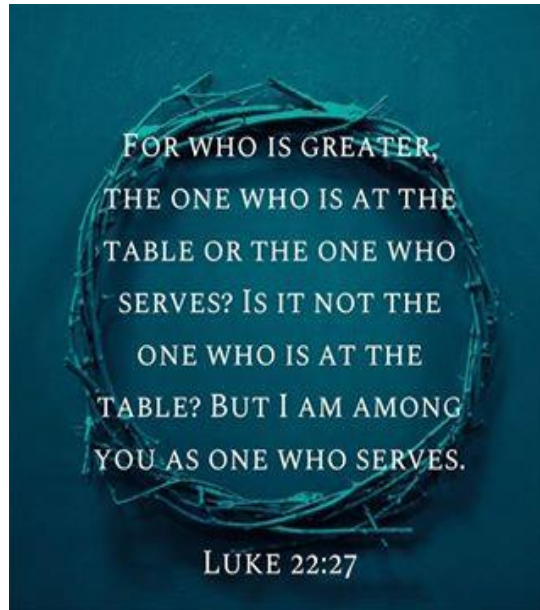


COSTLY, YET FREE



It's easy enough for us to put our arms around each other and sing, "We Are One in The Spirit," or to sit in our fellowships and pretend that we have unity with the saints around the world. But when we begin spending time with each other, as we are bound to do if we're going to get on with the job of spreading the gospel, when we start having some real contact with saints in other parts of town, and when we begin to bring our homes into the dimension of the kingdom of God, we quickly discover that unity with brothers and sisters is much easier to sing about and talk about than it is to live.

The Price



How can you live in unity with a professing believer who's forever trying to push you around? How can you work in unity with a brother who always tries to make you carry the heavy end while he carries the light end? How can you have unity with this super spiritual sister who is constantly giving you that

pained look as if she just took another x-ray of your soul, and found cancer? How can you have unity with a brother who always manages to get a headache at the last minute? Or this sister who endlessly complains? Or this brother who is mercilessly critical? Or that “walking Bible,” who has all the answers? Or Calamity Jane who wants to send you on an ambulance run every third day?

When you have to live at close quarters with brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ, it isn't exactly Paradise. To live in harmony with brothers and sisters is a very costly thing, as our Lord makes clear in the following passage:

A dispute also arose among them, which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors.

But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves.....

Luke 22:24-27

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, (plural), that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you, (singular), that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren.”

Luke 22:31

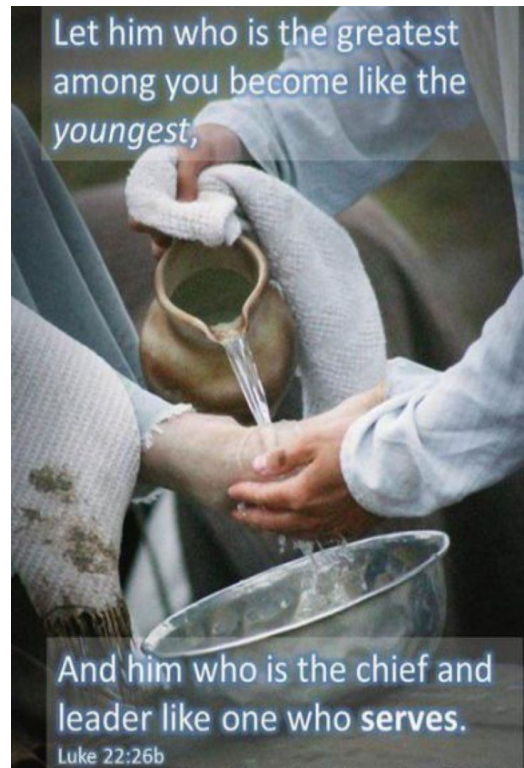
Those men around Jesus weren't as subtle as we are. We would never think of coming out in the open and having a dispute about which of us is the greatest.

We just spend ninety percent of our waking hours trying to prove which of us is the greatest.

Our disharmony, strife, cynicism, and suspicion of others, our ingratitude and our sullen moods are all evidence of how much of this is going on in our hearts. The advice our Lord gave these men is just as urgently needed by us.

To live in unity with brothers and sisters near and far is going to cost us three things --- three things which presumably went down with us into the waters of our baptism and should never have surfaced again, but which are in glaring evidence every day of our lives.

Living in unity with our brethren will cost us our ego.



The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest and the leader as one who serves.

Instead of gunning for the top of the pile, or striving to stay on top, (if that's where we think we are), we now settle joyfully for the bottom. If I'm on the bottom of the pile and walk up to someone after fellowship and say, "Hello, my name is Fred," and get the Sphinx response.. "Who do you think you are?" ...

How can I be crushed? I'm already at the bottom. If I've really chosen the lowest room and offer five people rides homes, and they're all going out for coffee with others, my joy in the Lord is still truly unshaken. If nobody appreciates my testimony or notices my accomplishments, I'm still together because, praise God, Jesus is with me down here in the lowest room.

If we are not willing to pay the price of really losing our ego day-in-and-day-out, if we're afraid to be the youngest, the littlest, the lowest in the actual knocks and wounds of living, then we really aren't serious about living in harmony with one another in Jesus Christ.

Living in unity with our brethren will cost us our convenience.



*For which is the greater, one who sits at table or one who serves?
Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who
serves.*

And one who serves *never has anything at his own convenience.*

He's always on call.

His plans are always being interrupted.

He can be roused in the middle of the night; torn away from the dinner table. His shoes have just been kicked off in preparation for a rest when the phone rings and he has to get into his shoes and go.

Of course, Jesus calls the shots. He tells us when to put on our shoes. He makes clear which of five simultaneous calls we are to respond to. And he tells us when to sit still and rest even if ten people are paging us. But when he calls we cannot say, "Not tonight, Lord, I'm too tired." "Not this week, Lord, I have a cold."

The Christian who somehow manages never to go out of his way nor to allow any disruptions in his plans is hardly likely to taste unity in the Body or harmony in his home.

In our fellowships there is often an unspoken desire to keep things shallow, so that we won't have to be inconvenienced; to stay a certain distance from those people with problems: getting involved with them will be just too disrupting.

But convenience is for Gentile kings and middle-class vegetables. Serving the Lord with gladness in the Body means learning to live a life of interruption, learning to constantly be going out of your way— with no one keeping track of all our heroic self—denial or appreciating our service but the Lord himself.

It means spending time doing things for brothers and sisters who never even say thanks, and still to go on rejoicing.

Living in unity with our brethren will cost us our heart.



“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have (all of) you that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail; and when you are turned again, strengthen your brethren.”

We do not strengthen our brothers and sisters by merely quoting scriptures and giving them hug.

It takes a heart that goes out of itself and really starts to care.

A heart that weeps, prays, pleads, encourages.

A heart that remembers when everyone else forgets.



Jesus put his heart into praying for Peter.

And Peter is to put his heart into strengthening his brethren.

And we are to put our hearts into doing the same.

How can our hearts be open to God and closed to each other?

How can our hearts be open to Jesus,
yet cool to brothers in inner city Detroit or Mexico or other fellowships?

Why are we afraid to put our hearts into caring for our brothers?

Are we afraid our heart might get broken?

What about our Master's broken heart?

If we insist on hanging on to our little hearts and protecting them from all bumps and scratches we shall *never taste unity* in the Body.

A Price Already Paid



Unity in the Body is going to be costly, so costly that not one of us could live this life if it depended on us. Praise God that the power to pay the price and walk this blessed road is imparted to us as a gift from the Lord.

Notice that the entire passage we've been looking at in Luke 22, with its high demands, revolves around the sustaining presence of Jesus.

“I am among you as one who serves...

I appoint you a kingdom...

I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail...”

This changes everything.

For it means that costly as the life of unity may be, it comes to us free.

“I am the way. I enable you to do these difficult things. Come and get under the yoke with me and I will teach you from within your own heart. Just as surely as I am your salvation, just as surely as I am your life, I am also your unity with brothers and sisters.

Let go of your ego and take hold of me.

Let go of your compulsive need for convenience, and take hold of me.

Let your heart move out upon the stormy waters and rely on me, and I will make you one with each other.”

Unity in the Body of Christ comes by the same hand that made us part of the Body in the first place. We cannot bring it about. Only Jesus can bring it about--and he will. Just as surely as we partake of the one loaf of his body and drink of the one cup which is his blood, Jesus himself will give us each the power to be as the youngest, to live as one who serves.

He will enable us to put our hearts into strengthening our brothers and sisters, so that we can get on with the work God has given us to do.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, our salvation, our life, you paid the price for us to live in harmony with our brothers and sisters; may we be willing to embrace this unity at the cost of our ego's, our convenience and our very hearts. May we not fear being lowly, rejected, overlooked, unrecognized, because this is where you dwell. As you are a servant among us, may we answer the servant call as well. May we serve with joy and gladness, embracing the disruptions you bring to us, not using being inconvenienced as an excuse not to serve. Dear Lord, turn our hearts. Give us compassionate, kind, caring hearts that seek to strengthen our brethren. Give us hearts that risk being wounded and broken, because your heart was wounded and broken. And Lord give us vision to see that any cost to us is a gift, because you are with us as we pay, you who are our greatest gift. We exchange our ego's, our comforts, our closed hearts, for your free gift of unity. May we move out into stormy waters, empowered to serve you and the world together.

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