

We need to see as Jesus saw, and feel as Jesus felt, so that we will do as Jesus did.

Unity in the community

We are starting the theme of Unity, up until Pentecost, and this ties in with Tina's talk on Worship, that it's not just for Sunday but 24/7, and Tim's talk last week concerning The Great Commission, based on Matthew 28 vs 16-20.

Philippians 2 vs 1-5

Imitating Christ's Humility

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ²then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

⁵In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Here, Paul is instructing the church in Philippi on how they are to act with each other. He's leading them to unity. And it's unity for a purpose. Vs. 2 says " then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind," it's about working together with one heart and purpose." This was not only relevant to the people of Philippi, it's relevant to us today, here and now, right where we are. It's when we follow these instructions of Paul and we, the Church, are united. Then we will accomplish our purpose in building God's kingdom. We can't appear united in the community if we are not united in the Church.

I've picked out three purposes for the church.

- 1/ To worship God, (We have spoken a lot about worship over the last few weeks)
- 2/ To build up the others.
- 3/ To spread the Good News. (The Great Commission)

Unity is important for all three of these purposes. When we are united, it leads to God being glorified and honoured. In John 13 v 15 Jesus says "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you". Here, Paul is encouraging the people of Philippi, and us to exhibit those same characteristics that Jesus had. "When we follow the command to be interested in others, that leads us to help build them up, it leads to the exaltation of Jesus. Therefore, this unity leads to building up the body, the church, and the community. And as Jesus said to his disciples, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35) So unity is important for accomplishing all of these three purposes.

Now how do we achieve unity, verse 3 reads, "³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves."

I. Don't be selfish. Our society is very self oriented. Very much into me, me, me. The big question we ask when we have a decision to make or whether to do something or no, is, "What's in it for me?" or "How will I benefit from this?"

The Church today should not be selfish. For us as Christians, the question should not be, "How can this benefit me?" but "How can this benefit others", "How can this benefit the Kingdom of God?" President John F Kennedy once said, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but you can do for your country." We should be asking, not what can the church or community do for me, but what can I do for the church or community.

In Ephesians 4 v 4 we read, "There is only one body." We cannot be in unity if we are disconnected with one another, we cannot expect to be in unity with the community, if we are not in unity within the church.

Using our body is a good example, our knees can't do what our hands do. Our eyes can't do what our ears do. But if our body parts work together in unity, we'll get along just fine.

Ephesians 4 v 29-32 makes it quite clear how we can be in unity, ²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

Are we kind and considerate, compassionate and forgiving to one another, this applies not only to those we get along with, but also with those we don't. With those in church and those outside. If we gossip or talk badly of someone are we

being, kind and considerate, compassionate and forgiving. If we can't speak kindly or positively about someone, then perhaps we should not say anything at all.

We can do this by seeing how Jesus saw, Feeling how Jesus felt, so we can then do as Jesus did, within the church and the community. Verse 5 **tells us to have the same mindset as Jesus.** Jesus spent his whole life denying himself for the sake of us. For the benefit of others. With all the things that Jesus did, he didn't do them to impress, he knew it was not the Father's way, He did what he did for others, whether it was healing, performing miracles or teaching.

2/ Don't live to make a good impression

In such a success-oriented society, it seems that everyone wants to impress others with their accomplishments. Do we want people to be impressed with our accomplishments and with our sacrifices. Do we want people to be impressed with everything we do. It's a basic part of the sinful human nature--we call it pride. We're so concerned about what others think of us. And guess what, pride tries to creep into the church too. People often want others to know of their accomplishments for God's Kingdom. They want others to know what they've given, what they've sacrificed. They want others to look at them and be impressed with who they are to see them as a holy person. Not that it's wrong for others to see a holy person, unless it's not real holiness, but only a show.

If what we do, we do to impress, then we won't be in unity to each other or to God.

3. Be humble--think of others as better than yourself.

God isn't interested in people who think they're great. In fact 1 Peter 5:5 says, **" In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble."**

We can all benefit from these instructions from Peter, Peter is specifically speaking about pride within the church. If we think we are better than others, we destroy the unity of the church, and unity is important in fulfilling the purpose of the church. This will also reach out and destroy the unity we have with the community.

4/ Be interested in others. v 4. **"Not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others"**

The church should not be a one-man show. God's Kingdom is not about what you are doing, what I am doing, it should be about what we are doing together, in unity with each other. We may all have our own role, hopefully doing things we are best at, using the gifts given to us by the Holy Spirit. You really wouldn't want me to lead the singing, or play the guitar during the service. We are though like the body each having our own part that works in unity with each other. This not only creates a positive and unified atmosphere within the church, it also promotes unity outside of the church.

We need also to look at others interests., to see the needs of others. I looked at the Eynsford and Farningham Facebook page, concerning the proposal to bring a Syrian family into the village and the comments that have been made on both sides of the argument both for and against. Matthew 25 vs 40 says, **“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’** Again, We need to see as Jesus saw, and feel as Jesus felt, so that we will do as Jesus did.

I've said that the unity of the Church and the achievement of the Church go hand-in-hand. When we are unselfish we glorify God, build up the body of believers, and can then reach out to unbelievers because of our unity and selflessness towards each other. Unity in the Church is not just desirable, but absolutely essential if the Church is to fulfil its purpose. Let me finish by reading from. John 17:20-23 **“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—²³ I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity.**

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I'd like to end with a prayer that I've adapted.

Heavenly Father, Grant that we may die to self, and live and grow in love and peace with one another, and with You. Grant to us, when we hurt each other by word or deed, or by neglect, the grace to recognise and acknowledge our faults, and to seek each other's forgiveness and Yours. Grant that our life together may be to this sinful and broken world a sign of Christ's love, that unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness heal guilt, and joy conquer any despair.

Grant that in all our relationships we may have such fulfilment of our affections, that, through mutual love and respect we may enrich the lives of others, and show forth Your truth and compassion.

Amen.

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