

## Harmony

Sermon Sept 27, 2020

Scripture reading: Matthew 20: 20-28, Philippians 2:1-5

Golden verse: *“Be like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.”*

Philippians 2:2b

HARMONY. What a wonderful word. ... HARMONY.

O, what a joy it is to listen to a choir who sing in harmony. What a joy it is to listen to a symphony with closed eyes, relaxing; to listen to the combination of simultaneously sounded musical notes which are producing a pleasing effect. It is such a joy for my ears and my heart. It is such a pleasure to watch a picture in which you discover harmony. It is such a joy to admire the colors in harmony, which are providing a pleasurable effect.

It is such a wonderful pleasure to worship in a congregation where there is harmony. It is refreshing to wake up in the morning, knowing that you go to a workplace where colleagues work in harmony. It is such a joy and blessing to be part of a family where there is harmony.

When we are enjoying harmony, we feel energized and we do our very best to keep everything in harmony.

I really miss our choir, and cannot wait for the time when we can enjoy again as they lift up our service in such great harmony.

If you watched the movie “Sister Act”, you remember that in the Abbey there was a great choir, but the choir members were not taught one by one how to sing in harmony. Amongst those humble sisters, there were some self-ambitious voices and they had their own-interest, as Paul would say “vain conceit”.

In these verses, Paul highlights five topics, whose poisons can destroy community, a work group, a family or relationships. These five barriers are: selfishness; vain conceit; lust of self-glory; arrogance; and self-interest.

We will debrief these topics briefly then we will see how these can be neutralized in us, and how we can help people who were damaged by some of these destructive behaviours.

### 1. Selfishness

Paul starts, not accidentally, with this horrible weakness. We all have this tendency in our blood since our birth. We already see the selfishness in our young children, as they start to communicate at a very early age: this is mine, that is mine too, and that one up there is mine as well.

Selfishness is lack of consideration for other people. A selfish person is excessively interested only in him or herself, disregarding others. Selfishness results in many other sins and bad characters. Selfishness withdraws from responsibilities and places more responsibilities on others' shoulders. Selfishness does not care about the other person's needs. Selfishness cannot even see the partner's, colleague's or friend's needs.

We learn about the Lord Jesus that there was no selfishness in Him. He once announced his program, saying that *“the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”*. (Matthew 20: 28) An example of perfect selflessness is Jesus Christ.

## 2. Vain Conceit

Vanity is a more dangerous sin, which can destroy groups and relationships. Vanity is an excessive pride in, or admiration of, one's own qualities, abilities, appearance or achievements. Vanity is excessively proud, and often has the lack of reality. These people can be extremely offensive and angry. Often, they are unable to sincerely apologize or to recognize their own mistakes. Often, they are unable to forgive and forget. They have great difficulties to reach true self-knowledge because they refuse to look into the mirror. Even if they see some of their own mistakes, in a forceful way they invest a lot of effort and energy to explain that they are right, and the other person is wrong. Therefore, they rarely have a realistic picture of themselves. Vain people cannot be effectively warned of their faults because they feel offended, and they are unwilling to change.

## 3. Lust of Self-Glory

We often meet people who have a huge desire to be glorified. A few days ago, I was talking to a person who was promoted in his job. Quietly, somebody told this person that his boss is a person who likes to be glorified and will not accept any contradictions. “You have to agree with your new boss, and you have to glorify all his proposals, and ideas, or you will be fired in no seconds.”

About 32 years ago, I often was invited for a Sunday lunch with a family where the wife was an awesome and famous cook. However, every time when the soup was served, she came up with the same comments: “Probably you won’t want a second helping of this soup because this time I did not do a good job and so it is not very tasty.” Then, suddenly, the whole table started to sing glory about her and her soup, and we all tried to reach out for the serving spoon to get more soup.

## 4. Arrogance

Arrogance is an attitude of superiority manifested in an overbearing manner or in wrong assumptions. Arrogance is an insulting way of thinking or behaving that comes from believing that “I am better, smarter, or more important than other people”.

Spiritual arrogance is the deception that our strength is our own and cuts us off from our foundation in Christ. Not arrogance, but only our humility can keep us rooted in our Lord, who said: *“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”* (1 Corinthians 10:12) Spiritual arrogance also involves deception and manipulation. We hide our true condition, even from ourselves, and no longer rely on God’s Word.

## 5. Self-Interest

The definition of self-interest is one’s personal interest or advantage, especially when pursued without regard for others. Self-interest is simply taking care of him/herself in a selfish way. Self-

centered persons are excessively concerned with themselves and their own needs. Self-centered people tend to ignore the needs of others and only do what's best for them. People can also call them egocentric, egoistic, and egoistical. This feeling or behaviour is far away from harmony or being “one” in a relationship.

HUH, it is so tiring to hear about all these negative behaviours. It is shocking to recognize some or all of these in our own lives, since we all are human beings, and including myself. In different moments or situations, we all can recognize these sins in us.

The word of God provides us with a few tools which we could use in our relationships to create harmony. Let's see these now.

### 1. Consolation

Comfort each other, Paul says. There is consolation in Christ.

The Holy Spirit is always close to comfort us in every situation. One of the Holy Spirit's names is COMFORTER. The Comforter will encourage you, said our Lord. Our responsibility is to encourage each other, mostly those who are discouraged. We have to watch over and care for those who are “on the floor”. We have to lift them up kindly with gentleness. We should use the messages like: hey, don't be discouraged, I am here for you; you are not alone in this; I will stay with you and I will hold you in my arms.

Let's recall those moments, when in our childhood, our parents or somebody gave us a little praise. Just a little praise gave us wings.

Remember that today probably YOU are providing encouragement to others. Tomorrow, you might be weak and you will need their encouragements.

### 2. Admonition

We were talking about this last week already. Wonderful mothers, loving partners, great friends and colleagues can provide helpful admonition with love. These pieces of advice are coming from heart to heart, from love because they really love the other person.

### 3. Mercy and Compassion

Our Lord Jesus Christ knew our weaknesses, but still He was talking with mercy and compassion. Our responsibility is to protect each other, to strengthen and to comfort each other.

### 4. Unity in Spirit

We have to have a communion, unity in Spirit. This means that we have to invite the Spirit of God to dwell in us and amongst us, in our communities and relationships. We should make every effort to be in harmony with the Holy Spirit and with each other: working together, praying together and loving each other. Let us nurture and strengthen each other constantly.

### 5. Be Like-Minded

*“Be like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.” (Philippians 2:2b)*

This is a very hard requirement. Getting two hard-willed people to come to one will is almost impossible. But if both bow their heads and humble their hearts before the Almighty God, it is possible. In such a relationship, we can experience miracles. Jesus says: *“truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.”* (Matthew 18:19) Let us pray King David’s prayer: *“Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.”* (Psalm 143:10)

Teach me, Lord, to recognize Your will and to act accordingly.

If we make those five mistakes, which were mentioned by Paul, let’s use these great tools to correct ourselves and to love and serve as Christ’s children.

May the Lord Jesus Christ increase our faith and our actions to love and serve as His children.  
Amen