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### Purposeful Unity

Today we come to the end of our series on how to live life together as a church. Jesus' call for us to live as one Body is challenged by the fact that although the call to be in the church is a call to invest years, sometimes even the rest of our lives, in regular fellowship with one another, we're sinful people and likely to wound one another at some point along the way. So how do we obey Christ's command to be One Body? And beyond simply avoiding conflict, how do we really enjoy the relationships He gives through the institution of the local church?

Last April I attended a conference in Chicago, and during that week I met with several old friends—some I planned on seeing, others who surprised me. After a couple days, I started to feel this weird feeling—a mix of nostalgia and heaviness. Only later did it dawn on me that I'd spoken with people from every stage and location of my life as a Christian—from High School up through the present. After digesting some of those encounters, I marvel at community. Those friends, and many others, roll in the credits of my life as people who helped me up when I'd fallen, knocked me down when I thought I was invincible, taught me things I didn't know but needed to, and showed me that sometimes what I thought I knew was wrong. They cheered for me when I needed encouragement, believed God had a call on my life when I wasn't as certain, loved me and told me so.

You have folks like this in your life too—instrumental in shaping the person you are. Of course, these aren't always happy stories. Some are stories of abuse, cutting words, abandonment. But Christ calls His people to have a role in shaping one another's lives through loving, truth-prizing, God-honoring, Christ-exalting ways—as One Body made of many parts with many gifts and functions, and with Christ as our head <sup>(1 Cor 12:12)</sup>—that the mind of Christ might dwell richly in us all. <sup>(Col 3:16)</sup>

One unique feature of 2 Timothy is the number of first names Paul includes. We get a peek into Paul's community of faith. We know something of how the Lord used many of these folks in Paul's life and vice-versa. We're going to list them and see how community functions beyond the mere accumulation of friends, but even deeper into the formation of our lives before God.

### 2 Timothy 4:9-22

<sup>4:9</sup>Do your best to come to me soon. <sup>10</sup>For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. <sup>11</sup>Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. <sup>12</sup>Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. <sup>13</sup>When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments.

<sup>14</sup>Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. <sup>15</sup>Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. <sup>16</sup>At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! <sup>17</sup>But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. <sup>18</sup>The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

<sup>19</sup>Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.

<sup>20</sup>Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus. <sup>21</sup>Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens, Linus, Claudia & all the brothers. <sup>22</sup>The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

### Prayers for Our Life Together

In Paul's words to Timothy, we see a life intertwined with the church, committed to the Gospel, drawn to Christ's people and devoted to the great commission to preach Christ to the world. I want to extract from these people's stories some prayers for this church, that we might live Gospel-proclaiming, Christ-centered, God-exalting, purposeful lives together—that Christ might make us One and use this local church for His glory over the decades, or until He returns. Drawing from our text, here are some of my prayers for this church, Oak Hills.

- **THAT WE'D PURSUE RELATIONSHIPS, EVEN WHEN WE FEEL WE HAVE LITTLE TO OFFER. (Onesiphorus)**—Here Paul greets Onesiphorus' household. But earlier he added more: "He often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me." <sup>(2 Tim 1:16)</sup> Onesiphorus couldn't get Paul out of jail. Still he searched for Paul, knowing he might endanger himself associating with the prisoner. Sometimes we doubt we have much to offer, but see Paul's affection for this man. Onesiphorus' presence and pursuit was a balm to Paul's heart—"May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day!" <sup>(1:18)</sup> I pray we'd invest in relationships, even when all we have to give is assurance that we love each other and aren't ashamed to call each other friend. Onesiphorus risked his life to assure Paul he wasn't alone, and it blessed Paul.
- **THAT THE LOVE OF CHRIST WOULD JOIN OUR HEARTS TO OTHERS AND MOVE US PAST RIFTS. (Mark & Luke)**— There was a time when Paul had a problem with Mark. <sup>(Acts 15:36-40)</sup> Early on, when Paul and Barnabas parted ways, it was over Mark. Barnabas wanted Mark to come on their next journey, but Mark had left them mid-trip before. To Paul, Mark's commitment to ministry was dubious, so he refused to take him along. Barnabas, Mark's cousin, left Paul to be with Mark. But in this text, we see not all rifts need to last—or even settle into distanced civility. Paul now wanted Mark to join Timothy in a visit, regarding Mark as useful in ministry. Mark had grown to show his commitment to Gospel ministry. <sup>(Note: Luke is with Paul. If Mark arrived before Paul was killed, Mark, Luke and Paul, the authors of 16 of 27 books in the New Testament, would've been in the same place at the same time.)</sup>

The naming of these guys shows Paul sees little distinction between friend and co-laborer in Christ. The ministry of Christ unites them, forming a bond of love and self-sacrifice. Remember, it was hardly safe to hang out with Paul. Still, Luke alone was with him, and he knew Mark would come if asked. Paul never demanded his friendships be based upon who understood him or liked what he liked. Being united in Christ was enough for a binding love to join their hearts.

- **THAT WE'D BECOME UNFORGETTABLE SOURCES OF STRENGTH TO EACH OTHER. (Prisca and Aquila)**—Prisca is a form of Priscilla. Here we have old friends from Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> Missionary Journey. When Paul arrived in Corinth, alone and broke, he met these two and they ministered together for a time. Timothy joined them there. (Ac 18:4) They set out for Antioch, but along the way stopped in Ephesus, where Priscilla and Aquila remained to serve the church as Paul traveled on. Now where do we find them? Right where Paul left them.

Do you know people like this—folks you used to worship with though you've moved on, but when you do get updates, you hear they're still fixtures in the church, blooming in the ministry the Lord has planted them in. Some of you are this sort of person now—ones fondly remembered by those who have moved on for the way you invested in their lives. To Paul's friends, he tells Timothy, "Say hello for me, would you."

These are the folks that you feel are always with you, even when you're far apart. For some of us, these are folks who invited us over during the kids-in-diapers years, or invited us to coffee even they were a decade older, or took an interest in what we were doing, believed in it, and us, and walked a few year of that road at our side. Just knowing they were there was a source of strength. Are we that sort of people to one another? Are we too busy, guarded or bent on recognition and credit to come alongside? I pray we'd be remembered by those who go out from here as people folks want to greet every chance they get—that we'd have legacies of that sort of encouragement by the grace of Christ.

- **THAT WE'D VIEW OUR LOCAL, IMMEDIATE COMMUNITY AS A SUBSET OF A GLOBAL, ETERNAL ONE. (Eubulus, Pudens, Linus and Claudia)**—Eubulus felt for Timothy as Paul felt for Priscilla & Aquilla. He greets Timothy, and Pudens, Linus and Claudia—believers close to Paul—greet the entire church in Ephesus. It could be they knew the believers in Ephesus, or they wanted to say hello because, though they may not have known each other, they were brothers and sisters. The truth is we have a fraternal relationship with all Bible-believing, Christian churches. They are our brothers and sisters. When we speak of churches, both local and around the world, we're speaking of our own family. How can we be healthy if our attitude toward our own family in Christ is one of superiority and constant comparison? I pray we'd view our local, immediate community as a subset of a global, eternal one.
- **THAT IF WE MUST OPPOSE, WE'D KNOW WHY: (Demas & Alexander, also Phylegus, Hermogenes, <sup>(1:15)</sup> Hymaneus & Philetus<sup>(2:17)</sup>)**—Demas, Phylegus and Hermogenes were men who were with Paul, but then abandoned him. Remember, this is a personal letter, unlike many of Paul's others which were intended to be read aloud to entire congregations—though this later would be. Paul isn't publicly exposing these men, he's warning Timothy of them. These men turned away from Paul, some causing great harm. It could be Alexander played a "Judas" role leading to Paul's arrest. Paul wanted Timothy to be aware, lest they show up looking for trouble.

Remember, Paul's main charge to Timothy is to guard the Gospel by preaching the Word. We're permitted to oppose people, but only if they meet certain qualifications. Paul's criteria were those who 1) proclaim a false Gospel, 2) mean to proclaim a false Gospel, 3) won't submit when confronted, and 4) intend to keep at it until they get their way. These we should oppose with vigor—even naming names if we have to for the safety of the congregation. What's the flip side of this? Unless these things are happening, we have no ground to live in ongoing opposition to other members of the church. None.

- **THAT WE'D INVEST OUR FAITH, KNOWING IT IS NOT OUR PROPERTY. (Timothy, Lois & Eunice)**—Let us not forget whose name is on this letter—Timothy, and his mother and grandmother. Paul cares deeply for these folks, and he has a clear sense that what the Lord began in Lois and Eunice, he's continuing in Timothy. Timothy possesses a legacy of faith handed down, and Paul is contending for Timothy to not only hold on, but to grow in maturity and strength. He has been given a deposit to guard—to invest and employ for solid returns. And here we have another humble reminder that our faith doesn't belong to us. Sometimes we're the first of our family to believe, sometimes not. But regardless, all who come to faith were brought there by God, and almost every time He has used His own people as the means by which we have heard, even as He Himself opens our ears to believe.
- **THAT WE'D STAY OR MOVE WITH PURPOSE: (The Scattered Others)**—Peppered through this text are other people and where they are. Though known to Timothy and Paul, we know little about them—except that they were partners in the Gospel. When you gather these names together, you get a picture of the spread of the Gospel throughout the world, and we have reason to care. These folks, Crescens in Galatia, Titus in Dalmatia, Tychius on his way to Ephesus, Carpus in Troas, Erastus in Corinth and Trophimus in Miletus, we presume, were in the process of taking the Gospel to the world—and it would be by the ministries of men like this that the Gospel would eventually find its way to Kansas in 2009.

We're called to be in community, but it seems hardly anyone stays put very long. People come and go, and we wonder why we should spend the emotional energy and time in building relationships. We have a purpose in this world to know and make known the astonishing grace of God. This message takes a community to of faith to tell well. I want to conclude with some words from Dietrich Bonhoeffer from his book, "Life Together."

*"Christendom is a scattered people, like seed 'into all the kingdoms of the earth...' (Deut 28:25) 'I will gather them; for I've redeemed them; and they shall return.' (Zech 10:8-9) When will that happen? It has happened in Christ Jesus, Who died 'that He should gather together in one the children that were scattered abroad,' (Jn 11:52) and it will finally occur visibly at the end of time when the angels of God 'shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.' (Mt 24:31) Til then, God's people remain scattered, held together solely in Jesus Christ, having become one in the fact that, dispersed among unbelievers, they remember Him in the far countries. So between the death of Christ and the Last Day it is only by a gracious anticipation of the last things that Christians are privileged to live in visible fellowship with other Christians."* (1954, Pg 18)

Our call to live in community is a privilege. My prayer is that we'd be an honoring reflection of our Lord Jesus Christ in how we love and live life together, always growing, always serving with the best we have, always studying His Word, always pursuing maturity and usefulness, always invested in Kingdom work, passionate to serve and glorify Christ our Lord and Head.