

The Transformed Us

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Well, to begin our time in God's word this morning, I invite you to turn to 2 Corinthians 5. This text is going to sort of help set the context for what we have to consider this morning. Beginning in verse 16, the Apostle Paul says this, he says,

16 Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. 17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Last time, we looked at that passage and considered some things from God's word to help us have a right sense of how to view ourselves in Christ and how to think rightly about the change that has taken place. We titled the message "The Transformed You," and the point of what we said was this, is that the Christian sees himself differently in light of Christ and in light of his salvation. Scripture speaks of our deadness in sin and our guilt in the past tense. We were dead in our trespasses and sins, Ephesians 2 says, but now Ephesians 2:4-5 say, we are alive in Christ. We were dead but now we are alive and we're not to think about ourselves individually if we are in Christ as being dead in sin. We see ourselves in a new way. Not only that, we don't see ourselves and define ourselves by our prior guilt, we are defined instead by what Christ has done for us. Christ has given us new life. His blood has washed away our sins, the Scripture says in 1 John 1:7, and in the text that we saw just now, we are new creatures in Christ and all things have become new, the old things have passed away. So you and I, if we are in Christ, we are to think about ourselves as we are in union with Christ, not apart from him. We should not think about ourselves as simply in terms of guilt and sin, if Christ has saved us and delivered us from that, then it changes our whole mindset about the nature of our existence. You should always see yourself in light of your union with Christ if you are a believer in him because that's how God sees you, God sees you in Christ, not in isolation from him.

So what we did last time as we focused on those things, is we talked about how the individual Christian, how you should see yourself in light of your salvation. It's very refreshing, it's a wonderful thing to contemplate, very liberating to consider. Now today, we're going to go a step further as we consider the effects of that transformation that has taken place, and this has massive massive consequences for a local church, certainly for our body, and it has consequences that would be easy to miss, easy to miss because we've all been conditioned by the nature of media in general, the nature of Christian media more particularly, the inclinations of our own heart, we think about ourselves in rather self-centered ways and we think about how all of this affects me. Well, the teaching of Scripture is that the things of this transformation go far beyond that and we need to contemplate it. I'm only going to spend one message on it. It's worthy of much more consideration. Here's the point for this morning, beloved, this transformation of being in union with Christ affects the way that we see each other. It affects the way that we think about and consider each other in the body of Christ, and it could be no other way. If Christ has changed the fundamental way that we look at ourselves in union with him, then it is obviously going to affect the way that we think about and consider and interact with others who have had a like transformation take place in their lives. There is a corporate dimension to this.

So today we're not thinking of how we look at ourselves in the mirror, we're considering how we look at each other in Christ. And as I did last time, I'm drawing insights in today's message from a book by Anthony Hoekema titled "The Christian Looks at Himself," the Christian looks at himself. It's not a book that I recommend unconditionally because he has certain presuppositions that if he were alive to rewrite it, I think he would say some things differently; that's a pretty arrogant thing for me to say about such an accomplished theologian but I think he would say things a little bit differently today. So I don't unconditionally recommend that book itself to you, but the things that we're going to say today were stimulated in my mind starting with that book and we're drawing upon that as we speak here today as we benefit from the insights of that great theologian into Scripture.

How does this affect us and what does it mean for us as we live in the body of Christ, and last week's message was, "The Transformed You," the title of today's message is the grammatically incorrect, "The Transformed Us." The transformed us. If you like to take notes and put a title at the top, this is about the transformed us, the whole point being is that we see this transformation in a corporate way as well and Scripture is abundantly clear about this and the implications that it brings. The things that we're going to consider today are at the ground of, they are the foundation of harmony in a local body. They are the foundation of peace with one another, not simply within the church but peace within a family that claims to know Christ. These are the ways that we look at each other. You should not look at your spouse apart from Christ. You should not look at your children, if they are in Christ, apart from him. And so all of those things are on the table for what we have to consider in this rich time together here this morning.

Let's start it here with this first point: how do we see each other in light of our salvation in Christ? Well, first of all, we accept each other in Christ. We accept each other in Christ and this is so fundamental, this is so essential for our right thinking. Think back to what we were saying last time, that Christ saved you from sin through his death and resurrection, and the Spirit took that redemption that Christ accomplished on the heart and applied it to your heart. The Holy Spirit powerfully drew you to Christ so that you would repent and believe in him, and he gave you new life in Christ and all things are new and the old things have passed away. Well, understand, beloved, and remember what your condition was when that happened. This is true of every believer. What did Christ do for you? Christ accepted you though you were unworthy of him. Christ in his holiness, in his essential deity, in his uncreated nature in the perfection of holiness looked on you in your sin and guilt and covered you with mercy. He covered you with his shed blood. He covered you with his righteousness and he drew you into himself, so to speak, though you were not worthy of such kindness and of such eternal blessing. He did that for you. While you were yet a sinner, Romans 5 says, Christ died for you. Christ died for us.

Now here's the key transition in our thinking and you can turn to chapter 15 of the book of Romans for the premise of this thought. Romans 15:7. Oh, the implications of this are just magnificent and a church that understands and embraces this and practices it is never the same again. Divisions in church, divisions in the broader body of Christ that we see going on around us even in this day, are all rooted in the fact that there is a violation of this principle that we're considering here right now. In Romans 15:7 it says,

7 Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.

So Christ accepted us at the cross, you might say, and the implication of that is that those of us that have been accepted by Christ must accept others who are in Christ as well. It's the foundation of everything.

This verb "accept" that is used there in verse 7, you could think about it in these ways based on some of the lexical work that better men than I have done, it has the idea of taking someone to yourself. Christ took you to himself, we take others to ourselves. It has the idea, this acceptance has the idea of treating someone with hospitality, with kindness, with a sense of generosity and love and acceptance, to welcome them. All of that bound up in that word "accept," an idea of welcome, receiving to yourself, treating them hospitably. That is exactly, my friend, what Christ has done for you in your salvation. Well, what Scripture teaches us is this, the way that Christ received you is the way that you are to receive other Christians. If someone else is in Christ, then you are to receive them in like manner as Christ received you. You accept them. You receive them to yourself. You welcome them. You treat them with kindness. And that premise is completely apart from any human factors that might change the way that you would otherwise view them. And follow me closely because this has massive implications for the whole way that social justice and critical race theory is dividing the church in awful ways before our very eyes. The distinctions that society, that fallen, sinful society embraces and emphasizes, those distinctions are of no account in the church of Jesus

Christ. What divides society and what drives politics and what all of the anger and animosity that are leveled at different groups of society against one another, that has no place whatsoever in the body of Christ.

Now in the context of Romans 15, what I'm going to do here is I'm going to flesh out that statement that I just made, this statement in particular, the distinction that society embraces has no place in the church of Jesus Christ and that completely changes the way that we interact with each other, that's what I'm going to expand on now. In the context of Romans 15, what this means is we receive each other, we treat each other hospitably, we love each other despite the fact that we have differences of opinion on lesser matters. There are lesser matters about, you know, whether we honor certain days or we treat every day alike. There are lesser matters about the foods that maybe you eat and the foods that I might choose to avoid. What the Apostle Paul is telling us in the context of this verse 7 is that we receive each other and we love each other despite the fact that we have differences of opinion on lesser matters, and so we don't let lesser matters, things that are secondary to salvation, things that are secondary to the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we don't let those things become a matter of relational fracture to us.

And you know, look, this is just undeniable if you've had any interaction with other people from other churches. You know, the whole matter, everything that's happened in the past year with COVID and masks and social distancing has become a source of great conflict in the body of Christ. Who would have thought that? Well, the reason that that has happened is that people in other places have lost sight of this fundamental matter that our presence in the body of Christ forbids us from allowing those things to divide us. And so we have people at Truth Community Church, some who wear masks, some who don't, and it's not an issue here. One way or the other, it's not an issue here because that is secondary to the greater unity that we have in Christ, and we cannot let distinctions about a piece of fabric over facial openings become a matter of division in the Spirit of Christ. That's not right. That's a sin against this kind of unity and that's just one illustration.

Well, and by the way, you know, I say it with sadness as I think about other churches that have been divided over this, and I know that there's great division over this matter in many places, but, you know, I'm grateful to the Lord that you have not divided with each other here within our body over these matters, and that is a great great blessing and it is a signature token of the blessing of God on our church that we are not divided over these matters. That is very important.

Now going another step further and bringing this to another point. Scripture tells us that ethnic background is of no account in the body of Christ. Look over at Galatians 3. It's secondary. It is incidental. It is not a cause for division of any kind. In Romans 3:26 you see the same apostle saying this,

26 ...you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Isn't that sweet, the comprehensive nature of what he says? You're all sons of God. Through all of your diversity and all of your differences there is a greater surpassing

commonality that you have that defines everything else. You're all sons of God through the one reality of faith in Christ Jesus. The same Lord is Lord over us all. We're saved by the same kind of faith, empowered by the same Holy Spirit, and so there is this great oneness that we enjoy despite the many differences that we have on more superficial levels.

Verse 27, he continues with the comprehensive statement.

27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

And what does that mean in verse 28?

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Do you see it there? Verse 26, all. Verse 27, all. Verse 28, all. You're all one in Christ and so you are not to divide over these ethnic differences, you are not to divide over your difference in social status, you're not to divide over the two God-given genders, two and only two. You're all one in Christ Jesus. You are defined in unity by a greater reality.

Verse 29,

29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

So ethnic background has no place of consideration in the way that we accept and receive one another.

Now moving on a little further, Scripture says that that kind of partiality in the body is a serious sin. Look over at James 2. It's as though there is a biblical road-grader at work that is just coming through and leveling everything and making it so that peace and love and harmony can follow in its wake, having cleared away all of the other bumps and rises and falls in the road that would otherwise cause us to be separated. So in James 2:1, I've got some things to say about this, this morning. James 2:1 says,

1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. 2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, 3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?

The idea is that you're making distinctions in the body of Christ and offering a different level of acceptance to someone based on an economic status, he says that is evil, that is wicked, that is wrong, that is a violation of the unity that we have in our common faith in Christ. And so he goes on and says in verse 8, he says,

8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

Wow. Let's just let that sink in for a bit, this unity and this acceptance and this mutual hospitality toward one another in Christ is a necessary consequence of the common faith that we have in him. We share in a common spirit. We have one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and all of these things are designed to promote unity and they have nothing to do with ethnic or economic status in the world. And so Scripture tells us don't let those factors come in and divide the body of Christ.

Now I want to expand on this, I want to say a couple of things about this section of Scripture. It is essential that we do not favor the wealthy in church relationships. That is the clear teaching of the book of James, and it's one of the reasons why I, in ministry, go out of my way not to know anything about the economic status of people that are at Truth Community Church. Some things you know incidentally and you can't avoid that and that's okay, but I am not interested in the economic status of anybody at Truth Community Church. It's one of the ways of protecting myself from violating this in my role of ministry. And so we need to be mindful of these things corporately together, that we don't think about each other in those terms. It's wrong. It's sinful. It's a violation of Christ himself.

But I want to address this from the reverse as well. This sin of favoritism and this sin of making distinctions over economic matters, beloved, it can work in reverse as well and I've seen it over the many years of ministry. Maybe it goes by a different title of envy or greed perhaps, but I have seen and it has broken my heart to see people of lesser means reject those who have greater means, and it's always clothed in a false garment of humility. I've heard it expressed like this, for example, with a pretense of humility I have heard people say, "We don't belong at that church. We are simple folks. We're just humble folks and we don't fit in with that crowd." Well, I want to tell you that that is a wrong way and a sinful way of thinking. The entire point of Scripture on this matter is this, the whole point of our spiritual transformation is that we do not see each other through such economic or ethnic glasses either direction. Either direction. Listen, Jesus Christ accepts the believing man and he accepts the believing woman on equal terms and so gender has no distinction by the way that we are received in Christ.

Beloved, Jesus Christ accepts the believing man of wealth and he accepts the believing man of poverty as well. He accepts the believing Jew and he accepts the believing Gentile. He accepts the believing boss and he accepts the believing employee. He accepted the sinful woman at the well. He accepted the sinful tax collector Zacchaeus as

well. He accepted Paul the Pharisee, and he accepted Peter the fisherman. And all of these different walks of life that are represented in the accounts of Scripture, Christ shows and extended his mercy over representatives of every single type of class. And so what we are to do, what you and I are to do, then, is that we are to follow our Master. If our Master makes no such distinctions, then on what basis would we do so?

I quote at length here from Anthony Hoekema. He says, "How has Christ accepted us? Without any partiality of discrimination. It makes not a particle of difference to Christ whether we are black or white, man or woman, young or old, Gentile or Jew, American or British, rich or poor, well-educated or poorly educated." Continuing the quotation, "Now, says Paul, we are to accept one another as Christ has accepted us, not on the basis of merit, not because we like one man better than another, not on the basis of externals like money, nationality or race but simply because we are all in Christ together. I need no other reason for accepting you into full fellowship with me than that you are in Christ."

Now picture yourselves, I get these mental images and it's not always easy to communicate them, but picture yourself standing in the realm that we'll call the world where all of these distinctions are in play and emphasized and become a source of great conflict and you're standing in that realm, as it were, and then Christ saves you. What you should understand is that you have stepped out of that realm into a different realm where different considerations are at play, and you've left behind all of those distinctions and you've entered into a realm where the supreme consideration is that we are in Christ, that we belong to him; that his righteousness is ours, that his shed blood is applied to our account; that by our faith is manifested the fact that we were on the receiving end of a pre-eternal choice of God to save us and to deliver us; that the Holy Spirit has done a common work in us and that we have a common destination as we look forward to heaven when we die or when the Lord returns, whichever comes first. And in that realm, these spiritual principles redefine how we think about everything. We look back at the prior realm and say, "What a loss. These people must be evangelized. We must take the gospel to them. We must call them to flee this wicked world and enter into Christ and to come to him and be delivered from this sinful and perverse generation." That's what I'm doing to you even as I say these things, those of you that don't know Christ; the whole point of this for you is to call you out of that and to come into this realm, to come to Christ and to be saved. But now as we look at each other within this realm, it's not through the dirty, tinted, distorted glasses that we wore in that other realm, we look at each other through new eyes and in different ways and we see each other and we think about each other differently. This is the key, or one of the key ways by which we glorify the God of our salvation.

Look back at Romans 15:7. As you're turning there, I saw a tweet from a prominent pastor recently, making a loaded statement supposedly about justice, referring to a killing that took place years and years ago, and I just grieved over what I read because I knew what he was doing really was creating division over a racial matter rather than encouraging unity in the body of Christ, and the way that people virtue signal on these matters is just so contrary to what we're considering here today. In order to be accepted by others within the world, you know, we emphasize these things to show that I identify

with you in these things. It's really sad, really grieves me, but the point that we're considering now is this, look at Romans 15:7 again, "Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God." You see, beloved, the way that Christ accepted us rebounded to the glory of God. As you and I accept each other in this realm and as we love each other in this realm for the sake of Christ, we are doing that which glorifies God, and that's why it is so critical for us to understand the implications of these things.

So you see the principle that we accept one another in Christ. That brings us to our second point this morning, and just to work out here some practical ways in which we can do this, we'll call this second point loving others in Christ. Accepting others in Christ without regard to ethnic or economic differences, and secondly, loving others in Christ. Loving others in Christ. How do we love others in the body of Christ in light of these teachings? You know, I want to say, you know, this works out in the small, the private realms of home life, in marriage, in parenting, the way that children respond to their parents has implications for you in that realm, and the way that when we come together corporately and as we interact, you know, beyond our family boundaries, how does all of this play together? Well, I think I've got five subpoints here. Let me just peek ahead. Yeah, five subpoints here, all of a very practical nature.

First of all, we do this, we deal with each other as forgiven sinners. We deal with each other as forgiven sinners. The fact that you have been forgiven in Christ, when you see another Christian, your first realm of processing that relationship is that I am dealing with someone who has been forgiven just like I have been. And so if Christ has shown mercy and sympathy to them, then my fundamental disposition toward them must also be one of sympathy and kindness and mercy.

Look at Ephesians 4:32, and we can start further back in verse 31, understanding that this isn't simply a moral exhortation, this is rooted in what Christ has done for his people and it changes the entire dynamic of every relationship that you have with other Christians. Chapter 4, verses 31 and 32 of the book of Ephesians.

31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Do you see it? The foundation of this, the assumption here is that you are in Christ and that God in Christ has forgiven you mercifully of all of your sins. That's the foundation of it.

Now with that firmly grasped in your mind that you have been chosen, adopted, redeemed and sealed by the Spirit, with that firmly in mind, now you look outward and look at all of your relationships with other Christians and you realize that everything has been transformed as a result of it. You keep short accounts with other Christians because you know that you are forgiven of much longer accounts with a holy God. How can I knowing of all that God has forgiven me, it's saying all of it, we don't know the fullness

of our sinfulness and wickedness like God sees it in his omniscience, but what we do know, we know that the well was dark and deep and it's been washed away. If we've been forgiven like that, then we carry that over and that vertical perspective informs everything that we look at horizontally. My friends in Christ, my brothers and sisters, young and old, boys and girls, men and women, rich and poor, I ask you in light of this text of Scripture, how is it that you can refuse to extend grace to another Christian when God has extended such remarkable amazing grace to you? If you have received grace, how can you refuse it?

Jesus in one of his parables spoke about this, didn't he? Man goes to the king with an infinite debt and says, "Forgive me! I can't pay you back, have mercy on me!" And the king graciously forgives him, and yet when that man went out and had a friend who owed him a small payable amount that he couldn't pay right at the moment and his friend says, "Please, forgive me. Please, be patient with me and I'll pay you back." And instead the man grabs him by the neck and say, "Pay back what you owe!" The king heard about it and he wasn't too happy with that guy. "I forgave you this great debt and you won't forgive someone a small debt? What's going on in your mind? What is the disconnect here that you who have received so much grace would refuse a smaller extension of grace to someone who's in a like position as you were with me? How can you refuse to extend grace if you've received it?"

So, my friends, what we find, it's really, you know, it's sobering. It's wonderful, it's rich, it's encouraging and yet it's also sobering and a little bit fearful to realize that for those of us that claim to know Christ, to have a misery view of forgiving others in our own realm, to just see the inconsistency of that. You know, we deal with each other as forgiven sinners, and if you are in Christ, then I can't withhold forgiveness from you and be faithful to my Lord as a result. This transforms every relationship, doesn't it? Husband and wife. Parent and child. Child and parent. There are great vast implications to you claiming to know Christ with how you relate with your circle of love and influence. Let that sink in for a moment.

Secondly, how do we love others in the body of Christ? Well, secondly, we pray earnestly and consistently for each other. We pray earnestly and consistently for each other. We had a sweet time of prayer before the service. It's a privilege for me to be a part of it with such tenderhearted believers. When we have the next one, I'd encourage you to make the effort to be with us because it is a precious time. Remember the premise here is that we all came to Christ as guilty sinners, and what does Christ do now in light of that? What is Christ doing in heaven now for his people that he has saved?

Look over at Romans 8:33. What is Christ doing for his people now that he has saved them? Verse 33, Romans 8,

33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

Somehow in a way that I don't claim to be able to plumb the depths of, Jesus Christ is at the right hand of God right now pleading and interceding for his people. He is continually interceding for us and protecting us, and exercising his power at the right hand of God for our good, for our benefit, for our protection to ensure our perseverance to the end. It's a wonderfully comforting doctrine. It tells you exactly why it's impossible for a true Christian to lose his salvation. Christ is interceding to keep us from losing it. Well, that's what he is doing for us as an ongoing aspect of his saving work on our behalf.

Well, Scripture tells us to pray for one another. James 5:16 he says, "confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another." In 1 Thessalonians 5:25, the Apostle Paul says, "Brethren, pray for us." And beloved, I say this sympathetically and gently and being fresh off of our prayer time this morning that was so much different from what I'm about to describe, this kind of praying is far more than the occasional prayers that you might make for someone for physical healing in the midst of their sickness, and just this praying for purely earthly matters. This is a matter of pleading and interceding, for Christ to cause them to grow in the grace and knowledge of the one who saved him, praying for people to find grace at the throne of Christ who are suffering under the weight of affliction and adversity and conflict, and feeling the weight of that so deeply. We love each other enough, we love one another enough that we're not simply concerned about what we need before the throne of grace, we're thinking corporately, we're thinking about others in the body of Christ and saying, "God, shed Your mercy abroad on them as well. If You've shown grace to me and I'm asking for Your help in my situation, God, what can I do for the other believers around me except to pray for Your grace to be upon them as well."

Pray for one another and pray for things that matter. You know, the physical stuff is okay and I pray for you when you're sick and afflicted and in surgery and all that and gladly so, I'm just saying don't let it stop there and think about and consider the matters of eternal consequence that we need the help of God in. Scripture says the earnest, the effective prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much. How much have we left undone because of our prayerless spirits for one another?

Now thirdly, we forgive each other, we pray for one another, thirdly, we thank God for each other. We thank God for each other. Scripture says so much about this. I'm not going to have you turn to all of these different passages but I am going to read a bunch so that you see the emphasis that God's word makes on this attitude of thanksgiving toward others in the body of Christ.

Now let me just say this by way of preface. Every Christian that has joined to Truth Community Church is a gift from God to the body. The most quiet retiring Christian versus the most prominent and outspoken Christian that is joined to Christ, they're all equally a gift from God to the body of Christ. Scripture says this in Romans 12, it says we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function. So there are many members even though they're different. 1 Corinthians 12, to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. The point of Scripture is

that God gives every Christian to the body. Every Christian is a gift from God to a local church and we thank God for his good gifts.

It's the pattern of the Apostle Paul. He regularly thanked God for his readers in his letters. Romans 1:8, "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all." 1 Corinthians, "I thank my God always concerning you." Philippians 1:3, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you." 2 Thessalonians 2, "We should always give thanks to God for you, brethren, beloved by the Lord." Thanksgiving. Not simply because of what somebody has done for us but what God has done for them. You're thanking God for what he has done. God has done a saving work and we thank him for that and then we go further and we thank him for the fact that he brought us together to share in life in the body together. What a blessing that is from God and how important for us to recognize that with conscious gratitude toward him.

Now we have some friends with us today that have been away, multiple friends today that it's their first time back after being away for a long time. So glad to see them back. And one of the things when you're away from the body for a time, you realize, don't you, you realize what a precious gift fellowship with your fellow believers is, and so we probably take it for granted when it's abundant in us, but Christian fellowship is a gift and these other people that God has saved, that God has transformed, transforms the way that we look at each other. We forgive each other. We pray for one another. We thank God for each other. There starts to be a change. It's no longer a utilitarian approach about what you can do for me, or what you can do for the church, and what practical thing can you do to make things go better here. It's far more than that. It's relational. It is spiritual. It is unity in Christ that causes us to see each other differently in this way, and to be a Christian is to see other Christians in a new way that can never go back to the old way.

Fourthly, we could say it this way, is that we must view each other in Christ. We must view each other in Christ, and that's what I've been saying all along. "Well, why did you make it another point, then?" I don't know. It seemed like a good idea at the time but now I'm not sure. I think I can make some sense out of this. The Lord sets the priority on love in relationships in the body of Christ, a sacrificial giving of ourselves to each other.

Look over at the gospel of John 13. John 13:34-35. Oh, it's just so much. There's such a Spirit-empowered movement in our hearts when we submit to these things and embrace them and understand them. John 13:34-35 says this,

34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you,

Do you see the parallel? Christ says, "I have loved you, therefore you love one another."

even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

And so there's this desire when we come together. When we come for corporate fellowship, when you gather in smaller groups during the week, there is this impulse, there is this natural inclination that you have to encourage each other in Christ.

Look at 1 Thessalonians back in Paul's letters, 1 Thessalonians 5, beginning at verse 9. "For God has not destined us," see the transformed us, see the separation from the world. We're under the choosing, electing, saving hand of God and that has consequences that go beyond our individual lives. That's the point. It's not simply about you and Christ, it's about you and Christ and his body that becomes a defining focus of the way that you think about all of life. Not in isolation. It's not just that Jesus is your personal Savior, he's the Savior of his people, and if you've been saved, you've been brought into union with his people as well as with him and that has consequences for your relationships and the way that you aim your affection. Verse 9,

9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.

What's the consequence of that? What does it mean for relationships in the body of Christ? Verse 11,

11 Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

Christ teaches us to love his people like he himself loved them, with a sacrificial, tender care by which he saved us and had mercy on us and received us, then in the body we adopt that same mindset.

Anthony Hoekema again says this. I like these writers that can say so much in such a short space. I quote, "When I look at you, my Christian brother, my first impulse should not be to see what fault I can find with you, it should be to see what Christ has done for you and is doing through you." In other words, this mindset deals the deathblow to a critical spirit within the body of Christ. Of course, we could look at each other and find all kinds of faults with one another, and if you have someone close to you that is a fault-finder with you, you know how crushing that can be because we all stumble in many ways. If the Lord should mark iniquities, which one of us could stand? We would all be crushed if our worst points were made the focus of any relationship, right? We all would be. We all would be, but the point of Scripture is that that's not how God has dealt with us. God has dealt with us in mercy and grace and has cast our sins into the bottom of the sea, as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. And the point is that when we come together as believers in Christ, we're not looking for the first fault that we can find with each other. The fault-finder is someone who has a very wrong-spirited head about them if they think they're in Christ. No, we look at each other through grace, we look at each other through love, we look through each other in acceptance. We look at each other from a perspective that says, "I understand that Christ has accepted me in all of my sins, and if He has done that for you as well, then I'm not

going to be focusing on finding your faults. I want to throw my arms of love around you as well, just as Christ did, and to be an instrument of His grace in your life."

That's what Christians do. That's how we relate to one another. And yeah, I get animated because I know that in the world about us and in the professing church about us, that is not the spirit that is animating the so-called and the claiming professing people of God today at all. "What's your position en masse? What's your position on race? What's your position on this? It's not mine? Well, let me just rip you to shreds." I can only imagine how the Lord grieves over that in light of this clear teaching from his word. We're not meant to be fault-finders with each other in the body of Christ. We're meant to love each other, pray for one another, forgive each other, thank God for each other.

And for those of you, let me just say this by way of pastoral understanding and encouragement, for those of you that are suffering under the weight of a relationship that's like that where you're on the receiving end of that kind of critical spirit, surely there's a special measure of grace from our Lord for those that persevere under that kind of antagonism, that un-Christlike spirit that magnifies faults and minimizes grace when it's supposed to be the exact other, the exact other way. And the elders of our church pray for you and understand when you're under that kind of affliction, and what a daily weight it is. So we sympathize with you in the midst of that.

Well, finally, fifth and finally as time has gotten away from us as it has a habit of doing. One of the things that I'm looking forward to in heaven is that there won't be watches and there won't be clocks timing things. It will be a timeless existence and that will be wonderful. But finally, point number 5 here in terms of the way that we love each other and show love for one another, we must maintain our unity in Christ. We must maintain our unity in Christ and we come back to a point that we've made probably hundreds of times from this pulpit, if not more, especially, beloved, especially in these days of race-based social justice teaching in the church, you and I must look past externals like skin color in order to maintain our unity in Christ.

After Paul had given all of his magnificent exposition in the first three chapters of Ephesians about what God has done for his people in Christ in making them alive together in him, his immediate implication is unity. Chapter 4, verse 1. Actually let's do this, let's just look at the end of chapter 3 as Paul says,

20 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, 21 to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

Far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think. How great is the power and the mercy and the greatness and the goodness of God. To him who is able to do far more than our minds can imagine, may he be glorified amongst his people to all generations forever and ever. "Therefore," chapter 4, verse 1, what's the consequence of all of that? What

does Paul say to the people of God in light of the great character of God and the great work of Christ and the great work of the Holy Spirit?

1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Do you see it there? Do you see how often that little three letter English word comes up in these discussions? All. All humility, gentleness, tolerance for one another.

Look, I know that I can be a pain in the neck to you. I know that my life falters and crumbles at times and that you are the witness to that at times, and vice versa. And the idea is not that we latch onto these failures of one another and make that the bone of contention that sticks in our throats whenever we see each other. No, we tolerate it. We're humble, we're gentle, we're patient about it because we know that the Lord has been humble, gentle and patient with us and therefore we extend it freely and gladly with everyone that names the name of Christ.

As we said last week, there is a transformed you and praise God for that. Understand that we are to extend that further and to realize that there is a transformed us.

I'm concluding with Hoekema's words. He says and I quote, he wrote this 50 years ago, "At a time when internal dissensions threaten to divide many Christians from each other, how urgently we need to remember that if we are truly in Christ, the points on which we differ are always less important than the spirit which binds us together."

My friends, I truly hope that you are in Christ. If so, I truly hope that this church is an edifying, loving influence on your life, and I pray by the mercy of God that each one of you, then, in turn, would be a merciful, edifying influence on the body that he so graciously brought you to.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for our Lord Jesus Christ, his righteousness and His shed blood by which we have been reconciled to You. Now help us to live out that same kind of love, humility, gentleness, patience, goodness, kindness, mercy with one another. Help us and, Lord Jesus, in Your own words, help us to love each other so that it might be shown that we are truly Your disciples. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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