

Life: Stick with humility

May 11, 2015

• *The Bible Studies for Life* lesson for May 24 focuses on Philippians 2:1-5, 13-15.

I heard an interesting story on the radio recently about improved living conditions in the colonias along the Texas border. The [Texas Secretary of State](#) defines a colonia as “a residential area along the Texas-Mexico border that may lack some of the most basic living necessities such as potable water and sewer systems, electricity, paved roads, and safe and sanitary housing.” Although poverty is pervasive and infrastructure needs still exist, community life in Texas colonias is improving as neighborhoods are gaining broader access to public services like utilities and plumbing.

Joanna Barton of the San Antonio branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas made one of the most surprising observations during the [interview](#), emphasizing the resiliency of the colonias: “One social issue residents don’t have to worry about is homelessness. It’s because of the values of the culture to not let any family member be left out. They’ll live two or three families in one home or family members will build on the same lot. ... They’re solving a potential homelessness problem.”

Homelessness

I contrast that with my own city—Dallas—where, even though we have many wonderful churches and nonprofits serving homeless people, on any given day more than 5,000 men, women and children lack a permanent home.

The expectation in the colonias that neighbors will care for each other is an example of the attitude of humility the Apostle Paul describes in his letter to the Philippians: “in humility value others above yourselves, not looking

to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others” (2:3). These characteristics of unity and humble service were common among believers in the early church that formed soon after the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Acts 2 explains: “All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (vv. 44-47).

About 20 years later, Paul and those who accompanied him on his second missionary journey established the church at Philippi—the first church on the European continent. A decade later, while imprisoned in Rome, Paul writes to his Philippian brothers and sisters in Christ, urging them to “make his joy complete” by continuing to practice the unity modeled by the early believers at Pentecost: “Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind” (2:1-2).

Renounce selfish ambition

Often we think of Christian unity in terms of “agreeing to disagree” on theological points, or working together to serve a particular cause. But Paul says the way for Christians to become united is to renounce “selfish ambition or vain conceit” in our lives. Instead, we should value others “above (our)selves,” watching out for the best interests of others (v. 3). This, Paul explains, is the mindset of Christ. By regarding each other with humility, we align our desires with God’s, “who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”

Christians whose relationships are typified by humility “shine like stars in the sky” in contrast to the surrounding “warped and crooked generation” (v. 15). Yet when I listen to non-believers talk about Christians, we often are described with words like “hate” and “hypocrisy.” Shifts in cultural norms that do not coincide with biblical paradigms certainly are part of the reason for this. But why have our culture’s values shifted so dramatically? Could it be that our disunity as believers, our failure at times to “be like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind” has weakened our influence?

The early church reminds us the care Christians offer each other, putting our brothers’ and sisters’ needs above our own, is a living illustration of the mind of Christ. As we live in humility, “without grumbling or arguing,” God can use us as “shining stars” among unbelievers to point them to Jesus.