

Dear Philippians, V

Paul's Unifying Theory

March 2, 2003

PAUL'S PHILIPPIAN PRISON

Ten years before this letter, Paul and Silas had been severely flogged, and then chained in the inner cell of the Philippian prison. (Acts 16:22-24)

This is a cistern on the outskirts of Philippi that is believed to be the very prison where Paul and Silas were held.

Then, around midnight as they were praying and singing hymns, an earthquake shook the mud walls which released their chains and unhinged cell doors. (Acts 16:25-26)

- This is the inner cell where they would've been singing.

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

Paul now shifts from talking about the struggles coming from the outside to the strife that can be on the inside of the church.

These verses emphasize the major theme of Philippians: Unity.

¹ If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. – Philippians 2:1-11 NIV

THE HYMN (6-11)

- There's something very interesting in verses 6-11.

Because of several words unique to Paul's letters and a poetic balance between verses 6-8 and 9-11, many scholars believe Paul is quoting an excerpt from one of the earliest Christian hymns. If so, then ten years earlier when:

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. – Acts 16:25 NIV

This could be one of the hymns they were singing; singing and reminding themselves of the humiliation and suffering of Christ which resulted in His being exalted.

BENEFITS OF THE FAITH

Paul begins this passage by reminding the Philippians of just a few of the personal advantages that come from being a Christian.

Five benefits of the ultimate life-insurance policy: *Encouragement*; *Comfort* (peace that passes understanding) *Fellowship* (indwelling of Holy Spirit) *Tenderness* (affection) and *Compassion* (mercy).

Then he says, “... *then make my joy complete by ...*” This signals that a rebuke is about to follow; a mild rebuke by contrast:

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? – Galatians 3:1 NIV

Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly – mere infants in Christ. – 1 Corinthians 3:1 NIV

He follows up with 4 expressions of unity: be like minded; have the same love; be one in spirit; and be one in purpose. We can't hoard the encouragement or comfort or fellowship or tenderness or compassion of Christ for our own indulgence.

- With significant benefits come significant responsibilities.

People grateful for encouragement encourage others; those indebted to Christ for His comfort, comfort others; and so on.

- True recipients of mercy become conduits of that mercy.
- The outcome, the evidence, is harmony with others.

Paul's four expressions of unity are a call to relationships that affect our mind, heart, soul, and purpose. If our relationships lack this depth, Paul gives five specifics to examine:

1. **Competitiveness** (Defuse Competition)

Do nothing out of selfish ambition (Vs 3)

The word for "selfish ambition" is the same Paul used in 1:17 describing "those who preach Christ out of envy or rivalry."

- Striving to build your own kingdom at the expense of others.

We live in a very competitive world. Too often we compete with people on our own team. If we view life as a competition, then everyone becomes our competitor/enemy.

Q: Are you working with your spouse to build your marriage; or are you competing with him/her for title of Martyr?

- We must choose to defuse the competition around us.

2. **Conceit** (Delete Conceit)

Do nothing out of vain conceit (Vs 3)

The Greek words for "vain conceit" are "empty" and "glory." It's self-promotion; showing off; boasting. Proverbs 13:10 says, "*Pride breeds quarrels.*" That's because conceit keeps us from admitting when we're at fault or wrong.

- Arrogance has become an American virtue.

On American Idol a record producer judges a performer, "You were off tune; the song didn't work; you need to work out." And the performer says, "I beg to differ. Who are you? I'm the best!" Everyone listening applauds, "Yeah! Good for you! You go girl!"

- Our culture has elevated selfishness to an art form.

People, too big for their britches, will be exposed in the end.

3. **Criticism** (Decrease Criticism)

In humility consider others better than yourselves (Vs 3)

Every time we criticize (constructive or not) we are declaring our superiority to whoever we're criticizing.

- Don't build yourself up by putting others down.

Paul's not saying, "Feel inferior." Or "Allow others to exploit you or mistreat you."

- Humility is not about devaluing yourself but valuing others.
- Humility is being other-centered rather than self-centered.

Everyone has something to learn from, glean from, or appreciate.

Two neighbor kids are playing with your cat; one is petting it, one is poking it; who deserves praise who deserves punishment?

- Ask yourself: Do you give more strokes or pokes?

4. **Concern** (Demonstrate Concern)

Look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others (Vs 4)

Notice the word "Look" it's the Greek word "skopeo;" it means to "take aim." It's how we got the word "scope" like on a gun.

- I must intentionally focus on the needs of others.

My relationships will never have depth if I only focus on my own needs, my own feelings, my own pressures, and my own goals.

Q: Can you name the five greatest interests of your spouse; kids; parents; friends; and coworkers?

5. **Christ-Likeness** (Develop Christ-Likeness)

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus (Vs 5)

Q: Are you willing to sacrifice for the benefit of others?

Unity is a gift of the Spirit that requires effort. We can't be unified with others apart from being unified with Christ.

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. -
Ephesians 4:3 NIV

- How to find J.O.Y: Jesus 1st; Others 2nd; Yourself 3rd.