

Life in the Local Church, Part 1

Selected Scriptures

God uses our diversity to unify us, and it sounds counterintuitive, at first, but that is the intent of the divine author of the church. That's the point. He's here to demonstrate his revealed wisdom. It's revealed. It's not something that comes from in our hearts. He had to reveal it; he had to show it. We had to read about it in his Word. It's all here and so that's what he's doing, he's demonstrating profound wisdom through the church.

Well, how does he do that? How does he unite us through diversity. On a human level, diversity fractures; it doesn't bring together. The multi-cultural European experiment, the multi-cultural US experiment, American experiment, we're watching the diversity not bring us together as much as it is starting to fracture more and more and more.

Well how does God unite us through diversity? How does he demonstrate his wisdom that way? Well, as we said last time, this diversity is his tool of sanctifying us. It's how he

sanctifies us. Because first we need to learn to accept our diversity with one another, to accept one another's diversity, something that's clearly ordained by our sovereign and wise God. We need to accept that. And when we accept that, you know what that does? It promotes humility in the local church. We humble ourselves before God's design. We humble ourselves, and humility allows us to accept the gifts that he gave each one of us. By humility we accept our own role in the local church. By humility we even learn to accept the circumstances of our lives in what we're able to contribute, in what we're able to do. Not only that, but humility is how we accept how God designed other parts of the body.

Accepting differences in the church, it's a mark of humility and that's what God intends to produce in us, thereby demonstrating his transformative power and his wisdom. Accepting our diversity, accepting it, it's only the beginning because the sanctification process progresses as we learn to not only accept, but also appreciate diversity in God's design for the church. We need to appreciate it. Each member is different, possessing different gifts, different talents. Each member has been given a different role by God, and when we learn to appreciate that diversity, we grow in attitudes and expressions of love and unity here in the church.

That's where we ended last time. 1 Corinthians 12:24-25, "God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another." What a joy, right? "Having the same care for one another so that," verse 26, "if one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is honored, all rejoice together." Such a blessed place to be!

And you know, that's exactly what the Lord will produce in our church as we continue to submit day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year to his design of showing forth his unity through our diversity. He's compelling us through all of that. We're not allowed to be comfortable, we're not allowed to be stagnant, we're not allowed to be just individuals off, isolated, doing our own thing. We're joined together, we're brought together and we're forced to grow in those virtues I mentioned: in humility, in love, in unity.

Those virtues, you remember from last time those are three of the significant themes that we find in the one another commands in the New Testament. Go through the one another commands, and that's how you can find those themes running all the way through them. That word, one another, it's the single

word *allélón* in the Greek, and that points to the reciprocal nature of the command, one another, as well as the result of obeying the command, right? So we are all commanded to do it, and as we do it, we're all benefited from the result. When we all embrace our responsibility, when we all embrace our duty before the Lord, before Christ, to love one another, to humble ourselves before one another, to be of one mind with one another, we all benefit, don't we? We all benefit from that. We all enjoy this environment of love, an environment of humility and unity. We all thrive in that atmosphere, as well. We grow; we get strong. There's an atmosphere of peace, of Christian camaraderie, of spiritual harmony.

So we said last time that word *allélón*, the word one another, it's used more than 100 times in the New Testament, and about 60 times to command the attitudes and actions of believers. I said this last time, you've seen it before if you've been a Christian for any amount of time, we call these the one another commands. The one another commands. About a third of the one another's, they exhort us to love one another; about a third of the one another commands, command us to unity or have to do with unity. High percentage of the rest of those commands have to do with humility, humility.

So love, unity, humility and you can divide the commands, and categorize them, also, into categories of attitude and action. Attitude and action. Love and unity and humility, those are to govern our internal attitudes. And then as they do that, they're to become manifest externally in our external behavior, through our words, our actions.

So that's what we want to look at today, alright. These one another attitudes and one another actions. One another attitudes and one another actions. We're gonna start with the internal, and we're gonna move to the external; see what the Bible has to say. We want *this* local church to be everything that God designed it to be. We want to operate according to God's design. We want to manifest the Spirit's unifying presence among us. We want to demonstrate his saving, his transforming power in our lives, individually, corporately, demonstrating the Gospel. That's why we exist, right? That's what we're here for.

So let's start there with point one, point one: The internal one another attitudes. We're looking at the internal and we're looking at one another attitudes. How you think. Here we're just asking a simple question. Let's identify them: What are the one another attitudes? What are they? Like I said, from sampling the one another's in Scripture, we're going to organize

these one another attitudes into the three virtues I named here: love, humility, and unity, okay? Love, humility, and unity.

Let's take that first virtue: love. Turn in your Bibles to John 13. John 13, we're starting here with love because love is primary. Love is absolutely fundamental. It doesn't matter what else we do, if we miss this one here, we've missed it all, haven't we? We need to pursue love. Pursue love, that was Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 if you're familiar with the love chapter. He starts that chapter with this point. Love is absolutely fundamental.

Verse 1 of 1 Corinthians 13 says it doesn't matter if you're an oratorical genius, if you're rhetorician; it doesn't matter if you know all the languages of the world; it doesn't matter if you speak in elevated language of angels, which by the way, holy angels never sin in what they say. So let's say you're sinless in what you say. It doesn't matter, how, what your vocabulary is; it doesn't matter if you have superlative, amazing expression. If you lack love, no one wants you to talk at the end of the day. Alright? You just become a bunch of noise. You're a clatter, you're a noisy gong, a clanging cymbal. Without love, you're nothing more than a distraction.

Verse 2 in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul says, it doesn't matter if you have the ultimate prophetic gift; all the data of heaven's hard drive has been downloaded into your brain; if you've got the wisdom of Solomon to implement all that, put it into practical use; doesn't matter if you have that prophetic gift; it doesn't matter if you have amazing mountain-moving faith, without love you're nothing. It's fundamental.

1 Corinthians 13:3, I know I'm marching you through 1 Corinthians 13, just quickly; it's setting up what I'm about to say in John 13. You're in the right place; stay there and don't keep turning. But in verse 3 of 1 Corinthians, if you demonstrate a superlative degree of generosity and sacrifice; if you're a philanthropist and you're giving to every charitable organization, you're donating your time and your energy, and you're going overseas, and you're doing all that stuff to help the poor in the Third World; it doesn't matter if you've got compassion for all those issues, and you put your money where your mouth is, you're ready to sacrifice all to save the entire world. If you have not love, you gain nothing from that even if you make the ultimate sacrifice, it says in 1 Corinthians 13, "submitting your body to be burned," giving it to the flames, becoming a martyr. Love is absolutely vital to everything we do, everything.

In fact, love is so vital to our lives as Christians, Christ intended that virtue, that singular virtue of love, to define us as Christians. You can tell whether or not someone is a bona fide, card-carrying Christian by the presence or the absence of this one single virtue. Look there in John 13 verses 34 and 35, look at it there, "Jesus said, 'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'"

I think he was pretty emphatic, there, don't you? I think there's no mistaking what he was trying to say. He wants Christians to love. And he said, "By your love you'll be known as my disciples." So what is love, exactly? A lot of ideas about that in our world. I can tell my wife I love her, and I can say, boy, I love this ice cream. Are those two the exact same things? No. I can tell you, no. We use love in a very, I mean it's got a huge semantic range in our culture, to where it sometimes, sometimes you're just puzzled. When someone says, I love this...I love that...I love this person...I love that person, what do they really mean? Especially in our distorted, perverted, degraded, defiled culture, what is love?



Four basic words for love in the Greek language. They actually, I love Greek because it gets so specific, it really does divide things up very, very well. And they had four basic words for love in Greek: *agapé*, *philea* (or *philos*), *eros*, and *storge*. I'm about to explain something, here. It's a bit of an oversimplification of the Greek, so just understand that. But it is helpful to make some distinctions between these four words. Basically, let's start with the word *storge*. *Storge* is a word that refers to a familial kind of love, kind of like the love a mother has for a child; that kind of natural family affection. Okay? That's *storge*.

The word *eros*: word *eros*, very familiar with that in this country, that's a word that means a romantic kind of attraction, a sexual attraction. It's where we get the word *erotic*, and probably that word probably has more in common with lust than with love, probably more in common with covetous desire than with love. And that is precisely what many in our culture, so sadly, have misconstrued as love. That's all they understand. That's all they think. *Eros* is the only form of love that they'll ever know. And when it's perpetrated upon them and they're the abused and the victim in that, apart from God's grace, they're hopelessly lost in understanding what love really is.

Most common word for love in both classical and *Koine* Greek, that is both ancient Greek of Socrates and Plato as well as the Greek that was spoken at the time of Jesus and his Apostles. That, the most common word for love during those times, and even the highest expression of love in the culture at that time was this this idea of *phileo* or *philos*. Okay, we tend to put a a gloss on *phileo*. It's not always warranted, but it's helpful that that *phileo* is like friendship or maybe an elevated form of friendship, like a brotherly love, like the love that David had for Jonathan and Jonathan had for David, that's *phileo*; that's a close love, friendship.

We get the word Philadelphia from this word, right? *Phileo*, love, *adelphos*, brother. Philadelphia: the city of brotherly love. Friendship is implied in this word, *phileo*, and that friendship can be of varying depth and varying loyalty. Sometimes it's superficial, but it can also indicate a friendship love that is very strong, like David and Jonathan. Or so strong that in John 5:20, it says, "For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing." That's that verb form *phileo*. *Phileo*: The Father loves the Son. So it's not a bad word. It's a very, very good word. Without a doubt, though, *phileo* was the most common word for love in the Greek language.

There was a less common word, one that was neglected, overlooked, and that was the word *agape*, *agape*; the verb *agapaó*. And that word referred to sacrificial love, a love that sacrificed solely for the good of the object of that love. When God revealed his love in Jesus Christ, that's the word he used. In fact, Christian writers are the ones who really took that word, defined it, injected it with all the divinely revealed meaning. That's why it's such a popular word today.

The word *phileo*, the verb *phileo*, assumed in it a certain level of self-interest, self-interest, which made perfect sense to the Greek, and it makes sense to us Americans, too; that you love what you find lovely. You love what you find useful to yourself. You love what you find beneficial to you in some way. There's an inherent self-interest. The verb *agapaó*, that verb, this, this *agapé* kind of love, has nothing to do with the self. It has everything to do with the good of the object of that love.

No wonder it was so neglected in the common parlance of the ancient world, no wonder. No wonder it's a neglected concept in the vernacular of our world, too. We don't think that way. *Philos*, *eros*, *storge*, we get those. Those make sense. We understand friendship. We understand romantic attraction,

magnetic attraction to the opposite sex and all that. We understand familial love, pictures of mother and child and fathers taking their kids to ball games and all that kind of stuff. Those concepts make sense to us. But *agape*, no, not so much. In fact, not at all. Who loves expecting nothing in return? That's ludicrous.

No, that's not ludicrous. That's God. That's God revealing himself in Jesus Christ. Turn over to the letter of 1 John chapter 4, and you're gonna go the right in your Bibles almost to Revelation. 1, 2, and 3 John and in 1 John chapter 4, we learn something very, very important about this love. John has become known to us in the church, throughout church history, he's been known as the Apostle of love. But listen, that's not how it started. That's not how he started out. He was one of the notorious Sons of Thunder. Sons of Thunder was the nickname for James and his brother John, the two sons of Zebedee. These two guys were harsh. They were harsh, they once wanted to call down fire from heaven on the Samaritans for refusing to allow Jesus to pass through their country on his way to Jerusalem.

So it's quite a story of God's transforming grace to see how John, one of these two Sons of Thunder would come to be known to us as the Apostle of love. Notice what John writes

starting in 1 John 4:7, "Beloved," what a tender way to address his readers, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love, does not know God because God is love." It's one of his chief attributes, his chief characteristics. God is love.

All through this passage, all through the book of 1 John, actually, John is using the word *agapé* and the verb *agapaó*. In fact, the word *phileo* that kind of love does not show up even once in 1 John. It's always *agapé*, always *agapaó*, personal sacrifice for the good of someone else, expecting nothing in return; not even a tax benefit, nothing. John says there in those two verses, John says *agapé* comes from God. The world doesn't have it. You don't find it resident in the human heart. It's not found in the Christmas spirit, American patriotism, or whatever. This *agapé* kind of love is not in the heart of an innocent child. It's not even in the heart of the mother for her child.

This *agapé* love that kind of love comes from God and *only* from God. Get this, it's only those who possess that kind of love, who belong to God. John calls them beloved, those who have been loved by God. No achievement, there. Nothing earned. No

merit. Christians are those who have become the recipients of divine love, those who are loved by God. And those who are loved by God, they are transformed by that love to begin loving like God loves. The love with which they love others is God-like. They love in the same manner; they love according to the same means. I just say they don't love to the same degree, right? None of us has a sinless son that we send to be a sacrifice for the sins of the world, right? We don't have that. So not in the same degree, but in the same manner and according to the same means.

By loving in the same manner, you know what? They learn to sacrifice like God sacrifices, giving, expecting nothing in return. By loving according to the same means, they love in the way that God prescribes. That is to say, they don't come up with their own definition of love, doing whatever *they* think is loving. They love according to how God tells them to love. They look to the Bible to see what the Bible says what love is and they do that.

Look at 1 John 4:9-10, "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the

propitiation for our sins.” Wow! There it is, ultimate sacrifice, wholly for the good of the object of the act of love, not seeking anything out of it in return.

There is no lack in God. There is no need in him that prompted him to create the world to redeem sinners like us. He didn’t do it out of need. He did all this out of love; doing it wholly for the good of us, expecting nothing in return. And notice, his love confronts sin. What does it say there? “He sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.” We need to realize we have sins. We need to face the facts.

So God does the hard work of confrontation to show us, here is what you really look like. Don’t fool yourself. Don’t pile up your good deeds and think you’re okay. Look at the standard of the divine Scripture. See God’s character on display. Take a look in *that* mirror and compare yourself. You know what? We’ve “all sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” right? God confronted us in our sin. That’s loving. God sacrificed his own Son on the cross. That was loving. He poured out all his wrath on *him* for the sins of all of those and only those who will ever believe. So costly! How kind. How good. How merciful.