

Philippians 2:1-4

Unity

Image Church // Philippians Week 4

MPS: Having a Christ-centered disposition within the church

Introduction

Well good morning Image family and friends joining us this morning.

I want to take a minute to say Happy Mother's Day to all of the moms here- thank you for your patience, sacrifice, love and for everything else you do- y'all are the real heros!

- If you have a mom watching with you today I want you to look at her tell her that you're thankful for her!
- I want to spend some time praying over our moms this morning...
- But I also want to pray for another group of people today... For some of you Mother's Day is hard for you, maybe because of Death, or infertility, or maybe you were hurt by your mom... I want to spend some time praying for you as well...

Let's Pray: Thank God for moms, pray for the hurting, for those struggling...

*If you have your Bibles go ahead and turn to the book of **Philippians**, we're going to be in **Philippians 2** this morning as we continue our series today...

My wife and I have been watching a show recently on **Netflix** called **All American** – if you haven't seen it, I would recommend it to you, it gives some really good insight in to a lot of the issues in America...

But we just started **Season 2**, by the way spoiler alert I am going to give a little bit away but it won't spoil it I promise...

You have a kid named **Spencer James**, who's from inner-city LA that get recruited to play at Beverly Hill's High School to help further his chances in playing football in the NFL...

This would be a massive transition on multiple levels, completely different backgrounds, home-lives, ethnically, socioeconomically and culturally... all of that

So, he makes the transfer and there's a bunch of challenges given the crazy transition from one extreme to another... And the team's all over the place- there's disunity, drams, and conflicts...

But they end up figuring it out and in **season 1** they end up winning the state championship...

But then you get to **season 2** and the unity they had managed to find begins to disappear- they get caught up in the glory of winning the state championship, and it gets to their heads...

They go from **a team focus in a team sport**, to an *individual focus in a team sport*, they relish in their self-glory, and as the cameras begin to isolate the players they feed off of it, and the result is the unity they once had dissipates, tensions rise and motivation is lost.

This is a lot like what's happening with the church in Philippi...

They are a church with a unique beginning, where a group of people come together who are completely different backgrounds ethnically, socioeconomically and culturally, that **unify together** and end up in a pretty good place as the first church in Philippi...

But priorities begin to shift, the motivation begins to slip away, unity begins to fade as they stand in the face of opposition...

Maybe it was the oppression that was causing disunity, maybe it was something else but for whatever reason there is conflict within the church... *We don't know...*

But we're going to watch as Paul begins to press in on this... Last week, we looked at the end of **chapter 1** where Paul *charges them as citizens of heaven...*

Reminding them of who they are and laying out his desire for them, to continue to fight alongside of him for the sake of the gospel.

Which leads us to our text today... The start of this next section here in **chapter 2** is closely tied to the end of **Chapter 1**.

Which is why Paul's starts off with conjunction ***If then or therefore...***

And what he's going to be drilling down on is how of **unity and harmony** are essential element for Christian Community and vital to be able to have an effective effort in defending the gospel.

Alright let's jump in...

Philippians 2:1-4

1 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ... OK, let me stop right here for just a second, ***what's Paul doing here?*** He's making a series of **if statements**, and these statements are obviously true, and so the **ifs** really function as **since then** because he's saying these things with the understanding that they know them to be true...

And the reason why he does this, is that he wants to give a reminder of these **truthful realities**, and they're also going to serve as the basis for his challenge here in just a little bit...

But I want to walk through what Paul's holding up here- Because these are some incredible truths that *like the church in Philippi*, we need to be reminded of as well, truths that we need to soak in...

So, he starts off here in verse 1 with:

Encouragement in Christ- That word also translates as *comfort*, he's saying that you have a source of comfort in Christ that consuls you in the midst of hardship...

Think about it like this, when the world has turned against you, Christ hasn't He laid down His life to receive you! You have been accepted and you're unconditionally loved through Christ.

Consolation of love- He's talking about God's love- you have consolation and comfort of the love of God, displayed through Christ...

This is powerful- The word **Consolation** is this idea of *speaking to someone by coming close beside them*.¹

I love that picture, in it you see a caring and close kind of love from God that we get to experience through Christ who provides the opportunity for us to be in a relationship with God...

*Paul would say it like this in **Ephesians 2:3-5***

3 We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children under wrath as the others were also. **4** But God, who is rich in mercy, **because of his great love that he had for us,** **5** made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. **You are saved by grace!**

- Give summary of verse

The Paul points to **Fellowship with the Spirit**- He's saying, we're united in one Spirit, the Holy Spirit that we received through Christ... The same Holy Spirit that started a work in us, and established the Church, is the **means of unity for in the Church!**

Then the last one here is **Affection and mercy**- He's saying, you have experienced great affection and sympathy that flows from Jesus that was displayed through His work on the cross...

¹ Hawthorne, G. F. (2004). *Philippians* (Vol. 43, p. 83). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

Let me stop right here for just a second before we move on, these truths that we just walked through are fundamental and foundational to the Christian life, and I want to make sure you don't miss them...

Do you understand that you have a source of **encouragement in Christ** in the midst of whatever you're facing?

Do you understand that you have access to the close, and caring and **consoling love of God**? Do you believe that God actually loves you even in the midst of your sin?

Do you understand the **fellowship** that God's established through the **Spirit in the church**? Do you understand the blessing of the church? That God didn't leave you all alone to figure things out of fight through struggles, that He's established the church to be a refuge for you a place of comfort, a family that you get to be a part of??

Do you understand the **affection and mercy** that's been extended to you?? Do you understand that Jesus bled for you while you were a sinner and a rebel??

- That Jesus saw you, and had compassion on you??

See, when you understand those truths **it changes everything!** It reorients your perspective...

Paul wants you to see and hear the **encouraging realities** of the gospel... And it's those realities that are going to be the bases for what he's about to say here in **verse 2**... They are the **motivators for what's about to follow**...

Look at **verse 2** where Paul continues, he says: **make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.**

Paul says **make my joy complete- IOW**: What you need to see is that there's joy found in gospel unity... Don't miss that, there's a **unique joy** that you experience in Christian unity **within the church**...

So, Paul says to be unified in this way:

- By thinking the same way
- By have the same love
- By being united in spirit
- And being intent on one purpose, *being of one mind*

Now, let me tell you what Paul's **not** saying here, **he's not saying** that we all have to have the same opinions on everything... *Which means:*

- We can have different opinions on how to raise our kids
- We don't cheer for the same team- **thank goodness**
- We don't have to have the same opinion on what worship looks like, or how we worship
- We don't have to like the same kind of worship music
- We don't have to have the same political opinions
- We can have different opinions on how the church executes certain things
- We can even have different opinions on certain theological issues

Paul's not saying make sure that you think that same way about everything in life... **So, what is he saying here??**

He's calling them to unity, **not around an opinion but around a person**... **IOW**: He's calling them to a Christ-centered mindset, a Christ-centered disposition that gives them the same framework, the same attitude, the same love, the same way of thinking through things...

And here's what I love about this, it means that we can be different, that we can have radically different opinions, come from different backgrounds, be different socioeconomically, politically and ethnically and **yet still be unified**...

- Which actually characterizes the church in Philippi!

What we need to see in this is that **unity isn't sameness, it's actually the opposite, unity is when people who are not the same come together around something that defines them more than that which makes them differences**...

And we've already talked about this in **week 1** but the thing that's greater than their differences, and the thing that brought them together from such radically different backgrounds was **the gospel...**

Which is why Paul's calling them to a Christ-centered mindset...

I want you to see what Paul's doing here, he starts off this section with the truthful realities of the gospel, and then then in light of those truths he makes a call for unity around the foundation of those truths which is Christ...

And then what Paul's going to do here in these next few verses is show us how this should practically play out so that unity can exist...

Look at **verse 3...** Where Paul says: **3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. 4 Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.**

Alright, I want to give you 3 points of application here for us based on the text today...

1. Allow Christ to characterize your view of the church (V. 1-2, 3)

Paul call's the church in Philippi to unity through a like mindedness, where Christ is central...

Example:

- Glasses with different color lens... cause us to see differently which means that we have different outlooks and perspectives...
- We need the same lens to be unified in our perspective...

Christ is the lens that allows us to be unified in our perspective, to be able see the same thing, have the same mind, the same love, the same attitude toward things, to be able to experience unity...

The way that Christ is the lens is that we see things in light of His finished work...

- **IOW:** What Christ has been to us, we want to be to each other and to the world around us...

*Which means this, that the primary objective of the church is protecting, preserving and proclaiming **the message of Jesus** and living out **the ministry of Jesus**...

That is what we have to rally around, and that's what we have to be willing to lay down our preferences for...

Division in the church exists when the primary objection is overlooked for personal opinions...

There's nothing wrong with opinions- they should be presented within the church but **the primary goal of the church isn't to appeal to opinions, it's to point people to a person!**

We have to keep the main thing the main thing... Coming to the table understanding that God established the church for the purpose of being a place where people can exist within their differences- **because what unifies us within the church is greater than our differences!**

So, we can all come together with open hands... Willing to lay down our **preferences** and **personal perspectives** for the sake of others growing in their love and knowledge of Jesus...

*Paul says in verse in **verse 3** that we're to consider others more important than ourselves, and in **verse 4** that we look out for the interests of others...*

Which means this means this:

That we're comfortable being uncomfortable for the sake of others...

- In the way we worship, in the things that we talk about, the tensions we step into, in the way that we go about serving the marginalized and the broken...

*It means that when racial, socioeconomic or political differences come up, the way that we navigate them within the church is that our first response is to listen and ***seek to understand before seeking to be understood...***

- White brothers and sisters, I love you but we're not really good that this... We have to understand that we can't ***superimpose*** our perspective onto others...
 - Ask questions, get context and clarity before dismissing or opposing something...
 - You will be amazed at the perspective you will get when you seek to listen and understand first...

There is ***no "us"*** and ***"them"*** within the church, there's only a ***"we"*** ... And for that ***we*** to exist it cost Jesus His life! ***We show-off the gospel when the world see's us living as a "we!"***

Listen, ***Christianity's hard enough as it is***, we're already facing opposition from the world, we already have people against us, we already have a culture that disagrees with us...

The last thing we need is to be on different pages within the church- we need each other, would we make it our ambition to have a Christ-centered disposition, a Christ-centered mindset, a Christ-centered framework with-in the church!

And here's the cool part, when this happens, when we come together as a group of people that are different, with different opinions and different perspectives, there's a joy that you experience, a joy that Paul points to that's profound— Because it's something that you can only experience through the gospel!

Here's the second thing that we need to see...

2. Combat selfish ambition with service (V. 3-4)

Paul says to ***do nothing out of selfish ambition...***

Selfish ambition: is a drive personal success that rivals that of others. This is unhealthy competition in life where your desire is centered around you surpassing other people...

Let me ask you this: *Where is it that you tend to compete with others in your heart?*

- Where you're at financially?
- Where you are positionally within corporate America?
- Where your kids are developmentally?
- Maybe it's even how *Christian* you are- you compete internally with others based on your good works...

There is something in your life that you hold up against others, that you use to compare yourself to others... ***What is it?***

Let me ask it like this: What is it that you take credit for, that you hold up and seek to expose as much as possible, and when you fail at it, you hide your failures at all costs?

Chances are that's where you have ***selfish ambition...***

- ***If you're still not sure what it is for you, just go to your social media account...***

We all have something that we have ***selfish ambition toward...*** And here's what it does, it creates internal rivalry and that internal rivalry leads to division within the church...

- It can lead to negative thoughts toward others within the church
- It can lead to gossip and slander within the church...
 - Those things will rip the church apart...
- Selfish ambitions can also isolate you from the church, because you get consumed by pursuing them over pursuing your ambitions over Christ...

And so, **here's how we combat selfish ambition**: You take whatever it is that you have selfish ambitions toward, and you use it to serve others.

If you have selfish ambitions toward your finances, **serve others** by being generous and giving more money away...

If you have selfish ambitions relating to climbing the corporate ladder, **serve others** by giving them your time...

You say what about if my selfish ambitions are my **good works and outside appearance toward others**, or **my kids**?!?!

That way that you serve others is by being like Paul and boast in your weaknesses, hold up your failures and your shortcomings as a person and a parent!

You have to understand **that boasting in your weaknesses is one of the greatest acts of service toward others** because it shows them where your identity and hope really rest- that it's not in your strengths, it's not in having it all together, it's not in your perfection as a parent, or as a person, it's in Christ!

And here's the big secret- no one has it all together! People identify with weakness and imperfection, no one can identify with perfection because that's not the reality for anyone! Revealing weaknesses serves others because when we boast in the Christ gets the most glory and not us!

So, what is it that you have selfish ambitions toward and how can you use whatever it is to serve others??

I want to encourage you to think through it like this: **What did Jesus give up for me, and what do I need to give up for others to help them see Jesus?**

Combating selfish ambition with service fuels unity, exalts Jesus, and keeping your mind and heart on him.

Let's look at the 3rd thing we need to see...

3. Find your significance in the affections of Christ and not your actions (V. 3-4)

Paul not only says do nothing out of selfish ambition, *he also includes the word **conceit** in there as well...*

Conceit: this word literally means vain glory, glory means weight... so conceit is an excessively high opinion of your worth or weight... **It's a form of Pride.**

Let me say this about pride, we tend to underrate pride- *It's like the go to confession...*

But here's the thing about pride, pride is a form of **cosmic treason**, because it's the **sabotaging of God's glory**- it's you taking that which is rightfully his and claiming it for yourself...

We do this all the time in the Christian life, and *I'm certainly guilty of this...* We want credit, we want to matter, we want to feel significant and important, and so we look to our ability and what we've done to fuel our need for significance.

And we hold up our *success* in the Christian, we hold up the things we're *good at*, and we minimize our failures so that we can maintain as much glory from others as possible...

- And we feed off of the praise that we get from people...

And watch how this plays out, what we start doing is not loving and serving as an overflow of the gospel at work in us, where Jesus is the **motivation** and the **prize**...

But we start to serve for the sake of **fulling our significance through our actions**...

And we end up finding our significance in the things we're doing **for God**, and not in God himself...

Paul's saying don't do things for the sake of fueling your ego, or establishing significance...

- Instead do something that attacks you own ego- lower yourself in service to others where you see them as more significant than you...

This is what Christ did for you, and it's through his affection for you that He displayed on the cross, that you find your significance- you're now no longer a sinner, you're a son or daughter...

As Jesus has been to you, so you're to be to others and when you do that- Jesus gets the glory and not you!

Conclusion [VAMP]

Ok, so here's the challenge for us as we continue to look at what it means to be a Christian and what it looks like to grow as a Christian...

We have to be unified together and here's how that unity should play out for us, we have to:

1. Allow Christ to characterize your view of the church
2. Combat selfish ambition with service
3. Find your significance in Christ affection and not your action

And the goal in all of this is that Christ is central in our lives...

And that we have a Christ-centered view within the church so that we can be united together for the sake of the gospel at work in us and through us...

Where is it that you need to have a Christ-centered view in your life?

As the church we have to always be fighting for a Christ-centered view so that we can be unified around the purpose that God's calls us to...

Where do you need to apply the gospel in your life?

For some of you, you need to believe the gospel for the first time!