

## The Letter to the Philippians

### Lesson 9: The Formula for Spiritual Unity

### Philippians 2:1-4

We may be beginning a new lesson, and a new chapter, but I don't want any of you to think that we are looking at a brand new thought. Remember, our chapter and verse divisions were first printed in the NT in 1551 adopting the work of Robert Estienne in Paris, France. He wasn't the first to attempt this work of indexing the scripture, but his work was the most widely adopted, and it is still what we use today. The purpose of this brief history lesson is to teach you that while we are on chapter 2, Paul was still on the 31<sup>st</sup> verse of chapter 1.

Paul is still expounding on what he wrote from verses 27-30, where he has been talking about living our lives worthy of our calling. He has talked about the importance of our unity in our doctrinal understanding, and our practical ministry, as well as our unity under the most severe persecution. Paul has encouraged the Philippians to stand firm to the end in the faith of Jesus Christ, expecting to suffer and counting it a grace of God to do so, as Christ and Paul had done beforehand.

If you turn your attention now to chapter 2, you'll notice that the first word is 'so'. Depending on your translation, the first word may be "therefore". IOW, Paul is linking what he has just been saying, with what he is about to say. We should always be mindful of the contextual flow of the epistles as we read them. If you remember my class on Biblical Theology, you'll remember how we talked about the importance of reading scripture in its proper genre. Paul's letter to the Philippians is not a collection of unrelated proverbs, it is a letter, and it should be read like any letter should be read.

So, here we are in chapter 2, and Paul who is still on the topic of unity, is about to give them a formula for spiritual unity in the face of the diverse attempts to divide them and create chaos in the church body. The god of this world is always actively seeking to silence the truth of the gospel. Whether it be through fear, or false teaching, or the ungodly desire for gain, so long as the gospel is not preached from the body of Christ, the opposition is satisfied. We face opposition today from our culture, few of us in the west are losing our lives for Christ, but many of us have been attacked verbally over our faith, some even threatened to silence. Our culture relentlessly attacks the source of our faith, the Word of God. As a result of this accumulative attack, the modern Christian church has dissolved into a group of nominal Christians with a weak view of scripture, and faith in a puny, powerless God with big hopes, but little promise.

Paul was afraid of the effect of this attack on unity in the church, he wrote to the Corinthians, **“For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarrelling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder.”** The effect of the culture on the church can be so severe that, save God's promising hand over the remnant, the church's impact of the world would disappear. Even in our day and age, I meet self-professing believers all the time who boasts of being spiritual, not religious. These people want a 'personal relationship with Jesus', but want nothing to do with His church. And our culture understands that these people are everywhere. And the response to this culturally-relevant version of Christianity has been to build places of 'worship' that cater to the felt needs of the 'worshippers', all in the name of Jesus. Now, those 'spiritual' people who are offended at biblical doctrine, who believe that truth is relative, and who reject organized religion, can meet and enjoy the mystery of God with each other, in the name of love and peace. This is not peace, or unity. The only belief that many 'churches' are unified around

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today is the rejection of the New Testament Jesus and His authoritative Word. Paul was afraid of the damage that would be done to the church and spread of the gospel when it's members are divided over doctrine, and so should we. The name of Christ is blasphemed by many because of the ungodly examples that are set by many 'teachers' on television and in print today. And I believe that it is our mission as Christians to spread this gospel across the world, touching not only the unchurched, but those who are duped under the teaching of these false teachers. We are to be unified as a body of believers, but we aren't to be united by the lowest common denominator, the one true Church is to be united with the same mind and spirit.

### **The Formula**

Paul provided the Philippians with a fourfold formula for achieving unity in the church: encouragement, comfort, participation in the Spirit, affection and sympathy. We've already talked about the word 'so', or 'therefore', linking what Paul has just said in verses 27-30. There is something to be understood about the next word 'if'. *If* is a conditional word, so it reads in plain English like Paul is giving them a conditional formula. "Because of what I have said, if you do these things, unity will happen." But that isn't quite how the wording is to be understood. I'm not going to pretend to be a scholar in the biblical Greek language. I don't have a firm grasp on indicative verbs and first-class conditional clauses, nor do I think it would be worth the time to learn and explain them. (Maybe I'm wrong about that). When it comes to grammatical interpretation, my plan is to pass along the work of the scholars before me. It is the agreed upon conclusion that 2:1 should be read, "Therefore, if you have any encouragement, and you do..." So, not only is Paul giving conditional statements, but he is also affirming that they are meeting those conditions, this last part we lose in translation.

A four part list for unity. The first two have to do with Jesus Christ, the last two have to do with the Holy Spirit. The first item for unity is **encouragement in Christ**. The definition of 'encouragement' is to come alongside someone to give them assistance by offering comfort or counsel or teaching. The Greek word used is *paraklesis*. Jesus used a similar word that may help us to understand this word, he used the word *parakleton* in [John 14:16](#) speaking of the Holy Spirit. I'd like you to see where that the encouragement comes from Christ. That may sound obvious, but it might help you to connect how the 'if' statement is conditional for unity, but is also happening. Hear it again: You cannot have unity apart from the encouragement of Christ, therefore it is conditional, but Christ is always encouraging His own. And the most powerful encouragement comes from the parakleton, the Holy Spirit. So, based upon the reality of the encouragement of Christ, they were to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel. (1:27)

The second item of the list is 'comfort from love'. It has the meaning of Christ's love. In fact, the TNIV adds the word 'his' to the sentence, "comfort from [his] love." This is done in an effort to draw out the connection between the first and second clause (being in Christ), which may be lost in translation. Love is an important theme throughout this letter, we see Paul commending those who preach the gospel out of love for the brothers. (1:16). Paul prays that the believer's love would abound for each other. (1:9). But the source of this love comes from Christ (1:8, 2 Corinthians 5:14, Ephesians 5:25), this is the comfort from love that these believers enjoyed. Romans 5:5 says, "**And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.**" The word 'comfort' can be translated, "to speak to someone in a friendly way". The first two clauses are closely related, almost synonyms of one another. This again shows us the guarantee that all believers in Christ will have these conditions met, unity in the body is impossible without it. Christlike love wouldn't be shown between believers if they had not experienced it from Him in the first place. So there is a condition on unity, and that condition has been met in Him.

The third item in a formula for unity is the “**participation in the Spirit**”. The word is *koinonia*, from which we get the word *fellowship*. MacArthur writes, “This fellowship is intimate because every believer is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). He is the seal and guarantor of believers’ eternal inheritance (Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; 2 Cor. 1:22), the source of spiritual power (Acts 1:8; cf. Rom. 15:19), spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:4-11; Rom. 12:6-8). And spiritual fruit (Gal. 5:22-23). The Spirit “helps [us in] our weakness,” and because “we do not know how to pray as we should...the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26). Believers are to be continually filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). To inhibit or be indifferent to spiritual unity is to both grieve the Spirit (Eph. 4:30) and quench His work (1 Thess. 5:19).”<sup>42</sup> The Holy Spirit is the seal, the guarantor, the source of power and gifts and fruit. He prays for us even when we can’t. This is a unity that all believers enjoy, God always upholds His end. But there is a way that believers can quench the Spirit’s work, and that being by focusing more on the world than the Word. Paul is encouraging them to stay united around the Spirit’s work. At the close of this letter he touches on how in 4:8ff, **“Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable. If there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”** There is a way to follow men and their endless philosophies and be divided and quench the Spirit. And there is a way to meditate on the Spirit’s work, and to make every effort to walk in lockstep with Him in all ways.

The fourth and final item in this formula for unity is to have “**affection and sympathy**”. The word for affection is a metaphorical word that expressed a deep emotion. The word spoke to the inward parts of a person, namely the intestines. In our day and age, we don’t tell our loved ones that we love them with ‘all of our intestines’, we say, “I love you with all of my heart.” It’s impossible to love anything with an organ in your body, the expressions mean the same thing. Paul has already spoken of this affection of Christ Jesus in 1:8. Paul’s purpose of speaking of this affection in this formula for unity is to show that Christ has, and is, showing this affection to all within the church, and they are to reflect that same affection to one another. To intensify the affection, Paul adds the synonym ‘sympathy’. We probably all know that to have sympathy for someone is to show a concern for them when they are going through a trial in their life. Again, God is the source of all compassion (sympathy), 2 Cor. 1:3, and the Philippians are to echo that compassion to one another, a unity builder.

Paul exhorted to Colossians to this same unity in 3:12ff, **“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”**

There is an element of responsibility and accountability for believers in this formula. Failure to recognize and pursue unity based upon these is sin. It is the ultimate act of ingratitude to the God who has provided the way to unity in the church. It is a sin to be a receiver from God, and to refuse to give back. (The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant – Matthew 18:21-35)

Paul records the fourfold formula for unity, and he has primarily focused on the grace and goodness from God to us in achieving it. At the beginning of verse 2 however, he adds a personal desire to it, **“complete**

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<sup>42</sup> MacArthur, John, *New Testament Commentary: Philippians* Moody, 2001 (p. 105)

**my joy...**". How amazing is it that Paul uses the word 'complete' my joy. He doesn't say, "give me something to have joy over", or "add to my joy", he says "complete my joy". Maybe it's been awhile at this point since I have reminded you of where Paul is when he is writing this letter. He's in prison, shackled in chains and tied to a Roman guard. His quality of life was horrible and the expectancy of his life was short. And yet, regardless of his circumstances, he names one thing that would complete his joy, and that one thing is Christian unity and maturation amongst the believers for the advancement and proclamation of the gospel. Paul listed a fourfold conditional formula for unity, conditioned upon God's indwelling in the believer, these four items are things that are present and true in every believer, these conditions are not met in those individuals who are not elect. And so disharmony is created between the wheat and the tares, and between the mature Christians and the immature. IOW there are some in the church who experience these four items, who know and cherish the gospel, and should, based upon the truths of 2:1, live in a worthy manner (1:27). And there are some in the church who have not experienced these things from 2:1, who do not know and cherish the gospel, who function in the church from wrong motives (1:15), and therefore bring disunity into the church and also scorn the name of Jesus Christ.

Paul's purpose in writing is to encourage a matured congregation of believers, a purified and holy group. Paul is exhorting them to be a people who are united, and he is about to write in detail what that unity consists of. There is a condition that must be met from God in order to have unity (2:1), but there is also a responsibility for the believers to live in a consistent and proper way (2:2-5). When the church is united and living to honour the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul's joy is complete.

#### A Church United (2:2-4)

There is something to be said about our fellowship together as one body in Christ before we get into Paul's words in our present text. Let's read how the Apostle John opens his first letter in 1 John 1:1-4. Note specifically verse 3, where John makes the connection between what he knows about God, his vertical fellowship, and his love towards other believers, his horizontal fellowship. His point is that horizontal fellowship must sprout from vertical fellowship. IOW, the love that God has shown us must flow out from us towards other believers. And our joy should be found in their health and growth and unity in Christ. Did you catch how John even connected fellowship with a completed joy, just as Paul did? Verse 4 again says, "**And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.**" Certain manuscripts say, "so that your joy may be complete." Personally, I think that both are true. As believers our joy is completed in unity, and our concern should also be to complete the joy of our spiritual leaders, as we see in the examples of Paul and John.

John has something else to say regarding our fellowship that we shouldn't overlook. There are many today who call themselves a 'follower of Jesus Christ', who claim to have a sweet and dear fellowship with Him, and yet have a deep anger towards His church. John warns us that we cannot claim to have a (vertical) fellowship with God while having no desire for (horizontal) fellowship with other believers. John says in 1:6, "**If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.**" And then verse 9, "**Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.**"

There is a responsibility placed upon the Christian to work towards unity in the church. It cannot happen apart from God's help and indwelling Holy Spirit, and unity will not happen apart from our effort through that same Spirit. Paul has written a list in Philippians chapter two, by which all believers should work towards if unity is to be found, and joy is to be had. We will now look at this list and seek to follow the inspired words from God. Paul mentions four keys for spiritual unity: being of the same mind, having

the same love, being in full accord, and being of one mind. (If you're thinking that the first and fourth keys sound the same, stay tuned.)

1) Paul first exhorts them to be 'of the same mind'. This really isn't too difficult to interpret, it basically means that Paul wants all believers to think the same way about theological issues. It's not that Paul wanted all Christians to be lifeless clones of one another, but rather he wanted the life altering truths of the Jesus Christ to be taught and understood and applied and forwarded by all Christians in the church. Christianity has always been a thinking religion. Although many in the modern 'church' prize experientialism and shun doctrine as divisive and manipulative, the call from the beginning has been for Christians to cling to the Word of God, and to conduct their lives in orderly worship. Paul bookends this verse by commanding, not suggesting, that all of the believers be unified in their minds theologically. (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10) There are two categories of Christian thinking according to Paul, according to 3:15: There are those who are mature and think together about the gospel, and there are the 'others' who think otherwise. Paul desires that believers' love 'abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that they may approve [what is right]. (1:9) There ought to be growth in a believers life, and with that growth is to be an increase of knowledge and wisdom and love. This is why Paul was concerned about correcting the situation going on with Euodia and Syntyche in 4:2. Paul could have left the situation alone and hoped that they worked out their issue, but he didn't. Paul entreated them (strongly urged, begged, pleaded with them) to agree in the Lord. This term 'agree in the Lord' is the same term used in 2:2, 'being of the same mind.' In fact, Paul has spoken of being like-minded ten different times throughout the letter. Hansen writes, "These ten occurrences of this word illustrate the range of meanings expressed by this verb: *feel, be minded, have the attitude of mind, take a view, think, set the mind on, and be concerned*. This spectrum of meanings indicates that this verb speaks of the dominant attitude and settled disposition of the entire person. So when Paul calls his friends to *think the same thing (being like-minded)*, he is not asking them to have the same thoughts or feeling about everything. They are not called to be ditto marks of each other. Paul is not squelching human creativity, nor is he prohibiting personal diversity. He is calling his friends to "seek the same goal with a like mind."<sup>43</sup>

2) Next Paul writes for them to have 'the same love'. This next key is really the outflowing of the first one. It would be impossible for them to act in any way honouring to God, or in accord with His will, apart walking in lockstep with God's will, which can only be accomplished by being united in mind. The attitude of love is nothing short of the attitude of Christ. The love that Christians are to emulate and be united by is the servant love of Christ, "**who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.**" (2:6-7) There was a division among the believers in love. Some were preaching Christ from good will, out of love for Paul, while others preached Christ out of envy and rivalry. (1:15-16) There should never be a split in the body of believers like this. Believers are commanded to love one another. That may sound like a strange command. How can we be told to love everyone? Isn't that just unrealistic? Even when I think of one hundred people that I like, I like them to varying degrees. And the church is filled with such a range of ages and personalities that there's bound to be a couple that I just don't blend with! What will help us to understand Paul's intention of being of the same love, is know which word for 'love' Paul used. I love my Lord, I love my wife, I love my children, I love this body of believers, and I love chocolate. I used the same word (love), but I meant something a little different each time. So which definition did Paul have? He used the word *agape*. This word describes the love of the will. It's not talking about a feeling you get, or some uncontrollable attraction.

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<sup>43</sup> Hansen, G. Walter, *The Letter to the Philippians* Eerdmans, 2009 (p. 111-112)

Paul is talking about the intentional, conscious choice to desire the best for another. This is the love of choice, and because it involves a commitment to love, it can be, and is, commanded to do so.

3) The third key Paul lists is **“being in full accord”** which follows naturally after the first two keys. The meaning behind the term is for believers to live in selfless harmony. People are sinners, believers are still sinners, and our hearts want to carry out its desires. And there are some in the church who have the appearance of godliness, but who inwardly are divisive and ungodly. Look at Paul’s list in 2 Timothy 3:1-5, **“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.”** Paul is warning people to be on the alert for those who will be in the church creating disunity! There will be these kinds of people in the church, who are there for all the wrong reasons, and who are bringing shame to the name of Jesus Christ and disgracing His bride. If the redeemed body of Christ does not make every effort to grow together and maintain purity, the gospel and its hearers will suffer for it. Believers are not to live selfishly, but selflessly, led unified by the Spirit of God. The character of each believer who has been adopted into God’s family should show a family resemblance. Paul wrote to the church at Galatia, **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”** (Gal. 5:22-24)

4) The fourth and final key with Paul gives them for unity is that they be **“of one mind.”** You’re probably thinking that this isn’t a fourth key, it’s just restating the first key. In a sense this fourth key *is* similar and connected, but Paul is drawing out another principle for unity. Sometimes I find that the ESV gives us greater clarity in its translation, and sometimes, like now, it doesn’t. Paul is looking forward with these words. Yes, he’s talking about being united in our minds theologically, which means we will love each other as God has loved us, which means we will be united in spirit. But here Paul is summarizing it all up, and bringing it all back to the mind, directing that unity towards the intended goal of ministry to others as the body of Christ. These words in the NASB read “intent on one purpose.” There is one purpose, one way to be, and that way is prescribed for us in the Word of God. It’s not optional, the way is not up for debate, we are to submit to God’s will and love as He loved.

#### The Right Means for Spiritual Unity (2:3-4)

**“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others.”**

Paul gives a list of five means by which believers can achieve genuine unity. Like the last list these five cannot be separated. The first mean on the list is ‘selfish ambition’. The sin of selfishness is the grandfather of all sins, every sin traced back to its root ends up at selfishness. This is the second time that Paul has used the expression in this letter (1:17), where he spoke of those who were abusing the gospel for personal gain. The definition is pretty simple: don’t do things that only benefit yourself at the expense of another. MacArthur adds, “The word accurately describes someone who strives to advance himself by using flattery, deceit, false accusation, contentiousness, and any other tactic that seems advantageous. It is hardly surprising, then, that Paul lists *eritheia* (“divisions”) as one of the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:20).”<sup>44</sup> When people in the church focus their attention on their own desires and agendas,

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<sup>44</sup> MacArthur, John, *New Testament Commentary: Philippians* Moody, 2001 (p. 110)

you can be sure that there will be conflicting desires and agendas that result in division and dissention. As James says in 3:16 of his letter, **“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.”**

The second mean that Paul gives comes right on the heel of the first. Selfish ambition always results in conceit (ESV), or empty conceit (NASB), or vain conceit (NIV). We have it in the ESV as one word, “conceit”, but in the Greek it is actually two words which translate *vain glory*. In fact, if you’re reading from a KJV, ‘vain glory’ is exactly how it’s translated. It paints the picture of someone who has spent much time polishing a garbage can, and painting a beautiful pattern on it so that it’s the nicest garbage can on the block, but in the end it’s still filled with garbage. We see people in power all of the time who have money and influence and prestige, yet their characters are deplorable. Sometimes we see businessmen who have climbed the corporate ladder by leaving a trail of blood behind them, and they carry themselves way up higher above the rest of ‘weak’ humanity. They have a ‘glory’ it seems, but it’s empty. We see this glory all of the time in the business world, but sadly we even see it in the church of Jesus Christ. Even those who love to study the scriptures can become conceited with their theological understanding. I’ve met people in my life who love to study the Word of God for what appears to be the sole purpose of debate and tearing down other people. The Word of God is a two-edged sword, but it’s not a weapon for conceited people to use in a way that tears other down, and lift up self. When people make abuse of God’s Word like that, they’re doing more damage and causing more disunity than anything else. The conceited ‘believer’ seeks unity, but only a unity that is around himself and his beliefs. Therefore, Paul second mean is that we not be a conceited person. Listen to Paul’s connection just a few verses later in 2:7-8, his example to us of humility is in Jesus Christ, who **“emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”** Jesus Christ humbled Himself. Yet we see people all the time exalting themselves. This is why the sin of conceit is as stomach churning as it is, because it’s as clear as day to others how unworthy conceited people are of their self-appointed glory. We aren’t to be conceited like the world is, we’re to follow Christ and be humble as He is, giving our lives up as living sacrifices. God has exalted Jesus Christ, **“and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”** (2:9b-10) Unity will only come when all people confess Jesus Christ as Lord, and live for His glory alone. *Soli Deo Gloria*—the glory of God alone! Selfish ambition and conceit take the glory meant for God alone and waste it on unworthy sinners.

The third mean that Paul mentions is that believers act “in humility”. This is a positive command, the exact opposite of the second mean. As believers we might have viewed humility as a virtue for so long that we would never consider it as a vice, but in the time that Paul was writing, it was. In the Greek literature of that time, pride was still considered unacceptable behavior, they didn’t promote arrogance culturally speaking. But they also weren’t promoting humility. Humility was regarded as lowly, weak and slavish. The Greeks idealized the great men amongst them who had overcome the shame of lowliness and weakness to become strong and influential. Again, it wasn’t that the Greeks applauded boisterous men who thought more of themselves than they were, but they had a vision for an evolved people who would pick themselves out of the trenches of humble service and elevate themselves to a place of arrival in life.

Sound familiar? Our world prizes the psychological babble of ‘self-esteem’. “Believe in yourself and you can do anything you want!” Our godless world has been trained to downplay the reality of sin, and to ignore the effects of sin upon their bodies and their minds. Instead of bringing our children face-to-face

with their sin, so that they learn their need of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, we have the world train them to blame their sins on everything else but themselves. “Blame your parents, blame your friends, blame your culture, blame your circumstances in life, but never, no never, blame yourself!” Our world of self-confident, highly self-esteemed people is a world that is absolutely at enmity with God. The gospel of self-esteem is an anti-gospel, you cannot save yourself. Isaiah 2:11 says, **“The haughty (proud) looks of man shall be brought low, and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.”**

Our example of humility is Jesus Christ, and He is the One who was exalted. Paul calls us to the same humility as Christ, and he tells us how in verse 3, **“but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”** The word ‘count’ gives the meaning of engaging in an intellectual process, to purposefully think, or consider the other person. As Hansen puts it, “Instead of being preoccupied with introspective, self-absorbed, egocentric thoughts, the mind turns outward to regard the value of others. This direction of thinking is not obsessed with negative thoughts about oneself; it is freed from thinking about oneself to consider others.”<sup>45</sup> Paul used the same word ‘count’ in 2:6 speaking of Christ, **“who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.”** Jesus could have had the circumstances of His life played out completely differently. Being God, He could have destroyed all of those who stood opposed to Him and His gospel. He could have demanded that His detractors bow the knee to His lordship. But He didn’t. He came to do the will of His Father, He came to be a servant, and to die for His people. He came, not for Himself, but for others. Again Hansen writes, “In his letters, [Paul’s] ethical exhortations list numerous responsibilities that members of the Christian community have toward one another: love one another; build up one another; bear with one another; forgive one another; bear one another’s burdens; and be kind and compassionate to one another. So Paul’s challenge to value others is really a call to think about the needs of the community.”<sup>46</sup>

Paul wants us to consider our brothers, to intentionally think about them. But even above that, he wants us to consider them to be “more significant than” ourselves. He uses this term again in 3:8, **“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”** As much as knowing Jesus far surpasses anything else we could have in this life. Consider others in such a way as that they far surpass any thoughts that you could have for yourself. Hansen one more time this page, “When Paul uses this word in his encouragement to value others above yourselves, he is not counseling his readers to beat themselves up or put themselves down. Instead, he is urging them to build up and lift up others. The focus is not negative, but positive. Let the needs and interests of others surpass yours: put them in first place; give them the place of honor; respect them; listen to them; speak about them; serve them; strengthen them; encourage them. Putting others instead of ourselves in the center of our concern will cause a radical revolution in the community.”<sup>47</sup>

The fourth mean that Paul uses is **“let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”** This final mean that Paul gives us is closely connected to the third, so there isn’t much more that I could say regarding it that I already haven’t. But nevertheless, I will make a few more comments, and then summarize this lesson into one application.

We must remember that Paul is writing to regenerated people, Christians, Holy Spirit indwelt men and women. And because of their calling and standing before God, they are saints, those who are becoming more and more like Christ as they journey through their lives. And yet at the same time these people

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<sup>45</sup> Hansen, G. Walter, *The Letter to the Philippians* Eerdmans, 2009 (p. 115-116)

<sup>46</sup> IBID, (p. 116)

<sup>47</sup> IBID, (p. 116)

remain sinners, who war against their sinful hearts every day of their lives. Sinful hearts are selfish hearts that only look out for one, and so Paul reminds them what to look for. The sinful heart looks out for itself. It looks for justice, it wants its own rights asserted; it wants its own demands to be heard. Paul is encouraging them to look instead for the best interests of everyone. Paul wants them to know that even when they feel as though they're suffering unjustly, that they should purposefully think of all the people who surround them who also suffer, some far worse. This is the principle that he has already written to them about in this letter, how he is more concerned with their well-being and the advancement of the gospel, than he is his own imprisonment.

### Summary and Application

What is it that enables us to think of others this way? It's nothing short of the living God indwelling our hearts. Do you remember the opening of chapter 2? "**If there is any encouragement in Christ** (and there is), **any comfort from love** (and there is), **and participation in the Spirit** (and there is), **any affection and sympathy** (and there is!)" IOW, if you are a Christian, you will be enabled to carry out verses 2, 3 and 4. I'm reminded of a sermon that I listened to many years ago by Voddie Baucham. He gave a parenting analogy that I think is applicable here. He gave the analogy of a basketball coach who was coaching his first practice with a team of young boys who had never played the game before. The first thing that he order to boys to do was to get up and start running the full court press. Of course, the boys stared at him in confusion. They couldn't run the full court press because they weren't taught the full court press before. Voddie had a different application than I do for this analogy, but I thought it fit to show you that certain results are not possible without certain work being done beforehand.

The unregenerate person is simply cannot carry out the commands of Paul because they are not born again Christians. They don't know the gospel, they do not have the Spirit of God alive in them, therefore they cannot echo the gospel towards each other in unity. Lloyd-Jones rewords the passage from 2:1-4 this way, "*Philippians, ' he says in effect, 'I am going to appeal to you to live your life in a certain way. How can I best make my appeal? I will put it like this. If your experience of Christ has any exhortation for you, or any argument with you, then live like this. That is the position. If love, and the spirit of love, that you have received from Christ can likewise exhort and plead and argue with you, then let each esteem other better than themselves. If there is any such thing as fellowship and companionship of the Holy Spirit, well show it in this way. If there are any bowels and mercies; if anything of the very life of God has been planted in you, well then proceed to live that life. This is something that is only possible to the Christian.*"<sup>48</sup>

It is God alone who teaches us the truths of the gospel, and who creates in us a heart that loves others above ourselves. And God does teach us, not in some mystical way, but plainly through the His Word, and the convicting, indwelling Holy Spirit make His teaching plain to us. The Word of God is the perfect mirror into which we stare, and it reflects to us (in the most accurate way possible) the image of our hearts, and the beauty of Christ. It is the word of God that shows me my sin. It is the Word of God that brings me to my knees and the foot of the cross and causes me to cry out to the Savior. It is the Word of God that shows me that my every accomplishment is worthless as far as gaining any standing before God. This was Paul's point in Philippians 3:4-11. So we must stare intently, and often, into the mirror of God's Word. Unity is impossible apart from being united around the truths of scripture, and living out the truths found therein. James 1:22ff says, "But be doers of the words, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who

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<sup>48</sup> Lloyd-Jones, Martyn, *The Life of Joy* Baker, 1989 (p. 145)

looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.”

It is only when we stare intently at God’s Word that we will see with clarity the utter sinfulness of our sin. That we will see the depth and the total extent of our sin. It is only upon seeing the reflection of God’s judgment of our hearts that we will see that we have in fact broken every commandment. We need a Savior. We need One who will meet us at the lost point and save us. And it is not until a person is given a new heart like Christ’s that they will ever love like Him.

There are three things that must happen in every Christian’s life before they will ever be concerned for others interests before their own. The first is the admission of pride. There are some Christians who have no issue confessing that their hearts are prideful, and the other Christians are too prideful to confess it. Long before you will ever see others as more important than yourself, you must admit that your heart frankly doesn’t. C. S. Lewis said in his book *Mere Christianity* (p.99), *“If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud. It is a bigish step too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it.”*

The next thing a person must do after recognizing and admitting pride, is to humble themselves before God. Peter says in 1 Peter 5:5-6, **“Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you.”** We need to step away from the example of Joel Osteen who said, “When nobody else celebrates you, learn to celebrate yourself. When nobody else compliments you, then compliment yourself. It’s not up to other people to keep you encouraged. It’s up to you. Encouragement should come from the inside.” We need to step away from this message of self-worth, and follow the example of Isaiah who said, **“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”** (Isa. 6:5) We would also do well to follow the example of Peter, who fell at the knees of Jesus and cried out, **“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”** (Luke 5:8) It isn’t until we see our complete unworthiness that we will ever see the worth of Christ, and love those whom He loves before ourselves.

The next thing that we must do in order to love other above ourselves is have a daily fellowship with Christ. He is the source of our life. He is the source of our love. He is the source of all wisdom. He is the source of all power. How ridiculous of an idea is it to admit our complete unworthiness, and then to live separated from God, and relying on our own worth? Christ is the One who we need to cling too daily. Paul said in 4:13, **“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”**