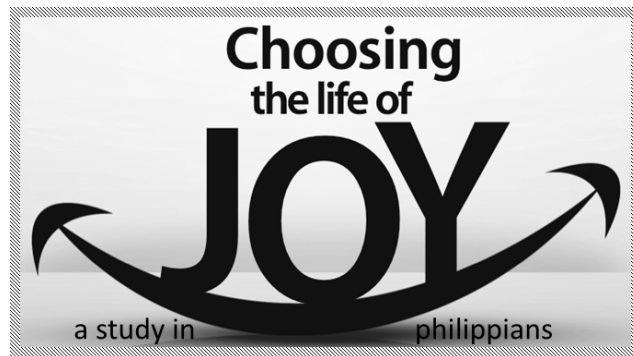


Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, November 7, 2018 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



CHOOSING THE LIFE OF JOY A Study in Philippians “Joy Through Unity” *Philippians 2:1-4*

*“Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ²fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. ³Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” – *Philippians 2:1-4**

“consolation in Christ” – “Consolation” can also be translated “encouragement,” and is from the Greek word that means “to come alongside and help, counsel, exhort” (see Romans 12:1), which our beloved Lord does for His own.

“comfort of love” – The Greek word translated “comfort” portrays the Lord coming close and whispering words of gentle cheer or tender counsel in a believers ear.

“fellowship of the Spirit” – “Fellowship” refers to the partnership, of common eternal life, provided by the indwelling Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16, 12:13, 2 Corinthians 13:14, 1 John 1:4-6).

“affection and mercy” – God has extended His deep affection and compassion to every believer and that reality should result in unity.

“fulfill my joy” – This can also be translated “may my joy complete.” Paul’s joy was tried to concern for the unity of believers.

“like-minded” – The Greek word means “think the same way.” This exhortation is not optional or obscure, but is repeated throughout the New Testament: Romans 15:5, 1 Corinthians 1:10, 2 Corinthians 13:11-13.

“same love” – Believers are to love others in the body of Christ equally – not because they are all equally attractive, but by showing the same kind of sacrificial, loving service to all that was shown to them by Christ (John 15:13, Romans 12:10, 1 John 3:17, John 3:16).

“one accord” – This may also be translated “united in spirit” and perhaps is a term specially coined by Paul. It literally means “one-souled” and describes people who are knit together in harmony, having the same desires, passions, and ambitions.

“one mind” – “intent on one purpose” is an alternative translation.

“selfish ambition” – The Greek word which is sometimes rendered “strife” because it refers to factionalism, rivalry, and partisanship (see Galatians 5:20), speaks of the pride that prompts people to push for their own way/agenda.

“conceit” – Literally “empty glory,” and often translated “empty conceit.” This word refers to the pursuit of personal glory which is the motivation for selfish ambition.

“lowliness of mind” – This translates a Greek word that Paul and other New Testament writers apparently coined. It was a term of derision, with the idea of being low, shabby, and humble (1 Corinthians 15:9, 1 Timothy 1:15).

“esteem others better than himself” – The basic definition of true humility (Romans 12:10, Galatians 5:13, Ephesians 5:21, John 13:12-17).

As we have been saying, Dr. Warren Wiersbe calls the book (letter) of Philippians, “a personal manifesto on how to live a life full of joy.” We began our verse by verse study of the book of Philippians a couple of weeks ago entitled, “Choosing the Life of Joy; A Study in Philippians.” The book is a book of joy, and that is surprising given the circumstances surround the book.

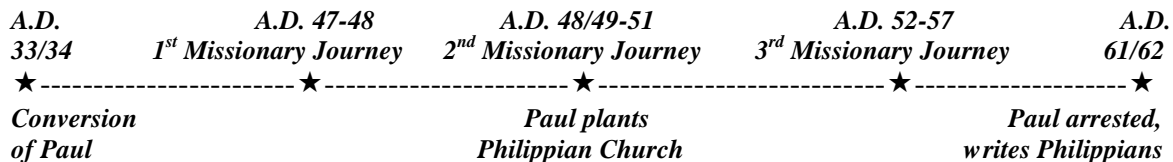
Just for review let’s be reminded of some of the more interesting facts about Philippians that we have been looking at as a background to the book.

5 Important Background Facts on the Book of Philippians: **these may be some things that set the book of Philippians apart from Paul’s other letters and writings*

- 1. The book of Philippians is written by the Apostle Paul** – The apostle Paul wrote the book as clearly stated in Philippians 1:1-2, “*Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*”
- 2. The book of Philippians is written to believers/Christians at the church at Philippi** – As already stated Philippians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul during his Roman imprisonment to a group of people that were very special to him. These at Philippi had come to know the Lord Jesus through Paul’s witness to them during his “Second Missionary Journey,” and in response to the “Macedonian Call” of Acts 16. Notice who Paul identifies as the recipients of this letter in verses 1-2, “*Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*”
- 3. The book of Philippians is actually a letter written by Paul to the church at Philippi** – The apostle Paul wrote this as a letter to the Christians in Philippi, from Rome. Paul ministered at Philippi during his second missionary journey, spending about three months in the city. The ministry at Philippi marked Paul’s entrance into Macedonia (Greece, Europe), which came about as a result of a vision he had in the city of Troas, just across the northeastern corner of the Aegean Sea from the port city of Neapolis and its close neighbor Philippi (Acts 16:8–12). During this first stay in Philippi—he later briefly visited the city on his third missionary journey (20:6)—Paul brought to faith in Christ people who would form the core of the burgeoning congregation in the city. Among them were Lydia, a businesswoman who opened her home to Paul and his coworkers (16:13–15), and the Philippian jailer, who was converted under Paul’s ministry after an earthquake miraculously broke open the prison (16:22–34).

4. **The book of Philippians was written around A.D. 61/62** – Of the four Prison Epistles, Paul likely wrote Philippians last, near the end of his Roman imprisonment in AD 61 or 62. Paul sent the other three Prison Epistles—Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon—by the hand of Tychicus, as their destinations were near one another. However, the letter to the Philippians was to be delivered by Epaphroditus, who had come to Paul in Rome with financial help from the church at Philippi (Philippians 2:25; 4:18). But during his time in Rome, Epaphroditus took ill, which delayed his return home and, therefore, the delivery of the letter (2:26–27).

Philippians Timeline



5. **The book of Philippians is called a prison epistle, because Paul write the letter while he was imprisoned for his faith in Rome** - The book of Philippians is actually one of four “prison epistles” (or letters) and most likely the last of the four written by Paul. As stated, Paul wrote Philippians while he was in prison in Rome. The four “prison epistles” are Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. Given the theme of the book it is significant that Philippians was written by Paul at a particularly difficult time in his life... while he was in prison.

Along with these essential background facts surround this letter written by Paul, we have also sated these interesting fact about the book/letter of Philippians:

5 Interesting Facts about Philippians:

1. **The book of Philippians has no Old Testament quotes** – This is distinction that not only sets it apart from Paul’s other writing in the New Testament where Paul is said to have quoted the Old Testament as many as 500 times, just not in Philippians. The Old Testament is quoted more than 1,000 time in the New Testament with half of those being found in Paul’s writings. The lack of Old Testament quotes in Philippians could be as simple as Paul’s purpose in writing. It is a more practical letter.
2. **The book of Philippians contains little historical or theological material, and is primarily a practical (*relevant, everyday, pragmatic, useful*) letter** - The only exceptions to this are the historical biographical material contained concerning Paul’s life in prison during his Roman imprisonment. And Philippians, chapter 2 that describes the humiliation and exaltation of Christ in theological terms. Philippians is the only of Paul’s letter that was not written primarily to address doctrinal, theological issues. The apostle Paul did not write Philippians in response to a crisis (caused by false teachers and false teaching), as he did with Galatians and Colossians. And, in fact, it may be the most practical of Paul’s 13 New Testament books/letters. What do we mean by practical? We mean that of all of Paul’s letters, Philippians in it purpose and content is the most pragmatic and common every-day letter he wrote. We will get more into this as we progress through our study, but suffice it to say that the very reason Paul wrote the letter is simple, every-day in it application.
3. **The book of Philippians is essentially a thank you letter** – This itself sets Philippians apart as the most unusual of Paul’s letters. Instead of writing to correct doctrinal matters, he writes a “thank you” letter to the church at Philippi that had been so generous in supporting him over the years. He primarily wrote to express his appreciation and affection for the Philippian believers. More than any other church, the believers in Philippi offered Paul material support for his ministry. Paul’s

affection for these people is clear through the letter as he encouraged them to live out their faith in joy and unity.

4. **The book of Philippians contain the word “joy” in some form at least 16 times** – With the common occurrence of this word in some form repeated throughout the letter, it make it clear that this is the theme of Paul’s letter to the Philippians and to us. And as stated above this theme of “joy” is particularly astounding given the fact that it is a prison epistle, written while Paul was incarcerated and being persecuted for his faith.
5. **The book of Philippians was written to a church and Christians that represent the one of the most important advancements of the Gospel to the west, particularly Europe** - Paul’s “Macedonian Call” in Troas during Paul’s 2nd missionary journey led him to his work in Philippi and the planting of the church there. Philippi was located in Macedonia, in northern Greece, on the continent of Europe. So the “Macedonian Call” and the planting of this church in Philippi through Paul’s second missionary journey, and Paul’s letter to the church at Philippi are very significant because they represent the advancement of the gospel further west, into Europe and ultimately to the entire world through Europe. It is not to be missed that the first converts on the continent of Europe were Lydia and her household, a demon possessed girl, and a Philippian jailer.

With these important facts about the book of Philippians let’s move on in our study to the second (2nd) chapter of this great “joy-filled” letter, and verses 1-4 (READ: Philippians 1:27-30)

“Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ²fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. ³Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” – Philippians 2:1-4

Of course the “therefore” of verse 1 refers back to what Paul has been saying in the first chapter. Remember that anytime you see the word “therefore,” you have to ask “What is it there for?” Remember in the first chapter Paul has been expressing his joy in the Philippians Christians, their love and concern, their support of him, and how thankful he is for them. He has also encouraged them because of his suffering, and communicated to them that the things he was going through (imprisonment for his faith, persecution, the struggles and suffering he was enduring) had in no way diminished his joy, but rather gave him reason to have even greater joy because it served for the advancement of the gospel, the sharing of the gospel, the strengthening of others suffering. That is the “therefore” of Philippians 2:1. Since all that was true, now Paul tells them how they could “fulfill” his joy... or make his joy complete. This passage become a very key passage for how we may ourselves experience joy... the key (or one of the keys, if you will) for finding the real “joy” of the Lord, deep, rooted, in all kinds of circumstances joy. And the key seems to be in one words communicated in the first four verses of Philippians 2... namely, “unity.”

WHAT AFFECTS OUR JOY?

As we have been saying there are many things that can, may, will affect our “joy” in the Lord and in the Christian faith.

The Believer's Joy Amidst Difficulties

Dr. John MacArthur says, “A believer's spiritual maturity can be measured by what it takes to steal his joy.”

New Christians will quite often have misconceptions about God, the Christian life and other believers and the things we face in this life... namely the struggles, the problems, the trials this life can hold, and when those trial and struggles strike they may cause one to lose their joy, or for their joy in their Christian life to be stolen away. They may be left floundering in their faith and wondering, “where is God in all of this?” Has He left me? Why are all of these bad things happening to me.

But that is not only a reality for new Christians, many who have been Christians for years may carry these misconception tucked neatly in their back pocket and when trial, and difficulties, challengers and hardships come... when things don't go as they expected in their Christian world these misconceptions may reveal themselves in a lack of joy and victory in their walk, in their life and witness, and even in their spirit and disposition communicated to others. Ever wonder why some who call themselves Christians look so miserable, unhappy, and downcast... and it may even be reflected in how they treat others? Again, MacArthur's statement says, **“A believer's spiritual maturity can be measured by what it takes to steal his joy.”**

What are some things that may affect our “joy” as believers? We might call them “joy stealers” that we allow to rob us of our joy... particularly in the Christian life. Think about it... **Why do many Christians fail to experience real joy, which is listed as a fruit of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:22?** In his book *Laugh Again*, Charles Swindoll suggests three common “joy stealers” that we looked at last time we were together...

3 Common Joy Stealers: (*“Laugh Again,” by Dr. Charles Swindoll*)

1. **Worry** = **“an inordinate anxiety about something that may or may not occur”** - And it usually doesn't... happen that is!
2. **Stress** = **“intense strain over a situation we can't change or control”** - But God can change our situation and circumstances and He is in control!
3. **Fear** = **“dreadful uneasiness over danger, evil, or pain”** - And fear magnifies our problems... and steals our joy.

Charles Swindoll says (in his book) that to resist these “joy stealers” we must embrace the same confidence that Paul expressed in his letter to the Philippians. After giving thanks for the Philippian believers (1:3-5), the apostle assured them “that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (v.6). Whatever causes you worry, stress, and fear cannot ultimately keep God from continuing His work in you. Resist those “joy stealers” by renewing your confidence in God each morning. Then relax and rejoice. **Happiness depends on happenings; joy depends on Jesus.**

Here is the “key thought” we have been saying throughout our study on the book of Philippians...

Key Thought: In all circumstances the Spirit of God produces joy, so there ought not to be any time when we're not rejoicing in some way.

Still, though we should not allow circumstances to make us sullen, bitter, or negative, or “joy-less.” We ought to expect trouble. Again, Jesus said, **“In the world you [will] have tribulation”** in John 16:33. The apostle James as we have seen said it, **“Consider it all joy ... when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance”** in James 1:2-3. **God has His own profound purpose in our afflictions, but it's never to take away our joy.** To maintain our joy we must adopt God's perspective regarding our trials. When we yield to the working of His Spirit in our lives, our

difficulties will not overwhelm us. It is a reality that struggles, trials, and difficulties will confront us in the Christian life, but how many are of our making, or at least something we may have control over?

The three “joy stealers” that Charles Swindoll mentions are not the only things that may affect our joy in the Lord in our Christian life. One of the greatest and perhaps most impacting things in the life of the church and Christians that can affect our “joy” is “disunity” and “disharmony” within the body of Christ... churches and believers who can’t get along, where there is constant bickering, and disagreements, critical attitudes, judgmental spirits, personal agendas and the pushing of one’s own way over the needs of others, tearing others down, division over budgets, programs, buildings

One of the greatest hindrances to a church making an impact on the community around her is a lack of unity—a lack of Christian love and passion focused together in the same direction. And not only does this diminish our witness in the world around us, it discourages, disheartens, and steals the joy of many Christians within the body of Christ. Jesus said, “By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). “By the love that you have for one another...” Not by the great facilities, incredible music, powerful teaching, excellent programs, etc.

Again, the apostle Paul wrote four biblical letters from prison: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. A common thread that runs through each letter is a challenge for the believers to be unified, to recognize that their new standing with God must deeply impact how they relate to others in the family of God. While enduring difficult persecution and facing an uncertain future, Paul wanted to be sure that the churches lived as one. Unity was not a tertiary issue in his mind; rather, it was essential for the advancement of God’s kingdom, and for the believers “joy.” We can endure many things together, and non-apart, divided, turning on one another.

Sadly, many local churches are plagued with disunity that confuses a watching world and hurts those inside the body... steals their joy. Sometimes the disunity manifests itself in overt fighting over preferences, such as style, dress, programming, and even facility decisions. Other times the disunity manifests itself more subtly in competing directions. Instead of “contending as one man for the sake of the gospel,” the church runs in a plethora of directions driven by multiple ministry philosophies that subtly compete with one another. Whether disunity rears its head overtly or subtly, the disunity reveals a spiritual sickness deep beneath the surface.

Paul challenged the church at Ephesus to “diligently [keep] the unity of the Spirit” (4:3). He did not challenge them to “create unity” because they were *already* unified by the “one hope at your calling—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (4:4-6). A church’s unity reflects the Godhead (He is one God, yet three Persons) and the salvation He has given us (He has made us one with Himself and each other). Thus, not to live as a unified body of believers is to drift from the foundation of our faith and the character of our God. A drift in unity reveals a deeper drift—a misplaced priority and a mistaken enemy.

WHAT STRENGTHENS OUR JOY?

The truth is the Bible talks more about unity of the church than it does about either heaven or hell. It's that important. Churches are made up of people, and there are no perfect people. So people get into conflict with each other and this affects our joy, on the other hand Paul knew that unity and building unity would strengthen, grow, and deepen our joy in all circumstances.

Again, a common thread that runs through Paul’s letters is a challenge toward “unity.” While enduring difficult persecution and facing an uncertain future, Paul wanted to be sure that the churches lived as

one, faithfully encouraging and supporting one another through good time and bad. I can't help but conclude that the Philippian church had a problem with unity -- and with the humility required to achieve that unity. If not, why would Paul spend a significant part of this short letter exhorting them about it?

In do so, he give you and I as believers, and in the church today much help in growing, producing, and creating “unity” in our own church, among believers, one another today. Let’s look at: Philippians 2:1 says, “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy.”

Again, Paul begins this new section in 2:1-4 with the transitional term, “therefore” (oun). Generally speaking, the “therefore” draws on what was said in 1:27-30, but has its specific focus on what Paul says in 1:30. That is, Paul appeals to them out of his suffering and struggling for the advancement of the gospel. Since he is doing this, they ought to stand firm and remain unified in love. He can appeal to them as such since he has a great love for them (1:7) and since he considers them his joy and his crown.

Then in verse 1 he begins to lay out for them (and us) the grounds for an appeal to unity...

THE GROUNDS FOR AN APPEAL TO UNITY

Paul gives a fourfold basis for his appeal to unity. Notice verse 1 again, “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy.” Did you notice the 4 appeals or reasons for “unity?”

4 Reasons for Paul’s Appeal to Unity in the Church:

1. **Consolation in Christ** – “Consolation” can also be translated “encouragement,” and is from the Greek word that means “to come alongside and help, counsel, exhort” (see Romans 12:1), which our beloved Lord does for His own. The first thing Paul mentions concerns his certainty that the Philippians have some encouragement in Christ (paraklesis en christo). The term paraklesis can yield the sense of “encouragement,” “exhortation,” “appeal,” or “comfort.”⁹⁸ Since the Philippians were suffering, the idea of “encouragement through comfort” is perhaps the intended sense.⁹⁹ But they had this “comfort” in Christ. The expression “in Christ” lies at the heart of Paul’s theology and among many things denotes the sphere of the Christian’s blessing (Eph 1:3-4). And so it is, that those in Christ are those who can receive comfort from him in the midst of their trials... He will comfort us. This applies to Paul in prison as well as to the Philippians who are undergoing the same struggle as their apostle. A similar idea can be found in 2 Cor 1:3-11 where Paul refers to his hardships in the province of Asia. In 1:3 he speaks about God as the “God of all comfort who comforts us in all our trials.” Then, in v. 5, he says that “through Christ” his comfort overflows. Further, since paraklesis is a general term, it may serve as an overview to steer the content of the remaining ideas of “love,” “fellowship,” “affection” and “mercy.” They all work toward the encouragement and comfort of the suffering believer.
2. **Comfort of love** – The phrase comfort provided by love (paramuthion agapes) is literally “comfort of love.” The meaning seems to be “comfort received from love or “comfort which comes from love.” It can also carry the meaning of “to alleviate” with respect to poverty.¹⁰⁰ Most likely Paul is appealing to the love God shows toward believers, the love he has poured out in their hearts through the Holy Spirit he has given them (Rom 5:5). Thus the Philippians who have experienced comfort in Christ, have also experienced (and are experiencing) love from God.
3. **Fellowship of the Spirit** – Paul appeals to yet another common Christian experience as forming the grounds for the command to be unified in v. 2: the Philippians have experienced fellowship in the Spirit (koinonia pneumatos). The expression koinonia pneumatos is literally “fellowship of

spirit.” It seems that the term “spirit” is probably a reference to the Holy Spirit since it is consistent with the mention of Christ and God (implied as the one who loves; see discussion above) in the context. The idea of fellowship, then, has to do with participation with or communion with the Holy Spirit enjoyed by each and every believer. He is the one who will give the Philippian believers strength (cf. 4:13) to love each other, courage to seek the interests of others, and generally do the will of God (2:13-13). In other contexts Paul refers to the Spirit as the One who lives in Christians, sanctifying them (1 Cor 2:12; 3:16; Gal 5:16; Eph 5:18), and making Christ known to them (Rom 8:16) and through them (2 Cor 3:3). Thus the Philippian believers could count on encouragement from Christ, comfort from the love of God, and communion with the Holy Spirit to enable them live in unity with one another, each of them seeking first the interests of others in the community.

- 4. Affection and mercy** - Next Paul refers to their affection (*splagchna*) and mercy (*oiktirmoi*). These terms are not modified by any reference to deity and seem to be directed at the strained relationships within the church at Philippi (4:2-3), as well at relations between the Philippians and their imprisoned apostle. Paul is saying that as a result of enjoying encouragement in Christ, love from God, and fellowship with the Spirit, they ought to have compassion and mercy toward one another and toward him. Since the Philippians have experienced all these things, he urges them to make his joy complete by being of the same mind;¹⁰⁴ whatever grievances have developed, they ought to be forgiven and relationships restored.

Can I summarize it by saying that Paul’s rationale for our having unity is Jesus and what He has done for us. We are never, never, never allowed to promote anything but unity giving the unity in Christ that has been granted to us by grace... free, unmerited and undeserved. If Christ has unified us with God through his life, freely and openly poured out for us... how can we offer less toward one another, or withhold unity toward one another.

READ: Romans 5:1-11 (The Benefits of Our Unity with Christ)

THE COMMAND TO UNITY

Having made his appeal to what they have in Christ, now Paul gets to the point -- a command from him... under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to them (and to us), Notice it in verse 2... this is a command, “²fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” “Like-minded” uses the Greek verb *phroneō*, “to think,” which occurs three times in the first 5 verses of chapter 2, twice in verse 2 and again in verse 5. “Like-minded” (NIV, KJV) or “of the same mind” (NRSV) translates a combination of two words *autos*, “same” and *phroneō*. Here the verb means “to have an opinion with regard to something, think, form or hold an opinion, judge.” Later in this verse it is used with the numeral “one” (*heis*) and translated, “being one in ... purpose” (NIV), “of one mind” (KJV, NRSV).^[71] “Think the same,” Paul commands us.

Is he appealing to some kind of politically correct “group think”? I don't believe so. Paul recognizes and applauds differences in people (1 Corinthians 12). But he calls them to the same attitude of mind, the same humility, the same way of thinking about life and others, the same kind of selflessness. Think the same when it comes to selfless humility, he tells us. Christian have a unity of how they look at things, a unity of purpose and world-view. Listen, you ought not to think like other people. You ought to think like a Christian... that is what we ought to share in common.

4 Indicators of How Christians Think Alike:

- 1. Same attitude of mind** - Paul said we are to “like-minded”

2. **Same love** - We are not to love as the world loves, we are all to love like Christ loves... unconditionally. Boy how that would cut down on what divides us!
3. **Same spirit** - "Being one in spirit" (NIV), "being of one accord" (KJV), "being in full accord" (NRSV) translates the Greek noun *sympsychos*, literally, "united in spirit," "harmonious." [72] This is a compound word from *syn*, "together, united with" and *psychē*, "soul." Put together, the compound word means, "harmonious in soul, souls that beat together, in tune with Christ and with each other." [73]
4. **Same purpose** – The phrase “one mind” means “intent on one purpose.” What is the purpose of a Christian/believer? We all have the same purpose don’t we... to glorify God, to worship Him and make much of Him, to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, to tell others about Him, to encourage and help one another, to love other people, etc. Our purpose unifies us!

A WARNING AGAINST SELFISHNESS

Paul has called them to unity with positive exhortations. Now he calls them by warning them against the negatives, the destroyers of unity. Notice the first part of **verse 3** and what he says, **“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit...”**

2 False Motives that Will Destroy Unity: What are the false motives that can destroy unity? ‘

1. **"Selfish ambition"** - (NIV, NRSV) and "strife" (KJV) we saw already. In explaining the false motives of his opponents in Rome (1:17), he has set them up to consider their motives within their own congregation. The Greek noun is *eritheia*, "selfishness, selfish ambition." The word is a rare one, found prior to New Testament times only in Aristotle as "a self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means." [74]
2. **"Vain conceit"** - (NIV), "vain glory" (KJV), and "conceit" (NRSV) is the Greek noun *kenodoxia*, "a vain or exaggerated self-evaluation, vanity, conceit, excessive ambition." [75]

If you've been around the church very long you've seen these: Powerbrokers who keep a lock hold on the church because it is their way to retain power. And those who are puffed up in their opinion of themselves and their importance. These attitudes are death to unity within the church.

Church strategist, Thom S. Rainer says, “One of the greatest sicknesses in our churches in America is disunity.” Indeed, many of the problems we think we have are really just symptoms of the breakdown of unity in the church. And certainly a “disunity” in the church will not only steal the joy, but destroy it oft times. No wonder many churches today are so filled with a coldness, a unfriendliness, a feeling of somethings just not right. What causes such “disunity” in the church? What are some of the key reasons we are seeing the breakdown of unity in our churches? Though my list is not exhaustive, allow me to share fourteen of those reasons.

5 Reasons for Disunity in the Church:

1. **Gossip and a critical spirit** - Church members talk about one another instead of talking to one another. Paul calls church members who gossip people “filled with all unrighteousness” (Romans 1:29, HCSB).
2. **Self-serving and agenda driven church members** - Some church members insist on getting their way for everything from worship style to the order of the worship service. Biblical church membership, however, is selfless and more concerned about others. Sometimes actions cloaked in darkness. I recently heard of a church personnel committee and a few church staff members who worked in darkness to fire a pastor without ever meeting with him first or giving him reasons for his dismissal. Then they refused to respond to church members who were asking questions.

3. **Church bullies and those who want to in control** - Some church members seek power in a church they can't get elsewhere. They are devious and dangerous. They want to be in control and in many cases in charge. These many even give rise to power groups within the church. Sometimes the bullies in the church get allies to form power groups. They may be informal groups, or they can be formal groups like elders, deacons, staff, or personnel committees. They must be courageously confronted.
4. **Fear of confrontation and dealing with problems** - Too many church members would rather sweep problems under the rug than deal with them. I know of one church where two deacons were known to be having affairs. No one wanted to deal with it. Sometimes church become fearful of losing members if they confront issues such as these, so they silently sweep the under the rug. I am familiar with one church plagued by a spirit of divisiveness by one particular member. No members have confronted him because they don't want to lose one of the biggest givers in the church. There is often the silent and fearful majority. One church member said it is not always good to know the truth. Such a statement is unbiblical and symptomatic of members who let evil exist because they are afraid to confront it.
5. **Churches known more for what they are against rather than what they are for** - This negativity becomes pervasive in the congregation and destroys church unity. Some churches adopt a hyper-critical and overly negative spirit of culture. This reality is especially true in blogs and social media, facebook and twitter. Critical and hurtful, judgemental and divisive things being posted by Christians and churches. I've seen many pastors attacked publicly on Twitter and Facebook.

These are just a few of the many things that may cause disunity and disharmony in a church, but notice how each of the may be connection to "selfish ambition" and/or "conceit." They are not shared here to further divide and be critical, but rather to identify the potential pitfall that can sow discord in the fellowship and cut at the "joy" that ought to characterize the life of a believer and church, and to encourage us to examine our own hearts and lives for our motives.

A CALL TO HUMILITY AND SELFLESS LOVE

Notice verse 3 again and pay close attention to Paul's encouragement at the end of verse 3 and in verse 4, "³Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." Here Paul expounds on the virtues of humility. In the Greek world of Paul's day, humility was looked down upon, considered a sign of weakness. But Christians know that it is their hallmark, the way of life of their Master. Far from being weak, humility takes the strength of the Holy Spirit since, it goes against our human nature. "Humility" (NIV, NRSV) or "lowliness of mind" (KJV) is the Greek noun *tapeinophrosynē*, "humility, modesty."

What Humility is Not?

1. **Genuine humility is not emotionally-needy** – This is not an emotionally-needy, false humility that fishes for compliments in order to feel good about oneself.
2. **Genuine humility is not manipulative** - Nor is it manipulative kind of humility to get others to do what you want. This is genuine humility that will actually "consider others better than yourselves." Wow! How do we do that with authenticity?
3. **Genuine humility is not self-deprecating** - Some resort to a negative humility of self-deprecation, inability to take a compliment. There is a sort of Christian piety that runs itself down obsessively. We see the mild form of this in Paul's statement: "*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief*" (1 Timothy 1:15). Paul realizes his unworthiness to be an apostle (1 Timothy 1:13; 1 Corinthians 5:19; Ephesians 3:8), but he isn't obsessed with it. That isn't the

source of his humility. The famous hymn "Amazing Grace" begins "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound / that saved a wretch like me." But the focus of the song is not groveling, but amazement and wonderment in the grace of God that has always been with us and always will be. The focus is God. Real Christian humility isn't found in self-deprecation.

What Humility Is? (according to Paul in *Philippians 2:3-4*, "³Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.")

- 1. Genuine humility focuses on God and others rather than on self** - A positive, winsome humility, on the other hand, has its focus on God and on others, rather than self. This is the sort of humility that Paul is urging. This is the way to understand Paul's phrase in our passage: "In humility consider others better than yourselves." "Better than" is the Greek participle of *hyperechō* means here, "to surpass in quality or value, be better than, surpass, excel." It is an attention on others, on their strengths and virtues that is Christian humility at its finest.
- 2. Genuine humility has at its root love** - In a word, this humility has at its root love! Negative humility focuses on self and one's inadequacies. But positive Christian humility is motivated by love and a focus on others. See the next verse: "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." (2:4) "Look to" (NIV, NRSV) is the Greek verb *skopeō*, "pay careful attention to, look (out) for, notice."^[79] Paul isn't encouraging us to be busybodies, always prying into others' affairs (2 Thessalonians 3:11; 1 Timothy 5:13). But rather to care about others' needs over our own. Paul's example in this brief letter is his assistant Timothy: "I have no one else like him," writes Paul, "who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ" (2:20-21).

To achieve unity in your congregation, why is humility necessary? Can you give an example of how lack of humility caused a division in your church? What are you doing to bring unity in your church?

PRINCIPLES OF APPLICATION

3 Encouraging Principles of Action for You:

- 1. Ask yourself, "How is your relationship with the Lord?"** - There can be no unity among brothers and sisters in the Lord until they have dealt with the sin they know to be in their lives. We do this by confession (1 John 1:9) and drawing near to the Lord (cf. 1 Peter 2:1-3). Further, it seems that when Paul talks about "encouragement in Christ," "love from God," and "fellowship with the Spirit," he is talking about a person having intimacy with the Lord (cf. 3:10-11). One way to draw close to the Lord, especially in times of distress (a la the Philippian situation), is to pray. Drawing close to God in this way, with a clean and pure heart, allows us to experience the filling of the Spirit and strength, as well as encouragement, and warmth from God. There is a time to act, and there is a time to pray. Unfortunately, most Christians in the West live such cluttered lives that they never make time to invest in prayer. Unfortunately they are also, on many occasions, powerless Christians.
- 2. Consider, "What can I do this week to promote Christian unity?"** - We must not lose sight of where Paul is going in 2:1-4. He is deeply concerned with Christian unity. What can you do this week to promote goodwill and unity among the Christian brothers and sisters at your church? Just this past week I had a discussion with a Christian woman who is relatively new to our church, who felt distressed because she knows of a woman here who doesn't like her and had made it known and felt, and this woman doesn't want to cause any problems here, but she feels unwanted. She rightly decided to pray for her and seek an opportunity to either be a peacemaker herself. Listen, it

grieves God's heart when Christians cannot live in unity. After all, this was one of the last things Jesus prayed for us (John 17:22-23).

- 3. Take time this week to *think* seriously about the needs and interests of another Christian -** Ask God to lead you to translate that thinking into some specific actions. God bless you as you reach out to others.