

INTRODUCTION

It is Chinese New Year and so let me begin with a riddle. What is something that you will lose it when you tell others that you have it? The answer I have in mind is humility. When you say to others how humble you are, then immediately people will think that you are bragging about yourself. Once a church asked its congregation to nominate the humblest member. The pastor won the recognition. (No, it's not me!) He was given a small ribbon as a keepsake. However, the following Sunday the judging committee asked the pastor to return the gift. Why? Because the pastor pinned the ribbon to his chest. Yeah, people are complicated animals. The humbler you think you are, the less humble you actually are. When we come to chapter 2 of the book of Philippians Paul brought up the subject of church unity. Paul told us an important ingredient to strengthen unity in a church is humility. Remember at the end of chapter 1 Paul encouraged the believers to contend "as one man for the faith of the gospel" when they faced hardship in sharing the gospel? When its members are not united, a team cannot succeed. The same is true for a church. Since Jesus' disciples established the first Christian church Satan had been working hard to spread seeds of disunity. He did not need to come up with new tricks. Why? It is because disunity always works in splitting churches. Paul told us that an effective way to build unity is through our showing of humility. My definition for humility is simply this: think less of yourselves and think more of others. Got it? Go and do likewise, then our church will be blessed!

EXPLANATION

1. 謙卑的操練 The Practice of Humility

First, Paul urged believers to practice humility by caring for others. Let us look at **verse 1**: 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. Paul motivated the Philippian believers to show one another encouragement, comfort, fellowship, tenderness and compassion. All five words are related to caring actions. When we humble ourselves, we will become more sensitive to others' needs. For example, at that time when a Philippian church member was arrested like Paul for sharing the gospel then other brothers and sisters in the church had to take care of the person who was in jail and his family members. When we care for a person, we go to that person, cheer him/her up and offer needed help. Recently, Thomas' home was burnt down. A brother living nearby showed up soon and gave Thomas a jacket. It was a cold night, and a coat was what he needed badly. Then gradually other people gave him more clothes, and our church started a love offering campaign to collect money for him. Those are all practical help. In **1 John 3:17-18** the apostle John also reminded us to show our love through action: 17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. John asked us not just to talk about love, we have to show it too. Often when I attend a funeral, it is not uncommon for me to hear people comfort someone who just lost a loved one by saying: "Please do let me know if you need any help. Anything at all." It is encouraging to know that someone will be available when a need arises. Are you willing to be a person like that? Paul

went on to tell us that our motions have to be based on the correct emotions. He said in **verse 2**: Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. In this verse we can find words that describe togetherness such as “like,” “same,” and “one.” In the book of 1 Corinthians Paul told us that Christians in a church are connected together like a body. When one member suffers the whole body should feel the pain. When we truly see that we are one in Christ then we can humble ourselves and see others’ needs as important. Notice what Paul asked us to do is not something we cannot do. It is true that some of us are more caring by nature. Even when you were not a believer you were eager to help others. But God has equipped every Christian to love others. Our unity is in Christ and our fellowship is in the Holy Spirit. God gives us power not to do supernatural things but anti-natural things. We are born to be self-centered. Loving others is against our nature. We can love others when we are willing to submit to God and allow Him to use us as channels of grace. Then we can overcome our reluctance and selfishness. We can pray that God would help us an awareness of others’ needs. When you see a brother or sister who are in hardship encourage him/her with a Bible verse or a home-cooked meal. A small action can show that you truly care.

2. 謙卑的障礙 The Problems to Humility

Paul told us that the key to unity is humility. We must think less of ourselves and think more of others. Paul then alerted us to some problems that may hinder humility. He said in **verse 3**: Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Here Paul contrasted the mentality of people who are self-seeking versus those who are humble. The phrase “selfish ambition” has appeared in chapter 1 when Paul described those believers who preached the gospel for the purpose of showing themselves off. Then there is the term “vain conceit” which can be directly translated as “empty glory.” People who have selfish ambition and seeking after vain conceit want to draw people’s attention to themselves. But the glory they want to receive is empty. It may look good on the outside but there is no substance on the inside. Go to any museum and you will see a lot of examples of that. Perhaps it is a shiny antique car with a dead engine on the inside. It is good for display but useless. People who have selfish ambition in their hearts find it hard to humble themselves. They like to compare with others to make themselves look better. Three kids were boasting about how fast each of their dads was. One boy said: “My dad is the fastest man. When he throws a ball he can run to the other side to catch it.” The second boy was not impressed. “My dad is faster than yours,” he said, “After he shoots an arrow he can dash to the bull’s eye before the arrow hits it.” Then the third boy spoke: “My dad can beat both of yours! He gets off work at 5 o’clock but he can arrive home by 4:30.” Boasting about oneself is an obstacle to humility. The attitude is: I am better than you. But in **Romans 12:3** Paul told us ...Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. In the context, Paul was talking about using the spiritual gifts God blesses us to serve in the church. Whether God gives you the ability to teach or administration, just use it to serve others rather than proving your ability. But then we may wonder: is there any difference between having self-confidence versus boasting about oneself? A person with self-confidence will say: “I can do it,” whereas for one who is self-seeking the statement becomes: “Only I can do it,” or “I can do it better.” Therefore, a prideful person only cares about who gets the job done. Paul said that such mindset would be detrimental to unity in the church. Instead, believers should “consider others better than yourselves.” Paul was not describing the fake humility Chinese folks

love to play. When someone compliment you for a great accomplishment. You reply: “Oh, that’s nothing.” But in your heart, you feel like floating in the cloud. Someone said it with good wisdom: when people praise you for a job well-done, just say “Thank you” then “Thank God.” Admit the favorable result but give glory to God. Then Paul went on to say in **verse 4** our focus should be on other people’s needs: Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. It is a truth so simple that we often overlook. When we were born we were selfish beings. As babies our survival instinct drives us to eat everything sent to our mouths. Then as we grew up our parents told us that we should share what our food and toys with others, and when we played with others we had to take turn. We gradually realize that we are not the center of the universe. There are other people around us whom we need to care for. But then after we get to adulthood the world tells us that we have to mind our own business. We have to work hard and protect what we have. Are we going the opposite direction? We have to constantly pray that God would guard our hearts against selfish ambition. God puts us in a church for us to look after each other’s interest like family members. We can stay humble if we do not mind who gets the credit, or even if no one pays attention to who gets the job done. The world sees humility as a weakness to avoid. But in God’s family humility is a virtue to pursue.

3. 謙卑的典範 The Pattern for Humility

In order to achieve unity, we must humble ourselves. We must think less of ourselves and think more of others. All the virtues Paul mentioned before can be found in our Lord. Jesus is our perfect pattern for humility. That is why Paul used **verse 5** as a transitional statement: Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Don’t we all agree that if everyone adopts the same mindset as Jesus’ then we can avoid a lot of conflict in the church? There will not be any argument about whether I am right, or you are right. But what is Jesus’ attitude? From verses 6 to 11 is the most concise doctrinal statement on the nature and work Jesus Christ in all of Paul’s writings. First, Paul talked about Jesus’ descension. Let us look at **verses 6 and 7**: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. Jesus willingly came into our world as a man. But it was not any kind of man. Jesus became the lowest of man – a slave. However, even when Jesus became 100% man He was still 100% God. I do not know if you are following the Winter Olympics. One day there was a headline news that the North Korea leader Kim Jong Un suddenly showed up to cheer for his team. He also seized the opportunity to take some pictures with President Trump. If you look careful they are not the real deal. But when Jesus came into our world He did not look like God. He is God! In the gospels Jesus displayed supernatural power. He knew what was in people’s mind and He performed miracles to heal sickness and cast out demons. However, Jesus deliberately chose not to use His privileges as God for His convenience. He walked and ate like an ordinary man. Jesus came into our world to accomplish the salvation plan. Paul continued to say in **verse 8**: And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross! Can you notice the downward progression in these verses? God became a man, and He became the lowest of man. He died, and He chose to die in the most shameful way. This is the pattern of humility we are asked to imitate. Only the One who had mighty power could choose to lay it all aside. The CEO of a company has the freedom to work as a janitor, but a custodian cannot work as a boss. Jesus’ suffering was not only humility, it was also humiliation. But that was not the end of the story. Paul continue to describe Jesus’ ascension in **verse 9**: Therefore God exalted

him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name. From the humblest slave, Jesus was ascended to heaven and He regained all glory that He originally had. Paul said that when Jesus rose on the third day God gave Him a new name. What is that name? It is the name "Lord." Rather to say that it is a new name, it is a new title. To call Jesus "Lord" is natural to us. When we believed in Jesus Christ we accepted Him as our Savior and Lord. But in the Roman world the only lord was Caesar the Emperor. To claim that there was another Lord was looking for trouble to one's head. To the Jews the only Lord was Jehovah God. Therefore, when a Jewish Christian called Jesus as Lord, then he/she treated Jesus as God. Jesus did not hold onto His power and privilege as God. He displayed the perfect pattern of humility for us. Recently, a brother shared that once he was scolded by a senior brother because he did not put things back in the right order that the older brother wanted. He thought to himself: "Why on earth I have to receive all his criticism? To the very least I am a well-educated person and I do all this for our church." Then he quickly realized that his leader was not seeking after his own glory. He did it all for the Lord. That is humility! We follow Jesus' pattern of humility when we stop holding onto our own status, but willing to lay it down to serve others. I am not asking every person to mop the floor and empty the trash. We need to have people to teach in the classroom and lead worship from the podium. But when we need someone to move tables and chairs and to help in the kitchen are you willing to serve, and do so with joy? I know it is easier to talk about humility in the church. What if you stay humble at the work place and you are being taken advantage of? Go back to Jesus' pattern of humility. In due time God the Father vindicated for His Son. Our Heavenly Father knows it if you suffer for His name's sake. He will give you strength and wisdom to endure the hardship. When the right time comes He will give you a way out.

CONCLUSION

The key to attain unity in the church is humility. We must think less of ourselves and think more of others. I came across an inspiring story from the Winter Olympics. This time it is not about national leaders! American athlete Chris Mazdzer became the first person ever won a medal in the men's singles luge. At a news conference Mazdzer attributed his success to a person most people would not expect. He is a competitor in the same event from Russia. It was last month when Mazdzer was having some final preparation somewhere in Eastern Europe. But he hit a bottle-neck. He was frustrated because no matter how hard he tried he could not get any faster. A Russian athlete took notice and he approached Mazdzer. He let Mazdzer use his luge. At that time the Russian guy was still unsure if he could make it to the Olympics because of the doping violation of his country. But he wanted his American friend to do his best. Mazdzer was dumbfounded. He commented that no driver would ever lend a competitor his car and no runner would ever allow another person to wear his shoes. Mazdzer recalled: "We all want the best for each other. I think what it shows is that we do care about each other." We show humility when we unite with one heart and look for the best interest of others. Think less of ourselves and think more of others. That is the way our Lord wants for His church.