

## The Joy of True Unity

**Text:** Philippians 2:1-4

### Introduction:

1. The Apostle has just exhorted them to strive together for the faith of the Gospel. He now issues a further exhortation to unity in the church. It appears there was a twofold threat to the unity of the church:
  - False teachers coming in from without (3:1-3).
  - Disagreeing members within (4:1-3).
2. In Chapter 1 it was Christ our life now it is Christ our mind. The only way true unity can be achieved in the local church is when believers submit to the mind of Christ.
3. We will consider this theme of unity under four headings:

### I. THE PROVISIONS FOR CHURCH UNITY (VS. 1)

Paul uses the word 'if' in the sense of "if, and I assume there is"; "since, in view of the fact". Theodore Epp explains it well, "In English, 'if' presents a condition that may or may not be true. In the original language of this verse, however, the way the 'if' clauses are used assumes the condition to be true. So, one could read this verse, 'If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, and there is,' or 'Because there is consolation in Christ.' ...Because these four conditions are true in a believer's life, they become the fountainhead for four flowing streams of actions." It is also intended to be thought provoking. As soon as we think about it, we know that indeed there is consolation in Christ etc... (Cloud) Paul outlines four resources they have in Christ that make unity possible.

#### A. Consolation in Christ

1. The word 'consolation' is made up of 'para' (beside) and 'kaleo' (to call), to all to one's side. It has the idea of encouragement, comfort and solace. The word is often translated 'comfort' (Acts 9:31, Rom. 15:4, 2. Cor. 1:4).
2. We use the word to describe the act of consoling someone. Webster defines it as, "Comfort; alleviation of misery, or distress of mind; refreshment of mind or spirits;"
3. This consolation is "in Christ." What comfort we have in the Lord by virtue of our salvation. God the Father is the "God of all comfort" (2. Cor. 1:3). The Holy Spirit is "the Comforter" (John 14:26; 15:26 & 16:7). Salvation is called "an everlasting consolation" (2 Thess. 2:16). What wonderful consolation we have as Christians!

#### B. Comfort of Love

1. Has a similar meaning to 'consolation' but with an element of tenderness. This comfort is derived from love.
2. This love is the love of God. The love of God is a constant source of comfort for the believer and is the glue that binds the hearts of believers together. Wuest writes, "Their realization of divine love which reached down and saved them, should urge them to live in a spirit of unity with one another. This love, produced by the Holy

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Spirit in their hearts, should also cause them to live in unity with one another.”

### C. Communion of the Spirit

1. Paul has already made reference to their fellowship in the Gospel (1:5). The word ‘fellowship’ comes from the Greek word ‘koinonia’ and denotes “sharing, holding something in common” (Gromacki). It means a “joint-participation in a common interest and activity.” (Wuest) Fellowship therefore goes deeper than a chat over a cup of coffee. Paul and the Philippians experienced a fellowship in the gospel (1:5), grace (1:7), in the Holy Spirit (2:1), in the sufferings of Christ (3:10) and in giving (4:14-15).
2. The fellowship in view here is one that is produced by the Holy Spirit of God. Unity is a work of the Spirit in surrendered hearts, binding us together in the common cause of the Gospel ministry. Evidently some in the Philippian church were not living Spirit-filled lives. If they had been, there would have been unity.
3. Note: True unity differs from uniformity. Uniformity is the result of pressure from without. Unity comes from within and is a work of the Spirit of God in the heart of the yielded believer.

### D. Compassion of Heart

The two sides of brotherly compassion are seen in the compound phrase “bowels and mercies”.

1. ‘bowels’ = referred to the intestines (e.g., heart, lungs, liver) as the seat of the affections, hence an inner disposition. The Word is translated “tender mercies” (Col. 3:12), “inward affection” (2 Cor. 7:5), “bowels of mercies” (Col. 3:12) and “bowels of compassion” (1 John 3:17).
2. ‘mercies’ = the outward deeds of mercy caused by the inner concern. It is the opposite of indifference. We have experienced the tender mercies of God in salvation and should therefore show mercy to one another.

## II. THE PLEA FOR CHURCH UNITY (VS. 2)

### A. The Personal in the Plea (Vs. 2a)

1. ‘fulfill’ = means to fill full, complete. The Apostle was already joyful but the unity of the Philippian church would bring his cup of joy to the full.
2. “my joy” = Paul reflects the desire of God Himself who desires unity amongst His blood-washed children.
3. True unity is a blessed thing! Psalm 133:1 “A Song of degrees of David. Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity!”
4. Note: Disunity in a church produces the opposite to joy. There is hardly anything more grievous in a church than carnal division.

### B. The Practical in the Plea (Vs. 2b)

The Apostle exhorts them to have:

1. The same mind – this concept is expressed in three phrases.
  - a. ‘likeminded’ = means to “think the same thing”. The same word is used in 4:2 – “of the **same mind** in the Lord”. This is unity of belief. Spurgeon wrote, “It is not likely we should all see eye to eye. You

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cannot make a dozen watches all tick to the same time, much less make a dozen men all think the same thoughts. But, still, if we should all bow our thoughts to that one written Word, and would own no authority but the Bible, the Church could not be divided, could not be cut in pieces as she now is.”

- b. “one accord” = agreement, harmony. It literally means “joint-souls”. “As a chain, one soul must be linked together with another soul.” (Gromacki) We cannot function independently as believers. We need each other! This was one of the defining features of the first church in Acts (See Acts 1:14; 2:1, 46; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25).
    - i. English word ‘accord’ used in music to describe harmony of sounds; the union of different sounds, which is agreeable to the ear; agreement in pitch and tone (Webster).
    - ii. Note: As all the instruments in an orchestra conform to the written music score, resulting in a unity of sound, so when God’s people with their varying gifts, abilities and personalities, submit to the written Word, present a united voice.
  - c. “one mind” = thinking **the one thing**. This is unity of purpose.
  - d. Remember: This is a doctrinal unity, not an ecumenical unity. There are no non-essential doctrines in the Word of God.
  - e. Illustration: The men of Israel were of one heart to make David King. 1 Chr. 12:38 “All these men of war, that could keep rank, came with a **perfect heart** to Hebron, to make David king over all Israel: and all the rest also of Israel *were of one heart* to make David king.” F.B. Meyer writes, “The deepest thought in Christian fellowship, and that which makes us truly one, is the desire to make Christ King, that He may be loved and honoured, that thousands of souls may bow the knee and confess that He is Lord.”
2. The same heart – “the same love”. This is unity of affection. This means that we do not show partiality to the saints. We extend Christian love one to another without selectiveness. We seek to allow ourselves to be channels of love to the brethren.

### III. THE POSTURE OF CHURCH UNITY (VS. 3)

#### A. The Attitude that should be Absent (Vs. 3a)

1. ‘nothing’ = this type of spirit is not to be entertained at all amongst the people of God.
2. ‘strife’ = contention, a selfish, competitive spirit. Word was used to describe a self-seeking pursuit of political office, of party squabbles, of the jockeying for position. Illustration: The Apostles argument over who would be the greatest - Luke 22:24 “And there was also a **strife** among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.”
3. ‘vainglory’ = empty pride; describes one ambitious for his own reputation and advancement. The Greek word is ‘kenodoxia’ made up of ‘keno’ (empty) and ‘doxia’ (glory). This attitude is not confined

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to the secular context. Self can easily creep into our service and it starts to become about us rather than the Lord. On the surface, it may even seem spiritual at times but there is no substance to it. Illustration: Vain glory is like an inflated balloon. It looks shiny and nice on the outside but inside, it is empty nothingness.

4. Someone wisely observed that vain glory is the disease whereas strive is the symptom. The former is inwards, the latter is outward. (Gromacki) "Paul wanted them to see that the basic cause of their disunity was selfishness, and the cause of their selfishness was pride.
5. Illustration: Diotrephes is an example of a man consumed with vainglory with his desire for pre-eminence in the church (3 John 1:9).
6. Believer's Bible Commentary: "Wherever you find people who are interested in gathering a clique around themselves or in promoting their own interests, there you will find the seeds of contention and strife."

### **B. The Attitude that should be Present (Vs. 3b)**

1. "lowliness of mind" = humility of mind. The word was used by an ancient writer to describe the river Nile at its low stage. "Humility," says Wiersbe, "is that grace that, when you know you have it, you have lost it."
2. 'esteem' = to count, think, consider. It is "a belief that rests, not on one's inner feelings or sentiment, but on the due consideration of the facts" (Wuest).
3. 'better' = lit. "having above", to be superior. Means we hold them in higher regard than ourselves, we consider them to be more important.
4. Note: This does not refer to a form of morbid loathing or self-condemnation. It simply means that we have the right perspective of ourselves as sinners saved by grace and focus on lifting others instead of ourselves.
5. Illustration: The Apostle Paul exemplified this attitude. He referred to Himself as "the chief of sinners" and "less than the least of all saints"

## **IV. THE PERSPECTIVE OF CHURCH UNITY (VS. 4)**

### **A. In Relation to Ourselves (Vs. 4a)**

1. 'behold' = to fix one's attention upon. Our English word 'scope' is derived from this word.
2. It does not say that we are not to give consideration to our own things at all. The word 'also' qualifies this. Some attention needs to be given to our own things (e.g., family duties, care of the body etc.) but not exclusive attention.
3. Sadly, some Christians are self-centered, spending most, if not all of their time and efforts on themselves with barely a thought to the needs of others. This is not the selfless mind God wants from us.

### **B. In Relation to Others (Vs. 4b)**

1. The Christian life is about Christ (chapter 1) and about others (chapter 2).

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2. Remember the acronym for joy? Jesus first, others second and yourself last.
3. Theodore Epp writes, "It does not honor the Lord for a believer to neglect himself or his affairs, but it is self-centered and uncharacteristic of the mind of Christ if the believer is concerned only about himself. When a believer loves his neighbor as himself, as the Scriptures command, he will be concerned about whatever needs his neighbor has."

**Conclusion:** Are you a contributor or a disrupter of church unity? We have been given all the resources we need in Christ to maintain unity so remember to be "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph. 4:3)