

July 27, 2014

Christian Unity

Philippians 2:1-4

INTRODUCTION:

Prayer

Tonight we will be watching a movie entitled “Last Ounce of Courage”. It is a movie that merges our patriotism and our religious beliefs together. It encourages us to make a stand to bring God and religious freedom back to America before all of our freedoms are lost. As citizens of the United States, we take pride in our country and want our grandchildren and future generations to have the right to recognize and worship God as we did.

Paul has been talking about citizenship, if you will, as well. Last week, he told us how to be worthy citizens of a heavenly kingdom by saying in 1:27 **“Only conduct yourselves (live your life) in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”**

We read last week that we can be good heavenly citizens if

1. Verse 27: We stand firm in one spirit for the gospel.
2. Verse 27: We unite with one mind for the gospel.
3. Verses 28-30: We are prepared to suffer for the gospel.

If Paul had to pick one of these three and elaborate on it further. Which one do you think Paul felt the churches most needed to hear? Would it be to

- Stand firm in one spirit?
- Unite with one mind?
- Prepare to suffer?

Let’s read our scripture this morning in Chapter 2 and see.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Philippians 2:1-4

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

2 Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any ¹affection and compassion, ² make my joy complete ²by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. ³ Do nothing ³from ³selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴ do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

So, what is Paul emphasizing here in Chapter 2?
It is Unity.

ILLUSTRATION:

There has been an effort by several denominations in recent years to try to unify the churches. It is a noble effort, but in order to try to get everyone aboard, some serious watering down of the gospel has occurred.

Paul told us in chapter 1:27 to “conduct yourselves (live your life) in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” and to “stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel”.

The key words here are “in a manner **worthy of the gospel of Christ**” and “striving together for the **faith of the gospel**”.

We must **not** water down the gospel! We need to be a moral church that is rightly dividing the Word of God. We must be teaching the truths of adultery, unfaithful marriages, and immorality, and stay firm on the moral issues of the day.

Churches that are always moving in the **direction of the culture** and in the **direction of government mandates** that **require** that you **betray Christ and His Word** may get a lot of people to come to the church. But, they are of no value to God’s kingdom.

We are here to show God’s perspective to the world. We have been entrusted with the gospel. What right do we have to tweak it just to make it pleasing to the current culture? What value is that to God? This is salt that has lost its savor.

Compromising for unity is wrong, but we can also go to the other extreme when trying to achieve unity of mind. Some churches or church leaders want to think that “**they are the final authority**”. “It is **MY WAY or the HIGHWAY**”. This is called “**pride**”. This prideful attitude will give the opposite result of unity and that is division. You will never find two independent thinking Christians that have the exact same view on everything. You cannot expect to have the same views on subjects such as

- when creation occurred
- understanding on the kingdom of God
- the sequence of events during the last days and the second coming

What is important is that we seek unity in a “**in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ**”.

So how do we do that? Paul gives us three ways in the first four verses of chapter 2.

1. Motivation for Christian Unity
2. Marks for Christian Unity
3. Means for Christian Unity

BODY:

I. Motivation for Christian Unity.

Philippians 2:1

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

Be Like Christ

2 Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any ^aaffection and compassion, ² make my joy complete ^bby being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

When Paul uses the word IF, **IF there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any ^aaffection and compassion**, he is not saying IF this occurs, he is saying since it is occurring or because it is occurring. It is like saying **IF there is any encouragement in Christ** (and we know that there is) MAKE MY DAY by doing it having the same mind, the same love, being united in spirit, and all working toward the same goal.

The first motivation for Christian unity is that

1. We are Encouraged by Being in Christ.

ILLUSTRATION:

We are in a world where people want to be loved, or “in the money”, or “in the know”. They want to be looked up to and be accepted.

We have something much better. We are in union with Christ.

Think of all of the people who are in sports. They want to excel so they can be great and popular. This gives them a sense of acceptance.

I can't think of anything more encouraging than to know that we are accepted by God! This is because we are “IN CHRIST”.

What does Christian unity look like? Paul helps us in verse 2. Here we will see the MARKS of Christian Unity.

The second motivation is

2. We are Encouraged by Being Consoled in Love.

This means that God loves us! This love brings us consolation or comfort. When we experience a loss, we are often consoled by someone. From this you find great encouragement, even in affliction.

The fact that we are loved by God consoles us like nothing else.

3. We are Encouraged by Having Fellowship with the Spirit.

Fellowship is a close relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. When we accepted Christ and were baptized, we received the Holy Spirit and we became a part of the body of Christ.

We have been studying the trinities in the Bible at Tuesday night Bible study. You might notice that the trinity is referenced here as well.

1. We are encouraged by being in Christ.
2. We are encouraged by being loved by the God.
3. We are encouraged by having fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

4. We are Recipients of God's Affection and Compassion.

This is perhaps a reference to the affectionate compassion that God has for His people. In light of all of this, Paul says that we need to work on unity.

These four truths need to fuel your pursuit of Biblical Christ-centered unity.

Ephesians 4:3

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

³ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

This doesn't just happen! We are have different interests. You think differently than me. I think differently than you. And you know what? You think that you are right, and I think that I am right! That is how we all think.

This is why we must get serious on the importance of unity.

So, this is the question. What does unity look like?

II. Marks for Christian Unity.

Philippians 2:2a

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

² make my joy complete ^{by} being of the same mind

That is mark number one.

1. Be of the same mind.

It is the idea of having the same **mindset**.

It is all of us having the same **attitude**. We do not have to think every thought exactly the same, but we must have the same focus.

What is that focus? Look back to chapter one verse 27. Our focus should be to “**conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ**”. Everything we do must be worthy of the citizenship that we have been given as recipients of the gospel. Everything must glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.

So what is our focus...to glorify Christ.

- No matter how long you have been saved,
- No matter what your theological background,
- No matter what church you may have been associated with in the past,
- No matter how you view a host of things that ultimately doesn't matter,

We **must** all agree on one thing, and that is to walk “**worthy of the gospel of Christ**”.

Be, Paul writes in verse 2, **of the same mind**.

Secondly,

2. Maintain the Same Love

We need to have the same love for one another as God has for us. We must love everyone the same in a way that is Christ like.

That is HARD!

It is hard, because there are some of us that “click” with each other. These are individuals have share things in common and it is natural to want to spend time with them. Then there are some people who do not share the same interests that we do not “click” with. It might be tempting to not even say “hello” to them. That is contrary to scripture, because the scripture here is telling us that we are to **maintain the same love**.

This is not talking about an affectionate, “I like you”. The love here is that I choose to love you as God chooses to love me.

- Even if politically you differ with me,
- Even if in sports, we root for rivaling teams,
- Even if in theological areas, we may come to some different conclusions,

Despite our differences, we must choose to love one another, because God has told us to. We must love each other because God expects as we work to be united in the body of Christ.

Third,

3. Be United in Spirit

When we are dealing with things that are “nonessential” we must have harmony. If someone starts teaching something contrary to the gospel, we must deal with it.

ILLUSTRATION:

When baseball teams are put together, each player has a different role. Some players have speed, some players are great hitters, some are great pitchers, some have quick reaction and can work the infield, others have speed and strong arms and are good in the outfield.

It is not always the most talented team that wins. The team that plays together and works in harmony will excel over teams who do not work with each other.

Our church is the same way. We are the body of Christ. Each of us has different talents. It is when we work together in harmony that God's work can be accomplished. We are the body of Christ.

The fourth mark of Christian unity

4. Intent on One Purpose.

Here Paul is making a full circle. He started out by saying that we are to be of the same mind. Here he is saying basically the same thing.

We must all be focused on why we are here. That is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.

The WHY is verse 1. That is the **motivation** for Christian unity.

The WHAT is verse 2. That is the **marks** of Christian unity.

The HOW is found in verses 3 and 4. That is the...

III. Means for Christian Unity.

This is how practically; by God's grace we achieve unity.

Philippians 2:3

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

³ Do nothing [a]from [a]selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves

1. We Must not Practice Selfishness.

It is the idea of selfish ambition or "This is what I want".

We can be so involved in our part of the ministry in the church, that we shut out what other people are doing and want all of the finances and attention given to us. Paul calls it selfishness, and it can affect the unity of the church.

2. We Must not Practice Empty Conceit.

This is like a vain glory. This is the idea of wanting people to applaud you for what you are doing or wanting to be recognized. Maybe the only reason you are doing something is so you can make a name for yourself and open a path to a higher paying job.

If we are going to practice unity in a way that pleases Christ here at Greenwood Christian Church then we must do nothing due to **selfishness or conceit**.

Paul then gives us a positive practice that we must do.

3. We Must Practice Humility of Mind

This is the opposite of pride. It is a low opinion of your own thinking.

The guy always out front arguing for what he wants is a proud person. He is convinced that he is right and all of the rest of us who disagree are wrong. Humility is the attitude that **I may be wrong**.

The final positive practice that we must do.

4. Regard Each Other as More Important than Ourselves

This is very hard. We are supposed to be walking around thinking that **you** are more important than **me**. This cannot happen with just human strength. This can only happen through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What would this mindset be like?

Maybe it would be when you are in a conversion with someone; you would listen to what their week was like instead of insisting on telling them about yours.

Maybe when I walk into church, I resist talking about the Royals and how they are doing, and instead learn more about you and your interests.

We would have more of these types of conversations, if we regarded each other as more important than ourselves.

1 Peter 5:5-6

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.

⁶Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,

You might ask, does this mean that I do not look after myself? No, Paul answers that in verse 4.

Philippians 2:4

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

It is not wrong to look after our own interests.

- By being careful
- By eating properly
- By getting enough rest
- By taking medication as needed

These are not wrong things to do. What Paul is saying is that we must learn to not only look out for ourselves, but also to look out for the interests of others.

CONCLUSION:

This is the pattern that Paul gives us in the opening of the second chapter to achieve unity.

Why should I care? Because...

- I am encouraged by being united with Christ.
- I am consoled by being loved by God.
- I experience the fellowship that only the Holy Spirit can give.
- I have experienced God's affection and compassion.

If we have experienced these things, you **MUST** care about unity. It is a **SIN** not to care.

What does unity look like?

- Being of the same mind.
- Maintaining the same love.
- United in spirit.
- Intent on one purpose.

How do we get there?

- By not practicing selfishness.
- By not practicing empty conceit.
- By practicing humility of mind.
- By regarding one another as more important than himself.
- By not looking out for our own personal interests alone.

We should be praying often that we can be a body of believers that are **united** as we seek to worship the Lord Jesus Christ and bring him glory.

If you have not accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, this is your opportunity to come forward and let Him know that you are ready to become a part of His family.

We are also here with open arms, if you would like to identify yourself as part of this family of God in the Greenwood Christian church.