



IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH
SERIES: TOGETHER FOR THE GOSPEL
SCRIPTURE: PHILIPPIANS 2:1-4
DATE: MAY 24, 2026

INTRODUCTION

Thus far in Philippians, Paul has stressed joyful participation in the gospel. He has expressed deep gratitude for the Philippian church because they partnered with him in gospel ministry from the very beginning. Paul also rejoices that the gospel continues to advance even while he is imprisoned. In fact, Paul explains that whether he lives or dies, he finds himself in a “win-win” situation. If he dies, he will be with Christ, which is far better. If he continues to live, then his life will be used for fruitful labor in the service of Christ. Now, Paul reveals another source of joy: seeing his beloved Philippian friends live out the gospel through unity and humility.

Text

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 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.

Explanation

Structure

Most English translations communicate the overall meaning of this passage well, but understanding a little of the Greek structure helps bring additional clarity to Paul's argument. In the original Greek, verses 1–4 form one complete sentence, showing that these verses express one unified idea.

Paul's reasoning follows an "if, then" structure. Verse 1 establishes the condition, while verses 2–4 describe the result. In other words, if the Philippians have truly experienced the blessings of life in Christ, then there should be a corresponding response in the way they live with one another.

At the center of this passage is one primary command found in verse 2: "Complete my joy." Everything that follows explains how the Philippians can fulfill that command. Their unity, humility, and selflessness would bring great joy to Paul's heart.

If any...

Before Paul commands the Philippians to complete his joy, he first reminds them of the spiritual blessings they have already received. He writes, "if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy..."

The condition Paul describes is rooted in the Philippians' relationship with the Triune God. Through Christ they have received encouragement. Through God's love they have received comfort. Through the Holy Spirit they have

experienced fellowship and participation in the life of God. They have also received affection and compassion from the Lord.

There also seems to be a gentle admonishment in Paul's repeated use of the word "any." The word itself could suggest even a small amount, yet the Philippians had not received merely a little grace from God. They had received an abundance of it. Paul's point is that if they have experienced even the smallest measure of these blessings from God, then they should be motivated to treat one another in the same way.

The specific words Paul chooses are important. He highlights encouragement, comfort, participation, affection, and sympathy. Certainly, Paul could have emphasized many other blessings from God such as power, wisdom, protection, or deliverance. Yet his purpose here is to encourage unity and humility within the church. Therefore, he focuses on the relational ways God has cared for them. Since they have received such grace from God, they should extend the same grace to one another. It would be inconsistent for believers to receive encouragement and compassion from God while refusing to show encouragement and compassion toward fellow Christians.

Complete my joy

Paul's central command is simple: "Complete my joy." What is striking is the kind of things that brought Paul joy. As has been referenced, Paul was in prison as he wrote this letter. Yet throughout Philippians, his joy was never dependent upon comfort, freedom, or favorable circumstances. His joy rested in gospel partnerships, gospel progress, and gospel promises.

Now Paul explains that what would complete his joy is seeing the Philippians walk together in spiritual unity and humility. Nothing would encourage him more than knowing that this church he loved was honoring Christ in the way they treated one another.

This becomes a challenge for us as well. What truly brings us joy? Is our joy tied mainly to comfort, success, recognition, or personal desires? Or do we find joy in seeing Christ formed in the lives of others? Paul's example reminds us that mature Christian joy is deeply connected to the spiritual growth and unity of God's people.

Unity and Humility

Paul now explains how the Philippians can complete his joy. First, they are to be “of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.” Paul repeatedly emphasizes unity through phrases such as “same mind,” “same love,” and “one mind.” He desires both doctrinal unity and relational unity. He wants their thinking and their affections to work together.

At the same time, Paul’s vision of unity is balanced. Agreement without love can easily become cold legalism, religious elitism, or truth without grace. On the other hand, love without agreement can drift toward licentiousness, wayward zeal, or grace without truth. Healthy Christian unity requires both truth and love working together.

Paul is not saying that believers must agree on every preference, opinion, or secondary matter. Rather, his concern is that Christians remain united around the core truths of the gospel while continuing to love one another amid lesser disagreements. A mature church learns how to move forward together instead of insisting that every personal preference prevails.

Paul then turns to humility. He commands them to “do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” Unity cannot survive where selfish ambition rules. Pride fractures relationships, but humility strengthens them.

A church family will never agree perfectly on every issue. However, when believers are willing to set aside selfish desires, value one another, and seek the good of others, unity becomes possible. Humility allows believers to function not merely as individuals pursuing their own interests, but as one body seeking the glory of Christ together.

Paul himself had already modeled this attitude earlier in Philippians. Even when others preached Christ from selfish motives, Paul still rejoiced because Christ was being proclaimed (Php. 1:15-18). Paul cared more about the advancement of the gospel than about his own reputation or personal recognition. Indeed, in the verses that follow our text today, Paul will highlight Christ’s ultimate example of humility (Php. 2:5-11).

Discussion Questions

- What stands out most to you about Paul's description of Christian unity?
- Why do you think Paul connects humility with unity?
- Can you say that your joy has even been *complete*?
- How have you personally experienced encouragement or comfort from God?
- What are some ways selfish ambition can damage relationships within a church?
- Why is it important for Christians to hold both truth and love together?
- In what practical ways can we "count others more significant than ourselves"?
- How can our church better reflect the unity Paul describes in this passage?

Conclusions or Applications

IS THIS POSSIBLE?

The kind of unity and humility Paul describes is not easy. To truly be of one mind, one love, and full accord is rare. Likewise, a church marked by genuine humility is a beautiful and uncommon thing. At times, we may wonder whether this kind of Christian community is even possible.

Yet it is important to notice how Paul begins his appeal. Before calling the Philippians to unity and humility, he first reminds them of their relationship with the Triune God. They have experienced encouragement in Christ, participation in the Spirit, and the comfort of God's love. The God who saved them is Himself perfectly united within the fellowship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In other words, Christian unity is not merely the result of human effort. It flows out of hearts transformed by God's grace. To the extent that we have received, encouragement and love from God, we are able to extend those same things to one another.

Paul's standard is high, but it is not impossible. Through the work of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, believers can grow in unity, humility, and selfless love. And when a church begins to live this way, it becomes a powerful testimony to the transforming grace of God.