

Unity

by Doc Greenway

Doc Greenway's sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual unity among believers, rooted in Christ and expressed through love and compassion.

Duration: 33:38

Scripture: Psalm 45:8, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 2:1-4

Topics: "Unity"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of spiritual unity among believers. He highlights the threat of disunity and the need for Christians to think the same way and strive together for the faith. The source of this unity is found in Christ, the love of God, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and the compassion and mercy of believers. The speaker also emphasizes the need for selflessness and considering the interests and well-being of others, rather than focusing solely on one's own interests. The sermon concludes with a personal anecdote about the speaker's experience of seeking God's guidance in a moment of uncertainty.

Transcript

I want to speak tonight from the second chapter of the Epistle of Paul to the Philippians, commencing an exposition of the whole chapter. Tonight I want to speak, as time permits, from the first four verses which I shall now read. I'm reading this time from the Authorized Version.

If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any vows and mercies, fulfill he my joy that he be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

The Epistle to the Philippians has been called Paul's love letter. It contains less of censure and more of praise than any one of his writings to the churches of his time. Undoubtedly he held the Philippians in very high esteem, and they also thought very highly of him as a servant of God, as an apostle of the Lord.

And as you read through this chapter, I'm sure that you will come to see, as I have come to understand, that this is one of the great chapters of the Bible. I think it is among some of Paul's finest writings. Certainly it is worth our studying in as minute a way as possible, because there is so much, almost in every word in this chapter.

One is almost embarrassed with the riches and the depth of truth that you have within the compass of this short chapter in the New Testament. It really is amazing. You know, Paul could write to the Philippians and speak very highly of them.

And as I said a moment ago, he does not engage in censure to any great extent where they were concerned. But there was one thing that threatened them. It was the threat of disunity.

The threat that came about because it seems that some of the people in Philippi, some of these Christian folk, believed it was possible to be perfectly sinless, that this was the holiness which God offered to them as believers. And this caused quite a lot of dissension and arguments and ill-feeling in the Church of God. Isn't it amazing? If Satan can't get God's people to disagree on the question of worldliness, he gets them to disagree on the question of holiness.

And this is what was happening down there in Philippi. And so right away in this chapter you are confronted with this threat of disunity. And this accounts for Paul's strong exhortation.

Because I think that very definitely the theme, especially from verse one to verse four, is that of spiritual unity amongst the people of God. There's a lot of talk about unity in these days, about the churches uniting and so on. But here I believe we have something that is intensely spiritual and according to the pattern and the plan of God for unity.

Now notice first of all the source of this unity about which Paul speaks. It's in verse one. If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any vows and mercies.

Paul bases his appeal for spiritual unity on the deepest, the most vital, and the most spiritual experiences of these Philippian believers. He places it right there at that foundation, on what they knew experientially about the dealings of God in their lives. And I'm sure that that is where the foundation ought always to rest.

You notice first of all that he asks them a question concerning the consolation in Christ. If there be therefore any consolation in Christ. This is a positive if, by the way.

It's not a negative if. If there be therefore any consolation in Christ is as though we would say if there be therefore any water in the ocean. It's a positive thing.

And the word consolation here is really supplication, entreaty, admonition, encouragement. It's all contained in this word translated consolation. In view of the fact, in other words, he says that you have received in Christ this sense of encouragement, that you have known in him this entreaty in a positive way.

Then in the light of this, I want you to express perfect unity. You see as the spokes of a wheel approaching the hub also approach each other, so in Christ as the center there is perfect unity one with another. This is where the center should always be in Christ.

For it is in him that we truly meet with each other as God intends we should. I remember in the old country some years ago a convention was held. It was a sort of a camp convention by a very exclusive company of God's people.

And they had as their motto on the outside of the tent the words Jesus only. And they were separate letters cut out of some material and I suppose attached in some way to the tent, Jesus only. But one night there was a very tremendously strong wind blew, we'll put it that way, as winds can blow in the old country.

And as the storm raged through the night, something happened to the Jesus only. When they came back in the morning some of the letters had fallen off and now they read us only. And it was as exclusive as that really.

And you know there are people who feel that they've got all the truth, that there's nothing more to be said about it. They have it all. And therefore what's the use of bothering with anybody else? I don't think for one moment that any denomination has all the truth of God.

Certainly we don't have all the interpretation of the truth of God that the Spirit of God would bring to us. But we do know this, that however we may differ in our interpretation of certain aspects of the word of God, when we meet in Christ these things don't matter at all. They go by the bow.

We find in Him a sense of unity, a sense of oneness that is stronger and greater than any denominational barrier could ever be. I sometimes wish that it was possible to take even some of God's servants and just land them right in the heart of some mission field, away from any church at all. You know it's a great experience.

When I was in Japan I experienced this. Kneeling to pray all alone, feeling the powers of darkness pressing in upon you, and not able to open your mouth sometimes to utter words because of the pressure. And then meeting once a month with other servants of God and having fellowship with them.

I still don't know what churches they belong to, but I do know this, that we met as one in Christ and that was wonderful unity and tremendous fellowship that we had. And it gave us the strength we needed to face the battle that was raging around us. This is the thing we have to remember all the time, that the source of our unity must be in Christ.

For in Christ there is encouragement to unity. Don't we read there are no national barriers in Him? Neither Jew nor Greek. No social barriers, neither bond nor free.

No physical barriers, neither male nor female, but all one in Christ. Here is where Paul begins. This is where we shall all have to begin.

Our personal relationship with Christ becomes the basis of our fellowship as the people of God. And for the life of me I can't see that there is any other foundation upon which we can build for true unity but this one. Then he goes on, if any comfort of love.

This word comfort is very like the word consolation in our English language, but it isn't quite the same in the original. It's the word paramoution. It means a word which comes to the side of one to stimulate him.

It need not be in the sense of consolation, but it can definitely be in the sense of persuasion. Let's put it this way. The word consolation gives you the idea of exaltation, exalting, entreating, admonishing.

But the word comfort here gives you the idea of persuasion, something which is gentle and appealing and winsome. If there has been any comfort of love. And here the word love is the word for divine love, agape.

Now their comprehension of the nature of God's love ought to be sufficient in the mind of the apostle to enable them to live in perfect oneness. Because in this kind of love there are no divisions and there is no dissension and there are no distinctions ever made. This is the love that loves the unlovely, the love that embraces the polluted, the love that finds a place for the unwanted.

This is the strong, deep, abiding love of God. And if, as the apostle says, you have found any persuasion in this divine love, then you will know that this love always tends to harmonize. When you read the classic on divine love in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, this is one of the things that appears surely.

This love believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things, and so on. The very basis for true spiritual unity lies then in this comfort of love which we have discovered in Jesus Christ. And then he moves on to the communion of the Spirit, if any fellowship of the Spirit.

This is the word *koinonia*, and it means a common interest and an active participation in the things of God, in which the believer and the Holy Spirit are fellow participants. He has an interest in certain things, I have an interest in the same things. And this brings about a sense of fellowship, a sharing in the common interests of life.

What sort of partnership is this? What kind of fellowship is it? Well, I would say at the very commencement, it is a personal fellowship. You can't have fellowship with an influence. You can only have fellowship with a person.

And therefore, it must be a personal fellowship that exists between the believer and the Holy Spirit. There's an interchange as between persons here. And not only is it a personal fellowship, but it is a progressive fellowship.

As we get to know the movings of the Holy Spirit in our own lives, and understand something of the kind of life the Spirit leads, then we have a growing consciousness of his demands upon us, and of his ways with us. And as we give obedience to him, then we discover the truth of what the Apostle said to the Romans, as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. There is something progressive about it.

When you think about the way in which the Holy Spirit is presented to us in the Bible, you have this idea of progressiveness. Think of the emblems of the Holy Spirit. The wind, the water, the fire, the seal, the dove, the rain, and so on and so on.

The oil, which is a symbol of power. You see, we are to know the Spirit of God in fellowship within the compass of all these emblems, which somehow describe the kind of thing that he would do in our lives. And then there are the titles of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of Power, the Spirit of Wisdom, the Spirit of the Fear of the Lord, the Spirit of Grace, the Spirit of Burning, and so on and so on. There are 27 titles of the Spirit, and each one of them means something. And there are the prepositions of the Holy Spirit.

Coming upon, beneath, around, before, in, into, and so on. All these prepositions of the Spirit show us areas of his moving in the lives of God's people. And open up before us tremendous vistas of possibility of knowing God in the Spirit.

This is the sort of thing that the Apostle is mentioning here. This progressive fellowship that the people of God have with the same Holy Spirit, so that he is blending them together in a harmony and a unity which is

beyond the earthly and the natural. Something which is born in the heart of God, and something which flows out from this tremendous source.

And if it is a progressive fellowship, it certainly is a very practical one. We know this, that if we are prepared to lay our lives open to the movings of God's Spirit in us, he will enter into every detail of our lives. There is no area in which he will not exercise his authority or show his influence.

Once we understand that he wants to be with us, moment by moment, an hour by hour of every day, not simply when we come to the house of God, to sing the praises of God, to worship him, to listen to his word and so on. Not only then, but in all of life's crises and indeed in the ordinary, everyday routine of our lives, he would enter in and show us his willingness to identify himself with us in our needs as the people of God. We don't begin to understand what the Spirit of God wants to do in the midst of us.

Even though we may have read his word, even though we may have known something of his power in our lives, I am quite certain we have not yet touched the fringe of possibilities that lie within this wonderful area of fellowship with the Spirit of God. Our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son, we know. It is the communion of the Holy Spirit with us, the fellowship of God's Spirit with the people of God.

But he enters into fellowship with us where he finds us, not that we might remain on that plane, but that we might arise by faith to enter into his position and live and move and reign in life through his power and his ability and not resting all the time back upon our own poor, finite human resources. When God, by his Spirit, opens the eyes of God's people to show them the tremendous possibilities that lie within the grasp of the Holy Spirit's hands in handling the affairs of Christchurch, we shall then perhaps understand more fully what Paul is aiming at here. The source of unity, spiritual unity, amongst the people of God lies right there in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

And then he goes on to compassion of heart. If any bowels and mercies--this is an unfortunate translation--he should read, if any tenderheartedness and compassion. Oneness with Jesus Christ will certainly reproduce this attitude of mine.

For as he was moved with compassion, so when he takes over in our lives, differences are resolved, bickerings are over and done with, and these estrangements that take place are healed. Because when compassion takes over, we are willing to forgive, we are willing to forget, we are willing to take the humble place, we are willing to stoop in order to conquer. And so he mentions the compassions of Jesus Christ.

We must remember this. It is not by virtue of the Holy Spirit's indwelling the believer that the unity of the Spirit is maintained. It is not by virtue but by his control of the Christian's life.

That is, it is not so much the fact that when I came to Christ, accepted him as my Savior, I was born of the Spirit, and the Holy Spirit came into my life, and that's it. Not by that indwelling alone, but by his coming to take control of my life, to take over and to lead and guide in the way that he desires it. It is only thus that the compassions of Christ are created in the life of any man or woman.

It is only thus that he reproduces in us as he longs to do the image of God's dear Son. And if the compassions of Christ are part of our new nature to a second birth, then we have the basis here for a glorious unity amongst the people of God. The source of spiritual unity, then, the Apostle reminds us, is traced to our deepest, our most intimate, our most vital experiences as Christians, whose center is Jesus Christ himself.

The central pivot on which one has turned is always the amount of Christlike that prevails in the lives of the Lord's people. As thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may be one in us, in God, in the Spirit, in Christ. There it is, the source, and the only source that the Word of God commends.

Now notice the scope of this unity in verse 2. Fulfill he my joy, that he be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. What is the scope of this spiritual unity of which the Apostle speaks? First of all, he says, complete my joy, make my cup of joy to overflow. By what means? Through a similarity of thoughts in the midst of them.

That he be like-minded, really that you think the same thing. He has spoken already in the former chapter of this quality in relation to the gospel, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel. Now they are to exhibit a general accord concerning the basic things, the elements of their common faith in Jesus Christ.

While Christianity recognizes in men the ability to think, it also ensures a unity through guidance into all truth by the same Holy Spirit. And sometimes this has surprising results, this being guided by the same Spirit into the place of God's appointment. I don't know whether you will be able perhaps to take this from me, but I'll venture out and tell you something of what happened some years ago when I was in Wales, my own little country.

I was a speaker at a convention, and in this particular convention, I was just a young man at the time, very young indeed. And I didn't have very many sermons in those days, but I had some that I thought were of convention standard. And the trouble was, you know, that I was bothered because I had two texts and I didn't know which one I was to take.

That was a predicament. I was sitting up there on the platform, and these two texts were in my mind, conflicting with one another it seemed to me. One was Galatians 2.20, and the other was in the book of Psalms, All thy garments smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia, out of the ivory palaces whereby they have made thee glad.

And there I was. Well, the singing had come to an end and the chairman looked to me and he said, well, it's time to stand up. So I stood up, but I still didn't know.

And I wasn't going to open my mouth until I was sure. And so in desperation from the depth of my being, I quietly, of course, silently, the prayer went up to God, oh God, please do something. Show me what you want me to do.

And as I stood there, the chairman began to sing himself, being in Wales, of course, they're fond of singing. And the congregation took it up and they were singing a little chorus, just over and over again, a simple thing. He was giving me time to get my bearings.

I understood this. But I was becoming more and more confused. I didn't know what to do.

And then from the other end of the platform, a servant of God rose up and came right to where I stood. Stood behind me and he said, I don't know what it means, my brother, but the Lord has just told me to come over and tell you myrrh and aloes. I don't know what it means, he said, but I'm just giving obedience.

And I gave up my text from the book of Psalms, all thy garments smell of myrrh and aloes in the cassia. And I preached. Well, I'd never finished that sermon.

Before I'd got half ways through that sermon, the Spirit of God came upon that congregation of God's people. And as it was in the days of revival, spontaneous singing, verse 4 from them. And they were singing that wonderful song that we have heard, I suppose, sometimes, out of the ivory palaces into a world of woe.

Only his great redeeming love made my Savior go. And they sang this. And a woman stood up and she began to wave her arm.

I thought, oh, I don't like this. That's fanaticism. That's going to extremes now.

I didn't like it at all. And I turned to the chairman and said, I don't like this very much. He said, man, that woman hasn't raised her arm for about 30 years.

She's been unable to do it. That arm has been paralyzed. It's no wonder she's waving it around.

God has healed her. And I saw to my amazement people breaking down and weeping and then coming out to the front and kneeling down. And there was no appeal made.

I had nothing to do with it. But the Spirit of God simply took over. And in that service, which went on for about four hours, there were lives transformed.

There were people brought to Christ. There were backsliders restored. There were people healed spontaneously and dramatically by the hand of God without anybody touching them at all.

And I tell you, it revolutionized that town. Now, this is what I mean when I talk about the possibilities that lie within the compass of the Holy Spirit's ministry when he has given his rightful place in the Christian church. And this is why I think the Apostle Paul keeps on stressing the thing over and over again.

There can only be similarity of thought. We can only think the same thing about the essentials of God's Word when the Holy Spirit takes control of us and when we allow him to guide us into all truth. And then, as it was in the early church, it will be of one mind and one heart.

It's gloriously possible, but not on any human level. God himself must take over before this can be done. And then there's a harmony of love, which he mentions here.

Having the same love, that is, love of the same quality. They had this love ideally in Christ, but he wants them to have it experientially in life. Not a filial love, a brotherly love, not an impassioned love of liking those who have likable qualities, but this divine love, this agape, this love that prizes the soul for whom Christ died and ignores everything else because it sees the preciousness of a life that has been redeemed by the grace of God.

Let this love take over, says the Apostle. I want you all to have the same quality of love. And this is possible because this is the love of God which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

So, harmony of love is mentioned. And then affinity of soul, being of one accord, literally being soul with soul in complete and absolute affinity. This soul with soul experience demonstrates the spiritual unity which ought to characterize the members of the body of Christ.

You know that many figures of speech are used to attempt to describe the unity that should exist amongst the people of God. In 1 Corinthians 6 and verse 1, for instance, you have this person joined to the Lord,

joined on, has something attached. Well, that's a unity which is close, but it certainly isn't vital.

And then in Romans 6 and verse 5, you have the figure of grafted. But here the graft is not more valuable than the stock, and so this seems to fail too. And then you have the figure of the husband and the wife to describe the unity in the body of Christ, or in the church of Christ.

But although that is a vital union, it is only until death do us part. Then comes the figure of the church as the body of Christ of which he is the living head. And this is the one figure, it seems to me, that describes unity as perfectly as human language can express it.

For here is something which time can never alter, something which lasts beyond time, something which exists as long as Christ exists. For the members of the body are joined to him who is the head of the body, not a figurehead, but a living head. And by joints and bands of a nourishment ministered, this body maketh increase of itself under the edifying of building up of itself in love.

This figure of the body of Christ, it seems to me, is demanded if we are to fulfill this idea of being of one accord, soul with soul, an affinity between us, which you can't describe, but which you feel and sense and know exists because of our relationship with Jesus Christ and therefore with each other. This being of one accord, soul with soul, is an affinity which he can produce. One thing more before I conclude.

You see the standard of this unity in verses three and four. Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. First of all you notice it is the spiritual ministry that is mentioned here.

A contentious spirit will breed ascension. A foul spring doesn't give out pure and sweet water, you can't expect it. And this vain glory is empty arrogance.

But rather in the true spirit of humility, says the apostle, still regard your fellows as superior to yourself. And if you do this, you must do it with a spiritual motive. Verse four, look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others, not consulting each one his own interests, but also each one having regard for the interests and the well-being of others.

So that self-interest is crucified and unity takes over. We are not concerned anymore with ourselves as individuals, but only concerned with the members of the body of Christ. And concerned most desperately that there shall be no dissension and no contention in the midst of Christ's body to cause schism and division.

Where the Holy Spirit is allowed to preside, not simply ideally as one whose presence we acknowledge and to which we give a mental assent, but practically and personally and progressively residing and presiding in the church, this sort of unity will be brought about. But without it, it seems to be an impossibility. So may we pray from our hearts that God will by his spirit create the sort of unity that pleases him and which brings us together in a new dimension of life's experience as members of the body of Christ, controlled by the spirit of the Lord.

May God bless his word. Next Sunday evening, God willing, we shall continue our exposition, commencing next time at verse five. Let us pray.

O God, our Father, we thank thee and praise thee, that in the fullness of thy lovingkindness thou didst send Jesus into the world. And he came that he might die as our Redeemer and was raised again for our

justification. But we thank thee that he hath sent the Holy Spirit as his representative, and we long to know that fellowship, that communion with the Holy Spirit in his position so that we can enter more fully into our work for God and into our fellowship one with another.

Move in the midst of us, we pray, and in the midst of thy church generally, and send in our day a mighty Holy Spirit revival that thy church may emerge as an army with banners, victorious in the power of the Spirit. This we ask for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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