

LESSON 3

Unity Through Humility and Service

Acts 14:1–28

It is necessary to go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.

Acts 14:22

Class Overview: In this lesson, we turn from identifying barriers to unity to exploring the attitudes and practices that actively strengthen it. Scripture makes clear that unity in the church is not sustained by personality, preference, or power, but by humility shaped by Christ and service modeled after Him. Drawing primarily from Philippians 2 and Ephesians 4, this lesson shows that unity grows when believers adopt Christ’s mindset—laying aside self-interest, serving one another sacrificially, and valuing the good of the body above personal recognition. Unity is guarded not by avoiding responsibility, but by embracing the way of the cross.

Class Objectives:

By the end of this class, you should be able to:

1. Explain why humility is essential to unity in the body of Christ.
2. Identify Jesus as the ultimate model of humble service.
3. Recognize how service redirects focus from self to others.
4. Understand the connection between humility, obedience, and unity.
5. Commit to practical acts of service that strengthen unity within the church.

Introduction

MOST PEOPLE VALUE UNITY, but far fewer are eager to practice the habits that make unity possible. Unity sounds appealing until it requires humility. Service sounds noble until it costs time, comfort, or recognition. Yet the Bible clearly teaches that unity does not survive on good intentions; it is built through Christlike character.

After identifying the barriers that fracture unity, we now turn to the attitudes that heal it. Unity grows, not when everyone gets their way, but when we choose to follow the example of Jesus, who learned humility, obedience, and service for the sake of others (Hebrews 5:7–9). If we want a united church, we must learn to walk the same path He walked.

When Paul addresses unity most directly, he does not begin with rules or structures. He begins with a mindset. In Philippians 2, Paul points believers to Jesus Himself: not merely as Savior, but as example. As we read this passage, listen for how Paul connects humility, service, and unity, and consider how Christ's example reshapes our understanding of what it means to live together faithfully.

Unity Begins with a Christlike Mindset (Philippians 2:1–4)

When Paul talks about unity in Philippians 2, he begins with what we already have. Encouragement in Christ. Comfort from love. Fellowship in the Spirit. Affection and mercy. In other words, look at what you share. Because we belong to Him, we belong to each other. That's the foundation. Everything else flows from that.

Then Paul makes the appeal to *think the same way* (v. 2). Have the same love. Be united in spirit, intent on one purpose. That doesn't mean everyone thinks the same thought at the same time. It's not uniformity. It's alignment. It's hearts moving in the same direction even when personalities and perspectives differ. You can disagree on details and still be deeply united in purpose.

But then he becomes very specific. *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit.* That's where unity normally breaks down. Not over theology first—but over ego. Selfish ambition seeks advancement, recognition, and influence. Conceit inflates our own importance. And once that seeps in, cooperation quietly shifts into competition.

So, Paul offers humility as an alternative. Biblical humility isn't about pretending you're worthless; it's not passivity. It's strength under control—choosing to value others above yourself. It's walking into a disagreement, asking, “How do I serve here?” instead of “How do I win?” This changes everything. It reshapes how we talk to each other. How do we share responsibility? How do we respond when we're overlooked? Humility steadies relationships.

In verse 4, Paul pushes it even further—*don't just look out for your own interests, but for the interests of others.* That requires awareness. Slowing down long enough to ask, “How will this decision affect the body?” It requires patience. And sometimes, it requires yielding. Unity doesn't grow because we avoid conflict. It grows because we cultivate the mind of Christ. A mindset that consistently places the good of the body above personal preference. When humility governs the heart, unity stops feeling fragile. It becomes steady. Sustainable. Strong.

Jesus Models Humility Through Service (Philippians 2:5–8)

After calling us to a humble mindset, Paul immediately anchors that call in the person of Jesus Christ. He does not ask the church to practice humility in the abstract. Instead, he says, *adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus.* What does that look like?

In verse 6, Paul begins by defining Christ's identity. Jesus existed *in the form of God*, fully divine, equal with the Father. This matters because it tells us that humility did not come from insecurity or inferiority. Jesus did not serve because He lacked authority; He served because He possessed it. His humility was a choice, not a necessity.

Verse 7 points to the shocking nature of that choice. Christ did not cling to His status or insist on His rights. Instead, He *emptied Himself* by taking the form of a servant. This does not mean Jesus stopped being divine; it means He willingly set aside His privilege to serve. He entered fully into human weakness, limitation, and suffering for the sake of others.

The depth of Christ's humility is seen most clearly in His obedience. In verse 8, Paul writes that Jesus humbled Himself *by becoming obedient to the point of death, even to death on a cross*. The cross was not only physically painful; it was socially humiliating. Christ embraced shame, rejection, and sacrifice to bring life to others.

Unity in the church relies on a pattern of self-giving obedience that directly shapes how we live together. When we seek recognition, special protection, or resist inconvenience, unity weakens. When believers follow Christ's example—serving without insisting on their own way, obeying God even when it's difficult, and putting others first—unity naturally deepens. What we learn about Jesus here shows us that humility is not thinking less of ourselves but thinking of ourselves less. It is the willingness to lay down comfort, preferences, and control for the good of the body.

Service Redirects the Focus from Self to the Body (Mark 10:42–45; Galatians 5:13)

Once humility settles into the heart, it doesn't stay theoretical. It shows up. And most often, it shows up as service. Jesus makes that connection unmistakable. In Mark 10:42–45, He flips the script on what greatness means. The world measures greatness by status. Authority. Recognition. Control. We want to be in charge and get noticed. But in the Kingdom? Greatness looks like a towel over your arm.

And Jesus doesn't just teach that—He embodies it. *The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many*. That's not a side note in His ministry. That *is* His mission. Which means service isn't optional for disciples. It's not a personality trait for a few naturally helpful people. It's the practice of anyone who follows Him.

Paul says something similar in Galatians 5:13. Freedom in Christ isn't permission to indulge yourself. Its freedom redirected—toward loving service. Our liberties do not remove responsibility; they reshape it. We're no longer enslaved to self. We're freed to live for others. Service changes perspective. When you're actively serving, you're not obsessing over your preferences. You're not keeping score. You're not angling for recognition. You're focused on needs. On mission. On shared work. And something happens in that space. Differences shrink. Cooperation grows. "My church" slowly becomes "our work."

Service is one of the most powerful cures for division. It's hard to stay bitter toward someone you're working alongside. It's hard to compete with someone you're helping carry a burden. Service softens the edges. It builds trust. It creates shared investment in something greater than any one person. When service becomes normal—just the air the church breathes—unity grows almost naturally. Not because everyone agrees on everything. But because everyone is participating, shoulder to shoulder, following Christ's example. Not seeking to be served, but choosing to serve in love.

For Application

Here's the thing about unity—good intentions alone won't get you there. I can want to be part of a unified church all day, but it ultimately comes down to how I treat the person next to me. What mindset am I bringing into the building? Am I following Christ's example, or just my own comfort level?

Jesus shows us what humility looks like in action. Though He had all authority, He chose the path of service and obedience. His example challenges us to rethink how we define strength, leadership, and success in the church. Unity is not maintained by asserting rights or protecting comfort but by willingly setting aside self-interest for the sake of the body.

Service then becomes the practical expression of humility. When believers serve one another, attention shifts away from personal preference and toward shared mission. Service builds trust, eases

tension, and fosters connection. It turns faith into action and makes unity something lived rather than just spoken about.

We need honest self-reflection. Where pride has taken hold, humility must replace it. Where distance or hesitation exists, service provides a way forward. Building unity isn't the responsibility of someone else; it belongs to every member of the body. The question isn't whether unity matters, but whether we are willing to practice the habits that make unity possible. Following Christ's example of humility and service is how the body is built up in love.

Memory Verse and Weekly Challenge

Memory Verse:

Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus — Philippians 2:5 (CSB)

Challenge:

This week, practice humility through service. Identify one specific way you can serve another person in the church without seeking recognition: offer help, listen patiently, encourage quietly, or meet a practical need. As you do, pay attention to how serving others reshapes your attitude toward unity and deepens your connection to the body. Come prepared next week to reflect on how choosing service affected your heart and relationships.

For Reflection

1. Why does Paul connect unity so closely to mindset rather than rules or structure (Philippians 2:1–4)?

2. How does Jesus' example of humility challenge common ideas of leadership, influence, or success in the church?

3. In what ways can selfish ambition or desire for recognition quietly undermine unity, even in well-meaning Christians?

4. Why is service such a powerful force for strengthening unity within the body of Christ?

5. What is one specific way humility or service could improve relationships or unity in our congregation right now?
