

Contagious Joy

Part 7 – Biblical Unity... Can't We All Just Get Along?

Philippians 2:1-5

May 3, 2009

Illustration: Rodney King. Not a bad question for the church!

We are never commanded to “create” unity in the Body of Christ, only to preserve it. It presupposes that you are to already have it in the church and therefore our job as believers is to maintain it. Why is it so important? What threatens it? How do we maintain it? Can't we all just get along?

¹⁻⁴If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care – then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. ⁵Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. (The Message)

I. THE MOTIVATION FOR BIBLICAL UNITY (v. 1)

Background

1. 1st Class conditions in the Greek. The writer assumes them to be true. “If and it is!” NIV better translates “you have” vs. “there is”. **Since you have... or Since there is...**
2. The one danger which threatened the Philippian church was that of disunity. There is a sense in which that is the danger of every healthy church. It is when people are really in earnest, when their beliefs really matter to them, that they are apt to get up against each other. The greater their enthusiasm, the greater the danger that they may collide. It is against that danger Paul wished to safeguard

his friends. (William Barclay *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*. Rev. ed., [Louisville, Ky.: Westminster, 1975], 31)

3. Paul's concern here is not about doctrines, ideas, or practices that are clearly unbiblical. It is about interpretations, standards, interests, preferences, and the like that are largely matters of personal choice. Pushing our agenda needlessly subjects the Body to unnecessary division. Of course we aren't talking about major doctrinal issues; our statement of faith addresses that! **It is when your personal preference becomes my moral imperative!**
 - Ear rings and tattoos
 - Drinking and tobacco
 - Dancing and card playing
 - Home School, private school or public school
 - Calvinism or Arminianism
 - Charismatic vs. non-charismatic
 - Having a building or not
 - Talking about politics or not
 - Contemporary worship or traditional
 - What we wear... or how we spend our money
4. When Epaphroditus brought a generous gift from the church in Philippi, and good news of the church's concern for Paul, he also brought the bad news of a possible division in the church family. Apparently there was a double threat to the unity of the church;
 - False teachers coming in from without (Phil. 3:1-3)
 - Disagreeing members within (Phil. 4:1-3). What Euodia ("fragrance") and Syntyche ("fortunate") were debating about, we don't know!
5. **True spiritual unity comes from within; it is a matter of the heart. Uniformity is the result of pressure from**

without. This is why Paul opens this section appealing to the highest possible spiritual motives.

6. Transition: He gives 4 simple incentives or motivations for spiritual unity...so we can just get along!

A. **The connection we have in Christ**

“if there is any encouragement in Christ”; If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ (The Message)

1. **Encouragement:** (Paracletus). Used of the Holy Spirit.
2. “Shouldn’t the divine influence of Christ in your life compel you to preserve the unity that is so precious to Him?” Can I encourage you because you belong to Christ?

B. **The comfort found in love**

“if there is any consolation of love”

1. Paul's love for the Philippians should impel them to respond positively to his request also.
2. **Consolation:** speaking closely with someone, and with the added idea of giving comfort and solace. Any comfort in His love?

C. **The community we have in the Spirit**

“if there is any fellowship of the Spirit”; if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, (The Message)

1. Is there any fellowship together in His spirit?
2. **Koinonia:** Fellowship: refers to the eternal life, provided by the indwelling Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16; 12:13; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 John 1:4–6).

D. **The compassion we can enjoy**

“if any affection and compassion”; if you have a heart, if you care (The Message)

1. The affectionate sympathy, of God and Christ toward the Philippians would make unity normal and expected for

this congregation. Are your hearts tender and compassionate?

2. **Affection** (*spIanchna*) refers literally to the bowels, or viscera, but was commonly used metaphorically of the emotions.
3. **Compassion** (*oiktirmos*): 2X
 - “By the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (Rom. 12:1)
 - And he speaks of God as “the Father of mercies” (2 Cor. 1:3)

II. THE MANIFESTATION OF UNITY (v. 2)

How do we know whether or not there is unity? What will be the evidence in our Body?

A. **Like-mindedness**: *Being of the same mind*

1. "Do your best to preserve the unity which the Spirit gives, by the peace that binds you together." Eph. 4:3 (GN)
2. Same Mind (*to auto phronēte*) “to think the same thing,” or “to be like-minded.” Thinking right is essential to the spiritual unity that is a major theme of Philippians – of the twenty-six occurrences of the verb *phroneō* in the New Testament, ten are found in this letter.
3. We care about the same things. Reaching people who are far from God, growing in our faith, etc.

B. **Loving relationships**: *Maintaining the same love*

1. To have the **same love** is to love others equally. On a purely emotional level, having equal love for others is impossible, because people are not equally attractive. *Agapē* (**love**), however, is the love of will, not of preference or attraction.
2. It is based on an intentional, conscious choice to seek the welfare of its object. It is because *agapē* (**love**) is based on the will that it can be commanded.

- C. **Spiritually Connected**: *United in Spirit*: Of one accord
1. Our unity is based on the fact that the HS resides in us. So when we fight, either the HS spirit isn't in control or we aren't really a Christ-follower!
 2. Spiritual connection can transcend geography
- D. **Purposely Focused**: *Intent on one purpose*
1. Working together with one mind and purpose.
 2. Harmony produces happiness!
 3. Example: Our mission...to be a community of authentic Christ followers, by knowing Him and making Him known.

III. THE MINEFIELDS THAT DESTROY UNITY

- A. **Critical spirit resulting in division**: You are wrong!
1. Sin revolving around stubbornness/self righteousness
 2. Last week contrasted a critic from a confronter.
- B. **Pride reflected in self reliance**: I am right!
1. That is the problem. We always think we are right!
 2. *"What causes fights and quarrels? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but you don't get it." James 4:1-2*

IV. THE MAINTENANCE OF UNITY (v. 3-5)

- A. **Defuse Competition**: Have the proper **motives**! (v. 3a)
Do nothing through selfish ambition (v.3a); "Never act from motives of rivalry ..." (Ph) "There must be no competition among you ..." (JB)
1. **Selfish ambition**: The same word (*eritheian*) appears in 1:17 to describe the attitude of those who opposed Paul.
 2. The term did not originally have a negative connotation and merely referred to a day laborer. But it came to be used metaphorically, and almost exclusively, of a person who persistently seeks personal advantage and gain,

regardless of the effect on others. It often was used of the unfair pursuit and self-serving preservation of political office. By New Testament times, it had come to mean unbridled, selfish ambition in any field of endeavor.

3. It usually carried the idea of building oneself up by tearing someone else down, as in gambling, where one person's gain is derived from others' losses. The word accurately describes someone who strives to advance himself by using flattery, deceit, false accusation, contentiousness, and any other tactic that seems advantageous.
4. **Illustration: Sibling Rivalry.** Are you competing with your brothers and sisters, trying to prove that you're better? You're an adult and you're still trying to compete! You're on the same team, the same family! **The first cause of conflict is competing desires.**

B. **Delete Conceit:** Have the proper **mood!** (v. 3b)

or empty conceit (v.3b)

"Never act from motives of personal vanity" (Phillips)

"Don't do anything ... from a cheap desire to boast" (GN)

1. **Whereas selfish ambition pursues personal goals, empty conceit seeks personal glory and acclaim.** The former pertains to personal accomplishments; the latter to an overinflated self-image. Understandably, a person with such **conceit** considers himself always to be right and expects others to agree with him. The only unity he seeks or values is centered on himself.
2. Ego gets in the way of hearing the other person's point of view. *"Pride only breeds quarrels." Prov. 13:10*
3. Anytime I'm critical of somebody else in a judgmental attitude, I'm playing God.
4. **The second cause of conflict is personal pride** – when I've got an ego and refuse to admit it when I'm wrong. That just breeds quarrels. If you could eliminate ego, you

would solve most of the people problems in today's church and even the world.

C. **Defer to others**: Have the proper **mindset** (v. 3c)

With humility (lowliness) of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself (v. 3c)

1. Unsaved people in Paul's day did not view humility as a virtue any more than most people today do!
2. **Humility of mind** is the bedrock of Christian character and of spiritual unity. It is not incidental that the first and foundational beatitude refers to being “poor in spirit” (Matt. 5:3), which is synonymous with **humility of mind**.
3. He was not saying we should view everyone as better than ourselves in every way. His point was that we should view others as worthy of more consideration than we give ourselves (cf. Rom.12:10; 1 Pet. 5:5-6).
4. When he says "better" he doesn't mean "superior". He means "worthy of respect". He says you're not to put people down; you treat them better than yourself.
5. **The third cause of conflict is when I fail to value other people**, when I treat them with less respect than they deserve.
6. Self serving agendas are nothing new!
 - Greece said, “Be wise, know thyself.”
 - Rome said, “Be strong, discipline yourself.”
 - Asceticism says, “Be lowly, deny yourself”
 - Religion said, “Be good, conform yourself.”
 - Epicureanism says, “Be sensuous, satisfy yourself.”
 - Education says, “Be resourceful, expand yourself.”
 - Materialism, “Be narcissistic, please yourself.”
 - Pride says, “Be superior, promote yourself.”
 - Christ says, **“Be unselfish, humble yourself.”**

7. Verse 3 deals with how we **view** other people

D. **Demonstrate Consideration**: Have the proper **manner** (v. 4)

Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also the interests of others (v. 4)

1. Be concerned for the interest of others. Be intentional about putting others interests before your own.

2. Andrew Murray, "The humble person is not one who thinks meanly of himself; he simply does not think of himself at all."

3. **Look**: "scopos" from which we get the word "scope" -- like the scope on a rifle. Telescope in on it. Pay attention to the needs of other people.

- He may be making a subtle reference to the ascetic lifestyle that was so self absorbed.
- Don't be selfish! Your focus is on other people.
- Someone well said: 'Love begins when someone else's needs are more important than my own,
- v. 4b deals with how we **relate** to them.

4. Are you a servant or are you selfish?

- Even when it is inconvenient?
- Serve even when you don't like the person?
- When you don't even like the task; when it is not enjoyable (ex. setting up?)
- When there is nothing in it for you?
- **Illust**: Yorba Linda Fires... neighbors helping one another.

5. **The fourth cause of conflict is when I'm insensitive to other's needs.** When I only see my needs, my feelings, how tired I feel, how pressured I feel, what I'd like to do on my day off.

E. **Develop Christ likeness**: Have the proper **model** (v. 5)

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus (v. 5)

1. Let the mind that was in Christ be in you
2. The fifth cause of conflict is living without Christ.
3. To be humble and servant oriented was quite extraordinary! Next week we will look at Christ's model of humility!

Table Talk

1. What four things should serve as a motivation for unity?
2. What should be the nature of our unity? How is it demonstrated?
3. What 5 things are necessary to maintain unity?
4. What are the 2 contrasting attitudes that Paul is comparing?
5. Do you think pride is an issue in our church? In your life?
6. How is God calling you to serve others?
7. If Satan wanted to attack the unity of our church, how would he do it?