**Unity and Diversity in the Church**

*Class 7: Counsel for Christians in the Minority*

**Introduction**

Good morning! Last week we focused on life in the local church through the lens of the majority. Today, we’ll think through the perspective of the minority. We’re working from that same passage we looked at last time in Romans 12. It’s on your handout, and it says:

**9**Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. **10**Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. **11**Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. **12**Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. **13**Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

Last week, we picked out a few descriptive words from this text about our love for one another in the local church. Today we’re going to apply those same words to the minority; you can see those words on the front of your handout:

1. **Genuine.** Last week we said that our goal isn’t just to love each other, but to like each other. But it’s really hard to like someone you rub shoulders with, if you’re not honest with them. So we’re gonna think about how honesty helps us to genuinely love one another.
2. [Our love should be] **Self-forgetting.** That’s another way of saying, “Outdo one another in showing honor.” We’ll see how considering Jesus’ service encourages us in the minority to keep putting others before ourselves.
3. **Zealous.** How can those in the minority zealously love their brothers and sisters in the majority? We’ll talk about that.
4. **Constant.** When two people get married – they promise, they covenant to constantly love each other – right, in sickness and in health. Well local church members aren’t necessarily stuck together forever. But while we are stuck together for however long, we covenant to constantly love one another– in happiness and sorrow. That’s what we promise each other every time we take the Lord’s Supper.
5. **Sacrificial.** We’ll see how sacrificial love is a powerful platform for those in the minority to love those in the majority.

But before we go any further, though, I wanna remind us of what we mean by “minority” and “majority.” So last week we had an awkward show of hands to see who was in the majority. With the hope of experiencing that same awkwardness: ***Let me see a quick show of hands: which of you are in the minority in this church?* [Call on someone who seems like a typical majority and ask them ways are they in the minority]** Right! That’s an example of the many dimensions that diversity has. When we consider political affiliation, income, personality type, ethnicity, and other categories of diversity we talked about in our first week – we see that diversity is like a diamond: It’s multi-faceted. We can be in the majority for some categories, and the minorities for others. If we only think of diversity in one way – we risk missing the beauty of our diamond. So with that in mind, let’s move on to our first word: **Genuine**

For those in the minority, what does it looks like to love genuinely? Well honestly, it looks like…being honest! We should be honest with ourselves and with others about who God has made us. Earlier in Romans 12, Paul says the body of Christ has different parts. Some of us are elbows, others of us are ankles, others of us are eyes, fingers, and so on. The point is that we’re all made different. But Paul emphasizes that we’re still part of *the same* body. And we’re not only all *valued* in the body of Christ, we’re all *useful* in the body of Christ. To be clear: we’re not valuable because we are useful; we’re valuable because God has made us and saved us. Right – we talked about that in the image of God class.

But at the same time, it’s our differences that make us able to love one another in uniquely useful ways. So because [Abigail Tanner] and I are different, she can love you in ways that I just can’t. We often talk about a married couple in this way, right? Husband and wife made different. And that means they can love each other in complementing ways. And so the power of their marriage is rooted in those differences.

But if we are *honest*, as a minority, we don’t always feel that power to love others, right? It’s easy to feel like the body works just fine without us. Ya know, “We’re a couple of ankles in a church full of elbows.” So we might feel like, “none of the elbows care about us.” And what’s worse is we can start believing what we are feeling. Satan wants us to believe that we are not valuable. And one way we apply that false belief is that we try to be something we’re not. Ya know, we hide those things that make us ankles. And we just try to be elbows. But brothers and sisters, that hinders God’s purposes for the church. No other part of the body can do the job the ankles can do! Being someone we’re not works against the God who made us. It lies about his work. And when we’re working against God, it’s really hard to do the work of God. It’s really hard to love others and even harder to like them. Right, how many of us actually liked the people in high school we were trying to be like?

So it’s really easy to feel left out because you’re not a certain age. Or because you’re not friends with a certain pastor. Or because you’re not being asked out, or because you’re not socially savvy, or because of your gender or for whatever reason you might be a minority. It’s easy to feel like our church doesn’t need you. But let me just make clear: We need you! If our church only has one type of person, we’re going to be more of a cult of personality and less of a church of Jesus Christ. If the church is the body of Christ, honesty is like Calcium. So be honest with yourself and with others about the different, good ways that God has made you. Genuine love is impossible without honesty.

Last week we had Jeremy McClain encourage us through some little interviews. Today I’m going to be asking Nile and Stacy some questions after we look at some of our words. So come on up, Nile and Stacy:

**Questions for Nile & Stacy:**

1. *One time at Weds. Bible Study, Nile, you shared about how “you’re just different.” What did you mean?*
2. *Stacy, what would you say the main type of personality is in our church?*
3. *Nile – do you ever feel pressure to be someone you’re not? Why or why not?*
4. *Stacy, how have you encouraged Nile to be himself?*

Let’s move on to our second word: **2. Self-forgetting.**

C.S. Lewis once said that, “humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less often.” Last week we talked about how one way to think of yourself less is to be more aware of your own culture. But we still live in a fallen world. And sometimes as those in the majority, we don’t even notice how our culture is affecting others. But as those in minorities, we always notice the culture of the majority. Cecilia and Sara shared about this a few weeks ago. Now, we just talked about how one bad reaction to the majority culture is to completely conform. Right, “God made me an ankle, but I’m gonna be an elbow!”

But brothers and sisters, there is another danger we must avoid and that is clinging too tightly to whatever makes you a minority. So instead of thinking too little about what makes you different, you think too highly of it. And you begin to only prefer people who share or appreciate your differences. You begin to think that only those people could ever understand you. So if you’re a democrat maybe you begin to favor the democrats. If you’re a childless couple maybe you begin to think families think less of you.

Your letting your differences define you. And because being a minority by definition means your differences are obvious, it’s easy to hold them too tightly. And if I can be frank, I think this is a *particular* temptation for those in the ethnic minority. Right, so for me being defined by ethnicity could sound like me saying *or thinking*, “My name is Isaac Adams, and I’m black. That’s what defines me, and it effects how I see everything – including this church.”

So, my sister or brother in the minority (any kind of minority) what should we do when we realize we’re letting our differences define us? We remember that Jesus defines us first and foremost. And that he defines all other Christians. After all, did you notice in verse 10 on the front of your handout how Paul describes our affection for one another? He says it shouldbe *brotherly*. Why would he use a family metaphor? It’s because Christians are one family.

Understanding that we share a new identity with others in Jesus reminds us that we are all a part of this family. Equally valued and equally loved. So though you may be a minority in our church, you are not a minority in Jesus. So we fight to not say, “I’m just the black guy,” or “I’m just the single mom” or “I’m just the laid back person and everyone else is Type-A.” It doesn’t mean we stop being those things or that those things aren’t good; they just don’t define us. So, who are you? A Christian. And that means you lay down your preferences, your differences so that Jesus can be exalted. We don’t necessarily focus on who is or is not laying down their preferences or differences because we know that we are called to lay ours down for the sake of unity. For the sake of Christ. With that said here are some good things for the minority to keep in mind:

1. *That you’re not the only type of minority.*
2. *That what makes you minority does not define you; Jesus does.* So if you’re a minority in any regard, remember what the hymn writer says: “Hallelujah: Jesus is my life.”
3. *That Jesus was a minority, too (Heb. 4:15-16).* Jesus was the only God-man on the planet. He was lonely. He was misunderstood unto death. That’s not to say that your loneliness or hurt as a minority isn’t legitimate. Ya know, “buck up. Jesus could handle being a minority.” No, it’s to say that your dying to yourself to love those in the majority is a little picture of what Jesus did for you. That glorifies God. And Scripture promises that Jesus is able to sympathize with you in everyway, and that includes being a minority.

**Questions for Nile:**

1. *Nile, how have you dealt with the temptation to pride yourself on being different?*

Let’s move on to our next word: **Zealous**

So, like last week, I want this third point to layer over the others we’ve already discussed. We should be genuine. We should be self-forgetful. And we should be zealous in being those things. “OK,” you say. “I get that, Isaac. But what should I actually *do* zealously*.* Are there tangible applications?” Thank you for asking. I can’t give you an exhaustive list because I don’t know everything about your situation. That said, here are some thoughts for what they’re worth. I think zealously loving, as a minority, looks like…

* ***Creating solutions, not just criticizing them.*** *(Philippians 2:14)*

We talked about this a few weeks ago, but a particular temptation for those in the minority is to complain with other minorities without any tangible changes in mind. Well, though you can criticize in a godly way, devote much of your energy to coming up with a solution, too. I would actually say you should be devoting more energy to coming up with a solution to the problem, than just criticizing the problem. Josiah Davis was an example of this: He felt isolated as a new member so…he started a welcoming ministry to new members. His different experiences gave him different insights to serve our church in a unique way! So remember, it’s so much easier to criticize than create.

* ***Starting the conversation*** *(Matthew 18:15-20; Galatians 6:1-5)*

So we’ve said that culture may be invisible to the majority, but hardly to the minority. And I think this means that those in the minority have an opportunity to speak up when they see something that might be a blind spot for others. So if someone says something horribly offensive, you should say something to them. In love. With gentleness. Saying something is serving that brother or sister. And it’s ultimately serving God! Paul says, “be fervent…serve *the Lord*.” It’s not necessarily weakness to be hurt by a sinful comment, though pride might have us think it is. Yes, this may mean correcting someone, which can be hard. But God gives us good counsel on how to do that (see Matthew 18, Galatians 6, and talk to someone in this church you trust about this). To be clear, you don’t always need to correct. But as Jamie advised a few weeks ago, if what someone said or did is hindering your relationship with them, you should say something. And I know, that can feel like more humility on your part when you think you’re always the humble one given that you’re a minority. But beware of the temptation to feel like you’re always giving more than you’re receiving. We all often feel like that, and that mentality doesn’t seem like the self-forgetting one we talked about.

* *[Zealously loving looks like]* ***Continuing the conversation*** *(James 1:19)*

So as a black man, one thing I’ve been really encouraged by is how many white brothers and sisters have asked me questions about my experience with the police since the Mike Brown and Eric Garner tragedies. These brothers and sisters were seeking to be slow to speak, quick to listen. But if those in the majority are trying to listen, those in the minority…need to speak! A conversation goes two ways: someone has to speak. So continue conversations. And let me just say, I think the zealous minority is going to continue the conversation with those in the majority *and* their fellow minorities. So, I can’t just be on the lookout for when a white brother says something insensitive. If a black brother says something insensitive, I should correct him, too. But when a majority person humbles themselves and asks you something, even if they do it in a blundering fashion, don’t be so proud that you refuse answering. Help them. Love them.

* ***Assuming the best and accepting help*** *(1 Cor. 13:7)*

And that brings me to my last point: loving zealously looks like assuming the best of others. That’s what mature Christians do. In this class we’ve seen some great examples of minorities assuming the best of those in the majority: We saw in Acts 6 the Gentiles genuinely believed their Jewish brothers were trying to help. So they accepted their help! They didn’t assume the Jews were pitying them. Jeremy McClain accepted Mark Kalenack’s offer to nanny his kids. Likewise, we should love people zealously by giving them the benefit of the doubt, even if as a minority, you feel like you’re always doing that. If you believe ignorance is always malicious, you’re likely going to always be on the defensive. But if you realize the truth, that ignorance is rarely malicious in our church — you will sweeten your relationships with those in the majority. And you will be happier. Let’s move on to our next word: **Constant**

Paul says we should be constant in prayer. But did you notice what he says right before that? He says be patient in tribulation. It is so easy as a minority to feel like some things may never change. And honestly, they might not. But if you’re only expecting a big change in a little amount of time, I think you’re going to miss the little steps of progress that God is making. So pray to God, yes ask him for change. But also praise God in prayer for the little works you see him doing. As it’s been said, “don’t overestimate what can change in five years and underestimate what can change in 10.” The hardest part about being zealous is being zealous for a long time. But zeal doesn’t just sound like loud passion. It can be quiet; it can be constant. The mother who loves her kids from day one until her last breath knows exactly what I mean. And we can constantly love others because God’s Spirit is constantly with us. The person who is patient in tribulation is often the one who is constant in prayer, even if they don’t see the results. We walk by faith not by sight.

**Questions for Nile & Stacy:**

* *Nile, what are some ways you’ve prayed our church would change? What’s a little evidence of grace that you’ve praised God for?*
* *Stacy, how can those in the minority better pray for those in the majority?*

Let’s look at our last word: **Sacrificial**

So we want to be genuine, self-forgetting, and zealous. But *where* can we be genuine, self-forgetting, and zealous? Right, we’re constantly praying about these things as we’re being patient in our trials. But the church isn’t a building, so where can we live these things out? Well I think Paul gives us at least one location in verse 13. He basically encourages us to be sacrificial. And in light of that he says, “be hospitable.” In other words, invite others into your home! Jeremy encouraged those in the majority last week to not just talk with but to come alongside those in the minority. Well brothers and sisters in the minority, sometimes those in the majority are going to need an invitation to do just that. After all, who likes inviting themselves over to someone else’s house?

Being hospitable is an incredible platform for sacrifice. When you invite someone into your house, you invite them into your life. That does require more of your time, budget, and energy. But we can sacrifice in great ways because Jesus sacrificed in the greatest way for us. Just like we sacrifice by continually giving financially to the church, we sacrifice by continually inviting others into our experiences as minorities. And we can do that by inviting them into our homes.

**Conclusion**

So, Nile and Stacy are very hospitable – they’re small group leaders. I’m not going to interview them about that. I’d love to close our time with you all sharing how this class, not just today’s class, but the entire course has encouraged or challenged you all to think about unity and diversity in the church?