

You know... I just realized something about our New Testament... that you may find surprising. Every one of the Apostle Paul's letters... were written because of some **conflict** of one form or another that was happening in the church to which Paul wrote. In fact, as Karl Barth once remarked: "*There are no letters in the New Testament apart from the problems of the church.*"

The Apostle Paul's letters are all trying to solve **problems** that had developed in those churches. Whether it was false teachers... teaching that you had to be circumcised and obey Judaism's legalism... or selfish behavior at the communion table... each of Paul's writings were to solve internal clashes going on inside the church. ... One of the biggest problems to the church through the centuries... is **not** the threat of destruction from the **outside**... but it has been the threat of destruction from those on the **inside**.

Our conflicts have given the world many opportunities to laugh at us. You know... there is actually a book that has been published by the title: "*Great Church Fights*" and was written by Leslie Flynn. ... In this book... Mr. Flynn quotes a story from a Welsh newspaper about a church that was looking for a new pastor. Here is an excerpt from that quote:

"Yesterday the two opposition groups both sent ministers to the pulpit. Both spoke simultaneously, each trying to shout above the other. Both called for hymns, and the congregation sang two—each side trying to drown out the other. Then the groups began shouting at each other. Bibles were raised in anger. The Sunday morning service turned into a bedlam. Through it all, the two preachers continued to outshout each other with their sermons.

Eventually a deacon called a policeman. Two came in and began shouting for the congregation to be quiet. They advised the 40

persons in the church to return home. The rivals filed out, still arguing. Last night one of the group called a "let's-be-friends" meeting. It broke up in argument."

There are other stories in the book that might **otherwise** be funny... if they weren't so sad. (I'll just mention one other that resulted in a church split... in Dallas... all because a church leader was served a smaller piece of ham at a church dinner...than the child beside him. ... Wow! Really?!!)

In our Book of study on Sunday mornings... Philippians... Paul's occasion for writing is that Epaphroditus has just brought a generous gift from the church in Philippi to him... as he sat in prison in Rome. ... It was **good news** that the church had such concern for Paul. ... But Epaphroditus also brought the **bad** news... of a division in the Philippian church.

Apparently there was a double threat to the unity of the church... **#1**) there were false teachers coming in from the outside (and Paul will write about this we will see when we come to Phil. 3:1-3.) ... **#2**) there were disagreeing members from within (as Phil. 4:1-3 reveals). ... Euodia (whose name... ironically means "fragrance") and Syntyche (whose name means "fortunate")... were at odds with each other over some issue... and the other members of the church were lining up behind one or the other. ... What they were fighting about... Paul does not state. ... Perhaps Euodia wanted Ambrose tea to be served at the Christmas luncheon... and Syntyche wanted 7up. ... Or maybe it was over who would get to sing the solo in their Easter cantata... who knows...!

But Paul **knew** that unity had to be restored. What a challenge Paul faced as he sat hundreds of miles away from them in a Roman prison!!! What would **you** do...? How would **you** handle such a situation...? Would you demand that they **CONFORM** to more appropriate behavior...? “*Common people – find a way and get along...!*” “*Shape up...!*” - That probably would **not** work as well... as what Paul actually **does**.

By the way... what is the difference between “unity” and “uniformity”? ... Can you have “unity” without “uniformity”? ... Is “uniformity” an essential ingredient... if we are to have unity...? ... If we are to have **unity** in our church... does this mean we all must **conform** to an external standard of behavior...? Do rules and regulations produce Christian unity...?

Before we get to today’s passage... we need an **answer** to these questions... along with an understanding of the difference between “unity” and “uniformity”... That way we will be able to recognize how Paul deals with the conflict that is miles away from him.

The short answer... is that “unity” and “uniformity” are **not** the same... and that Christ-like unity is **NOT** best achieved by “uniformity.” ... there is a **better** way to achieve unity in a church than simply demanding that everyone conform to an external set of standards.

True spiritual unity comes from **within**... it is a matter of the **heart**. **Uniformity** ... on the other hand... is the result of pressure from **without**. This is why Paul opens today’s section of Scripture appealing to the highest possible spiritual motives.

In a gracious way... Paul says to the church, "*Your disagreements reveal that there is a spiritual problem in your fellowship. It isn't going to be solved by laying down strict rules... along with threats - if those rules are not followed... .. It's going to be solved... when your hearts are right with Christ and with each other.*" ... Paul wanted them to see that the basic cause was *selfishness*... (LISTEN - RULES AND THREATS ARE **NEVER** THE BEST WAY TO SOLVE A CHURCH CONFLICT...)

Paul will present the pattern for Christian living... but please don't mistake this for what it is not. While it is a pattern... this is not an external set of standards that they must conform to. Paul is not presenting something that everyone must imitate. ... Imitation... (in other words... a mere facsimile of some peripheral norm) ... is not at stake here... He is talking about impartation. ... That is... the mind of Christ... that needs to be in us... and it can be there only by the power of the Spirit of God. ... So Paul calls for them to dig deep from within themselves.

Paul began with a deliberately emotional appeal... that was meant to move the Philippians... to a fourfold remembrance of what happened to them when they came to Christ.

Paul hoped these sweet recollections... of the supernatural in their lives would move them to do... what was necessary to ensure their unity and mutuality.

**We** need to have these same memories resurface in our own minds... often. I am thankful that our church is not experiencing any real conflict at this time... but since we are a church that is centered on the Gospel of

Christ... and Satan does not like that... we **will** have future controversy and conflicts. ... Much will be avoided and minimized... if we regularly elicit these remembrances that Paul lists for us.

The point is this: the more strength and activity a church has... the more attention it must give to unity. ... Why? ... Because a strong church has more minds and bodies working... and where more people are working... more differences are bound to arise. ... Consequently... the members must give more attention to unity.

So look at what Paul wants us to regularly remember...

### **Philippians 2:1-2**

The first thing I would like for you to know... is that in the original language of the New Testament... there is a grammatical device known as a “first class condition”. ... I can still recall my Greek classes in seminary often referring to Philippians 2 verse 1... whenever they explained what a first class condition is...

Basically... whenever an author used this device... which we see translated with the word in verse 1... “**if**” ... “**If** there is any encouragement in Christ...” ... you can just as easily substitute the word “if” for the word “**since**”... “**Since** there is encouragement in Christ...” “Since there is comfort from love...” etc. ... And Paul rattles off these four conditions which every believer... who has ever been born again... has experienced at least one... possibly more than one of these conditions.

In a room of this many Christians... we could probably check all four of these off by asking every individual ... “Which one of these have you experienced...?” “Have you ever experienced any encouragement in Christ...?” ... It probably would not take us very long at all... before we could affirm... yes... all 4 of these experiences are true. Christ does do these things inside of us as believers.

These are important to acknowledge... that He has been working in our lives in these ways. You see... what Jesus Christ has done for us... should be a continual **incentive** for us to pursue unity among ourselves.

So... lets take a closer look at them... and let me have you ask yourself... if this would be one of the experiences you have had with Christ.

The first experience we need to acknowledge in our life is... any encouragement in Christ. Has there ever been any encouragement in Christ as you've walked with Him...? Stop and consider it. What has there been that you can specifically point to... where you had an internal sense of being boosted... reassured... a sense that you can attribute to Christ... where you have been internally encouraged...? Does this ever happen to you...? Have you ever been going about your day... when seemingly from out of nowhere... a sense of peace and assurance that He is with you... washes over you?

I am going to take the risk of sounding like a nut-case... and tell you... that there are many times when I am driving down the road... all by myself... and for no discernible reason... it is as though my heart starts singing... all I can say is “Thank You... Thank You... Thank You that You are with me right now...” There are many times in my office when I am reading... that I

just drop my head into my hands... as I am overwhelmed... and all I can say is “Thank You...”

All of our experiences will be different... but have you ever felt the encouragement of Christ from within...?

The next experience to focus on is “comfort from love.” The word "**comfort**" is from the Greek word **paramuthion** which means "*to speak closely with someone or to give them comfort.*" ... Our second recollection... "any comfort from love" asks about our experience of Christ's love. Have we taken the time to settle our minds on the truth that we have been loved unconditionally by Christ... Who gave His life for us...?

This remembrance is CRUCIAL for us to focus on... You see... there will NEVER be any internal strife in a church... where God's love is appreciated. ...The moment that the love of Jesus Christ ceases to be real to us... we lose our affection for others.

Once we start to think that we somehow DESERVE God's favor... "*Well of course Christ loves me... I am such a loveable person...*" ... Instead of seeing how undeserving we really are... the love of Christ ceases to be real to us... and we will not have a proper love for others. ... It just won't happen.

Have you ever been comforted by Christ's unconditional love...?

The next area of our focus should be – “any participation of the Spirit” ... and I understand this to mean... “the Holy Spirit.” ... Is there any joint partnership... a common partaking with other believers... a fellowshiping because of the Holy Spirit in your life...?

The Holy Spirit's indwelling... makes us co-partners in God's Kingdom work... with other believers. Can you look inside yourself and see evidence ... a sense of being in a **partnership** with other believers... to advance the Gospel of Christ...?

Once a person has trusted Jesus Christ as his Lord... God's Spirit does two significant things to him.

1) The Holy Spirit enters the believer's heart and life to comfort... guide... teach... equip... and use him as a witness for Christ.

2) The Holy Spirit creates a spiritual union between the new believer and other believers. ... He melts and moulds the heart of the believer to the hearts of other believers. ... He attaches all their lives together, and they become one in life and purpose. ... They have a joint life sharing their blessings and needs and gifts together — all focused upon their Lord and His purpose. ... The mind of the Holy Spirit is set upon unity and fellowship — all centered around Jesus Christ and His mission.

Is there any memory of your sensing this within you?

The fourth recollection — "any affection and sympathy" — is more exactly the divine compassion and mercy... that came from Christ Himself to us at salvation... and now passes through us... to others.

Compassion is the trait that stirred Christ to reach out for us. Compassion is the force that drives Him to keep after us time and again — even if we are in rebellion and stand opposed to Him. ... We may be cantankerous;



we may even curse Him and take up arms against His movement. ...But His compassion drives Him to stay after us so long as we live.

Paul is so emotionally compelling here. ... He has taken the Philippians (and us) back through our grace-filled memories... to focus on the supernatural work of Christ that is at work in our souls. He has tried to activate our spiritual DVRs.

So... with all of this... freshly replaying on our inner screens... we are now ready for the exhortation he is about to give us... to maintain unity and mutual care in the church.

## **Philippians 2:2**

Even though he is in prison... Paul is rejoicing in the Lord... but he says that he would rejoice even more... if he knew four things were true about them: 1) if they were likeminded 2) if they had the same love 3) if they all drove around Philippi in a Honda Accord... ahh... I mean... if they were all in one accord and 4) if they were all of one mind. ... Now lets look at these individually.

### **A. Be Likeminded**

In other words... they were to be on the same wave-length.

Notice that Paul starts with the words "*the same mind*" ... and he ends the verse with the words "*of one mind.*" ... Both of these emphasize a church that is intent on a unified purpose — a single

goal. ... And in the context of what we are reading... what is the unified goal? ... The **gospel!**

Paul mentioned the gospel five times in the first chapter... and in the fifth mention (verse 27) he declared... "*Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel,*" which is the commanding theme all the way to 2:18. ... The oneness they were to have was to be the result of having one dynamic purpose.

Are we all like-minded at Living Water...? Is there a single mind in every one of us... that is intent in getting the Gospel out to those who still need Christ in their lives...? ... Is that the reason we come here every week...? Now our ladies do a wonderful job putting out some wonderful treats for the fellowship time... before church. But I hope that is not the main reason any of us come here each week. ... We have a lot of friendly folks who attend here... and it is great to visit with them... joke around... talk sports... or cooking... or life in general... but I hope THAT is not the main reason you come. ... A lot of people are good folks... faithful to what their family taught them since they were young and they see regular church attendance is a good thing. ... But I hope you are not here simply because it is a family habit... a tradition... or you made a commitment to your husband or wife or mom or dad. – (LISTEN) If you have been attending regularly here... I hope that it is for no lesser reason... than you are like-minded with us... to advance the Gospel through our mission endeavors... our local efforts such as AWANA... Kids Church... Celebrate Recovery... and to have a fire lit inside of you

that wants to take the Gospel message to your friends and family members. If you have any other reason... than to know Christ, personally ... and to make Him known to others... you are simply wasting your time. It will not spiritually benefit you in any way.

## **B. Have the Same Love**

Unity is the result of loving the same things. There must be unity in love for God's *word, work, workmen, and God's world of lost sinners*

"Have the same love"—the same love Christ had for you. He has an *Agapē love*. It is the love with the mind... using reasoning... and a deliberate use of our will. It is the love that goes so far...

- that it loves a person even if he does not deserve to be loved.
- that actually loves the person who is utterly unworthy of being loved.

Agapē love is the love of Christ... the love which He showed when He gave and sacrificed Himself for us. ... We did not deserve it and were utterly unworthy of such love... yet Christ loved us despite all. Imagine the spirit of unity that would exist within a church if every member would let the love of Christ flow through him.

## **C. Be of One Accord**

The word "**one accord**" comes from the Greek word **sumpsuchos** (**soom'-psoo-khos**). It is formed from two words which means "together" and "soul." This word means "to be one in soul." The

hearts of every believer in every local church must be knit together and mutually motivated by the same urge and desire.

#### **D. Be of One Mind**

Four times in five verses this word "mind" appears." It deals with our mental attitude... especially of those who have a different viewpoint than our views.

Christians are not going to see eye-to-eye on every detail. Our thoughts and actions are influenced by heredity... environment... education or lack of education. ... It is impossible to find a group of Christians who see everything from the same viewpoint.

But how... exactly... is the church today supposed to obey Paul's command to be "likeminded" and to be "one in spirit and purpose"? ... Does this mean that Paul supports some rigid set of external rules to which everyone must conform... in thought as well as in deed?

I don't think that Paul sees that the church is to be a group of automatons... walking in lockstep with one another. ... Instead... he sees it as a group of individuals who... despite their differences... are willing to show love for one another through putting the well-being of others first. ... This will always mean speaking the truth and acting on the truth... but doing so in love.

So... How then... exactly... shall we resolve our differences and solve our problems...? What a great question... I'm so glad that you asked. Our answer is found in the next verse.

### **Philippians 2:3**

Many people — even Christians — live only to make a good impression on others or to please themselves. ... This is what motivates many people to do the things they do in their service within the church. ... their thoughts are consumed by how it is going to look to others... how it might stir the thoughts in others of what a good organizer... or committee member... person who is filled with Biblical insight... handyman... baker... financial planner... or whatever! ... So much of what we do... is so that people will recognize us... and like us for what we said or did. It is to get the eyes of others on us... not Christ.

This is “vainglory.” (Some of the Bible translations you are reading from use that term... “do nothing from rivalry or vainglory”) ... We are not to try to outshine others in the church by demonstrating we have better insight or can do things better. ... We are not to be concerned about our own reputations.

The word "**strife**" comes from the word **eritheia** which means "selfishness, rivalry, infighting, and carries the idea of building oneself up by tearing down another person."

The word "**vainglory**" comes from the word **kenodoxia**. This word is formed from two words: kenos which means "empty" and doxa which means "opinion or glory." The word means "empty conceit."

So...strife involves tearing down a person... and vainglory involves pulling yourself up.

Some people just want the attention... the recognition... the position... the flattery... the praise... the honor. ... They want people seeking their advice and counsel and opinion. ...They want to be on the major committees and acknowledged as a leader of the church.

Selfishness can ruin a church... but genuine humility can **build** it.

When people are selfishly ambitious and trying only to make a good impression... they ruin a church's unity.

Humility is that grace that, when you know you have it... you have lost it. The Biblical view of humility... is entrusting your situations to God... rather than to your own abilities or resources.

The conductor of a symphony orchestra was once asked what is the most difficult instrument to play. He responded, "*Second violin. I can find plenty of first violinists, but to find someone who can play second violin with enthusiasm — that is a problem. And if we have no second violin, we have no harmony.*"

*It takes more grace than I can tell  
To play the second fiddle well.*

The perfect blueprint for genuine humility is found in verse four. The Lord Jesus Christ looks on the interests of others. If we will look out for the needs and interests of others, God will look out for us.

### **Philippians 2:4**

The believer's eyes must be turned away from himself... and focused on the needs of others.

This does not mean that the believer is at the beck and call of everybody else... or that he is a "religious doormat" for everybody to use! ... Some people try to **purchase** friends and maintain church unity... by "giving in" to everybody else's whims and wishes. ... This is not what Paul is suggesting at all.

How, practically, can we curb the temptation to assert our rights over others? In his superb essay on how Christians should live together, Dietrich Bonhoeffer supplies seven principles for eradicating selfish ambition from Christian communities. Christians, he says, should:

- hold their tongues, refusing to speak uncharitably about a Christian brother;
- cultivate the humility that comes from understanding that they, like Paul, are the greatest of sinners and can only live in God's sight by his grace;
- listen "long and patiently" so that they will understand their fellow Christian's need;

- refuse to consider their time and calling so valuable that they cannot be interrupted to help with unexpected needs, no matter how small or menial;
- bear the burden of their brothers and sisters in the Lord, both by preserving their freedom and by forgiving their sinful abuse of that freedom;
- declare God's word to their fellow believers when they need to hear it;
- understand that Christian authority is characterized by service and does not call attention to the person who performs the service.

... ..

Two weeks ago... in our study of this letter by Paul to the Philippians... we launched a larger study of which today's passage has been a part. The metanarrative ... of which Philippians 2:1-4 contributes... is "How to have joy... in spite of our circumstances." Well today... we have added the third piece of the puzzle.

How do we have joy in spite of our circumstances?

- 1) By being faithfully present to Christ
- 2) By being faithfully present to our tasks (bringing the Gospel to others)
- 3) By being faithfully present to each other