Philippians 2:1-4 United we stand…

1. Introduction

a. Without us even saying a word, our lives can be like a light shining in the darkness of a society that has lost its way, that has no answers to the problems and complexities of life, and for many, life itself seems to have no purpose and meaning. As we continue in Philippians we will see that God has put a living hope within our hearts and power to live each day as citizens of heaven, a powerful testimony of God's glory. Paul writes to encourage the Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 3:2-3 *You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. [3] And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.*

b. Don't underestimate the power of your own testimony as you go about your daily life – you never know who is being impacted by what they see in you. Again, Paul speaks about us being the fragrance of Christ both to those who are being saved and to those who are perishing.

c. Chapter 2 begins with a continuation from chapter 1. Very often Paul in his writings will say something, and then he will say the same thing again, or he will enlarge upon one or more aspects of it, and that's what he is doing in today's verses.

Philippians 2:1-4 *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 rivalry 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.*

2. The Importance of Unity

a. We all want harmonious relationships – life would be so much easier if it weren't for other people! In reality, so often the biggest problem isn't someone else – it's me! These verses are a mirror for us, like a personal plum-line to see how we measure up. Paul is giving us a framework to check ourselves against.

b. There are two main dangers facing the church today. The first is an attack on the authority of the word of God and biblical truth. Things like God's standards of righteousness, his intolerance of sin, and the absolute finality of God's word. Alongside this are attacks on the unity of the church, attempts to disrupt, weaken and destroy a church by causing discord, disharmony, conflict and division. Fracturing the church is one of Satan's major objectives; so the challenge to preserve the unity of the spirit is vital.

c. First of all, what do we mean by unity in the church? Unity of the spirit is an inner desire to live together in a co-operative manner, to be on the same team, to pursue the same objectives, all for the benefit of one another and for the glory of God. One of the most beautiful ways the Spirit manifests this unity is through diversity. In any fellowship of believers, we will never see eye to eye on everything. We are all influenced by habits, culture, education, and the measure of maturity that we have gained. Unity comes when we are prepared to lay down lesser things for

the sake of the greater thing – the exaltation of Jesus in our midst. Paul refers to it as "having the mind of Christ" which is a theme he develops in the course of this letter.

3. Framework for Unity

a. Paul firstly gives the **information** – the "what" of unity, and then he gives the **exhortation** – the "how" of unity. In v1 he outlines the **motives** for unity; in v2 he outlines the **marks** of unity; and in v3-4 he outlines the **means** to unity. Here's the same verses in the NET translation:

Philippians 2:1-4 *Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort provided by love, any fellowship in the Spirit, any affection or mercy, [2] complete my joy and be of the same mind, by having the same love, being united in spirit, and having one purpose. [3] Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition or vanity, each of you should, in humility, be moved to treat one another as more important than yourself. [4] Each of you should be concerned not only about your own interests, but about the interests of others as well.*

b. Paul begins with four "if" statements followed by eight "by" instructions. In normal English the word "if" is normally associated with possibilities. For instance, we would say "I'll have to water the garden tonight if it doesn't rain." But Paul turns this in its head by using the "if" statements in a particular grammatical use pointing to a fulfilled condition.

   i Paul is really raising a series of rhetorical questions in the mind of his readers. The statement "if there is any encouragement in Christ" would raise the question "Is there any encouragement in Christ?" To which he expects the response to be "yes, there is." By using this particular construction, he is bringing emphasis to them, causing his readers to stop and think for a moment – "Is that true? Yes it is."

c. Summary of these statements:

   If any encouragement in Christ
   If any comfort of love
   If any fellowship in the Spirit
   If any affection or mercy

   complete my joy

   by being like-minded
   by having the same love
   by being one in spirit
   by having one purpose
   by (doing) nothing according to selfish ambition or vanity, but
   by regarding one another as more important than yourselves
   by each one not being concerned about their own interests only, but also
   by (being concerned) about the interests of others

d. This is Paul's checklist that he wants us to consider as we work at achieving unity in the church. Is there anything we can say about the "if" statements as a whole? They are motives for unity, catalysts that provide the environment where unity can be expected. The first three are the result of God's work on behalf of his people, what he produces in us by direct interaction through

his Word and his Spirit. The fourth has to do with relationships within the church and the outworking of our community life together.

4. If there is any…

a. **<u>Encouragement in Christ</u>**. Unity must begin with Jesus – the source of all our blessings, and we have nothing outside of him. He is the author and perfecter of our faith, and has reconciled us to God through the cross. We have received a great deal of encouragement because we know Jesus. Encouragement comes from a Greek word that speaks of someone who comes alongside to help. Literally, it means "one who comes to the side of another to stimulate or comfort him."

   i The Holy Spirit is described as "the paraclete" – he is the one who comes alongside us to bring us strength and encouragement. Paul is using the same idea here, speaking of Jesus.

   ii When something goes wrong in the context of church fellowship, it can be a source of great discouragement. At such times, our union with Jesus, His all-sufficiency, and His promise never to leave us or forsake us, are a source of real hope. The encouragement Jesus gives is a motivation to live to please Him, even if attempts at reconciliation are resisted.

b. **<u>Comfort of love</u>**. Comfort here is similar to encouragement, but refers to words. It speaks of persuasive address, bringing comfort and healing. Comfort here means to settle the soul. The tender persuasion and encouragement that leads to unity, comes from God's love. Realization of God's love which reaches down and saves, should urge us to live in a spirit of unity with one another. Also, this godly love produced in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, should cause us to so love one other with a love that is sacrificial, so that any little differences will be ironed out, and we will live in unity with one another.

   i Strained relationships result in a sense of loss. The solution is to lean on Jesus, receiving the comfort of his love. Jesus loved you when you were a rebel and undeserving, and that is how he wants us to extend love to others. My love for others shouldn't be dependent on their response to me; but it must depend on the comforting love of Jesus for me.

c. **<u>Fellowship in the Spirit</u>**. Paul appeals to the participation in the work of the Holy Spirit among the Philippians. He is the source of their strength enabling them to love each. Fellowship – ***koinonia*** – means to hold things in common, the things we all experience that the indwelling Spirit brings to us. The Holy Spirit is active and involved in our lives, both indwelling us individually, and also at the heart of our corporate life together.

   i We all have access to the same Holy Spirit, and he doesn't change – what he says to one is the same as what he says to another. In any given fellowship he will be saying the same things to each member of the fellowship; we all have fellowship with the same Spirit.

d. **<u>Affection or mercy</u>.** The word we have translated as *affection*, in the Greek is ***splagchna*** – which literally means the intestines or the bowels. In the ancient world, the bowels were regarded as the seat of the affections and emotions. What Paul is referring to here is the deep, internal caring or expression of deep feelings, expressions like "broken-hearted" or "gut-wrenching."

   i When we are walking in the Spirit, being conformed to the likeness of Jesus, it's his compassion and affection that flows through us to our fellow men whom Jesus loves and for

whom He died. We have the privilege of being a partner with Jesus in sharing his compassion to those around us.

ii If we feel mistreated, unloved or betrayed by a fellow believer, we have the privilege of drawing near to Jesus and encountering his heart of love. Here we can find the strength and desire to release others from the pull of our negative emotions because of the mercy that he has shown to us.

5. Complete my joy…

a. The context for v2 is that though Paul's circumstances of being a prisoner and having believers purposely trying to add to his distress, he was nevertheless joyful in what God was doing in the midst of his current tribulations. Though he couldn't visit them they could still add to his joy by living out these truths in unity with one another. In a parallel passage in Colossians Paul says something similar:

Colossians 3:12-13 *Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, [13] bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*

b. Paul directs his readers' thoughts toward different ways in which they can come to a place of greater unity and complete his joy. There is a correlation between attitude and harmonious relationships, it doesn't happen just by natural compatibility. There are things that have to be worked at, built on a mind-set that works at seeking unity.

c. **Having the same mind**. The foundation for this unity of understanding is holding to the same biblical truths; if there isn't agreement on the foundation, there cannot be agreement on the principles built on those foundations. Unity does not come at the expense of truth, but because of truth. We must not set aside essential truth for the sake of unity. It's an active striving towards common understanding that leads to genuine agreement.

i Not that we must all see every little detail exactly the same, or hold the same opinion on every issue. Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 12 is that for the body to function effectively there has to be diversity, we're not all the same. This is a call for us to focus on what we have in common in Christ, and not focus on our own desires and preferences.

ii The word translated "mind" has no direct English equivalent. It's more than just being the way we think. It means is that we should have the same attitude-set, the same framework of thinking and feeling. It goes way beyond our opinions or preferences because it also impacts upon our will and our emotions. When we share the same mind that we have the basis for working through any conflicts.

d. **Having the same love.** We must have our minds geared towards godly love so we seek the highest good of one another. If we want to show godly love, we have to commit ourselves to the best interest of others, based on our conviction of what is right before God, not on personal feelings or preferences. This is agape love, which is based on an intentional, conscious choice seeking the good of others.

i This mutual love is expressed in the way we treat one another, and not just in our words – sacrificially sharing with those in need, or going the extra mile. We cannot produce this kind

of love on our own, it only comes as we allow Jesus to love others through us. The more we become like Jesus the greater our unity will be.

e. **<u>One in spirit</u>**. Unity at the soul level, literally "one in soul". Unity is much deeper than just agreeing about our doctrine and world-view. There is something much more substantial here where mutual love causes us to have our souls knit together.

   i As Christians, we are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. We strive to have no division among us, but rather have the same care for one another, because if one member suffers, all of us suffer with them, and likewise, if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with them. Our common bond in Jesus and our fellowship in the Holy Spirit unites us in one spirit with one another and thus brings about unity.

f. **<u>We have one purpose</u>**. Having the same mind, the same love and being of one spirit all contribute to us having the same purpose. whatever we are doing, we are all working towards the same goal: to bring the greatest glory to God. It means that God's agenda trumps our agendas. So whatever we set out to do as a community of God's people, we give ourselves to it 100%, each one employing the gifting and the resources that God has given us.

g. Having set the goals before us, knowing what we are aiming for, Paul gives us some practical ways to help us achieve those goals. All of these bring us into conflict with our base human nature, things we have to war against in our flesh. They are not easy to overcome; we have to work at them if we are to prevail.

6. Where the rubber hits the road

Philippians 2:3 *Do nothing from rivalry [selfish ambition] or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.*

a. We are not the centre of the universe, and the world does not revolve around us. In the 15th Nicholas Copernicus, an astronomer, demonstrated that the sun was at the centre and the earth rotated around the sun. It was revolutionary because it countered what everyone had believed.

b. We live in a world that is all about self: self-realisation, self-determination, self-esteem, self-help and so on. In 2002 a new word came into popular use – the selfie, where the main focus of the picture was yourself.

c. Selfishness, for the sake of personal gratification or advantage, disregards the rights or feelings of others. The world's way of resolving conflicts is to teach you to stand up for your rights, be assertive, negotiate for what you want; in other word to make sure that you get what you consider to be rightfully yours.

d. In contrast to these worldly ways, Paul says that we must do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit – specific manifestations of pride, which is the root of all other sins. One of the most common ways in which this pride is manifested is through a critical spirit. This operates like a cancer in the church – often hidden from sight, but always there under the surface. As well as being quick to criticise others, this problem also manifests itself through gossip, slander, judgmentalism and complaining.

e. Paul says, "In humility, count others more significant than yourself." [v3] This is one of the hardest verses in whole of the new testament to put into practice, and we can only do so through the power of God at work within us. We have to learn how to see others through Jesus' eyes. Will you count others worthy of your help and encouragement? Not, are they worthy, but will you count them as worthy? It requires that you humble yourself.

Philippians 2:4 *Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

f. Finally, in v4 Paul says that we need to take our eyes off ourselves and look to the needs of others. JB Philips translation: "None of you should think only of his own affairs, but should learn to see things from other people's point of view." The word "interests" is not there in the Greek. All that is specified is "your own (something)" or "the other's (something)." So it could be, "Let each of you look not only to your own…… [fill in the blank]." Don't just think about that, think about the other's….. [blank].

g. Take care of your own affairs, but also look out for others. Paul's call for us here is to go beyond our own affairs because humility looks at life in terms of how what we do affects others.

   i But we also need to be discerning, for the sake of one another. Looking to the interests of others doesn't mean we give way to their every desire or requirement, otherwise we may end up feeding their selfishness or vanity. Consider ways in which we can bless others, and use the gifting and resources that we have to be a blessing to them.

7. Conclusion

a. Paul is deeply concerned with unity in the church, and so should we be. In Psalm 133, David, the author, describes unity with two vivid metaphors. Oil running down the head, beard, and robes of Aaron may seem odd to our modern imaginations. Oil symbolized blessing. In the same way, unity shows that God's Spirit is at work in his people. Similarly, dew flowing from the snow-capped Mt. Hermon blesses the land beneath it, including Jerusalem. Unity is contagious. It feels great when we experience it, and sorely missed in times of tension.

b. There is a sweetness of communion that can only be known by those whose lives are laid in the dust at Jesus' feet. We long for the place where the definitive unity of the godhead is stamped deeply on the community of his people. This is the sweet unity for which we yearn and which can only be ours through the one who was cut off in order that we might be forever grafted in to the fellowship that will never fail.

Psalm 133 *Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! [2] It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! [3] It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.*