



CAPITOL COMMISSION

A Call for Unity—Philippians 2.1-4

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PHILIPPIANS: CULTIVATING A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE AT THE CAPITOL

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INTRODUCTION

Who hasn't experienced the frustration of fractious individuals who put their own whims above the needs of the group. In a family, in business, in the church, or in anyplace that calls for a spirit of cooperation, it only takes one self-promoting individual with an inflated opinion of himself to ruin things for everyone. Discord can cripple a group of people in their efforts to accomplish together what no one of them could do on their own.

Paul calls for unity among the believers at Philippi. It is imperative that believers "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." Having introduced the necessity of unity, he makes a clear call for unity in these first four verses of chapter two and then goes on to provide living illustrations in the lives of Jesus Christ, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

In this week's study entitled A Call for Unity, we consider unity's conditions, description, estimation, and application.

Philippians 2.1-4—Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

I. UNITY'S CONDITIONS (1)

Paul opens this passage with an "if-then" conditional clause. In this case it refers to a condition that is a certainty or settled fact and could be rendered "since" or "in view of the fact."

Paul lists four fulfilled conditions or facts which compel the believer to strive for unity—unity with Christ, God's comfort, fellowship in the Holy Spirit, and tenderhearted compassion.

THE BELIEVER'S UNITY WITH CHRIST

Rather than consolation meaning comfort, here it carries more the idea of exhortation or motivation. It is the same word used to describe the Holy Spirit's role in the believer's life as paraclete. He comes along side to comfort, admonish, exhort, guide, and inspire. In view of the fact that we are united with Christ we find significant exhortation or motivation to unity.

THE BELIEVER'S COMFORT IN GOD'S LOVE

Next Paul pleads for like-mindedness in view of the comfort we find in God's love. This word implies an assuagement or abatement of suffering. In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he writes of the "God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation." The comfort experienced by all believers establishes a condition that will predispose us to unity.

THE BELIEVER'S FELLOWSHIP IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

Now Paul points out the fellowship of the Spirit. In view of the fact that "by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" we should be like-minded (See I Corinthians 12.13). The fact that we have been "made to drink of one Spirit" establishes ideal conditions for spiritual unity.

THE BELIEVER'S TENDERHEARTED COMPASSION

Finally, Paul appeals to the emotions. Since there is "affection and mercy" be like-minded. Common feelings act as a springboard to unified action. Empathy among believers—gentleness and heartfelt compassion for one another will result in actions that allow them to act as soul with soul.

These four conditions provide a breeding ground for unity. Believers, by recognizing the current conditions, can find overwhelming impetus for acting as one with fellow believers.

BIBLE STUDIES (MEALS PROVIDED)

LEGISLATORS ONLY: WEDNESDAY @ LUNCH AT THE AUSTIN CLUB (11:30A.M. OR UPON ADJOURNMENT, WHICHEVER IS LATER) OR THURSDAYS @ 7:30 A.M. IN THE MEMBERS' LOUNGE (E2.1002)

CAPITOL COMMUNITY (ALL ARE WELCOME): FRIDAYS @ 8:00A.M. IN THE MEMBERS' LOUNGE (E2.1002)

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II. UNITY'S DESCRIPTION (2)

Paul's delight in these believers would be filled full by their living in unity. He provides a description beginning with the term like-minded and then adding synonyms to reinforce this basic idea. Unity here is described as having the same disposition, mental frame, or perspective. Believers are to have mutual love for one another and act as those who are joined "soul with soul." What a beautiful picture of individuals bound together by a mutual dedication, committed to common values, the same disposition toward the world, and bound by a common allegiance to one Master.

III. UNITY'S ESTIMATION (3)

Moving from description to prescription, Paul lays out a standard for estimating our own value in light of the value of others. Motives matter in life and for the believer rivalry and conceit are never acceptable. As before, selfish ambition connotes political intrigue and manipulation to advance selfish interests. Empty boasting is the literal rendering for the conceit forbidden here. Unity vanishes in the presence of self-promotion and an inflated estimate of oneself. In another place urging Christian unity, Paul warns each believer "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think."

Paul recommends lowliness of mind as the only cure for the ills of rivalry and conceit. Lowliness of mind is the product of sober thoughts about oneself. You are not called to run yourself down in your own thinking, only to rightly acknowledge your faults. The temptation is always to build yourself up in your own mind by focusing on your strengths while tearing others down by focusing on their faults. The Christian is called to reverse this thinking. Thomas Carlyle's words reflect a sound estimation of ourselves and others, "Every man is my superior in that I may learn from him."

IV. UNITY'S APPLICATION (4)

Paul moves from motivations, which are abstract, to concrete action. The proper estimation of oneself is key to proper

actions toward others. Right motivations are important, but right actions must follow. Look out for the interests of others. Imperative force is given to this practical instruction directed to each of us as believers.

Practical instruction must be practical and Paul realizes that each of us have personal responsibilities to fulfill. Yet looking out for your own interests and only for your own interests is what is forbidden here. Believers are to be others-oriented in their habits of thought. A sensitivity to the needs of those around you is vital, but especially your brothers and sisters in Christ.

CONCLUSION

We are prone to think that conditions are not at all favorable for unity among believers. Conflict in the church seems to be a constant. Yet Paul points out four ideal conditions for unity in the church. Are you willing to acknowledge them and allow your attitudes, words and actions to be informed by them?

Unity is a necessity. Yet we tend to relegate it to the category of wishful thinking where we place other imperatives like loving our enemies. Will you accept Paul's description of unity as like-mindedness, a common disposition, relating soul with soul with fellow believers, holding a shared allegiance to one Master?

Do your thoughts betray a disposition of pride and self-promotion? Do you build yourself up in your thoughts? Do you tend to focus on others faults, mistakes, or weaknesses? Would others say you have humble attitudes? Do you dwell on the value God places on others around you? Do you esteem others better than yourself?

Finally, are you looking out for your brother and sister in Christ? How so? What actions have you taken in the past week that would serve as evidence for your others-orientation?

What if unity in the body of Christ were dependent upon you? Guess what? It is!