

Oneness through Lowliness

Humble Unity Part 4
Philippians 2:2-3 3-13-2016

Summary: Motivated by God's tenderness, we are given the mandate of unity. And the way to achieve that is through humility and other-centeredness.

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Philippians 2:1 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Introduction

The Roots of Division (wrong responses to small offences)

There was a church in Dallas that became so divided that they ignored the clear command of 1 Corinthians 6 that we are not to sue brothers in Christ, and the two sides actually took each other to court in their fight over who would get the church property. The judge wisely ruled that it was not the role of the courts to decide something like that. So he remanded the matter over to the denominational officials to decide. Those officials eventually gave all of the property to one of the factions. And, predictably, the other faction split off and formed their own church nearby. Church growth, American style. During the whole investigation by the denomination, the officials managed to trace the dispute back to its original

source. And that was reported in the Dallas news. It turned out the whole dispute began at a church dinner when an elder was served a smaller piece of ham than the child who is sitting next to him.

We hear a story like that and shake our heads at the little-ham elder and think, *How could someone be that childish?* But you would be amazed if you knew how many church splits began with something almost that trivial. It happens all the time. Someone in the church feels slighted, and they respond in the flesh, with a sinful, selfish, angry reaction. And now that they got their little dig in they think that will be the end of it. But then the other guy reacts in the flesh too, and that provokes another response, and neither side is willing to humble himself and repent, and so it starts to escalate. And at some point the issue shifts from that minor little thing that started it, to some doctrinal issue or a “matter of principle” or something that will make it look like it’s not as petty as it is. And once it becomes attached to a doctrinal issue or a matter of principle, now neither side can ever compromise, so they start digging in. And friends start rallying around friends and pretty soon the whole church is involved. And most of the people have no idea what really started it all.

And later on when somebody is sifting through all the ashes of the devastation, they find that first offense and point the finger at that as the cause. But that’s not really the cause. There are always going to be offenses and sins and insults. Those things are always going to happen; there is just no way around that. But they don’t have to destroy the church. If we can learn to respond in a godly way to insults and the sins of others, then the result can be the strengthening of God’s household, rather than the destruction of it. The little-ham church split in Texas wasn’t caused by someone failing to provide an elder portion to an elder. It was caused by wrong reactions to that, and wrong reactions to those reactions. Maybe the server should have given a little more generous piece. But if the elder had any humility at all, he would have been thankful to have any ham at all, and he would have been thankful for the fact that someone was spending their time and energy serving him food, and would have been happy for the kid who got even more. And he would have assumed the best of the server, and there would have been no problem.

Or, maybe the elder reacts in the selfish, prideful, sinful way that he reacted, but the people around him don’t respond in kind. Instead of letting it escalate into a war, they come alongside that elder and help him see his sin and gently restore him to godliness. There are so many points in the early stages of a conflict where the car can be steered back onto the road so that we don’t drive off the cliff of conflict.

Our Deadly Love Affair with Pride

But if that’s the case, why do so many churches still keep driving off the cliff? Why do so many Christian marriages drive off the cliff? Why do people who have been friends for years throw those friendships away over little offenses? If a huge, painful catastrophe can be avoided just by having a godly response to an offense, why don’t we have more godly responses to offenses than we do? Here’s why: it’s because having a godly response to an offense requires one of the most painful and difficult things a human being can ever do, namely, letting go of pride. We cling to our pride, which is insanity, because nothing causes us more trouble and heartache and loss in life than our pride. Pride turns our Creator against us.

James 4:6 God opposes the proud

Wouldn’t you agree that the worst imaginable thing that could ever happen to you would be to have an all-powerful God opposing you? Pride never brings us joy – always heartache and sorrow. It makes us discontent and unsatisfied no matter how much blessing we have. It makes us get angry when things don’t go our way. It spoils our mood, destroys our relationships, damages our marriages, fouls up our parenting, hurts our careers, and invites the discipline of God on our lives. And yet the hardest thing we can ever do is let go of it!

I remember, one of our kids, when she was just a little baby, suddenly started crying. So I looked over to see what was wrong, and she had gotten a hold of a big, metal spoon. She was just an infant, without any control of her arms and legs yet, and she was smacking herself in the head repeatedly with that spoon. So I took the spoon out of her hand. And that made her cry even louder than she was already

crying. She really didn't like it that I took that spoon away from her, because she had no idea that it was the spoon that was causing the strange, recurring pain in her head. That's the way we are with our pride. It's like that spoon. It does nothing but hurt us. It causes nothing but harm and destroys our lives, and yet we grip it as tight as we can because we have this sick love affair with it.

Humility, on the other hand, is both beautiful and beneficial. And that is what Paul is going to show us in this chapter.

The Motive: Love

Make Jesus Happy

But before he starts talking to us about humility, he knows it is going to be incredibly difficult for us to let go of pride, and so he begins with motivation in verse 1. And last week we spent the whole hour just basking in that verse. Verse 1 is one of the most powerful motivational speeches ever given, and it is only a half of a sentence. It is all about God's tender love and compassion and kindness towards us. He said, "If you have received any encouragement or comfort at all from God, then do what I'm about to ask you to do in verses 2-4." Today's sermon is going to be a hard one. There will probably be numerous times in the sermon when you think to yourself, "That's impossible." And every time you are tempted to think that, we need to go back to verse 1, and hear the Lord Jesus asking you the question, "Have I ever been kind to you? Have I ever shown you any love at all?"

"Yes Lord, of course – more kindness and love than I can fathom."

"Then won't you do this for me? Would you show humility toward one another for my sake so that there will be unity in my church?"

And please don't think of that as some sort of repayment. It is not that we are paying God back for his love by being unified and humble. It is not a business transaction; it is a love relationship. We aren't doing it to pay God back; we are doing it to make God happy, because we love him. The more you love someone, the more you want to make that person happy. And Jesus is saying, "Do you want to know what would make me happy? Be unified."

That is the first part of the motivation. Then he gives us another motivation in verse 2. The motivation in verse 1 is God's love for them; the motivation in verse 2 is their love for Paul.

Make Paul Happy

Philippians 2:2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded...

Verse one – do it to make God happy. Verse two – do it to make Paul happy. He says **make my joy complete**. He is already joyful - we saw that in chapter 1. Even when people opposed him, rejected him, refused to listen to him, and tried to hurt him. Nothing could take away his joy, but there are some things that can make his joy less complete or more complete. And the thing that would really top him off, right up to the brim, would be their unity. So Paul says, "Would you do this for the sake of my joy?"

My first thought when I started studying verse 2 was about how beautiful this relationship was between Paul and the Philippians. We will see that all through this book. They loved each other so much. I think every pastor dreams of having this kind of relationship with his people, to where he could motivate them to do something really hard just by saying, "It would make me happy if you did it." How does a pastor get that kind of relationship with his people? Paul got to that point because he had sacrificed so much and had loved these people so profoundly. And it is my life's goal to earn that kind of relationship with all of you.

But on the other hand, I will say this – even in a situation where the elders haven't earned your respect or love, the Bible teaches that it really is in your self-interest to make them happy through your responsiveness to the preaching of God's Word.

Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

We are all a lot better off when our spiritual leaders are full of joy. I remember once at a previous church I made a joke about getting depressed because of the poor lighting in the church. And when I said that, the janitor said, “Well, there ain’t nothing more depressing than a depressed pastor.” I don’t know if he was thinking about Hebrews 13:17, but it’s a very similar idea. If the pastors of this church have sorrow rather than joy, that is not going to be advantageous for you at all. And the best way to make sure we have joy is not to pat us on the back, or give us a card on pastor appreciation day, or any of that – the way to put the deepest joy in our hearts is to walk in unity by being humble and loving toward one another.

Okay, so now that we are motivated by Christ’s love for us, and by our love for our spiritual leaders – we have all kinds of motivation to fulfill the mandate; what, exactly, is the mandate? The mandate is in verse 2. Verse 2 tells us what he wants us to do, and then verses 3 and 4 tell us how to do it. So here’s the mandate:

The Mandate: Unity

2 make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

Three different ways of saying one thing: be unified. I told you before that I think Philippi was Paul’s favorite church. They were a wonderful church. They didn’t seem to have any doctrinal problems or heresies; they didn’t have the kinds of problems with immorality or unrepentant sin or resistance of Paul’s authority like you see in Corinth and other churches. This is a spiritually mature, generous, loving, godly church. But they had a unity problem.

Does that strike you as a little strange? How could such a spiritual mature church have unity problems? That is actually not all that surprising, because disunity tends to be more of a problem for healthy churches than it is for dead churches.

Life Problems

There are life problems and death problems in churches. Problems associated with a dying church – can’t pay the bills, there’s no fruit because people aren’t energized for ministry, etc. Those are the kinds of problems you have in a dying church. There are other problems that come along with a lively, thriving church. Things like not enough space, the facility can’t handle all the people, people falling through the cracks because so much is going on, etc. Those are life problems.

And disunity is a life problem. The healthier a church is, the more enthusiastic people tend to be about ministry and about doctrine. So when conflicts arise, they really matter. In a liberal church, if there is a disagreement on doctrine, it’s no big deal. Who cares? You have your superstition, I have mine – what do I care what you believe? That is what you have in a dead, liberal church.

But in a living church, where I’m doing what I’m doing because I believe God called me to it, and so I would literally die for this calling, and you feel just as strongly about your ministry, what happens when you do something that gets in my way, or I do something that hinders what you are doing? It is a big deal. It matters. So the more life there is in the church, the more you will find that church struggling with unity.

This is why it is so important for every church to remain vigilant. No matter how healthy and mature a church is, we have to stay alert because spiritual health in a church is attained slowly and lost quickly. And what we gain with all our good doctrine and passionate ministry can be lost through disunity. So let’s take a look at these three descriptions he gives us of unity.

Like-Minded

First he tells us to be **like minded**. That word has to do with attitude.¹ It means having the same attitude and orientation of life. You can be unified with someone who has different opinions on various issues as long as you both have the same attitudes and orientation of life. Some of my closest friends and family members hold theological views that are significantly different than the views I hold. But I don't feel even slightly estranged from them, because we share the same attitudes about things. The list of things that we value very highly is the same. And the list of things we think of as being of small importance is the same.

Same Love

The second phrase is **having the same love**. In order to have unity, we have to love the same things. If you have two football fans who have very different ideas about strategies or players, usually they will still get along just fine if they are rooting for the same team. They love the same team. But if they are rooting for opposing teams, they might find themselves against each other even if they have exactly the same opinions about strategies or players.

If you and I both love the word of God, and we both highly value things like humility and faith and love and perseverance and compassion, and we both love the church and we both live for the glory of God, and we both delight in seeing worshiping hearts - if we have all that in common, we can disagree on quite a bit and still not have any relationship problem at all.

One in Spirit and Purpose

Same attitudes and orientation, same loves, and then thirdly - **being one in spirit and purpose**. That means having the same desires and objectives. We have the same attitudes, and we love the same things, and as a result, we have the same priorities. We are working at the same goals, using the same methods. Not only do we love the same things, but those things are more important to both of us than our own personal comfort and preferences. So if you do something to slight me, or I do something that insults you or irritates you, our relationship will handle it just fine if we both care way more about the progress of the gospel than we do about our own pride.

Divisiveness

All of that is exceedingly pleasing to God.

Psalm 133:1 How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!

And that is why it is such a big deal to create disunity. God has very, very strong words to say about people who would create division in his church.

Titus 3:9 But avoid foolish debates, genealogies, quarrels, and disputes about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. 10 Reject a divisive person after a first and second warning, 11 knowing that such a person is perverted and sins, being self-condemned.

In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul writes a whole chapter rebuking the people in the church of Corinth for their lack of unity.

1 Corinthians 3:3 ...since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? ... 16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple ... 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

¹ It is the same word translated "feel" in 1:7.

It is a very serious matter, because when there are divisions in the church, our corporate worship actually ends up doing more harm than good!

1 Corinthians 11:17 ... your meetings do more harm than good. 18 ...when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you

So what should we do when we disagree? Just keep our mouths shut? No.

1 Corinthians 11:19 No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.

Again, we don't want to just be peace fakers, and sweep our differences under the rug. If you and I see things differently, we need to work through that. But working through the differences of opinion won't bring about unity unless we love the same things and care about the same things and have the same attitudes and orientation in life.

The Means: Humility

How to Achieve Unity - Humility

So how do we get there? When a church starts to fragment, how can you get back to everybody's heart beating as one - same purpose, same priorities, same loves, same attitudes, same orientation? Does that happen by getting everybody to sign the doctrinal statement? Or everyone signing a membership covenant? By constantly repeating our slogan, and making sure everyone can recite our purpose statement from memory? All of those things can be helpful ways of *clarifying* unity, but none of them will bring about unity. In order to bring about unity, we are going to need a particular character quality, and Paul gives us that in verse 3. Verse 2 gives the mandate (unity); verse 3 gives us the means to achieve that mandate. Here is how we bring about unity in the church:

3 doing nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility considering others better than yourselves.

The way to achieve unity is to let go of pride. Paul describes it with two negative descriptions and two positive descriptions. First the negative ones.

Selfish Ambition

3 doing nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.

Selfish ambition is when I want to promote myself above others. This word was used to describe people campaigning for office. So we know exactly what this is, don't we? The people who are currently running for president – everything they say and do is designed to promote themselves and to gain popularity. In an election year we see that in the extreme, but in its more subtle forms it is something we all do. We are all campaigning to some degree. Albert Barnes had a poignant comment on this:

Probably there is no command of the Bible which would have a wider sweep than this, or would touch on more points of human conduct, if fairly applied. Who is there who passes a single day without, in some respect, desiring to display himself? What minister of the gospel preaches, who never has any wish to exhibit his talents, eloquence, or learning? ... Who, in conversation, is always free from a desire to show his wit, or his power in argumentation, or his skill in repartee? Who plays at the piano without the desire of commendation? Who thunders in the senate, or goes to the field of battle; who builds a house, or purchases an article of apparel; who writes a book, or performs a deed of benevolence, altogether

uninfluenced by this desire? If all could be taken out of human conduct which comes from pride and selfish ambition, how small a portion would be left!

It's true – we are all out there campaigning. Not for votes for public office, but just for people to like us. For people to be impressed with us. For people to be supportive of us – we love those endorsements.

Everything you do every day is an effort to fulfill some desire – which is fine. There is nothing wrong with that. Where it becomes selfishness is when our pursuit of fulfilling our desires ignores other people's desires and interests.

Vain Conceit

The other term Paul uses is **vain conceit**. Pride. This is the attitude that is behind the lifestyle of **selfish ambition**. The reason I spend my energy trying to fulfill my desires without considering your interests is because of pride. It is because I think my desires are more important than yours.

God hates pride. Proverbs 6:16-17 lists seven things that God hates; the very first one is **haughty eyes**. James 4:5 says God resists the proud.² When we are proud we position ourselves as God's enemies.

This comes as a shock to the world. They think pride is a virtue. The world has always loved pride, and that will only get worse as time goes on.

2 Timothy 3:1 But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, ...4 conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God

One of the worst things about the last days is that self-esteem will take over. The world is enamored with pride, but the very definition of a Christian is someone who is poor in spirit (Mt.5:3). You enter the kingdom of God by humbling yourself – confessing your sins and bowing the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ. And after that we are called to live lives of humility, and to keep making more and more progress toward letting go of our pride.

Baseless

And Paul helps us here by reminding us that our pride is vain – **vain conceit**. The word **vain** means empty – baseless. When we become puffed up with self-importance, there is no foundation underneath that. There is no basis for it. It is irrational. If you can imagine some random guy walks into a room full of people and announces, “I am in charge!” And everybody just looks at him and says, “Who are you?” That's kind of how most of us walk through life – “I'm important. My opinions matter. My comfort and my preferences really matter.” But there is no basis for thinking that. What makes my opinions or my preferences or my comfort matter? Nothing.

And so Paul says nothing we do should ever be driven by those motives. What should drive them? That is the positive side.

Humility

3 Doing nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility considering others better than yourselves.

The opposite of pride is humility. Now, don't confuse humility with putting yourself down or self-loathing. The greatest example of humility ever is Jesus, and he never put himself down. People who put themselves down all the time or who talk about how horrible they are – those people are not humble. Those people are proud. Who are they always talking about? Themselves! Who are they thinking about?

² In the next verse James says we are to resist Satan – using that same word for resist. That means the action we are to take against Satan is the same action God takes against us if we are proud!

Themselves! Humility is not putting yourself down; humility is when you stop thinking about yourself and start thinking about others. Or to put it another way, pride is when you have a master mentality – “Everyone around me exists to serve me.” Humility is when you have a slave mentality – “I exist to serve you.”

Anti-Entitlement

Pride has an attitude of entitlement. Proud people walk through life with an attitude that says, “You owe me. I’ve suffered a lot, you have more than I have, therefore you owe me. Everybody owes me, and I’m perpetually angry because they’re not paying up.” It is amazing how that attitude has taken over our culture. I hear college students interviewed about the election, and the primary criterion for their vote is whoever will take money from someone else and give it to them. They want free college tuition, they want the rest of the population to pay off their student loans - other people should pay extra money in taxes and the benefits should go to me just because I’m me. There is an entire political party built around promising, “If you vote for us, we will take money from other people and give it to you.”

It is sad to see that attitude taking over our culture. And yet, to one degree or another, we are all guilty of that. We all walk around with somewhat of a “You owe me” kind of attitude. You owe me a certain look on your face when I walk past you. Don’t frown when I expect a smile. You owe me friendliness. The clerk at the store owes me good service. The people in my family owe me some gratitude for all the stuff I do. The people on the highway owe me some courtesy.

That is the opposite of humility. And, I am ashamed to say, that’s me. Pray for your pastor, so that I might become less like that, and more like Paul, who said in Romans 1:14 **I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish**. Paul walked around with the attitude, “I owe everybody. You don’t owe me anything – I owe you something.” What would church life be like if everyone had that attitude? I owe you the continuing debt of love (Ro.13:8). Every time I see you I need to make another payment on that debt. I owe you kindness. I owe you the Word of God. I owe you the ministry of my spiritual gift. I owe it to you to rejoice when you are happy, and to weep when you weep. That’s my goal. I want to be like Jesus who said in Luke 22:27 – **I am among you as the one who serves**. That is humility.

Other-Centeredness

And so Paul says **in humility, consider others better than yourselves**. A better translation would be **consider others more important than yourselves**. Jesus did not consider us better than him, but he did consider our needs more important than his own glory. So we let go of pride, we let go of selfish ambition, we get rid of the master mentality - we stop thinking, “you owe me,” and instead, with a humble, servant’s attitude, we consider others’ needs and desires and opinions and preferences and welfare more important than our own.

You go into a restaurant and think, “I want this server to have a good experience.” You get a sales call at dinner time, and you actually have concern about the feelings of the telemarketer – realizing that he is at a point in his life where he had to take one of the most miserable jobs there is. What if you made a habit every time you get on an on-ramp to spend the whole length of that on-ramp praying for the woman or man in the car that will end up in front of you and behind and beside you on the highway – that they would have a good rest of their day, and something would point them to Christ? When you are driving home from work, you tell me... – how would you need to spend the last 10 minutes of the drive to prepare your attitude so that when you walk in the door, you are all about your spouse’s interests and your kids’ interests ahead of your own? Kids - on your way home from school, spend that time thinking about “How can I make my brother or sister happy? How can I make mom and dad happy the rest of the day?” At work you think, “What is it like to be my boss? What are the challenges? How can I reduce those so that my boss has a great day today?”

Are you in a conflict with someone right now? Maybe you are in the right and they are in the wrong – but even if that’s the case, have you stopped at all to think about what it’s like for them to be in conflict with you? Are you making it easy or hard for them to come to their senses and repent? And remember – if these things are sounding impossible, where do you go? Back to verse 1. If this sounds like too much to ask, go back to verse 1 and hear Jesus saying to you, “Have I ever been kind to you? Have you ever received encouragement or grace from me at all? Then would you do this for me?”

This Is for Your Good

We need that motivation because letting go of pride is so hard. Most of us hear a sermon like this, and we are so prideful that the whole time were sitting there thinking about all the people in our life who need to hear this sermon.

“I hope my husband is listening.”

“I hope my wife is getting this.”

And the Holy Spirit is saying the whole time, “I want *you* to get it.” I remember when Josiah was a toddler, he would take some other kid’s toy away and when we corrected him he would say, “I thought you said sharing was important. I was helping him share.” Every time we said something to him about sharing, he could only hear it from the perspective of others sharing with him. And we laugh at that, but aren’t we the same way? You are listening intently, taking notes on the sermon, you look over at your husband and he’s helping the kids with something right when I was teaching that principle, and you think, “Oh great! That’s the worst. I hear all this teaching about letting go of selfishness and putting others first, and my spouse misses it. Now I’m doomed to be a doormat. I will be selfless and giving and caring about his needs, and he’ll go on with his selfishness, thinking the world is great, and I get to be miserable the rest of my life.”

If that’s how you feel, you are missing the point. Selflessness is good for *you* - even if the other person remains selfish, because God blesses humble, selfless people and he punishes proud, selfish people. Just read verses 5 to 11. Jesus became a doormat, and God exalted him to the highest place. How many different times does the Bible say that if anyone exalts himself God will humble him, but if anyone humbles himself, God will exalt him?

(For example Luke 18:14 “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”)

Not only that, but the greatest joy in life comes not from other people being considerate towards you, but from you being considerate towards them. That is what will make you happiest in life. There is much more enjoyment and happiness to be found in loving than there is in being loved.

Acts 20:35 ...It is more blessed to give than to receive.

If you hear this message and your spouse doesn’t, you are the one who comes out ahead, and he is the one who loses out.

This Is for the Body’s Good

And not only does it work out better for you, but it works out better for the body. And since you are part of the body, that’s to your advantage. What does the rest of your body do when one part isn’t pulling its weight? You sprain your ankle, and it becomes non-functional. What does the rest of your body do? Put more weight on it? No – less. You limp, right? What is limping? Limping is the other parts of the body taking on an extra burden to take the load off of that dysfunctional part to give it a chance to heal. If our physical bodies behaved like the body of Christ often does, the rest of the body would retaliate against that sprained ankle. How effective would you be in life if your body parts had a civil war going between

themselves? If someone in the body is dysfunctional, and you step in to carry the extra load to make it easier on that person, you are doing yourself a favor, because we all part of one body.

If I am the left foot and get into a conflict with the right foot, and I manage to defeat it, have I really won? No, I've lost. Now the body is going nowhere thanks to me. You see, if we are all part of the same body, then what happens to you happens to me. That is the argument Paul uses for married couples in Ephesians 5. He says to husbands, "Hey, your wife is now part of your body. If something good happens to her, that means something good happened to you. And if something bad happens to her, something bad happened to you. If she suffers a loss, you suffered a loss. And so you should be nice to your wife, if for no other reason, for your own self-interest. Nobody in his right mind fights against his own body."

Conclusion

So we need to be joined at the heart with one another in the church. Doctrinal unity and philosophical unity are very important, but they will get us nowhere without relational unity, because when you start not liking someone, every other kind of unity will fall apart before long. When there is anger or bitterness or resentment in a relationship, you will find a way to disagree with each other. We hear about a church split over a piece of ham, and we think it is most ridiculous thing we have ever heard, and yet, it is really not that far off from the kinds of things that go on routinely in every church, including this one. When I told you that story about the piece of ham, you probably thought, "I can't imagine anyone responding that way." If you picture someone you love doing the serving, then of course you can't imagine yourself reacting that way. But what if it's someone you are at odds with? If someone has slighted you, insulted you, they've been mean to you, and that has gone on for months without resolution, and you have all kinds of bitterness or resentment in your heart – when you get to that point, they can do something very, very minor, like the way something is served at a meal, and it really hurts you because it's not just that one little thing – it is everything they have done for the past six months.

Disunity does not come mainly from differences of opinion. Division and dissensions, factions, and unreconciled, broken relationships in the church come from selfishness and pride.

Galatians 5:19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions

Where there is selfish ambition and pride, you see anger, hatred, and jealousy, and that is what causes the discord, dissensions, and factions. But humility can heal all that, and bring that oneness and unity that is so pleasing to our Lord Jesus Christ, who died to purchase our unity. And he appeals to his love for us to persuade us to humble ourselves toward one another.

Benediction: 1 Peter 5:5 clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

- 1) What are two or three areas in your life where there is a special need to remember Christ's tenderness toward you so that you can be more humble?
- 2) Can you think of someone in your life with whom you have disagreements, but no relational friction because you have the same attitudes, same loves, and you are one in spirit and purpose? Describe that relationship.
- 3) Think about some beautiful, peaceful relationships at Agape. Take some time as a group to thank God for granting that unity.