

Philippians 2:1-4

Pursue Humility for Unity

- Paul is in prison
- Chained to a guard half a decade. He remembers God is sovereign. He went from being a Pharisee of Pharisees to being a prisoner for Christ
- He had everything he thought he wanted until Christ knocked him off his donkey
- He suffered abuse, neglect starvation, storm, persecution, discredit, pain, and great loss
- Not fighting for freedom, but for Christ by evangelizing, praying, and encouraging the Church.
- His joy is in Christ alone

Last week we discussed that Christ gives us two gifts, belief in him, and suffering for his sake.

The church at Philippi is growing, but in danger. Paul knows that fear and selfishness left unchecked will turn them **against one another** and **away from the gospel**. Paul desires that people will look on the church at Philippi and see a people characterized by love for one another and an interdependence that can come only from Christ.

Facing his own imprisonment and eventual execution, Paul points the church at Philippi to Christ and charges them to **pursue humility for unity**. Unfortunately, the church at Philippi is facing what naturally arises out of groups who work together: **division** and **selfishness**.

Paul is imprisoned. Epaphroditus has nearly died twice. There is false teaching in the church advocating self-reliance. The gospel is not welcome in their area. There is doctrinal and interpersonal conflict in the church.

The church today is still under great strain, and the human propensity for selfishness hasn't changed. We need to pursue humility for unity. If we don't, the church will die

Verse 1

"So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy." These are the aspects of Christ that brought the believers together in the first place. He's reminding them of what it was like to first become a Christian. They followed Christ for a reason.

If there is any encouragement in Christ - Christ never turns away, and he is fighting for us. He showed that on the cross! Paul says that anyone who is a follower has experienced Christ's encouragement during trials and mistakes. No believer is more beloved to Christ than another. That truth carries the power to humble and unify the church at Philippi

If there is any comfort in love – This is like God choosing to offer me his own righteousness despite all the times I've hurt him. Being known personally by the Father is kind of awesome. Paul says that anyone who is a Follower knows the comfort of God's love. They experience a deep relationship with the Father as well as the benefits of being a child of God

If there is any participation in the Spirit – This is sort of a spiritual requirement of salvation and also what actually inducts us into the family. Without the Holy Spirit there is no righteousness. Paul says that when the believers claim eternal life, God's Spirit is in them. He opens their eyes to truth and inextricably connects them, even beyond the grave.

We are going to unite with the believers long dead and still to come in heaven witnessing the fullness of God's glory. Through the Spirit the Philippians are reminded of their brotherhood: the same spirit that sets them apart from the condemned makes them one with each other.

Galatians 3:27-29 – “²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Nothing that divides us is stronger than what brings us together. Also through the Spirit, the Philippians remember that their works cannot earn righteousness.

Galatians 2:16 – “¹⁶ yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.”

We are free because of what Jesus did for us. The encounter with the spirit is an experience like no other. He knows me, he sought me anyway.

If there is any affection and sympathy - the same God we serve counts our tears as precious and has endured the human experience; that's amazing. What other god has shown his people that kind of love? Paul says that God's affection and sympathy are exactly what makes salvation possible. God's affection for us brought him down to us, and his living among us made his death enough to atone for us.

Paul pushes the Philippians to unity on the basis of their own relationships with God: they were all saved in the same way by the same God from the same heart disease called sin and death and offered the same gift of eternal life though they did not deserve it. This truth humbles and unifies them by reminding them of the depth of God's grace.

Verse 2

"complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind"

Paul's greatest desire is that the disciples of Philippi will pursue humility for unity.

Complete my joy - Paul addresses them a father does children. He loves them, and they love him. He helped plant Philippi, and now it had exploded. There was two-way correspondence with Paul. His bond with them, of love, is the base of his influence. On this base, he exhorts them to complete the joy that they have already begun in him by bearing the gospel flame appropriately and becoming a mature body of believers able to do for other churches what he is doing for them. This is relevant today because it is the ultimate call of every body of believers

By being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind – He tells them to think the same way. He pushes the Philippians to collaboratively lift Christ high in their city. They can do this by loving one another, supporting each other as one body, and pursuing the same goal.

All believers love all believers. That's what Paul says, and that's what he means. In all church bodies there is conflict: personalities clash, methods cause friction, and people make mistakes. Paul argues that there is no excuse to treat believers unequally. Whether someone is awkward, abrasive, quiet, loud, annoying, weird, headstrong, opinionated, introverted, extroverted, involved, busy, funny, serious, focused, organized, disorganized, structured, flexible, talented, sitting up front, standing in back, raising hands in worship, or prone to overzealous hugging, that person is loved by Christ the same as everyone else. Popular people have feelings and don't love being gossiped about. Fringe people get tired of being ignored. These things are not new, nor do they have a place in God's kingdom.

The love that characterizes the Church is and always has been what draws in new believers. It's what drew me in. The BCM community was a safe place where people genuinely cared about each other. Rahul and Nathan both made enormous effort to welcome me in, but also showed a countercultural love for the people that were already in. I knew that Jesus love is love that lasts.

This verse describes the first half of gospel heart-transformation that must take place constantly for a church to stand firm and continue growing: unity. The next two verses dive into the second half of this transformation: humility.

Verse 3

Paul speaks here with authority. This is an order. "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves."

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit - This is the hardest thing ever. Paul understands this concept well. His entire life before Christ was about earning his righteousness. Only Christ's love taught him that humility was more admirable than vain achievement. That's crazy! Paul had it all! Pharisee of Pharisees now a prisoner for Christ.

The Philippians were dealing with the same thing any believing body deals with: ambition and rivalry. Individuals would climb the ladder of authority not for the sake of service, but to gain status and position. They didn't seek to advance the gospel flame; they sought only to be recognized by their peers and congratulated for their efforts. As a result, their leadership was poor and their accomplishments were riddled with holes. They were out of touch with the needs of the ministry that they shepherded.

In humility count others more significant than yourselves – I was just kidding, this is the hardest thing ever! This was not an attractive proposition. Roman society was advanced, and the systems of power were brutal. The words associated with the concept of humility generally described slaves and other frequently employed persons.

Paul's suggestion was to disengage from the power struggle of Roman society and to instead tend quietly to one's own affairs and the ministry of the church. Paul's instructions would set the believers apart from the world they lived in, because no other faith allowed people to let go and trust God. No other faith allowed people to become one another's servants, because the requirements placed upon the individual were so strict that no time was left to love others. This was counter cultural.

Verse 4

"Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."

This verse elaborates on the concept he lays out in verse 3. Paul says "don't cling so tightly to yourself that you're blind to the needs of the believers around you." The Philippians were to handle their own affairs as necessary, but to also be intentionally mindful of one another. The believers were to have open hearts, open hands, and open homes.

Open hearts – They lived their lives in a way that welcomed their fellow Christians in so that they could learn to walk in the way of Christ.

Open hands – They leveraged their resources for the benefit of their brothers and sisters that the gospel would advance unhindered by poverty.

Open homes – They lived as family, spending time together in the private spaces and being real with each other even sharing meals sometimes.

Paul recognized that unity in the Church and humility in Christians are both necessary for the gospel to cut away darkness in an area, because nobody wants to join a family that is always turning away from each other or trying to “one-up” each other. Jesus paints a picture much more beautiful than that, and the anguish of his sacrifice bought far more than believers’ petty squabbles. Paul moves the church to pursue humility for the sake of unity, because a church divided will eventually die.

What does this mean for us?

Imagine what would happen if we pursued humility for the sake of unity? We would intentionally set aside time to talk to the students in our ministry that occupy the fringe. We would maintain an awareness of the needs in our ministry and act to keep each other secure. We would share our homes and very lives with one another, becoming strong disciples. USF would be breaking down our doors to get in, and this campus would be sending believers out just as much as it was bringing students in.