

A Culture of Unity

Ephesians 4:1-3

Theme: unity

Point: we accept, because we've been accepted

FCF: self-preservation

App: die to yourself, live Christ, serve others

We live in a cut-throat culture of self-preservation

where to gain approval, you must take it from someone else

Look out for yourself, cause no one else will (examples?)

Christ creates a covenant community (church)

It confronts the self-preserving aspect of culture

The church should look different than the rest of the world

A paradigm shift

The exhortation (v1) of the gospel

“Walk” = conduct, occupation: lit. “bringing into equilibrium”¹

adjust your occupation (not job) to fit your calling

calling = election, not vocation (1:18)²

The expression (v2) of the gospel

Four expressions (out of this exhortation) **the church must be occupied with:**

1. Humility

1. Would have surprised Gentile readers when Christians first read this virtue...

2. this word doesn't even show up in the OT. Epictetus (A.D. 50-130) listed this word the first among qualities not to be commended.³

1. **modest view of self** in relation to others

1. this is not *self-deprecation*⁴ <-- another form of pride!

1. we put ourselves down in hope of approval

Timothy Keller,

“The essence of gospel-humility is not thinking more of myself or less of myself, it is thinking of myself less”⁵

2. See, at the heart of *pride* is a desire to be approved

1. and at the heart of *self-loathing* is a desire to be approved

¹ Harold W. Hoehner. *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002) p.506

² Peter T. O'Brien. *PNTC: The Letter to the Ephesians*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999) p.275

³ Ibid, p.506

⁴ Ernest Best. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*. ICC. (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 1998) p.363

⁵ Timothy Keller. *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness: the path to true Christian joy*. (10Publishing, 2011) p.32

3. the gospel frees you from the need to be approved, and all of the sudden, you no longer need to be at the center of attention.

1. because you have a balanced view of yourself in relation to God's plan

1. Romans 12:3 (HCSB)

For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one.

2. Gentleness

This one risks misinterpretation by two kinds of people:

- extroverts

- may view gentleness as a sign of weakness. But it's not weakness, it's...
 - showing power through self-control⁶, rather than self-exertion

- introverts

- amiable; willing to accept the wishes, decisions, or suggestions of others.

Philippians 2:3

Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves

- may think they've got this down because they are *temperamentally* gentle. But Paul's gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit which enables the Christian to be steadfast in their beliefs while remaining self-controlled. Without this, it's not gentleness, but passivity, and perhaps even cowardice.

1. gentleness allows you to have a backbone, without steamrolling people.

2. **generous view of others**

3. Patience <-- long-suffering (w/qualifier)

1. suffering what you want *for the benefit of others*

1. the ability to suppress your annoyance (son, daughter, ushers, comm)

4. Acceptance (in love)

1. why are you able to love? because you have a balanced view of yourself in relation to God, which allows you to use your gifts to bless others, while suppressing your annoyance when things don't go your way.⁷

1. This type of person *cannot be destroyed by the failings of others, and yet will never allow others to be destroyed by their own failures.*

PROBLEM:

Even when we attempt humility, gentleness, and patience, we can hardly do them without injecting our own fallen versions!

⁶ R. Kent Hughes remarks, "This meekness/gentleness is not weakness. It is rather strength under control." *The Mystery of the Body of Christ*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990) p.123

⁷ Frank Theilman mentions that *patience* "sandwiched as it is here between references to humility and gentleness on one hand and bearing with others on the other hand, it clearly connotes 'being able to bear up under provocation.'" *BECNT: Ephesians*. (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2010) p. 254

- our humility is tarnished by self-loathing
- our gentleness is tarnished by timidity
- our patience is weathered by the resentment that sets in.
 - these qualities (expressions) cannot be apprehended, they must be given!

That's why we're being told to walk according to the calling we've received.

When Paul wants us "diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit" (3a)

- he's speaking about a unity has already been established⁸

"in the bond of peace" (3b)

- the bond of peace is how our unity is kept
 - When you are about to give up on each other, remember that the burden of creating peace is not on you. In fact, no human society or community can manufacture their own peace. Christ brings us peace by the gospel (Eph. 2:14)
- This is how God "brings everything together in the Messiah" (Eph. 1:10)**
And the Church is His masterpiece (3:10)

We preserve this unity, even as we are transformed by preaching the gospel to ourselves.

The effects of the Gospel in Christian community (3)

It changes your view of yourself within the church

The law humbles you, and condemns you to failure.

Grace pardons you, and enables you to live.

It changes your view of others within the church

we're a family - covenant community (in a family, you're born in, or adopted)
prayerfully asking the Lord if you want to commit, and then following through

- normative in a consumeristic culture: church as a cafeteria buffet
 - example: reasons for leaving a church?! (multi-site, sermon, bad coffee)
 - are these reasons you would secede from your blood-related family?
 - There are good reasons, but are these them?

If God is calling you to a local church (HE IS!), you need to do it prayerfully, and thoughtfully. It doesn't have to be Reality, but it has to be a church. And there are many good ones in the area. When God calls you to that church, stick with it until He tells you to move somewhere else.

AND...those that go to Reality need to take our calling as a church very seriously!

Are you in or out?? Because if you're in, you can't be out when the air conditioning gets too cold, or when Britt is out of town, or when you get bored, or when someone hurts your feelings. Your commitment to the body of Christ must be founded on the head, not the body. <-- we will fail you, but Christ will never fail you though you fail him constantly.

⁸ Clinton E. Arnold. *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010) p.231

How the Gospel Shifted a Tilt Between Titans: John Wesley and George Whitefield

Much in common, but separated by differences. Yet, Whitefield battled for his brother...

Humility

He sought reconciliation, and humbled himself...yet without compromising his beliefs.

Gentleness

When someone asked Whitefield if he thought he would see Wesley in heaven, Whitefield replied, "I fear not, for he will be so near the eternal throne and we at such a distance, we shall hardly get sight of him."

John Wesley

Should we not mention, that he had a heart susceptible of the most generous and the most tender friendship? I have frequently thought that this, of all others, was the distinguishing part of his character. How few have we known of so kind a temper, of such large and flowing affections! Was it not principally by this, that the hearts of others were so strangely drawn and knit to him? Can anything but love beget love?

Servant of God, well done!
Thy glorious warfare's past;
The battle's fought, the race is won,
And thou art crown'd at last

Why were Wesley and Whitefield able to lay aside such monumental differences?
THEY WERE OCCUPIED WITH JESUS.

George Whitefield

"Let the name of Whitefield perish, but Christ be glorified. Let my name die everywhere, let even my friends forget me, if by that means the cause of the blessed Jesus may be promoted. But what is Calvin, or what is Luther? Let us look above names and parties; let Jesus be our all in all--So that He is preached...I care not who is uppermost. I now my place...even to be the servant of all."⁹

What are you occupied with these days?

You're occupations will reveal how deeply you have understood your calling and election. Community is our barometer for a life walked worthily...not of how bad "others" are doing, but how much you and I need a saturated immersion in the knowledge of the gospel.

Charles Wesley

He left His Father's throne above, so free, so infinite His grace—
Emptied Himself of all but love, and bled for Adam's helpless race:
'Tis mercy all, immense and free, for O my God, it found out me!
'Tis mercy all, immense and free, for O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—I woke, the dungeon *flamed* with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.
My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.¹⁰

⁹ Arnold A. Dallimore. *George Whitefield: God's Anointed Servant in the Great Revival of the Eighteenth Century*. (Wheaton, 1990) p.154

¹⁰ Charles Wesley. *And Can It Be*. Hymn.

Works Cited

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