

Thoughts From Other Minds:

Ver. 16. - *Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind, not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.*

Be of the same mind one toward another. This precept refers rather to unanimity, cordiality, and harmony in transacting all the business of the Church, rather than to oneness of mind as to the truth. With respect to Faith, it is the word of God with which believers are to be in accordance, and not with the opinions of each other. Besides, this often-repeated precept is always introduced is always introduced with others of a practical nature. Oneness of belief in everything, even the least part of the revelation of God, is of importance. This, however, cannot be effected but by a full knowledge of the Divine word. The injunction is most important, and cautions against a captious spirit respecting the affairs of the church with which we are connected, or our intercourse one with another. ...

Mind not high things. – Men in general are aspiring to things above them. The great efforts of life are to obtain high rank or commanding station in the world. Christians are here cautioned against setting their minds on high things. Nothing can be more opposed to progress in the Divine life, than the evil against which we are here warned. In proportion as Christians indulge it, they make their bed among thorns, turning away their eyes from the glory of their future inheritance.

Condescend to men of low estate. – The word here translated *condescend* signifies to be led away with; and that which is rendered *men of low estate* may with equal propriety be rendered *low or humble things*; and in this way the clause is an antithesis to the one preceding. ‘*Not thinking of high things,*’ says Calvin, ‘by which he means that a Christian ought not to aspire, in an ambitious manner, after those things by which he may surpass others, nor indulge in haughty feelings, but meditate rather upon modesty and meekness; for our excellence, in the presence of God, consists in these virtues, not in pride or the contempt of our brethren. This precept is properly added to the former; for nothing breaks the unity mentioned by the Apostle more completely than the exalting of ourselves, and our aspiring to something still more elevated, with a view to attain a higher situation. I take the word *humble* in the neuter gender, that the antithesis may be more complete.’

Be not wise in your own conceits. – ‘This sentence,’ says Calvin, ‘connects with the preceding part of the context; for nothing inflates the mind more than a high opinion of our own wisdom and prudence.’ Self-conceit is an evidence of weakness of mind and of ignorance. So far as it manifests itself among Christians, it evidences low attainments in the knowledge of the things of God, and is most destructive to the harmony of a church, and the improvement of the individual under its influence.

Robert Haldane, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 570-571.

Camperdown Noorat Terang Presbyterian Charge

21 August 2016

Sermon: “Life in the Body # 1—not pride, but humility”

Scripture: Romans 12:1-21

Sermon Notes

Introduction: We begin a new series of studies following on from our August communion study from John 14:12, ‘This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.’ Preparing that study reminded me of other ‘one another’ scriptures, and I thought it would be good study some of these.

Faith in Jesus unites us to him and to each other as the head and members of a body (Rom 14:4-5) - and within this body we are to love one another as Christ, the head of the body, has loved us. But what does such love look like? How will outsiders know that we love each other, and are therefore Jesus’ disciples? (Jn 13:35).

We are to love not in word or talk but ‘in deed and in truth’ (1 Jn 3:18) - and a study of these ‘one another’ scriptures will help us answer these questions and help us love in deed and in truth as our love for one another grows and matures and is more clearly seen by us and by others.

I thought to begin with harmony: ‘Live in harmony with one another’ (Rom 12:16, 15:5-6, ESV); but then while the NIV has ‘harmony’ in Rom 12:16, it has ‘a spirit of unity’ in Rom 15:6-6; digging deeper, I discovered that a more literal translation is ‘be of the same mind’ (Rom 12:15) and ‘be like-minded’ (Rom 15:5-6).

We use ‘mind’ as a noun (the human mind) and as a verb (mind the baby); the word the apostle used in the original meant ‘to think’; it’s the same word used in Romans 12:3, ‘think’ - and so ‘mind’ here refers to the way we Christians think about each other: ‘the same thing thinking to one another’ (Rom 12:3, lit. trans.).

1. Right thinking

What this means is explained by what follows: ‘not thinking high things, but associating with the humble’. The enemy of right thinking towards one another is pride—and one of the ways pride expresses itself is in some thinking ‘high thoughts’ about themselves, and setting themselves above and apart from others.

This ‘intellectual’ pride is not the only breach of love—and so the apostle prays ‘may ... God ... grant you to be like-minded [or ‘to think the same thing’] toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Rom 15:5-6 NKJV).

‘According to Christ Jesus’ means ‘after his example’, ‘according to the pattern’ he has given us in his own conduct (cf. Phil 2:2-7). Being ‘like minded’ towards each other means patterning our mind, our thinking, on his mind, his thinking, to take the path of humility, rather than the path of pride.

In chapter twelve the issues was intellectual pride—but here it is the pride of culture, what we would call ‘racial pride’, for the apostle continues ‘Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you’

There were tensions in the church in Rome between Jews and Gentiles, for Jews were raised to be proud of their Jewishness and to despise Gentiles as unclean—and so Gentiles responded with hostility and scorn. In our day the divisions are between other groups who elevate themselves and look down on others.

These are bad ways of thinking; they disrupt the peace and harmony and unity of the church and hinder our witness to outsiders. Our congregations should be startlingly different from the outside world, places where the differences and divisions that matter there mean nothing.

The divisions between classes, between employers and employees, between rich and poor, between educated and uneducated, between people groups and cultures, have no place in Christ’s church. We are to be like-minded towards one another, according to Christ Jesus, so that united as one body we glorify God.

Christianity was born into a world that despised humility; the world today has been influenced by Christian values, and pretends to admire humility, while people strive to rise higher, to move in the right circles of power and wealth and influence. As followers of the humble carpenter of Nazareth, we must not think like this.

Among ourselves if we are a ‘somebody’, we are to be startlingly different from the world around about us; we are to gladly associate with our brothers and sisters in Christ who are not ‘somebodies’; in Christ we are all equally members of his body, welcomed by him, and so we are to welcome each other to glorify him together.

2. Right learning

This is not Utopianism; as disciples of our the Lord Jesus we dare not disregard this as impossible and, for these commands come to us from God our Saviour—and so we must learn from the scriptures how to do them and work hard at obedience.

In Romans 15:5-6 the apostle Paul teaches that being like-minded towards each other is gift of God: he prays ‘may God grant you to be like minded toward each other’; the right thinking that overcomes sinful divisions cannot be obtained by self effort or by education or social engineering; it’s a gift, a grant, from God.

However, he gives it by means—by the prayerful use of the scriptures (Rom 15:4). Surely our failures to demonstrate Christian love in humility between ourselves must be because we have not been a people of the Book; let us put this right, so God can give us the grace of humility to live for his glory.

And he gives it by the power of the obligation imposed upon us by the humility of our Lord Jesus, which was for us (Phil 2:5-6; Rom 15:7-9). If we felt the power of his love for us, how could we allow pride to divide us and to damage our testimony to the world that desperately needs to see his love in our love for one another?

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My Notes:

Questions for Reflection:

1. Why is it important for serious Bible study to compare English versions and to refer to the discussion of the differences in commentaries? How are the benefits of this approach seen in our study of Romans 12:16 and 15:5-6?
2. How might studying the ‘one another’ texts of the New Testament help us better obey our Lord’s command to love one another so that the world will know that we are his disciples?
3. How is ‘be of the same mind toward one another’ (Rom 12:16, NKJV) more helpful both in understanding this text of scripture and in putting it into practice than ‘live in harmony with one another’, (Rom 12:16, ESV & NIV)?
4. What sorts of pride was the apostle Paul addressing in these scriptures, and what sort of pride might express themselves in wrong thinking and divisions within Christian congregations today?
5. It would be easy, knowing how badly professing Christians have failed to ‘be of the same mind toward one another’ to regard humility, harmony and unity to be hopeless; what should we do, how should we do it, and why must we do it?