

Tim Gamston's Sermon on Sunday November 20th pm

To live is Christ Part 6 (2) - The beautiful result of humility

Scripture references from the ESV

Philippians 2:1-11 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, ⁸ being born in the likeness of men. ⁹ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ¹⁰ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹¹ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹² and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Strong muscles are developed by working them hard and the same principle applies in our spiritual life. God has given us gifts of grace, and the way we grow as believers is by exercising those gifts (**vv1-4** above). Paul had planted this church in Philippi (**Acts 16: 11ff** see p4) and had served alongside its members. Nothing brings people closer than serving together for the sake of Christ, and Paul speaks of the bond of love between them (**Phil 1:8** see p4). The church loved Paul in return (**Phil 4:10, 14-16** see p4) However, it was a church that found it easier to love at a distance than close up. Although they loved Paul, they were struggling to love one another. Euodia and Syntyche had fallen out with one another, and it is likely that others were taking sides. That kind of disunity still happens today. We find it easy to love believers who are at a distance (our missionaries, visiting preachers etc) but when it comes to loving our brothers and sisters who we serve alongside, it is sometimes a different matter. This is not how it should be. The local church should be a place where there is genuine love for one another, a community where God's love is displayed to all in the lives of God's people. Paul needed to deal with this disunity. First, he prayed for them (**Phil 1:9** see p4), and then he issued a command (**v2** above). Only God can do the work of

restoring relationships, but Paul knew that these believers were not to be passive. Unity may be a miracle that God works but they still have to work out the miracle that God has worked in them.

Not only does Paul pray for them to grow in their love, but he also commands them to work out their love through unity and humility. How often do we pray in this way for one another?

What they have needs to be exercised so that they don't lose it, but rather grow stronger in it. If disunity makes the church crumble, the witness to the gospel would be gone.

The witness of the Gospel is at stake.

This is true for us too. This church is a loving community, but there is always room for growth.

The grace gifts that God has given us need to be exercised so that rather than lose them, we grow in them.

What are these gifts and how do we exercise them?

1. **Our blessings in Christ. (v1 above)** The encouragement we have in Christ is that we are a people loved by him and united in one Spirit with Christ and his people, experiencing love from his people. Do you think of church as just a group of people who meet once a week to do religious stuff? The local church is so much more than that.

We are a people united to Christ, and united to one another in one body - Christ's body.

What unites us is far stronger than what divides us.

We value our own body, and care for it. We don't want to lose any part of it, and when something hurts, we find ways to stop it hurting. We take care of every part of our body – even the parts no one else sees and that is because our body is one unit. The Bible uses this image to describe the church. It is one unit connected to one head – Jesus Christ.

We are one people deeply loved by Christ and filled with Christ's love for one another.

- We have a network of people around us to love and care for us, and who feel deeply when we are hurt.
- We have a head, Jesus Christ, who even more deeply loves us, cares for us and feels for us when we hurt.

Being a member of Christ's body is a massive privilege, and so it should not be a burden to belong to a local church.

The encouragement we have through being united to Christ is:

The blessing of being loved by Christ, united to him and his people, and being loved by his people.

Knowing what we have in Christ, we need to live differently and exercise unity.

2. Our unity in Christ (v2 above). The unity the Bible calls for is a single-mindedness. However, this does not mean that we all have to dress the same, like the same things or even believe the same things when it comes to non-gospel issues. That is more like the unity of the cults and false religions in the world.

Christian unity is unity in diversity.

It is expressed in a single-mindedness when it comes to the Gospel (**Phil 1:27** see p4).

Christian unity recognises that we like to dress differently, we like different styles of music and can hold different views when it comes to issues such as baptism, church government and the role of the Holy Spirit, for example.

What unites us is the Lord Jesus Christ and the Gospel.

This means that certain truths are non-negotiable. The truths that lead to salvation from sin are to be united around:

- The deity of Jesus Christ and his virgin birth
- His sacrificial death to atone for sin and his resurrection to life after he died
- The authority, reliability and sufficiency of the Bible
- Heaven and hell
- Marriage between a man and a woman (**Jude v7** see p4)

All these truths, and anything that threatens the Gospel are non-negotiable. We unite around those things, while giving freedom in those areas that are not salvation issues. To use a saying often attributed to Augustine:

**In essentials, unity
In non-essentials, liberty
In all things, charity**

So often, Christians look to unite around non-essentials, while neglecting to unite around essentials. We look only at external things, and this leads to fights and divisions in the church.

**Paul is calling us to be a people bound together in Christ as one body,
exercising one love for all in the church, and with one mind set on one purpose.**

- We are to love all whom Christ loves, and we are to love them all with the same love we have for those we are naturally attracted to.
- We are to have one mind when it comes to the Gospel, agreeing on the essential truths of the Gospel
- We are to have one purpose – to see Christ exalted. We are to see him exalted in our lives as we love him

and love one another. We are to see him exalted in the salvation of sinners and to see him exalted in the world when we live obedient lives.

A network of believers from very different church backgrounds called 'Together for the Gospel' demonstrated this well. They were able to appreciate and love one another, setting their non-essential differences aside (see p4).

As a church, we are equally diverse, and there is a danger that we could allow non-essentials to undermine our unity. We are to be a people united around the Lord Jesus Christ and the Gospel. How will this happen?

3. **Our humility in Christ.** (vv3-4 above). Unity flows out of humility. We are to count others more significant than ourselves (v3). This means that whatever concerns us is not to be our only concern (v4). When we look to our own financial affairs, we should also look to those of others. When we look to our own family needs or

our own ministry in the church, we should also be looking to the family needs or ministry of others.

Jesus said, **“You shall love your neighbour as yourself”** (Matt 23:39). We do this when we count others more significant than ourselves. It doesn’t matter whether the person is worth more than us or is better than us.

The question is do I count the other person as more worthy than me?

- Will I esteem them to such an extent that I will put them before myself?
- Will I sacrifice my rights to enable another to have their rights?
- Will I stop doing what I want to do to help someone do what they need to do?

Without humility we will never do this (v3 above). How do we kill the root of pride and selfish ambition in our lives?

God does this by bringing us to the end of ourselves in affliction, but he also does it as we look to Jesus.

We see that Jesus did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but left the glory, splendour and worship of heaven to be born as a human being on earth, living for 30 years in obscurity and poverty. When he did begin his public ministry, he was despised and rejected by those he had helped, leading to his death on the cross. That death secured our salvation. The Lord Jesus Christ **became** poor so that we might become heirs of the world.

That is grace and it is grace that kills the root of pride

- How can any of us have a higher opinion of ourselves than we do of others, when the Lord Jesus Christ, who is above all things, treated us as worthy of his service when we were utterly unworthy?

There is no room for pride in the church of Christ

If we fail to exercise our blessings in Christ, our unity in Christ and our humility in Christ then we will have nothing but selfish ambition in every part of our lives, resulting in disunity. The gospel of Christ will be stripped of its power.

We need to exercise the grace gifts – so confess, seek, trust, think and act.

Confession – The Lord may have been convicting you of pride and failure to count others more significant than yourself. Confess that to the Lord and perhaps confess it to those you have hurt through your pride.

Seek – seek God’s help to change. He wants to help so ask him to bring his particular promises to your mind and ask him to give you the faith to believe those promises.

Trust – as we trust God’s promises, his Spirit changes us

Think – ask yourself how what you are about to do will affect the people around you.

How does the attitude you display help or hinder people in their Christian growth?

What can you do that will enable you to serve others?

- How can you serve and surprise the people God brings into your life every day?

Act – When you see how you can do that, then get on and do it!

All time, keep asking the Lord to help you. As you do this, you will be exercising the grace gifts God has given you, growing spiritually as a believer and becoming more like Jesus.

Acts 16:11-12 So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the^[d] district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days.

NB Please read the full account in your Bible.

Phil 1:8 For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus

Phil 4:10, 14-16 ¹⁰I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Yet it was kind of you to share^[f] my trouble. ¹⁵And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. ¹⁶Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.

Phil 1:9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,

Jude v7 just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire,^[d] serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

Together for the Gospel used a series of affirmations and denials (examples below) to state their vision:

Affirmation: We affirm that evangelical congregations are to work together in humble and voluntary cooperation and that the spiritual fellowship of Gospel congregations bears witness to the unity of the Church and the glory of God.

Denial: We deny that loyalty to any denomination or fellowship of Churches can take precedence over the claims of truth and faithfulness to the Gospel.