

Complete Unity Class 4 — Unity depends on mutual submission

Introduction

- This is probably the deepest class on the topic of unity
 - It is the hardest to teach, it might be the hardest to hear
 - it is tough to teach, because this angle on unity can easily be misunderstood, and I am very conscious of only scratching the surface
 - It is difficult to hear for some because it may trigger memories of ungodly experiences
 - However, submission is spiritually enriching or we would not see Jesus modelling it. We might need to be re-educated as to what submission means, but it is something we do not need to fear.
 - More a devotional than a teaching class
 - With those thoughts in mind, let's take a look into the Scriptures as to the connection between submission and unity
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Submission to the Father

- ““My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.” (John 4:34 NIV11)
- “For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.” (John 6:38 NIV11)
- “Father, glorify your name!” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.”” (John 12:28 NIV11)
- “Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”” (Matthew 26:39 NIV11)
- “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.” (Hebrews 5:7 NIV11)
- Note: Submission did not make him weak, a push-over or a doormat. Nor did he submit to unhealthy authority
- Note: Jesus and his father were completely united. Jesus submitted himself voluntarily to the will of the father, even though it cost him so much.

- How was he able to do this?
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Security with the Father

- “A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.” (John 16:32 NIV11)
 - “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53 NIV11)
 - “Abba , Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” (Mark 14:36 NIV11)
 - Note: From the time in his father's house when he was 12, to his father's acclamation of him when he was baptised, to his prayers as he hung on the cross, Jesus tenaciously trusted in his father.
 - Note: He was confident of his father's company, his power, and his approval. It was this security with his father that enabled Jesus to live a life of submission to his father's will. Their unity was an outcome of their mutual love.
 - What does this mean for us?
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Submission to one another

- “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Ephesians 5:21 NIV11)
- “Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you” (Hebrews 13:17 NIV11)
- “Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.” (1 Peter 2:18 NIV11)
- “Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives,” (1 Peter 3:1 NIV11)
- “In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble.”” (1 Peter 5:5 NIV11)
- Note: No follower of Jesus is exempt from submitting to other followers of Jesus. Some members of households are specifically reminded to submit because of local church circumstances and cultural pressures of the time. But even those were not specifically called to submit, like husbands to wives, must do so because all Christians are called to submit to one another.

- Note: The submission called for is based on a trust of God – "in the Lord".
 - Note: Richard Foster in his book *Celebration of Discipline* sums up his position with this statement, "Revolutionary submission commands us to live in submission to human authority until it becomes destructive."
 - Note: Biblical submission is not about who is in charge, who has the power, who makes the decisions. It is about modelling Christlike submission to one another. The kind of submission we are talking about is laid out most powerfully and poetically at the beginning of Philippians chapter 2.
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Meditation

"Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:1–11 NIV11)

- Paul loves the Philippian church and has vision for them - 1.3-6
- The church has problems with unity, 'stand firm in the one Spirit' (1.27), 'being like-minded' (2.2), 'selfish ambition' (2.3), 'your own interests' (2.4), 'grumbling or arguing' (2.14), 'everyone looks out for their own interests' (2.21), 'I plead...be of the same mind' (4.2).
- Timothy and Epaphroditus are on their way to follow up on the letter and make sure the Philippians make progress
- Jesus is the focus of the letter: Jesus, Christ, Lord, Saviour -- 76 mentions in 104 verses
- Unity with Christ leads to a concern for each other's well-being that creates unity among us - his brothers and sisters, his family.

Questions

- What is Biblical submission, and what is it not?
- What helps us submit to one another and what makes it difficult?

- How can you personally, and the members of your group, grow in healthy submission to one another?
- How will this help your unity in Christ?

Conclusion

- Instead of, 'We are not going to have unity until we agree with one another', how about, 'We are not going to have unity until we submit to one another.'?