

Philippians 2:1-4 (One Mind)

The sermon

Intro

Local church unity. What is it? What comes to mind when we think Christian unity?

Maybe it's identical interpretation. We all need to be in firm agreement on predestination and election, the age of the earth, the millennium, the timing of the rapture, speaking in tongues. Unity can only be achieved when we agree on every last detail. Some churches have very specific doctrinal statements that spell out a firm conclusion on every one of these matters.

Unity isn't possible without total uniformity. We can only love those who think exactly like us.

Maybe it's avoiding hard discussions. Don't rock the boat. Doctrine divides. Let's never talk about predestination and election, the age of the earth, the millennium, the timing of the rapture, speaking in tongues. Some churches have doctrinal statements so basic that they leave critical aspects of the gospel out. Like the fall, sin, repentance.

Unity isn't possible with doctrinal conviction. We can only love each other if we avoid doctrine.

On the other hand, the New Testament presents unity as a possibility in churches where differences of opinion and interpretation exist. Paul thought the Roman church could fellowship even though they disagreed on the implications of the New Covenant (Rom 14:1-23). And the New Testament presents doctrine as critical to the local church. These doctrines where Christians disagree today are spelled out in Paul's letters. And these doctrines were read out loud to the whole church. If we couldn't talk about these things we'd have to throw out 90% of the Bible. If we think we can't talk about these things, we think we're wiser than God. He had these doctrines recorded for us so that we could know them. So that they would shape our lives today.

With these thoughts in mind, let's turn to Paul's comments on unity in the local church.

BIG IDEA: Be of one mind.

READ 1:27-2:4

Body

Passage Focus

Last week Paul expressed his desire that the Philippian church boldly stand firm together in gospel mission, despite local opposition.

This morning Paul advances the idea of being one. Last week the problem was external threats. This week the problem is internal threats.

Point 1: Be of one mind by rejecting selfish ambition.

Community application

This morning we'll focus on communal application rather than individual application. Why? Every bit of application is directed at the whole Philippian church. The appeal to be of the "same mind" or "one mind" is directed at a local church. Everything Paul says in these four verses speaks to how the local church does life together.

The Christian faith is a communal religion. We come to Jesus personally through faith and repentance, but when we come to Jesus, we come into community with his church. We're saved for community. We're saved to do life together. We're saved to advance the gospel together.

Paul's appeal in 2:1

So if there is any encouragement in Christ

The gist is: if these things are true, one mind should be true too.

Unified gospel advance should be happening "*if there is any encouragement in Christ.*" Are we not encouraged by the forgiveness of sins? Are we not encouraged that God's wrath is satisfied by Jesus' substitutionary death? Are we not encouraged that Jesus is coming again to end all gospel opposition and bring us into his eternal kingdom? These shared experiences should lead to unity.

any comfort from love

Do you receive comfort when others in the church love you? The selfish ambition that disrupts unity disrupts that comfort.

any participation in the Spirit

Participation is the Greek word for fellowship: *koinonia*. We're fellow partakers of the Spirit. The Spirit has made us one. Ephesians 4:3 speaks of being "*eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*" That's the Spirit unites us and makes us one. We have to work to break the bond the Spirit's created.

If we have fellowship in the same Spirit, why the struggle to be of one mind?

any affection and sympathy

If you have affection and sympathy for each other, why the selfish goals? Why the rivalry?

How odd. We can care deeply for each other yet fail to be of one mind. How is this so?

complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. – 2:2

What does it mean to be of one mind?

Mind = our mindset. The way we think. The way we see life. Our attitude. The things that we love. The things that we hate.

Same love = love the same things. Like God's word and gospel advance. Have the same love for each other.

Full accord = agreement, similarity of attitude that results in harmonious relationships.

Same mind/one mind = perceiving things the same. Loving the same things. Having the same goals and ambitions, namely, gospel advance = making new disciples and each other's spiritual progress.

"*Being of the same mind*" is the ideal. This is what a pastoral apostle wants to see. This is what a pastor wants to see in the local church.

Do nothing from selfish ambition The first obstacle.

Selfish ambition = self-seeking, self-interest, the goal is personal gain. Evidently some in the church wanted some things so bad it was interfering with working side by side. That's personal gain over gospel advance.

Battle at the heart level

That's personal desires interfering with the bond the Spirit established among us. Christians working against the Spirit. Yes Christians can do this!

Why can we care deeply for a brother or sister, even to the point of tears and financial generosity, yet at the same time fail to be of one mind? This is possible! Because our heart wants personal gain above all else. Our own preferences and agendas and desires are more precious to us than gospel advance.

When all that matters is getting what I want, gospel advance fades to the background. The good of the body fades to the background. People become obstacles in the way of our desires. There's no love, no compassion. Only I want. The implication is clear: selfishness hinders our gospel mission. We won't stand our ground together, we won't lock arms when selfishness reigns. The battle occurs at the heart level!

When our own preferences are more precious to us than love and unity and gospel advance, it's time to repent.

Point 2: Be of one mind by rejecting conceit.

The second internal threat to gospel advance.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, – 2:3

Conceit: inflated opinion of oneself, people who think too highly of themselves when there is no basis for it. Empty, groundless pride. The result is vanity and self-absorption. When we inflate our own importance, the concerns of our brothers and sisters fall into the background. We're blinded by self-worship.

The Bible says don't think too highly of ourselves (conceit) and don't think too low of ourselves. Cursing people is wrong because they're "*made in the likeness of God*" (James 3:9). That's humans have value. Additionally, we who believe are God's children, his treasured possession (Mal 3:16-17). The biblical way is thinking correctly about ourselves (Rom 12:3).

How does inflated self-opinion prevent a local church from functioning as one mind? Personal goals take center stage. Gospel advance and the common good falls by the wayside. That battle occurs at the heart level. Do I think too much about myself? Are the concerns of my brothers and sisters in Christ foreign to my thinking? Do I care about what I want for myself, what I should have, how others should treat me? Have I over-estimated myself such that I see my desires as more important than the common good?

I have observed some of the most miserable people are the most self-absorbed people. When self-worship is blinding us to the needs of our brothers and sisters and gospel advance, it's time to repent.

Point 3: Be of one mind by embracing humility.

but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

That's come to the conclusion, judgment, understanding that the needs of others are more important than my personal preferences. What's humility?

- 1) Selfish ambition and conceit are the opposite of humility.
- 2) Selfish ambition and conceit are a roadblock to humility.
- 3) Humility is needed to move beyond concern for our own interests and our self-centered agendas to the interests of each other.

Cultivating humility drives out selfish ambition and conceit.

What's humility?

humility = without arrogance, self-humiliation.

- 1) An attitude that leads us to regard our brothers and sisters as more important than ourselves and look out for their interests (2:3-4).

- 2) Jesus being the chief example in taking on human flesh, veiling his divine glory, obeying the Father, and dying on the cross for our sins (Phil 2:5-8).

Humility is imitating Jesus!

- 3) The same word is translated asceticism in Colossians 2:18 and 2:23. Meaning submitting to manmade rules not required by God. There's a submission and self-denial aspect to humility.
- 4) The opposite of pride in 1 Peter 5:5.

So humility involves submission to God, denying self, looking out for others, and not being arrogant (pride).

What problems were present in the Philippians church that required humility?

- 1) Selfish ambition.

Gospel advance wasn't goal number one. Evidently personal agendas were.

- 2) Conceit.

Self was king. Personal desires were elevated above the common good.

The Trustees have some decisions to make. Stewardship of funds, the common good should be in the equation. The question shouldn't be what color of paint do I like? What do I prefer the money to be spent on? The questions should include what items need to be fixed so that each type of person (whether infant or 90 year old) can be blessed with gospel instruction today? What items will be useful to the church 20 years from now? What will serve the common good? is a better question than what do I prefer?

- 3) They didn't agree.

"I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord." – 4:2

"Agree" is the same word as "mind" in 2:2. These ladies thought differently. They had different agendas. They had relational conflict. This threatened the unity of the church. This weakened the church in mission. This stifled the ability of the church to withstand cultural persecution.

What does humility look like?

Humility might involve going back to the Bible. Maybe I'm seeing things incorrectly? Maybe Euodia's right and Syntyche's wrong? Humility might involve realizing I'm not as important as I think. I don't have to have my way. Humility might involve realizing I'm after what I'm after because of selfishness. My goal is actually getting what I want, not what's good for the whole church. Humility might involve bearing with someone who doesn't see everything just like me. A Calvinist (emphasizes God's sovereignty in salvation) and an Arminian (emphasizes free will) bearing with theological differences in the same church. Humility means placing gospel advance and the common good above getting what I want.

Point 4: Be of one mind by embracing the importance of each other.

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. – 2:4

"Look" = notice, be aware, be on the lookout for more than what I want.

"Interests" isn't a specific word about a particular kind of interest. It's generic literally translated "the things of ourselves" and "the things of others."

We need to look out for our own needs. There's nothing wrong with denying someone's request when you have a doctor's appointment. There's nothing wrong with a young mother prioritizing the needs of her own children. No guilt needed. But our own preferences aren't critical.

We should be more concerned about the spiritual progress of others in the church than advancing our own preferences (paint color, what I'd like the money to be spent on). It's okay to enjoy life and deal with our own pressing needs (own interests). It's wrong to neglect the good of one another (others' interests).

In the church, it's forsaking our personal preferences to do for others what God says is wise and helpful and right and necessary. Valuing the spiritual progress of each other over selfish desires.

Rivalry

There's another problem in the church I've yet to highlight. Rivalry in the church.

Paul's mentioned preachers who preached from rivalry with Paul (1:15). Those preachers were guilty of selfish ambition (1:17) like those in Philippi (2:3). Paul highlights that sinful rivalry to shine light on rivalry in Philippi. That's church members in the same church seeing each other as rivals. A sure threat to church unity.

How do we fight the urge to see each other as rivals?

Be being of one mind in gospel advance. Seeing making new disciples and helping each other to make spiritual progress as more important than having my way. Refusing to see each other as the enemy. Acknowledging differences while affirming the presence of the Holy Spirit in one another and affirming the common goals we have as Christians: making new disciples, making spiritual progress together, caring for each other as trials arise.

God placing us in a church with people whom we disagree may be the means by which God forms the character in us that we lack!

Conclusion

My friend Gary's Dad lives in England. "There are only three good churches in the entire county." Maybe you've heard the stories of church buildings being converted into bars there because of all the closed churches? Meaning options don't exist. Gary's dad was troubled by the fact that he's an Arminian (free willer) and so many of his church members were Reformed, or Calvinists. Gary found himself counseling his father from Philippians 2:1-4. His dad had to make it work because there were no options.

My friend Gary used to be a missionary in the United Arab Emirates. Not many gospel churches there. They had an issue. A number of Anglicans wanted to join the church, but the church was Baptist. Anglicans subscribe to infant baptism, but these Anglicans agreed with the Baptist church on virtually everything else. The only other option for the Anglicans was to join with liberal Anglican churches, organizations that don't believe the gospel and aren't Christian. What did the elders do? They welcomed the Anglicans in as members, even though only believer baptism would be conducted in the church. They thought providing these Anglicans with Christian fellowship was more important than forcing every member to subscribe to believer baptism.

Being of one mind requires that we work with each other, that we look out for each other, even if doctrinal differences exist among us. Because if we're Christians, we hold in common the goal of gospel advance. The Spirit has created a bond between us. God's saved us to do life together.