

**Series:** The Church — A People with A Purpose

**Title:** Becoming More Unified

**Text:** Philippians 2:2-4

**Date:** August 14, 2022

## **Verse 2**

In Philippians 2:2, Paul remarked on the behaviors involved in Christian unity. He said, "...make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose." The apostle's words revealed that Christian unity transcends the worldly factors that often bind people together. As Timothy went to visit the Philippians on Paul's behalf (Philippians 2:19-24), it would have brought Paul great "joy" to receive a report that the church was marked by a unity centered on the things of God. Such "joy" was a theme of Paul's letter (Philippians 3:1; 4:4).

Notice four marks of Christian unity from Paul's words in Philippians 2:2. First, the apostle spoke of his desire for the Philippians to be committed to "thinking the same way." The original language of the text literally reads "the same might be thinking." In the Greek, Paul used a present active indicative verb, calling for a habitual action.<sup>1</sup> One has translated his words as meaning, "Keep on thinking the same thing."<sup>2</sup>

It is important to note that Paul was not an advocate of a close-minded, cult-like mentality. He didn't advocate unanimity and perfect agreement in all matters. Instead, he simply wanted the church to be in agreement in major doctrines concerning the faith. God's people needed to be united in the gospel, the Great Commandment, and the Great Commission. Sure, there would be differences of opinion on secondary and tertiary matters, but the Philippians needed to be of one mind on what mattered. One has said Paul's words called for the church to be like "clocks that strike at the same moment."<sup>3</sup> Unity and fellowship grow when individual members of the body submit themselves to the cardinal doctrines of the faith.

Second, Paul spoke of the need for the church to have "the same love." The love in view was the one our Lord commended in the Great Commandment — "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands" (Matthew 22:37-40). Love is the mother of all Christian virtue (1 Corinthians 13:13). What one loves determines the direction of one's life (Matthew 6:21). Consequently, advancements in godliness occur through setting one's heart on loving God and others. In doing so, one will naturally fulfill the requirements of God's Moral Law (Galatians 5:14). In addition, one will contribute to the unity of the church. This is true, since a commitment to loving God and loving others naturally aligns the hearts of God's people. Fellowship and like-mindedness grows when God's people aim to live by Christ's Great Commandment.

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<sup>1</sup> Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 451.

<sup>2</sup> Robertson, 443.

<sup>3</sup> Robertson, 443.

Third, Paul encouraged the church at Philippi to be “united in spirit.” His words evoked memories of what he said in 1:27. Through the mutual indwelling of the Holy Spirit, a strong bond could be built in Philippi. In the original language of the text, Paul used a single Greek word that literally meant “together in soul.”<sup>4</sup> It contained the Greek word from which we get our term “psyche.” One has said the language depicted “souls that beat together, in tune with Christ and with each other.”<sup>5</sup> Paul called for “total agreement in attitude.”<sup>6</sup> Such agreement can grow when hearts beat for the message and mission of Christ. Sure, there will often be differences of opinion when it comes to methodology and more minute doctrinal emphases; however, the Spirit of God can give a spirit of oneness even in the midst of such differences.

Paul’s last means of unity in Philippians 2:2 was the mission of the church. He urged the Philippians to be “intent on one purpose.” The original language literally reads “thinking one thing.” It seems the Christian Standard Bible (the Bible translation used for this commentary) has taken an interpretive liberty with its translation. Perhaps, however, the meaning of the translation is correct. Maybe Paul’s call to “think one thing” was a call to focus on the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). When believers stay centered on the mission of the church, church unity will inadvertently grow.

### Verse 3

Paul further encouraged unity in Philippi by saying, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3). Notice that Paul’s words prohibited two sins — “selfish ambition” and “conceit.” The first referred to “an attitude of self-seeking.”<sup>7</sup> In some first-century literature, it was used negatively to speak of one who sought political or public office out of baser motives.<sup>8</sup> Such a person was driven by “a strong drive for personal success without moral inhibitions.”<sup>9</sup> Paul listed the vice as one of the works of the flesh in his letter to the Galatians (Galatians 5:20). Earlier in his letter to the Philippians, Paul used similar language to indicate that his adversaries were driven by such selfish motives. He said, “To be sure, some preach Christ out of envy and *rivalry*, but others out of good will” (Philippians 1:15).

In addition to “selfish ambition,” Paul discouraged “conceit.” The Greek word underlying English translations was a compound one that literally meant “empty glory” or “empty conceit.” It was used of one who made groundless boasts or gloated in empty pride.<sup>10</sup> Paul used a cognate of the word in his letter to the Galatians, saying,

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<sup>4</sup> Zodhiates, 1331.

<sup>5</sup> Robertson, 443.

<sup>6</sup> Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, 363.

<sup>7</sup> Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, 172.

<sup>8</sup> Zodhiates, 655.

<sup>9</sup> Bible Sense Lexicon, Logos Bible Software.

<sup>10</sup> Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, 228.

“Let us not become *conceited*, provoking one another, envying one another” (Galatians 5:26). One has conveyed the idea of the word translated “conceit” by saying it referred to one who was proud and arrogant without any good reason.<sup>11</sup> Considering the weight of God’s glory, it is illogical for any person, especially a Christian, to be given over to conceit and selfish boasting. All should aim to have the frame of mind possessed by Paul. He said, “...by the grace of God I am what I am...” (1 Corinthians 15:10).

In place of the toxic virtues of “selfish ambition” and “conceit,” Paul encouraged his readers to cultivate the godly virtue of “humility.” Oswald Chambers once noted that humility is a difficult virtue, since one loses it as soon as one believes he or she has developed it. What is involved with the humility Paul promoted? In its most fundamental form, humility is “a quality of voluntary submission and unselfishness.”<sup>12</sup> It has often been said that humility isn’t thinking less of yourself; instead, humility is thinking of yourself less. Such is a good way of looking at the virtue. Scripture encourages believers to develop the virtue of humility. In 1 Peter 5:5, we read, “In the same way, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. All of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Paul delineated the real essence of humility in the latter half of verse 3, saying, “...consider others as more important than yourselves.” The apostle’s language spoke of a “conscious, sure judgment resting on a careful weighing of the facts.”<sup>13</sup> His point was that Christian humility involves a deliberate decision to place others before self. Such activity is commended by the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40). It is also promoted by Jesus’ Golden Rule — “Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12). Humble believers are those who place the needs, interests, and desires of others before their own. Paul upheld such a life perspective in Romans 12:10 — “Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Take the lead in honoring one another.”

#### **Verse 4**

In verse 4, Paul provided a restatement of what’s involved in true humility. He wanted to emphasize the nature of the virtue, as he knew his readers had great need of developing it. The apostle said, “Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:4). Interestingly, the Greek rendered “look” was used of the act of spying in the first-century world.<sup>14</sup> As used by Paul in our verse, the verb depicted one staying on the look out for the needs and interests of others. One has said the apostle’s meaning was that believers should “not be keeping an eye on the main chance for number one, but for the good of others.”<sup>15</sup> Such is the

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<sup>11</sup> Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 451.

<sup>12</sup> Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, 375.

<sup>13</sup> Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 451.

<sup>14</sup> Zodhiates, 1296.

<sup>15</sup> Robertson, 444.

essence of real humility — a focus in life wherein one lives by the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40), placing priority on God and others before self.