

## **The Secret to Unity in the Church – Philippians 2: 1-4**

### ***Introduction and Outline***

- Scripture reading: Philippians 2: 1–4; John 17: 9-11, 20-23.
- The theological foundation of church unity: The Triune God! Let's look at Jesus' prayer before His crucifixion ——

**John 17: 11, 22**“.....Holy Father, keep them in Your name.....that they may be one even as We are..... The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one.”

It is an unfathomable mystery that the three Persons are in perfect unity in a harmonious and orderly relationship. And yet, God has purposed somehow to reveal such a glorious image through the unity of the church! To break church unity is to distort God's image by misrepresenting the relationship among the Triune God and thus hindering people from knowing God! That's why church unity is such an important matter.

The metaphor of unity: Not *wearing a uniform*, but *completing a puzzle*.

- Outline:
  - Title: The Secret to Unity in the Church
  - 1. The Provision for Unity (v1)
  - 2. The Pursuit of Unity (v2)
  - 3. The Pivotal Attitude for Unity (v3-4)

### **The Provision for Unity (v1)**

- “Therefore”: Previous text (1: 27-30) tells us the importance of unity, therefore, let me tell you how to have unity.
- “in Christ”: It begins by showing the basic premise of unity. Genuine unity can only exist in Christ.
- “if”: Paul is not doubting whether or not there are such things, but he wants the readers to ponder for themselves: Do I have these things?

Do you have any encouragement in Christ? Any consolation of love? Any fellowship of the Spirit? Any affection and compassion? If you do not have these, that is, if your life is filled with bitterness and complaint, what you need is not faking unity on the surface. You need the gospel.

- “encouragement”: The meaning is broad, encompassing comfort and exhortation. Do you have any encouragement in Christ? Does Christ’s life, His teaching, and the salvation of His cross give you any comfort and exhortation? If so, you have the provision of unity.
- “any consolation of love”: Does God’s love bring you consolation? If so, you gotta strive for unity. If you find unity hard, consider the consolation of God’s love that you share with your brothers and sisters.

**Romans 5: 5** “the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit”;  
2 Corinthians 5: 14 “the love of Christ controls us”.

- “any fellowship of the Spirit”: “fellowship” literally means sharing. Every Christian shares the same Holy Spirit who guides us. Such sharing entails the objective fact of the Spirit’s indwelling (Romans 8: 9) and the subjective experience that comes with it. It is the fellowship of the Spirit that gives us the conviction of sin unto repentance (John 16: 8), the understanding of the gospel (1 Corinthians 2: 12), the intimate knowledge that we are God’s children (Romans 8: 16), the assurance of eternal salvation (Ephesians 1: 14), the production of spiritual fruit (Galatians 5: 22), and the spiritual gifts that enable us to serve (1 Corinthians 12: 11) .....

Unity is produced by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4: 3). It is an internal and spiritual unity which cannot be artificially created by external efforts. Metaphor: It is not a bottle of pebbles, but a handful of magnets.

- “any affection and compassion”: This is the heart of Christ. Every Christian knows the Lord as such the moment they’re saved.

### **The Pursuit of Unity (v2)**

- Since you have enjoyed such rich blessings in Christ, you ought to respond in the following ways. Verse 1 is the blessing of salvation all Christians share, and verse 2 is the necessary response to salvation – Unity!
- “being of the same mind”: It does not refer to complete agreement in all things. According to Greek grammar, this phrase is an overview which is further explained by the next three phrases in detail.
- “maintaining the same love”: Two aspects——First, the same love for the Lord, that is, the first love, which must be greater than all other loves; Second, the same love toward everyone, that is, no partiality, loving everyone the same.

- “united in spirit”: *sum*“united”+ *psuchos*“spirit”——soulmate! Do you have a soulmate? The same indwelling Holy Spirit gives believers the same ultimate desire and pursuit of life, so we are soulmates already. Give me a Christian, and I’ll tell you immediately what his soul desires——Christ!
- “intent on one purpose”: Literally “thinking *the one thing*”. What is that one thing? It is right in this epistle (cf. 1: 20; 3: 8, 13-14) — Pursuing Christ, Knowing Christ, Glorifying Christ—that is the one thing Paul thinks single-mindedly! If you all have this single-minded pursuit, Paul says, unity won’t be hard.
- “make my joy complete”: This is the main clause of these four verses. In other words, be in unity, so that I will have full joy .....Selfish? Quite the contrary! This is a most humble and selfless expression——Paul finds his own personal joy in the spiritual health of the church! If every believer has such a heart that really cares for the spiritual health of one another, unity won’t be hard!

**1 Thessalonians 2: 19-20**“For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.”

### The Pivotal Attitude for Unity (v3-4)

- “Do nothing from selfishness”: The Greek originally refers to a hired worker. They work for money and do not really care about the work per se but only their own benefit. The key is what your heart really wants. Is it the glory of Christ and the benefit of others, or is it your own benefit?

**1 Corinthians 10: 24**“Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor.”

**1 Corinthians 10: 33**“just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the *profit* of the many, so that they may be saved.”

**1 Corinthians 13: 5**“[Love is.....] it does not seek its own.”

- “empty conceit”: Literally “vain glory”. True glory is only to be found in Christ. All other glory is empty and vain, lasting for a moment and then gone. All glory of this life is vanity that comes and goes in the blink of an eye.

**James 1: 9-11** “But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; and the rich man *is to glory* in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.”

- “but with humility of mind”: “Humility” is a strongly derogatory term in secular literature at that time, referring to that which is “base” and “lowly”, often used of slaves at the very bottom of society. The force of Paul’s words is perhaps better captured by these derogatory —— Consider yourself base and lowly!
- “regard one another as more important than yourselves”: The original Greek means “to hold above, to be higher”. Since I’m a slave of the lowest level and cannot be lower, all others are in a higher position and more worthy to be served than me. (Paul himself is an example of living like this. Review 1: 23-26)

*“Perhaps the best way to approach that seemingly unrealistic and impossible challenge is for believers to consider their own sins. Believers know far more about their own hearts than about the heart of anyone else. Recognizing the sinfulness of their hearts should exclude any boastful self-exaltation. If Paul viewed himself as ... ‘the very least of all saints’ (Eph 3: 8) and even the foremost of sinners (1 Tim 1: 15), how could any believers honestly think of themselves in any higher way?” — One Pastor*

- “do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others”: “Look out for” is literally “to view intently, to watch closely.” Paul asks you to not look at yourself all day long. (Who do you look at first in a group photo?) Don’t focus on your own needs, your own weakness, your own dream, your own hobby..... You also need to see the interests of others!

“Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man, he will be what most people call ‘humble’ nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him, it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all.” —— C. S. Lewis