

Conformed to Unity

Philippians 2: 1-4

As we move into chapter two, we quickly discover these verses are a continuation of the previous passage. **Phil.1:27 – Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.** Paul was concerned that the church continue to possess unity in the Lord, striving together for the faith of the Gospel. He well understood that unity was essential for the church to prosper. If they were not united in Christ, working together with a common vision, they would have little effect in ministry.

This fundamental truth has not changed. In fact, I am convinced of its great importance. Apart from believing and teaching sound doctrine, nothing else is as essential to the health and well-being of the church. If we lack unity, we will never be fruitful for the Lord. We may continue to gather within the church building, but our efforts cannot be of eternal value apart from unity. **Mark 3:24-25 – And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. [25] And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand.**

The opening verses of this chapter deal with the conformity of believers. Today I want to discuss the **challenges** Paul presents as we consider: **Conformed to Unity.**

I. The Admonition for Unity (1-2a) – *If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, [2] Fulfil ye my joy...* Here Paul offers an impassioned admonition regarding their unity. As he dealt with their unity, he reminded them of:

A. The Lord we Serve (1) – *If there be therefore any consolation in Christ.* Paul immediately directed their attention to the Lord Jesus Christ. The word consolation speaks of *encouragement and comfort*. Paul had certainly received consolation from the Lord and he knew they had as well. They shared a common consolation from the Lord and a common obligation to be of the same mind regarding Him. Paul wanted to emphasize the importance of unity, if for no other reason, than because of the graciousness of the Lord they served. That alone was reason for unity.

- That is very simple and yet strikingly profound. An awareness of the Lord should be reason enough to strive for unity among the church. We too have received great consolation from the Lord. He has been faithful to meet our needs and continually deals with us according to His grace and mercy. Our love for the Lord ought to create a burning desire to serve alongside fellow believers in unity.

- We cannot please our Lord apart from unity. He remained committed to the will of the Father, going all the way to the cross, bearing our sin and securing our salvation. There was no rebellion or lack of unity within Christ. That alone should motivate our unity!

B. The Love we Share (1) – *If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love.* Paul also mentions the comfort of love possessed by those in Christ. Here the word comfort speaks of “*strength.*” Paul admonishes – if your love is strong, if it is real for one another, then unity will come natural. Those who share a common love, being strengthened by that love, would strive to maintain unity, and grow together!

- This presents a great challenge to the church today. I fear that far too many of our churches lack genuine love for one another. If our love is lacking, we will not possess unhindered unity. If our love is strong, and we are being strengthened through that love, we will possess unity. Our love for one another will dictate our lives and unity will be a natural by-product of our love. Genuine love will create an atmosphere of unity among the church. *1 John 4:11 – Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.* John 15:12 – *This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.*

C. The Life we Live (1) – *If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit...* Next Paul mentioned their fellowship in the Spirit. As believers they all shared the same Spirit, not a similar spirit, but they all possessed the Spirit within. Such a common bond would create a common fellowship through the Spirit and directly affect the lives they lived. With the Spirit abiding within, and guiding their lives, He would keep them united in fellowship. When one experienced pain, the others felt it too. When one rejoiced, the others were compelled to rejoice as well. As long as they walked in fellowship with the Lord, they would enjoy fellowship with one another.

- Sadly it doesn't always work this way because we tend to allow sin into our lives which clouds our vision and creates division, but I am thankful for the fellowship I have experienced within the church. As we walk in awareness of the Lord, focusing on our love for one another, the Spirit leads us according to the divine will of God. As we follow His lead, we enjoy fellowship with one another and great unity in the faith. We have the guidance and help necessary to possess continual fellowship and unity if we will follow the Spirit.

D. The Load we Bear (1) – *If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies.* Finally Paul deals with our compassion and care for one another. He refers to a phrase – bowels and mercies. This literally speaks of “*our tender*

mercies for one another.” It deals with being so united in our zeal for the Lord and love for one another that we feel the hurts and burdens of fellow believers. When they are under a heavy load, we are compelled to come alongside them and help carry their load. It is motivated action generated by love.

- There are those outside the church who seek to help others when they are burdened, but this is amplified within the church. We are united within the family of God, being filled with the Spirit, and walking together in the faith. Such a close relationship creates a heart that is moved with tender mercies toward those who are struggling. I have experienced it many times in my life and witnessed such mercies being shown from you. When others hurt, we hurt; when they are under a heavy load, we feel the weight as well and want to lighten their load if possible. [Gal.6:2 – Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.](#)

II. The Attributes of Unity (2-4) – After admonishing the church regarding unity, Paul reveals several attributes that are always present with unity. He spoke of:

A. Harmony (2) – [Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.](#) Where unity is present, harmony among the believers would be revealed and evident. He desired them to be likeminded, literally *thinking the same thoughts*. This would prevent petty squabbles and needless disagreements. As we have already discussed, there needed to be harmony in love. Their harmony would allow them to be of one accord and one mind, sharing common goals while pursuing a common purpose.

- I love Dr. Adrian Rogers’s thoughts on harmony within the church – You know, there are three words that sound alike: one is *unity*; one is *union*; and one is *uniformity*. Now, it's unity that we're looking for, not union. Somebody has well said, "You can take two tomcats, tie their tails together, and hang them over a clothesline, and you have union, but you don't have unity." And, you can kind of conjure up that picture in your mind. We want more than union. We want to be more than wired together, or rusted together, or frozen together—that's union. And then, uniformity. What is uniformity? Uniformity comes from *without*—everybody saying the same thing, looking alike, and doing the same things.

That uniformity comes by pressure from *without*. Union comes from *within*, where we have the same Spirit and the same Lord. We're not brought together by rules. We're not brought together by threats. We are bound together by love of the Lord Jesus. And so, there's to be harmony. ⁱ

- We need harmony in heart, deed, and thought – same love, one accord, and one mind.

B. Humility (3) – *Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.* Our unity will also promote humility. Notice:

➤ **The Caution (3a)** – *Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory.* Paul cautioned against being filled with strife – *contention or rivalry motivated by self-interest.* He also warned them of acting according to vainglory – *self-conceit, empty pride, or a desire for praise.* Such actions were not representative of a humble spirit and would never promote a sense of unity.

➤ **The Direction (3b)** – *Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.* Through a humble spirit, the church was urged to place the needs of others above their own. They were to sacrifice their desires and wants for the benefit of the church. Rather than acting in pride and conceit, they were to act in humility, always aware of the needs of others and the church as a whole. Many of our problems would cease to exist if we stopped thinking solely of self while considering the needs of others. This is the Lord's church. We are not here to safeguard our preferences or promote our agenda. Everything we do should be approached with a desire to exalt the Lord, edify the church, and evangelize the unsaved.

C. Hospitality (4) – *Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.* This goes hand in hand with the previous thought. Rather than seeking to serve ourselves, and ensure we are pleased with every decision, we are to be conscious of the needs of others. *To seek one's own advancement is worldly. To seek the prosperity, good, and promotion of others is divine. [Philippians 2:4](#) expresses the essence of the spirit of the Lord Jesus. Those who heed these words of Paul have the larger view of life. The view that seeks one's own things tends to narrowness, selfishness, bigotry, smallness, and meanness of soul. The view that seeks to promote the interests and well-being of others leads to largeness of life both here and hereafter.* ⁱⁱ

▪ If we focus on the needs of others, and the church as a whole, we will have little time for our selfish, self-serving desires. Our Lord came to earth robed in a body of flesh. Over and over again we see Him humbly serving others. He had us in mind as He bore our sin and endured the wrath of God in our place on the cross. He was not there for His benefit, but for ours. May we live and love as our Lord!

Conclusion: This has been a practical portion of Scripture that offers relevant truth for our modern day. Unity is a must within the church. Without it, we will accomplish little of lasting value. Where unity exists, the church prospers. Unity motivates and dictates our actions. I pray we will seek a closer unity within our congregation. We must share a common vision and work together

toward fulfilling the work we have been given. If there are needs, bring them to the Lord. He alone can provide the wisdom and desire to walk together in unity.

ⁱ The Adrian Rogers Legacy Collection - The Adrian Rogers Legacy Collection – Sermons.

ⁱⁱ John Phillips Commentary Series, The - The John Phillips Commentary Series – Exploring Philippians: An Expository Commentary.