

Philippians 2:1-2 sermon notes: The foundation for Christian unity

Passage: "Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind" (NIV).

Sermon outline

Main point: The unity of the church is not a worldly achievement but a supernatural reality rooted in our shared experience with Jesus, and it is a command to be pursued for the glory of God.

Introduction: The church's essential need

- Paul's letter to the Philippians is known for its joyful and encouraging tone, yet it also addresses a specific concern: disunity within the church.
- While there may not have been widespread chaos, small rifts and conflicts, like those involving Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2), threatened the church's health and witness.
- Paul's plea for unity is not a suggestion but a necessity for the church's mission and for the fulfillment of a pastor's joy.
- To get "back on the right track," Christians must model the sacrificial love of Christ.

Initial Unity in the Church

- **"Fellowship in the gospel":** The Greek word *koinōnia*, or "fellowship," in verse 5 implies the shared spiritual partnership and common purpose of the Philippians in the gospel. This bond was the basis for Paul's initial thanksgiving.
 - **Philippians 1:3-5** - I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.
- **"Partners in grace":** In verse 7, Paul mentions that the Philippians are "all partakers with me of grace." This emphasizes that they have a common spiritual standing, not due to human effort, but through God's grace.
 - **Philippians 1:7** - It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me.

Reasons for later disunity in the church

Although Paul initially rejoiced in their partnership, other parts of the letter indicate that problems had developed in the Philippian church, including:

- **Selfish ambition and pride:** Paul addresses rivalry and conceit, which were causing division. He calls on them to do nothing "from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3-4).
 - Philippians 2:3-4 - Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.
- **Complaining and arguing:** Paul instructs the church to "do all things without grumbling or disputing" (Philippians 2:14), indicating that these activities were present in the congregation.
 - **Philippians 2:14** - Do everything without grumbling or arguing.
- **Specific conflict between individuals:** In Philippians 4:2, Paul specifically addresses two prominent female leaders, Euodia and Syntyche, urging them to "agree in the Lord". This indicates a personal dispute was threatening the church's stability.
 - **Philippians 4:2-3** - I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³ Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel.
- **Pressure from external opponents:** As Paul mentions, the Philippians were "in the same conflict" with the outside world that he was (Philippians 1:30). This external pressure can exacerbate internal tensions.
 - **Philippians 1:29-30** - For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

In short, the disunity arose not because of a lack of foundation for unity in Christ, but because the members of the church were struggling to live up to that reality. Their human pride, selfish motives, and personal conflicts were creating factions and discord, which Paul addresses directly in the later chapters of his letter.

Reasons For Disunity In the Church

- (1) Pride/Selfishness
- (2) Complaining/Arguing
- (3) Conflicts between individuals
- (4) Outside pressure/suffering
- (5) Different cultures/races
- (6) Different ages
- (7) Different socioeconomic status
- (8) What people wear
- (9) Opinions about music/worship styles

Point 1: The basis for our unity (v. 1)

Paul begins by listing the profound, gospel-centered blessings that are the shared experience of every believer. He uses "if" statements, but they function as a settled reality, like saying "since".

- **Encouragement in Christ:** We are united with Christ, and our salvation is found in him. This union is the source of our comfort and encouragement, which empowers us to endure trials.
- **Comfort from his love:** We have all experienced God's deep and sacrificial love. This shared experience should comfort us and make us eager to show that same love to others.
- **Common sharing in the Spirit:** We are all indwelt by the same Holy Spirit. He is the seal of our faith and the bond that connects us as one body. The Holy Spirit produces "peace, love, and gentleness," which counter disunity.
- **Tenderness and compassion:** As new creations in Christ, we have been given new hearts marked by affection and mercy. This is the fruit of our salvation that should change how we relate to one another.

Point 2: The command to pursue unity (v. 2)

Because of these shared gospel realities, Paul issues a direct command to the Philippian church.

- **Be like-minded:** This does not mean everyone must be identical or forfeit their individuality. Instead, it is a unity of purpose, values, and direction that puts Christ first. This mindset, which Paul will further explain in verses 5-11, is a humble and selfless one modeled by Christ.
- **Have the same love:** The church should be united in their affections for one another, a love that flows from God's love poured into their hearts. This is a commitment to sacrificially love one another, just as Christ loved us.
- **Be one in spirit and of one mind:** Paul reinforces his message with a powerful repetition. This is a call to a unity of soul and purpose that allows the church to stand together against spiritual opposition. This collective focus on Christ prevents the church from being tossed about by shifting cultural opinions.

Conclusion: The joyful witness of unity

- **Making a pastor's joy complete:** Unity among believers brings great joy to the leaders who have invested their lives in them. It is evidence that the gospel has truly taken root.
- **A powerful witness to the world:** Jesus prayed that his followers would be one, "so that the world may believe" (John 17:21). The unity of believers, despite their differences, is a powerful and attractive witness to the surrounding culture. The world, often a place of division, is desperately hoping to find a place where people can truly get along.
- **Only possible through Christ:** Unity is a supernatural fruit of the gospel, not a product of human effort alone. Our motivation for seeking unity is not worldly reward but the recognition of God's grace in our own lives. This unity, rooted in humility and selflessness, is the overflow of God's grace in the heart.

Personal reflection and application

- Recall a time when you experienced deep encouragement from fellow believers. How did that shared faith strengthen your unity?
- How does being "united with Christ" impact your relationships with other Christians, especially those you disagree with?
- What does a shared love look like in a practical sense within your church community? What is one specific thing you can do this week to show that kind of love?
- Consider Paul's command to be "one in spirit and of one mind." How can we pursue this without sacrificing our individuality or unique giftings within the body of Christ?
- How does our culture's emphasis on individualism and personal rights challenge the biblical call to Christian unity?

Practical action and community

- What are some practical ways your small group or church can actively cultivate unity?
- What are the greatest threats to unity in your church today? How can you and your group members work to counteract them?
- What does it mean for your church to complete your pastors' or leaders' joy? How can you specifically contribute to that?
- Based on Paul's words, how should a unified church approach the world around it? What does our unity or disunity communicate to non-believers?
- How can we pray for unity in our church community this week? Write a brief prayer together based on this passage.