

Lesson 12

Standing Firm in One Spirit

Philippians 1.27-2.4

Overview

This section of Paul's writing begins a line of thinking that runs through the end of chapter 3. The well-known verses of 3.20-21 form a fitting conclusion for the point Paul wants to make:

Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of his glorious body, by the power that enables him to subject everything to himself.

Here, we learn how citizens of the heavenly realm are to live on earth. We live for the good of others and in partnership with other believers. We strive for consistency with Christian values and live with a sense of pride in our new identity. And, we are to constantly interact with fellow believers who are on the same journey to heaven.

The Bigger Picture

Most all the early Christians experienced difficulty and persecution because of their decision to follow Christ. The Philippians were no different. They were experiencing stress and opposition to their Christianity. Those who stand and endure together have a way of blending together. Difficult times are opportunities to grow together in unity, not be driven apart.

The Text

NLT

Philippians 1:27–2:4 (NLT)

²⁷Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News.

²⁸Don't be intimidated in any way by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed, but that you are going to be saved, even by God himself.

²⁹For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him.

³⁰We are in this struggle together. You have seen my struggle in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of it.

¹Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate?

²Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

³Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.

⁴Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

CSB

Philippians 1:27–2:4 (CSB)

²⁷Just 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,

²⁸not being frightened in any way by your opponents. This is a sign of destruction for them, but of your salvation—and this is from God.

²⁹For it has been granted to you on Christ's behalf not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him,

³⁰since you are engaged in the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I have.

¹If, then, there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy,

²make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves.

⁴Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others.

Explore the Text

1. What did Paul desire to hear about the Philippian church?
2. What does it say about their identity? Why is understanding who we are so essential to unity?
3. What kind of resistance were the Philippian Christians receiving? How were they to respond?

- i. Unity with a purpose. We have a common opponent to face, and our objective is to win. Our common objective is victory over Satan.
 - ii. Someone has said, *the army that faces death doesn't have any internal quarrels. It is only concerned about defeating death. Petty internal conflicts are lost in the battle for what really matters.*
 - iii. We proclaim and preach *the faith of the gospel*. We preserve it and proclaim it.
 - 1. We do this not being frightened by our opponents ... we are called to be bold and courageous because victory is ours.
- D. 1.29-30: *Suffer Together*.
- i. God has graciously gifted us with suffering.
 - ii. Suffering leads us to heaven; strengthens the church; and wins the lost.

II. Philippians 2.1: Four Motives for Unity

- A. 2.1a – We receive *encouragement* in Christ.
 - i. Each of us receive personal and consistent help from Christ through His forgiveness, strength, wisdom, and blessings.
- B. 2.1b – We have *consolation of love*.
 - i. We have received an overflowing amount of love, Romans 5.5.
 - ii. It has come at its greatest, highest, and most superior level.
- C. 2.1c – We have *fellowship with the Spirit*.
 - i. Galatians 3.3 – we are born by the Spirit.
 - ii. Galatians 5.16 – we walk by the Spirit.
- D. 2.1d – We have *affection and mercy*.
 - i. When we fall, the Spirit picks us up. When we sin, the Spirit forgives. When we need strength, he supplies it. When we need wisdom, he gives it.

III. Philippians 2.2: Four Identifiers of Unity

- A. 2.2a – *Thinking the same way*.
 - i. Unity comes when believers think alike, i.e., have the same attitude.
 - ii. Believers need to come to hold the same feeling, disposition, attitude, and thinking patterns.
- B. 2.2b – *Having the same love*.
 - i. Everyone is loved the same. Mutual self-sacrifice.
 - ii. See Romans 12.10.
- C. 2.2c – *United in spirit*.
 - i. “one-souled.” Deep harmony and passion for one another.
- D. 2.2d – *Intent on one purpose*.
 - i. Our purpose together is to advance the kingdom for the glory of God. We have a common vision.
 - ii. Personal agendas have no place in the body.

IV. Philippians 2.3-4: Four Ways to Maintain Unity

- A. 2.3a – *Do nothing from selfish ambition*.
 - i. Self-seeking leads to quarreling, haggling, fighting, arguing, and contending.
 - ii. Galatians 5.20b-21a – it is a work of the flesh.
- B. 2.3b – *Do nothing from conceit*.

- i. A state of mind that seeks personal glory. An arrogant spirit.
 - ii. An attitude of self-promotion must be removed.
- C. 2.3c – Be humble.
- i. Unity begins when we *count others more significant than ourselves*.
 - ii. Humility described the mindset of a slave: “unfit, low, common.”
- D. 2.4a – *Look not to your own interests, but rather to the interests of others.*
- i. Our aim is not just to take care of our own interests.
 - ii. We must be involved in the lives of others. Their needs and concerns must surpass our own.

Reaction

1. As we focus on Philippians 1.27-2.4 – what is Paul’s primary focus? Unity in doctrine ... or unity in attitude? Explain.

2. What does it mean to stand together? How does Paul explain it in Philippians 1.27b?

3. Why is it important to always remember the mission as we work together? When this happens, what happens to all the internal issues inside a congregation?

4. How have your experiences with suffering united you with other brethren?

5. Why is a self-seeking person almost always in conflict with everyone else?

6. What is humility? How was this virtue looked upon in the first century world? What about our world today? Why is it a key characteristic of discipleship?

7. What are some ways you can find joy in making others joyful?

For Today's Christian

Unity comes when believers think alike. Self-seeking pursuits will be a problem that always confronts us. Envy and rivalry (Philippians 1.15) was the motive of those who afflicted Paul while he was imprisoned (Philippians 1.17). It is very easy for the selfish person to focus on the differences he or she has with others. They are almost always in conflict with others. In Corinth, Paul urged the brethren to be *united in the same mind and the same judgment*. This was the solution to their factions (1 Corinthians 1.10). Paul's exhortations on unity in Philippians and 1 Corinthians go far beyond doctrine. What he has in view is our attitude, mindset, and disposition inside the local congregation. We get there by:

- Romans 8.4-5 – thinking in harmony with the Spirit.
- Romans 12.3 – thinking with sober judgment
- Romans 15.5 – committing to live in harmony with one another.

Difficulty brings us together. In Philippians 1.28-30 Paul focuses on the difficulty he and the Philippian Christians faced. He says suffering is a gift of grace from God. That may challenge our human thinking just a little. But, when we suffer for the faith, it leads us toward our heavenly reward. It strengthens the church. And it wins the lost. A recent challenge for churches all over the globe was the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some applied the principles Paul speaks of in this section and survived. Others even thrived. Others, sadly, succumbed to division and discord. There may be more difficulties on the horizon. Will local congregations learn to apply Paul's teaching in Philippians 1.27-2.4 in order to be prepared for whatever comes?

Humility is a key characteristic of discipleship. Humility is where we count others as more significant than ourselves. It is very easy to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. For example, we often have little difficulty seeing the shortcomings and failures of others, while glossing over our own. We are usually very patient with our own failures and then begin to hold ourselves up on a higher plain than others. We can be less patient with others . . . which leads to conflict. Problems of discord, division, and factionalism will end when we hold others as more worthy of respect and honor than ourselves.

Journal

As we move in our relationships, it is not about what others are or where they're at. The focus is, *will I count them as worthy of my help and encouragement? Will I serve my brother or sister? Will I take the time to actually do things that help build them up?* As you think about the work ahead, what are some ways you can make the good of others the focus of your life?

For Further Study

As Paul concludes this section on unity and working together, he points the readers mind to Jesus. He says, *adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, 2.5*. Read Philippians 2.6-8 and describe how Jesus did nothing from selfishness or conceit. How did he regard others as more important than Himself? In what ways did he set aside his own importance? Why did He come?