

Philippians 2:1-11

Introduction: *Life lessons*: Ginger's Church falling apart shortly after she moved away.

- I. Like-mindedness only happens by design.
- II. The way we become like-minded is by having the mind of Christ.

Unity is achieved by design; the way we become like-minded is by taking on the mind of Christ.

- I. Like-mindedness only happens by design.

2:1 **In Christ** To be in Christ is to be saved. Paul often expresses the relationship we have with Him in this way. This personal union with our Lord is the essential reality of the Christian faith.

if there is... This might better be thought of as "since there is..." There is no doubt that these things are there for the taking for every believer.

Consolation *paraklēsis* (Related to *paraklētos*) encouragement, comfort, help.

2:2 **fulfill my joy** Nothing would make Paul happier than unity in the Philippian church. This is not to say there were any awful problems in this regard. In Corinth, you may recall, the church was falling apart due to lack of unity and rival factions among the believers. Paul is just reminding them of the importance of maintaining a proper frame of mind.

likeminded ... same love ... one accord, of one mind There should be a peaceful unity among Christians - not uniformity. We do not have to think, look, and dress or act alike. Rather, this is the "common disposition to work together and serve one another." (NIV Study Bible)

2:3 **selfish ambition or conceit** These are the arch enemies of unity within the body of Christ. The first was used regarding politics. It refers to "electioneering or intriguing for office" (Thayer), "canvassing for public office, scheming" (*Complete Word Study Dictionary*). Whenever there is a mindset of rivalry or jockeying for position, unity goes out the window.

Lowliness of mind is the essence of the attitude of Christ that we see in 2:5-11

Application: Unity in the Church Disorder is more probable than order. Think of it as entropy. Attribute it to the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Whatever mental category you use, disorder is more probable than order and that principle applies to churches as well as physical substances.

If you throw a pile of bricks off a truck, you get a disorderly pile of bricks. If you want to build a wall, you have to put forth effort and intentionally make the wall straight. Disorder is more probable than order, unless you bring in the time and effort to put something together by design.

Unity in the church is achieved by design. If we don't think about what we are doing as a body, disorder will be more probable than order. If we are intentional about working together and putting others before ourselves, unity will be the result. If we try to let it happen by chance, unity will deteriorate as a natural result of our lack of effort.

II. The way we become like-minded is by having the mind of Christ.

2:6-8 **Jesus' Voluntary Act** In the phrase "being" or "existing in the form [*morphe*] of God," the word *morphe* [form] implies a harmony between appearance and essential nature, so that the one reflects the other. Paul's emphasis here is not so much on Christ's essential nature as it is on the status which Christ rightly enjoyed because He was God in that essential nature. Every outward sign and symbol, every privilege of deity, belonged to Christ because Christ *is* God.

When Paul says Christ "did not consider it robbery to be equal with God" it is more literally, "something to be grasped, seized or held onto". Here it is the *status* associated with deity, rather than "Godness" itself; that he has in mind. Christ's underlying attitude was displayed in His act of emptying or making Himself "nothing," and in "taking the form [again, *morphe*] of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men" or "being made in human likeness" (2:7).

On the one hand the grammar indicates that Christ always existed in the form of God, while in becoming a man in the Incarnation He also took on, as a new thing, the form of a servant. In becoming a human being, Jesus did not cease to be God in His essential nature. But He did abandon the status of deity, exchanging it for the status of a "servant."

The word translated "servant" is *doulos*, a bond-slave. Paul's point is this: As a slave has no social advantage but is in fact disadvantaged by the absence of all status, so Jesus totally abandoned His status as God to live as a "nothing" among men.

But Paul goes on. Living among us as a human being Jesus humbled Himself even more, and permitted Himself to suffer the most shameful and painful of all ancient forms of execution: crucifixion (2:8). Thus Christ's attitude was *totally* selfless, totally self-sacrificial, solely directed toward the interests and needs of others. In the Incarnation we discover truths about God and His love for humanity that no one could imagine before. (Victor Bible Background Commentary)

2:11 **Jesus Christ is Lord** The word for "Lord" used here is *kurios*. The same word is used in the Greek version of the OT to translate *YHWH*, the proper name of God in Hebrew. This use appears in **Mat 1:20, 22 & 24**.

- See **Isaiah 45:20-25** for additional insight into this passage. Paul is here linking Christ to the God of Old Testament prophecy. This is possibly the clearest statement of monotheism in the OT – and there are many such statements. God is rejecting idols, all false concepts of God and declaring Himself to be the one and only, the Creator, the Savior, the God to which all will bow in reverence.

Isaiah 45:18-25 NKJV¹⁸ *For thus says the Lord, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited: "I am the Lord, and there is no other."¹⁹ I have not spoken in secret, In a dark place of the earth; I did not say to the seed of Jacob, 'Seek Me in vain'; I, the Lord, speak righteousness, I declare things that are right.²⁰ "Assemble yourselves and come; Draw near together, You who have escaped from the nations. They have no knowledge, Who carry the wood of their carved image, And pray to a god that cannot save."²¹ Tell and bring forth your case; Yes, let them take counsel together. Who has declared this from ancient time? Who has told it from that time?*

Have not I, the Lord? And there is no other God besides Me, A just God and a Savior; There is none besides Me. ²² "Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other."²³ I have sworn by Myself; The word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, And shall not return, That to Me every knee shall bow, Every tongue shall take an oath.
²⁴ *He shall say, 'Surely in the Lord I have righteousness and strength. To Him men shall come, And all shall be ashamed Who are incensed against Him.*
²⁵ *In the Lord all the descendants of Israel Shall be justified, and shall glory.'"*

The Trinity affirms that there is one God in three Persons. Jesus is God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity. Many have tried to provide metaphors or analogies for this concept. All of them seem to fall short – which affirms that God is totally unique. He is different from all else and all others.

Our belief about Christ, which is quite clearly stated in this section, is that He is one Person with two natures – a divine and a human. Contrast with *Nestorianism* (Two natures so separate that they tend toward two persons) and *Monophysitism* (One person, but in which the two natures merge to become one). The idea of *one person with two natures* is not contradictory if we consider a square and a cube.

Application: Paul is not interested in abstract theology for its own sake. There are really two huge points behind what he tries to explain here:

1. We ought to try to understand the Jesus – and the God – that we worship. It does no good to simply throw up our hands and say, "Ah, He is unknowable!" when we haven't seriously tried. What kind of intimate relationship is that? It seems rather like a non-relationship, or the relationship that near strangers are content to have with one another. The infinite, unfathomable God invites us to know Him through the Person of Jesus Christ. We honor Him when we try to understand as best we can what He is actually like.
2. Paul holds what Christ did before us as an example. None of us will ever have to humble ourselves as much as He did. He willingly moved from His exalted status as God, worshiped by the angelic hosts, to the place of a humble – not even a highly respected – human being. Once here He endured all kinds of criticism, misunderstanding and disrespect even from His family, betrayal by a friend, and finally a shameful, painful death.
 - a. This passage started out talking not about theology but about unity in the church. We need to remember that unity is achieved by design. Unity happens when we decide to be like-minded, to work together and be supportive of one another. We will then do things that promote this intentional unity.
 - b. The like-mindedness that we desire is achieved by taking on the mind of Christ. We follow Christ's example of humbling ourselves for the benefit of others.

But unity is achieved by design. We should plan for it – strive for it, making an effort to be like-minded. The way we become like-minded is by taking on the mind of Christ.