

"Unity". Philippians 2: 1-11

by Dorothea Moreton

I would like us to look at our subject Unity under three headings. The first of those you will find I have taken from verse 1 of this chapter, and that is Unity of position - in Christ. The second point is taken from verse 2, and that is Unity of Purpose - for Christ. The last one is in verse 5: Unity of pattern - like Christ.

Now that is very simple. That is the way in which the Lord spoke to me through this passage, when I began to look at it after I had received the letter from brother Bintz. And so I hope that under these three headings you too will find somethings to help you in your christian life.

1) Unity of Position - in Christ

We are talking a lot about unity these days. We do it almost in every other sentence. But we must say, someone, sometime during the synod (and it is better at the beginning) someone must say: there is no ground for unity amongs us - unless we are in Christ.

We are a very varied selection of people; from East and West, from North and South. We are of many different colours: yellow, we call ourselves white, brown and black. We speak many different languages; there is nothing at all which unites us - unless we are in Christ.

I want to be bold enough to say that even calling ourselves Moravians will not unite us, - unless we are in Christ. You know, when Paul wrote to these people in chapter 2, in verse 1, you have him speaking of your life in Christ. But if you look back (and I must say, I have tried to confine myself to Bible references from this one letter) in chapter 1, verse 1, you will find another interesting thing which Paul says about our position as Christians. He writes to these people in Philippi, and he says to them, to God's people, or saints, in Philippi, in Christ. Now I find this very interesting, because here Paul shows us that we all have a geographical position and a spiritual position.

When Paul was writing to these people, he was writing to first generation Christians. I wonder if any one of us is a first generation Christian? I think most of us have come from Christian families, at least one or two generations back.

But these people were all first generation Christians. They had nothing of Christian tradition behind them, as we have. They had nothing at all which united them. They consisted of slaves, and free men, a remarkable barrier indeed. I think we are quite unable to understand what it meant for a free man to be able to speak to a slave on equal terms, in Christ. We just do not know what it means. But there were free men and slaves, educated people and uneducated

people, Jews and gentiles. Again, I do not think we can begin to comprehend what it meant for a Jew and a gentile in the time of the early church, to be able to sit down together and pray and share the Word of God. But Paul could write to these people, all these different sorts of people, and he could write to them in Philippi - in Christ Jesus!

Now that is a marvelous thing. I hope that as we sit together, we too can hear the Word of God coming to us, and saying to you - in Bad Boll - in Christ; to you - in Tabora - in Christ; to us here now in Herrnhut - in Christ. But of course, it is not just a matter of once being in Christ. Our being in Christ is a dwelling place, isn't it? Do you know that word "to dwell", or "to abide"? It means you stay put, you do not move. And sometimes we find that we have, if you like, a testimony; we can speak about wonderful times of blessing, when we were, in fact, in Christ. Now He will never let us go. That is His Word to us, and His Word can be trusted. But sometimes we move a little bit away from Him, perhaps because we get good ideas of our own, which are not His. And so we are in a state of disobedience, and we somehow move out from Him. Sometimes, then we have to say, "Yes, I am in Christ, but not so closely as I once was." And we have to stop and think, and repent, and get right back there.

It is another marvellous thing too, that although we are so different, and we have many different backgrounds, for example most of the pastors here have infinitely more training than I have, but I do not think that matters. One thing we do know is, that although there are so many ways of coming to Christ, really basically there is only one way. We come as repentant sinners in need of the grace of God. We used to say when I was in Tanzania something like this: The ground at the foot of the cross is level. We all come on the same ground. That is right, isn't it. So, unity - of position - in Christ.

Some of us have a lot of which we think we might boast. Well without taking any other human examples, I think we must just move on to Ch. 3, and see that great testimony of Paul himself. For he had a great deal of which he could boast; his education, his birth, his experience, his zeal, his enthusiasm for keeping the Law.

But Paul himself had to come to the place where he would make as it were, a credit balance account. And on the one side - you have it there in Ch. 3 he writes down all the things which before he was in Christ, counted for so much for him, his education. We can look at the things - he was a trueblooded Israelite, a Hebrew, and so on. And all these were things which mattered so much to him, but then he says, "I met Christ." You have it there in verse 8. He says that all those things I counted gain or profit, I put away, I consider them as mere refuse, in order that I may be found in Him! It's marvellous. I think sometimes we get a little like that. We say "I have been chosen to go to Unity Synod therefore... And immediately we move out from that position of being in Christ, and dependent solely on Him. We say "I have been chosen for further education" and we move away. I think this is one of many lessons I began to learn when I first went to East Africa because sometimes things were not quite as they should be, and sometimes work that I was doing was not blessed in the way I hoped it would be. And I would sit back and have little arguments with myself and say, "It can't be my fault - here I am. I have come here. My parents are missionaries. And I was senior student at college." And so I would go on. And it took some time before the African brethren were able to help me to see something of the truth of Phil. 3 that all

these things which we feel are good reasons for God choosing us - after all, I mean, here I am and He has chosen me - and we almost say "He has good sense." But no. All those things we lay aside and we take hold of just this one thing, our unity of position, that we are in Christ.

I shall finish this first part of our study by copying our Continental brethren, and saying "Dear brethren and sisters." Do not go beyond this point unless you are absolutely sure that you are in Christ. What a wonderful thing if Unity Synod could be for someone the time for getting there.

In our congregation at Leominster we have one member, now a committee member, who was brought up in the church and who taught in the Sunday School. One year she was elected to go to the Provincial Synod. And there in the Provincial Synod during the Holy Communion service, she suddenly realized what it is to be a Christian. And there and then, quietly, without telling anyone, she became a Christian. She went into Christ. Isn't it marvellous?

Now let us move on. But I should not really move on without saying that I do not know where your Philippi is, and I do not know what difficulties your Philippi brings you. For these people their Philippi brought them many difficulties, because they lived in a non-christian culture. They had all the pressures of a pagan world against them. I think Philippi in the time Paul wrote must have been something like our country now, where the moral life has gone so far. We say sometimes that we are living in a post-christian era, and that we have to go back to being missionaries. Some of you, perhaps, live in countries where it is in fact very difficult to be a Christian. Well, there again, I would think that it is when we are in Christ, which is after all a position of safety, although not of safety from worldly trials and troubles, that when you can almost feel the hot breath of the tempter right up to you, it is then that you can begin to understand something of what our Lord went through at Calvary. And that is something which Paul wrote about also in this letter about knowing the fellowship of his sufferings. However, that is another thought.

Paul's Philippi as he wrote this letter was a Roman prison. Not perhaps very pleasant and for a man of Paul's temperament, one would think, a tremendous frustration. But now he is writing gems like this. So, unity of position, in Christ.

2) Unity of Purpose - for Christ. Verse 2

Paul prays for his people that they may be of one mind. Now again, you might say, "Here we are at Unity Synod. Of course we are of one mind." Well, we shall see as the week goes on whether we are of one mind. Let us beware though, about the things that do divide us. Yes, the way you do a thing in your Province would not work in ours. The way we set about things just would not do for you. But basically our purpose must be the same - to further the purpose of Christ. This morning in our Text we heard somethings about sanctification, becoming more like Him, and that is, perhaps, His first purpose. We think that His first purpose is that I should make Leominster congregation grow until we have 350 members. But no, I do not think that is Christ's first purpose. I think that might become a problem to me. Perhaps then I might really begin to say - "We have a good one here!"

But Christ's purpose is to change us, and to make us like Him. And His purpose for us as a church is that we should present Him and His claims to the world in which we live.

Sometimes of course we get a bit tied up with our own projects. Perhaps you want to build a Youth Hostel. Or you want to have a new Province. Or you want to recruit ten new candidates for the Ministry this year.

Sometimes these ideas are not just directly from our Lord and we can quickly turn away from this path. But basically we must have one purpose, and that is to be for Christ. He says here, doesn't he, that we should not have any selfish ambitions. Now that is a difficult one. Again we have had it in our readings. We have had the disciples, grumbling amongst themselves as to who was the greatest. It is still a problem, isn't it. Sometimes we find ourselves doing things in order to advance our own personal cause. But that is not unity of purpose. That is not being, living for Christ. We may have all sorts of abilities. But you know, our abilities are no use at all in the service of God, unless we are available to him. And so I would put that another way, and say that our Lord is not so much interested in our abilities as in our availability. He can do far more with a lay preacher, who is 100% for Christ, preaching a simple message, then he could do with all the fine theology of one who is, as we say in England, "preaching with a view". We do not do it in the Moravian Church, but in some denominations you do "preach with a view". You go to a place, and you preach your best sermon, in the hope that the members or the elders, or the Church Committee, will say, "There's a fine one. Let's have him."

No, unity of purpose - for Christ.

I have in my book, a note book into which I write verses which have helped me from time to time, a hymn I found while I was at college. I do not know who wrote it, but it says this -

All for Jesus, All for Jesus
All my being's ransomed powers
All my thoughts and words and actions
All my days and all my hours.

Let my hands perform His bidding
Let my feet run in His ways.
Let mine eyes see Jesus only.
Let my lips speak forth His praise.

And it goes on, but that is enough.
Unity of purpose - for Christ.

Unity of Pattern - like Christ

I am a dress maker. I like to make my own clothes. But if I had to make dresses for you ladies, I would need a variety of patterns, because you are all shapes and sizes. But it is not that sort of pattern we are thinking of here. We are not talking about an outward likeness. What we are talking about is that something which is very difficult to describe. W.J. Fullerton had a word, "Christly". I have never read it anywhere else. But it is that indefinable something which

you take with you when you go around, and which makes other people say - "a Christian". The Tanzanians have an expression "Mtu wa Mungu" - which literally translated means a man of God. But it doesn't just mean that; it means a lot more than that. It means someone who has the stamp of Christ, if you like, a family likeness. This is what we are after here. A unity of pattern - like Christ. Verse 5 here says "The attitude you should have is like one that Christ Jesus had." We have it in other English translations, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." And how does it go on - He talks a little about becoming a servant, a little about humility, about obedience. But all the time it is a downward ladder and it goes down to the place of death, not just death as we, I suppose, all hope to die, peacefully, in bed, with perhaps a wife or a husband holding our hand, or a nurse just wiping our head. But no; death on a Cross, which is something I find very hard to think about, very hard even to begin to understand.

Being poor will not necessarily make you like Christ, any more than being rich will make you un-christlike. The two do not fit together automatically at all. But it is something of his self-emptying, deliberately laying aside glory which was His by right, but which for our sakes He was prepared to lay aside. And that is a great thing. He did not think that He must remain equal with God, but of His own free will He gave up all that He had.

We sometimes use the expression "free-will offerings". Sometimes in our church we have a concert of christian music, and then we take a free-will offering for the work of the Bible Society or something like that. That means people give what they want. It is not a tax, or a ticket price, but people give what they want.

I think sometimes we hold on so tightly to the things which we consider to be our rights, our privileges, that the Lord almost has to force our fingers open to get from us the things that He wants. Our rights- My rights. The right to choose my own friends, the right to live where I choose to live, the right to go to the congregation I choose, the right to stay there as long as I want. These are the sorts of things that affect us in our Province.

But we have to say, "No, I am going to be like Christ - by His grace." I shall never do it by myself. I am going to freely give.

I do not think you can really make a sacrifice for the Lord, but sometimes when we do not let Him have what He wants, it starts to feel like a sacrifice. But when He has all that there is of us, then there is no sense of sacrifice, but just a tremendous sense of privilege, in being able to give, not just to Him, of course, but to one another. For our Lord went down, and down, and down, didn't He. He offended the important people of His time, the ones about whom He talks. I think that was one of the times our Lord was joking, when He talked about the people who liked the front seats, and who went about in their beautiful long robes, and took the best seats in the synagogues.

They did not like to hear that, but the ordinary people listened with great gladness to what our Lord said. They could equate with Him. They could understand a little more.

It still offends people, doesn't it? We still find ourselves enjoying the privileges of position. But we are a Brethren's Church. We were told this morning by Dr. Potter that we have this stamp. Good - I am glad he said it. I think sometimes we need to have it a little more definitely,

so that we find we are becoming more like Christ. I have said and I repeat, our Lord's humility had nothing to do with His poverty. Of course we know that He lived a very poor life, and none of us would like to live at the standard at which He lived. I do not suppose that there is anyone here who lives quits in the way our Lord lived. I had the great privilege to go to the Holy Land last year, just for a few weeks. And this was one of the things that struck me, the utter poverty which our Lord must have experienced. We know how He talked about having no home, and so on. But His humility was somewhere else, wasn't it?

Let us just say this. It is our business to humble ourselves to be obedient to whatever He might call us to be for Him.

There is an interesting thing here in verse 9: I say we must humble ourselves. In verse 9 it says "For this reason God raised Him to the highest place above." I want to say this. It is our business to humble ourselves, and often just being obedient to the Lord is more humiliating than anything else we can think of. But it is God's place to raise us up.

Now I know there is no comparison between the way in which God raised our Lord and gave Him a name which is above every name, and the way in which He can, if He chooses raise us up in some way. But let us just make sure that if we are "raised", it is by the Lord and not just by some personal manipulation which we have managed for ourselves.

If our Lord has a higher position for us He can show us the way; He can direct other people, so that they know He chooses us. He can then equip us to do the work He wants us to do.

I hope you all have honest brethren and sisters in your fellowships, or perhaps you have husbands and wives who will say to you when you become rather un-christly, "Sister, is that what you really meant to say?" You know we all need help like this, or we get rather out of the way sometimes.

One last thing to finish. In one of our churches in the British Province, when one goes up into the pulpit to preach the sermon, one's attention is drawn to a small brass plate, and on it these words; "Sir, we would see Jesus." You know where those words came from. The first time I went to preach in that church, many years ago now, I went up into the pulpit, and sat down to say my prayer, and I opened my eyes and saw those words. You know, I have never forgotten it. It is a marvellous thing to remember when you stand up to preach, those of you who are ministers and pastors, that is what people want to see, if you like, to hear. They are not so interested in what you have in your head. They want that, above all, we show them Jesus Christ. Sir, we would see Jesus. That is the family likeness, isn't? I want to finish with another verse which I have turned to many times, which is written on this passage, and which can sum up what we have been thinking about.

May the mind of Christ my Savior,
Live in me from day to day.
By His love and power controlling
All I do and say.

May the Word of God dwell richly
In my heart from hour to hour
So that all may see I triumph
Only through His power.

May the peace of God my Father
Rule my life in everything.
That I may be calm to comfort
Sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me
As the waters fill the sea,
Him exalting, self abasing,
This is victory.

May I run the race before me
Strong and brave to face the foe,
Looking only unto Jesus
As I onward go.

May the beauty rest upon me
As I seek the lost to win
And may they forget the channel
Seeing only Him.