



**Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit? – Part 9**  
**Various Scriptures**  
**GCSP – 04/10/2010**

I recently had the privilege of officiating a wedding. As nervous as I was the first time someone asked me to perform a wedding ceremony, I have now come to relax and enjoy them; the bride and groom are usually plenty nervous for all of us.

I touch on several passages of Scripture during a typical ceremony but spend most of my time in **Ephesians 5:21-31**; that great section of Scripture where Paul outlines the expectations placed upon a husband and wife.

Last night, as I was thinking about this sermon before I went to sleep, the Spirit brought a verse from this passage to my mind in how it applies to the current topic of unity in the Holy Spirit. So before we complete the passage we have been inching our way through in **Philippians**, turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Ephesians**.

**Ephesians 5:25-27**

Let's pray.

Twice in the last few weeks I have taken you to **John 17:21** where Jesus prayed to God the Father concerning His great desire for us to live in unity. We have seen in that verse that the extent in which the world will believe that Jesus was sent to this world by the Father is connected to how much we live in unity.

Now, through the Apostle Paul, Jesus expresses His sacrificial love for us, His church. He shows us that He gave Himself up for the church; which is much too mild lest we forget what it meant for Jesus to give Himself up for us.

As we studied on Wednesday night, the brutal beating Jesus took on our behalf left Him unrecognizable. The Bible says "**His appearance was marred more than any man**" (**Isaiah 52:14**) and He was "**one from whom men hide their face**" (**53:3**). We looked at passages that dealt with the scourging He endured, the fists that battered His face, the crown of thorns that was beaten down on His head, how His beard was literally ripped from His face, how people spat upon Him and hurled abuses at Him; not to mention the pain and suffering of being nailed to a cross.

So when you read this verse in **Ephesians 5:25** that says **He gave Himself** up for the church, don't miss what that is really saying. And when we read the verse that tells us how Jesus, knowing full well the hellish and horrific beating that awaited Him, chooses to pray on our behalf that we live in unity, don't miss the weight and significance of that prayer.

Discord and disunity are caused by many things, but whether you are the cause, the contributor, or someone who is trying to mediate, keep in mind the words of our Lord and the brutal beating He took for you and me; if we do this it will bring much needed perspective to the situation and to how we handle the problem.

As I mentioned last time, one reason unity is so elusive is we are always waiting for the other person or persons to come into line with our way of thinking instead of biblically dealing with the issue. And biblically dealing with the issue is another problem because so many of us misapply or misinterpret what the Bible says. We have an agenda and we miss the whole point of biblical confrontation, which is to lovingly come alongside the offender for the purpose of bringing them back into a right relationship with the Lord first, and then a right relationship with his or her brothers and sisters. Most, if not all, attempts at church discipline comes from an agenda to kick the offender out of the church for their crimes; and that's the furthest thing from biblical church discipline.

Let's get back to the Book of **Philippians** and see if we can't wrap this passage up.

### **Philippians 2:1-5**

We have been given the why and the what, in regards to this topic of unity, and we are now in the midst of the how.

A quick review shows us that the why, or the reasons we should be unified, is because of the encouragement we have in Christ, the love that He has showered upon us, the fellowship of the Spirit, and the affection and compassion we have through Him (**v. 1**).

The what, or the marks of unity, are being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, being united in spirit, and being intent on one purpose.

Being of the same mind literally means to think alike or to have our attitudes in agreement; and as we just read in **verse 5**, the context of having the same attitude is to have the attitude that Jesus Christ had. Christ was never concerned with His own welfare, or needs, or desires, or agendas, but was always serving others.

Maintaining the same love has to do with your service to others. We cannot maintain the same emotional love for every brother or sister but we can provide the same acts of service to one another. As God supplies to me I can provide for your needs whether or not I have the same emotional love for you as the next person.

Being united in spirit means to have the same passions and desires when it comes to the church and the kingdom. Having a common passion to see the Spirit of God in control of all things, or to see Jesus Christ's church united, or for the glory of God, or for the exaltation of Jesus Christ, this is what it means to be united in spirit.

Being intent on one purpose means your thoughts, your attitudes, and your actions will come into alignment with the fulfillment and advancement of God's Kingdom.

So how do we get there? **Philippians 2:3-4** tells us that.

The first point we looked at last time was to **do nothing from selfishness**. The Greek word means selfish ambition and has an additional meaning of strife; some even go so far as to translate this section as, "**Let nothing be done through strife**".

Albert Barnes comments: "*The command prohibits all attempts to secure anything over others by mere physical strength, or by superiority of intellect or numbers, or as the*

*result of dark schemes and plans formed by rivalry, or by the indulgence of angry passions, or with the spirit of ambition...What we do is to be by principle, and with a desire to maintain the truth, and to glorify God."*

One of the words Barnes uses in his description of this passage is "rivalry." I believe he has captured the true essence of this selfishness/strife cause of discord and disunity. Having a rivalry mentality will come into complete conflict or collide with God's desire for us. Rivalry means "I want to be on top, or in charge, or have my way." It is the exact opposite of submitting to authority, which is found all throughout the Scriptures. And beloved, we cannot refuse to submit to the human authorities God has put in place while at the same time believe that we are submitting to the authority of God; these two positions are in utter conflict.

Our sinful nature resists authority of any kind, especially if you are used to being the person in authority, or the person in authority is viewed as being inferior to you in some way, or even if the person in authority is younger than you. And this resistance or this rivalry will be a constant source of conflict every time something doesn't go exactly as you would prefer.

It is the kind of self-seeking attitude that leads to quarrels and arguments and contentions. And by the way, this same word is listed as one of the deeds of the flesh in **Galatians 5**, right alongside immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, and carousing (**v. 19-21**).

If you get offended, if you feel neglected, if you feel slighted, if your feelings have been hurt, if someone has done something that has your nose out of joint, and you cannot be happy or satisfied until your form of justice prevails, then you are operating out of selfishness and strife; and unity is out the window.

When your personal focus at the church has to take precedence over the focus of others, you are operating from selfishness and strife. When the church leadership makes a decision you don't agree with (as long as it is not a violation of Scripture) and you choose to ignore that authority, you are operating out of selfishness and strife.

I used the illustration from **1 Corinthians** when we saw the Christians at Corinth dividing themselves up into cliques and groups: "**I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas, I am of Christ...**" This happens in every church, especially when there are multiple Bible study groups and prayer groups, etc. Well I'm of the Monday night group, well I'm of the Wednesday night group, well I'm of the Praise & Prayer group, well I'm of the Saturday night group, well I'm of the ladies group, etc. And naturally some will look at their group as the best or the most spiritually mature, etc, and we have selfishness and strife and disunity running rampant.

The second point we looked at last week was **empty conceit** or vain glory as some older translations choose to say it; which simply means to seek personal glory, status, or admiration.

Sometimes it shows up in the disguise of giving a testimony if the point is to get a pat on the back or to have everyone look at the great things you are doing, instead of proclaiming God's glory. Sometimes it shows up in more subtle ways when we think we are saving the church from some evil by asserting ourselves into a matter that really didn't concern us. It also shows up when someone seeks a leadership position in the church for the purpose of being recognized as a leader. And there are obviously many other ways we can violate this command and derail unity.

Paul then commands us to do something that may seem impossible at first glance; he says, "...**but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves.**"

Matthew Henry comments: "*Be severe upon your own faults and charitable in your judgments of others; be quick in observing your own defects and infirmities, but ready to overlook and make favorable allowances for the defects of others. You must esteem the good which is in others above that which is in yourselves; for you best know your own unworthiness and imperfections.*"

In sales training, one of the tenets of being an excellent listener is to consider the person who is talking to you as the most important person in the room. The logic being that in most people's minds they indeed are the most important person in the room. But even when making the sale may depend upon having this attitude it is often difficult to maintain this line of thinking. Our fleshly, sinful, selfish human nature squirms and fights and resists anything short of you being regarded as the most important person.

This is why Paul begins this section with the precursor of "**with humility of mind.**" Pride will not allow you to regard one another as more important than yourself. Pride demands justice and it demands your particular form of justice to boot. Pride doesn't have any room for other opinions or positions on the subject; you are right and everyone else is either partially or fully wrong.

Without humility of mind nobody is more important than you; and that attitude will leave you constantly on the precipice of offense, as an aura of superiority and arrogance will deceive your heart into believing that you are always standing on the truth whether or not you actually are.

And here is the crux of the matter: The only person to ever walk this earth that was indeed better than anyone else, and had a valid reason to crow or toot His own horn, was our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet He gives us the perfect example of being humble and living a life of abject humility.

Let's read it again.

### **Philippians 2:5-9**

Beloved, we must slay this dragon in our lives on a daily and even moment-by-moment basis. We must always be about the business of crucifying the flesh, along with the pride and arrogance and superiority and prejudice that clouds our vision and keeps us in an attitude of selfishness and strife instead of an attitude in alignment with our Lord Jesus Christ.

In New Testament times, humility was seen as a weakness, not a virtue. The Greco-Roman world viewed humility as something ugly, unfit, valueless, and utterly useless. It would be considered senseless and foolish to seek after humility in your own life or to admire humility in someone else's life.

So even though God taught and celebrated humility in Old Testament times, it was never a common trait the Children of Israel modeled or consistently followed. Some of God's prophets lived lives of humility but not until Jesus did anyone truly see what genuine humility is – He **emptied Himself**.

It is difficult to even fathom what it means or looks like to empty myself. Self is always present. Self is always asserting its views and thoughts and opinions and passions and desires. Self is always choosing its way over the ways of God and the ways that benefit my brothers and sisters in Christ. The closest I come to emptying myself is when I am truly engaged and overwhelmed in praise & worship, or in prayer, or in the deep study of God's Word, or in genuine acts of service to others. Pretty much all other times, self is having its influence in my thoughts and words and deeds.

But the example Jesus left for us holds the key to consistent and persistent victory over self. It says "**He humbled Himself by becoming obedient.**" And the key to obedience is having a mindset of urgency whenever we read God's Word and the Holy Spirit reveals a short-coming in our life; and urgency to obey immediately, not tomorrow or someday. And the fact of the matter is that I can be obedient right now at this very moment...and I can be obedient now too...and now...and now. And if I start stringing together a life marked by obedience I will at least be on the path of true humility.

Let me give you a practical application of how to achieve this mandate of regarding others as more important than yourself. Matthew Henry made a brilliant observation in the comments I already quoted. He said, "*...for you best know your own unworthiness and imperfections.*"

Do you know the heart of any other person? Do you know what is in the heart of someone else? If you answer honestly you have to say no. If your answer is yes, you are being deceived by your own heart and by the lies of Satan. No matter how much you think you know the heart or the motives of another person, you simply can't. We may get to know someone so intimately that we can occasionally know what's on their heart, but even in that kind of relationship it is difficult to know someone else's heart and motivations on a consistent basis.

Even when it comes to sin, I can only know what I see and hear. I don't know the sins that lurk in your heart or the temptations that torment you. I can sometimes put some things together and have an educated guess, but it will indeed only be an educated guess and not a verifiable reality. Yet the deception of my own heart will convince me that I do know your heart more often than not.

Now consider this: Even though my heart can deceive me if I am not very careful, I can and do know my own heart, at least to a much greater extent than I know yours. I do know the sins I struggle with. I do know the thoughts I have towards others. I do know

the jealousy and the anger and the prejudice that invades my mind; and you know the same about yourself. So if we are viewing things from first-hand experience and information, who is the worst sinner you know? It's okay, you can admit it to yourself.

Who has the most corrupt mind you know of? From the perspective that you simply cannot know the mind of anyone else as intimately as you know your own, the answer has to be you. Now what I am saying to you is this, you have enough personal information on your own depravity that you can put yourself in a position to look at others as more superior than yourself; and this is what Paul is saying when he tells us to regard others as more important than ourselves. And this attitude will promote unity instead of destroying it.

Barnes adds to this thought: *"We are sensible to our own defects, but we have not the same clear view of the defects of others. We see our own hearts; we are conscious of the great corruption there; we have painful evidence of the impurity of the motives which often (lead) us...but we have not the same view of the errors, defects, and follies of others. We can only see their outward conduct, but, in our own case, we can look within."*

Paul gives us an example in this when he says, **"I am the least of all the Apostles"** or **"I am the chief of sinners"** because to the best of his human ability and knowledge he is. He doesn't know anyone better than he knows himself so he has no business considering himself above anyone else; and neither do we.

#### **Philippians 2:4**

Lastly, Paul tells us how to be unified by saying, **"...do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."**

This gets to the heart of the matter doesn't it? Especially since the sixties, the concept of looking out for yourself and your own needs and your own desires above the needs of others, if not to the exclusion of the needs of others, could probably be counted as the fastest growing religion this world has ever seen. The worship of self and the care of self has never been more promoted or more embraced than it is now, or at least it is difficult to imagine a time when self-absorption was at a higher level.

One of the reasons we have conflict in the church is because we are only looking out for ourselves most of the time. We may give lip service or a fleeting glance at the needs of others but we are much more concerned about our own little enterprises; our own little kingdoms.

You can hear in many of the conversations we have; we can't wait for the other person to stop talking so we can get our comments in. We aren't listening to others we are formulating our response before we even finish hearing everything the other person says.

Looking on the interests of others does not mean you have free reign to stick your nose in other people's business. This is not giving you the right to be a busy-body or to haphazardly throw your advice into every conversation you hear, it is simply

commanding us to not be so self-absorbed and to instead be ready and willing to get involved with the interests of others when that involvement is solicited and/or needed.

So there we have it. If we desire unity in the church we must heed God's Word in these two verses.

**Philippians 2:3-4**

Let's pray.