

# The Necessity of Unity and Humility

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, then make my joy complete by being like-minded having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

Philippians 2:1-3

The three words humility, unity and harvest are ones you don't normally put together. Yet in regard to our desire to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus to all nations, they are indispensably related. For a time we lived on board the M.V. Doulos, an ocean-going vessel used to bring the hope of Christ to the nations. On board are people from 35-40 nations and from every denomination, with every kind of personality and every kind of cultural background. Among the 300 people were the ingredients for heaven or hell. In this environment we learned the importance of esteeming one another better than ourselves in order to preserve unity. "Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble" (1 Peter 3:8).

If we are members of a kingdom of peace, joy and righteousness but have conflict, tension and evil murmuring between us, we have evidently failed. Many workers in the harvest have been defeated by poor relationships. If you will not resolve these problems on a mission's team, the best thing to do is to pack up and go home, because no one will believe your message of peace and love.

James, the half-brother of the Lord, writes one of the most convicting letters in the New Testament. He talks a lot about the tongue and the power it has for good and evil. But the tongue really is a spokesperson of the heart. In the heart of natural man are all kinds of evil. This includes any of us who are undisciplined, overcome by the flesh and are not walking in the Spirit. Here's what James says in James 3:13:

"Who is there among you who is wise and intelligent? Then let him by his noble living show forth his (good) works with the (unobtrusive) humility (which is the proper attribute) of true wisdom."

A perspective we have gained from working with people in over 75 nations is that intelligence alone will not convince people of the Gospel nor will it win favor with God. There have been simple people with little education who have had a great harvest of souls, while the more educated had little. James says that humility is the proper attribute of true wisdom. This is wisdom that comes from above. It is a clearly known fact that many foreign workers return from the field because they cannot get along with their fellow workers. Personal relationships can be challenging. Even in marriage there can be irritating differences that cause tension. A lack of understanding and love heightens the tensions. Spiritual strongholds come into play.

James says that these things come from several sources and create havoc in relationships. Envy is a major problem on the field. When someone else succeeds, we feel less significant. Instead of rejoicing with them, we begin to find fault. This was a major factor in Jesus' own crucifixion at the hands of the Pharisees. Selfish ambition is a brother of jealousy. It is the same attitude that led Satan to think he could usurp the throne of God. If we look carefully, we can see that the seeds of selfish ambition are in all of us. Self needs to be crucified. James actually says that this kind of attitude is earthly, unspiritual and demonic. The results he states are anything but the peace and joy workers in the harvest are meant to bring.

"But if you have bitter jealousy (envy) and contention (rivalry, selfish ambition) in your hearts, do not pride yourselves on it and thus be in defiance of and false to the truth. This (superficial) wisdom is not such as comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual (animal), even devilish (demonic). For wherever there is jealousy (envy) and contention (rivalry and selfish ambition), there will also be confusion (unrest, disharmony, rebellion) and all sorts of evil and vile practices" (James 3:14-16, Amplified).

An example of prioritizing unity on a team was in 1999. We were on a team in a closed-access nation. Initially I was asked to lead the team but later learned that a policy required a member of the apostolic team to lead. The brother who was asked to lead was a peer and often very successful. At the time it was difficult, especially because I wanted to be in control. I sensed that the Lord was speaking to me, requiring my faithfulness to support the appointed leader. I determined I would humble myself and seek the success of the team under his leadership. It is a long story but to say the least, the team was extraordinarily unified. As a result of our unity, we made a huge impact on the place where we went because the presence of the Lord was among us. This served as an example to many, especially the national leaders and expatriate workers in the country. Jesus prioritized unity as He prayed for the Church before returning to the Father. Unity is essential for harvest. We must humble ourselves to

seek this unity.

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:20–23).

## **How to Facilitate Unity**

We might assume that during Jesus’ prayer before His crucifixion, He would have prayed that His disciples would have courage, or would remain faithful, or would remember what they had been taught. Yet He asked that His followers would remain united in their love for one another. Jesus understood that it is spiritually impossible to love God but not love others.<sup>4</sup>

- Learn to esteem others – In Philippians 2:3–4, Paul says that this is the Christ-like attitude. It involves listening to others, learning their values, desires and needs. It also involves becoming a cheerleader or advocate of their gifts and calling.

“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves” (Romans 12:9–10).

- Seek peace – Over-work stemming from striving to achieve or perform is not from God. Many times workers fall into this trap. It can even come from undetected spiritual strongholds that devil sets up in our minds. In a recent time of fasting and prayer, the Lord showed me that if I am bleeding under the yoke, then it is not His yoke. Pain and suffering are indeed part of the Christian life. However, the yoke Jesus asks us to carry brings invigoration, life and blessing, even amid periods of pain and suffering. Read the Scriptures for yourself. Peace within your heart will result in peace with others.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 12..

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful" (Colossians 3:15).

- Develop a sense of compassion for others – Pray that the Lord gives you compassion. When we are irritated with each other, we put on our war garb. We look fearsome and defensive. That is not the real person. I like the 80's song, "The Warrior is a Child." Behind the masks that we wear, we all have pain, we all are struggling, and we all feel weaker than we want to be. When we see this in another, we should be moved with compassion.

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (Colossians 3:12).

- Learn to be tactful and considerate – Cross-cultural communication is largely learning what another culture values and adjusting your lifestyle to be considerate of your hosts and not offend them. We all have a personal culture. There are things we value that others may not readily understand and visa versa. Good manners are a big thing. Manners simply say that I value another as a person. Simple considerations and good manners go a long way in building solid teamwork.

"... to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men" (Titus 3:2).

A quote to remember from a leader of a mission agency is the following: "We must have zero tolerance for disunity."<sup>5</sup> Those of us who have been involved in long-term missions would be willing to guarantee in writing that if you practice these things, you will undoubtedly reap a harvest!

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But the wisdom from above is first of all pure (undefiled); then it is peace-loving, courteous (considerate, gentle). (It is willing to) yield to reason, full of compassion and good fruits; it is wholehearted and straightforward, impartial and unfeigned (free from doubts, wavering, and insincerity). And the harvest of righteousness (of conformity to God's will in thought and deed) is (the fruit of the seed) sown in peace by those who work for and make peace (in themselves and in others, that peace which means concord, agreement, and harmony between individuals, with undisturbed-ness, in a peaceful mind free from fears and agitating passions and moral conflicts).

James 3:17-18 (Amplified)