

Messages on Philippians

by

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CHAPTER TWO

UNITY IN CHRIST

Unity is exceedingly essential both in worship and in service.

- Unity in the home is necessary for blessing and prosperity.
- Unity in business matters cannot be overlooked without disaster.
- Unity in the Church is an absolute requirement for God's blessing and spiritual growth.

The Church must be united as the body is united in all its members, as the watch is united in all its parts, as the tree is united in its branches, twigs, roots and trunk. Paul writes a great deal about unity because he knew that no one individual could carry on the work of God successfully by himself.

In chapter 1:5 Paul speaks of unity in service. It was fellowship in the Gospel that stirred his heart. It was not merely fellowship in church service as we know it today. It was not fellowship in church work, church suppers, interchurch athletics, building programs, or clean-up campaigns. He loved these people because they were united with him in the blessed business of winning souls. They prayed and preached, he prayed and preached, and together they rejoiced in the power of the Gospel of Christ.

In verse 7 we read that he rejoiced with them because of their sweet union brought about by the grace of God. They exercised the graces of Christ among themselves. They forgave one another; they were patient with one another. They were faithful and true to Paul while he was away from them. Their lives were filled with grace and this knit them together in heavenly bonds.

In verse 14 we learn that Paul's sufferings were used of the Lord to unite the saints of Philippi in service. When Christians are busy serving, there is no time for grumbling. When Christians are pulling together, there is little opportunity for kicking, biting, or holding back. Paul in his lonely prison cell rejoiced that his children in the faith had not fallen by the wayside but were striving to preach Christ and to make known the unsearchable riches of the Lord of Glory.

In verse 27 Paul compares the believers at Philippi to those who play in games. His experience in the Roman games reveals itself clearly in this passage. The basketball "five," the baseball "nine," the football "eleven" work together.

Each player seeks to fit in perfectly with the actions of the others. Each one in his position seeks to reach the goal and thwart the enemy. The players do not stop to criticize one another or complain or find fault. If they did, it would mean defeat in the game. If they did, the umpire would dismiss them from the game and put someone in line who would work in co-operation with the other members of the team. Each player must supplement the other. If the first one misses the ball or fumbles it, the second player and even the third must go running to make up for the error and to put out the opponent. The team must operate like clockwork. There must be unity.

Paul knew also that in the great game of life, in the battle between Satan and the Lord, between darkness and light, between evil and good, the team standing for God and for righteousness must work together in perfect coordination and devoted fellowship. Nothing short of this will do.

Some things may be omitted from the Church but there must be unity or else there will be defeat and failure. Paul knew it; therefore he impressed it strongly upon his loved ones in order that they might stand fast, striving together for the faith of the gospel. Their spirits must be in accord; their minds must be in agreement; their plans and programs must be coordinated. When this is true, success will come though there may not be a great deal of knowledge; blessing will come although the believers may be more or less young in the faith and somewhat ignorant of the Word. When unity is present, Satan is thwarted, God's people are strengthened and the work of the Lord will prosper.

In chapter 2 Paul expresses his desire for unity in humility. Throughout the chapter there is a call to humbleness of mind. In verse 1 the Lord's people are told to be humble enough to let the consolation of Christ mend their broken hearts and His love bring solace for their sadness. They are to be willing to walk in the fellowship of the Spirit, not in arrogancy and pride.

In verse 2 the Philippian believers are exhorted to be willing to think with one another, to be likeminded, willing to be guided somewhat by the thoughts of other believers. No believer should elevate himself above others as knowing more than they do. Each one is to have love for the other.

In verse 3 Paul warns them about pride, egotism, self-sufficiency and self-elevation. Pride and love do not go together. Pride does not make things go smoothly; rather it makes them go very hard. Lowliness of mind is most essential to successful ministry. No church can prosper if the leaders are proud, exalt themselves and extol their own virtues.

The remedy for this pride is found in verse 4. The Lord's people are to observe the needs of others rather than to satisfy their own selfish desires. They are to fit in with the lives of others, the hearts of others, the minds of others; and this applies to every man, not just a few. Pride will not be present where hearts are filled with love for others. Humility will reign where there is love for others. We must be willing to be a doormat in the palace of the King.

Let us be linked together with all of God's people in humbleness as Christ became the Head of the Church through humility. He took the low place, the humble place, the place of weakness.

He did not grasp after the throne and its power but was willing to be born in a stable and to die on a cross. Humility leads to exaltation. Humility precedes promotion. It hurt Paul's heart because there was not as much humility as there should have been, for he expresses his feelings in verse 21, all seek their own.

Paul expresses his appreciation of Epaphroditus because of his humility. He tells us in verse 25 of the sweet service rendered by this humble man who was such a great man. Although he was a brother in Christ to Paul, although he was his partner and fellow soldier, he humbled himself to be a body servant to Paul. His humility is recorded. The record of his deep desire to serve others occupies a place in the Word of God.

In chapter 3 Paul speaks of unity of purpose. Beginning at verse 2, he declares that there should be purpose of heart to live a life of separation from false leaders and teachers, and evil workers. Such people are not to be permitted to teach or minister among God's people.

There must be purpose of heart also to lay aside the things that would naturally appeal to our sense of comfort and ease, or even to our spiritual pride. We must strive to become more like Christ and take advantage of each and every means of grace.

Paul expressed his purpose and desire in no uncertain language. In verse 15 he links his purpose with theirs and with ours. He desired that all believers be united in mind and heart. He says, "**LET US . . . be perfect . . . and whereto WE have already attained, LET US walk . . . LET US mind.**" He did not keep his purpose of heart for himself alone. He joined with others so that all together might seek to grow in grace and become more and more like Christ. We, today, need also to help one another along this blessed path.

In chapter 4 the apostle states that there is unity in meditation. At the beginning of the chapter he urges the believers to meditate on the Lord Jesus Himself. He urges these two quarreling sisters to think about the Lord and not about the failures of each other. He wanted his fellow laborers to rejoice in the loveliness of their Lord, His greatness, His power and His sufficiency.

In verse 6 he exhorts them not to meditate upon the sorrows and problems of life, but to join their hearts together in prayer and thanksgiving for answered prayer. Paul knew they would have perfect peace when they meditated on Christ's perfect power.

In verse 8 Paul directs their meditation to the things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and full of praise. If the heart meditates on such things, then the very presence and fellowship of the God of peace will be our happy portion.

In verse 11 Paul reveals that his meditation on the Person and the work of Christ was quite sufficient to keep him from meditating upon and grieving over the sorrows of his life.

The unity which we have been considering cannot be obtained or enjoyed unless the Spirit of God conforms us in some measure to the image of Christ. We are to be like Christ in our manner of living, as Paul states in chapter 1:21.

When we live as He lived, we are in happy union and communion with others of God's people. Paul said, "**For me to live is Christ,**" and again he said, "**Christ liveth in me.**" Christ's lovely, living presence will make us act toward others as He did, and this will mean sweet unity in the family of God everywhere.

In chapter 2:5, we are told to be like Christ in our manner of thinking. The apostle tells us, "**Let this mind be in you.**" Again he says, "**Think on these things.**" We read in Proverbs, "**As he thinketh . . . so is he.**" The mind controlled by the Holy Spirit will think in accordance with God's will.

Only as the Spirit controls our thoughts will godly unity be maintained with other believers. This is brought about, as we read in Romans 12:2, by "**the renewing of your mind.**" The Spirit does it. When He does not do it, we are thinking thoughts about our brethren, but which, however, are not wholesome and conducive to the unity which the Spirit desires. When He controls the thoughts, then the lips are affected and each expression is controlled. Godly unity is brought about by godly thinking.

In chapter 3:7 we are exhorted to be like Christ in our decisions. Paul decided that nothing was worthwhile except the glory of Christ. He knew that Christ could not be glorified in dissension and strife; therefore he exhorts us to be of the same mind, to care for each other's welfare, and to think more of others than we do of ourselves. When we choose that path, we have decided on a path to godly unity which will prevail wherever we go. You remember that Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the pleasures of Egypt. He made his decision.

Esau made a decision that was calculated to bring a terrible division between himself and Jacob. Demas by his decision brought a division between himself and Paul. We must decide according to the will and mind of God, and when we do so, then we shall find a happy communion and unity with other believers.

In chapter 4:13 we are exhorted to be like Christ in our manner of performance. When Paul said that he could do all things through Christ, he meant that he could endure long, he could live sweetly with those who opposed him, he could bear patiently the insults heaped upon him. Thus Paul brought much blessing to the people of God and sent his benediction to all the people of God.

You will notice that when he expressed his love to them and gave his benediction of grace, mercy, and peace it was ever to all the saints. He omitted none; he included everyone. By thus showing his love and devotion to every believer he was able to live in sweet union and communion with them. He reveals to us also that we, too, may maintain a godly unity and thus bring honor to our blessed Lord.

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