

Lesson 14

Keeping Unity and Peace

make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose,
Philippians 2.2

Introduction

Philippians 1.27 begins a section where Paul calls for unity and peace. Just one thing: *As citizens of heaven, live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, in one accord, contending together for the faith of the gospel.* As citizens of a spiritual kingdom, we live for the good of others. We are in partnership with other believers. Together we stand, share, strive, and suffer.

What motivates all of this? Philippians 2.1 gives us the answer:

- The encouragement we receive from Christ.
- Our experience of comfort we receive through the love of God.
- Our sharing of life together in the work of the Spirit.
- The deeply felt affection and sympathy the Spirit gives.

Philippians 2.2 is a strong personal appeal by Paul. He pleads, *make my joy complete*. His was a deeply emotional relationship with the Philippians, caring immensely about their spiritual and physical well-being. The emphasis in this verse is on unity of purpose. Christians are to be:

- Of the same mind
- Of the same love
- United in spirit
- Intent on one purpose

Be of the Same Mind

Unity comes when believers think alike. The NIV rendering of this phrase is, *be like minded*. It is much like Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 1.10 where he instructs believers to *have the same judgment*. This is the possession of a certain disposition, attitude, or mindset toward something. It is a certain way of looking at things, where we all come to share the same thinking patterns. That sounds like a challenge. It is... *continually*. How can people from differing backgrounds, various levels of spiritual maturity, and differing personal worldviews maintain unity and peace? We live in a time when things appear to be more divided than at any other time in our life experience. How do we keep that from creeping into the church?

How do we get collectively bring ourselves to be of the same mind?

We need God's help, because this is something we can't achieve by human power alone. Let's tie in Romans 8.4-5:

in order that the law's requirement would be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit have their minds set on the things of the Spirit.

Focus on where Paul says *have their minds set*. This is the same word (*phroneo*) Paul uses in Philippians 2.2. What does Romans 8.5 teach? There are two possibilities on how we think: we can think with the Spirit or think with the flesh. If we are to think the same, we must think in harmony with the Spirit.

This means we must move beyond our personal agenda, preferences, and desires. This is where disunity often originates. Conflict comes when some are thinking with the flesh while others are thinking with the Spirit. It also comes when no one is thinking with the Spirit.

The same Greek word mentioned above (*phroneo*) is also found in Romans 12.3:

For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one.

Note here how we are to think objectively, i.e., *sensibly* or with sober/sound judgment. Our turf, our conditions, our pride all compel us to lose that objectivity. Our own selfish pride can cause us to exaggerate our opinions and expertise. The flesh often exalts brash behavior, self-centeredness, ego-building, and the fulfillment of every ambition. This leads to conflict. Conflict is always the result of a sinful attitude. It is a collision of the mind of the Spirit with the mind of the flesh. Whenever we have conflict, somewhere, with someone, there is an attitude problem. There is a failure to think on a divine level. There is a rushing into the process of relationships with your own agenda. There is a quickness to speak and a slowness to think, pray, mediate, or search the mind of God in His word. It is always compelled by the flesh - which longs for its own agenda.

We must not overvalue our abilities, gifts, or worth.

Consider the following passages:

- Galatians 6.3: *for if anyone considers himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*
- 1 Timothy 1.12-16: what will an honest assessment of oneself reveal?
- 1 Corinthians 4.6-7: will we see the need for self-examination and withhold judgment of other Christians?
- 1 Peter 5.5: will we *clothe ourselves with humility*, remembering *God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble?*

The idea of thinking the same is also found in Romans 15.5:

Now may the God who gives endurance and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, according to Christ Jesus,

As you read this verse did you see who is the source of the harmony and peace we desire? It is the Father who supplies. When we make the commitment to live in harmony with one another, we are deciding to think the same. We desire the same disposition, attitude, or concerns with one another. This is all in accordance with Christ Jesus. It is interesting to consider how many of these passages include the Father, Son, and Spirit. The apostles are calling us to think like them. *How do we do that?*

We must put on the mind of Christ

It is possible to think like Christ did. Paul certainly did, 1 Corinthians 2.16. He called for Christians to develop this disposition, a mindset for spiritual things. This is a mark of spiritual maturity, 2 Corinthians 13.11; Colossians 3.2.

Colossians 3.12-16 is probably one of the best passages that helps us see how to put on the mind of Christ:

- 3.12-14: we must develop these attitudes as we live inside our new identity.
- 3.15: we must humble ourselves and allow Jesus to call the shots. His *peace* rules our life.
- 3.16: we allow the word of Christ to dwell inside our heart. It becomes the controlling force in our life.

Be of the Same Love

We must love everyone the same. This is based on mutual, sacrificial service and will not always be based on emotion. *Love one another with brotherly affection*, Romans 12.10. True sacrificial love acts on behalf of someone else's needs. It has been said that love begins when someone else's needs become more important than my own." John said it this way:

If anyone has this world's goods and sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him—how does God's love reside in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in action and in truth, 1 John 3.17-18.

Our love for others naturally flows freely when we think with the mind of Christ. It is in direct relation to our spiritual maturity and heavenly mindset.

Conflict always arises over attitude. And while this may reflect itself in doctrinal disputes or moral lapses, the core of the problem rests in someone's fleshly attitude. Bitterness, envy, personal ambition, protectionism, etc., all manifest themselves from a lack of love.

Be United in Spirit

Other versions describe this as being *in full accord* or *united in spirit*. The original language here uses the term "one-souled," as it joins soul and mind together. Paul is talking about both feeling and thinking. He is describing people who are knit together – deeply down – in complete harmony of the soul – where their passions, desires, and ambitions are all the same.

Be Intent on One Purpose

This is the same word (*phroneo*) used earlier in the verse, here it is just used in a different way. Here it means to focus on one thing; to have one purpose in mind. Think about how during times of conflict that everyone often has their own purpose, which leads to many problems. The imperative here is that we remember our one purpose: *to be like Jesus and to bring Him glory*. That is what disciples do.

Conclusion

What Paul does in verse 2 is say the same thing in four different ways to bury the concepts deep into our minds. The principle here is that unity is brought to light by a group of people who think alike. People:

- Who are controlled by a deep knowledge of the word of God.
- Who walk in the Spirit.
- Who love each other equally, don't hold grudges, or take offense easily.
- Who aim for the same holy principles, goals, and divine ends.
- Who are driven to accomplish things totally unconnected to themselves.

How strong is your desire to keep unity and peace?

For Thought and Reflection

1. Why must we involve God in the process of keeping unity and peace?
2. What does it mean to think with the Spirit?
3. What is conflict the result of?
4. What does it mean to be "one-souled?"
5. What is the purpose that brings us all together?