



UNITY

(Power in the Body of Christ)

**"I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me because of their testimony. My prayer for all of them is that they will be one, just as you and I are one, Father — that just as you are in me and I am in you, so they will be in us, and the world will believe you sent me."
(John 17:20-21 NLT)**

Paul's letter to the Philippians serves as a passionate plea that encourages every generation of Christians to stand united against such divisive opponents as social separatism, spiritual segregation, congregational competition, religious rivalry and disunity in the body of Christ.

The letter to the Philippians is designed to inspire Christians to embrace one another with the humble attitude of Christ. This was a timely message for the church at Philippi because it was under assault from within and without by people motivated by a toxic mindset of carnal egotism.

A selfish, self-promoting, self-seeking and self-centered spirit threatened to tear apart the spiritual fabric of the fellowship in the Philippian church. There were hidden agendas driven by individualism and selfish ambition that caused members in the church at Philippi to competitively pursue the satisfaction of their own interests to the neglect of the interests of others.

There was a major disagreement between two prominent members in the Philippian church. This bitter conflict threatened to split the Philippian congregation into two warring camps with two separate loyalties dedicated to two powerful personalities.

This potential church split led Paul to plead with Euodia and with Syntyche in **Philippians 4:1-2 to agree with each other in the Lord. Regardless of what divided them Paul knew the only way for them to resolve the conflict between them was for both**

of them to rely upon their mutual agreement they could find only in their common Lord.

Paul's advice to the Philippians is still true for the church today. No matter what serves as the basis of our disagreements in the church today, the only place we are going to find total mutual agreement is in the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Paul does not take sides in this dispute between Eudia and Syntyche. He does not rule in favor for one against the other. He simply instructs both sides to step into the Lordship of Christ.

It is only through the Lordship of Christ that Christians are able to stand in unity with each other. It is only through the Lordship of Christ that we are able to give up our attempts to use human strategies and solutions to defeat the other side. It is only through the Lordship of Christ that we shall find agreement in the midst of an array of theological differences.

It is the Lordship of Christ that stands at the center of our relationships with one another and not doctrinal arguments and theological positions. It is the Lordship of Christ that enables us to discuss our theological differences without expressing a **mean spirit** of negativity towards one another.

In **Philippians 2:1-2**, Paul gives more sound instruction that serves as the spiritual solution for the ugly problem of infighting within the Philippian church. He tells the church to have the same mind, to have the same love, and to be one in spirit and purpose.

Paul knows that when the church of Jesus Christ is united within through a common love, a common spirit, and a common purpose, there is no external opposition that is powerful enough to obstruct the holy mission of the church.

Paul says in Philippians 1:27, "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you."

Next, in **Philippians 2:5-11** Paul uses Jesus as the supreme example of what it means to pour oneself out on behalf of others, and as an example of what it means to lose so that others might win.

If Jesus' example is truly followed, it will inspire both sides in church conflict to give up their need to be right and the need to prove the other side as being wrong. Jesus' example will inspire both sides to give up their need to experience the thrill of victory as well as their need for the other side to suffer the agony of defeat.

Jesus is in the Godhead. He is in perfect harmony with the Father and the Holy Spirit. There is no conflict, rivalry or competition between members of the Godhead and neither should there be conflict, rivalry and competition between the members of the body of Christ.

In **2:1**, Paul practices what he preaches by referring to the Philippians as "**dear friends.**" Paul still recognizes them as "**dear friends**" even though some at Philippi were engaging in competition and selfish ambition. Paul did not consider them as his enemies, even though their behavior was not Christian.

Paul uses himself as an example in how he deals with certain ministers that were attacking him. Paul says in **Philippians 1:15-18**, "**It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of that I rejoice.**"

Paul could have felt justified in using his energy to discredit those who were attacking his reputation. He could have used the church by poisoning the minds of Christians towards his opponents. He could have used the church as a tool to fight the people he did not like personally. He could have sought to ruin the reputations of his opponents by labeling them as false teachers in letters, articles, books and emails across the Brotherhood. But instead, Paul rejoices in the single most important fact to him, Christ is being preached. Paul was able

to distinguish a personal attack against him and an attack against Jesus Christ.

Paul understood that if we spend all our time and energy seeking to tear down and discredit one another in the body of Christ, we will not be able to stand firm in one spirit and to contend as one man for the faith of the gospel.

Paul reminds us that for Christians there is never justification for ever doing the wrong thing in the life of another human being, no matter how convicted we are of that person's wrongness. Just because someone differs with us theologically, we are not justified in treating that person or group with a mean spirit of hatred. It is not sensible to hate someone simply because they disagree with us on the correct interpretation of Love. We shall never find justification for hating and despising someone in the name of Christian love.

Finally, Paul says to the divided church at Philippi in **Philippians 2:12** to "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling." Paul does not say work for your salvation, but work out your salvation.

Paul makes it clear that the salvation of the congregation is not in Paul. The salvation is not in the human personalities of Eudias and Syntyche. The Corinthian tendency to depend on human personalities and exalting men above that which is written has for too long kept the church of Jesus Christ spiritually immature.

Some churches feel they cannot work out their problems and differences unless they have certain personalities present to do the work for them. The salvation of the church is not in any human personality.

Paul had trained the Philippian congregation with the understanding that he would not always be physically present with them. Paul tells the church at Philippi that he is confident that the Philippians are spiritually mature enough now to solve this conflict in his absence.

Paul says, "As you have always obeyed — not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence." You have done the right thing when I was present with you, now continue to

do the right thing even in my absence. He tells them that they have someone in their midst that is greater than any human being that will empower them to live in harmony with one another.

In Philippians 2:13, Paul says, "For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." Paul encourages them to work out the works that God is working in them. He tells them to act out the will of God that God has placed in them. The Philippians are commanded to manifest the miraculous work that God is doing within and among them. They were to be revealers of God's harmonious nature before a divided and conflicted world.

It is interesting to note that Paul does not tell the Philippians to attend a seminar or a conference on church conflict. He does not tell them to read the most recent Christian literature written by Christian authors on Conflict resolution. He tells them that they already have what they need to work out their salvation as a congregation. They have Christ working in them.

Christians today must realize that we have what it takes in Christ to work out our salvation. We can work out the salvation in our marriages. We can work out the salvation of our families. We can work out the salvation of our congregations. We can work out the salvation of our friendships. Paul says in **4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength."**

It is possible in the power of Christ for Christians to erase the color line in the body of Christ.

It is possible in the power of Christ for Christians to overcome class warfare in the body of Christ.

It is possible in the power of Christ for Christians to exalt the interests of others above their own.

It is possible in the power of Christ to exalt the body of Christ above the body politic.

It is possible in the power of Christ for Christians to exalt the Christian party above the Democrat or Republican parties.

It is possible in the power of Christ for Christians to relate to each other as brothers and sisters instead of liberal and conservatives.

Let us make the solid commitment to refuse to use the church as a vehicle to promote our personal agendas of vain conceit and selfish ambition. And commit ourselves to doing all we can through the power of Christ to protect and defend the unity of the Holy Spirit in the bond of peace.

Yes, we come together as the body of Christ with the Godly determination to reflect the divine unity that exists within the Godhead between Father, Son, and Spirit. We stand as one person, in one spirit, against every strategy of division devised by the evil forces of hell.

We will soar above division.

We will soar above competition.

We will soar above rivalry.

We will soar above separatism.

We will soar above selfish ambition.

Thank God for soaring!