's when it becomes harmful. Selfishness says, "I am most important!" Whether or not I like or dislike something, my opinion is most important. Selfishness is the essence of sin. You have to be saved from your selfishness before you can ever be saved. I was saved when I was nine years old. I was not a murderer or drug addict, but I was lost because I was a selfish person. My whole world revolved around me. But when you become a Christian, you repent of that and you put Christ at the center of everything.

### B. An attitude of pride destroys unity: "I am right!"

The second attitude is pride. If selfishness says, "I am most important!" Pride says, "I am right!" Selfishness and pride are basic signs of spiritual immaturity. Parents know when something goes wrong or breaks and you go into a room with a bunch of children and ask who did it, no one will confess or they'll blame each other. That's exactly what Eve did in the Garden of Eden when she sinned. God asked Adam what happened and Adam said, "It's your fault God; you gave me that woman. She's the one who ate it." Then Eve blamed it on the serpent. When the fingers of blame are pointed at others, it's a sign of pride and immaturity.

A few years ago I took my family to Six Flags over Georgia. We rode all the rides and ate all day long. You have to go to the bank and get a loan to go on a trip like that. We had a great time. And just as we were walking out, one of my girls said, "Daddy, I want one of these balloons." I was tired and said, "No, we've already done everything we're gonna do. Let's go to the car and go home." We took the tram to the car, got in and were driving out as I was thinking what a great day it was when I heard a whimpering sound from the back seat that every parent loves. I looked back there and she was crying. "What's wrong?" "I didn't get a balloon!" I wanted to say, "We spent all day doing all these great things, riding all the rides, having fun and just because you didn't get a balloon the whole day is blown."

Pride is putting self on stage. I learned a lesson early in my ministry about that. I was minister of music at a church in Montgomery and there was a lady in the church who was a former opera singer. After I'd been there awhile, she informed me she had a two-note less than four octave range and had sung in operas and wanted to sing a solo one Sunday. The church had a policy that you had to be in the choir in order to sing a solo. I told her I'd be glad for her to sing a solo, but that she needed to be in the adult choir. She said, "I'm not going to have anything to do with that choir! That last choir director before you would let me sing a solo in the Christmas cantata." At that point I wondered if she wanted to sing for the Lord or for herself.

It didn't end there. On some Sunday nights, we used to have hymn requests, where people would try to stump the organist by trying to find a song he didn't know. She would request a very unfamiliar song from the old Baptist Hymnal and she was the only one who knew it. It ended on a high G above middle C and she was the only that could hit that note. So everyone would mumble to this congregational hymn and she would sing it almost like a solo and everyone else just dropped out on the last note and she'd be singing her solo. This kind of thing happens. It happened in the church at Philippi, it happened at Corinth and Ephesus.

There's not a perfect church, but if there's a problem with unity, you start looking for the causes of it: Selfishness and pride. If you're thinking about someone when I say that, that probably shows you have a little pride and selfishness yourself. If you think I'm giving this message for anyone in particular, I am: Myself. The guy I have more trouble with than anyone else in this church is my wife's first husband, me. I am so far from a perfect pastor, I've made so many mistakes. I guarantee I'll make a lot of mistakes in the future too. But I hope I never get to the point where I'm too proud to say, "I'm sorry. I made a mistake, please forgive me." I hope none of us ever comes to that point where we're so proud of the fact that we won't apologize.

Temper and pride are a terrible combination. Temper gets you into trouble and pride keeps you there. Ask yourself as I ask myself, "Is there selfishness and pride in my heart?"

Verse 3 and verse 14 are like two bookends that enclose that beautiful theological passage on who Jesus is. Verse 3 is the inner attitude, selfishness and pride. But verse 14 says selfishness and pride manifest themselves outwardly through complaining and arguing. The place to deal with it is not in the fruit, it's at the root of the problem.

### **III. THE BOND OF UNITY**

## **A. Attitude that builds unity: When selfishness is replaced by love**

There are two attitudes that strengthen and build unity? Number one is when selfishness is replaced by love. Selfishness says, "I am most important." Love says, "You are more important."

Paul says in verse 1, "If there is any comfort in HIS love," and again verse 2, "make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, one for another." If you want to know what love is, look at verse 3. "Consider others better than yourself."

A pecking order is an unspoken hierarchy of importance. The phrase is based on barnyard behavior. Have you ever thrown feed out to chickens and watched as one chicken always gets first chance to peck? Only after he's had his chance can chicken number two slip in and so forth. Chickens understand pecking order. If you break out of your pecking order, you become the peckee. You get pecked! Sometimes we make the same mistake and develop a pecking order. When you look around a room full of people, there are some you think are better than you, but you also think there are some that you are better than. We tend to do that, but that's not what the word of God teaches. A pecking order may be acceptable in a barnyard, but it has no place in the church of the living God. The only pecking order we should follow is, "consider others better than yourself."

There's a man in Prattville, Alabama, I met when I was a youth minister. His name is Dr. Mel Cooper. He's one of the leading Baptist laymen in the state of Alabama. He is now the executive director of the Alabama Ethics Commission, which was set up to ensure all the politicians and public officials in the state of Alabama maintain ethical conduct and behavior. They have to submit financial statements to him and if there is a question about ethics, his commission investigates it. He is a very important person in the state. He rubs elbows with the governor and all the senators and legislators. And if there's one person many of them fear, it's Dr. Mel Cooper.

I was privileged to know Dr. Cooper when I was at First Baptist Prattville. His daughters were part of my youth group and I still consider him a good friend. One summer afternoon, he invited me to his home to swim in his pool. At the time, he was a retired Air Force Colonel with a successful law practice and was commissioner of the ethics committee. He had a beautiful home in a beautiful neighborhood. And here I was floating in his pool with a glass of lemonade and having a great time, thinking, "I'm so glad I know someone as important as this man," when the pecking order came into play. We'd been swimming for awhile and heard a car rumbling down the street. It was a pulpwood truck with the door hanging off. It pulled up and stopped, engine idling roughly. A redneck got out and walked up to the chain link fence and stood there looking at us. I was in a little huff over that. "What is this guy doing?" Dr. Cooper walked over and asked if he could help him. In a twangy country voice, the redneck said, "Yeah, we're thinkin' about puttin' in a pool out behind our mobile home. I'd seen yours and I just wanted to check it out." I thought to myself, "This guy's not putting a pool in. He can't even afford a pulpwood truck. He's going to put a pool in at his house?" But I learned a lesson that day I hope I never forget. Mel Cooper invited the man in, offered him a seat and a glass of lemonade. He took about twenty minutes talking to the man, showing him some literature and talking about the builder. As I witnessed that, I became so ashamed, because I had set up a pecking order. Dr. Cooper > Me > The Redneck. But Dr. Cooper treated that man with as much respect as he would treat the

governor of the state of Alabama. I hope I learned a lesson that day. He was practicing Philippians 2:3, "You consider others better than yourself."

What do you think would happen in your family if you practiced that? In your marriage? In your church? Imagine driving into the church parking lot on Sunday morning and you consider others more highly than yourself and that may mean instead of parking next to the building, you park in an adjacent parking lot. It may mean when you walk into church, instead of running down to get a good seat, you go sit up in the balcony so someone else can have a better seat. It will change your life if you begin to practice it.

### **B. Attitude that builds unity: When pride is replaced by humility**

Another attitude that strengthens and builds unity is when pride is replaced by humility. Verse 3 says, "In humility," verse 4 says, "you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." Selfish pride says, "I am right." Humility says, "I am nothing." Verses 6-7 says Jesus, "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing."

The Bible says God resists the proud. I don't want God resisting me, do you? But he gives grace to the humble. "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." (Proverbs 16:18) God has a way of humbling us.

### **CONCLUSION**

Dr. Jim Henry, Pastor First Baptist Church Orlando, is a good friend of mine. He attended college at Georgetown, Kentucky, but he said he was a nobody on campus. Later, he was invited back as the outstanding alumnus of the year. He was at the graduation ceremonies in the stadium sitting on the platform with all those dignitaries thinking about when he used to run track around that very stadium how no one even knew who Jim Henry was. "But here I am, I've made it— Outstanding Alumnus." He said at that very moment a pigeon flew over and bombed him. He looked at that and said, "Lord, I know you've got a sense of humor."

The Bible says if we don't humble ourselves, God has a way of humbling us. The secret to joy is found when Jesus is first, others are second and you are last. If you have selfishness and pride in your heart, turn from it; repent. Ask God to replace your selfishness with love and to replace your pride with humility. Let's guard the unity God has created.

## OUTLINE

### I. THE BASIS OF UNITY

#### A. Jesus prayed for our unity in Him

"I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." *John 17:23*

#### B. The Holy Spirit creates our unity

### II. THE BREAKING OF UNITY

Two attitudes that destroy unity:

A. Selfishness: "I am most important!"

B. Pride: "I am right!"

### III. THE BOND OF UNITY

Two attitudes that build unity:

A. When selfishness is replaced by love: "You are more important."

B. When pride is replaced by humility: "I am nothing."

Jesus

Others

Yourself

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes