

Philippians 2:1-11**"Christian Unity"**

Imago Dei Church | October 18th | 2 Services

INTRODUCTION

We live in a **hyper-divided age**. It feels like at every turn we are being asked to take sides, to demonize people on the other side, and not back down.

You've got to declare yourself on so many things. Dem-Rep. CNN-Fox. Mask-No Mask. Freedom-Security. Marvel-DC. Duke-UNC. LeBron-MJ.

As we are inundated with these options and told that we are forced to choose sides, some of those divisions creep into the church.

Even though **Jesus prayed** that his church would be one, as he and the Father are one, the church of Jesus Christ regularly **finds itself assaulted** by divisions and dissensions that threaten to tear us apart. And it's no surprise.

(ILL) [Divide and Conquer — war, politics, construction, Ezra reading](#)

We have an enemy that wants to divide and conquer.

Let's look at Christian unity as presented in Phil 2, for 2 reasons:

- (1) To **protect** against the danger of **disunity within**.
- (2) To **present** to the world the power and goodness of the gospel.

Let's look at **4 Aspects of Christian Unity** in this text:

1. THE MOTIVATION FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY (2:1)

If we look at verse 1, we see that Paul wants to ground the believers' unity primarily in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[1] So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,

Verse 1 is one long conditional clause → if...if...if...be unified
 "if" is rhetorical → "since".

We know that because of the rest of the verse → These 4 phrases summarize the power of the gospel in the Christian life.

- (1) "encouragement in Christ" = Paul knew that the Philippians would experience difficulty, but he also knew that Jesus said "In this world you will have trouble, but take heart; I have overcome the world." Because we are united to Christ, we can have hope, and confidence in every trial.
- (2) "comfort from love" = the Christian has infinite comfort at his disposal in the love that is on display in the gospel.

Romans 8:38-39

[38] For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39] nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (ESV)

- (3) "participation in the Spirit" = the Christian isn't just saved by God through Christ, but he is indwelt with the

Holy Spirit of God to live a life worthy of the God who has saved him.

(4) **"any affection and sympathy"** = speaks to transforming power of the gospel in the life of the believer.

We are changed at the root of our affections, our hearts.

And that manifests in sympathy, or love, for others.

(Notice that the first 3 have a somewhat Trinitarian framework that echoes the benediction we've been saying these last few months as we close out our service: 2 Cor. 13:14: **"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."** He's trying to make clear the gospel grounding and motivation of everything that comes next.)

So the motivation Paul gives for Christian unity is none other than the gospel itself.

Paul **doesn't just give commands**; he gently exhorts them and encourages them...with the gospel.

They have received Christ's saving work, God's everlasting love, the Spirit's comforting presences and transforming power!

Now, in light of that...unity.

(APP) Why is it important for us to understand this?

Because even those who are transformed by the gospel are still fallen and sinful, and we are SO DRAWN to ground our unity in SO MANY other things.

Age — political party affiliation — political positions — skin color — sports teams — life experiences — family size — family background — parenting philosophy — mask wearing — hobbies — favorite preachers

These things CAN NOT bring true unity in Christ's church. Only the gospel can produce and preserve true, lasting, and God-honoring unity.

That brings us to the second aspect of Christian unity in this text:

2. THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN UNITY (2:2)

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

Paul invites the Philippians to "complete his joy"—in a sense, to justify his labors among them—by cultivating gospel-fueled unity in the church.

These 4 phrases speak not so much the "how to" but to the "what is it" nature of gospel unity.

- (1) "being of the same mind" = thinking the same way
- (2) "having the same love" = sharing with one another the love that we have received from God
- (3) "being in full accord" = like-souled
- (4) "of one mind" = unified in purpose

Heart, mind, will

Taken together, the image here is of a people who are... on the same page about what's most important, headed in the same direction, committed to one another in love, and grounded together in the gospel.

(APP) Now, you might be thinking to yourself, **"But I'm NOT on the same page with so-and-so. We don't value the same things.** I mean, sure—we believe the same gospel, but that's about it. We disagree about politics, about pandemics, about ethics. We both believe in Jesus, but we disagree about the implications of the gospel for certain aspects of our lives. How can we be unified?"

Two responses:

- 1) **One of the marks of Christian maturity is being able to distinguish between what is important and what is most important.** The like-mindedness in view here is not about EVERYTHING (sports, clothes, preferences). It's primarily focused on unity *around the gospel*. It's not trying to raise everything else to the level of the gospel. It's trying to show that the unity we have in the gospel is more profound and more lasting than any imposter unity we all so naturally gravitate towards.
- 2) It is instructive that Paul does not say to "go find people with whom you can have unity." Rather, he says, this is something you're going to have to work for.

HOW?

3. THE PRACTICE OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

(2:3-4)

His instruction comes in two pairs, with each principle stated first negatively and then positively.

(1) The first practice has to do with our posture towards, or esteem of others. Paul says we must **humbly prioritize others above ourselves**.

[3] Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Instead of prioritizing self and what I want ("selfish ambition and conceit"), believers should take a posture of humility that puts others first.

This is incredibly hard to do, isn't it?

We are, each of us, utterly convinced that we are the most important person in the room.

Yet Paul tells us to rearrange our prioritization. My friend, my brother, my opponent...THEY are more important, more significant.

(2) The second practice has to do with our pursuits—what we're chasing after.

[4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Rather than simply asking "what do I want," Christians can confidently stop to ask, "What is it that you want?" How can I work for YOUR interests and YOUR good, not just my own.

That's it. That's the instruction. It's a simple list, but exceedingly hard to walk in faithfully.

(APP) Unimaginable instances of marital strife, church division, family drama, and small group quarreling (among Christians!) can trace their origins back to one or more people operating out of a belief that 'I'm more important, and I'm going to insist you care about my interest.'

We're fine with unity! We want it. But instead of Jesus being the person we unify around and the gospel being the message that binds us together, it's ME that's the person we must unify around, and it's MY INTERESTS that will be our message.

Paul knows we're going to be torn in different directions, so he encourages and exhorts us to de-center ourselves and turn our eyes to our brother, our sister, or our opponent and love them.

(APP) Now before I move on to the last point, let me issue a warning. We are, most of us, probably fighting a temptation to think something along the lines of, "I really hope so-and-so is listening to this." And that is the most dangerous response we could possibly have to a text like this.

Yes—You may, at some point in your life, be able to humbly encourage someone with Phil. 2.

But if you find yourself using Phil. 2 to coerce someone to come towards you and your position, you're missing the point. The instruction is not for us to humble others, but to humble ourselves. The instruction is not for us to get others to look out for my interest, but to look out for the interests of others.

Yes—Others will fail. No, they will not always return your humility and love in like kind. But that is not your job.

Your job is to follow Jesus.

Which leads me to my last point.

4. THE POWER OF AND MODEL FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY (2:5-11)

Paul does not leave us without an example. He knows he's making a radical request, but it's not a request he's pulling from nowhere.

The call to persevere Christian unity by focusing on others and putting their needs first is not arbitrary, but bound up in Christ himself.

He is our Model. He is the one who for our sakes went to a cross, died for our sins, so that we could receive what we did not earn or deserve in the form of everlasting life with God.

God the Son—considered others more important than himself in taking on human flesh.

Jesus Christ cried out to the Father and asked that the burden of divine judgment not be placed on his shoulders, but then said, "Not my will, but yours be done" so that he could work for our interests.

5-11 was recorded as an early Christian Christ-hymn, but here it's used primarily to hold up Jesus as a model of this radical humility that produces radical unity in the people of God.

Not only is Jesus a model for our unity, but he is also the one who guarantees its success.

If you look in verse 5 you see that the posture Paul wants us to have towards one another is already ours!

[5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

He says the power we need to cultivate this Christian unity is already ours because we are united with Christ, wrapped up in him, and possessors of his Spirit.

So Jesus guarantees the success of our unity by providing the power, but also in securing our future.

[9] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Friends, we will be unified.

The question for us today is, will we honor our Lord and Savior now by unifying around his gospel showing the watching world what he is like, or will we substitute him for lesser things, exalting those imposters and defaming his name until he brings us all to himself?

May it be that IDC and the broader church of Christ Jesus has his mind, even as the enemy seeks to divide.

PRAY

Lord's Supper

[17] But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. [18] For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. ...

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." [25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ...

[27] Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. [28] Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. [29] For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. (ESV)