

EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

PASTORAL COUNSEL ON UNITY, PHILIPPIANS 2:1-4

A. Introductory Notes

1. Paul will tell the Philippians that their behavior should be worthy of the Gospel of Christ, the topic of the entire section.
2. He then will explain what constitutes a worthy walk by giving characteristics and the life of Christ as the example.
3. Warren Wiersbe, *The Christian life is not a playground; it is a battleground. We are sons in the family, enjoying the fellowship of the Gospel (1:1–11); we are servants sharing in the furtherance of the Gospel (1:12–26); but we are also soldiers defending the faith of the Gospel. And the believer with the single mind can have the joy of the Holy Spirit even in the midst of battle.*

B. On unity (1-4)

1. The call to Christian unity (1-2), *So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.*
 - a. Paul encouraged the believers to pursue unity so his joy in them could be complete.
 - 1) He gave the Philippians four incentives for unity.
 - 2) Each one is a conditional clause (assuming the statements to be true for the sake of argument).
 - 3) Therefore, the *if* may be translated *since*.
 - 4) The first three incentives mirror the picture of our triune God in 2 Corinthians 13:14, *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*
 - b. The incentives
 - 1) *encouragement in Christ*
 - a) The unity of the Father and the Son should promote unity, John 10:30, *I and the Father are one.*
 - b) The fact that every believer is related to each other through Jesus should promote unity, John 17:22, *The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,*
 - 2) *comfort from love*
 - a) The source of this love is God the Father.
 - b) The love of God which comforts our hearts should produce a unity between brothers and sister in Christ.
 - c) Also, Paul's love for the Philippians should be an encouragement for them to pursue unity.
 - d) It has been said, *Love begins when someone else's needs are more important than my own.*
 - 3) *participation in the Spirit*
 - a) It is the same word translated *fellowship* in 2 Corinthians 13:14, *...the fellowship of the Holy Spirit...*
 - b) The indwelling Spirit of God provides the grounds for fellowship with other believers.
 - c) Robert Lightner believes it also refers *...to fellowship that comes from the Holy Spirit, just as encouragement comes from Christ and comfort comes from love.*
 - 4) *affection and sympathy*
 - a) These words carry the meanings of *tenderness and compassion*.
 - b) Such affection for Christians from the triune God should encourage unity among believers.
 - c) Robert Lightner, *One of the Spirit's ministries is to produce within each believer a concern and love for other members of God's family. This may be received or rejected by a believer, but the Spirit's work is a reality and is a basis for spiritual unity.*
 - c. He described the components of unity.
 - 1) *the same mind*
 - a) Christians should have the same opinions concerning spiritual concerns, *thinking the same way.*
 - b) Romans 12:16, *Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.*
 - 2) *the same love*
 - a) It is the same love exhibited within the Trinity and by the Trinity to us.
 - b) Unity demands love that is other-centered, not self-centered, unconditional not conditioned on what is best for oneself.
 - 3) *in full accord*
 - a) Christians should be in *harmony, like-minded* with other believers.
 - b) A. T. Robertson, *...souls that beat together, in tune with Christ and with each other.*

- 4) *of one mind*
 - a) It means to have a *singular purpose*.
 - b) The singular purpose of Christians has been emphasized in this epistle, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

- d. He emphasizes the importance of unity as best he can, H. Spence, The apostle's earnestness leads him to dwell on the idea of unity, clothing the one thought again and again in different words.

2. Unity demands humility (3-4), ***Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.***
 - a. Paul encouraged the Philippians to think less of themselves and more of others.
 - 1) There is no room for *selfish ambition* in believers.
 - a) Paul used the same words to describe those who sought to preach the Gospel with improper motives, Philippians 1:17, *The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.*
 - b) Warnings from Scripture
 - 1] James 3:14, *But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.*
 - 2] 3 John 9, *I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.*
 - 2) There is no room for *conceit* in believers.
 - a) *Conceit* is *pride without basis*.
 - b) It is *false pride*, empty glorying.
 - c) Such an attitude leads to selfish ambition.
 - d) The object of attention for Christians must be Jesus Christ, we are to glorying in Him.
 - 3) There must be room to put others first.
 - a) Humility is the attitude that allows unity to flourish. Paul will emphasize it by illustrating the mind of Christ in the next section.
 - b) Walter Grundmann, *Unsaved people in Paul's day did not view humility as a virtue any more than most people today do.*
 - c) Robert Lightner, *Humility before God and man is a virtue every child of God needs to strive for. A spirit of pride in human relations indicates a lack of humility before God. Paul exhorted the Philippians to consider others before themselves.*
 - d) 1 Peter 5:5-6, *...Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,*
 - b. Christians are to attend to their own needs as well as the needs of others.
 - 1) We are called to provide for our needs, 1 Timothy 5:8, *But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*
 - 2) Humility allows a person to see beyond his own needs and care for the needs of others, as well.
 - 3) Humility is not just an attitude (considering others important) but action (concern for the needs of others).
 - 4) FF. Bruce, *If Christ's example is to be followed, then it is better to be concerned about other people's rights and our own duties than about our own rights and other people's duties.*

CONCLUSION

- A. Unity among Christians is not an option but a priority.
- B. Humility is a platform on which unity is built.