



First Baptist Church At The Villages

Discipleship Group Lesson

Series: Under Authority • Title: Unity in Our Community • Main Passage: Phil 2:1-4

for use by groups 5/6 - 5/11/2019

Main Point

One of the ways Christians set themselves apart is by considering the interests of others ahead of their own.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

How would you define the word humility? How do you think people in our day generally define it?

Describe the personality and behavior of the most humble person you know.

Why is humility such a challenging trait to model? What does this tell us about ourselves?

In Philippians 1:27, Paul challenged the Philippian Christians to be unified with his charge to stand firm “in one spirit, with one mind, working side by side for the faith.” Paul continued with his theme of unity in chapter 2. His words are as incredibly challenging today as they were then. One of the ways Christians set themselves apart is through truly considering the interests of others ahead of their own.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| **HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 2:1-4.**

What four specific areas of unity did Paul desire for the Philippian believers? How would you describe what Paul meant by each phrase?

How are each of these areas represented in our church and in our relationships?

Why would things like encouragement in Christ, comfort from love, and participation in the Spirit lead to unity?

Read John 13:34-35. What additional insight does Jesus' commandment give into the purpose of unity among Christians?

Paul called them to fulfill his joy by pursuing unity with one another. Their harmony could exist only by their having the same outlook—thinking the same way. They would express that unity by having the same love as Christ had, sharing the same feelings, and by their focusing on one goal. Jesus Christ stated that this kind of obvious, mutual love and practical unity is the distinguishing characteristic of His disciples.

What are some potential reasons why unity like this might not exist in a church? What larger issues, other than simple disagreement, might disunity point to?

| **HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 17:20-23.**

Scan back through the passage leading up to these verses. What was the context in which Jesus said this?

What does that indicate about the importance of unity among His followers to Jesus? Why do you think Jesus held unity as such a priority?

What, according to Jesus, is the effect of a unified church?

Unity is an incredibly powerful testimony to those outside looking in. When the church is unified around truth and mission, it demonstrates to a skeptical world the validity and power of their faith. The church is meant to be where people, of all different kinds and varieties, might come together under the message and mission of the gospel of Jesus Christ. When there is disunity, the world around wonders whether the message of the church is truly real or not.

Does unity mean there is absolute agreement on everything? Why or why not?

Why is humility an essential element to this kind of unity?

What does it mean to consider someone “more significant than” yourself (Phil. 2:3)?

Where can we find the kind of motivation we need to truly consider others better than ourselves?

Paul was asking His followers to do something contrary to fallen human nature. We are, in our sin, preconditioned to think of ourselves first and foremost. To think of another as better than ourselves is an attribute that can only come from a heart changed by the gospel.

How did Jesus demonstrate this kind of thinking?

How might considering the gospel, again and again, lead to true humility?

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What do you think it feels like to be part of a church that cares for one another like Paul describes here?

What are the primary obstacles to living out this passage?

If we are to be the church Christ wants in our community, what types of sacrifices should we be prepared to make?

Thinking about the relationships in your life, how can you consider others to be more important than yourself?

Pray

Divide up into pairs or small groups of men and women. Encourage everyone to share their prayer needs, specifically related to areas they need to practice humility, sacrifice, and unity. Challenge the group to begin their prayer time by voicing statements of gratitude and praise to God for the work of Jesus on our behalf. Pray for our church, that we would be a place where we are unified, humbly following Jesus.

Commentary

| Philippians 2:1-4

Paul built his challenge for unity on the reality of Christ within each believer. The phrase encouragement in Christ refers to encouragement that comes from Christian commitment. That Christ lived in the Philippians' hearts was indeed a great blessing for them. The term comfort from love refers to Christ's love for them. Believers are the eternal recipients of God's tender affection not because they deserve love, but because it is God's nature to love. The participation in the Spirit emphasizes the shared nature of the Christian life. The presence of the Holy Spirit makes possible the proper functioning of the body of Christ. With the expression affection and sympathy, Paul pointed to the mercies the Lord had given the believers at Philippi. The Holy Spirit provided rich fellowship among them (v. 1).

In verse 2 Paul shifted from the spiritual blessings the believers enjoyed together to their responsibility to him. The Philippian believers had a heartfelt concern for Paul. He planted the church at Philippi. They watched as he invested his life in their lives. Now he called them to continue what they started.

In contrast to his positive instructions, Paul also detailed for the Philippians what attitudes to avoid in pursuing unity. The word nothing (v. 3) emphasized Paul's conviction that rivalry or conceit should not taint any aspect of the church's life. The term rivalry implies a selfish ambition that causes disputes and divisions. The sense is that the problems facing the Philippians caused members to choose sides. Paul saw schisms in the church as contrary to the testimony of Christ and dishonoring to God's name. Also the word conceit describes what is vainglorious or groundless pride. The cornerstone of Christian faith is that humans are powerless to save themselves and must trust Christ to provide all that is necessary for salvation. Thus the believer has no basis for arrogance toward others. Furthermore, arrogance strikes at the heart of Christian unity, spoiling the testimony of the faithful.

To avoid such a destructive mind-set, Paul directed the believers to consider fellow Christians and their needs as more important than their own interests and concerns (v. 4). The church's antidote for selfishness and divisions is an abiding concern for the welfare of others. Paul called the believers to take careful note of the concerns others hold. Such willing consideration of others erases the gaps between individuals and builds a strong unity.