

Towards the end of Philippians 1, Paul moves on to talk about living a manner of life, worthy of the Gospel. And today's topic, is about completing the Pastor's joy. That's a bit self-serving...

So, what do you think the message might be about???

- Put more money in the offering box;
- Give the Pastor a pay rise;
- Renovate the manse (not for us – we don't have a manse);
- Start using your gifts and take a bit of a load off the pastor;
- Fill the church – become the biggest most vibrant church in town;

You know,

- *I hear preachers on the wireless (Vision Radio), And some of them, their congregations applaud them. You lot never give me a clap.*

Maybe that would complete my joy...

But what's Paul talking about – What's he looking for in the church in Philippi, and what's he praying for??? The thing that would complete his joy, is unity in the church.

And so the message today, isn't about me. It's about **us**. And as we progress, we're going to realise it's about Christ....

And while the message **is** about “unity”, I tell you what, for me as a pastor (and as a Bible teacher), what gives me **great** joy, is to see the Spirit of God at work in the hearts of those I'm preaching to... It's to see us as a church, becoming more like Christ. And to see the Spirit moving us – to have the

same mind – the same love; in full accord, with this one mind...

Unity in the Church.

We know it's important. We know a church will be completely dysfunctional without it. Some people quote Jesus (He wasn't actually talking about Christian unity – He was talking about the Spiritual battle) – but some people quote Jesus when he said "A house divided against itself will not stand", and they apply it to Christian unity... And that's probably true...

But it's not only in the church that we seek unity. *I've found it interesting (over the last few months, to observe our Federation at work (as the PM puts it).*

The challenge for Australia (Covid pandemic) is, "We are a federation of states". And the Federal government is responsible for some things, but the State Governments are responsible for Health and Law enforcement, and a fair bit of industrial relations Law... But they're mostly dependent upon the Federal Government for Funding (& international border policy).

And so, to deal with the current Covid 19 crisis, they came up with The Covid National Cabinet. Where the States and Territories, all meet with the Prime minister, to try and come up with a unified, national approach.

And at the end of each meeting, the PM would emerge as the spokesman, and give the message, "We are unified!"

(Premiers & chief health officers) And this is what we're going to do."

I'd love to see what went on behind those closed doors meetings, and what threats and cajoling was done to make them tow the line.

And we heard how great the states have been, at working together. But even so, it didn't take long for them to break ranks. The National Cabinet decides, "The Schools will remain open. You must send your kids to school – it's the safest place for them." And a day or 2 later, Victoria closes its schools. And then QLD closes them... And some states closed their borders... And what does our premier say??? I've got to do what's right for Qld....

There wasn't national unity at all...

But Paul describes **true** unity (Godly unity):

- The same mind;
- The same love;
- In full accord;
- One mind;
- Doing nothing from selfish ambition; or Conceit; and
- in humility, counting others as more significant than ourselves...

That's God's unity...

And yet, the way that many seek to bring about unity in the church, is man's way, rather than God's way.

Probably the most common method of trying to get unity in a church, is for the pastor to try and re-educate a congregation – it's to try and line-up their way of thinking with his.; or to try and **preach** unity into the church... Where they have a whole series of messages around leadership and unity.

And the church get taught that:

- unity's really important; and
- They'll be a unified church, when the Pastor or the Elders cast the vision; and
- The rest of the church get on board and follow them; and
- if anyone in the church disagrees with the direction, well put aside your concerns, because unity is more important than what you think...

But you know what??? To me, that reeks (pretty much) of being like the political National Cabinet unity – it's an illusion of unity – it's a dog's breakfast – It's not unity at all...

The denomination I was once a part of, used to try and 'contrive unity'. Their favourite catch-phrase, was "unity in diversity" ... In the Bible, it talks about there being a diversity of gifts, and as we all use these gifts, we become a united body (and that's fantastic) ... But that's not the way they used that phrase "Unity in diversity" ... They used that phrase to say, "You can believe what you like, and we'll believe what we like, and we'll all believe different stuff, and we will find unity in that diversity" ...

It was pretend / contrived – it was an ‘illusion of unity’. It was nothing more than a poor counterfeit... In fact, it was pretty much the opposite of Godly unity... Godly unity is **never** found in diversity of belief... Unity is found in **“Sameness”**:

- The same mind;
- The same love;
- In full accord;
- One mind;

Righto, so forget about human designs of unity – here’s God’s recipe, for unity in the church:

1. being of the same mind

That means “Being like-minded” Believing the same stuff. He’s talking about “Truth” – having a unified belief in the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ...

That’s why a lot of the New Testament, rails against false teaching. I’ll tell you what, if there’s something that’s going to destroy unity in the church quicker than anything, it’s when false teaching gets brought into a church, and some of its members are convinced by it... You see, at that point, that church is no longer of “the same mind”.

The first ingredient in the recipe of unity – **being of the same mind.**

When Robyn and I go away on holidays, we always like to visit a local church in the area where we’re staying... And we

try to pick a good one... But, what I consider ‘a good church’, might be very different to what somebody else considers ‘a good church’.... For many people, it’s about ‘how professional the show is’,,, But for me, the starting point is “What do you believe? What do you teach?”

And oh, the joy that we experience, when we meet a new group of people – we’ve never met them before, but as we worship Jesus together, and as we hear the word being preached, we realise that we are of the same mind...

And almost without exception, when the word that’s been taught has been Gospel truth, and we realise “We’re amongst people here, of the same mind”,,,, Almost without exception then, it flows over into loving fellowship afterwards...

I think I’ve probably said in the past, “I can worship the Lord Jesus Christ, in any church.” But to be with a people of the same mind – That’s just amazing... I love it...

And when I’m with people of the same mind, it just makes me love Jesus all the more.

2. The second ingredient: having the same love

That means “being a church who love Jesus, and love each other”...

I’ve encountered some churches who pride themselves on being ‘theologically correct’, and they guard the truth (for all

*their worth), and they all believe exactly the same thing....
But they're the most loveless people...*

But as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, without love, we're nothing... And so Paul's desire, was for that Philippian church, to be a church who were filled with love for each other.

3. The third ingredient: **being in full accord**

The Greek word Paul uses here σύμψυχοι (sympsychoi) literally means "one-souled" – harmonious – united in Spirit...

And why wouldn't we be united in Spirit?

If as Disciples of Jesus:

- we are filled with the same Holy Spirit;
- if we've been born again; and
- if all have the same Heavenly Father; And
- if we're being **led** by the same Spirit; and
- we're **following** the same Spirit,

shouldn't we be in full accord...

And so it's only when 'self' gets in the way, that we're **not** in one accord. Of one soul...

4. And then there's the fourth ingredient: being ... of one mind

Now, that sounds very similar to the 1st ingredient he listed – (being like-minded) being ... of one mind. Is there a difference? Yes, there is. In the first case, “being like-minded” is about having a common belief (the common faith we have.)

And in **this** case, it’s talking more about “purpose”ⁱⁱ... And as we read on, we’re going to realise what this common purpose is. The common purpose, of a united church, is for us to be Gospel-orientated in the way we relate to each other.

Now, we live in an age of:

- corporate planning; and
- strategic planning; and
- mission planning

And in many churches, the worldly corporate model gets brought into the church, to try and define and manage, what is our common purpose (set our goals & objectives). Alright, so the mindset is, “*We have to be a people on a way to somewhere – What’s our common purpose?*” (workshops / brainstorming) *Ta-dar – here’s our 3-year plan...*”

But the common purpose that Paul’s looking for in the Philippian church, is for that church to be **living** the Gospel, and **expressing** the Gospel, to one another. He explains it in V3:

³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Do you see that there???

That, (right there) is the common purpose...

³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

My goodness Paul, that sounds like something Jesus would say...

And when I think of the hundreds / thousands / millions of collective hours that the Christian church have spent on writing strategic plans and mission plans, to try and nail down and state the purpose of their church....

.....

You see that – We don't need to spend all this time in workshops to construct a strategic plan for our church. There's the plan – there's the purpose right there:

³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

V4 it goes on: **⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.**

So, that's the 4th ingredient to unity – being of one mind in purpose – the whole church, not only looking after our own interests, but looking after the interests of the other...

And if we were a church like that, wouldn't the world notice... ““Wow, look at how those Christians love each other.””

Now, you'd think, that as Christians, we'd be all over this, hey... And yet, why is the lack of unity in churches, so common??? (& in some cases, it's downright ugly)

Well, there could be lots of reasons, but I'm just going to give a few examples.

1.

In some cases, there's disunity, because the unity we **think** we have, is counterfeit... As I said before, there **cannot** be unity, when we believe different stuff – when we don't agree on the fundamentals of the Gospel... There's a disconnect that makes true fellowship impossible...

2.

Secondly, disunity can happen, when we follow men (instead of following Christ). And we try to create an **image** of unity because they're the leaders, we're the followers, and we're **united** in their vision.

Alright, I've talked about 'the consumer church' before, where the church (insert church leaders) provide a product that I'm going to consume. And if the product that's being provided, appeals to me, then I'll stay and consume the product, but if it's not really "doin' it for me", well, I might be just as likely to go and find another church that provides a product that I **do** want to consume...

And consumers of church, largely have their own interests at heart. Back in the old days:

- if you were born a Methodist, you died a Methodist.
- If you were born a Baptist, you'd die a Baptist
- If you were born a C of E (Anglican), you'd die an Anglican...

And still today, if you were born a Presbyterian, you'll stay a Presbyterian. (I hope nobody's offended by that. I've got good friends who are Presbyterians, and they joke about how they never change)

But today, for many people, things have changed... It's become quite common to shift from church to church (denomination). Some do it regularly...

Now, sometimes, a person shifts from one fellowship to another, for a very good reason (What's a good reason? doctrine/belief/what's being taught)... If you are in a church, and you now realise that what you've been getting taught, isn't biblical teaching,,, Well, that's a good reason, to move to another church, where the true gospel is being proclaimed...

But in many cases, where people move from one church to another, it's largely because they have their own interests at heart... The grass is greener on the other side of the fence. The other church has:

- Better music;
- Nicer coffee;
- Better chairs;
- Air conditioning;
- Kids ministry;

- That's where all the cool people are...

But let me tell you, if we are a people who have our own interests at heart, we will never be the unified people of God, no matter what church we go to,, because we've got our own interests at heart, and not the interests of the other. (that is the destroyer of unity).

If you see a need in your church, the unified approach, is to ask, "How can I serve others in this church?" Do you want a bigger band? Learn to play an instrument. Or, offer to plan the instrument you already have. Or offer to lead the singing...

You see, the way of unity, is we don't just expect the church to provide a product for me to consume. It's about putting others first, and serving others, and loving others...

3.

Which brings us to a third reason why disunity is so common in churches: Too often, we tend to put ourselves first.

V³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit...

He's talking about "self-seeking" and "vain glory"...

What are our true motives? Why do we do what we do in the church? Do we do what we do, to serve others? Or is it for our own sense of achievement / accomplishment??? Or is it for our own glory???

³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

This my friends, is the way of Jesus. V5 tells us this: **⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus**

But here's the thing: He's not just telling us to follow the example of Jesus. He says: **⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus**

Alright, **this** is the mind of Jesus. And the mind of Jesus, is already ours...

We have been born again. We have put to death the old man, and raised up the new... We have put off, our old sinful self, and we have become a new creation... As disciples of Jesus, we are in **Christ Jesus** . And while we are in **Christ Jesus**, the Holy Spirit in us, transforms us, and renews us, to have the mind of Christ...

And when we (as a church) (the body of Christ) are in **Christ Jesus** , with the mind of Christ, there's the unity...

Let's see how deep this goes:
As I read this, I am so humbled.

V6 says:

though he was in the form of God, [He] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Jesus Christ, is God. (Father/Son/Holy Spirit). And sometimes, the deep thinkers amongst us, consider, “Is God the Son, subordinate to God the Father?” Because Jesus Himself said, “I don’t know this, but only the Father does.” Does that mean, “The Son” subordinate to “The Father”...

Well, in a way (in some aspects) (different roles), when Jesus became human, He temporarily lost some of His ‘godness’...

- [He] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped
- emptied himself
- took the form of a servant

I find this amazing. We were created in God’s image, but He was born in our likeness.

I don’t know if you’ve ever considered this, but I cannot think of another species, whose young are more helpless, and more dependant, for as long as a human child...

A human baby / child are the most helpless of young... And the Lord God Almighty (God the Son), became the most helpless bundle of gurgling squirming flesh...

I don't want to be crass, but I do want to make it real: The Lord of Heaven and Earth, lowered Himself / emptied Himself, such that he couldn't even control his own bowels. That's what it meant for Jesus to become a human baby... The Holy One, would dirty His pants and be in His own excrement, until His Mum had time to change Him...

And he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

He did this for us:

- Because of our sins, **we** deserve death.
- But Jesus humbled Himself and died for us.
- Because of our sins, **we** deserve to go to Hell.
- But God had mercy on us, and His Son, stepped down from Heaven, so that He could save us, and take us to be with Him in His glory...

But hang on a minute. Didn't Jesus lose His glory when He stepped down from Heaven??? Only temporarily...

When we get to V9, we catch a glimpse of what is now, and what will be.

- Started in Heaven (as God)
- Lowered Himself to Earth (as a humble servant)

But where is Jesus now? What's His status now???

⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every

tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This is the truth. This is who Jesus is. Right now, Jesus:

- Is highly exalted
- The Name of Jesus is above every name

For what purpose???

¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

We are seeing here, a combination of what is, and of what will be...

At the moment, it's the minority who bow their knee before Jesus (Do you?) ... At the moment, very few tongues confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

At the moment, it's the minority, but that's all going to change (on the day of the Lord) when Jesus returns... On that day, the proud and the arrogant and the faithless, will not be able to stand in their arrogance. They will cringe and fall in fear, for the day of judgment will have come... But sadly, by then, it's too late...

You see, this is the Gospel. To become disciples of Jesus, we yield to Him now; we bow our knee before Jesus now; and we confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Now.

How could we ever seek our own petty glory, when we owe all glory to Jesus???

How could we ever be self-seeking, when we worship the one who gave everything for us, and He's now exalted to the highest place???

How could we ever put ourselves first, when Jesus gave so much for us and for our brothers and sisters in Christ...
Wouldn't we do the same...

What's being described here, is Christ-likeness... Last week, in Todd's message, he was talking about maturing in Christ... And I think he said something along the lines of, *If you're not becoming more like Christ, then you're not maturing...*

And for unity in the church, we have to be all maturing in Christ. When a whole church is maturing in Christ – when each member is becoming more and more like Christ, there's the unity...

If I'm becoming like Jesus, and if you're becoming like Jesus, we'll get on pretty well, won't we... And if I've got the mind of Christ, and you've got the mind of Christ, we'll be of one mind, won't we...

I believe, a large part of the disunity, that we find in the church today, results from a dodgy, self-centred version of the gospel...

But today, I want you to hear the Christ-centred Gospel.

We have all sinned, and fall short of the glory of God. Because of our rejection of God; and our sin; and our self-centredness, we deserve death... We are incapable of saving ourselves. No amount of good can save us.

And so Jesus humbled Himself, and He died, to pay the penalty of our sins...

But we have a part to play in this. Not everybody automatically gets forgiveness... Those who are forgiven, are in the minority – they are the ones who bow their knee before Jesus...

We do this, to the glory of God.

- We repent of sin. We recognise that our old way of life, is incompatible with the renewed life of following Jesus, and so we repent of sin; and
- we bow our knee before Jesus; and
- we confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...

Self-centred versions of the Gospel, tend to omit this part. We bow our knee before Him, and we confess that He is Lord...

And it's not just a matter of words – this has to be a heart thing, accompanied by actions. Jesus isn't just any lord. He is **our** Lord. He is **our** Master... This is an image of total

submission... We submit ourselves totally to Jesus... And by submitting ourselves totally to Jesus, we don't lord it over one another...

Let's pray, and if you're not sure if you've given yourself totally to Jesus, and that perhaps you've only ever embraced a self-centred version of the Gospel, I'd invite you to pray with me now.

Lord Jesus Christ,
We thank You for Your sacrifice.
We thank You, that You were willing to empty Yourself
And to become a servant;
And to be humbled, even to die on a cross...

But Lord, we now recognise that You are no longer lowly;
You are now highly exalted;
No name is greater than Your Name.

OH Lord,
I recognise my need of a saviour.
I repent of all my sin;
Of all my selfishness;
Of all my rejection of You;
Lord, I am so sorry, that I haven't held Your Name as highly
as I should.

God forgive me.
And Lord, I want to thank You for Your grace;
And the forgiveness and the New life You give to us;

Lord, I submit to You.

You are my Lord / master / boss
Change us, Lord, we pray.
We don't want to remain the same any longer.
Help us to live in unity.
Change our hearts,
so that we would be a people of humility,
Looking out for the interests of others, rather than ourselves...

Oh Lord,
I pray that today would be a new day – a new beginning,
Where my life is surrendered to You,
In totality, for the Glory of God.

Amen.

ⁱ O'Brien, P.T., 1991. *The Epistle to the Philippians: a commentary on the Greek text*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

ⁱⁱ O'Brien, P.T., 1991. *The Epistle to the Philippians: a commentary on the Greek text*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.