



Philippians 2:1-4

The Life of Unity

Philippians 2:1-4 NKJV

¹Therefore, if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the spirit, if any affection and mercy, ²fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. ³Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Overview

Paul is taking up the theme of worthiness again that he spoke of in verse 1:27. He is now emphasizing the need for Christian unity. In 1:27-30 he tells the Philippians how to stand strong for the Lord against external conflicts. Now he tells them how to act against internal conflicts in the body of Christ.

This is necessary against a hostile world (how true then and how true now.) The Philippian church is beginning to experience factions and Paul desires to reverse the trend. Dissensions cut at the heart of Christian fellowship and they weaken the church's ability to respond to an adversative world.

The life of unity was important to Paul (again referenced in verses 1:27 and 2:2.)

- It's a central theme to our Christian belief.
- It's an example to the rest of the world.
- It's a distinguishing feature. Unity is the gospel's hallmark.

Paul instructs the Philippians to “complete my joy”. His exhortation was to heed his word because they should know it would make him happy.

Verse 1 – Gives us the facts. Paul is reminding the Philippian church of their deep corporate benefits of their Christian calling.

Verse 2 – Gives corporate exhortations. In light of the benefits described in verse 1, Paul is now directing the church to walk in unity.

Verses 3 & 4 – Gives individual exhortations. This is a continuation of Paul's direction to the church to walk in unity.

A) Christian Oneness (verse 1)

- 1) The word “Therefore” or “So”, depending on your version is a connection back to verse 1:27. In the previous passage, Paul's focus was on the need for good Christian unity in the face of the opposition of the world.
- 2) “Consolation in Christ” connects us to one another.
- 3) We note then, that the order of the first three items in the verse is the same as that of the ‘grace’ in 2 Corinthians 13:14, ‘Christ...love...spirit...’ (Motyer, 1984, p. 103)

¹⁴The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.” 2 Corinthians 13:14

- 4) Paul is writing a series of conditionals (“if” clauses) that he takes to be true. These truths then ground his resulting instructions in verse 2. Paul definitely considers these conditionals (“if” clauses) to be true of the Christian life. (Chapman, 2012, pp. 98-99)
- 5) We’re supposed to be a part of the body of Christ. I think of *If We Are The Body* by Casting Crowns (partial lyrics below). This song is a good example of telling us what we should be. It isn’t questioning if we are the body, rather it tells us that we are and how we should be reaching out and be more unified.

*But if we are the body
 Why aren't His arms reaching?
 Why aren't His hands healing?
 Why aren't His words teaching?
 And if we are the body
 Why aren't His feet going?
 Why is His love not showing them there is a way? (Mark Hall, 2003)*

- 6) Fellowship in the spirit testifies of the vertical and horizontal relationships we have. First, we have to have a relationship with God, through the Son and the Holy Spirit (vertical.) That is something we all have, or should have, in common. Once we have that, we can have we can be in mutual fellowship with one another (horizontal.) 2 Cor. 13:13, Phil. 1:5, 1 Cor. 1:9 10:16, Phil. 3:10, 1 John 1:3

*⁶If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.
⁷But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1:6-7*

- 7) In Christ, he (Paul) pours this aspect of the divine nature, fellowship, upon the church. To have the gift of fellowship but fail to exercise it must be a central denial of saving truth. (Motyer, 1984, p. 104)
- 8) Accepting Christ = New Creation = New heart and new sensitivities = New relationships and new possibilities of identifying deeply with each other. (Motyer, 1984, p. 104)
- 9) Paul is reminding believers of the many benefits they have in their Christian fellowship – benefits that stem directly from God but also flow through mutual loving relationships within the church body. In light of these benefits, Paul will call for Christian unity. It is important to note that such benefits provide consolation in times of external persecution (thus connecting us with verses 1:27-30). (Chapman, 2012, p. 100)

B) Christian Unison (verse2)

- 1) The truths of verse 1 lead into the exhortation of verse 2. “...it appears important that we note the connectedness between verses 1 and 2...Verse 2 clearly focuses on the human interaction in the church, so it makes some sense that verse 1 previously acknowledges the mutuality of their fellowship with one another.” (Chapman, 2012, p. 100)
- 2) “Complete my joy”. Paul is exhorting the church to fill others up. The Greek word used here (pleroo), Paul has used elsewhere to describe filling up someone with joy (Rom. 15:13, 2 Tim. 1:4), filling someone with knowledge (Rom. 15:14, Col. 1:9), and filling someone up with comfort (2 Cor. 7:4). He’s calling them to action of unity.
- 3) Yet unity without mutual love, common interests and agreed values could be as cold as a marriage of convenience. (Motyer, 1984, p. 96)
- 4) We must agree to what the gospel is. How do we know what is meant to be like-minded? Paul tells us here that to “think the same thing”, we must participate in mutual love, have a mutuality of soul, and be of one mind. The last one here overlaps with the initial call to be like-minded which is a way Paul is expressing the importance of unity. Chapman

¹⁶ Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Rom. 12:16

⁵ Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, Rom. 15:5

¹¹ Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. 2 Cor. 13:11

5) In this passage, Paul says to have the same love. “Note that he does not say ‘loving the same things’, but ‘possessing the same love’. What can this be but a love identical with God’s love, his own love bestowed on us so that we act and react as he would do?” (Motyer, 1984, pp. 105-106) We should have both a love for our brothers and sisters and a love for God our Father.

6) It doesn’t hurt to remind ourselves of the royal law,

^{18b} but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord. Lev. 19:18b

7) We don’t see the light in ourselves, sometimes, without feedback. We’re called to help others see their worth and to help them grow.

8) Being of one accord – to be in agreement, in harmony, “like-souled”.

9) Love is the emotional side of unity while accord is stressing the side of our will.

10) Unified thinking was an important theme in Paul’s Christian ethics. “Paul’s vision of unity includes mind, emotions, and will.” (Motyer, 1984, p.106) This vision translates to our full being, which was talked about by Steve in his teaching on Phil. 1:27-30. These three things also have to be manifested in us for us to be of one accord.

11) We must embrace the call to unity (both in our local churches and in our global relationships). We must also regretfully allow that there are times when division is necessary. We must be very, very slow to seek division, and we must look for opportunities for a return to unity. And, our own attitude through it all must be one of humility – and it is to this last point that Paul turns to in the next verse. (Chapman, 2012, p. 108)

C) Christian Harmony (verses 3 & 4)

1) Amity, peace, friendship. “Any unity in the church demands some give and take, some willingness to compromise. That willingness requires us to be open to not getting our own way. In short, it demands humility.” (Chapman, 2012, p. 108)

2) Selfish ambition and conceit are great enemies of a united church. “What unites ‘rivalry’ (i.e. self-ambition) and ‘conceit’ is a deep desire to have things ‘my way’. ‘My way or the highway’, as the saying goes. If we all seek to have things our own way, then rivalry and quarreling is the natural outcome.” (Chapman, 2012, p. 109)

3) We are not to do things to make ourselves look better or for gain, but through a lowliness of mind. A lowliness of mind here is the same thing as saying to make ourselves humble. Pride gets in our way too many times and is the beginning of the downfall. Pride also sets us apart from one another, taking away the ability to become, or be more, unified.

4) We are to regard others highly, better than ourselves.

a) There is a difficulty in thinking lowly.

i. Being offended and exerting our will.

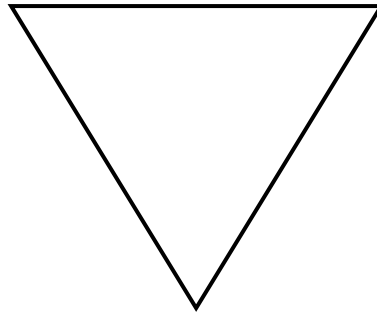
ii. Doing things for others with the thought of receiving something in return.

5) Verse 4 turns to our individuality. We are to watch out for our own interests, as well as the interests of others.

6) What are we looking out for? Our steadfastness against a hostile world. This brings us back to the previous passage that Steve taught on. Difficulties of the Philippian church back then are similar to the American church today. Examples include but are not limited to: pride, self-interest, apathy, in-fighting, and lack of love.

7) Motyer describes Paul’s teaching from 1:27 to 2:4 as an upside-down triangle.

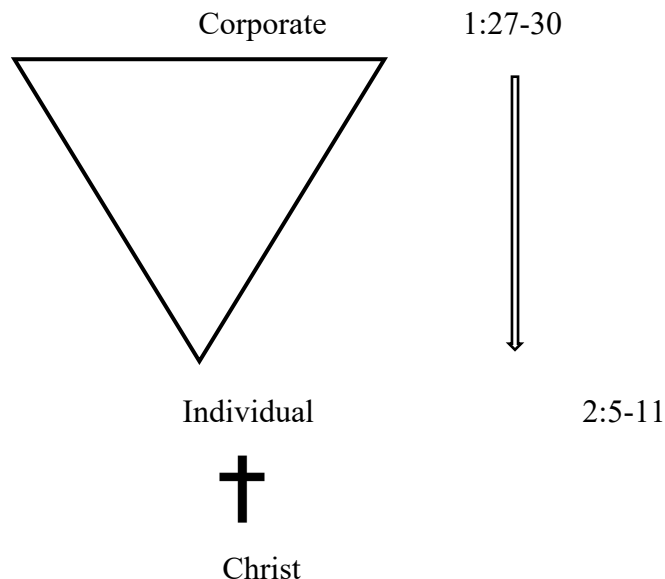
Where the church faces the world, finds it hostile yet stands fast.



Individual responsibility

But this steadfastness depends on the strength of the 'legs' which support it, and they are not 'splayed out' for strength, but triangle-wise come to a point – the point of individual responsibility. Steadfastness depends on unity and unity depends on me. (Motyer, 1984, p. 106)

8) Phil. 1:27-30 gives us another way to look at the triangle.



Corporate Unity depends on the individual which depends on the relationship with Christ. Any unity in the church demands some give and take. We have to be willing to be open and not get in our own way. To put it simply, it demands humility.

9) This is Paul's insight here so he calls for Christian humility, and looks to Christ as the great exemplar of such humility (2:5-11). (Chapman, 2012, p. 108)

10) Such humility is a common theme in Paul's writings. (Eph. 4:2, Rom. 12:16, 1 Pet. 5:5-6, Col. 3:12-14) (Chapman, 2012, p. 109)

¹²Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; ¹³bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. ¹⁴But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. Col. 3:12-14

11) "...the difference between appropriate self-denial and self-abuse. In the American vernacular, does this text call us to become 'doormat's for other people to step on?" No, it means for us to be appropriately humble in all aspects of life, especially to achieve a unified church. "Therefore, discernment must be

exercised to know when the call to “count others more significant than ourselves” applies outside of situations involving Christian unity. (Chapman, 2012, p. 110)

- 12) In order for Christ’s church to reflect the unified fellowship we are called to have in the Spirit, we must each contribute humbly toward the good of everyone else in the church. (Chapman, 2012, p. 111)

D) Application

- 1) Agreement in the doctrine. “In verse 1, . . . the doctrine of salvation is stated in its classical Trinitarian form as the work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If people do not agree in their acceptance and understanding of this, how can they be at one?” (Motyer, 1984, P. 104)
- 2) Experience of salvation. We all have an experience of salvation, a common belief of the saving grace of the Most High through Yeshua Ha Mashiach.
- 3) Manifested unity of living in fellowship in Christ.
 - a) My experience of being in the wrong fellowship after going to college is a perfect example of being unified, but not in the way Christ wanted me to. I am a Pi Delta Sigma alumni and I have very fond memories of the people who I was with at school. However, we didn’t go to church, we didn’t read the bible, nor did we always act according to His will. What I am proud to report, though, is as we’ve gotten older I have been reacquainted with some of my frat brothers and sisters and there are a lot of us who are believers. I can’t say how many believed in the Lord at that time because we never discussed it, but I think our fellowship would be a whole lot different now than it was then.
 - b) We have an obligation as believers to live together in unity. That was Paul’s main concern for the Philippians, even over his own welfare of being in prison.
 - c) Paul’s unselfish mutual care – his concern for the church. One could say these verses are preparation for Phil. 2:5-11, which is Christ’s expression of His unity with His Father.
- 4) Theologically, we could rightly reflect on the Trinitarian nature of God Himself: how the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit exist in unceasing love and unity with one another. That is what holiness looks like; and that is what we, who are being recreated in His image, reflect when we are in unity with one another. (Chapman, 1984, p.)
- 5) Head knowledge and heart knowledge.
 - a) Where do I see myself in these passages? I know that since I came to the Lighthouse I’ve been struck by how much knowledge of the bible others have. Sometimes I feel like I don’t compare or I have a feeling of inadequacy. However, I’ve been reminded that while it’s good to have the “head” knowledge, it has to translate to one’s heart! They have to coexist, so to speak. Having a heart for others can lead to a greater understanding of the word. I’m a good example. I’ve developed relationships with people in the other churches I’ve attended, but not to the degree like the Lighthouse. Here, I’m more involved with you, and you, and you. Get it? I’m more entwined with your needs and your lives. I’ve mentioned before how the prayer community here is something I haven’t experienced before. We continue to lift each other up when we need prayer. The application I take from this passage is bringing up how God works in us during tough times to strengthen us, help us grow, and to be able to reach out to others who are struggling. Not only does this promote unity within our church, but it also helps me build a 45-second testimony into a devotional!
- 6) The last application I have is a passage that is dear to me, which helps me in my walk.

⁵Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Prov. 3:5-6

Bibliography

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