

## **HUMBLE LOVE**

### **Romans 12:16**

**Dr. George O. Wood**

An Old Testament text first. Psalm 133:1–3: “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore” (NIV).

Romans 12:16: “Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited” (NIV).

We have shared now in the Book of Romans for some months, especially Romans 12. Next Sunday will be the concluding sermon in Romans 12. As we have looked at Romans 12 I have seen time and time again how this chapter is such a blueprint for life in the body of Christ.

Verses 1 through 3 speak of the role of the individual in the Church. The role of the individual is to have a presented body to Christ, a renewed mind, and a proper estimation of self-worth. As the individual is renewed and consecrated to the Lord, then Paul directs our attention in verses 4 through 8 to an understanding of our unique place in the body of Christ. We look at that and say, “What is it that the Holy Spirit has gifted me to offer to the Body?”

When we come out of that second phase of Romans 12, then we look at the beginning of verse 9 and following, at the universal characteristics which are to be present in every member of the body of Christ. So we start out with our own dedication to the Lord and talk about our uniqueness in the Body, and wind up with universal attributes that are to be a part of all of our experience.

Especially if we look at an interplay of the fourth through the eighth verses with the ninth through the twenty-eighth verses, we see that some of the individual gifts in verses 4 through 8

## **HUMBLE LOVE**

### **Romans 12:16**

may have particular significance for helping all of us practice the attributes that are in verses 9 through 21.

For example, in the phrase, “Let love be genuine, hate what is evil, hold fast to the good,” it is the prophet in the midst of the body of Christ who has the sharpest distinction of what is evil and what is good. He can, therefore, perfect the Body through exercise of that kind of ministry. A servant or contributor might be especially helpful in showing us all how we can better contribute to the needs of the saints and practice hospitality. An exhorter may provide particular strength by showing all of us how we can rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. And a mercy person can show us how to live more with our emotions so that we can weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. Hopefully, the teacher can keep before us all the responsibilities that are ours as believers. So verses 4–8 and 9–21, I think, have a real interconnection. The ministry gifts, verses 4–8, help the Body accelerate and display the qualities God wants in all of the areas.

Romans 12:16, the verse for today, is actually made up of four phrases, dividing into two different themes. The first phrase speaks to us of a plea for unity, and the second three phrases speak to us of the peril to unity in the Body. There are some difficulties in translating this particular verse because in the language in which Paul writes, he is doing a play on words.

Literally, if we were going to translate, it might sound something like this: “The same thing toward one another minding—not the high things minding, but to the lowly being led, become not wise-minded with yourself.” That word “mind” is a play on words. Three times he uses it. The Revised Standard translation puts it: “Live in harmony with one another. Don’t be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be conceited.” Phillip’s translation puts it this way: “Live in harmony with one another. Don’t become snobbish, and take a real interest in ordinary people. Don’t become set in your own opinions.” The New English Bible puts it this way: “Care as much

## **HUMBLE LOVE**

### **Romans 12:16**

about each other as about yourselves. Do not be haughty, but go about with humble folk. Do not keep thinking how wise you are.” The Living Bible, that always looks at things somewhat interestingly says, “Work happily together. Don’t try to act big. Don’t try to get into the good graces of important folk, but enjoy the company of ordinary folks. And don’t think you know it all.”

#### **I. The first phrase, “having the same mind toward one another,” or “live in harmony together” is Paul’s plea for unity.**

It’s very instructive to note that when he makes this plea, he has preceded it by fifteen verses which have shown us how to arrive at unity. The logical outcome of practicing verses 1–15 is the statement in verse 16, “Live in harmony with one another” (NIV).

Because I have this commitment to Scripture which says what works in the Body is, first of all, demonstrated in the home, I thought I’d do something a little unique this morning and put verse 16 in its setting that is coming in Romans 12. And show that if I gave a free translation, maybe a free paraphrase to verses 1–3 and verses 9–15 of Romans 12 as it applied to a husband and wife relationship, that you might get a better feel for what Paul’s admonition is here to live in harmony one with another. Unity in the home is crucial. This admonition, “Live in harmony one with another,” is not only true for the Church. It is true for the home. And if we’re not living in harmony in the home, it’s very difficult to live in harmony in the Church.

“Husband, wife, God saved you before you were perfect. In fact, you were very flawed. The point is, He loved you even when you didn’t love Him. So I appeal to you to begin living with your spouse as God has lived with you. Look at God’s mercies. When you repented, permitted Christ to be punished for your sins, received through faith the gift of God, God saved you and didn’t put you on probation or withhold His love until you had really proved yourself worthy.

Now you are to make these responses in love. First, daily present your ears, eyes, mouth, hands,

## **HUMBLE LOVE**

### **Romans 12:16**

feet, all the inner and outer parts of your being for the purposes that God wants to use them for. Second, don't let magazines or movies, *Playboy* or *Playgirl*, soap operas, godless, immoral plays, or novels shake your thinking about sex, marriage, family, or values. But fill your minds with God's attitudes and ways. Third, don't think your spouse got the best deal in your marriage. Get a more realistic view of yourself. Don't fake that you love your spouse. If your spouse does moral evil, you are not asked to condone it or to participate in it. Perhaps he would even be of such a nature that you would have to leave. But don't so react to the things in your spouse which irritate you that you fail to embrace praise and draw forth the beautiful qualities in their life which attracted you in the first place. Show affection. How about hugs and kisses, especially after you've been apart for the day? Have a fun contest daily to see if you can find more ways of showing your genuine love to your spouse than you did the day before. How about washing the dirty dishes or giving a good back rub? Don't back off, and see what kind of response you're getting. Just keep pouring on the love. Let the radiance of God's Spirit shine in your facial expression and body language, and keep serving the Lord with all your heart. He is your Resource from whom you draw pails of love and strength.

Don't be sour or down-faced. Be glad, even when things are so bad the only thing which makes you glad is the fact that the Lord is coming back. Don't fly off the handle when your spouse irritates you. Don't even slam the door, yell, or pack a suitcase. Escape a troubled room by retreating to the haven of prayer. Keep prayer parked outside your door like a get-away car. Let God hold your hand and talk with you when your spouse will do neither. Look at the needs in your spouse's life. Needs of spirit, body, soul. Needs for praise, for intimacy, for help, for assurance, for rest. Which ones can you alone meet? Which ones can you help to meet? Go ahead. Practice making your heart and house a safe and peaceful place in which your partner knows they really have a home. When you get chewed out, picked at, criticized or even ignored,

## **HUMBLE LOVE**

### **Romans 12:16**

look into your spouse's face, smile an honest smile, and say from your heart, "I really love you."

Instead of finding flaws, find strengths in your partner. Don't assume your spouse knows what you are thinking or that you love him or her. Say it. When your spouse feels good about some accomplishment or good fortune, do something special. Celebrate by having a party, a dinner. Have fun. Enjoy laughing together. Be sensitive to one another's moods, even to the point that both of you can cry when only one of you hurts. Live in harmony one with another."

With that kind of atmosphere in the home, it's easy to see why harmony would be taking place. It's easy to see, too, why Paul did not begin Romans 12 with a plea for harmony. Other things had to proceed it that it would flow naturally from it. I really feel—although this is a very free and expanded paraphrase of Romans 12 as applies to the home—that we could do similar kinds of things. We sought to do them all along as we've moved through Romans 12 and apply them to life in the Church, the practical ways we demonstrate love.

Paul here is calling not simply for a union of believers, but a unity of believers. There's a great deal of difference between union and unity. Union is all of us being gathered together in one place. Unity is us being gathered together in one heart. If you tie the tail of a dog and a cat together they have union, but not unity. And it is in the body of Christ that the Lord speaks to us: Live in harmony with one another.

The Old Testament illustration which I have read—Psalm 133—speaks to us of the beauty of unity in the body of Christ, this living in harmony with one another as it would be seen from an Old Testament viewpoint. "How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity," is the text. Then two illustrations are given which describe the beauty of unity. Both of the illustrations sort of fall over us. Like, what in the world is this business of oil dropping down on Aaron's head, through his beard, and on the robe of his collar? It sounds sort of messy. I've never thought of that as a very good symbol for unity. And the dew from Mount Hermon falling

## **HUMBLE LOVE**

### **Romans 12:16**

on Zion. I don't particularly like to go wading in the wet grass, so the dew didn't sound to me like a very good symbol of unity either. Yet, as I did some work in looking at what these images and symbols meant to the Old Testament person, it struck me how beautiful the image was and how it's fitting to describe Christian congregations.

The oil. The unity among Christians is like the oil by which Aaron was anointed that flowed on his head, down his beard, and down to the collar of his robe. Several things about that oil and the components of the oil are given to us in Exodus 30. Unity is compared to oil, and the oil which was upon Aaron had as its first characteristic the fact that it was rare. It was an oil which was not for general usage. It was made out of a special composition that the perfumer had worked and could only be used for those things which could be used for the worship of God in the temple and also as exclusive anointing oil for the priest himself. "You will make like it," Moses says on behalf of God, "no other composition." The unity, therefore, that is present among believers is a rare and precious thing. It is not found in any of society. Not found anywhere else in the world. When you tap into it, it's like atmosphere. You walk into the midst of a vibrant Body and feel the pulsating sense of unity. You look at the societies of this world and see the lack of unity in the world, and you perceive how rare unity is.

The oil is not only rare, but it is reserved for exclusive purposes. It could only be put forth upon the consecrated of God. When we come to the Book of Acts, we find that the oil of God's presence through the power of the Holy Spirit is also reserved. It's poured out upon those who are gathered praying to the Lord. It's not something which is dumped upon the world. In the Church, in the Christian family alone, can you get a feel of what God intended human society to be like? And it's liberally poured out. That's another thing about the oil. They didn't just put a little dab on Aaron. They emptied the contents on the high priest when he was consecrated for ministry, and it flowed down his beard and on the collar of his robe. That oil happened to be

## **HUMBLE LOVE**

### **Romans 12:16**

made of these kinds of compositions: 18 pounds of myrrh, 9 pounds of cinnamon, 9 pounds of sweet cane, 18 pounds of cassia, and a gallon and a half of olive oil. Then it was all mixed together, and when it ran down there was plenty.

Again, from our culture that sounds terribly sticky and not something that we would like happening to us. But it was a very, very beautiful sight to the Old Testament psalmist. Because he recognizes when the anointing oil is given, it is given in profusion. Likewise, on the Day of Pentecost when Peter notes that the Spirit of God has been poured forth upon the Church, he says in a very fascinating way as we relate it to Psalm 133: “What you see and hear, God has poured forth” (Acts 2). God pours forth the gift of His Spirit in unity upon the Church so that it is in very much effusion.

I think the thing about the anointing oil which most of all struck the senses of the psalmist must have been its fragrance. It was better than Chanel No. 5 or some of the other concoctions that are on the market. This oil had its own distinctive, radiant perfume to it. There was so much on Aaron that wherever he walked was a fragrance that surrounded him. It is in the Christian life. When there is unity among believers, when there is unity in the family, there’s a special kind of fragrance that is shed abroad everywhere. And people coming amongst us and dealing with us say, “There’s something there that is radiant and really beautiful.”

Paul comments in 2 Corinthians 2 on this fact that we are an aromatic kind of people. He says, “Thanks be to God who in Christ always leads us on to triumph, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.”

If our church were going through some great cataclysmic struggle of contention right now and I were to preach this sermon on unity, it would be much different than right now. What if Winston Churchill had said, “Let us fight on the beaches. Let us fight in the air. We will not surrender.

## **HUMBLE LOVE**

### **Romans 12:16**

We will keep on struggling.” What if he had said that in a time when there was total peace in the land? It wouldn’t have had quite the significance, as at wartime saying, “We’ll fight anywhere. We’ll pay any cost. We’ll fight any battle.” It’s kind of an amazing thing for me to find myself amidst a Body of people where I really believe what the psalmist is talking about. The oil which has that perfuming fragrance to it is present among us as the people of God—a rare, reserved, and precious kind of unity.

The psalmist says not only is this kind of unity like the perfuming oil, which is put on the high priest to anoint him for service. But it’s also like the dew from Mount Hermon, which falls on Zion. Hermon was way to the north, and it was the highest mountain in the land. It was toward Lebanon. There was a thick dew that fell. And the psalmist, as he thinks about the dry times in Zion and in Jerusalem and the hot day, thinks of the dew as something which is very cooling and refreshing, as bringing life and sustenance through the watering of the dry ground, bringing forth beauty.

So unity among believers has this quality of being cool and refreshing and fruit-filled toward the person who comes within the body of Christ. Wherever this unity is present, the psalmist says, God commands a blessing. It’s not surprising, therefore, to find in Acts 1:14 the disciples all in one accord devoting themselves to prayer. It isn’t but a moment after that that the Spirit of God is poured forth upon them. Why was it? Because they were gathered together in unity. And wherever God’s people are gathered together in that precious unity, God cannot help but command a blessing and multiply the people.

Sometimes we think, I think falsely, that the clue to bringing people to the Lord may be an activity. We get out and work and work, while not neglecting our obligation to witness. It seems to me that the New Testament had the perspectives right. That if the body of Christ is being what it should be, there is an aromatic fragrance in it that automatically it becomes a winsome place

## **HUMBLE LOVE**

### **Romans 12:16**

for those who do not know the Lord. They want to do more than make a decision to be saved from hell. They want to make a decision, a life response, that will lead them into living life now for God, with a kind of beauty which they see displayed about them.

So no wonder—whether it's the psalmist or it's the Apostle Paul—there can be a waxing eloquent on the subject of unity. Live in harmony with one another. Be of the same mind toward one another.

### **II. Paul recognizes, as well, that there are perils to this unity.**

He notes, as we look again at Romans 12:16, what these perils are. “Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited” (NIV).

Here Paul is not dealing with creedal differences or doctrinal diversity. It would be true that no unity would be possible where we do not continue in the apostle's doctrine. So to say to persons who believe something false about Jesus Christ that we're to be in harmony with one another is to present the impossible. The early disciples were gathered together and devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship. But the apostles' doctrine or teaching came before fellowship. If we aren't in one mind together in regard to the basic understanding of our faith, we cannot really be one in fellowship. So this “live in harmony” assumes that we are together when it comes to the basic understanding of God and who Jesus is.

We had a church orientation class for membership in the last three weeks. We have our church bylaws styled in such away that the first five articles of our sixteen truths which this church is committed to are what I would call the essentials. There can be no disagreement on them at all. For to disagree with them is to depart from the faith. Things like the authority of the Scripture, the nature of God as one—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The sinless and saving life of Jesus Christ who was crucified for our sins and physically rose again from the dead. On all of those things, there can really be no difference. But then our next eleven articles of faith, we candidly

## **HUMBLE LOVE**

### **Romans 12:16**

admit believers sometimes differ on interpretations. Some look at the Lord's coming this way, and some look at it that way. Some look at sanctification this way, and some look at it that way. In regard to the Holy Spirit, some see this, and some see that. This church happens to be committed to this particular viewpoint, but because we are Christians we recognize that the body of Christ embraces more than those who share this particular viewpoint. So come in and be among us. What we're trying to do is find a unity in Spirit together, recognizing those things upon which we cannot disagree, but recognizing those things, as well, in which we can have unity on and still agree to disagree. That's to have the same mind toward one another.

People can be very much united in doctrine, I have found, and very much divided in the body of Christ. I have seen in my experience that most of the divisions that come in the body of Christ have not been in my lifetime over doctrine. They have been often over personality. Someone has said our differences often lie deeper in our nature than the region in which we keep our creeds. The peril to unity, as Paul presents it, is the fact that there will be those in the Body who are minding the high things. That they're being wise in themselves.

This is such a radical message, which the apostle Paul proclaims. It's especially radical when we think of it in the setting in which the Church arose. Imagine with me a moment that you are in a first-century setting and that you are a part of the Christian congregation that is meeting in just any medium-sized town in the empire. Imagine that there is someone in your town who is a very notable citizen, and a person of means has just come to the Lord. They, as a new convert, are now coming to the Christian congregation, to the Church for the first time. As they come in, let us suppose for a moment that the leader says to them, "Will you sit here please?" And the convert says, "But I cannot sit here. For that would be to sit beside my slave." The leader says again, "Would you sit here please?" The convert says again, "But surely not beside my slave." The leader says again, "But would you sit here please?" And the convert then crosses the room,

## **HUMBLE LOVE**

### **Romans 12:16**

sits beside his slave, and gives him a kiss of peace. It was only in the Church where master and slave could sit side-by-side and truly be one. It was only in the Church where the barriers between the high and the low, between the mighty and the weak, between the knowledgeable and the unknowledgeable, between the Jew and the Greek, between the male and the female—where these barriers were breaking down, and the commonness of experience in Christ was emerging. The continual tension in the Church was that there might be people who were serving Christ out of a false motivation and wanting to put themselves forward as boss. Or maybe forming cliques in the Church where they wouldn't have something to do with other people. Often I've found in the Church that our most subtle cliques are not the cliques of the old versus the young but the young in the midst of the young or the old in the midst of the old saying, "We have these particular interests, and you don't have those particular interests so you go your way and we'll go our way—although our way happens to be better and more sophisticated because it is either more cultural or it's more spiritual for one reason or another." It is used to advance supremacy. Paul keeps us back to this theme. Be lowly. Don't be high and mighty. But humble yourselves. As a practical matter, when Paul came to Rome some years after writing this letter, he received a report from the Philippian church, which had been founded in the beginning of his second missionary journey. There were in that Philippian church two people who were having a difficult time getting along. Their problem was not doctrinal, evidently. Their problem was of this matter of being at odds one with another. It seems, as you read the Philippian letter, that the whole letter is directed toward these two people, although you can't hardly pick it up at first. When you come to 4:2, he's saying "I beseech you, Euodia and Syntyche, to agree together in the Lord." All of a sudden, it makes a lot of sense why he had written Philippians 2. "Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus. Though he was in the form of God, he thought not equality with God as a

## **HUMBLE LOVE**

### **Romans 12:16**

thing to be grasped, but humbled himself and went to the cross and became a slave, a servant for us.”

That great doctrinal admonition of the example of Christ was intended to gently persuade these two people and this church that had perhaps divided around them to agree one with another.

Euodia, whose name really meant “happy journey,” and Syntyche, whose name meant “good fortune” or “lucky.” Beautiful names. They were having trouble with one another.

What does Paul do to them? He’s appealing to them as they disagree. Let one of you, or both of you, become weak. Let both of you become lowly. When disunity is present among believers, and the issue for the disunity is not a doctrinal issue, but when disunity is present that is non-doctrinal it almost is always a result of forsaking the Cross. Of not minding the lowly things. It is a result of being conceited. So the Lord pleads to us in regard to love to be of similar mind one toward another, and not be proud. But associate with one another, even the lowly. And do the menial tasks, not just the big and important ones.

### **Closing Prayer**

Lord, we take this word from You, and we, first of all, apply it to our personal lives. We would recognize that there are moments when I get so busy trying to do the big things that the little things slip by me undone. So often it is in the kingdom of God that we are pressured to really think of the big things that really count for God. We push our way past a numerous array of small responsibilities that really are beckoning us. Somehow we justify going past the small responsibilities because we’re on our way to do something big and something important. All the while, that small thing or that person whom we have been avoiding because we haven’t had the time to talk to them, that goes waiting. So we hear Your Word coming to us again today. We see Your example placed before us once more. You risked for us. You became weak. You associated with us. You went all the way in service towards us. In our own individual lives and in our

## **HUMBLE LOVE**

### **Romans 12:16**

family—where at times we can cling to our rights and bring disunity through our desire to be master rather than servant—put within us Lord, a new, a serving heart, a gentle spirit, a kindness. Within our church family, as well. Lord Jesus, let us have toward one another a servant heart. May there be a continual fragrant spirit about our walk with one another so that it will be pleasing to You. It will be a refreshing experience for those who come into the church from the world, from out in the cold, from a lack of intimacy and warmth and person regard. That we will have in this Body a concern for more than programs and things—a concern and welcome heart for people. That we'll never see persons as a means to an end. But as the ends themselves. That we are here to bless one another, to meet the needs spiritually in one another's lives. And to be joyful and to weep and to be linked together arm-in-arm and heart-to-heart with each other. Lord, we're gathered today to partake of communion which expresses our unity in You. We are gathering in one accord. We're in one place. We ask that Your Spirit will be liberally poured forth on all of our hearts, that we might have that gentle and refreshing rain of Your Spirit's presence. Through Jesus our Lord. Amen.