

Joy in Unity

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[0 : 00] Well, let me begin with a parable. So it is a parable. It's not true. I heard it a few years back. And it's really simply to introduce the theme of unity, which you'll notice is the main theme in these few verses that we've read from Philippians chapter 2.

So the parable is this. A man was walking across a bridge and he saw another man on the bridge who looked like he was about to jump off. Don't jump, the man said. Why not? said the other man. Nobody loves me.

God loves you, the first man said. You believe in God, don't you? Yes, I believe in God, he said. Good, said the first man. Well, what religion are you? And the man replied, I'm Christian. The first man said, me too. What denomination are you?

Baptist, the man replied. Me too, said the first man. Is that independent Baptist or is that southern Baptist? It's independent Baptist, said the man about to jump off the bridge.

Me too, said the first man. Is it moderate independent Baptist or conservative independent Baptist? It's conservative independent Baptist. Me too, said the first man. Is it calvinistic conservative independent Baptist?

[1 : 14] The man on the bridge said, it's calvinistic conservative independent Baptist. Me too, said the first man.

Is it dispensational premillennial calvinistic conservative independent Baptist? Or historical premillennial calvinistic conservative independent Baptist? he said it's dispensational premillennial calvinistic conservative independent baptist to which the first man said die heretic scum and then pushed him off the bridge now it is a parable of course so it's not a true story but and we're not recommending that kind of behavior by anyone in here but it simply highlights doesn't it how easy it can be to be divided if you're a christian over the simplest and the smallest things division is a reality sadly in the church and it's nothing new it has always been there and that's why paul the apostle is writing to the philippians and he has to address the issue of unity with them now if you've been with us in the series so far you'll know that the church in philippi really is a healthy church and yet there's an issue and the issue is some people in that church are divided and so they need to be united and so as paul now turns onto the church themselves and focuses on them he makes this strong appeal to unity in chapter 2 verse 1 to 4 he specifically picks up on the philippians and their relationships with one another because it's clear from his words that there are tensions among them and so as a pastor he gently urges them towards unity and it's a unity of course that is produced by the gospel of jesus christ and so if you were here last week chapter 1 verse 27 to 30 not only do the philippians have to stand firm in one spirit striving together as one for the faith of the gospel that's a theological unity a unity against external opposition they also have to have this personal unity a unity that fights against internal division and so the philippians had to feel the weight of what paul was saying to them because you may have noticed as we read it there's a rhythmical even a poetical nature to paul's words and so they come with a piercing challenge to the philippians but also to us in fact we'll see later how paul actually singles out two women for special mention because he wants them to be united together in chapter 4 verse 2 and 3 and this is all because division and disagreement are a real threat to the health of any church whether philippi philippi or anywhere else and it only causes problems on the inside of the church but it also harms our witness on the outside to the outside world if you look on from the outside and see a bunch of people arguing and fighting and divided but not united then who'd want to be part of that and so paul's approach here is to point the philippians and to point us to jesus christ and he does that by reminding us what jesus has done for us and how the implications of what jesus has done are useful and helpful and necessary for us and how we treat one another and so i'd like us to look at three things from these verses first of all the basis of unity verse one second the call to unity verse

two and then thirdly the attitude for unity in verse three to four so first of all the basis of unity the basis of their unity is all of their blessings in christ so let's read verse one again therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with christ if any comfort from his love if any common sharing

in the spirit any tenderness and compassion and he goes on so paul is going to argue here that being in christ has implications for how you conduct yourself as a member of christ's church and he highlights four great privileges of being a christian and he says you need to be united because of everything that is yours in christ jesus and each of these four privileges is introduced by the word if and you notice that in verse one so the first if you have any encouragement from being united with christ the second if any comfort from his love the third if any common sharing in the spirit and the fourth if any tenderness and compassion if if if and he's arguing that if this has happened first one then here's how you should be verse two and three and four now of course he doesn't doubt that this has all happened for the philippians so the if really means since in this first verse since you have experienced all of this then it ought to be worked out in how you relate to other people in the church which is kind of obvious isn't it if you're united with christ if you call yourself a christian then it's going to impact your relationship with christ's people so let's look at these four ifs because paul's words are a reminder of what god has done for us in jesus christ so if you're a christian this is what god has done for you if you're here this afternoon and you wouldn't call yourself a christian then here's what it means to be a christian and so the first is we have encouragement from being united with christ now remember that in christ that phrase is paul's favorite way of describing just exactly what it means to be a christian it expresses all of the blessings that are ours through our union with christ and so it gives us great encouragement because what jesus has done because being in christ means we belong to him and we benefit from everything that he has done for us what has he done for us well we've been chosen in christ before the very creation of the world in christ we have died to the reign of sin and been raised to new life in christ we now can look forward to sharing in the new creation in the future because in christ we've become a new creation so that's the first thing the first if since and then the second is comfort from his love paul's saying believers know comfort from god's love for them in christ and it's such a massive encouragement to know that god loves us how does god love us well god gave his one and only son to die on a cross for our sins and because of that god is committed to us forever god loves you god loves me and he always will and that is a great blessing of the gospel and it gives us real comfort the third if common sharing in the spirit and this phrase could also be translated fellowship in the spirit because when we're united to christ we have the gift of the holy spirit the holy spirit the spirit of christ dwells in our hearts and so we have fellowship with jesus and the same spirit who dwells in our hearts dwells in the hearts of every other christian believer and so we're in fellowship with jesus but we're also in fellowship with every one of jesus's people which means we are

one with them we're united together as brothers and sisters in christ through this common sharing in the spirit that's why we need to be united and so this is another blessing of the gospel and then the fourth if his tenderness and compassion so all god's people have received this tenderness and compassion we know it and we experience it through our union with christ but paul is reminding us that all of these blessings everything that christ has done for us is due to god's grace because in christ we enjoy access to and we enjoy fellowship with the triune god father son and holy spirit in fact paul's blessing or benediction which we often see at the end of our worship service at the end of second corinthians chapter 13 expresses virtually the same sentiments as philippians chapter 2 verse 1 where paul says may the grace of the lord jesus christ and the love of god and the fellowship of the holy spirit be with you all and so paul's focus here firmly on christ but he's reminding us of the blessings of christ's work and helping us see how the basis of unity is actually rooted in god himself god the trinity father son and holy spirit and so christian unity isn't found in all of our attempts to try and get along with each other and try to be nice to one another its basis is in god himself god is united father son and spirit and so all of our blessings flow from our union with christ and that's why unity is fundamental to christ's church because if we belong to the family of god god then the family characteristics ought to be evident in us we ought to reflect the god who has brought us into his family we had some folks staying with us last week that we don't know and they said to to me and to shona what people always say when they meet our two boys our two children joshua and matthew they say they really look like you which is unfortunate for them and hopefully they will grow out of it but it's just clear that they are the groups for better or for worse in lots of ways i'm sure and this is what paul is essentially communicating here isn't it where those who

belong to the family of god because of what jesus christ has done ought to display the family likeness you should see it in the church in god's people a reflection of god himself god the trinity and so what paul is saying here the unity that we need to have in church and that is ours in christ exists in god himself so that's the first thing the basis of unity the second thing is the call to unity there in verse 2 and so these great blessings of being in christ come with great responsibilities because paul's argument is that if all of this is true or since all of this is true then certain implications follow on so if you've been given all of these amazing blessings blessings in christ then you must live for christ in every way including in your relationships with other people and so paul gives his call to unity there in verse 2 when he says then make my joy complete by being like-minded having the same love being one in spirit and of one mind so of course paul

has joy but he's saying the philippians would complete his joy by dealing with this threat to unity in their church so this is a gentle but a necessary command for them so paul brought the gospel to the philippians but now he's distressed because he hears that there are divisions in the church and so he longs to see them become more of what they are in christ which involves taking action to restore the health of their church there's a sickness and so they need to take the medicine he prescribes if they're going to get well what is his prescription then well just as he outlined the four great blessings they have in christ with the word if now his call to unity comes in this fourfold way with the word then where the fourfold privileges of verse one then lead on to these fourfold outcomes of verse two and so just notice this strong emphasis on unity in each phrase in verse two they are to be like-minded have the same love be one in spirit or be in full accord and be of one mind so paul's call to unity is encouraging them to one mind one love one spirit one purpose essentially they're to have the mindset of christ which he's going to go on and expand upon in verse 5 to 11 that's the mindset they need because only with it can their life together be harmonious and if if you're like me you'll you'll enjoy music i'm sure and this phrase that's translated one in spirit here in verse 2 in the original greek is where we get our word symphony from symphony of course meaning agreement of sound or harmony just like in an orchestra so the symphony sounds wonderful doesn't it when all the instruments play together in harmony and yet it's spoiled when somebody goes off and plays the wrong notes so paul here is pleading with this fellowship of believers to live in harmony don't be that guy or that girl who goes off and does your own thing and plays your own tune because as he wrote this there were some who were spoiling the sweet sound of fellowship together now yes they believed in jesus they all believed in jesus but some were lacking love for one another they weren't playing along with the sweet music of the gospel of christ they were playing a different tune their own tune to suit themselves and it was grating on the ears unpleasant harsh irritating to hear and so it was disrupting the harmony and the unity that comes from the gospel of jesus christ now this has a clear application for our church too doesn't it and not because there are any divisions between people at least not that i know of and i hope there aren't but because paul's call to unity is one that we always need to hear isn't it because the fact that we are in christ has implications for how we live for christ together with our brothers and sisters in christ because we're to love one another and this is more than just a kind of passive get along with other people or tolerate other people like you know it's not great that they're there but well we kind of have to put up with them now what he's saying here is that this unity has to be cultivated because it's a unity that already exists in christ

[17 : 36] but it needs to be cultivated and nurtured so that there's a deeper affection and love for each other there's a need to be one in spirit to be in full accord so not wanting to do our own thing or to get our own way not not being frustrated with other people because they don't do things the way that we reckon they should be done because all that happens is discord disharmony damning words just divide us from each other rather than draw us closer and so rather than grow in love amongst ourselves what can happen is that we are bitter and we backbite instead and so he's saying we're to have one mind and one purpose together as christ's people in this place united so that we display the beauty and love of jesus christ to a watching world because it's by embodying the kind of life that paul outlines in verse 2 that we become a powerful witness to jesus christ and so that's the call to unity first there's the basis of unity second the call to unity and then third the attitude for unity and this is in verse 3 to 4 paul highlights the attitude necessary for unity in the church and the attitude he says here is humility but what he does is he spells out what this humility looks like in concrete terms so verse 3 and 4 do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit rather in humility value others above yourselves not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others notice how paul puts this both negatively and positively he highlights the

negative attitudes and behavior in order to encourage the positive attitudes and behavior so it's negative you'll notice verse 3 then positive verse 4 negative again and then positive again so first negative is do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit this is speaking of comparing ourselves to other people or competing against other people so that we look better than other people it's taking pride in being better than others and wanting to get all the glory wanting the spotlight to shine on me and not on anyone else so that's the negative so he's saying don't be like this and it's countered with the positive because he's saying instead be like this because you know and i know negatives don't work on their own do they it's no use just being told don't do this or that so paul's call to unity here will only be effective if he gives the positive counterpart and so the positive is in humility value others above yourselves so humility means we won't count ourselves as more important than other people but we'll value other people as more important than ourselves it's basically the difference in looking down on people devaluing them and looking up to people recognizing that they do have value and this is an attitude that's completely counter to our human instinct because our human instinct is to put ourselves first all the time but paul's saying here is this humility is what fosters unity in the church and it makes sense doesn't it just imagine if everybody in the church this church or any church selfishly put themselves first all the time and no one valued anyone else well it would be a recipe for disaster wouldn't it

lead to all kinds of division and difficulty so paul's saying the key to a united church is that its members value others value others above themselves and then he presses this home further in verse four with another negative followed by a positive and essentially he's saying the same thing so the negative is not looking to your own interests because normal life is we look to our own interests as long as i'm okay and i get what i want it doesn't really matter about anybody else for us our interests tend to be all that matters so our time our energy our money our resources our capacity tends to be all focused on me to look after me or those closest to me everything revolves around me because we see our interests as being more important than anyone else's interests but again just imagine if everybody adopted this attitude all of the time not even all of the time but just some of the time or not even just some of the time but a little of the time there would be disunity there would be division there would never be unity never be any of the harmony that paul is speaking about here and that's why he warns against this negative attitude because this negative attitude turns people against one another and it can paralyze the work of the gospel so paul urges us to be concerned for others where we're not looking after just our interests but looking out for theirs we're aware of the concerns of other people or the needs of other people and we're actually willing to go and do something about it and it does take real humility doesn't it to adopt this attitude and suppose words here are a real challenge because we're forced to consider the value that we place on other people and to acknowledge that actually it isn't all about me there are more people in the church than me so my preferences my comfort my convenience my way isn't what actually matters most of all so the challenge is well do we really count others as more important than ourselves or do we think we matter more do we want to serve others or do we just like being served all of the time are we most concerned about our needs being met or do we open our eyes and our hearts warmed because we see others and their needs and we're genuinely concerned and so we do something about it are we always looking out for our own interests or are we looking out for others because our attitude in all of this will either strengthen our unity in christ or it will weaken it and drive us apart now as paul says all of this to the philippians it's hardly surprising that paul instinctively starts to speak about jesus because who is the one who valued others above them himself jesus even though he is the lord he valued others more than him jesus looked to the interests of other people before his own interests even though he is lord just remember how jesus humbled himself and he washed his disciples feet

in john chapter 13 but more than that remember how jesus humbled himself and died on a cross for us so do we then really think that we are somehow excused from practicing the humility that values others above ourselves do we think that we are more entitled than the lord jesus because jesus counted us and our salvation as more important than his own life jesus entered into this world to look out for our interests not his own and so if we're going to have unity in the church family this church family paul said you need to have the same mindset as that of jesus that's what paul's going on to say chapter 2 verse 5 to 11 and so what he says here shatters every possible reason the philippians could have had for having division in their church and he does it by pointing them to jesus and the way that jesus humbled himself to death on a cross and so by raising what jesus has

done and pointing the philippians to jesus paul's implying here that just as jesus died for you so you must die to yourself you must die to your selfish ambition you must die to your conceit you must die to your own interests you must die to anything that stops you being united to your brothers and sisters in christ paul's pointing us to jesus because jesus is the basis for unity in all of our relationships in the church because jesus is the source and he is the example of true humility and so when we are united to christ then should not the love of god and the fellowship of the holy spirit and the tenderness of compassion that we've experienced from the gospel should not all of this mean that we bear much fruit in our life together as a church well of course it should we must look to jesus jesus is the ultimate motivation for us to be humble and to know joy in unity let's pray