

Book: *Philippians*
Series: *Rejoice in the Lord!*
Lesson 7: *Why Can't We Be Friends?*
Text: Philippians 2:1-11
Date: October 13, 2013 (SF)
October 27, 2013 (ABF)

Colonial Hills
ABF
Baptist Church

Key



= Teacher Information



= Discussion Starter

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Next Lesson: Philippians 2:12-18



TEACHING TIP

This lesson may be a review for those who were in the Round Table Department last year. The key concepts in this lesson are (1) the formula for spiritual unity in verses 3-4 (i.e., unity through humble ministry) and (2) the relationship of verses 5-11 to verses 1-4 (i.e., verses 5-11 provide the enablement for verse 1-4).

INTRODUCTION

That God has a sense of humor is visibly demonstrated by the creation of the church, for in this one body, God brings together millions of personalities, backgrounds, opinions, ideals, emphases, etc. and tells these many people to be unified. Such a goal is hard enough to accomplish in a family of five, much less a local church of 500. Yes, God certainly has a sense of humor. It is evident when we look around us in church and notice peoples quirks and idiosyncrasies, and it's easy to simply chuckle at such oddities around the Sunday afternoon dinner table. However, laughter and joking are not the only response to differences among the people of God. Anger, frustration, arrogance, and rejection are often discovered in the church, as well. Believers and unbelievers alike frequently leave a church asking the question of the 1975 hit song, "Why can't we be friends?"

One author has vividly depicted this difficulty of harmony among people with a book entitled "The Delicate Art of Dancing with Porcupines." In the church, porcupines are all around us, and our own quills are sharpened as well (cf. Philippians 4:1-3). Can we, then, just be friends in the church? Absolutely! Christ died to join Jew and Gentile together into one body and to join that one body to God (cf. Ephesians 2), and His last prayer request for His church was that believers be one (cf. John 17).

Throughout his epistles, Paul has a tremendous desire for unity. We saw last week from Philippians 1:27-28 that two of the marks of gospel-worthiness had to do with togetherness (i.e., unity and ministry). Paul wrote in 1:27, “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in *one* spirit, with *one* mind striving *side by side* for the faith of the gospel.” There’s no way that we can stand *for* Christ if we’re fighting *against* one another. In this lesson’s passage, the central command is to “complete my joy” by being unified (2:2). Paul would be led to rejoice when he heard of the unity of God’s people. Then, Paul returns to this theme in 4:1-3. “Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”

Unity, then, is not just a blessing, a byproduct, a prayer request, or a desire. It is a command and a goal towards which we should all be practically and purposefully striving. *As those who have been united to Christ, we must live together in unity.* In Philippians 2:1-11, we’ll consider two parts of Paul’s discourse on unity.

THE EXHORTATION (vv. 1-4)

The Basis for Unity (v. 1)

Verse 1 provides the “if” part (with the force of “since”) of an if/then statement—in other words, “‘if’ or ‘since’ these things are true, ‘then’ respond this way.” Verse 1 contains four truths that each believer enjoys with other believers because of our union in Christ. These four realities provided the *basis* and *incentive* for unity.¹

- “Encouragement in Christ”: this refers to the encouraging reality and resulting responsibility of being joined to Christ. We all have as much of Christ as the other.
- “Comfort from love”: this seems to refer to the everlasting and impartial love of Christ even for those who were His enemies. We all find equal standing in His love. Cf. Romans 5:5; 2 Corinthians 5:13-14
- “Participation in the Spirit”: this highlights either our fellowship with the Spirit, which we all share, or our fellowship with one another because of the Spirit. Cf. John 14:16; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 2; 4:3
- “Affection and sympathy”: this seems to be speaking of the compassionate nature of Jesus, even for those “like sheep without a shepherd.” cf. Isaiah 42:3; Matt. 12:18-20; 2 Corinthians 1:3; Philippians 1:8

Why does Paul start his discourse on unity by laying this foundation of our union in Christ? Well, there is a difference between union and unity. If you take two cats, tie their tails together, and throw them over a clothesline, you have union, but not unity. Within the church, we experience a similar problem: we can have union (an objective reality) without unity (a subjective choice). What Paul has done in verse 1 is to demonstrate the union that we *share* in Christ (as a result of the gospel—1:27). This union, then, is both a firm foundation upon which to build our brotherly unity and a strong incentive to live in unity with each other. Union (in Christ) is the basis for unity.

Ask your group, “What’s the difference between union and unity?”

What other spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3) do all believers share because of our union to Christ that should compel us to unity?

The Desire for Unity (v. 2a)

In verses 2, then, the exhortation is clearly understood: be unified. But, before he actually discusses what this will look like, Paul provides one more motivation for the local church to practice

unity. He maintains that unity will “complete” His joy. Paul’s passion was to “present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Colossians 1:28), and unity within the church was one of the objectives towards that goal. Unity, then, is a sign of spiritual maturity and a badge of joy for our spiritual leaders. Furthermore, unity is an answer to prayer for our Lord Jesus Christ. In His high priestly prayer (John 17) in which He prayed for you and me (v. 20), Jesus’ predominant request for His church was “that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You” (John 17:21). The rest of John 17:21-23 demonstrates that Christ saw such unity as necessary for God’s glory through evangelism (i.e., “...so that the world may believe that You have sent Me...so that the world may know that You sent Me and loved them even as You loved Me”), and thus He prayed earnestly for it. So, when we strive for and practice unity, Jesus is fulfilling His prayer request in us.

The Explanation of Unity (v. 2b)

Paul exhorts the believers to be “of the same mind.” One commentator notes,

The verb used here occurs ten times in Philippians (of twenty-three times in the Pauline corpus). It speaks to the intellect (i.e., way of thinking), but it goes beyond that. It incorporates the will and emotions into a comprehensive outlook which affects the attitude. With this word and the contexts in which it occurs, Paul spoke of the values and ambitions which surface through the mind. This is unity. It is not found in an identical life-style or personality. It occurs when Christian people have the same values and loves.²

What do we learn about “one-mindedness” from Philippians 3:12-16, 19 and Philippians 4:8? Cf. Rom. 8:4-5; Col. 3:2

Paul supplements this main exhortation—to be “of the same mind”—with three other phrases. In other words, “be of the same mind” by...

- “Having the same love”: As we have individually and equally shared in Christ’s love, we are to possess the same love for all others. Cf. 1 John 4:7-12, 19; Romans 12:10, 13
- “Being of full accord”: Literally “one-souled,” this phrase was also used in 1:27; it emphasizes the sharing of a life principle, unlike the two believers mentioned in 4:2.
- “Being...of one mind”: This seems to emphasize either (1) that they should be valuing and evaluating similarly, or (2) that they should share the same purpose (NASB).

One commentator summarizes these phrases this way: “Together these speak to the unity found among those who are going the same direction. There is nothing superficial about it.”³ It is evident that God would have each believer take ownership of this unity-principle and earnestly pursue it (cf. Romans 12:18).

Throughout this letter, what does Paul show to be our “shared life principle or direction” (cf. 1:18b-26, 27; 3:8, 9, 13-17, esp. v. 16)?

In this one verse the apostle presents a full circle of unity—from one mind, to one love, to one spirit, to one purpose.... These four principles are complementary, overlapping, and inseparable. The same basic idea is expressed in four ways, each with a somewhat different but important emphasis. In Colossians, Paul beautifully summarizes these marks of spiritual unity:

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.

We could start application with this Colossians passage and ask what Colonial is weak at and strong at from this list.

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” (3:12-16)⁴

The Expression of Unity (vv. 3-4)

We could summarize verse 2 this way: “Be unified.” While simply stated, such a command is a hard command to obey, because it is somewhat nebulous. Therefore, in verses 3-4, Paul gives two clear characteristics that we can consciously work on developing in our lives through the Holy Spirit’s empowerment that will lead to unity. Verses 3-4 is where the “rubber meets the road” in our pursuit of unity in the church. These two characteristics are humility and ministry, and a formula is presented to us here—unity through humble ministry.

1. Humility (v. 3) – This is internal.

While the Roman world of Paul’s day looked with contempt upon *humility*, this is the exact quality that must characterize believers, for they are “mindful of their spiritual brotherhood and their ultimate subjection to Christ.”⁵

The original language in verse 3 demonstrates a sharp contrast between the first and second parts of this verse. Paul is clearly demonstrating what is and is not acceptable among the body of Christ. The believers are instructed to humbly *put off* “selfish ambition or conceit”—arrogance, belligerence, and pride (cf. Proverbs 13:10; Galatians 5:20; 6:3; 1 Corinthians 3:1-3). In continued humility, we must *put on* the mindset that “count[s] others [as] more significant than yourselves.” The word “count” refers to an intellectual process by which one reasons to a conclusion. In other words, Paul wants us to reason through, evaluate, and come to a certain conclusion—that is, that others are “more significant” than ourselves. This phrase is dealing with our value-system, our estimation of peoples’ worth, even of people who annoy or anger us (e.g., “love our enemies”). We must evaluate and conclude others as

“excelling” our focus on ourselves (cf. 3:8—the same word is used: the knowledge of Christ was “better” than any other pursuit; cf. Romans 12:10). MacArthur writes, “It does not mean to pretend that others are more important, but to believe that others actually are more important....If Paul viewed himself as ‘the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle’ (1 Cor. 15:9), ‘the very least of all saints’ (Eph. 3:8), and even the foremost of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15), how could any believers honestly think of themselves in any higher way?”⁶

The only way we can fulfill this put off/put on model is if we first clothe our hearts with “lowliness of mind” (KJV). Before there can be like-mindedness, there must be lowly-mindedness. “Lowliness of mind” means that we must be willing to give up our rights and our rightness. One person has illustrated this concept with a new word: “carpet-mindedness”—we like our carpets to look nice, but we’re also willing to walk all over them. The humble follower of Christ will be willing to take the place of a carpet.

What are some personal rights and rightness we might cling to when interacting with other believers?

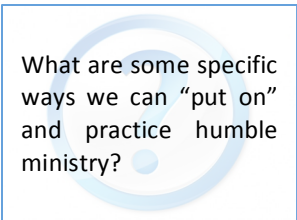
What are some situations in which it is really difficult to practice this kind of humility? Prepare yourself.

2. Ministry (v. 4) – This is external.

The internal mindset of humility will be demonstrated in a willing external ministry. Paul exhorts us to “look...to the interests of others.” The KJV appropriately translates this phrase, “Look...on the things of others,” for Paul is being purposefully general here. There is really no limit to the others-centered attitude we should have. This kind of others-focus (a) meditates upon the good qualities of other believers (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, esp. “thinks no evil” and “believes/hopes all things”); (b) shares the burdens and interests of others (cf. Galatians 6:2; Romans 12:15; 1 Corinthians 10:24, 33-11:1); and (c) looks out for the needs of other believers.

A beautiful illustration of this kind of others-focus is discovered in Christ in Matthew 14:16. When His disciples wanted to send away the hungry crowd, Jesus' immediate response was, "You give them to eat." Jesus refused to let them meet their own needs. He knew their needs, and He was focused on meeting their needs. Such carpet-minded ministry must characterize His followers, as well.

Application: We talk about unity, we pray for unity, and we understand the blessing of unity (Psalm 133:1), but I wonder if we are practicing unity. Are you cultivating humility in your life by putting off selfish ambition and conceit and by putting on a high value of others? Are you demonstrating by your interactions that you are willing to give up your rights and rightness, or in rebellion against God are you fighting to win? Are you exercising ministry towards others by thinking the best of them and looking out to meet their needs?



What are some specific ways we can "put on" and practice humble ministry?

Transition: In his exhortation, Paul has very clearly commanded the church to strive for unity. Lest we be discouraged by the high calling or our failure to practice the needed humble ministry, Paul moves on in this chapter to show the limitless enablement to help us be unified.

THE ENABLEMENT (vv. 5-11)

Of verses 5-11, MacArthur attests,

Some scholars believe this passage was originally a hymn, sung by early Christians to commemorate and celebrate the incarnation of the Son of God. It has been called a Christological gem, a theological diamond that perhaps sparkles brighter than any other in Scripture. In a simple, brief, yet extraordinarily profound way, it describes the condescension of the second Person of the Trinity to be born, to live, and to die in human form to provide redemption for fallen mankind.⁷

The question we seek to answer is how this theologically rich passage connects to the preceding four verses. Our answer lies in that phrase "this mind [of Christ]." Verse 5 labels everything we read about in vv. 2-4 as "the mind of Christ," a mind that we ought to be renewing our mind with each day (cf. "mind" 2x in verse 2). The ESV translation of verse 5 is unfortunate and isn't very literal. The KJV provides a much better rendering, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." This verse could also be translated, "Keep thinking this among you, which [attitude] was also in Christ Jesus."⁸

It's important to note, too, that while "let this mind" sounds passive, the idea here is an active command—"Do this...think like Jesus." This is an imperative that we should be choosing to obey and actively pursuing every day in our interactions with other believers (cf. Philippians 3:15-17; 4:8; Colossians 3:12-16; 1 John 2:6). Furthermore, it is a plural imperative, emphasizing the responsibility of every believer within the local church.

We must arm ourselves with the mind of Christ—we must think His same thoughts after Him! Therefore, the example presented to us in verses 5-11 is also our enablement. It is only when we consider the ministry of Jesus Christ *for* us individually that we are empowered to respond in love toward others, "because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

As we consider this "mind of Christ," we will learn that the characteristics of verses 2-4 (e.g., humility, ministry, and unity) were evident in Christ's life/attitude, as well. The difference is the progression—we practice humble ministry with the goal that it will breed unity; Christ already possessed perfect unity with the Godhead, yet He still humbly ministered.

1. Unity (v. 6)

Paul writes that Jesus "was in [or, existing in] the form of God"—that is, Jesus has (i.e., "was" is a present active participle, better translated "being" [KJV], expressing an ongoing reality) the very appearance of God, because He is

God (reality). Therefore, He “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.” Jesus already possessed the very essence of and thus equality with God, but He “resolved not to cling to it.”⁹ So, while we strive for unity with others, Jesus possessed complete unity with God as very God Himself. Nonetheless, Jesus still responded towards *us* in humble ministry.

2. Humility (v. 7-8a)

Jesus “emptied Himself.” The idea is that Jesus “made Himself nothing” (NIV; “of no reputation,” KJV). We do so much to protect our reputation; Christ sacrificed His—and oh the pain and extent of that sacrifice. Yes, “[Jesus] emptied Himself.” “The contrasts between ‘Lord’ (v. 11) and ‘servant’ (v. 7), and ‘the very nature of God’ (v. 6) and ‘human likeness’ (v. 7) express the emptying. Thus the emptying is that God became human, Lord became servant, and obedience took Him to death.”¹⁰ As someone has said, this was subtraction (i.e., emptying) through humble addition (i.e., the addition of human nature). The supporting statements make this clear:

- “by taking the form of a servant”: While He eternally exists as God, at a specific time He added (“taking”) the nature of a servant, an attitude that expressed itself when He was “born in the likeness of men.”
- “by...being born in the likeness of men”: He became like us. This does not deny His true humanity by saying He was like us, but not one of us. Rather, He was like us in that He was one of us, (a) without the sinfulness of our nature and (b) with the addition of another nature—deity. So, He was not entirely one of us; He was also something more.
- “by...being found in human form”: This “looks at [Jesus] from the standpoint of how He appeared in the estimation of men. He was ‘found’ by them, as far as His

Think back through the Gospels: what were some obvious ways in which Jesus humbled Himself?

external appearance was concerned, as a mere man. Outwardly considered, He was no different from other men.”¹¹

Illustration: Mark Twain’s, *The Prince and the Pauper*, provides a beautiful illustration of the humiliation of Christ. In this story, the son of Henry VIII temporarily changes positions with a poor boy in London, who looks just like him. Throughout the remainder of the story, both deal with the shock of receiving the treatment that these newly assumed positions bring—the poor boy now experiences the luxury of the court, while the actual prince is treated like a street rat. Similarly, Christ willingly humbled Himself to take our disgusting place, and He’s graciously enabled us to take His!

Illustration: Missionary Paul London, who ministered in Africa, pictured this “emptying” with the following illustration.

In the African tribe, the chief is the strongest man. He wears a very large headdress and heavy ceremonial robes to distinguish him from the commoners of the tribe. Since water is very scarce where these people live, they have to dig deep wells, as much as 100 feet into the ground. The tribes people would cut slits into the side wall of the well (like steps) to be able retrieve the water from the bottom. Only the strongest of the men could make the trip into the deep and back out with a full skin of water for the tribe to drink.

One day a man carrying water out of the shaft fell and broke his leg. He lay at the bottom of the well. No one dared to help him because no one had the strength to make the climb carrying another man. The chief was summoned. When he saw the plight of the injured man, he laid aside his massive headdress and discarded his ceremonial robes. Then the chief climbed down into the well, took the weight of the injured man upon himself, and brought the man to safety.

The chief did what no one else could do. This is just what Jesus did for us. He came down to rescue us by taking the

weight of our sin Himself. He put aside His heavenly honors, just as the chief put aside his headdress and robe, in order to save us. When that chief took off his headdress and robe, did he stop being the chief? No, of course not. In the same way, when Jesus “made Himself of no reputation,” He put aside His heavenly glory without ever ceasing to be God.

Application: What incredible humility was lived out by Jesus! When we think we’re being humble, our attitude is proven to be pride in light of Christ’s attitude and resulting actions. May we set no other, no less standard, then, than the humility of Jesus.

3. *Ministry (v. 8b-c)*

The passage continues: “He humbled Himself.” Up until now, the expression of Christ’s humility that Paul has in mind has been, in a word, His *incarnation*. Now, Paul demonstrates that Christ humbled Himself even further than the very humbling (and, at times, humiliating) addition of a human nature. Indeed, Christ not only entered the realm of His enemies in the form of one of them, but in humble love He ministered to them by His *crucifixion*, as the next two phrases demonstrate.

“He humbled Himself, by becoming obedient.” This is not a verb that you expect to describe royalty, but it is certainly appropriate for a servant. Christ was committed to obeying the will of His Father (cf. Hebrews 2:10; 5:8; Matthew 3:15; Luke 22:42), even to the loss of His own life. Indeed, He was “obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” He obeyed not only to the point of death, but unto the most painful and disgraceful death of the time—crucifixion. “The cross, so dear to Paul and other devout Christians, was an embarrassment to many. That, in itself, demonstrates the extent to which Jesus went.”¹²

Application: The stunning aspect of this ministry is that you expect this behavior from a servant, but not from a King!

Jesus, our King, served *us*. We, Jesus’ servants, must serve *others*. Jesus puts our ministry to shame, in that He completely gave Himself for His enemies. We are rebuked, when we proudly look for commendation for our ministry or when we refuse to go to a certain extent in our service or when we think that non-personal service in the church is all that’s required of us. In these verses we find enabling grace (1) to break our stubborn hearts concerning our sins of pride and self-centeredness as we behold the humble and serving agony of a gracious Savior; (2) to release us from enslavement to those sins because the penalty has been paid and the power has been broken through that Savior’s humble ministry; (3) to empower us to walk in the footsteps of our Savior with the same humble ministry He demonstrated, because He is making us new, just like Himself.

4. *Exaltation (vv. 9-11)*

Now, in the final stanza of this worshipful hymn, Paul considers Christ’s glorification. Here we are taught that while unity is achieved through serving others (vv. 3-4), it will be more fully accomplished through glorifying Christ. Ultimately, the church isn’t about meeting the needs of others (and it certainly isn’t about meeting our own needs); it’s all about magnifying Christ (cf. 1:20; Ephesians 3:10). It’s not about different personalities; it’s about one distinct Person.

Verse 9 exclaims that Christ has been “highly exalted,” referring to His resurrection, ascension, and glorification (contra the very lowly humiliation He willingly practiced). This doesn’t mean that He’s become “above” God in equality; rather, it refers to His position (v. 9). Christ has been given the highest “name” of “Lord” (v. 9; cf. v. 11, Acts 2:33-36).¹³ “Now, since the ascension, all that God is comes to us through Jesus, and all who come to God do so through Jesus.”¹⁴ One day, all humanity will acknowledge His exalted position and render submissive worship to Him (vv. 10-11). In fact, Jesus will answer His own prayer request (John 17:11, 20-23), as He

brings us to unity in Him (Ephesians 4:13). This exalted status, awarded to Jesus after His humble ministry, will further resound to God's glory (v. 11; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Ephesians 1:20-23).

Application: When we practice humble ministry resulting in unity, Christ continues to be exalted, as He was after He practiced humble ministry. Obedient humble ministry is the best marketing tool for our great Savior. He assured His disciples, "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another" (John 13:35; 17:20-23). Christ Himself served to the glory of God (v. 11); we must do the same. Life is *not* about us; we must worship God daily through humble ministry.

A final note needs to be made and applied here. Notice that Christ didn't exalt Himself; He was exalted by the Father, following His humble ministry. Likewise for us, exaltation follows only humility, and is only given by God. While this passage is not teaching us pragmatism (i.e., "Hey, want to be exalted? Then start humbly serving"), it does demonstrate the heart of a gracious God who loves to reward righteousness. God has promised us that we will in no wise lose our reward for humble ministry (Matthew 10:42). Our benevolent Father does motivate us to follow in His Son's humble, ministering footsteps by promising us the reward of glory. Be patient, therefore, and be not weary in well-doing; your exaltation is promised (cf. 1 Peter 5:6; cf. James 4:6-10)!

CONCLUSION

Within the church, we can be friends, because we have all been united to Christ in His body, His family. In fact, Christ expects and commands that we do be friends, learning to love one another with humble hearts and ministering methods, even as He does towards us (cf. Hebrews 2:18).

ENDNOTES

¹ While the exact interpretations of these phrases are debated, the explanations below are common, and I believe the best, interpretations

² Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 93-94.

³ Melick, 94.

⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Philippians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 2001), 109.

⁵ Homer A. Kent Jr., "Philippians," ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 122.

⁶ MacArthur, 113.

⁷ Ibid., 118.

⁸ Kent, 123.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Melick, 103.

¹¹ Kent, 124.

¹² Melick, 105.

¹³ "The Philippians' commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord was a threat to the civic-minded patriotic Romans who ran Philippi. The Philippians' allegiance to another "Lord" than Caesar bordered on treason as it challenged the political establishment. At times Christians were tarred with the (amazing to us!) opprobrium "atheist" because their loyalty to Christ challenged the divinity of Caesar. The Roman citizens of Philippi, who customarily honored the emperor at every public gathering, pressured the church to conform. Christians were a political embarrassment with their Kyrios Jesus. And more, Christians who had the temerity to declare with Paul that their citizenship was in Heaven (cf. 3:20) were thought to be "un-Roman" and thus enemies to public order" (R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel, Preaching the Word* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007], 67).

¹⁴ Melick, 106.