

Fellowship Through Humility Philippians 2:1-11

You may not be a basketball fan, but even if all you did was watch the news, the name Charles Barkley may have been someone you heard about back in the early 1990's. He was a controversial person both on and off the court. During a game in 1991, he was being heckled by someone courtside spouting racist comments. He confronted the racist and spit at him but missed and hit an 8-year-old girl instead. He was suspended and fined \$10,000.

During and after his basketball career, he has been outspoken on many things from sports to politics. Perhaps one of the more controversial comments came during the airing of a commercial he did for Nike in 1993. They had enjoyed top spot in the sports shoe market 92% of teenage guys. In one year they lost nearly 20% of the market to Reebok. To gain back some of its lost shares, Nike employed Charles Barkley to do a commercial to hit a nerve with teen guys and woo them back to the sports shoe giant. The controversy surrounding the ad was his statement claiming he was not a role model.

On one hand that is not necessarily true. Every person in the spotlight no matter what it is, whether sports, politics or entertainment is, in some way, a role model. You may remember the catch phrase around that time when Michael Jordan hit the hardwood floor when it was bantered around "I want to be like Mike." Kids looked at Barkley and like it or not they wanted to be like him, play like him. But he said he wasn't a role model. Now, in all fairness, Barkley went on to say something in the commercial that helps us understand what he meant.

When he said he wasn't a role model, he also went on to say that kids should be taught to emulate their parents, not athletes or celebrities saying that just because he could dunk a basketball, didn't mean he should raise your kids. He pitched the idea to Nike because he felt at the time, and it's just as true today, that society needed to do a better job at choosing the right role models. A national debate ensued as to whether athletes have a duty to set a good example for kids to look up to.

Some thought he made a valid point, that parents are better positioned than celebrities to teach the value of hard work or right from wrong. Others thought he was shirking his responsibility as a person of influence and excusing his behavior.

Someone who criticized his statement was Carl Malone who said that being a role model wasn't Barkley's decision to make. He was one by virtue of being in the public eye. The only choice he said Barkley had was whether to be a good or bad role model. He added that you can't accept all the glory and money and not accept the responsibility that comes with it of setting a good example knowing that people of all ages look at them as role models – good or bad. Now almost 30 years later, that debate is still going on.

From our text today, there is no controversy about the person Paul encourages us to emulate. His example in both attitude and action leads the way for the unity and fellowship we display in the body of Christ. Our discussion centers around the one issue of concern that Paul addresses with the believers in Philippi. The issue of unity and humility is the topic of **chapter 2**. Whether it was intended as a general concern about what was happening in the church or specifically directed at Euodia and Syntyche whom he mentions in **chapter 4** is uncertain. The reality is that if we will be a church, a people others can look up to depends on how well we do at what Paul has to say in these verses. Please turn to **Philippians 2**.

From **verses 1-4** let's consider an exhortation.

I. AN EXHORTATION – vv. 1-4

Back in **1:27** Paul wrote about living a Christian life that is in harmony with the message of the gospel with a call to show spiritual unity.

“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.”

The word “if” appears four times in **verse 1** and can be translated “since” or “because” and speaks of certainty. It looks forward to a divinely given reality. Such certainty is evident by four marks of unity.

A. Four Measures of Unity – v. 1

These four measures are meant to motivate them for Christian unity. It’s an opportunity for introspection and are intended for us to consider in our effort of pursuing fellowship in the body of Christ. **Are we living our lives in Christ and are we living in a spirit of Christian unity?**

1. Encouragement from being united with Christ

It can also read “**united in Christ.**” The reality of salvation is that when we trust Christ as Savior, we are in Christ. To be in Christ simply means to be saved. **II Corinthians 5:17** attests to that. This union with Christ means that we enjoy an intimate relationship with Him. It is the mystery of His living in us.

The word encouragement is used by Jesus in **John 14:16** when He speaks of the coming Holy Spirit that will be sent when He leaves. The word can also be translated exhortation in the sense of rebuking or comforting. One is negative and the other is positive.

When we think of a rebuke, we often mean scolding or reprimanding someone in a sharp way. A rebuke can either be corrective as in **II Timothy 3:16** when Paul says that the word of God rebukes us, meaning that it points out where we have gone astray from obeying God’s commands. This kind of rebuke is corrective in that it not only shows us where we have gone wrong, but it also points us in the direction we should be going that is right.

But a rebuke can also refer to criticism that is intended only to point out a fault without any thought of being corrective.

Paul is using the word to appeal to the Philippian church to strive for spiritual unity. It’s an

encouragement toward unity rather than division. Let’s remember that unity is not uniformity. Unity comes from within. Uniformity comes from pressure without. If we are truly in Christ, then we will work toward unity because love does not divide. Encouragement then, is coming alongside others to assist them either through words or actions. That’s what brings the church together in unity. In this case it is encouraging one another in such a way that our conduct is worthy of the gospel. Such unity stems from the influence of having Christ in us. Keep in mind that being united with Christ isn’t just referring to a singular relationship that exists between the believer and Christ, but includes a union with all believers who are also united with Christ.

2. Comfort from His love

Every believer receives comfort from Christ’s love. We should be comforted by the fact that Christ loved us enough to leave the splendor of heaven and come to earth as a man to die in our place, carrying our sin, guilt and shame to the cross so that we can be made righteous or right with God. Receiving comfort from His love should be a motivating factor to pursue unity in the body of Christ.

The word used here for comfort is close to the word Paul used for encouragement. Both words speak of showing genuine concern, helpfulness and love.

This same love was given by Christ to undeserving sinners when in grace He offered salvation. Grace is the demonstration of His love.

Ephesians 2:8-9

Romans 5:5-8

Walvoord and Zuck write that “**God’s love in people’s hearts produces spiritual unity in their lives.**”

Imagine, if you will, that God’s love was in some way fickle causing Him to change His mind about you. The demonstration of love from that kind of God would leave us wondering where we stood on any given moment on any given day. We couldn’t depend on Him keeping His promises.

We couldn't depend on His forgiveness.
 We couldn't depend on His grace or mercy.
 We couldn't depend on His love, comfort, peace.
 Would He choose to enact punishment?
 Would He enact His wrath and judgment?

But God's unchanging nature means every day we will be comforted by knowing that His love never changes, that He will never view us differently even if we blow it and sin.

He has loved us with an unchanging and everlasting love that is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His love should bring us comfort.

3. Fellowship with His Spirit

This kind of Spirit driven fellowship is seen in **II Corinthians 13:14** **“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”**

Remember that it is the Holy Spirit that binds us together in Christ in the first place through common faith in Christ for salvation. The fellowship of the Spirit is the result of His permanently indwelling the believer and the ensuing work that He does in us. This is more than just having the Spirit living in us through His act of regenerating work at the moment we are saved. Fellowship with the Spirit implies a willingness on our part to allow His work to continue in us conforming us in the likeness or character of Christ to whom we now belong.

As a matter of fact, when we place our faith in Christ as Savior and God gives us the Holy Spirit to live in us, we become His temple. We belong to Him. He is not ours to command. We are His to obey. Fellowship, as I said, implies we are doing what He tells us, living by His rules. Our body is the sacred home of the Holy Spirit, and sin taints it, making a crack in that fellowship with Him. This kind of fellowship with the Spirit is intimate because He lives in us, compelling us to godliness.

4. Tenderness and compassion

When we are in fellowship with the Spirit, these are a product of the Holy Spirit's work in us. They are a

work of His grace as we yield to His divine transformation to make us like Christ in character. This work produces in each believer love and concern for one another in the members of God's family. It is our choice whether to accept or reject that work in our lives. If we accept it, the outflow is fellowship within the body. If we reject it, the result will be division.

This work of the Holy Spirit is the basis of fellowship and is evident in our attitudes and actions toward each other. Without the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in each believer, genuine fellowship on a spiritual level can't happen. We won't exhibit the fruit of the Spirit from **Galatians 5:22-23** and neither can we demonstrate genuine love as Paul outlines for us in **I Corinthians 13:4-7**. A lack of the Holy Spirit's work in the life of a believer will not produce love or hospitality showing little concern for the welfare of others and no desire to serve each other. We will not be devoted to them.

The kind of tenderness and compassion Paul is referring to is a deep and personal longing toward others that looks out for their well-being. Isaiah gives us a picture of this in describing the nature of the prophesied Messiah.

Isaiah 42:3 **“A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out.”**

Think about how fragile a bruised reed is. It represents someone who is weak and hurting. The Messiah will be someone who mends broken lives. He knows how fragile we are and treats us with gentleness. Showing tenderness and compassion is means by which we demonstrate unity.

The word compassion used here is the same word translated mercy in **Romans 12:1**.

Lamentations 3:22-23 reminds us that God's compassion is new every morning. Why? Because He is faithful.

Matthew 9:36 says that as Jesus traveled to different towns and villages, He had compassion on people because they were like sheep without a

shepherd. He then told His disciples to ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers to bring in the harvest of souls among those who were lost.

We are to exhibit the same tenderness and compassion in the body of Christ as He showed us.

Colossians 3:12 tells us to clothe ourselves with compassion.

Paul has given us four measures of our unity. He then gives us four marks of unity.

B. Four Marks of Unity – v. 2

Paul wants to motivate the church toward fellowship measured in **verse 1**. **Verse 2** helps us see what that fellowship looks like. **Or to put it another way, if unity is to exist what does it look like in the life of each believer?** He gives practical ways unity is demonstrated through being in Christ. By living out these principles, Paul's joy would be made complete. He would see that his work among them was having a positive impact in their church as they sought after unity together.

1. We will be likeminded

To be likeminded literally means to think the same thing. If there is going to be unity in the body of Christ, then thinking right is essential. Paul isn't referring to issues of doctrine, although there should be an agreement on the fundamentals of doctrine, for example, on matters like the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, salvation by grace alone.

Neither is he referring to standards of morality, although we can agree that there is a Biblical basis for conduct that cannot be altered by cultural whims, public opinion, or changing laws.

I believe that Paul is talking about the body of believers actively striving to achieve a common understanding and genuine agreement on seeking fellowship in the body of Christ through mutual effort. They all work at it.

Verse 5 says we should have the same attitude/mind as Christ. It says in **I Corinthians 2:16** that **"we have the mind of Christ."** If we have His mind, it

stands to reason that we will be like minded.

Romans 8:5 says we should have our minds set on what the Spirit desires, walking after Him, rather than having our minds set on what the nature desires. One leads to death, the other leads to peace.

Philippians 4:8 tells us what kinds of things we should think about, things that would be a reflection of having the same mind.

In **II Corinthians 13:11**, Paul exhorts believers to be of one mind.

2. We will have or maintain the same love

This is a direct result of or flows from having the same mind and means that we are to love each other equally. No one person is better or to be treated differently than anyone else.

John 13:34-35

James 2:1-9

I John 4:7-12

The compelling argument to a watching world as to the genuineness of our faith and fellowship is in how we love each other. When we love one another as God loves us, we demonstrate that we are followers of Christ. This kind of love is a willful, intentional, and self-sacrificing choice that seeks the welfare of one another – regardless. **Romans 12:10, 13** tell us that we are to be devoted to one another in the same love accompanied with a desire to serve. This kind of love was demonstrated by Christ.

I John 3:16-18

And while our text is specifically to believers, we are to also love those outside the body of Christ. The person who lacks this kind of love will be self-centered, an attitude that will stymie unity.

As we sang last week **"they will know we are Christians by our love."**

3. We will be one in spirit

Just as you can't have the same love without first being likeminded, being one in spirit only happens if the first two are evident.

The word **"united"** literally means being one-

souled. The kind of friendship David and Johnathan had could be considered as one-souled, knit together through an unbreakable bond. It's the same idea found in **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.”** Think of this body of believers standing shoulder to shoulder facing any hardships together.

It refers to having selfless harmony with other believers and is grounded on the truth of God's Word. About this spirit of oneness, John MacArthur puts it this way when he writes that there is a **“deep and passionate concern for God, His Word, His work, this gospel and His people.”**

Such desire compels believers to use their unique gifts in the body to benefit each other and to glorify God at the same time. Paul is motivating them to do whatever it takes to not allow differences to divide them or hinder their work for the Lord.

4. We will be one in purpose

Again, this is only possible if the other three are being actively pursued and evident. Goals and aims will be different and conflicting if we aren't first being likeminded, then one-souled, and then having the same love. Being one in purpose is the natural outflow of the other three and is synonymous with having the same mind. They are complimentary and overlapping. One author described them as being inseparably linked. Being one in purpose means to think one thing. It is the desire to work together to maintain unity as the goal of the body of Christ for the purpose of bringing glory to God.

I don't like ants. They are a nuisance. They come through the tiniest of cracks with the sole purpose of gathering food for the winter. Last spring we had an infestation around the dog dish. On a daily basis, it provided plenty of food. I followed the line of marching ants from the dog dish along the edge of the kitchen cabinet, both the width and length. It continued unbroken along the front of the cabinet,

turned the corner and into the little nook where we have our kitchen table. They went over a little three-inch ledge following the threshold to the corner and then along the wall to the corner of the outside wall. I watched them freely march in and out of a tiny hole with only one thing on their mind. I would guess the line of ants was about 25 feet long as they marched to and from that source of food. I don't like ants, but I marvel at the singular purpose in which they work for the benefit of the colony.

Our one goal as the body of Christ is to have an unbroken line of fellowship, each believer doing what is necessary for the benefit of the Church.

From **verse 1**, Paul says there are four measures of unity in the body of Christ. In **verse 2** he gave us four marks of unity. **Verses 3-4** help us see the means for unity.

C. Four Means of Unity – vv. 3-4

1. Reject selfishness

Don't do anything out of selfish ambition. Ambition is a strong desire to reach a particular objective like fame, power, or wealth. In the context, Paul says this ambition is fueled by wrong attitudes and actions. This ambition is motivated by selfishness.

Selfishness is the root of every sin. Selfishness is what prompted Lucifer to seek the place of God. He wasn't content with being created, he wanted to take the place of the Creator. It was selfish ambition that drove him to wanting to ascend to the heights of heaven, raise his throne above the stars of God and sit on the throne of authority in the assembly. It was pride that led him to want to be like the Most High. He wanted to be worshipped, he wanted to be like God, he wanted to be God. Selfishness comes from a lack of contentment. There is nothing wrong with hard work to achieve advancement in your position, but when it is selfishly motivated, it becomes a sin.

When Satan didn't succeed, he spun the same idea in the minds of Adam and Eve that they could be like God. Selfish ambition drove them to sin.

In **1:17** Paul says that it is out of selfish ambition that some were preaching Christ. It wasn't for any other reason than to make a name for themselves, to earn a living off the gospel, to see their names on the neon marquee.

Galatians 5:20 lists selfish ambition among the acts of the sinful nature.

Selfish ambition is placing our will over God's will. In the Greek, the word **"do"** is not there, so it really reads "nothing by way of selfishness." Selfishness is more than just an action, It's a heart issue. Selfish ambition builds up self while at the same time tearing others down. It's like gambling. Your personal gain is at the loss of someone else. Selfishness describes the desire of a person who through flattery, deceit, false accusations, and contentiousness seeks an advantage over others.

Selfishness is the breeding ground of anger, envy, resentment, bitterness, jealousy to name just a few with its underlying motivation to serve self instead of serving Christ or others. In **I Corinthians 3:1-3** Paul describes such a person as an immature Christian unable to be nourished with spiritual food. They are considered worldly in their thinking. The result being division and discord and Paul says we should reject it.

Next, Paul says we should relinquish empty conceit.

2. Relinquish empty conceit

Your translation might read vain conceit meaning that it's a futile or hollow attempt. It literally means empty glory referring to an exaggerated view of self, to puff up one's ego. If he was a fisherman, the fish would get a little bigger each time.

This person always has to be right, and others must always agree with him. Every conversation is about him and his exploits. He is nothing more than a big wind bag tooting his horn to make himself look better than he actually is and Paul says it is nothing more than empty words.

If unity is to exist, there is no room in the body of Christ for empty conceit, bragging about how many

you have in your class, or how many are in your church or how often your asked to speak or sing.

Both selfish ambition and empty conceit are enemies of unity. They bring only division in its wake. They are to be rejected and relinquished.

The third means to unity in the body of Christ is to respond in humility.

3. Respond in humility

This is the opposite of selfishness and vain conceit.

The concept of humility to the Greek mind was repulsive. They never considered themselves to be inferior to someone else. So it was something new for Gentile believers to understand and practice. In the New Testament, the word is always used in a positive way.

Andrew Murray says **"Humility is that grace that, when you think you have it, you have lost it."**

Genuine humility means not thinking too highly of yourself and requires instead that you think of or have regard for others. Regard is more than just having an opinion about someone else. It refers to a careful and thoughtful conclusion about them that is based on truth.

Proverbs 11:2 says that disgrace comes with pride, but wisdom comes with humility.

Proverbs 16:18 reminds us that destruction follows pride and a haughty spirit.

Psalms 138:6 says that the Lord looks on the humble but the proud are far from His thoughts.

In **I Peter 5:5-6** we read that God gives grace to the humble, but He resists or is opposed to the proud.

Paul tells us to pursue humility. Humility is the source of unity in the body of Christ. This person has a right attitude about himself. He makes no effort to put himself in the spotlight. It's the difference between Mordecai and Haman. Haman sought his own glory, while Mordecai sought the glory of others. After he was honored by the king

for saving his life, it says in Esther that he quietly went back to his seat at the gate to resume his duties. On the other hand, after Haman learned that only he and the king had been invited to a special dinner hosted by the queen, he went and bragged about it to all his friends. When the king wanted to honor Mordecai for spoiling an assassination attempt, he asked Haman what should be done for the man the king wanted to honor. In his pride, he couldn't think of anyone more deserving than himself. Just as Scripture says, in his pride, he was put down, while Mordecai was exalted in his humility. That's the attitude we should pursue.

The fourth means of unity is to remember others.

4. Remember others

The truly humble person seeks the welfare of others, instead of himself. He considers what their needs are, thinks about what they must be going through. He is the person who serves rather than seeks to be served.

In the verses that follow, Paul gives us an example of what true humility looks like when it comes to thinking about others. The ultimate example of the kind of humility Paul is saying we should have is in the person of Christ. Instead of having selfish ambition and empty conceit, we are to have the mind or attitude of Christ. Even though He was God, He set aside the prerogatives and privileges of God and became a man, humbling Himself to the will of the Father and going to the cross to die. He could have come to earth and demanded that people worship Him. Instead of seeking to be served, He chose instead to serve. He served in so many ways: meeting tangible needs of food, healing the sick and maimed, raising the dead, comforting tears, forgiving sins. His ultimate demonstration was to submit to the will of the Father and die on the cross.

I wish I had more time to talk about what it means from this passage that Christ is our example from **verses 5-8**. His incarnation was the most profound example of humility.

For a time, He emptied Himself of His glory.

For a time, He emptied Himself of His attributes.

For a time, He emptied Himself of His divine authority.

For a time, He emptied Himself of His riches.

For a time, He emptied Himself of the intimate relationship with the Father.

He became a slave in the fullest sense. That word servant in **verse 7** is the Greek word for slave. He didn't just appear as a man, He became a man. I can put on a Detroit Tiger's uniform and appear to be a baseball player, but I am not. He was completely man and completely God at the same time.

And after it was all done, after He had accomplished what He set out to do in becoming a man by going to the cross and atoning for sin, **verses 9-11** show us His exultation. God lifts up the humble.

He was lifted up at His resurrection.

He was lifted up at His ascension to the right hand of God.

He was lifted up at His coronation when all authority was given to Him in heaven and on earth.

He was lifted up to be our High Priest interceding on our behalf before the Father.

He was given a name above every name so that everyone will one day bow before Him. All will acknowledge Him as the One He claimed to be. Some do it now as the attest to Him as Savior, others will do it later but not as a means of repentance.

The example of Christ in His attitude and actions along with His exultation are all for the glory of God. We are to emulate His example so that, through humility, we can build unity in the body for the purpose of glorifying God.

We are given the measure of unity, the marks of unity and the means of unity. All of that is wrapped up for us in the example of Christ. Without humility we won't experience true fellowship.

To God be the glory.