

8. The Book of Philippians 1:27-2:2

Joy in Unity-Part 1

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We have begun a study in Paul's letter to the Philippians—looking at its theme of 'joy' topically.

So far we've looked at:

- I. Joy in Fellowship—1:3-6
- II. Joy in Proclaiming the Gospel—1:12-18
- III. Joy of Faith—1:25
- IV. Joy in Unity—1:27-2:2**

Philippians 1:27–2:2 (NKJV)

²⁷ Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God. ²⁹ For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, ³⁰ having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear *is* in me. ¹ Therefore if *there is* any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ² fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

The heart of Paul being expressed in this passage out of Philippians—is unity among the people of God.

Seven times in these verses Paul using various phrases expresses his hope that the Philippian Christians will walk in unity with one another:

1. '*One spirit*'—1:27
2. '*One mind*'—1:27; 2:2
3. '*Fellowship of the Spirit*'—2:1
4. '*Like-minded*'—2:2
5. '*Same love*'—2:2
6. '*One accord*'—2:2

➤ *Why was the subject of unity so important to Paul?*

It was important because he knew that it was not only essential for **joy**—it is essential for **victory** in our battle against the devil.

So essential for victory is unity—that our Lord prayed for it the night before His crucifixion.

In John 17 just hours from the cross Jesus prayed to His Father (His final request) that His disciples would be one with each other after Jesus returned back to His Father in heaven.

The Lord knew that this would be vital for the success of their mission (i.e., “the great commission”) when they went out from Jerusalem into the world preaching the gospel—

John 17:6, 9, 11, 13–23 (NLT)

⁶ “I have revealed you [Holy Father] to the ones you gave me out of this world...You gave them to me, and they have kept your word...⁹ “My prayer is not for the world, but for those you have given me, because they belong to you...¹¹ Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, you have given me your name; now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are...

¹³ ...I told them many things while I was with them in this world so they would be filled with my joy.¹⁴ I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.¹⁵ I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one.

¹⁶ They do not belong to this world any more than I do.¹⁷ Make them holy [set apart from the world and united as My Church] by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth.¹⁸ Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world.¹⁹ And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth.²⁰ “I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message.²¹ I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.²² “I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one...May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me...

So here, Jesus is praying that the Father would keep His disciples in *unity*.

➤ *Why was the unity of His disciples (then and now) so on His heart and mind that night?*

Because He first of all knew that unity leads to joy (verse 13), but more importantly unity leads to victory (there is strength in numbers)—whereas disunity leads to strife and defeat.

It is the devil’s goal to create *disunity* and *strife* because he knows they create division—and division will destroy families, churches and even nations:

Matthew 12:25 (NKJV)

²⁵ ...“Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house [family] divided against itself will not stand.

Mark 3:24-25 (NLT)

²⁴ “A kingdom divided by civil war will collapse.²⁵ Similarly, a family splintered by feuding will fall apart.

Unity is of the Holy Spirit—whereas *division* is of the devil whose main strategy is ‘*divide and conquer*.’ Just to be clear—he can’t *conquer* until he first divides.

REFLECTION: How does Satan cause “disunity” among God’s people?

Let me tell you something about *unity*—it is impossible without *humility*.

➤ **What is biblical humility?**

First of all, understand that **humility is listed as one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit** in Galatians 5:

Galatians 5:22-23 (NKJV)

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness [humility], self-control...

When Jesus walked on the earth, He bore all of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in His life—including and especially *humility* which He manifested *before* His incarnation upon the earth:

Philippians 2:5-8 (NLT2)

⁵ You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. ⁶ Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. ⁷ Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself [further] in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.

Let me say it again, *unity* would be impossible without *humility* — and *humility* would be impossible without a relationship with Jesus Christ.

That is because humility is an attribute of God—an attribute that Jesus manifested throughout His life on earth—but especially on the cross when He laid down His life as Holy God for fallen sinners. Unity comes when we *humble* ourselves by dying to self in loving and forgiving those who have wronged and hurt us—and choose to be in unity with them (as in marriage or a church).

- *“But I just can’t forgive them for what they did to me.”*

Understand that forgiveness isn’t earned—it’s *bestowed!* It’s given as a gift to those who have wronged us—even if they don’t ask for it or deserve it!

Jesus from the Cross forgave those who wrongfully put Him there. (Luke 23:34)

- *“But I just can’t forgive them for what they did to me.”*

Well, then if you can’t forgive them for *their* sake—forgive them for *Jesus’* sake.

Are you going to deny Jesus His last request? The request He prayed for just hours from the cross that His disciples would have unity with one another.

REFLECTION: Besides going to the cross, think of a couple examples of how Jesus demonstrated Humbleness:

Many Christians do deny Jesus His last request because their pride won't let them forgive those who have hurt them—they are simply filled with too much anger and or hurt—and sometimes with a desire for revenge:

Andrew Murray—

"I cannot too greatly impress upon my readers the need of realizing the lack there is today of humility within Christian circles. There is so little of the meek and lowly Lamb of God in those who are called by His name. Let us consider how our lack of love, indifference to the needs and feelings of others, even sharp comments and hasty judgments that are often excused as being honest and straightforward, are thwarting the effect of the influence

of the Holy Spirit on others. Manifestations of temper and touchiness and irritation, feelings of bitterness and estrangement, have their root in nothing but pride. Pride creeps in almost everywhere and the assemblies of the saints are not exceptions. Let's ask ourselves what would be the effect if all of us were guided by the humility of Jesus, that the cry of our whole heart, night and day, would be, "Oh, for the humility of Jesus in myself and all around me!"

Let me at this point, define for you what true humility is—and remember this is in the larger context of knowing the joy of unity:

True humility isn't going around putting yourself down. I say that because a lot of Christians think that being humble means that you go around putting yourself down all the time - "I'm nothing, I'm nobody, I'm a worm..." Often, that kind of self-deprecation is nothing more than pride masquerading as humility!

Jesus said, "Learn from Me for I am meek and lowly in heart..." Jesus was the epitome of humility—but He certainly wasn't a worthless worm! He didn't go around putting Himself down to everyone He came in contact with!

**Humility isn't self-loathing—
it's not beating yourself up all the time—
and it definitely isn't low self-esteem!**

Genuine humility doesn't focus on self at all—it doesn't put self-down, and it doesn't lift self-up—**true humility simply ignores self-all-together** while it focuses on others. Humility has both a *vertical* and a *horizontal* dimension to it.

1. **Vertical Humility—our relationship to God**

Vertical humility is simply the quality that understands—“I am weak, and I can do nothing apart from God.” (John 15:5)

This causes me to depend on Him for everything—and my motto becomes, “When I am weak, then I am strong!” This is a truth that takes humility to accept—without it, pride takes root and we become ‘self-reliant’ and not ‘God-dependent!’

The result is, God will put us on a shelf, and no longer use us in the work of building His Kingdom upon the earth until we humble ourselves in His sight.

REFLECTION: What must we do to obtain vertical humility?

2. **Horizontal Humility—our relationship to others**

Horizontal humility simply says to those we come in contact with and minister to—“You’re more important to me than I am.”

That is exactly what Paul the Apostle commanded believers in Philippians 2:3—“**Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.**”

When you constantly **put others above yourself and do what’s best for them and not yourself**—you’ll discover how easy it becomes to walk in unity with others. The reason is because **by you dying to self** it circumvents any attempt by Satan to use pride, selfishness, and self-glory to get in your way and in the process cause strife and division.

But again, God’s Word teaches that—unity is impossible without humility.

The devil could never sow discord and division into a family or a church without *pride*—pride being the opposite of *humility*.

REFLECTION: Give some examples of how you have put others above yourself and did what was best for them?

James warns us:

James 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ For where envy and self-seeking exist [i.e., 'where pride is present'] confusion and every evil thing are there.

Again, **unity leads to victory whereas division leads to defeat**—which is why God has such strong condemnations for those especially who sow discord and disunity in the Church.

For example, one of the 7-sins God singles out in Proverbs 6:19 as sins He especially hates are: *“One who sows discord among brethren.”* Because unity is essential for victory (over the devil—i.e., ‘spiritual warfare’) - **God commands us to do all that we can to promote unity in the Body of Christ.**

One of the greatest if not the greatest passages on Christian unity in the New Testament comes out of Ephesians 4. Paul spends the first 16 verses stressing the importance of unity as being essential if we are to properly represent and serve Jesus as His Body on the earth until His return.

In Ephesians 4, verses 3 and 13 Paul talks about the *basis* for our unity with one another as believers in Christ—*“endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”* (v.3) and then in verse 13 he says—*“till we all come to the unity of the faith...”*

In these verses Paul speaks of 2 kinds of Christian unity. We’ll touch on the first one today:

A. Unity of the Spirit

Ephesians 4:1-3 (NKJV)

¹I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ²with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

In the Greek, Ephesians 4:3 literally reads—**“Being eager to maintain, or guard, the unity of the Spirit.”**

The Greek verb used here is a present participle which means - **“We must constantly be endeavoring to maintain this unity.”**

- **Why? Because it will constantly be under attack from the devil (think of marriage).**

That is why Jesus prayed to His Father for us on the night before His crucifixion that we, as His people, would always walk in unity with each other—because He knew how vital unity among His disciples was for our victory over the devil and the world. (John 17:3-23)

REFLECTION: Maintaining Christian Unity such as in marriage is very important; think of other examples of Christian Unity that all Christians should endeavor to maintain?

Paul picked up on the heart of Jesus with regard to unity among God’s people in Ephesians chapter 4.

In Ephesians 4:1-3 Paul speaks of **the importance of maintaining our unity as Christians**—but then in verses 4-6, he goes on to give us the 7 spiritual realities that make up our unity and bind us together as one in Christ:

Ephesians 4:4-6 (NKJV)

⁴ *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;* ⁵ *one Lord, one faith, one baptism;* ⁶ *one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

So here in verses 4-6 Paul names 7 spiritual realities that unite all true Christians together—

1. One Body—verse 4a

This of course is referring to the ‘Body of Christ’ containing all true believers spread across the world and throughout the Church Age from Pentecost to the Rapture.

Jesus is the Head of the Body from which the Body draws its life and direction.

The great theme of the epistle to the Ephesians is “in Christ.”

To be “in Christ” means to be a member of His Body and members of one another as truly and intimately as the organs of a human body are knit together and function together as a single unit—for the overall health and function of that body.

The unity that we share as Christians far transcends the *organizational* or *social* unity the world embraces—and that is because ours is a spiritual unity.

Ray Stedman—

“Here is the fundamental error of modern ecumenical movements. By and large, they strive to generate a man-made institutional unity, ignoring the spiritual unity that already exists in the Holy Spirit...The church is not a conglomeration of individuals who happen to agree upon certain things. It is bound together as a spiritual organism in a bodily unity. It cannot therefore derive power from the sum of its numbers. It derives its power solely from the Spirit of God who binds these individuals into a unified, spiritual whole.”

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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