

Gospel Unity

Philippians 1:27-2:11¹

Introduction:

Divide and Conquer: When I was a kid, I knew to get what I wanted I had to divide and conquer my parents (e.g., spending the night at a friend's house, eating what I want, etc.). If my parents were united, I didn't stand a chance, if they were divided, the convicts were running the prison.

- Satan has done a good job of dividing us. Our country is divided. Our churches are divided. Our homes are divided.
- God has a word for us in Paul's letter to the Philippians, but he understands if you want unity you have to have a sturdy foundation. Paul starts in a powerful place – the gospel.
- True unity and true community = true strength. We are called “together for the gospel.”

1. The Gospel is the Foundation of Unity (1:27-30)

²⁷ Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, ³⁰ engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

One Thing: Only (“this one thing”) let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. **The gospel is the one thing that can handle being the one thing.** The gospel is the *only* thing that can bear the weight of your life. The gospel is the one thing that can bear the weight of your struggles, your joys, your hopes, your dreams, your marriage, your relationships, your parenting.

Information overload: The average person watches more than 6 hours of television daily; more than 3 hours online daily... Each day you receive messages from TV, movies, radio, ipod, email, text messages, cell phones, Facebook, Twitter, magazines, newspapers, books, blogs, websites, mail, and other advertising. Why does this all matter? Because the continual

¹ ²⁷ Μόνον ἀξιῶς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ πολιτεύεσθε, ἵνα εἴτε ἐλθὼν καὶ ἰδὼν ὑμᾶς εἴτε ἀπὼν ἀκούω τὰ περὶ ὑμῶν, ὅτι στήκετε ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι, μιᾷ ψυχῇ συναθροῦντες τῇ πίστει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ²⁸ καὶ μὴ πτυρόμενοι ἐν μηδενὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ἀντικειμένων, ἧτις ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς ἔνδειξις ἀπωλείας, ὑμῶν δὲ σωτηρίας, καὶ τοῦτο ἀπὸ θεοῦ· ²⁹ ὅτι ὑμῖν ἐχαρίσθη τὸ ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ, οὐ μόνον τὸ εἰς αὐτὸν πιστεῦν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ πάσχειν, ³⁰ τὸν αὐτὸν ἀγῶνα ἔχοντες, οἷον εἶδετε ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ νῦν ἀκούετε ἐν ἐμοί. ^{2:1} Εἴ τις οὖν παράκλησις ἐν Χριστῷ, εἴ τι παραμύθιον ἀγάπης, εἴ τις κοινωνία πνεύματος, εἴ τις σπλάγχνα καὶ οἰκτιρμοί, ² πληρώσατέ μου τὴν χαρὰν ἵνα τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε, τὴν αὐτὴν ἀγάπην ἔχοντες, σύμφυχοι, τὸ ἐν φρονούντες, ³ μηδὲν κατ' ἐριθείαν μηδὲ κατὰ κενοδοξίαν ἀλλὰ τῇ ταπεινοφροσύνῃ ἀλλήλους ἠγούμενοι ὑπερέχοντας ἑαυτῶν, ⁴ μὴ τὰ ἑαυτῶν ἕκαστος σκοποῦντες ἀλλὰ [καὶ] τὰ ἐτέρων ἕκαστοι. ⁵ τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ⁶ ὃς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων οὐχ ἄρπαγμόν ἠγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ, ⁷ ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβὼν, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος· καὶ σχήματι εὐρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος ⁸ ἐταπεινώσεν ἑαυτὸν γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου, θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ. ⁹ διὸ καὶ ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερύψωσεν καὶ ἐχαρίσατο αὐτῷ τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὄνομα, ¹⁰ ἵνα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ πᾶν γόνυ κάμψῃ ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων ¹¹ καὶ πᾶσα γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσῃται ὅτι κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρὸς.

onslaught of information has the tragic effect of causing us to overlook the few things that we truly must know. **We have information but lack wisdom** (cf. “discern what is best).

- The Gospel is the foundation of all of life; it's not just a ticket to heaven (e.g., marriage, parenting, ministry, etc.). “Our temptation is to think that the gospel is for beginners and then we go on to greater things. But the real challenge is to see the gospel as the greatest thing — and getting greater all the time” (Piper).

Gospel Citizenship: Let your manner of life (i.e., lifestyle). “Live as citizens” (πολιτεύεσθε). Live up to the ideals and values of your culture. He says “live as citizens of a gospel country.” Live a “gospel lifestyle.”

- We are not citizens of Rome (e.g., Philippians) or Israel (e.g., Jewish listeners) or America (e.g., modern hearers) but of the kingdom of God – live like it!
 - When we talk about “unity” this isn't just Coexist™ or “let's just get along.” This is *togetherness* founded in the gospel.
 - If our “working together” means we have to share the same interests, opinions, and preferences, we are sunk. **But**, if our unity is deeply rooted in the life-changing power of the gospel, then we have hope!
 - The gospel, and nothing else, is our foundation for unity.

Gospel Community: I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,

- Our culture understands “birds of a feather flock together.” If we are to have diverse unity then we must have a transcendent unifier. The gospel is strong enough to bind different people together (e.g., one body and *many* parts). **Because the gospel is our unifier, nothing else has to be.**
- We can share a common life because we share a common gospel. We'll never have “gospel unity” if we do things our way (e.g., Burger King Christianity; consumers vs, builders). We have to do things God's way.

Garden Community: Sin breaks relationships. We were created for community (e.g., God, “not good to be alone,” wife). God exists as eternal community (e.g., Trinity). When our first parents sinned, the effects were a break in our fellowship with God and with one-another (e.g., husband and wife relationship broken in the garden). The effect of sin is broken community.

- All of us were designed to be in communion with God and one another, it's not an option.
- Without it, we won't be strong enough to endure the challenges of this fallen world, but with it will not be frightened by opposition. We will have the strength to not only to believe but also suffer with joy for the sake of Christ.

The story of the gospel is the story of death and resurrection, of brokenness and restoration, of creation, destruction, and re-creation. In Christ, we are restored in our relationship to God and to our relationship with one-another. The gospel makes us alive in Christ and remakes us into a community. **The picture of heaven is unbroken communion with God and with his people.** In an incomplete, imperfect way the church has the opportunity to picture that eternal community now.

With: **σὺν** (i.e., “with” or “together”) prefix (cf. “im”-perfect, possible): partner together (1:7), strive together (1:27), united together (2:2), rejoice together (2:17, 18), work together (2:25), soldier together (2:25), imitate together (3:17), labor together (4:3), work together (4:3), participate together (4:14) – **11x**

- "Is [our] church unified? Jesus commands us to go to the world, but if there's dissension among us. He commands us to be committed to one another in love, affirming and strengthening each other as fellow workers in His kingdom. It's no exaggeration to say that, without a deeply [and] spiritually united team, our hearts can never be synchronized with God's" (Dave Black).
- **Community isn't found, it's built** (i.e., standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side). We aren't called to merely *participate* in gospel community but to *build* it. We must commit to developing this type of community.

Unity: Unity is described as one spirit (ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι, 1:27) and “one soul” (μιά ψυχή, 1:27), having “the same mind” (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε, 2:2), “one mind” (τὸ ἓν φρονοῦντες, 2:2).

- Why is being united so important? Why does a gospel life demand gospel unity? Why is togetherness a requirement of the gospel? Because the gospel is a **reconciling word**. The very shape of the gospel involves bringing broken relationships together. Jesus takes us from brokenness to restoration, estrangement to fellowship, enemy to friend. He tears down the dividing wall between us and God, and us and one another (e.g., Jew and Gentile). **If our gospel is to be believed then it has to be demonstrated. If we as believers live in division then our message is hard to trust.**

Gospel Unity...

(1) Reflects the character of God. "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (Jn 17:20). We worship one God in three persons, unity and diversity. When we are one body with many parts we reflect the very nature of God.

(2) Demonstrates the power of the gospel. "May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (Jn 17:23) The church is the one place where worldly categories shouldn't set the terms of our unity. We are not here because of shared style, experience, or social status. When people see us, they are compelled to ask what brings us together. Only the gospel is that strong. **The church is not pursuing sameness but oneness. We are seeking unity, not uniformity** (e.g., cake, baked together by the HS). Our unity is for the purpose "that the world would believe" (Jn 20:21).

- Perfect unity doesn't mean we're all alike. The Lord doesn't redeem diversity by destroying it, but redeems diversity by giving us eyes to see the beauty we once were blind to. He draws us together around him, not by obliterating our differences but by transcending them with his own majesty.
- "From politics to sports to culture to family, everybody believes that their way is *the way*. When we flatten church to a particular way of looking, dressing, singing, etc. we make the church a monochromatic, one-dimensional place and we rob the gospel of its

unifying power. But when all of us, different kinds of people, walk together in unity for the glory of Christ despite our many external differences, God looks really big and our lives show the value of the gospel.”

(3) Prepares us for an eternity of community. The unity that only the gospel can bring is a “foretaste” (e.g. appetizer, sampler) of eternity. “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” ” (Rev 7:9-10). “The church is not simply an aggregation of individuals who are saved, but it is a ‘pilot plant’ of what humanity would look like under the Lordship of Christ. We are to show the world a whole new way of being human” (Tim Keller)

The gospel calls us to unity and unity is the foundation for the effective witness of the church but unity can only be accomplished through humility.

2. Humility is Required for Gospel Unity (2:1-4)

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.

Humility: How does the gospel produce unity? Through humility. The gospel humbles us. The gospel reminds us that, “We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope” (Keller).

- Think of your worst decision, action, thought, etc. God loved *that* you (enough to die for you). If that doesn’t humble you, nothing will.

“If” (vv. 1-4): if you’ve experienced Christ then you must be humble. Arrogance has no place in the presence of Jesus.

- This is the foundation of gospel unity and gospel community. **We are all needy and needed.** Unknown and loved (superficial); known and unloved (fear); known and loved (gospel = modeled in our community).
- Pride kills community. Christ humbles us so our preferences don’t destroy us.
 - “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought” (Rom 12:3).
 - “Honor one another above yourselves” (Rom 12:10).
 - “Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others” (1 Cor 10:24).
 - “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:39).
- “No Christian can be at peace with God if he or she is constantly at odds with other Christians. There can be no unity where there is desire for personal prestige.” (Black).

Counting Others: In humility count others more significant than yourselves. Treating others not as they are but as God treated you. *Regard them* as more significant. They *aren't* more significant but you treat them that way (e.g., this is not a gospel scholarship but gospel charity, not earned but freely given). **The question is not whether someone is worthy, but will you consider them as worthy?**

- “Do not look out for your own *interests*, but also the *interests* of others” (v. 4). The word *interests* is a filler. In the original, it is open-ended. Do not only look out for “your own (blank)”. Fill in the blank with whatever is appropriate (e.g., finances, property, family, health, reputation, education, success, happiness).

Covenant Love: “True love is finding joy in the happiness of others” (Piper). This is true in marriage, parenting, and the church. In the self-centeredness of our society, we struggle to devote to anyone but ourselves. This is hardly more prevalent than in the view of marriage and the ubiquity of divorce.

- “A [marriage] covenant never claims to regulate love’s intensity but only its security. What the world does not see is that love that truly loves is willing to bind itself, is willing to promise, willing and gladly obligates itself so that the other may stand securely in that love” (Davis).
- This is why we believe in membership and accountability. This is why we “covenant” or promise certain things to each other. **We are committed to one another.** We are promising to be here. We’re not going anywhere. We are committed through thick and thin. We are family. **We are trying to grow a family, not draw a crowd.** We know what it’s like to be lonely and we want everyone to find their place and belong in the family of God.
- “We want to see the gospel demonstrated in our church through people living grace-filled lives that have patience and mercy and gentleness for the spiritual journeys of others and respect for the differences and idiosyncrasies we all bring to the Lord’s table [because] the ground is level at the foot of [the] cross” (Chandler).

Humility is the fertile soil the gospel produces to allow true community to blossom. And Christ shows us what such humility looks like and empowers us to live like him.

3. Christ Leads Us on the Path of Humility (2:5-11)

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- You can tell that Paul is a preacher because he uses a song to illustrate his point (*Carmen Christi*). To show how important humility is to the cause of the gospel, he uses the life of Jesus as his central example.

Mind: Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. That word “mind” should sound familiar. We are told to have the “same mind” (τὸ ἓν φρονοῦντες, v. 2) which is humility. Humility means “lowliness of mind” (τῆ ταπεινοφροσύνη, v. 3). This mind is the mind of Christ (τοῦτο φρονεῖτε, 5).

- How can you be of **the same mind**? By being **humble of mind** which is exactly the **mind** of Christ.

Humility of Christ: How humble was Christ? He went from heaven to earth. That’s the longest mission trip anyone has taken. He didn’t just come to earth but took on flesh. He didn’t just become a human but a servant and he didn’t just serve a little; he served to the point of death!

Holding Tight: Jesus didn’t hold tightly to his rights or position (did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped). He **let go** to serve us. Jesus willingly let go of what he deserved.

- To live and love like Christ we have to let go of what we think we deserve so he can give us something better, i.e., life eternal and joy everlasting (e.g., *monkey holding nut*).
 - Don’t cling to your dreams; cling to God’s dreams for you. Let go of what you think you deserve so you can find in Christ more than you imagined.
- Rather than “get”, Jesus chose to give. Following Jesus, having “the mind of Christ” means to serve; it is a downward path of humility. **It means sacrificial self-giving, rather than entitled self-taking.** In God’s economy, the way up is down.
- At the end of his descent, is God’s victory and glory. In the end, God wins. God always wins. One day, at the name of Jesus every knee [will] bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
 - Regardless of what everyone tells you, regardless of your circumstances, regardless of your past, Jesus wins.

Conclusion

So What?: With the gospel as our foundation we can walk together down the road of humble service, the same road as Jesus, our Savior and Lord. And at the end of that journey God gets all the glory for the great things he has done.

- You say, “Sure, Christ can be humble like that, but I can’t!”
 - It seems impossible to live “worthy of the gospel,” but living worthy of the gospel is about dying with Christ to one’s self and being raised in Christ to walk in the newness of life only he can give.
 - It requires turning from our sin and ourselves and trusting in Jesus. It means depending on his righteousness and not our own.

- “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20).
“Christ becomes what we are [enabling] us to become what he is” (O'Brien).
 - Give him the keys to the car, not just co-pilot.
 - Not just “be good” (like I saw). You can’t. You need change.
 - Good news if the gospel, God can change your heart (faith in him; “give me a new heart”).