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Sermon Notes

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Christian Unity Essential to the Gospel Advance

Philippians 2:1-4

Introduction: The Disintegrating Power of Sin, The Perfect Unity of Heaven

December 2, 1942: “The Italian Navigator has landed in the New World”... code language reported to President Roosevelt, not speaking of Columbus but of Italian-born physicist Enrico Fermi, who had achieved the first controlled nuclear chain-reaction in history at the University of Chicago... the fission reaction operated by breaking apart atoms and releasing atomic particles which would then break apart other atoms... the disintegration of atoms resulted in the release of immense energy by the famous formula of Albert Einstein, $E = mc^2$

That first chain-reaction ultimately resulted in the atomic bomb which was dropped with devastating power and horrific consequences on the city of Hiroshima less than three years later

Christi and I visited the Atomic Bomb museum in Hiroshima, and were amazed and stunned by the photos and evidence of the terrible destructive power of this nuclear chain reaction

But as terrible as the consequences of atomic disintegration, SIN has destroyed for more... Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden set off a chain reaction of evil, breaking apart beautiful things that God had original set together... breaking apart, breaking apart, breaking apart... as sin’s chain reaction continues to rage throughout human history...

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only truly unifying force in the universe... it has as its final goal the perfect unity of all redeemed creation under His headship

Our practical daily unity is the gospel adorned... the gospel made beautiful, the gospel made attractive

I. Christian Unity: The Gospel Adorned

A. Perfect Unity the Goal of the Gospel

1. The Perfect Unity of the Trinity

- a. before the universe was created, God existed in Three Persons

- b. the Three Persons of the Trinity existed in perfect harmony and unity with each other
- c. not the slightest need, nor the slightest hint of disagreement or jealousy
- d. God the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit created the universe not out of need but out of fullness and perfection
- e. everything in the universe in perfect unity and order... everything was perfectly suited for its place in the universe; the universe created in pattern after God

2. The Destruction of Unity: Sin

- a. sin entered the universe through the devil's pride and aspirations

Isaiah 14:13-14 You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. 14 I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High."

- b. sin entered the world through man's pride and aspirations

Genesis 3:5 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

- c. soon disunity and conflict characterized every aspect of the world

brother against brother: Cain killed Abel out of jealousy

husband against wife

parent against child and child against parent

nation against nation

Strife, conflict, disunity spread like a disease through the human race, getting only worse and worse as history unfolded

3. Christ's Redeeming Work: Bringing All Things Together in Perfection

- a. bringing all things back under one head

Ephesians 1:10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment-- to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

John 11:51-52 Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.

b. perfect unity patterned after the Trinity itself

John 17:11 Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name-- the name you gave me-- so that they may be one as we are one.

John 17:20-21 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 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.

John 17:22-23 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 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.

Basic theological principle: Everything Christ prays for, He gets!!! And He prays for us to be perfectly united in each other and in Him... the unity of the Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit is our pattern and model for unity

Someday, all Christians will be as perfectly one as Christ and His Father

4. The Gift of the Holy Spirit: internal power for unity

Ephesians 4:3-4 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all...

The Holy Spirit was given to make the church one... united internally, a genuine unity of mind and heart

B. Perfect Unity the Greatest Evidence of the Gospel

Proof to A Watching World: The Greeks, Romans, the Gentiles and Jews hated one another. The very idea of love and self-sacrifice was foreign to their thinking. When they observed Christians from many nations, with different languages and cultures, actually loving one another and sacrificing to help each other, they responded in amazement, "**Behold, how these people love one another!**"

1. Christ's high priestly prayer: this is how the world will know I am God

John 17:20-21 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 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.

John 17:22-23 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 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.

As the church is gradually assembled through evangelism, and then behaves as Christ would in perfect unity, the watching world can see the power of the gospel

2. Christ's clear command: this is how the world will know you are Christians

John 13:35 "By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

C. Philippian Disunity

1. This strong appeal proves it

a. Philippians 1:27-2:18 clearly designed to solve problems of disunity

b. last week: 1:27-30... CONDUCT YOURSELVES IN A MANNER WORTHY

Philippians 1:27-30 I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel

c. Philippians 2: strongest possible appeal to unity based on the example of Christ

2. So also the command in verse 14

vs. 14-16 Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe 16 as you hold out the word of life

If the Philippian church is going to shine like stars in a dark world as they hold out the word of life, they **MUST** stop arguing with each other

3. So also the problem between Euodia and Syntyche

Philippians 4:2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.

D. Disunity a Constant Problem

1. Among the apostles

a. argued about who forgot to bring bread

b. argued constantly about which of them was the greatest

2. In the New Testament churches

a. even after the cross and the giving of the Spirit... problems with selfishness and conflicts

b. in Acts

i) Acts 6: dispute over distribution of food to Greek-speaking widows

- ii) Acts 11: dispute over whether Peter should have gone into a Gentile's home
- iii) Acts 15: disputes over the issue of circumcision
- c. in almost every church you can mention
 - i) Galatians

Galatians 5:15 If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

- ii) Corinthians

1 Corinthians 1:11 My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you.

1 Corinthians 3:3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?

2 Corinthians 12:20 For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.

- 3. Even Paul himself: dispute with Barnabas over John Mark
- 4. In church history

Illus. Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli on Lord's Supper; George Whitefield and John Wesley on predestination;

- 5. Around the world today
 - a. many churches spend more time arguing with themselves than spreading the gospel
 - b. church factions and church splits occur in every nation on earth
 - c. people are still as selfish today as they were when Paul wrote this letter
 - d. sometimes a deeper problem: FAKE, SACCHARINE UNITY (discuss later)

E. The Causes and Cost of Disunity

- 1. Causes: sin = selfishness

James 3:16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

James 4:1-2 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.

Galatians 5: essential to the “flesh”... the sin nature

Galatians 5:19-20 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: ... hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions

Seven words in a row that trace conflicts and arguments to the sinful nature

Even more striking is Paul's statement at the end:

Galatians 5:21 I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

2. Cost: difficulty holding out the gospel to a lost world

- a. how can the Philippian church hold out the word of life to their neighbors if they are arguing like pagans?
- b. ALSO... in a time of persecution, the church should be a place of refuge and encouragement, a place to be renewed. BUT this cannot happen if there is selfish ambition, strife, conflict and pride
- c. surrounded by enemies on the outside
 - i) the Philippian church had bitter enemies outside them, surrounding them
 - ii) persecutors who would love to throw them in prison
 - iii) the devil and his demons who would love to destroy their faith
- d. greatest pain comes from conflicts on the inside
- e. Devil uses it to ruin the witness of the church
- f. Devil also uses it to sap strength from the church... when it should be renewed through mutual support, encouragement, and prayer—instead it is dragged down by dissension

5. End result: gospel is greatly hindered

F. The Only Remedy: The Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Power of the Holy Spirit

1. Christ CAME to DIE for sins like this... this is exactly why Christ came to earth

2. Even so, without the power of the Holy Spirit, no unity is possible... we're just too selfish

In Galatians, Paul contrasts the life in the flesh with the life of the Spirit:

Galatians 5:23-26 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

The remedy is the life of Christ... the fruit of the Spirit flowing through people who are obedient to Christ

The same message supports Paul's appeal here!!

II. Paul's Appeal for Unity

verse 1-5 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. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus

A. The Basis of the Appeal

1. The Theological Basis: "In Christ"

vs. 1 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ

- a. Christ's finished work on the cross
- b. their status "in Christ" (without that, no hope for such an appeal)

"In Christ" = a Christian, spiritually united with Him through faith

Philippians 1:1 To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi

Ephesians 1:7 In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

Romans 6:5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

Being "in Christ" = being spiritually united with Him... His death becomes your death, His life becomes your life

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

That position of being “in Christ” is our only hope on judgment day... to be “in Christ” means to be saved, to be outside of Christ means to be lost to hell forever

Being “in Christ” is the theological position from which Paul argues so strongly here. It is on that basis, namely that “in Christ” you have full forgiveness of sins, a perfect future in Christ, that Paul makes his appeal for unity

Why? Because you’re not the only ones who have received it! People all over the world are “in Christ” too!

2. The Experiential Basis: Their rich experience of the gospel’s blessings

“If there is any...” = “Since there is so much...”

a. encouragement in Christ:

Same root word that Jesus uses to describe the work of the Holy Spirit... the *paraklete*, the encourager

b. comfort from His love

A strong word of consolation, like the kind of solace that comes from a loving friend after a tragedy

We are greatly consoled in this world because of Christ’s love for us

c. fellowship in the Spirit

Word is *koinonia*, a very important word which speaks of sharing all things in common with each other and with God

Same word Paul uses concerning the Philippians support of the gospel:

Philippians 1:5 For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now

And of Paul’s deep yearning to have fellowship with Christ even in suffering

Philippians 3:10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death

d. tenderness and compassion

words that describe Christ’s own tenderness for suffering sinners and mourning people:

Luke 7:12-13 As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out-- the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry."

Literally Christ's insides were moved with overwhelming feelings of compassion

Paul therefore lists the gospel blessings the Philippians have so richly experienced... and on the basis of these... encouragement in Christ, consolation of His love, fellowship with the Spirit, tenderness and compassion, he makes his appeal

3. The Personal Basis: Paul's example and relationship with them

“make my joy complete by being like-minded”

- a. I have a very great joy in Christ
- b. but it's not a perfect joy since I hear that you are arguing with each other
- c. if you care about me, stop your arguing

B. The Goal of the Appeal: Total Selfless Unity of the Mind

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

1. Not just an external unity... by sweeping disagreements under the rug and pretending we all like each other

1 Corinthians 1:10 I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

2. A genuine, perfect unity from inside, based on truly agreeing from the heart and out of love
3. The Focus of the Appeal: The MIND

RSV Philippians 2:2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Literally = think alike, see things from the same perspective, come to a true unity

Philippians 2:3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves

Again, strong mental appeal: think like this, have a radically different way of thinking

Philippians 4:2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.

Literally: “to think alike”, “to be one the same mind as one another”

4. The mind controls the life: attitudes, choices, loves and hates all happen in the mind

5. Paul totally focuses on the thought process... for everything follows the mind
6. In a moment, he will hold out as a pattern the “mind of Christ”

Philippians 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus

7. Therefore, the only hope for true unity is the renewing of the mind in the pattern of Christ

Romans 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Romans 8:5-6 Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;

The new life in Christ is a life controlled by the Spirit... a mindset of what the Spirit wants. As our minds are filled with the pattern of Christ and controlled by the Spirit of Christ, only then will true unity come

C. The Practical Steps in Fulfilling the Appeal

1. Negatively: Do NOTHING out of selfish ambition or vain conceit
 - a. selfish ambition = a desire for one’s own things, your own plans, your own goals... pure selfishness; also a desire for advancing your own position of power
 - b. vain conceit = vain glory... wanting to be honored and recognized for your good deeds and abilities
2. Positively: Be humble, consider others better than yourselves, seek the things of others
 - a. AGAIN, the focus is on the mind:
 - b. FIRST: think of yourself as of lesser importance than anyone else

Illus. #1: Christiana at Interpreter’s House: [Each clothed in white linen garments] “It was fine linen, white and clean. When the women were thus adorned, they seemed to be a terror one to the other; for that they could not see that glory each one had in herself, which they could see in each other. Now therefore they began to esteem each other better than themselves. For, You are fairer than I am, said one; and, You are more comely than I am, said another. The children also stood amazed, to see into what fashion they were brought.

Illus. #2: George Whitefield, English evangelist of the 18th century, had a conflict with John Wesley over doctrine. Even though there was a lot of trouble over this, Whitefield stayed very humble. Someone once asked Whitefield “Do you think you will see John Wesley in heaven?” Whitefield answer “No, I don’t. Because he’ll be so close to the throne of Christ and I will be so far.”

This kind of humility destroys conflicts and is greatly honoring to Christ

- c. SECOND: think of your time, money, energy, abilities as totally at the service of others; set your mind on what others need and want

Illus. Victor Hugo's classic *Les Miserables*, the bishop put his silverware and expensive candlesticks at the disposal of Jean Valjean... his needs were more important. So, even though the criminal Jean Valjean had stolen them and the priest had every right to have them back, all the priest cared about was "He needs them more"

V. Applications

A. Discern the Counterfeit Unity from the Genuine Article

Illus. Saccharine

Saccharin was the first artificial sweetener discovered. It was accidentally found in 1879 by a chemistry research assistant Constantine Fahlberg. Fahlberg was working on new food preservatives when he accidentally spilled some of the compound he had synthesized on his hands. When he went back home that night and ate his dinner that night, he noticed the intense sweetness of the compound. He named the compound saccharin after the Latin word for sugar. He went back to the lab, tracing his steps until he was able to synthesize saccharin in bulk.

Saccharin was used as a sweetener only sporadically until the advent of World War I. During World War I, most of the sugar was rationed, and saccharin use increased dramatically as the sugar was sent to the troops in Europe. By 1917, the little pink packets were seen all over tables in America and in Europe

The word "saccharin" has come to mean "fake sweetness", like syrupy kindness when the heart is far different... it is the very picture of hypocrisy

God does not want saccharin unity... He wants genuine unity

Eight marks of fake unity in a church...

[when it never gets any deeper than the following, you have fake unity]

1. Christ, the Bible, spiritual things hardly mentioned or mentioned only to meet a form (prayer before the meal, etc.)
2. Superficial affection: backslapping, jokes, flattery, sweet greetings and fake interest in conversations; secret jealousy when any member has an advantage
3. Shallow discussions: weather, sports, current events; even worse: gossip and slander
4. Superficial activity calendar: centered around fun, entertainment, eating
5. Low level of sacrifice for those in need within the group: forms followed, cards sent, people go to the funeral... but not much else... very little sacrifice!!

6. Avoidance of hard, theological/spiritual topics like the plague: at the first hint of disagreement, issue is quickly swept under the rug; GOAL IS AVOIDANCE OF ANYTHING UNPLEASANT THAT MIGHT RUIN THE PARTY
7. Disagreements quickly papered over, topics of disagreement never mentioned again; secret hidden divisions and factions left to fester, root of bitterness left to grow
8. Heart characteristic: pride, self-centeredness, hostility, keeping a record of wrongs

Eight marks of true unity in a church...

1. Christ, the Bible, spiritual things central to everything, and mutual love for Christ is the center of the unity... were it not for Christ, we would have little in common, because of Christ we have a deep unity
2. Heart-felt love: genuine, sincere love for the brothers and sisters; deep desire for whatever may benefit them the most; true delight in being together; true delight if another person is honored even above us
3. Discussions = Heart-felt, deep, God-centered: “Deep calls to deep”... Desire to understand the “depths of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God”
4. Activities = Spiritual acts of service: centered around advance of the Gospel and the work of the Kingdom
5. High level of sacrifice for those in need within the group: like Christ, willing to leave a place of comfort and give whatever you have to help a brother or sister in need; may just be emotional sacrifice: willingness to “weep with those who weep”
6. Love for hard, theological/spiritual topics: at the first hint of disagreement, issue is never swept under the rug, but dealt with through prayer, love, mutual humility, deep searching of the Scriptures... GOAL IS PERFECT UNITY OF MIND AND HEART
7. Interpersonal Disagreements dealt with directly through genuine communication, love, humility, prayer, yielding, forgiveness, and a deep hunger for Scriptural truth to triumph; disagreements seen to be mark of unfinished business in Christian growth... time to roll up sleeves and work on the relationship
8. Heart characteristics: love for God, love for neighbor as self, humility, selflessness, servant’s heart, deep thirst for perfect unity in mind and thought; arriving at the same kind of heart unity enjoyed by the Trinity

B. Search your own heart:

do I live for my own glory?

am I seeking great things for myself?

do I live every moment to satisfy my own desires and purposes

OR...

am I living for the glory of Christ and for the good of His people

C. Repent from Selfishness and Pride

D. Study Again the Example of Christ