

**Conducting Ourselves in a Manner Worthy of the Gospel
(Unity and the Church)
Philippians 2:1-4
Part Five**

It is not easy to maintain unity. But hopefully amongst believers this is exactly what we will experience. Hopefully we will experience unity in our marriages, in our families, and in our church. This is not an impossible dream but a reasonable expectation.

This truth will be brought home to us in the passage we will be looking at this weekend. We are now studying **Phil. 1:27-2:18**. In this section of Scripture, Paul shares with us what it means to “conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

The first element of conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel is “standing firm in one spirit, with one mind” (Philippians 1:27-30). Standing firm in one spirit, with one mind means that we will strive together for the faith of the gospel while being in no way alarmed by our opponents.

The second element of conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel is our pursuit of church unity (Philippians 2:1-4). We see this truth shared with us in **Philippians 2:1-4** which is the passage we are now presently examining. Let us read this passage, **“If there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, (2) make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. (3) Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; (4) do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”** This passage is not simply a call to unity but a formula for unity.

We are in the process of breaking down this formula for unity in **Philippians 2:1-4** into its basic components. The first component in the formula for church unity is right motivations. Let us read **Philippians 2:1**, **“If there is any encouragement in Christ (and there is), if there is any consolation of love (and there is), if there is any fellowship of the Spirit (and there is), if any affection and compassion (and there is).”** Because of all these what? Look at **V. 2** **“Make my joy complete, by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in the spirit, intent on one purpose.”** In other words, because of all these things in **V. 1** which are in fact true, because of all the blessings listed for us in **V. 1** that the Lord has lovingly poured out upon our lives, then strive for the unity that is described in **V. 2**.

The second component in the formula for church unity is a right description (Philippians 2:2). What the world may understand unity to be and what Paul considers unity are two totally different things. The first mark of unity is “being of the same mind” (Philippians 2:2). Let us look at **Phil. 2:2**, **“Make my joy complete by being of the same mind.”** This does not simply involve being united in our thoughts; it involves the whole disposition. The second mark of unity is “maintaining the same love” (Philippians 2:2). We are to love one another in the same kind of

way that the Lord loved us. The third mark of unity is “united in spirit intent on one purpose” (Philippians 2:2). Just as we are hopefully striving together for the faith of the gospel in the midst of opposition from the world which we saw in Philippians 1:27-30, we will be intent on striving together for the faith of the gospel even in the midst of the challenges that come to us as we relate to one another in the church.

This weekend we will look at the third component of the formula that Paul gives us for church unity. The first component was right motivations, the second component was a right description. The third component is the right means (Philippians 2:3-4). We hopefully are highly motivated based on Philippians 2:1 to strive for the unity that is described in verse two, but how is this going to be achieved? Paul gives us three principles in these two verses.

My hope for this message is that we will have a clear understanding of how we can, as believers, enjoy unity. My hope for this message is that we will have a clear understanding of how we can enjoy unity no matter what the circumstances of our lives might be and no matter how challenging our personal relationships might be. What is the first principle?

The first principle is: Our totally self-oriented agendas must be set aside (Philippians 2:3). Where do we see this in **Philippians 2:3-4**? Let us begin to read **Philippians 2:3**, **“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit.”** What does Paul mean by this statement?

Let us read the very first phrase in verse 3, “do nothing from selfishness.” What does Paul mean by the word “selfishness”? The word “selfishness” (ERITHEIA) comes from a Greek word meaning “to serve for hire”. It speaks of a party spirit. It is the willingness to sacrifice unity on the altar of personal goals. In fact, Aristotle used this word to describe the self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means.

Are there actually people like this? Are there actually people who are really willing to disrupt relationships because they want to enjoy and experience something for themselves? And the answer is, of course! Let us consider parent/child relationships. You may want to help your children learn how to clean up their rooms for a number of very good reasons. But if your children’s agenda is to avoid cleaning the room so that they can continue to play and they are unwilling to set their agenda aside, even in light of your encouragement, then conflict will invariably take place. It is taking place because they are acting selfishly.

Someone might say, “Why doesn’t the parent yield their agenda, which is training their child, in order to accommodate the child’s agenda, which is the desire to play?” The reason is quite simple. Parents who have been placed in a position of oversight cannot yield their God given responsibilities to accommodate the self-serving agendas of those whom the parents have been called to serve. We need to understand that not every personal agenda is necessarily self-serving but unfortunately, often times this is exactly the case and it is these self-serving agendas that invariably create unnecessary conflict and disunity.

Remember the story of the ice cream. Several weeks ago I shared with you my earliest memory

of conflict with Lynn. The conflict happened when Lynn and I decided to get ice cream. But there was still the question of where we would get that ice cream. I decided that we would go to Thriftys where you could get ice cream at 5 cents a scoop but Lynn wanted to go to 31 Flavors where ice cream was 24 cents a scoop. As we drove up to Thriftys I did not sense that Lynn was very happy with my choice. I believe, looking back on this incident, it was not so much that I got upset with her because she wanted to go somewhere else and made that clear to me, but rather I did not get what I thought I deserved, which was respect. I wanted her to give me respect in a manner that I felt was appropriate and when she did not cooperate with my agenda I became angry.

We need to set aside self-oriented agendas. We need to set aside self-centered agendas. Certainly this is not easy to do. In fact, much of the time you may not even know when you have in fact adopted a self-serving agenda. It would prove very helpful when you are having a conflict to pause and consider why you are getting so upset. Perhaps the answer will be your personal selfishness and your self-oriented agenda.

The reason why you may be upset with your child is because you want to rest and your agenda is simply to secure a little relaxation for yourself. The reason why you may be upset with your husband is because his decisions do not fit into your view of what he should be doing and this causes you some anxiety. The reason why you may be upset with your wife is because her response to your decisions are not showing you the respect that you believe you deserve.

Not every agenda is a totally self-oriented agenda, but unfortunately it is far too common and is a primary source of conflict within marriages, families and in churches.

What would drive a person to act this way? Let us look at the very next phrase, **“do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit.”** What does Paul mean by the word translated “empty conceit?” The word “empty conceit” comes from a Greek word (KENODOXIA) which literally means “vain or empty glory.” A person who is characterized by empty conceit will ultimately demand that people bow to him because they have an inflated view of themselves.

How could we ever come to the point where we might be willing to set aside our personal self-motivated agendas? Let us go on to the rest of the verse. **“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself.”**

This leads us to the second principle. We have to stop seeing ourselves in terms of being better than others (Philippians 2:3).

What does the word translated “humility of mind” mean? “Humility of mind” (TAPEINOPHROSYNE) means “lowliness of mind.” It came from a Greek word used to describe the mentality of a slave. It conveyed the idea of being base, unfit, shabby, mean, of no account. Obviously it was not regarded by the world of that time or even of this time as a virtue or quality to be pursued. But God saves the lowly and humble according to Ps. 17:28; God looks upon the lowly according to Ps. 112:4-6. God pays attention to the prayers of the lowly

according to Ps. 101:18. God gives grace to the lowly while he opposes the scoffers according to Isa. 2:11. In the New Testament it refers to the lowliness with which one serves Christ in Acts 20:19 or relates to other Christians which is seen in Eph. 4:2.

If we have the mentality of the slave then it will tend to result in viewing others in a different light. How do we know this? Let us continue to read the verse. **“But with humility of mind (with lowliness of mind, with the mind of the slave) let each one of you regard one another as more important than himself.”** This would seem very reasonable but what is the process that actually brings us to this point?

The personal awareness of the magnitude of our sin is the factor that will produce the humility of mind that Paul is speaking about (1 Corinthians 15:9, 1 Timothy 1:15).

The only sin I know in another person is what I see or hear when I am near them. Because of these limitations I will only be able to see the smallest part of all the sin that is most likely present in another person’s life. But unfortunately I am not nearly so limited in terms of myself. I am always present to bear witness to my own transgressions. Not only the transgressions that people might be able to see if they were near me. But also all the transgressions of the heart whether they are near me or not.

With all this first hand knowledge of our sin, let me ask you, “who would you most likely feel is the greater sinner, the person across the street or the person you might be staring at in the mirror?” I believe it would be the person that we are staring at in the mirror. It is ourselves.

I believe that we see this in the life of the apostle Paul. Let me ask you this question, “was the apostle Paul a horrible sinner?” I would think that we might quickly respond, no! But how would Paul respond? Let us consider for a moment Paul’s words in **1 Cor. 15:9** where he makes it very clear to us that he was the least of the apostles because he had persecuted the church of God. I wonder if Peter would have felt the same way? “Oh yeah, the apostle Paul, is absolutely the least of all us because he persecuted the church.” Do you believe that is what Peter would say? I don’t believe he would even think the thought. But I believe if we were able to ask Peter that question, he would make it very clear to us that he was the least of the apostles because he denied our Lord, not once but three times.

Let us consider another statement by Paul in **1 Tim. 1:15**, **“it is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.”** Not only did Paul consider himself the least of the apostles, he considered himself the least of all of mankind. With this mentality it is not surprising at all for him to go on to say, **“but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself.”**

The word “regard” (HEGEOMAI) means “to calculate,” “to reckon.” It implies a conscious sure judgment resting on carefully weighed facts. The fact upon which our judgment is resting is the conscious awareness of the magnitude of our personal sinfulness. Just as Paul considered others as more important than himself in light of the perceived magnitude of his personal sin, he is

calling us to do the same thing.

There may be someone here this morning who might say, “what a horrible way for someone to view themselves.” But hopefully for the Christians here we don’t see this as such a terrible thing at all. Why? Because it magnifies our sense of gratitude to the Lord for his gracious gift of life made possible through the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son. It causes us to direct our attention to the person that our attention needs to be directed toward and that is the Lord.

And beyond being the means to stimulate worship, it is also the means that God uses to cause us to set aside our self-serving agendas so that we can move in a new direction. What would that direction be? This leads us to the third principle.

The third principle: Our personal agendas need to involve not only our needs but the needs of others. Let us read **Phil. 2:4, “do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”**

The Greek word (SKOPEO) translated “look out for” means ‘to look at attentively,’ ‘fix one’s attention on’ something with deep interest in it. Are you paying close attention to your needs? The answer will invariably be yes. We need to also pay close attention the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

CONCLUSION

If we are going to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, we need to be standing firm in one spirit with one mind (Phil. 1:27-30).

If we are going to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ we need to be striving for church unity. This means that we must understand a certain basic formula which Paul shares with us in Phil. 2:1-4. This involves us understanding the various motivations listed in Philippians 2:1. It involves us understanding the various marks or characteristics of unity listed for us in Philippians 2:2. And it also involves us understanding the means of unity which is spelled out for us in Philippians 2:3-4.

The means of unity is setting aside our totally self-oriented agendas. The means of unity is considering other better than ourselves. The means of unity involves adopting a new agenda which includes meeting the personal needs of my brothers and sisters in Christ and making that an important priority of my life.