**Philippians 2:1-11 – How To Have Unity With Others**

As we continue in Philippians, I am going to jump down to **Phil. 2:1-11**. That does not mean that **vss. 19-30 of chapter one** is not important, but I just felt that we were head here today. I will say that **Philippians 1:19-30** has some great things to say. In **vs. 21 Paul tells us, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”** He wrestled with his life mission, of being here to help others and his desire to go and be with Christ. At the end of **Philippians 1** he reiterates the need for the church to be unified.

This leads us into **Philippians 2** which includes one of the great passages in Scripture. There is some theological depth found beginning in **Phil. 2:6 and going to vs. 11**. But the first eleven verses fit together as we shall see. For as we will note, we are called to have the same attitude that Jesus had as **vss. 6-11** will show us. But before we get to that, we cannot overlook the beginning of this very important chapter.

Paul has encouraged this church to be unified **(Phil. 1:27-30)**, to be focused on the same goal regardless of if they had different opinions or preferences on how to get there. Someone had to make the call at this church of how they were going to pursue reaching their city for Christ. We can learn from each other, take suggestions, but someone ultimately must make the call.

**The following is our first main point – steps to unity. These will be seen in vss. 1-4 so here we go:**

So, here we are in **Phil. 2**. There is a lot to unpack in these eleven verses in **Phil. 2**. So, let’s get right to it. Paul continues the topic of unity in **vs. 1**. Let’s see what he has to say. Note in **vs. 1** the word **“if.”** The conditions that Paul mentions in **vs. 1**, and I agree with one commentator on this, already existed in the Philippian church. Because of what they had gone through and were going through, they had learned to lean on the Lord, and they were for the most part, unified as a body.

Let’s look at four key words found in this verse and ask some questions as we go. The **first** word is **“encouragement.”** The word can be used to describe comforting others or rebuking, admonishing someone. It is related to the word that Christ used to describe the Holy Spirit, for example, in **Jn. 14:16**.

We have the Holy Spirit living in us. And it takes all of us to make things happen, for unity to occur. It includes comforting and encouraging each other. It also includes, when needed, lovingly confronting one another. But these are all important when it comes to unity.

Keep in mind that even at Philippi there were some things that were challenging their unity. Look at **Phil. 3:1-3** and **Phil. 4:2-3**. We do not know in the latter verse what the problems were between Euodia and Syntyche, but they were big enough for Paul to address. Unity is not automatic; we must work on it. Our encouragement comes from Christ. It is based on our love for Him and each other which is why we comfort and challenge one another.

**Practical examples** would be listening when someone is struggling, encouraging them in a difficult time, thanking them for what they do, and if they are sinning, to challenge them because we love them.

The **second** word is the word **“comfort.”** **Mounce** translates this as **“gentle cheering, encouragement.”** It seems to overlap with our first word, but I like it. We need to cheer each other on. We have all experienced Christ’s love and that should be passed on to others.

The **third** word is **“participation” (fellowship, sharing, community)**. It means sharing in each other’s lives. It is more than surface “hellos.” I understand that we will have certain individuals we connect with as friends maybe more easily than others. But we are to share in each other’s joys and struggles. We are to meet needs within the church when we can, materially and spiritually. We share in each other’s life because of the Holy Spirit Who has brought us together.

The **fourth** set of words are **“affection and sympathy.”** They are joined together by the word **“and”** so I am going to look at them together. **“Affection” to the Hebrews, comes from a Greek word that speaks of the seat of our tenderest affections, especially kindness, compassion, tender mercies**.

We need to be sensitive to the needs of others. We need to be kind and compassionate. Unity is destroyed when we are angry and frustrated. The word **“sympathy”** **carries the idea of “pity”, “mercy” and “compassion.”** This is not to be seen in a negative sense, like we pity someone for acting a certain way. It means that we see a need and we want to try to help. This is what the church is about. Too many churches are fractured and fighting because these things are not evident in the lives of the people.

Then in **vss. 2-4**, Paul takes what he has just stated and shows how as we live these out, it brings strength and unity to the church because our mindset is different. We are focused on others. Let us look at this together and then we will dive into the richness of **vss. 5-11**.

In **vs. 2** Paul says that by the actions of the Philippians, by their unity, brought great joy. He knew that there was a little issue or two going on as we have noted because he uses the word **“complete”** when it comes to his joy. Not that he was not joyful but if the Philippians were getting along it would make him just that much more joyful. **“Complete”** is a great word. **“Make perfect my joy”**, Paul says.

Here are some additional thoughts to what Paul says will make his joy complete in **vs. 2**:

**1) Be of the same mind.** Again, this is not uniformity, but unity. We are headed in the same direction. As individuals, Paul wants them to be united in their thinking, in their purpose, in their focus. The word **“mind” has the idea of the “same understanding, the same views, harmony, to agree together, same inclinations, same goals.”** This means we must lay aside at times our preferences and opinions as we work together to further the kingdom of God. We are to “love God, love people, love serving.”

**2) Have the same love.** This is **“agape”** love, a love that puts others above ourselves, that wants the best for someone without expecting anything in return. It is sacrificial, it is willing to love the unlovely, the difficult, even within the church. We can only live this through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is an action word, meaning that we show God’s love to others by serving them, helping, praying for them, and reaching out to the community around us. It is obviously a choice we make.

**3) Be in full accord.** This word for **“full accord” means “of one mind, united in mind, unity**. It is having one spirit and purpose. Paul ends **vs. 2** with a reminder of being of one mind, one purpose, all headed in the same direction.

The **Life Application New Testament Commentary** notes,

**“A unified church is a formidable fortress against any enemy. The very unity of the Philippian church would ensure that it could stand against any persecution or false teaching that might come its way.”**

**Stuart Briscoe** has a quote, though somewhat long, that I think helps us to understand Paul’s words here, **taken from his commentary on Philippians,** **Briscoe** writes regarding unity,

**“When you attend a symphony concert you don’t hear a stage full of people all playing the same note. Neither are they playing their own separate compositions. Rather they are all scraping, banging, and blowing different parts clearly defined in the score under the direction of the conductor. And the result is not unison, but harmony.**

**To live unitedly requires a knowledge of your part of the score, respectful submission to the conductor and appreciation for the part played by the others in the orchestra. Your score is the Word of God. The conductor is the Holy Spirit, and the rest of the orchestra are your fellow believers.”**

This is a great illustration of **vs. 2**.

**Vs. 3-4** are crucial also to having unity in the church. But these verses also apply to life situations. For the most part, when you and I look around the world we see selfishness. Agendas that are self-centered, people thinking that what their opinion is on anything is what everyone else should think though they base it often on subjectivity, and not absolute truth.

These two verses, which lead into **vss. 5-11**, are packed with practical and encouraging words for us to live by and we can because the Holy Spirit lives in us. So, let’s look at **vss. 3-4**.

**First**, do nothing from **“selfish ambition or conceit” (vs. 3)**. This is a challenge to keep myself off the throne of my life. There is only one King and Lord, Jesus, and it’s not me. The word that is used for **“selfish ambition” was used in the ancient world to describe someone, and this will sound like it is 21st century stuff, who when running for office, would use anything they could, to get elected**. This is the person who would lie about their opponents to get votes. We talked about this word last week.

It also has the idea of being contentious with others. This attitude will destroy unity in a church because the person who is acting selfishly makes themselves the center of everything.

It describes putting ourselves forward, above others, being factious, and willing to do what we need to so we can get ahead or get what we want - a promotion, an office, or just to become the head of something or in having this attitude we try to intimidate others. And we don’t care whether we do so with integrity or not. **James 3:14, 16** warns against having this mindset. It is flat-out self-centeredness, and we must stay away from it. It is a choice we make. Unity in a church will not survive this attitude.

The word **“conceit” (vs. 3) means “empty pride, groundless self-esteem.”** We walk around thinking we are better than others. We have a high opinion of ourselves because of who we are or what we have done. We miss the point. It is not about us; it is about Christ. This attitude will cause problems in a church.

**Second**, in **vs. 3** Paul says in **“humility” count others as more significant than ourselves**. This does not mean that we put ourselves down or do not take care of ourselves. Self-pity is not found in this word. This is talking specifically about unity in the body.

Humility sees ourselves in comparison with God. It is having a healthy respect, as one writer puts it, for Who God is. We know that all we have is from the Lord and the gifts, talents, and abilities we have come from Him. We should do our best at whatever we do but all we have is from Him and humility recognizes that. So, there is no place for walking around acting as if the church is fortunate to have us.

**Col. 3:12** tells us that this is to be one of the marks of a Christ follower. One of the hardest things to do is to put others above ourselves. This is true in marriage, at work, in a community setting. I mean, it is a challenge to do this but because the Holy Spirit lives in us, we can make this happen.

As **William Mounce** says, as the word is used here, we are **“to act in such a way that others may see an attitude of humility.”**

We are to consider others as more **“significant”, meaning “to excel, stand out”** above us. This is humility, putting others first. When we are living in humility, we will not be as quick to point out the errors of others while overlooking our own. In **vs. 4** Paul continues his thoughts on building unity.

**Third**, we are to **“look out” (have regard, care for, have respect to) for the interests of others**. Note that Paul does not say we should not be concerned about ourselves, for he says to take care of our situations, but we are also to look out for others, because in doing so it helps build unity. Pay attention to things in our life and look and see how others are doing. Do they need help? Do they need encouragement?

We must be looking outside of ourselves to have this mindset. Yes, take care of us but take care of others also. That is the point here.

One commentator points out that we need to note the good points and qualities in other’s lives. We need to appreciate each other and one another’s walk with the Lord. The church needs to practice this, the church universal. And all of us as individuals.

**Our second key point this morning is we must have the same mind or attitude as Christ.**

We now come to a place in **Philippians 2** that is theologically deep yet very practical. It begins in **vs. 5**. Paul, after giving us words of encouragement in **vss. 1-4** to work towards unity, turns to the best example of the main thought behind unity and the Christian life, Christ, and having the attitude to serve as He did. Do not overlook this. This is crucial.

In **vs. 5** Paul says, **“Have this mind” (understanding, seek or strive, side with someone)** or mindset because we belong to Christ. We are to be in the same frame of mind that Christ was, that of being a servant. Our thinking is to be like that of Christ.

We could, as some have, say, “Have this attitude among ourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” The key in this verse is that our relationship to Christ as His child enables us to do what Paul is writing. To have the right thought processes towards others and regarding our place in God’s work is vital to unity and church health. Our connection to Christ makes everything Paul says possible for us to live out.

There is no greater example of humility than our Lord and **vs. 6** brings this out. This is what theologically is known as the **“kenosis,”** Christ emptying Himself and coming to earth. But we must be very careful to explain what that means and what it does not mean, that He **“emptied”** Himself.

**2 Cor. 8:9** tells us that though Christ was rich (not financially, but in His place and status in heaven), and that He became poor, meaning He left behind the glory and awesomeness of heaven to come to earth so we could join Him in heaven by accepting Him.

Before we explain what it means that Christ **“emptied”** Himself, notice that Paul says that Christ was in the **“form”** of God. That means **“external appearance, the form by which a person or thing strikes the vision.”** Jesus was the exact likeness of God because He was God. When we see Christ, we see God. When He came to earth, He was by His very nature, God **(Jn. 1)**.

The point here is that He did not have to hold on to something **“a thing to be grasped”** as **vs. 6** says because He was God and continued to be God when He came to earth. His equality with God did not change. Jesus did not lay aside His Deity when He came to earth. Jesus did not cease being God. As **John 17** states, He laid aside His glory, or veiled it we could say, so that we could experience God in human flesh.

In fact, for the first 1,800 years of church history, no one held to the view that Christ laid aside divine attributes when He came to earth. This was a nineteenth and early twentieth century phenomenon and false teaching promoted by some theologians.

**Key:** He did not consider or think of His equality with God something to be held tightly because He did not change His nature when He came to earth. He added humanity to His Divine nature. He did not feel cheated.

**Vital:** Being God also was not something that Christ was trying to seize and hold on to, or retain, to eagerly claim and grasp. Or as we have said, “hold tightly.” His equality with God never changed.

**Mounce** says it well. **He writes that the word in vs. 7 for “emptied” means “to divest one’s self of one’s prerogatives.”** He did that. Jesus laid aside His glory and place in heaven and came to earth and was clear - He was there to do the Father’s and His will. His plans, His goals, all lined up with God the Father’s. There were in total unity.

As noted, Christ did not lay aside His divine nature. For example, He was All-knowing (Jn. 2:24). He knew what was in man. He performed miracles and did these things to show Who He was and that what He was saying was true **(Jn. 6:36; Jn. 10:25)**. He did some miracles through His own power **(Mt. 9:28)**.

He at times chose not to use His divine attributes but He did not leave them in heaven. He restricted, as **John Walvoord** writes, the **“independent use in keeping with His purpose of living among men and their limitations.”** For example, Christ got hungry and tired. He experienced aspects of humanity.

He also chose to do what the Father asked and had shown Him (**Jn. 5:20)**; taught Him **(Jn. 8:28)** and given Him to do **(Jn. 5:36)**. He could have done these all on His own, but He chose to not use every ounce, if we can say that, of His Deity at all times like Omniscience, Omnipresence, Omnipotence.

What He did take on was human form and He became a servant to all **(Phil. 2:7)**. This is the incarnation. Christ in human flesh, serving the world **(Mk. 10:45)**. This is **John 1:14**. The Word (Christ, eternal God) became man. In Christ the fullness of Deity dwells and did dwell when He was on earth **(Col. 2:9)**.

**Phil. 2:7** tells us exactly what Christ did. He became a servant. As **Wayne Grudem** writes, **“The emptying includes change of role and status, not essential attributes or nature.”**

This was accomplished by Jesus coming to earth and serving. **Mk. 10:45** tells us the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom (a payment) for many. Christ helped others. He served a broken world. For the church to have unity, we must think about serving others, as Christ did. It keeps us from self-centeredness and keeps us going in the same direction.

He was willing to die for our sins **(vs. 8)**. But as **Phil. 2:9-11** reminds us, Christ did not stay dead. He returned to heaven, and some day every knee, every person who ever lived, every created being (including angels) will bow before Him as the Lord of the universe. As **John 17:5** shows, Christ received the glory that He had with the Father before coming to earth when He returned to heaven.

May we learn to be servants from the supreme example of Jesus. Next week we will finish out **Phil. 2**.