

Unity Through Humility

Philippians 2:1-4 – NCBC, March 19th, 2023

Main Point: Unity in the church is sustained when you humble yourself before God and others.

Outline:

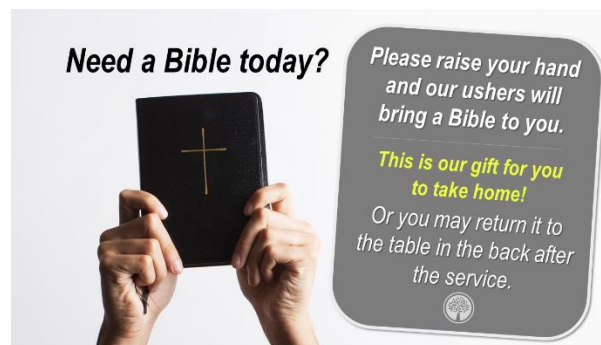
- I. Right **Reasons** (v.1)
 - a. **Son's** Encouragement and Love
 - b. **Holy Spirit's** Indwelling
 - c. **Father's** Compassion
- II. Right **Goals** (v. 2)
 - a. Same **mind**
 - b. Same **spirit**
- III. Right **Attitude** (vv. 3-4)
 - a. Selfless (3)
 - b. Humble (3)
 - c. Servant (4)

Application: Put on the humble attitude of Christ to preserve unity in the church.



I. SBTS

II. Introduction



This morning we are continuing on in our study of Philippians and are entering some very piercing and humbling verses. If you have your Bibles with you, please open them to Philippians chapter two. If you don't have a Bible with you, just raise your hand as one of our ushers walks by and they will be more than happy to provide you with one to use.



Churches are prone to conflict. It's natural for a diverse group of people, with our various preferences and personalities, to find disagreement on any given subject. But it's sinful and shameful for churches to be full of conflict and division.

Some of the issues people fight over are just down right silly. This week I read about conflicts over what the appropriate length of a worship pastor's beard should be; a dispute over whether to build a children's playground or use the ground for a cemetery; and another dispute about whether or not a clock should be in the worship center.¹

While those are silly, here are some more realistic examples that are equally just as sad: conflict over worship music, disputes over length, style, and content of sermons, disputes over how money is talked about, disputes over mask mandates, what constitutes modesty, roles of men and women in family and church, disputes over whether the timing of the rapture and tribulation, or whether the miraculous gifts ceased when the apostles died or if they continue today.

What's worse is when a conflict goes unresolved – that just festers and spreads to other people like a disease. Bitterness poisons the heart of the one side and pride infects the heart of the other and keeps them both from reconciling - nobody wants to be a peacemaker.

When conflicts arise, the temptation is to dig in and fight or to flee and hop over to the next church. The problem with this “fight or flight” response is that we tend to think our opponent is the problem. When in reality the problem is inside each of our own hearts – we just don't always realize it.

James 4:1 ***“1 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?”***

The fact that James has to point out that our selfish desires are at the heart of conflict goes to show how clueless we are at times.

¹ <https://churchanswers.com/blog/twenty-five-silly-things-church-members-fight-over/>

It's easier to see other people's selfishness than your own - just like you can see the giant piece of food in someone else's teeth but not your own; or how you can smell someone else's breath when they've eaten a whole bag of Ghardettos or Italian food with a ton of garlic, but not your own. Or how you can tell when someone else puts on too much cologne or perfume, but not on yourself.

Lack of awareness is the failure to see beyond your own thoughts. It's failure to grasp the impact of your emotion, actions, and behavior on other people. That's the very definition of selfishness.

But if we grow in greater awareness of our selfishness than we can grow in our ability to handle conflicts biblically or avoid them altogether for the harmony of the church and the glory of God.

That's what our text deals with this morning. So in honor of God's Word, I'd ask you to stand if you are able, as I read from Philippians 2, verses 1 through 4.

III. Scripture Reading

“1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:1-4 ESV)

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This is the reading of God’s Word, you may be seated.

Let’s pray.

IV. Proposition



In this text, Paul very clearly shows that our own selfishness is the greatest enemy to unity in the church. That each of us has a propensity to live for ourselves and consequently create division in the church.

This is the **main point** of the text that you should come away with: **Unity in the church is sustained when you humble yourself before God and others.**

Last week, Josh walked us through the end of chapter 1 where Paul commanded the church to live as worthy spiritual citizens of heaven. This meant that the church was to be united in the faith and progress of the gospel as they faced threats from outside the church – enemies who wanted to persecute believers. But now Paul turns his attention

to the importance of unity against threats that come from within the church.

As we walk through this text, we’ll see Paul describe three characteristics that are essential to sustain unity in the church.

The first characteristic we need is the right reasons. You need to have the right reasons motivating you to unity. Another way to put it, is Paul answers the question “why should we be united?”



V. Right Reasons (1)

1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,

Paul gives three reasons to properly motivate us to be united. He describes how each member of the Trinity has already graciously united us together. God creates unity and we are called to live in it and preserve it.

The first reason we should be united is because of the Son’s encouragement and love.

“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love.”

I. The Right Reasons (1)

A. Son's encouragement and love (18-20)

When we hear the word “if”, which we would call a conditional statement, we think it describes a hypothetical situation. I could say “If I won the lottery, I would travel the world, or go on a shopping spree at Lowes, or the Sweetwater Music store” – a situation that could happen but is not guaranteed nor likely. But that’s not what Paul is doing. In the Greek, the word “if,” here assumes the statement is true. You could say *“since there is encouragement in Christ, since there is comfort from love”*

Paul is calling us to play back memories in our mental camcorder and remember God’s goodness.

So what is *“encouragement in Christ.”* The Greek word for encouragement refers to someone coming alongside you to give assistance by offering comfort or counsel. It’s similar to the word used to describe the Holy Spirit in John 14 as the “Comforter” or the “Helper.”

How does Jesus encourage us? Through salvation – our salvation unites us to Him.

Similarly, Paul also says we ought to be motivated by the comfort we receive from Jesus’ love.

In Luke 7, Jesus was eating at Simon the pharisee’s house. While he’s at the table, a woman known and despised for her sinful lifestyle comes and weeps over Jesus feet, wipes them with her hair, kisses his feet, and covers them with costly perfume. The pharisee despised the woman for her sinfulness and Jesus for not telling her off. But Jesus turned toward her and said, *“47... her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much...”* Then he looked at her and said, *“48 “Your sins are forgiven...Your faith has saved you; go in peace.””*

Is this not the experience of each one of us? When we realized and were crushed by the weight of our sin and guilt that we turned to Jesus with weeping, only for Him to turn to us and say “your sins are forgiven, your trust in me saves you, be at peace.”

This same love shown to you despite your sinfulness, was shown to your fellow believers – those whom we are tempted to fight against or disagree with. His love for us, and for them, ought to drive us to love them too.

Remember the words of 1 John 4:19 *“We love because....”* What? *“He first loved us.”*

Love is not shown by being nice to people who are nice back to you. It’s shown, as Jesus showed us, by sacrificing yourself for the benefit of others, especially when they don’t deserve it.

Next reason Paul says should motivate us toward unity is the Holy Spirit’s Indwelling.

I. The Right Reasons (1)

- A. Son's encouragement and love
- B. Holy Spirit's Indwelling

“If there is any participation in the Spirit.”

This refers to how the Holy Spirit baptizes us (immerses us) into one body – the body of Christ.

1 Cor. 12:13-14 ***“13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. 14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many.”***

The same Spirit that dwells in you, that changed you, that helps you, also dwells in the rest of the church. That's why Ephesians 4:3 tells us we must be ***“eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”***

When you have conflict in your family it does not change the fact that you are still a family. It cannot change that bond. The bond actually drives us to make peace because conflict ruins the joys of that family bond. The same motivation should be true of our spiritual family that has been created through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The third reason that motivates us to unity is the Father's Compassion.

I. The Right Reasons (1)

- A. Son's encouragement and love
- B. Holy Spirit's Indwelling
- C. Father's Compassion

“if there is any affection and sympathy.”

The word “affection” comes from the word for bowels, kidneys, or liver. It refers to the feelings of tenderness that you feel deep in your gut. We use this kind of imagery today too. When someone says something mean to us we might say “it felt like a punch to the gut.” Or if someone is relying on their intuition they would say “trust your gut” or “my gut was telling me that something was wrong.” If someone is brave and does something heroic we might say “that guy's got guts.”

God treats us tenderly because of his mercy. Many other translations say ***“mercy”*** or ***“compassion”*** instead of “sympathy” which I believe is clearer. Sympathy is a very different word than mercy.

Mercy is feeling pity and love for someone in a weak or sorry state. This is the feeling drives you to act in tenderness if you came across a child crying in the store because they can't find their parents.

2 Corinthians 1, says that God is the ***“Father of mercies.”*** In Exodus 33 Moses asked to see God’s glory and He displayed it by telling Moses about His character ***“The LORD the LORD, a God merciful and gracious....”***

God’s compassion and tenderness causes him to forgive and forget our sins and trespasses. So too should it cause us to forgive and forget the sins of others.

We could rephrase verse 1 to say this “because God has mercifully loved, encouraged, and united you, a sinner, into His family, you ought to treat other believers the same way!”

God’s love is the foundation of our unity and it is the motivation to preserving our unity with each other. It should compel you to be united with others. We must reflect on and become increasingly aware of the reality of God’s goodness toward us so that we will be rightly motivated to preserve unity with each other.

Having the right reasons is crucial. It’s the lift, the mechanical force, that gets an airplane off the ground and in the air.² But in addition to the right reasons, we need to have **the right goals.** We need to know what we are aiming for – what does it mean to be united? What does it look like?

² <https://www1.grc.nasa.gov/beginners-guide-to-aeronautics/what-is-lift/>

VI. Right Goals

I. The Right Goals (2)

In verse 2 Paul describes the goals of unity when he wrote, ***“complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.”***

Paul wants to experience the joy of seeing those he spiritually nurtured obey Jesus. As a spiritual father, he is delighted when the Philippians are united, just like parents delight in their children get along and love each other. The Philippians were motivated to do so just like a child is excited when they hear their parents delight and say “way to go! I’m so proud of you.”

This relationship is not unique to them alone. Hebrews 13:17 says ***“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”***

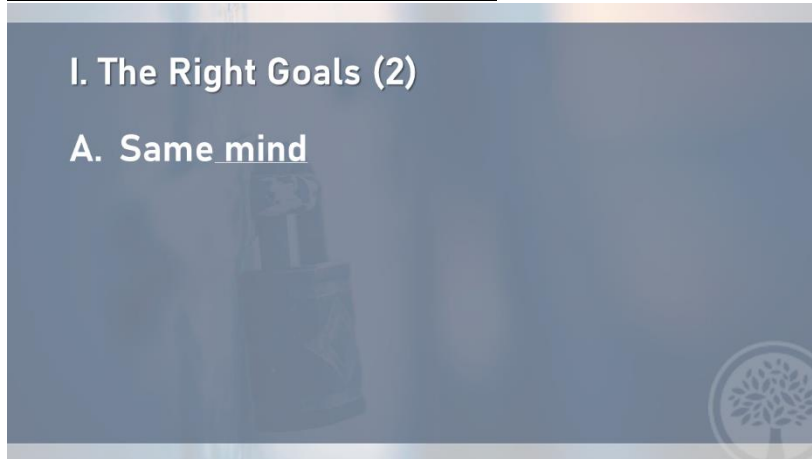
All of us pastors and elders find great joy in your spiritual growth. Our hearts are heavy and burdened for you when you are trapped in sin and our hearts rejoice when you live in a manner worthy of the gospel - in the power of the gospel. As the scriptures command us, we labor to present you mature in Christ and we labor for your joy.

And let me say that you already fill the leadership here with great joy!

So what does it look like to be united?

I prefer the way the NASB translates it: *“by being of the same mind, maintain the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”*

The first goal is to have the same mind.



“being of the same mind” literally means “think the same.” It means unity comes through conformity. Not that people adopt your ways or that you adopt their ways – but that we all adopt God’s ways. The goal of unity is to conform to God, not to one another.

You can breathe a sigh of relief that it doesn’t mean you all have to conform and be a Kansas City Chiefs fan like me (though your joy won’t be as full as mine).

But you might say, “How can we adopt God’s ways when we don’t agree on what His ways are?” How can we “think the same” when one person believes God wants us to give more attention to outreach and evangelism while another person disagrees and believes we should be more focused on Bible studies and life group. One person believes we should do communion more frequently, but another thinks we do it too much. One person thinks we should sing more hymns another thinks more contemporary.

We have to recognize that there are categories of doctrine and practices in the church that are essential to our faith, that we must be unanimous and uniform on otherwise we deny the faith, and there are other categories where we have room to have diverse opinions and preferences on.

I’m not saying that some doctrine are important and some are not. Not for a second. All doctrine matters, but not every Christian doctrine matters in the same way or degree.

Paul gives us areas where we are to think the same in the first 11 verses of chapter 1. We are to have a common LORD and Savior³; we are to have a common understanding of the gospel and salvation⁴; we are to have a common source and pursuit of the truth⁵, we are to have a common mission of proclaiming the gospel⁶, a common conformity to the character of Christ⁷, and a common goal of glorifying God.⁸ These are matters that we must be uniform on.

The phrase *“being of the same mind”* and the last phrase *“be intent on one purpose”* – both use the verb “to think” and they are similar in meaning. We are to be uniformly “gospel-oriented.” If we are conforming ourselves to God’s ways then we will have the same

³ Phil. 1:1-2

⁴ Phil. 1:6

⁵ Phil. 1:9

⁶ Phil. 1:5

⁷ Phil. 1:10-11

⁸ Phil. 1:10

Christ-centered, Holy Spirit empowered, and God-glorifying purpose.

It's like the game of basketball, we've got March Madness going on right now, where each team is intent on one purpose. They're uniform in their thinking that they need to put the ball through the hoop more times than the other team. There are certain rules you have to follow to play the game that are non-negotiable. But there is a lot of diversity of personality, preferences, and skills that each player brings to the team to achieve the common goal.

Filtering our differences through the categories of essential and non-essential issues helps us discern between when we want people to conform to God's ways or when we want people to conform to our own ways.

I. The Right Goals (2)

A. Same mind

B. Same spirit

The second goal is to have the same spirit.

Paul writes that we are to *“maintain the same love, united in spirit”*

These two phrases are also similar in meaning.

To *“maintain the same love”* means we love others equally. In other words, our love isn't conditioned upon how people treat us or how we feel.

This is very different then the way the world defines love. To the world, love is about self – it's about how you make me feel.

But Biblical love is not based on emotions – if it were, then it would be impossible to maintain love for one another. The Greek word used here is “agape” which means it's an act of the will. That's why God can command us to love others. Love is a conscious choice to seek someone else's good even if it costs you something.

To *“be united in spirit”* is just one word in the Greek and it literally means “one-souled” – it means everyone mutually seeks the benefit of the other person – that we love each other the way we would want to be loved.

In order to preserve unity we have to understand what it means. The goal is to have the same spirit and the same mind. It doesn't mean there are no differences or disagreements. It doesn't even mean there is no conflict. It means that we strive to conform ourselves to God's ways and love each other sacrificially through disagreements and conflict.

Now that we have the right reasons and the right goals in mind, Paul explains **how** to preserve unity by having the right attitudes.

I. The Right Attitudes (3-4)

VII. Right Attitudes

Look at verses 3-4.

“3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

In these two verses, Paul calls us to reject sinful attitudes and to put on the right ones. This is so much more than an intellectual exercise. It's not just thinking the right thoughts, but your whole person being aligned with God's way. That's why the word “attitude” perfectly captures what we need.

There are three attitudes Paul call us to put on like clothing.

First, we need a selfless attitude.

I. The Right Attitudes (3-4)

A. Selfless

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit.”

Paul tells us our natural inclination is to be selfish and conceited. “Selfish ambition” is prioritizing what you want without thinking about other people.

It often comes in the form of consumerism – seeking to get rather than to give. It can be manifested by imposing your preferences and opinions on others – having a domineering and controlling attitude. It can be manifested in low commitment in church. Lack of serving. It's manifested in apathy toward others. You keep a distance socially, not because of COVID, but because you don't want to give of yourself. You don't want to be drawn in.

Hand-in-hand with selfishness is “**conceit**” which simply means “arrogant pride.” It's seeking personal glory - we want to be admired.

This can manifest itself in the church in places like theological pride or pride in our abilities. We compare ourselves to others inside and outside the church. We think we have the better doctrine, the better

ministry programs. It manifests itself in bragging. I serve more often and work harder than that person, or I am a more gifted teacher, or I would be a better leader. I am a better parent than that family over there. My kids would never do that.

At the heart of selfishness and conceit is pride. It's easy to see in others, but hard to see in yourself. It isn't something that only professional athletes display on a football field after scoring a touchdown. It lurks in the hearts of each of us no matter how doctrinally sound or mature we may be. It's very subtle and can poison any type of ministry.

Pride shows itself in a critical spirit. It comes in the form of anger. It's argumentative. It's quick to judge other people who do things differently than you do. It recoils at the idea of submission to authority. It's defensive, blame shifts, and minimizes its own sin and shortcomings. Pride is jealous and envious. It's unteachable and impatient with other people. It also shows itself in a lack of prayer.

Pride is number one enemy of God and unity. Puritan pastor Thomas Watson said "Pride seeks to ungod God."⁹

So Paul calls us to have a selfless attitude which means we put God first, others second, and ourselves last. Jesus said the cost of following him was daily self-denial.¹⁰ Commentator William Barclay cleverly observed, "the aim of the Christian ought to be not self-display, but self-obliteration."¹¹

In order to do that, in order to be selfless, you have to have a **humble attitude**. That's the next attitude we need.

I. The Right Attitudes (3-4)

A. Selfless

B. Humble

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves."

Sometimes humility is viewed as a drab and dreary virtue. It's something we all know we need, but we don't expect it to be easy or fun - like going to the DMV or the dentist (sorry Kyle). Sometimes humility is viewed as self-deprecation, hiding your abilities, or thinking less of yourself like Eeyore "thanks for noticing me." But that's just self-pity which is another form of pride!

John Piper shares an excellent observation about self-pity, "Boasting is the response of pride to success. Self-pity is the response of pride to suffering. Boasting says, 'I deserve admiration because I have achieved so much.' Self-pity says, 'I deserve admiration because I have sacrificed so much.'

⁹ Stuart Scott, 179.

¹⁰ Luke 9:23

¹¹ Barclay, 32.

Boasting is the voice of pride in the heart of the strong. Self-pity is the voice of pride in the heart of the weak. Boasting sounds self-sufficient. Self-pity sounds self-sacrificing.”¹²

So what is humility? The word literally means “lowliness of mind.”

Humility is an attitude focused on serving God rather than yourself.

Gavin Ortlund wrote that “it’s not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.”¹³

Another author described humility this way, “Humility is the only soil in which true unity can grow. Only when Christ is more precious to us than our own reputations will we give up our petty rivalries and personal agendas. Only when his glory eclipses all else will we live for his cause and no other.”¹⁴

How can you cultivate a humble attitude that sees people this way? Simply by growing in awareness of your sinfulness and the holiness of God by reading and meditating on His Word.

Paul considered himself the “chief of sinners,” the “least of all saints” and someone who was unworthy and unfit “to be called an apostle.” John the Baptist didn’t even consider himself worthy to untie Jesus’ sandals. Your awareness of

your sinfulness will correspond to your esteem of other people because you will have a greater sense of unworthiness.

Alexander Strauch wrote, “The humble person sees himself or herself in right perspective before an infinite, perfect, glorious creator-redeemer God and as a servant to others.”¹⁵

What’s the evidence that you are humble? That you “*count others more significant than yourself.*” Not to just have an opinion or that we pretend to think this way, but that we actually have a well-thought and formed conclusion that other people are more important, because of how Jesus treated us when we were unworthy.

Practically speaking, this means that when you recognize you have a disagreement over something that is preferential – you defer to other people. If you prefer hymns over contemporary songs, but you see that contemporary songs we sing are full of God-glorifying truth that others enjoy singing, then you joyfully defer. If you don’t prefer hymns then it works the other way too.

¹² John Piper, Future Grace (Multnomah Books: Colorado Springs, CO, 1995), 94.

¹³ Gavin Ortlund, “Humility Is Not Hating Yourself: The Joy of Self-Forgetfulness,” Desiring God, Aug. 21, 2019, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/humility-is-not-hating-yourself>

¹⁴ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/evangelical-integrity/>

¹⁵ Strauch, 46.

This is what a humble attitude looks like and it paves the way for the last attitude we need which is a servant attitude.

I. The Right Attitudes (3-4)

A. Selfless

B. Humble

C. Servant

Verse 4 says, ***“Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”***

Paul isn’t teaching us to not take care of ourselves or to never pursue our own interests. The word “not only” is key. We shouldn’t selfishly look to our own interests. This could refer to interests outside of the church. We can certainly allow our personal lives and activities to crowd out our responsibility to serve in the church.

But in this context, it’s assumed that believers are already actively serving for the sake of the gospel. In this context, Paul is referring more specifically to personal interests as they relate to serving the LORD. Quarrels and divisions quickly rise and get heated over spiritual issues that we are passionate about.

How do you cultivate this servant attitude? Well looking out for other’s interests requires something – powers of observation - it

requires that you actually know what other people are interested in. Sherlock Holmes is famous for his powers of observation. He chided Watson for missing clues saying “You see, but you do not observe.”¹⁶

How often do we see others here in the church, but fail to make observations. First step, in order to know people’s interests, you have to be willing to be in relationships with other people.

Just think about people within your immediate vicinity. Do you know the names of all the people in the row you’re sitting in? What about the row behind and in front of you? If you know their names, are you aware of the burdens and joys in their life? Do you know of ways you can serve others? If you don’t, then you have to ask yourself “why?” Are you like Watson, that you “see, but you do not observe”?

How about on a smaller scale – are you aware of the interests of others in your life group? Children and students, are you aware of the interests of others in your Sunday school class, during AWANA, or ROOTED ministry? Do you try to be kind to everyone, or do you just seek your own interests, fun, and friends.

To look out for the interests of others is to treat them as if it’s their birthday. When it’s someone’s birthday we gladly honor the person, seek to serve them, and plan fun activities and gifts based on their interests. This doesn’t mean we cater to every fancy they come up with – but that we take efforts to elevate their interests above our own. This is what a servant attitude looks like.

VIII. Conclusion

¹⁶ <https://www.christopherroosen.com/blog/2019/2/28/sherlock-holmes-and-the-power-of-observation>

Our text this morning really sober us to two things: the reality that we all struggle with selfish pride and that preserving unity is a continuous effort. Disagreements and conflicts are inevitable on this side of heaven. It only takes two people to start a conflict that can spread like wild fire in a church. But this passage also shines as a light in the midst of sinful darkness to show us the clear pathway to joyful unity and to handling disagreements in a Christ-honoring way.

There is always great hope when our company remains true to Christ. Just as we pray in our benediction every week from Philippians 1, we are dependent on Christ to help us abound all the more in love for one another through knowledge and discernment. The Word of God helps us grow in our awareness of our selfishness so that we can mortify and crucify our sinfulness and put on humility in its place. We all have a part to play in the unity of the church. We all have areas that we can grow in.



Application: At the end of the day, each of us is responsible to put on the humble attitude of Christ to preserve unity in the church.

That's what Paul commands us to do in the very next verse. Next week we will soak in the glorious example of Jesus who humbled Himself infinitely further than any of us ever have.

If your conscience has been pricked and made more aware of your tendency to selfishness don't despair. Jesus humbled himself in love to save you from your sin and to empower you to follow in his footsteps. We all are in need of greater awareness of our sin and greater awareness of God's holiness.

Adopt the right reasons to motivate you to unity. Keep your eyes on the right goals and cultivate the right attitudes. When disagreements come, and they will, when conflicts rear their ugly head, and they will, don't try to bury conflict or let time heal it. It won't. Don't run from it. As far as it is possible, be at peace with all.

Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God and He will exalt you. You'll never be more like Jesus than when you are humble.



— Today's Sermon ————— 3-19-23 —

“Unity Through Humility”
Philippians 2:1-4 - *Pastor Tysin Smith*

Main Point: **Unity in the church is sustained when you humble yourself before God and others.**

I. Right _____ (v.1)

- a. _____ Encouragement and Love
- b. _____ Indwelling
- c. _____ Compassion

II. Right _____ (v. 2)

- a. Same _____
- b. Same _____

III. Right _____ (vv. 3-4)

- a. _____ (3)
- b. _____ (3)
- c. _____ (4)

Application: **Put on the humble attitude of Christ to preserve unity in the church.**

Your responsibility by God's enabling is to consistently apply the divine principles and truth you've heard (Phil. 2:12-20, 1 Tim. 4:7-9, James 1:22-27).

As you meditate on this message, ask yourself:

- How does God want my beliefs/actions to change?
- How can I accomplish this change?
- What is the first step toward bringing about this change?