

Subject: *The Recipe for Christian Unity*

Scripture: *Philippians 2:1-4*

In Philippians 1, Paul's theme is Christian joy in spite of suffering. In chapter 2 his theme is Christian joy in serving. His theme is the mindset and privilege of serving others. This chapter focuses on three aspects of a servant spirit: the reasons for a servant spirit (vs. 1); the requirements for a servant spirit (vs. 2-4); and the role models for a servant spirit (vs. 5-30), of which the primary model of a servant spirit is Christ.

1. The MOTIVES for Christian Unity (vs. 1)

We know how important it is for believers to have unity because this was on Christ's heart when he prayed in John 17, on the night of His arrest and before His crucifixion.

John 17:20-23 ²⁰ Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; ²¹ That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. ²² And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: ²³ I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

Christians should be motivated in unity because we are so blessed a people. In this opening verse Paul reminds us of the blessings we share in Christ. The word "if" should be understood as "since" or "because." Paul mentions four motives that unify believers:

- A. Consolation in Christ – (*paraklesis*, same work used of the Holy Spirit in John's Gospel, "the Comforter," the one who comes alongside); there is consolation only if we are "in Christ."
- B. Comfort of love (*paramuthion*) – believers are comforted because the Father and Christ love them and because they love the Father and Christ and one another. What a blessing it is to be loved by God.
- C. Fellowship of the Spirit (*koinonia*) – sharing, participation in the Spirit; the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is something only believers have.
- D. Affection and mercy – mercies that reach the innermost part of us deep in the soul; to be able to say, "It is well, it is well with my soul."

2. The MARKS of Christian Unity (vs. 2)

Since believers all share the blessings in verse 1, they should be likeminded, love each other, and be united. The words in verse 2 refer to the mind, heart, and soul. The mind is mentioned twice. Christian unity is different from uniformity. Uniformity is looking alike, but unity is thinking alike. True unity is inward unity based on having similar attitudes, but uniformity is outward. Paul mentions the marks of spiritual unity:

- A. Being like-minded – Lit., “thinking the same way” about Christ and the Christian life. This is the basis of all unity...being on the same page. That’s why it’s so important for us to read and study and learn the same thing (Scripture).

Romans 15:5 *Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus.*

- B. Having the same love (agape) – showing the same sacrificial love to others that God has shown to us; we are “beloved” by God and by others; it is our privilege to love God and one another.
- C. Being of one accord – can be translated “united in spirit” (lit. “of one soul”)
- D. Being of one mind – this the same word at the beginning of verse 2; it means “thinking as one”; having one purpose, that is to glorify God

3. The MEANS of Christian Unity (vs. 3-4)

The recipe for Christian unity is not only a spirit of unity, but a spirit of humility.

Paul warns against any attitude that would be divisive. Nothing should be done through strife, which is being selfish and proud, wanting to have our own way. Vainglory means “empty glory” or pursuing glory for self instead of Christ. The Five Solas that came out of the Reformation were truths that unified true Christians in the 1500s and unify us still today: *Sola Scriptura; Sola Gratia; Sola Fide; Solus Christus; and Soli Deo Gloria*. If we believe the first four, then we will always be unified in the fifth...glory to God alone.

There is a big difference in the spirit of Cain (Gen. 4:9, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”) and the spirit of Christ (Mk. 10:45, “who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many:). We have been saved to serve, not to be served. Gen. William Booth was unable to attend the annual meeting of the Salvation Army, but as their leader, he send a message that was read to the gathering...one word “OTHERS.”

This calls for “lowliness of mind,” a term that apparently was coined by Paul and other N.T. writers. This lowliness of mind or true humility works out in two ways:

- A. Placing a higher value on others than yourself

Romans 12:3 *For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*

Romans 12:10 *Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another.*

B. Looking out for others and not just yourself

That's easier said than done. Humility and putting others first doesn't come naturally.

Mark 9:30-34 ³⁰ *And they departed thence, and passed through Galilee; and he would not that any man should know it.* ³¹ *For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day.* ³² *But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him.* ³³ *And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?* ³⁴ *But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest.*

4. The MODEL for Christian Unity (vs. 5)

Christ is the supreme example of humility. We will consider that in our next message, but let's read verses 5-11. The central statement in those verses is found in verse 8, "he humbled himself." The whole plan of redemption hinged on Christ's humility and obedience to die for our sins. What if Christ had not been willing to humble himself? What if Christ had only looked on His own things instead of the things of others?

The recipe for Christian unity is through humility, and the key to humility is to remember our blessings in Christ and the example of humility we have in Christ.