

CHRIST — THE TRAITS OF HIS LIFE IN US

PHILIPPIANS 02:01–04

Introduction

The Philippian church was a strong church — a very strong church. When a church is strong, it is always full of vision and planning, and it is always working out a strategy to carry forth the gospel. A strong church launches ministry after ministry and programme after programme. It is never still and never complacent — neither the minds of the people nor the hands of the people. Because of this, there is always the danger of differences of opinion: differences in vision, desires, concern, emphasis and interest. There are always different ideas as to which ministry or project should be undertaken and supported and a host of other differences.

The point is this: the more strength and activity a church has, the more attention it must give to unity. Why? Because a strong church has more minds and bodies working, and where more people are working more differences are bound to arise. Consequently, the members must give more attention to unity.

Paul knew this; he knew that he had to put the Philippian church on guard. The church had to protect itself against disunity and division. This is the subject of chapter two: The Steps to Unity (2:1-18).

The first step to unity is Christ — allowing His life to be lived out in us. In particular there are seven traits that will hold the church together and keep it unified.

- I. The trait of encouragement (v. 1).
- II. The trait of love (v. 1).
- III. The trait of fellowship in the Spirit (v. 1).
- IV. The trait of compassion (v. 1).
- V. The trait of concern for one another's joy (v. 2).
- VI. The trait of humility or lowliness of mind (v. 3).
- VII. The trait of controlling self-interest or concentration on self (v. 4).

I. *Philippians 02:01 Encouragement*

There is the trait of *encouragement* (*paraklesis*). The word means many things throughout Scripture; but in the present context it means encouragement, comfort, solace, exhortation and strengthening. Note that this trait is a characteristic of Christ Himself. The very beat of His Spirit is to encourage, comfort and strengthen believers to be one in spirit and busy about the ministry of His church. Christ wants no murmuring, no grumbling, disturbance or weakening of the unity within the church. The Spirit of Christ is to take the disturbed or upset person and...

- console him
- comfort him
- encourage him
- strengthen him

Now glance at the charge of verse two:

=> “Being like-minded” — be just like Christ: console, comfort, encourage, exhort and strengthen each other.

Let absolutely nothing interfere with the spirit of unity in the church. But note, we are not only to help those who are disturbed, we are to let the comfort and encouragement of Christ flow in us when we are disturbed. When disturbed, we are to let Christ comfort us; and when others are disturbed, we are to comfort them. Just imagine the spirit of unity that would flow through a church if all the members would let the encouragement of Christ flow through them. There would be no murmuring, grumbling, disturbance — no disunity whatsoever.

John 14:18 *“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”*

1 Th 5:11 *Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*

Isa 40:1 *Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.*

II. **Philippians 02:01 Love**

There is the trait of love. There is a *comfort* (paramuthion) of love that is in Christ. The love of Christ stirs a person to keep the unity with other believers. The word “love” is *agape love*, the love that is selfless and sacrificial. *Agape love* is the love of the mind, of the reason and of the will. It is the love that goes so far...

- that it loves a person even if he does not deserve to be loved.
- that actually loves the person who is utterly unworthy of being loved.

Agape love is the love of Christ, the love which He showed when He gave and sacrificed Himself for us. We did not deserve it and were utterly unworthy of such love, yet Christ loved us despite all.

Imagine the spirit of unity that would exist within a church if every member would let the love of Christ flow through him. There would be no bitterness, anger or strife — no action that would hurt another person whatsoever. If the person was wrong and deserved punishment, the church’s members would sacrifice and give themselves for him. Note verse two:

=> “Have the same love” — the same love Christ had for you.

Thought 1. This is the answer to unity: the Lord’s spirit of love! How desperately the church needs its members to let the love of Christ flow through them to each other!

John 13:34-35 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

John 15:12 “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”

Rom 12:9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

1 Th 3:12 May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.

1 Pet 1:22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

III. *Philippians 02:01 Fellowship in the Holy Spirit*

There is the trait of fellowship in the Spirit. Once a person has trusted Jesus Christ as his Lord, God’s Spirit does two significant things to him.

=> The Holy Spirit enters the believer’s heart and life to comfort, guide, teach, equip and use him as a witness for Christ.

=> The Holy Spirit creates a spiritual union between the new believer and other believers. He melts and moulds the heart of the believer to the hearts of other believers. He attaches all their lives together, and they become one in life and purpose. They have a joint life sharing their blessings and needs and gifts together — all focused upon their Lord and His purpose.

The mind of the Holy Spirit is set upon unity and fellowship — all centred around Jesus Christ and His mission. The church and its believers are to have the same mind. There are to be no discordant elements whatsoever in the church: no talk about differences; no sharing of bad news; no gossip, rumours, cliques, nothing whatsoever that would tamper with or disturb the fellowship of the Spirit in the church. Again, quickly glance at verse two:

=> “*Being one in spirit*” — keep the unity of the Spirit, the fellowship of the Spirit.

IV. *Philippians 02:01 Compassion*

There is the trait of compassion. Compassion is the trait that stirred Christ to reach out for us. Compassion is the force that drives Him to keep after us time and again — even if we are in rebellion and stand opposed to Him. We may be cantankerous; we may even curse Him and take up arms against His movement. But His compassion drives Him to stay after us so long as we live.

If we allowed His compassion to flow through us, can you not see what would happen in the church? What would happen if we were driven by compassion to go after those...

- who have been hurt?
- who have been disturbed?
- who differed?
- who were critical?
- who withdrew?

The list could go on and on. But just think how many would have already been reconciled back into the fellowship of the church if we had been compassionate and gone after them. Just think how much less trouble would have happened if we had reached out in compassion when a difference first appeared.

The point is this: we are to let the compassion of Christ flow both in and through us. His compassion will comfort us when we differ and are disturbed; it will stir us to reach out in compassion when others differ and become disturbed. The compassion of Jesus Christ flowing in and through us keeps the unity of the church. It will also keep our minds together — keep them focused upon the needs of a world that must be reached and ministered to in compassion.

***Rom 15:1** We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.*

***Gal 6:2** Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.*

***Heb 4:15-16** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

***1 Pet 3:8** Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.*

***Psa 103:13** As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.*

***Isa 63:9** In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.*

V. *Philippians 02:02 Joy*

There is the trait of joy. The believers in a church are to be concerned for each other's joy. And note: the one thing that brings joy to a church quicker than anything else is unity.

***Phil 2:2** Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.*

Paul's point is simple but direct: his joy in Christ would be fulfilled by only one thing — the unity of the Philippian church. The leaders and members of a church usually have joy in Christ, but their joy can be fulfilled only if unity exists between them. Joy is always disturbed when there is criticism, dissatisfaction, grumbling, murmuring, cliques,

opposition and a host of other divisive negatives. We are to worship, plan, organize, programme, build, staff, finance, minister and serve in the joy of Christ. But the only way we can do that is...

- to be like-minded
- to have the same love
- to be in one spirit
- to be in one purpose

John 15:11 *“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”*

John 16:24 *“Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.”*

Rom 14:17 *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

1 Cor 1:10 *I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.*

2 Cor 13:11 *Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.*

Eph 4:3 *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

VI. *Philippians 02:03 Humility — Lowliness of Mind*

There is the trait of humility or lowliness of mind. Note two significant points.

1. A strong and active church will always have two problems to stick their ugly heads up: *selfish ambition and vain conceit*.
 - a. Some people are just going to be *selfish* with others. They are not mature in the Lord, not yet; therefore, they give in to...
 - talking about differences
 - jealousy
 - envy
 - desire for position
 - loving flattery
 - forming cliques
 - desire for recognition
 - opposition

If they do not get their way or what they want, they strive against the church or other members. The result is disunity and divisiveness, one of the most terrible crimes within the church to God.

Phil 2:3 *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.*

2 Tim 2:14 *Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarrelling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen.*

2 Tim 2:24 *And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.*

James 3:14 *But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.*

Prov 3:30 *Do not accuse a man for no reason — when he has done you no harm.*

Prov 20:3 *It is to a man's honour to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.*

Prov 25:8 *Do not bring hastily to court, for what will you do in the end if your neighbour puts you to shame?*

Prov 26:17 *Like one who seizes a dog by the ears is a passer-by who meddles in a quarrel not his own.*

- b. Some people are going to *display vain conceit* within the church. Vain conceit means empty glory. Some people just want the attention, the recognition, the position, the flattery, the praise, the honour. They want people seeking their advice and counsel and opinion. They want to be on the major committees and acknowledged as a leader of the church.

Mat 23:12 *“For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”*

Luke 22:24 *Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.*

John 5:44 *“How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?”*

Prov 17:19 *He who loves a quarrel loves sin; he who builds a high gate invites destruction.*

Isa 14:13-14 *You said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.”*

Oba 1:4 *“Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,” declares the Lord.*

2. The spirit that must prevail in a strong church is that of humility or lowliness of mind. In fact, the only way a church can remain strong and be blessed by God is for its people to walk in a spirit of humility (see *Humility*, Ph. 2:3).

PHILIPPIANS 02:03

HUMILITY (TAPEINOPHROSUNE), LOWLINESS OF MIND (TAPEINOS)

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. **Philippians 02: 03***

To offer oneself as lowly and submissive; to walk in a spirit of lowliness; to present oneself as lowly and low-lying in mind; to be of low degree and low rank; not to be high-minded, proud, haughty, arrogant or assertive.

Note: a humble person may have a high position, power, wealth, fame and much more; but he carries himself in a spirit of lowliness and submission. He denies himself for the sake of Christ and in order to help others.

Men have always looked upon humility as a vice. A lowly man is often looked upon as a coward, a cringing, despicable, slavish type of person. Men fear humility. They feel humility is a sign of weakness and will make them the object of contempt and abuse and cause them to be shunned and overlooked.

Because of all this, men ignore and shun the teaching of Christ on humility. This is tragic:

=> for a humble spirit is necessary for salvation (Mt. 18:3-4).

=> for God's idea of humility is not weakness and cowardice.

God makes people strong, the strongest they can possibly be. By humility God does not mean what men mean. God infuses a new and strong spirit within a person and causes that person to conquer all throughout life. He just does not want the person walking around in pride. He wants the person to do what the definition says: *to offer himself in a spirit of submissiveness and lowliness; not to act high-minded, proud, haughty, arrogant or assertive.*

Humility is to be developed. Scripture tells us how:

Mat 11:29 *“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”*

Mat 18:3-4 *And he said: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”*

Mat 23:12 *“For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”*

Rom 12:16 *Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*

Eph 4:1-2 *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.*

Phil 2:3-4 *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Col 3:12-13 *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

1 Pet 5:6 *Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.*

Contrary to what the world thinks, humility reaps unbelievable benefits. A close study of the above verses shows this.

1. Humility results in a person coming to Christ and learning of Him. It leads to self-evaluation, an honest and courageous evaluation. When a person looks at Jesus Christ, he sees what he should be and it motivates him to become what he should be. He sees where he needs improvement and he is driven to fill in the gaps.
2. Humility results in conversion, assuring our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.
3. Humility results in our being exalted by Christ in that glorious day of redemption.
4. Humility results in healthy relationships and in community and social benefits (see Rom. 12:16; Eph. 4:1-2; Phil. 2:3-4; Col. 3:12-13; 1 Pet. 5:6). For example...
 - It acknowledges and boosts others
 - It leads to better relationships
 - It encourages and helps others
 - It motivates others to grow and do more

Christ demands that His followers walk in humility. Practicing humility demands two things.

1. Humility requires an honest evaluation of oneself. Barclay points this out (*The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians*, p. 39). Humility comes from knowing ourselves, just who we really are. It comes from an honest appraisal of ourselves. It takes courage to look at ourselves and it takes honesty to see ourselves as we really are: basically self-centred, a bundle of self-admiration and self-love. We tend to dramatize ourselves. We tend to see ourselves unrealistically. We see ourselves...

- at the centre of action.
- as the hero of some spectacular rescue.
- as the great politician marching to victory.
- as the renown sportsman saving the game in the last second or bagging a record catch.
- as the beauty queen dazzling the crowds.
- as the labourer of brilliance.
- as Prince Charming or Cinderella sweeping others off their feet.

We are always at the centre of the picture. Humility begins to come when we honestly face ourselves and admit our self-centredness. Self-centredness weakens and limits relationships and achievements. Humility reaches its height when we lose our lives in the cause of Christ and welfare of others.

2. Humility requires courage. It takes courage to be honest about our self-centredness, and courage to convert or to change by coming to Christ as a small child (Mt. 18:3-4). It takes courage to become Christ-centred and people-centred and to give ourselves to the cause of Christ and others.

Rom 12:16 *Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*

1 Cor 8:2 *The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.*

Gal 6:3 *If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*

1 John 2:16 *For everything in the world - the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does - comes not from the Father but from the world.*

2 Sam 22:28 *You save the humble, but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them low.*

Psa 10:2 *In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises.*

Prov 11:2 *When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.*

Prov 13:10 *Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.*

Prov 16:18 *Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.*

Prov 21:4 *Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin!*

Prov 26:12 *Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.*

Prov 28:25 *A greedy man stirs up dissension, but he who trusts in the Lord will prosper.*

Isa 5:21 *Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.*

Isa 24:4 *The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the exalted of the earth languish.*

Oba 1:4 *Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,” declares the Lord.*

Hab 2:4 *“See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright - but the righteous will live by his faith.”*

Zep 3:11 *On that day you will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me, because I will remove from this city those who rejoice in their pride. Never again will you be haughty on my holy hill. □*

VII. **Philippians 02:04 Humility**

There is the trait of controlling self-interest or what Barclay calls concentration on self (The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians, p. 40). Very simply, a Christian believer must forget himself. He must quit looking upon his own things, his...

- ambition
- position
- wants
- being bypassed
- not being recognized
- not being honoured
- not being given the position
- being overlooked
- desires
- being neglected
- being ignored

Believers are to concentrate upon Christ and His ministry to people and reaching the world with the glorious gospel of salvation. They are not to be focused upon self. The world is too needful and too desperate for any believer to be focused upon himself. Every believer is needed to reach the lost and lonely, the shut-ins and helpless, the hungry and cold, the sinful and doomed of his community and city, country and world. Every believer does not need to be thinking on his own things, but on the things of others. He needs to be out...

- visiting
- listening
- sharing
- planning
- transporting
- helping
- counselling
- clothing
- ministering
- advising
- feeding
- teaching

Mat 19:21 *Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”*

Mat 25:43 *“I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.”*

Luke 9:23-24 *Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.”*

1 Cor 10:24 *Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.*

1 Cor 10:33 *Even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.*

2 Cor 8:9 *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*

Phil 2:4 *Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ■*