

## The “What” of Church Unity

### Introduction

We as people are composed of parts. Specifically, the human person has two main parts—a physical part and a non-physical part. The physical part consists of the human body. We as humans have bodies. We are not disembodied souls who float around in this world. We consist of a fleshly body. We have arms, legs, hair, blood, brains, hearts, lungs, bones, etc.

The second part of humanity is non-physical or spiritual. This is the part of us that you cannot see, touch, taste, smell, or hear. The Bible uses many different concepts to describe this spiritual side of mankind. They include soul, spirit, heart, will, and mind. I'm not exactly sure what the difference between all concepts are. For example, how is the heart different than the soul? Or is the heart another way of designating the soul? Or vice versa? I'm not sure how to answer these questions. Nevertheless, the Bible states very clearly that man has a non-physical side and it uses different concepts to describe non-physical component of mankind.

Now going back to last week, I remarked for three weeks—last week, this week, and next week—we will be studying church unity. this week we will explore the “what” of church unity. I've kept my promise. That is the title of this morning's sermon—the “what” of church unity. The question we want to answer this morning is very simple: what is church unity? Very simple.

The way I want to answer this question this morning is by using the biblical concept of man's non-physical existence. That is, I will argue this this morning: church unity is a unity a local church's spirit, heart, and mind. Church unity is a unity the local church's spirit, heart, and mind. That's the big idea for your this morning.

Within that big idea, there are three smaller ideas. These three small ideas will make up my three sermon points this morning. Kapeesh? Alright, here we go.

Go ahead and open to Phil 2:2. This is the passage we will explore this morning. To capture what Paul is saying, let's start in v. 1.

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Last week we covered v. 1 through the very beginning of v. 2. Our passage is: “by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.”

## **Unity of Spirit**

### *The Text*

For our first point this morning, write this: Unity of Spirit. What is church unity, pastor? Church unity is, first, a unity of spirit. This idea comes from what Paul, “being in full accord,” found towards the end of 2:2. The Greek word behind this English phrase only occurs one time in the whole NT. Any time you have a one-time occurrence of a word, that word is difficult to understand. The Greek word here is σύμψυχος. This word is a compound word. It consists of the prefix σύν which means “with” or “united.” The stem word is ψυχή. This word ψυχή means soul, life, spirit, mind. This is where we get our word psychology, “the study of the soul, spirit, mind” from. When you put these the prefix together with the root word, you get the idea of “harmonious, united in spirit,” or, as the ESV renders this word, “in full accord.” If you’re reading out of a different version this morning than a ESV you might have NIV: “being one in spirit.” NASB: “united in spirit.” NKJV: “being of one accord.” KJV: “being of one accord.” All these translations are valid.

### *Our Context*

What Paul is commanding here is a bit abstract. He is commanding the Philippians to be united in their atmosphere, ethos, culture. He is calling the whole church to be united in a corporate spirit. That’s not something that is immediately discernable. You can’t really see a church’s corporate spirit. You can’t really point it out and say, “Hey, look, here’s their corporate spirit.”

A corporate spirit is best felt than it is observed. Have you ever been in a room where two people you care about are arguing about some issue and their disagreement is very heated? Wow. Those are tough places to be. You hear the argument and see people disagreeing, but you also feel it. You can feel the tension in your soul. In situations like these, there is a corporate spirit of disunity. There is this ethos, this culture, this non-physical reality of disunity.

It’s that reality—the untouchable but feelable reality of the Philippians—that Paul is commanding them to have unity in. Paul wants their culture to be one of unity. He wants their corporate spirit, identity, ethos, to be one of unity.

I've heard from several people who attend are church—some are new attendees; others have been attending for some time—that our church is not the most welcoming of churches. Now, as the pastor, I have not experienced this firsthand. This church has been very welcoming to me as the pastor. So, I can't say that this is true from experience. However, the people who have told me that our church is unwelcoming are godly, genuine people. I take their word for it, even though I myself have not seen this.

Paul command to be “in full accord” touches upon this idea. When we do not welcome others, when we only say “hi” to people we like and know, when we form cliques and only associate with our friends, this does not foster a unity of spirit. A unity of spirit is one that welcomes all people into the fold—regardless of class, color, or socio-economic status. Our approach here to ministry is call all peoples to Christ. We want this to be a place where people find forgiveness and comfort. We must all be unified in that idea. Regardless of who shows up in this church, we want all peoples to hear the saving message of Jesus Christ. Come one, come all. And it is the duty of every single Christian who calls CBC home to make this their goal—to welcome all and to include all. Invite others out to lunch, greet someone you don’t know, invite others over to your home for a meal, seek to show an interest in others. Paul wants us to have a unified spirit regarding this. One in which we are welcoming and inviting, not cliquish and standoffish.

## **Unity of Heart**

### *The Text*

Along with a unity of spirit, church unity also entails a unity of heart. This is our second point. Write, “Unity of heart.” “Unity of heart.” Look again with me at Phil 2:2. Paul mentions this, “having the same love.” The Philippians are to “have the same love.”

Now notice that the concept of “heart” does not occur here. That is something that I have added to the text. Nevertheless, I believe this idea of having the same love is synonymous with a unity of heart. Love flows from the heart. The heart is the organ of human love. Thus, another way to put what Paul is saying here is to say, “Unity of heart.”

What Paul is saying here is that he wants the Philippians to delight in the same thing(s). He wants their affections, their emotions, their feelings, their allegiances, their heart to be set on the same object. He wants their hearts to be for certain objects—namely God and one another. The most basic Christian commandment is to love God and love people. He wants the Philippians to share in this love.

Conversely to this positive aspect of love, Paul also wants the Philippians to share in the same displeasure. While this is not stated, it's a corollary to Paul command for them

to have the same love. When we love something, where our heart are set on something, that usually entails an opposition to any force that seeks to harm that which we love. Take my wife, for example. I love her dearly. She is my best friend. I share with her everything. She knows me better than any. As a corollary of my love for her, I hate any force that seeks her harm. If there were some force that sought to harm her, I wouldn't love that force, I would hate it. And I wouldn't just not like it. My aversion to these forces that seek to harm my wife are very strong because I love my wife so much.

### *Our Context*

Here's what this means for us, for our church, for our church unity. First and foremost, we are to love the Lord Jesus Christ above all. He is supreme, he is excellent, he is true, he is risen from the dead, he is coming again, he is faithful to save us from our sins. Next, we love people. We don't just tolerate people; we actually love people. Third, we love to see Jesus (whom we love) work in the lives of people (who we also love). We love to see Jesus work in the lives of others. We share in this love. We have this unity of heart.

Conversely, because we have the same love, we also have the same displeasure. We share in a mutual aversion together. Our loathing is not directed towards people. No, no, no, dear friend. We are called to love people, even our enemies. What we are called to take displeasure in is sin. Sin is what led our Lord to the cross. Sin is what leads us to hell. Sin divides us, brings us down. Sin leads to conflict, grief, bitterness, and hurt. What is our response to sin, dear brothers and sin? Is it love? Are we to love sin? No, my dear brothers and sisters. The second this church begins to love sin we will fall under the judgment of God. Our response to sin ought to be the same response God has—hatred for it.

Church unity is a unity of heart which is a sharing in the same love and in the same aversion. We take joy and displeasure in the same realities.

### **Unity of Mind**

#### *The Text*

My first point this morning is this, "Unity of Mind." "Unity of Mind." This idea of a unified mindset arises from two places in Phil 2:2. Look with me at there. Paul mentions towards the beginning of v. 2, "being of the same mind" and at the end of v. 2, "being . . . of one mind." Paul says that the Philippians are to be of the same mind and of one mind.

The reason why these two commandments sound so similar is because both in both commands Paul uses the same Greek verb. That verb is φρονέω. This is a very

important verb in Philippians. It occurs 10 times in the epistle. That's a lot. Let's take a look at each of them.

Go to 1:7. Paul writes, "It is right for me to feel ( $\phi\pi\sigma\nu\omega$ ) this way about you all." The word "feel" in English is the Greek verb  $\phi\pi\sigma\nu\omega$ . Go to 2:5. "Have this mind ( $\phi\pi\sigma\nu\omega$ ) among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." 3:19, "Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set ( $\phi\pi\sigma\nu\omega$ ) on earthly things." 4:2, "I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree ( $\phi\pi\sigma\nu\omega$ ) in the Lord." 4:10, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern ( $\phi\pi\sigma\nu\omega$ ) for me. You were indeed concerned ( $\phi\pi\sigma\nu\omega$ ) for me, but you had no opportunity."

As you can tell by the ESV translation, the verb  $\phi\pi\sigma\nu\omega$  has a broad range of meaning. It can mean feel, think, have a certain attitude, be concerned, have a mindset, set one's one upon something.

The best way to understand this idea of "being of the same mind" and "being of one mind" is with the English concept of mindset. A mindset is a collection of beliefs, feelings, and thoughts that guide someone in their decision making. To be of one mind is for us as a church to corporately share in the same mindset. Our thinking is lockstep with one another.

Now, this does not mean that we all must think the same things or in the same way. No. I am not arguing for that this morning. Paul does not even argue that. Look at 3:15 (x2), "Let those of us who are mature think ( $\phi\pi\sigma\nu\omega$ ) this way, and if in anything you think ( $\phi\pi\sigma\nu\omega$ ) otherwise, God will reveal that also to you." What Paul is saying here is that he does want the Philippians to agree with his teaching (those who agree with him, Paul calls "mature"), but if they do not, he's not too worried about it because he believes that God will lead them into the truth. Paul is content with a certain type of diversity of thinking in the church. But he does want the Philippians to have a unified mindset.

### *Our Context*

### *Our Authority*

Within our context, this is what a unified mindset looks like. First, we must all agree upon our authority. For this church, for its beliefs and its practices, what is our authority? Is it me? Is it Pastor Jesse? Is it the elders? No, dear friend. We believe strongly here that it is the Bible that is the authority. The Bible when properly interpreted stands above all.

A good friend of mine sent me an excerpt from Reader's Digest recently. In this excerpt, Thom Rainer, a prominent Southern Baptist, provided the top ten reasons for why

people skip church. One of the reasons was this: “The pastor stays in the Bible too much.” I’m not sympathetic to that complaint.

We believe that the Bible is the Word of God and is therefore functions as the authority in God’s household. It is Scripture that is our guide, our rule, our law. Not our feelings, personalities, charisma, or wishes.

### Our Theological Vision

Next, it entails agreement on a theological vision. Not only must we agree on the what our shared authority is (the Bible), we must also agree regarding the correct teachings of that authority. We must agree on a doctrinal statement. We must agree on who God is, who we are, what salvation is. We must agree on the fundamentals of the faith and of healthy church life.

Correct doctrine matters, dear friend. Some very genuine Christians believe that doctrine is divisive and not helpful for the local church. Why can’t we all just believe in that the Bible and get along? Believe it or not this type of approach is not conducive for unity. There are many pressing questions that demand an answer. Take the question of women preachers. Imagine how disunified this church would be if I wanted women preachers and Jesse didn’t. That would be chaos. Disaster.

What you will find, dear brother and sister, is that the sharper and more exact our theology is, the deeper and richer our fellowship will be. Churches that have kumbaya doctrinal statements don’t have unity. That have the appearance of unity but its shallow. It’s only with a shared theological vision that we can share in deep fellowship with one another.

Nevertheless, not all theological issues rise to the level that we all must agree on. For example, if you feel very strongly that the rapture is not going to happen before the tribulation, I welcome you here. Diversity is allowed here. We’re looking for unity, not uniformity.

### A Shared Philosophy of Ministry

Finally, not only must we agree on our authority (the Bible), a theological vision (our doctrinal statement), we also must agree on how to execute that theological vision. It’s great to agree on doctrine but we also need to agree on how to implement that doctrine within the local church. We must agree on a philosophy of ministry.

To make this issue concrete, let’s take the issue of global missions. So, we all believe the Bible teaches that global missions are important. And we all believe that, theologically, people are lost, and they need to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now how is global missions done? That’s a very important question. Do we go overseas,

feed the poor, help the sick, build houses, but maybe occasionally tell people that God loves them? Is that missions, dear friend? No. It's not. Global missions is first and foremost about proclamations, it's about the gospel, it's about establishing churches. Humanitarian works are wonderful and good. But the best is gospel proclamation.

We need to agree how to implement our theological vision. We need to agree on a philosophy of ministry. Theology is important, but if it's not properly implemented, it's useless.

## **Conclusion**

Returning to the main question I asked at the beginning: What is church unity? Based upon this passage, what Paul says here, church unity is a unity of spirit, heart, and mind. Praise the Lord. Pray with me.