

## Chapter 12

### Filling in the Gaps

#### *Submitting to one another in the fear of God*

One of the most moving stories in the Bible comes out of the account of what we call 'The Last Supper'. Having eaten the Passover meal with His disciples, Jesus rose from the table and wrapped himself in a towel, took water, knelt and washed the feet of the disciples. What a tremendous act of service. He knew this night He would be betrayed and arrested. By this time tomorrow He would be lying dead in the tomb having suffered as no flesh and blood has suffered. If that were you and me we would probably be self-absorbed. We would ask our brothers to pray for us. We would probably have a distant look in our eye and not be very good company around the table.

Why such a great act of service and sacrifice? He was not thinking of Himself or seeking the comfort of the disciples. Even on this night He was thinking of them. What a tremendous example for us as to how we should think of one another. He washed their feet. On this night of all nights! Not just eleven pairs of feet. He washed the feet of His betrayer, Judas Iscariot. He knew what was in Judas' heart and still He served him.

Jesus, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords; the Son of the Living God took the role of the least of all servants and said. "*If I your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash the feet of one another.*" (John 13:14). Yet in the church and between the different denominations we do not even dream of washing each others feet. For some, it is their worst nightmare! Yet even when people leave our church, hurt us, and appear to set up 'in competition' to us, we should have an attitude of servanthood.

"Impossible!" I can hear it on the lips of some Christians even as they read this. "Ridiculous!"

Impossible? No! Jesus washed the feet of His betrayer just before His arrest. Ridiculous? Only if you believe that what Jesus did was ridiculous.

There were twelve founder members of Charlton and Blackheath Christian Fellowship. We had all, until recently, been members of St John's Church in Blackheath. When we left and the Fellowship started we hurt the vicar, Michael Kelsey. I know, because he told me. We did not deliberately hurt him, but he was deeply hurt. I mention his name, because some men deserve honour even if they do not seek it. He reacted in a Christ-like way. It was not impossible or ridiculous for a man of Michael's spiritual stature to forgive us. He loved the church – Jesus' church. "I am anxious that no dishonour should come to the name of the Lord or to the Kingdom of God," he told me. "Therefore, I give you my blessing." These were not empty words. On more than one occasion he wrote about us positively in his Parish Magazine that went to every home in his parish! He washed our feet. It is no wonder

that St John's Church in Blackheath has prospered both spiritually and materially since that day.

Church leaders! As you work to build your churches and congregations remember the attitude of Jesus. He did not seek the highest place of honour. He did not have a bishop's throne. The apostle Peter did not set himself up in a fine palace separate from the people and only see them by appointment. He went and turned the world upside down until he was crucified upside down on a Roman cross. Paul did not work to make a name for himself, but counted as nothing all that was to his advantage in the world.

The early church leaders did not wear special robes but carried a special message of salvation. The only procession they took part in was to their deaths. They did not sit on committees but sat in jail. They did not go after roles for themselves but souls for Jesus. They did not deliver sermons but were delivered up to death.

*'Jesus said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave-*

*-just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'" Matthew 20:25-28)*

Jesus did not come to take a place of honour. He came to serve. He did not come for a soft comfortable life but the discomfort of the cross.

Paul summed it up so well in Philippians 2:4-11:

*Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*

*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,*

*Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,*

*But made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.*

*And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.*

It speaks for itself.

*Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,*

*That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven,  
and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,*

*And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the  
glory of God the Father.*

When we put ourselves first we are not following Jesus. When we build our church, our denomination or our ministry we are not putting the kingdom of God first. When we consider our church or denomination better than others we do not have the mind that is in Christ Jesus. When we keep our members for ourselves and do not share their gifts with other churches we are acting out of selfish ambition. Vain conceit pops up when we have a superior attitude to another because their doctrine is not the same as ours. There is no unity in our churches!

*Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself  
will be exalted. (Matthew 23:12)*

Unity requires that we all humble ourselves. Unity cannot come until we learn to wash one another's feet and serve one another. Pride and unity will not mix. It was pride that caused the men of Shinar to build the Tower of Babel and when it was ruined so was their unity.

I am not the greatest supporter of 'Bible lists' but I recently went through the New Testament and found the different occasions where Christians are encouraged to perform a positive action towards other Christians. Some are very close in meaning, but whenever a different word has been used I have included it in the list. Where there is a duplication I have only shown the first verse in which it appears. My 'list' is taken from the New King James version.

Wash <b>one another's</b> feet	John 13:14
Love <b>one another</b>	John 13:34
Be kindly affectionate to <b>one another</b>	Romans 12:10
Give preference to <b>one another</b>	Romans 12:10
Be of the same mind toward <b>one another</b>	Romans 12:16
Let us not judge <b>one another</b>	Romans 14:13
Receive <b>one another</b>	Romans 15:7
Admonish <b>one another</b>	Romans 15:14
Greet <b>one another</b> with a holy kiss	Romans 16:16
Wait for <b>one another</b>	1 Corinthians
11:33	
Care for <b>one another</b>	1 Corinthians
12:25	
Through love serve <b>one another</b>	Galatians 5:13
Bear <b>one another's</b> burdens	Galatians 6:2
Bearing with <b>one another</b>	Ephesians 4:2
We are members of <b>one another</b>	Ephesians 4:25
Be kind to <b>one another</b>	Ephesians 4:32
Forgive <b>one another</b>	Ephesians 4:32
Submit to <b>one another</b>	Ephesians 5: 21
Do not lie to <b>one another</b>	Colossians 3:9

Abound in love to <b>one another</b> 3:12	1 Thessalonians
Comfort <b>one another</b> 4:18	1 Thessalonians
Edify <b>one another</b>	1 Thessalonians 11
Exhort <b>one another</b> daily	Hebrews 3:13
Consider <b>one another</b> to stir up love and good works	Hebrews 10:24
Do not speak evil of <b>one another</b>	James 4:11
Do not grumble against <b>one another</b>	James 5:9
Confess your trespasses to <b>one another</b>	James 5:16
Pray for <b>one another</b>	James 5:16
Have compassion for <b>one another</b>	1 Peter 3:8
Be hospitable with <b>one another</b> without grumbling	1 Peter 4:9
Minister gifts to <b>one another</b>	1 Peter 4:10
Be submissive to <b>one another</b>	1 Peter 5:5
We have fellowship with <b>one another</b>	1 John 1:7

Here are thirty three occasions when we are instructed to be, talk, act, think or speak positively to our fellow Christians. This is not just in the context of our own congregation, but towards members of the church that Jesus is building. We should have a ‘one another’ attitude towards men and women in other denominations. We should have this ‘one another’ attitude towards leaders in other churches. We should have a ‘one another’ attitude towards a brother that betrays us or sins against us in any way – whatever their denomination. We need it within our own congregations too! Our own congregations would be a fine training ground to practice these ‘one anothers’. Among established Christians there are so many disagreements and arguments, so much unforgiveness that it is only by the grace of God that we are able to build anything of value in the kingdom of God.

When I was in active eldership in my church, there were three elders. We made it a point of practice in our decision making that unless all three were in unanimous agreement on any issue we would not act. In this way, any action that we took we took in ‘unity’. It was not perfect, but it did mean that there was no root of division in the decisions that we took. It meant that we were sometimes disappointed personally, because ‘we did not get our own way’, but if one of us felt really strongly about an issue we would all continue to pray about it until we were sure that we were like-minded. It avoided the dangers of a ‘one man ministry’ and it was a safeguard for the church as a whole.

By building this unity in the eldership, we built it into the church. As a result we had the support of the members of the church. At one time, in the early life of the church a decision was needed that would have changed our whole direction. It was presented openly to the whole church and when the time came for a decision, we had complete unanimity and did not proceed. One member even wrote and said that he had not heard from the Lord, but was in total support of whatever decision was taken. I believe it is one of the reasons why the church was considered by more ‘established’ churches as very radical. However we did see the blessings of God in the full manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

I remember listening to John Wimber giving testimony of his early Christian life. He was in the popular music industry and after he was born again he was a witness to many from that industry. It was not long before drug addicts, alcoholics, hippies and drop-outs were coming to his church, and people began to complain that they were spoiling the church. "Things are not the way they used to be!" was a common complaint. People were thinking of themselves and not of others. They did not have a 'one another' attitude. They should have rejoiced that such men and women were being saved but instead were uncomfortable because things were not the same. They were not putting into practice the 'one anothers'.

The concept of 'one another' is not so radical. The opposite of 'one another' is 'myself'. In chapter 10 we saw how sin puts a hole in the body of Christ, the church. The centre of sin is 'myself'. I am not sure if there are any examples of sinning for 'one another'. We may do something for another which is a sin but our motives are probably selfish.

A man may steal because his family is hungry, but it is still sin. If we do not honour our parents it is because we want to do what we want to do. Maybe we do not want to make time for them. A lie is to stop us from being caught out in another wrong doing. We are jealous because someone has something that we want for ourselves. Murder is committed because we are angry with another or because we selfishly want to steal from them. The motive for all sin is selfishness. It is 'myself' and not 'another'.

There is a way that we could learn to put the 'one anothers' into practice. The above list of thirty three is not conclusive, but if the church was truly practicing them, the unity in the church would soar and the Lord would fulfil his promise and command blessing into our communities.

Take a 'one another' from the list and actively seek to put it into practice. Do not just allow one day, but start with a minimum of a week with no upper limit. Meditate on it. Pray for grace to put it into practice. Start to put it into practice. Allow God, through His Holy Spirit to show you times when you have fallen short. Ask Him if there are any situations that you need to repent of and put right. Cultivate a habit of actively practicing the 'one another' until you are sure that you have grasped the principle and it is becoming a part of your life style or speech.

Let us follow through one example. Forgive one another.

1. Meditate on forgiveness and unforgiveness. Find scriptures that deal with forgiveness. The Lord's Prayer, as we know, says, 'Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us'. Have we truly forgiven others? Are we holding on to unforgiveness in our hearts? If we are with-holding forgiveness from others we are asking the Lord to forgive us in the same measure. Mediate on this. The story of the unforgiving servant told by Jesus in Matthew 18 says that we will be handed over to the torturers if we do not forgive from the heart. If we know what the Bible says on the subject it will help us put it into a right perspective.
2. Pray for grace to practice forgiveness. We need grace at times. We have all been terribly hurt by others. The father that abused us. The victim of rape. The

person that was bullied as a child. The one that betrayed us. We have all been victims at one time or another. There are circumstances when we find it difficult to forgive. We need God's grace. Maybe we need to see how much He has forgiven us to help us.

3. Begin to forgive people that have hurt you. It does not necessarily mean that you have to go to them (although that may be necessary in some circumstances), but forgive them unconditionally in your heart in prayer.
4. Let the Holy Spirit prompt you and remind you of areas of unforgiveness and areas that you may have hurt others and need to repent. These should not be times of negative introspection and searching for things. If there are circumstances that need such healing, if we are open to Him, He will show us. It should not be a negative experience whereby we condemn ourselves but a positive releasing of hidden hurts. I have known many people physically healed as they release forgiveness in their hearts.
5. In your daily life continually forgive those who hurt you. Keep no record of wrongs.
6. When you are sure that you have fully understood and are putting it into practice start on the next 'one another'.

It sounds simplistic, but gradually in your life and in the church, you will see that the holes that give the devil a foothold will gradually be filled. Your life and the life of your church will begin to see more of God's blessing as He commands.

Unless we put the 'one anothers' into practice, especially among the leadership of the churches, the blessings of unity will not come. This is not a call for a one world church, but a call to replace the foundation stone of unity in the church. A W Tozer is widely quoted as saying that worship is the missing jewel in the crown of the evangelical church. I believe that unity is a missing crown in Jesus' church!