

March 4, 2018

Unity's Humility

Philippians 2:1-4

Gospel growth thrives best in churches where spirit-wrought unity is the fruit of intentional humility.

LTS: John 17:1-19

This morning we return to Paul's letter to the Philippians. As I'm sure you remember, Paul wrote this epistle from Jail. He wrote it as kind of a Thank You letter because of the support the church sent by the hand of Epaphroditus who was loved by Paul and perhaps a leader in the church.

To say that the Philippian church was dear to the heart of the apostle Paul would be a gross understatement. Near the beginning of the letter he says (1:7) "It is right for me to feel this way about you because I hold you in my heart... Back in verse four he tells them that every time he thinks of them he prays for them with joy because of their partnership in the gospel.

The reason the Philippians went to such lengths to send support to Paul was because they heard that he had been moved out of house arrest and into the jail. They were concerned about his personal welfare and the welfare of his ministry. But Paul assured them that his being put in the slammer had actually turned out (12) for the advancement of the gospel.

The Philippians would have understood Paul's optimistic attitude. After all, Paul had personally discipled them and instilled in them a deep sense of gospel urgency. Their church was the product of Paul's sacrificial ministry when he visited their homeland two years earlier, and his passion had become their own. They were now partners with him for the advancement of the gospel. For Paul, the center of the Christian life was the gospel. Hence, he says in v. 27, "Only let your life be worthy of the gospel of Christ."

Now, its significant to note that the relevant pronouns in chapters 1&2 are all plural. So, when Paul says, "Let your life be worthy...", he is talking about all of us together as a church. Is our collective life together as a local body of Christ worthy of

the gospel? You may ask, “How do we know?” Well, Paul gives us a brief answer in that same verse (27), “so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the gospel.”

What Paul is looking for in terms of whether or not the life of the Philippian church is worthy of the gospel is this: are they experiencing the kind of Spirit-wrought interpersonal unity that promotes,

- not their church;
- not their program;
- not their blogs;
- not their church’s worship band
- not their new paradigm for church ministry,
- but the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Are they collectively living in a manner that shows the world what Christ is like and what His gospel is like? This is what’s on the mind of the Apostle Paul when he writes this part of his letter to the church of Philippi.

Evidently, while this church had a lot going for it, Paul was concerned about the ever-present danger of factions and disunity in the body. And this is a concern in every faithful church. Wherever there are sinners gathered together in one place there is the potential for pride to seize hold of hurt feelings, disagreements, and conflicting interests and turn them into an unholy wrecking ball that devastates a church.

This kind of thing happens in every church from time to time, but woe to the ones by whom it happens. There is no excuse for factions and disunity in the church of Jesus Christ.

- We have the word of God.
- We have faithful teaching.
- We have the indwelling Spirit.
- We have everything we need to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace.
- This is why Paul was so concerned about the conflict between Euodia and Syntyche in chapter four.

Paul was so serious about unity in the church that he commanded Titus if someone in the church body causes a faction, you warn him once, you warn him twice and then

kick him out of the church (Tit. 3:10). There's no long process of church discipline. Just get that person out!

Here in Philippians, however, Paul is attempting to preempt any problems that may arise through sinful disunity.

Read Phil. 2:1-5

As I said, in this short passage Paul is concerned about true unity in the church. In verse 1 he speaks of Divine Incentives for Unity. In v. 2 He points to Essential Objectives of Unity. And then in verses 3-4 he reveals the Humble Methods of Unity.

I. Divine Incentives for Unity:

1. Right from the start we can see how Paul's affection for the church of Philippi is directing the manner in which he calls them to unity. It is full of tenderness and love. There are four incentives Paul points to that every believer has experienced.

A. Encouragement in Christ.

- 1) The word for "Encouragement" is *paraklasis* which carries the idea of coming alongside of someone to offer loving comfort, counsel, or correction.
- 2) Paul is asking: Have you ever been comforted by Christ? Have you ever prayed for wisdom on a perplexing matter and received counsel from God's word in response? Have you ever received loving correction that turned you away from the kind of thinking and behavior that otherwise may have caused great harm?
- 3) This is the common experience of those who are united with Christ. We treasure the encouragement of Christ.

B. Comfort from his love

- 1) "Comfort" here is sometimes translated "consolation." It points to a close relationship marked by genuine concern, helpfulness, and love. It is very similar to the meaning of *paraklasis*.
- 2) In the N.T. the H.S. is referred to as the *Paraklete*, the One who comes beside us to help in our time of need.

- 3) Charles Spurgeon, who suffered much in life and knew such spiritual consolation, wrote: “The H.S. is the comforter, but the comfort is Christ. The H.S. consoles, but Christ is the consolation. If I may use a picture, the H.S. is the Physician, but Christ is the medicine.
- 4) Paul is appealing to our mutual experience of the tender mercies of Christ when we suffer. Are you sick? Are you lonely even in the midst of this a crowd? Is your heart broken? Are you sick of your sin? Know this, you’re are deeply loved and cherished by the Son of God. Fly to Christ in prayer and drink in his precious promises. Let Him console you with His love.

C. Fellowship in the Spirit

- 1) In the ESV it reads “Participation in the Spirit.” But the word here is koinonia which means... fellowship.
- 2) Everything we have from God comes by virtue of our Union w/ Christ. But it is all applied to us practically and experientially by the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
- 3) If you are a child of God (1 Cor. 6:19 says) your body is the temple of the H.S. You are indwelt by the Spirit. It is by the Spirit that you have spiritual life, spiritual gifts, spiritual fruit. And Paul says in Romans 8:26 that the Spirit helps us in our weakness because we do not know how to pray as we should. So, the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words”
- 4) And, by the way, even the unity that we have is called... the unity of... “the Spirit.”

D. Affection and Sympathy

- 1) “Affection” is *splagna*, meaning “inward parts,” or “bowels”. The KJV renders it “Bowells of Compassion.” He is using Bowells metaphorically of our emotions.
- 2) Sympathy is also translated compassion. But you get the idea here. Paul is reminding us of the tender, compassionate, personal ministry we all receive by virtue of being children of God. We are unspeakably blessed and personally cared for by

the Lord.

2. All of us have experienced these graces. We should note that the word “If” here is better translated “since.” Paul assumes we all have experiential knowledge of the tender ministry of the merciful Lord.

3. He is saying: Since this is your common experience, let it be an incentive to live in a manner worthy of the gospel. You see, obedience to God is something believers do NOT merely because of the commandments, but as the fruit of our gratitude for God’s kindness toward us. It’s not that we HAVE to obey Him; it that we GET TO obey Him. We GET TO live in fellowship with God, and we GET TO experience the joy of walking under his Lordship.

4. Paul is already happy with the church at Philippi. He already rejoices over their faithfulness to the Lord and the Gospel of His grace. His bucket of joy is almost full regarding them! But there is still room for more! So he says, (v. 2) Complete my joy. Fill it to the fullest.

- A. When you go to the gas station you will often see a sign that says, “Do not top off your tank.”
- B. In other words, Don’t fill it all the way to the top because some of it could spill and that makes for a dangerous situation.
- C. But Paul says, with regard to my joy in you, Top It Off! Top it off! How? By preserving the unity that we have in Christ
- D. We’ve rehearsed the Divine Incentives for Unity, now let’s look at the...

II. Essential Objectives for Unity.

Read v. 2

1. Notice the three objectives: 1) Same mind, Same love, same purpose

A. Being of the same mind:

- 1) Being of the same mind means we as a church go after life the way the Philadelphia Eagles hit the field at the super Bowl. They all have one motive, goal, attitude, and will; namely, to get the ball into the end-zone. They’re not out there to hawk the new men’s Colone with their name on it. They’re not there to sell T-shirts and ball caps. No, there hit the foorbball field to win the competition!
- 2) To mutually live in a manner worthy of the gospel means we all have the same mind about the goal. We are here to proclaim

the excellencies of Christ in all things to the glory of God in the joy of all peoples. We live to display Christ and promote his Gospel.

3) So the first objective is to have the same mind.

B. Having the same love:

- 1) Paul wants us to have a reciprocal love for one another. Remember, Jesus said “they will know you are my disciples if you love one another” (Jn. 13:35)
- 2) When the apostle John wrote his first Epistle he repeatedly declared that if anyone does not love your brother, he/she don’t belong to God. But then again, it is the natural inclination of the heart of a believer to love other followers of Christ. The fruit of the Spirit is... Love.

3) Unity comes when we have the same mind and the same love.

C. Being of full accord and one mind:

- 1) The NAS separates these phrases to read, “United in Spirit, intent on one purpose.”
- 2) Whether you divide them up or keep them together Paul’s is clear. He’s is exhorting us to live in harmony with one another and direct our lives toward a single goal.
- 3) Beloved, this is what it looks like to mutually live in a manner that is worthy of the gospel. It looks like something the world only dreams of. It looks like true unity between people from diverse backgrounds (Jew, Greek, Slave, Free, Male Female)... It is unity of mind, love, and purpose in life. It is a supernatural unity, and one that we freely delight in at Calvary Bible Church.

D. So, we have considered the Divine Distinctives of Unity, the Essential Objectives of Unity, and finally...

III. The Humble Methods of Unity

Read v. 3-4

1. Someone has well said that, “Love begins when someone else’s needs are more important than my own.”¹
2. These two verses offer us an example of a Jewish writing devise called antithetical parallelism where one thought is stated and then contrasted with its opposite. And right in the middle we find the word “But.”

Read Verse 3

3. O beloved, this is where this text becomes painfully practical. If a church is going to enjoy and maintain the kind of unity Paul is calling for, believers must practice radical self-denial rather than worldly self-agrandizement. The unity of the Spirit in the local church can only be achieved if each member of the body Puts Off all self-seeking and self-promotion and self-entitlement and Puts On a mindset that sees everyone else as more significant than one’s self.
 - A. I should never preach to be viewed as better preacher than someone else.
 - B. One should never sing in such a way as to best someone else.
 - C. We should never play a musical instrument to draw attention to self.
 - D. One shouldn’t talk of their children as if they are better than other people’s children, or our career, or house, or our net worth.
 - E. Rather, in everything we do as believers we should seek to exalt Christ and lift others above ourselves. “Let all things be done for edification” (1 Cor. 14:26)

4. Selfish ambition always looks for an angle to elevate self over others. Conceit constantly strains for empty praise. But humility urges us to consider our own insufficiencies and consider others as worthy of more honor than ourselves.

Read v. 4

5. This is NOT saying we should have no self-interest. Rather, Paul is saying that our own self-interest should be exceeded by our concern for other’s interests whenever possible.
 - A. We hold the door for someone coming through behind us.

¹ Thomas Constable, *Expository Notes of Tomas Constable – Philippians*, (Sonic Light website, last viewed on March 1, 2018) <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/philippians.pdf>

- B. We offer step up to gather people's plates after the meal so they can rest and fellowship
- C. We offer the other person the seat we wanted, or the parking space, or the classroom, or the part in the ensemble.
- D. I remember hearing one preacher say that the reason Euodia and Syntyche were divided in the church of Philippi was because Euodia was the choir director and Syntyche was the women's ministry leader and both wanted to use Fellowship Hall on the same day.

6. It might be obvious when someone has a real need that we should sacrifice for them. But here Paul is speaking about interests. Paul wants us to be concerned NOT only about what the other person NEEDS but what he/she desires as well.

7. What are we learning here? Paul is teaching us what it means to live in a manner worthy of the Gospel. People who eagerly receive the daily unmerited grace of God on themselves should constantly pour out the unmerited grace of God on others. And that means we regularly deny self in order to serve others.

8. Do you want to know what that dynamic looks like?

Read v. 5-8

9. You see, Jesus showed us how to live in a manner worthy of the gospel. It's not just loving Jesus with all your heart. It's also loving one another in a manner that in some way mirrors how Jesus loved us, and loves us.

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