

Have you ever sat in a church business meeting? A deacon meeting? An elder board meeting? Being of the same mind is a beautiful thing but it doesn't happen all the time!

23 Phil – The Eight Paths of Unity and Peace

In John 13:35 we find these words from Jesus, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Our love for one another confirms our witness for Christ and it reinforces why Christ said, “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another as I have loved you.” Jesus did not say, “I think this would be a really good idea,” but “a new **commandment.**”

In John 17:21, 23 we find that Jesus took this matter to prayer.

I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. ²³I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.

“That the world will believe, and, that the world will know.” This is what is at stake and this is why Jesus commanded it, why he prayed it, and why Paul wrote about it as he did.

Philippians 2:2-4 is one of the clearest passages to make this command and prayer reality in the church. In these verses he presents eight paths to pursue, eight steps to take, eight ways to behave – whichever way we prefer to speak of it doesn't matter so long as we put it into practice. Let's listen to Paul.

Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, ²make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. ³Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Let's look at these one-by one.

1. Be of the same mind – That's a tough one right from the start. Have you ever sat in a church business meeting? A deacon meeting? An elder board meeting? Being of the same mind is a beautiful thing but it doesn't happen all the time! But that's OK. Church meetings or church gatherings don't have to start that way, but they should end that way. Being of the same mind is not something we just always ooze into. Differences of opinion can make us sharper. It's like Proverbs 27:17 where the writer says “as iron sharpens iron so one man sharpens another.” I've been in meetings where people were afraid to share their opinion or ruffle

feathers. That's not healthy. We must have such love for another and such security in Christ that we can speak openly and receive respect and that we can listen with respect. We must learn from one another, be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger as James tells us in his letter.

2. Here is the second step. Maintain the same love. The same as what? I would like to suggest four ways to approach this:
 - We should have the same love that Christ has for us. That was his command in John 13:34-35 and that was the newness of the command. Remember, loving one another wasn't new, but loving as Christ loved was new. So, we should maintain the same love as Christ had.
 - We should have the same love that we had at the beginning of our relationship with Christ. Remember what Christ said to the church in Ephesus in the book of Revelation? He said, "you have done a lot of great things but this one thing I have against you, you have left your first love. Therefore, do the deeds you did at first." Have the same love that you showed at the beginning of your relationship with Christ.
 - Paul was telling them, "have the same love for one another that you have had for me." All the Philippians loved Paul, but they didn't love one another as they loved him. Sometimes it's easier to love the famous people than it is to love the common person sitting next to you. Paul wants them to love one another as they loved him.
 - Paul was telling them to make sure they had the same kind of love for one another without partiality. James 2 warned against showing favoritism to rich people above poor people. We should love the less educated the same as the intellectuals, the poor the same as the rich, those who are struggling the same as those who are doing well.

Maintain the same love, Paul says.

3. Be united in spirit. Literally, in the Greek, it says, "with soul." I like that. Don't you? Love people with soul. Don't just have an outward show, but love from the heart. Paul says similar things in Colossians 3:23 and Ephesians 6:6 where he stated, "Do your work from the heart and do the will of God from the heart." In the Greek it is "work out of your soul," and "do the will of God out of your soul." You see, we can have an outward unity. That is really uniformity and God isn't looking for uniformity. He is looking for unity of the heart and that requires that we drink deeply from the four resources he speaks about in verse 1 – the love of the Father, the encouragement of Christ, the fellowship of the Spirit and the affection and compassion he builds within us.
4. Intent on one purpose – literally in the Greek, "thinking one thing." And it shows us that we are not just to be a mutual admiration society where we are focused inwardly but that we are outward focused and upward focused. Paul will say in 3:13 of this book, "this one thing I do." He viewed his life as doing one thing. He was a busy man and doing a zillion things. He was expanding into new territory and trying to maintain all of the churches he had already started – and doing it all without a daily planner, an i-phone, or an ipad. But he simplified his life and coordinated everything so that he was doing one thing. Jesus told Martha, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about so many things, but only a few things are necessary, really only one and Mary is showing that by sitting at my feet and listening to

me.” And so Paul urged the church to simplify and be intent on one purpose. That one purpose was already expressed in 1:27 where he told them to stand firm with one spirit and mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.

5. Here is the fifth thing he told them and it is the first negative among the eight. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit. The word selfishness is the same word as in Galatians 5:20 translated faction. Paul isn't just telling them not to be selfish with their money or their food or their time. He is warning them against leveraging disputes to personal advantage. He is warning them about creating factions in the church. This is reinforced by the next word when he speaks of empty conceit. Did some of them want to be recognized? Did some of them want a personal following? Paul reminded them that this was pride and it was empty conceit. People are all puffed up but there is no substance except for a lot of hot air. And when any of us are that way it shows we have forgotten that the glory belongs to Christ and that brings disunity.
6. After Paul gives this command against pride and factions, he then gives the positive side and this is our sixth point. Paul says, with humility of mind regard others as more important than yourselves. That's a tough one! We are all important. God did not make us “nobodies.” He made us in his image and we are important but if we are secure in that and know what Christ thinks of us then we can show humility by considering the importance of others and putting their importance even above our own.

Humility of mind is a uniquely Christian concept in the ancient world because the ancients associated humility with servitude and groveling. But Paul and Christ showed humility to be the way of God – not groveling but obedience and being a servant for the sake of others. In verse 8 of this great chapter he will speak of Christ humbling himself all the way to the cross – and all for us.

7. Finally, Paul finishes this tight, little section where he so profoundly urges that church in Philippi and all churches throughout all ages to work toward unity and oneness by giving us the second negative command followed quickly by the eighth command which is the positive flip side. He says, “Do not look out for your own personal interests,”
8. But look out for the interests of others.

I don't think Paul is telling us to neglect ourselves. Jesus said love your neighbor as yourself. Think of the practical ways you love yourself. You make sure you eat enough, get enough sleep, have some fun, and a thousand other things. That's expected. The Law said, “what you do for yourself to live and survive, when the situation arises, do that for others.” And Paul basically says the same thing, “don't just look out for yourself, but make sure you are looking out for others as well.” I know we can't do this with everyone but we can do it with a few.

In fact, practice all eight of these steps and see what God does in your life, in your family, and in your neighborhood and church. Don't think it will just come in one day or one week. Why not focus on it for one year and see what happens.

And if you do that joy will abound. After all this is why Paul exhorted them! He said, “make my joy complete” in verse 2. He said, “I have had a lot of joy in my heart over you Philippians for over ten years. Now, make my joy over you perfect by getting over these divisive attitudes in your church.”

It’s not easy to walk in love and to maintain unity, but with the love of the Father, the encouragement of the Son, the fellowship of the Spirit and the affection and compassion that springs up from within as we spend time with him, it will be possible.