

Living Likemindedness/ Gospel Unity

Therefore if *there is* any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ² fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. ³ *Let nothing be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, (Phil. 2:1-5)

A changing world creates new kinds of jobs. A relatively new career, one that 20% of Fortune 500 companies now include in their personnel, is that of Diversity Officer. A diversity officer is employed to make sure a company recruits people from all race groups and genders, and now, almost certainly, sexual orientations. The diversity officer is there to supposedly prevent racism in the hiring practices of a company, and to create a culture in a company of, as the buzzwords go, inclusivity and diversity.

Behind all that are the growingly popular and very dangerous theories of critical race theory, social justice and cultural Marxism. But in principle, diversity by itself is often a welcome thing. It means there is peace instead of division, cooperation instead of enmity, a certain kind of acceptance instead of rejection. And actually, it was Christianity that taught the world the virtues of peace, tolerance, and welcoming the stranger.

But the fact that secular culture needs diversity officers and enforced quotas and diversity training shows that the only way they get unity between races and sexes is with a carrot and a stick. The world must crowbar its unity onto each other, because it won't happen any other way.

One of the most powerful things that the gospel does is to bring people together voluntarily into what the world would regard as an unlikely partnership. From the first century, what the gospel did was bring under one roof, and seat at one table, slaves and their masters, the aristocrats and the poor, Jews and Gentiles. It is the very theme of Ephesians: that the gospel has torn down the wall of partition that existed between ethnicities, and made us one new ethnos, a new nation, a new people in Messiah.

The gospel strips a man of pride, and makes us come on our knees to the cross. And there at the cross, you meet all the other people who have been stripped of their proud boasting, and you find that for all of us, Christ is all in all. No longer can we use our education, our skin colour, our political connections, our money, our looks, our intellect to elbow others out and feel a kind of smug satisfaction that I am better. No, in the gospel, I have nothing to bring, and nothing to offer, and so nothing to boast in. I have only Christ, and so does every other Christian.

When Christians get a hold of this idea that Christ is our all in all, our life, then selfish boasting and pride and division evaporates, and is replaced with unity and humble likemindedness. That kind of unity becomes a corporate testimony of the gospel.

Every Christian has an individual testimony, his or her life which displays what Christ has changed. But our relationships with each other are a corporate testimony of what the gospel does to relationships. How Christians dwell together, especially in one local church is a visible message to the world of whether the gospel does anything remarkable, unusual, even miraculous when it comes to racism, classism, ethnic hatred, partiality, unkind or unfair treatment of the elderly, or children, or women, or the disabled.

The world tells us that we need diversity training and inclusivity classes, and legally mandated

racial quotas. But the church of Jesus Christ needs none of those, when the gospel and the gospel's implications are rooted deep in its members.

This is the deep plea of the letter of Philippians. The city and culture of Philippi was just marinated in the pride and honour culture of Rome: status, name, ambition, position, rank. Paul says to the Philippians, as Christians, we have died to those things which the world counts as gain, and risen to know and magnify Christ. And so, among Christians in Philippi, there should be no competition, no rivalry, no ambition, no jockeying for position, and jostling each other for recognition. The church at Philippi should be showing the unsaved in Philippi how the gospel changes our relationships with others. Instead of the dog-eat-dog world of selfish competition and envy, the gospel should shine forth in Christians with a Gospel-empowered unity.

I. Gospel Unity Pursues Sameness of Mind

Therefore if *there is* any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ² fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind.

These four *if* statements are Paul's way of saying: since you are Christians, since you have believed and experienced the gospel, since there really is new life in you, then be of one mind. Look at what the true Christian experience is:

The true Christian experience is consolation in Christ. When you are saved there is a deep consolation that you are in Christ.

The true Christian experience is the comfort of God's love, especially in suffering.

The true Christian experience is the common participation and sharing in the Holy Spirit.

Paul is probably obliquely referencing the Trinity here, as he often does when speaking of the theme of unity, like in Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12. Notice consolation in Christ, fellowship in the Spirit, and he likely means for us to supply the idea of the love of the Father.

The true Christian experience is being a recipient of God's tender affections and mercy.

Now Paul says, since this is the case with you, since you Philippians have experienced the working of the gospel inwardly, complete my joy by being like-minded. I will feel completely satisfied and content if you Philippians become likeminded.

What does this mean?

Likemindedness is what Paul calls for in this passage. Christian likemindedness is a deep, robust unity, not a surface friendliness. It's not the polite cooperation of people trading together. Christian likemindedness is what the gospel that raised Jesus from the dead does to our relationships.

Likeminded means more than think the same way. It means Christians must share a comprehensive mind-set or outlook. Our whole inward posture towards reality: what we love, what we value, how we reason, how we interpret life. It should be shared; it should be one.

You can see that in Paul's three modifiers having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind.

Oneness is when we share the same love. We love what God loves and hate what God hates.

We're of one accord. That's literally, "souls together". We are harmonising our priorities, our goals. We're of one mind.

To some this sounds like losing your ability to think for yourself. It sounds like brainwashing, or as the term today is, "group-think". It sounds like giving up discernment or reason, maybe giving up

your freedom or your individuality.

But Christian like-mindedness is true freedom, and true self-identity. Why? Because likemindedness is not mindless conformity to some false idea. It is patterning your mind after the ultimate mind, and oneness with the truth, is freedom. What is that mind?

Now we're focusing on the first four verses, but if you want to see what this mind is which all Christians should share, drop down to verses 5 and following. ⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross. (Phil. 2:5-8)

When we all pursue the mind of Christ, Christlike perspectives, Christlike priorities, Christlike goals, Christlike attitudes, we are not a bland uniformity, but an exciting unity. When we are one in mind in Christ, we don't lose our identity; we become who we were meant to be. And in harmony with other Christians, iron sharpens iron, we become even more who we were meant to be.

An orchestra has 80 or 100 different musicians, all playing different types of instruments: brass, woodwind, wind, strings, percussion, pitched in different registers: bass, tenor, alto, soprano. How can all this harmonise? Before any performance begins, one instrumentalist, the first violinist, plays an A. As she plays, every other instrumentalist listens to that A and tunes his violin, viola, cello, double bass, flute, oboe – you name it – to that one violin. Because they all harmonise around one note of one instrument, they are all in tune with each other. Soon an orchestra of incredible diversity, with over 21 different types of instruments will be of one voice.

This is what the gospel can do in a church, when there are all kinds of backgrounds, vocations, aptitudes, ages, ethnicities, levels of wealth, levels of education, and so on. When all those people tune their hearts and minds to that of Christ, there is a oneness that is music to God's ears.

Now, what does this unity really look like? What does this mind of Christ bring that is so unusual to the world's way of seeking unity? In the next verses, Paul shows us both what this mind of Christ looks like on the inside and the outside.

II. Gospel Unity Practises Selfless Service

³ *Let nothing be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

Christian unity through the mind of Christ means we must put off some things and put on some others.

Do nothing according to selfish ambition or conceit. These two concepts capture what the culture of Philippi was probably like. They mean self-seeking and vanity.

Philippi was all about honour and status. And that meant all kinds of patronage networks of *you scratch my back, I scratch yours*. An ambitious wealthy man in Philippi would want and could expect support from his clients, friends, household members, in his ambition to rise through the ranks.

And unfortunately, some of this selfishness was affecting the unity in the church. Look at 4:2

² I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³ And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life. (Phil. 4:2-3)

Now Paul says, if you import that into church, you are not modelling the oneness, the likemindedness of the gospel.

You, see, Jesus didn't do that. Verse 6 tells us that He didn't cling to what was His. He didn't insist upon His rights. He didn't cling to His status.

If you bring that kind of selfishness into the church what will it look like? It will look like people seeking positions in church, wanting to be recognised as an elder or deacon, or musician, or ministry leader or counselor. I want my name mentioned somewhere. I need special seats reserved for me, special mention from the pulpit. I need to be a Someone in church, not a nobody. I need to watch what others do, and do the same or outdo them.

It looks like insisting on your own preferences when it comes to how the church worships, or assembles or is led, and then complaining if it doesn't happen. Demanding your way, and then becoming obstructive when it doesn't go your way. It looks like beginning to despise others or speak ill of others when they don't play on your team, or do it your way, or support your project.

What is this? Selfishness. Selfish ambition. Using church for vainglory. But here's the great problem with selfishness. Selfishness is mostly invisible to a selfish person. A selfish person is often oblivious to his selfishness. It's rather like when we were at school, and of course no pupil was allowed to smoke. But then you'd have the boys who snuck off somewhere to smoke, and then did all kinds of things to their breath and to their clothes to mask the smell. And to themselves as smokers, they were sure they had not a hint of smoke. But to a non-smoker, the smell is a lot more pungent than to a smoker who has got used to it. So you find the smoker can't smell his own smoke, and the non-smoker can. The same with garlic.

Selfishness is just like that. When you're being selfish, it doesn't seem selfish; it just seems justified, or normal, or what you deserve, or what's best. But to the people around you, its obnoxiously self-centred, and egotistical and vain and self-absorbed. That's why those people who can do nothing except talk about their problems and their children and their stress and their busyness and their demanding life don't even notice that all they do is talk about themselves. It hasn't occurred to them to stop, and ask, "You know, how are *you*? *What is your life like?*" I think one of the punishments in hell might be that all the narcissists will keep interrupting each other to tell stories about themselves.

Paul says, if you want likemindedness, you've got to stop smoking fleshliness all the time. So how do you kick the habit? In the Bible, you only properly kill a sin when you replace it with a virtue. So here, Paul says, in place of rivalry and independence and self-absorption, do this instead:

but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

This is quite revolutionary. Lowliness or humility, was not a prized virtue in Ancient Greece and Rome. Humility was something that happened to you; you didn't choose it. You were born humble – the child of a slave. You were of a low rank, of the lower classes. That's what humble referred to. Paul says, voluntarily adopt humility in your mind, by regarding other Christians as better than self.

Now Paul isn't calling on you to have a false view of yourself, to pretend you are worse than you

are or less than you are, because that's just false humility, which would be more pride. Nor is Paul telling us to try to convince ourselves that we are less intelligent or less gifted in some area or less able than someone else, when we know that's not the case. This isn't an exercise in self-deception.

What Paul means is to regard others as worthy of better treatment than self, deliberately prioritising the needs of others over self. He is going to illustrate it for us with the voluntary humility of Jesus in verses 5 and following. Obviously Jesus didn't pretend that the people He was loving were better than Him. But He prioritised their needs, our needs over His own. He prioritised our salvation over holding on to His rights and His glory.

Humility is selflessness. My orientation goes from me and my spiritual needs and my life and my children to these other people and their growth and their needs and their lives, and their disappointments.

C. S. Lewis: "Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call 'humble' nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all."

Or in another place, Lewis says, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less."

Selflessness. The gospel rescues us from the tyranny and torture of a chronic self-focus. Following the mind of Christ, we become genuinely, and happily, more interested in others than in self.

Now Paul doesn't just talk about the inner attitude of this Christlike mind. In verse 4, he talks about an outward action.

⁴ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Selflessness turns into service. Once you have the selfless mind of Christ, you look out for the interests of others, not merely your own. You're interested in serving, not consuming, helping, not being entertained.

There are many churches where several thousand people arrive, and sit next to some complete strangers, and then the lights go out on the audience so that you can forget about the people sitting around you, and only the stage is illuminated, and you watch those performers sing and make music, and now and then you mouth a few words with them. And then you watch a talented speaker do his motivational speaker quoting Bible verses thing, and feel pepped. Then the lights go back on and you go home. Nothing in that experience challenged your selfishness, and therefore nothing pushed you towards oneness with those people. They were just audience members, fellow spectators.

But live in a real community, be a member of a church, and one of the first things you'll bump up against is selfishness. It will all be other people, of course. Until you grow a bit and begin to find that maybe you also smell of smoke. And if you repent of selfishness and remain determined to be other-focused, you are on your way to oneness of mind with these believers. You are on your way to getting the mind of Christ, which is the gospel unity.

Life in a gospel-church is one where you know and are known by the others. You get to know others well enough that you come to know their needs. You know what their needs are: their

struggles, their disappointments, their besetting sins, their pressing financial needs or health needs, their family, their history. You are genuinely interested in building up the other believers in the church, making them stronger Christians, making them more like Christ.

Imagine if you had 200 people arriving on a Sunday, or meeting in smaller groups during the week, and when they arrive, everyone is thinking about the other: how to edify, how to strengthen, how to encourage. When they go home, they're not thinking, "Hardly anyone noticed me!" They're thinking, "I wonder where so-and-so was? I need to give him a call." When they arrive, they don't notice that someone took my parking, or someone took all the best doughnuts, or why does he always get to read the Scriptures. They think, "I wonder if that ministry needs extra hands. I wonder if I'd be able to contribute to that ."

They don't think, "I stood there by myself for 4 minutes and 30 seconds and not a soul greeted me." They think, "Shame, that person over there is standing by herself or himself, I'll go and say hello."

Now guess what happens when believers strive to have this one mind, this mind of Christ, this same love of selfless service of each other? These disappear: Selfishness and rivalry, and envy and cattiness, and pettiness, and petty conflicts, and nursed grudges, and longstanding resentments. Haughtiness, conceitedness, cliques, rivalries, partiality, racism, chauvinism, begin to disappear.

The result is a true community of believers, all vastly different from you and yet gloriously of one family. That kind of diversity in unity is true beauty and God delights in it. It is very much at the heart of what the gospel is and what the gospel does: destroys pride, strips us of boasting, makes us all needy, and lets us come as little children to Christ, serving each other.

When the world sees it, they will want to know who our diversity officer is, and how we deliberately structured our membership to be reflective of diversity and inclusiveness. And we'll smile and say, everyone here, is here out of free will. Everyone here calls the other brother and sister. Everyone here meets other's needs and is not touchy, brittle or protective of his or her own. We didn't do it with the carrot and stick of penalties and re-education seminars and quotas and tax incentives.

It was Jesus who did it. He selflessly served us as our sacrifice. In Him we died to our pride and rose to loving Him and others. And now we live in the perfect freedom of Christ's mind: selfless service of the other. That's what gospel-unity says to this world: only the Selfless Sacrificial Prince of Peace can bring true peace.