

Practical unity amongst the Ph

Part 1

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[00:00:01] Could we turn to the Epistle to the Philippians.

Philippians chapter 2, from verse 1.

Philippians 2, verse 1.

If there be, therefore, any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind [00:01:02] let each esteem other better than themselves.

Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

So far the word of God tonight.

Dear brethren, we have been talking about this wonderful prayer of our Lord in John 17. And we have noticed and will notice that the Lord has prayed several times for the unity of his own.

And we have spoken about the matter that this prayer has been fulfilled. That there is unity seen from God's point of view.

And the Lord in his prayer is not talking about the practical aspects under the responsibility of man. [00:02:03] But I would like tonight to add a few thoughts on this practical side of unity.

And I'm not going to talk about separations, divisions and these things that were mentioned this afternoon. Because that was not in the days of the early disciples.

We mentioned today that in the early chapters of books, in the early chapters of the book of Acts, we see this wonderful outward unity that was to be seen. But, on the other hand, there is the matter of unity in the local assembly.

And if we study the New Testament assemblies, the New Testament epistles, we find that this lack of unity was nearly a problem in most of the assemblies.

And Philippians is a good example to look at this from a special point of view.

[00:03:06] The Philippians were not the Corinthians.

In the assembly of the Corinthians, there was also a lack of unity. There was gross disorder in their midst. There was sin in their midst. And a lot of things were not according to God's will. And they had started to make parties in their midst. Some were saying, I'm of Paul and the other was saying, I'm of Apollos and I'm of Cephas. And some were saying, I'm of Christ.

And Paul deals with the matter of the lack of unity amongst them straightforwardly. In the first chapter he just says to them, are ye not fleshly? Is the Christ divided? And, in many other words, he approaches the matter straightforwardly from the beginning. But this was not so in Philippians.

[00:04:01] The Philippians were not like the Galatians. In the assemblies of Galatia, there was also a lack of unity. There was fighting amongst them and the truth of the gospel was at stake. And the result was that Paul had to say to the Galatians in chapter 5 of Galatians verse 15, But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. He speaks very clearly and plainly to them about the situation in their midst. But the Philippian case was different. The Philippians were an assembly in a good state.

Paul says, ye are my joy and my crown. He had a lot of things he could commend in their midst and it was a joy for him to think about the Philippian sins. But there was the same problem among them.

[00:05:02] And he deals with it in a much tender way.

He knew the Philippians were in a state to understand this. They were in a position that they had an ear to hear what the Spirit was going to say to the assembly. In every chapter of Philippians, Paul mentions this problem. In chapter 1, he says, in verse 27, in the middle of the verse he says, That he stand fast in one spirit with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel. He encourages them to strive together for the faith of the gospel. But he says, Philippians, be careful to do this in one spirit with one mind.

[00:06:04] And he deals with this in chapter 2, we come to that in a minute. And in chapter 3, he says, in verse 16, Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. Again he says, keep in mind, if you walk the path of faith, to do so in the same steps as the New Translation says.

Walk in the same steps.

And in chapter 4, he mentions two sisters by name in verse 2 and says, That they may be of the same mind in the Lord.

Chapter 2 makes it clear that this was not only a problem of these two sisters. Maybe this problem among these two sisters was so publicly known that it had to be addressed publicly. But in chapter 2, he addresses all of them.

[00:07:02] But in what a tender way he does so.

First he says, if there be therefore any consolation in Christ.

If any comfort of love.

If any fellowship of the Spirit. If any bowels and mercies. This is not a very easy verse from the grammatical point. Because in English and German, the word if normally introduces a conditional clause. And so the sentence could mean, if this should happen, perhaps then something else would be the case. But that is not what Paul is saying.

Mr. Darby has a marginal note where he says, we could say instead of if, we could say since. Because it is something that was there. Not something that would be possible, but it was there. Maybe we could express in our own words what he is saying.

Paul says, if there be therefore any consolation in Christ for me, the prisoner Paul, then you Philippians have been that to me. [00:08:05] And if there is any comfort of love for me, the prisoner Paul, I've seen it in you Philippians. If there was any fellowship of Spirit, it was with you Philippians. And if any bowels and mercy, it was what I saw in you Philippians. He is acknowledging what they, the Philippians, had been for him, what they have done for him. They had sent a gift to the apostle in prison.

And he felt that it was not only a material gift, that there was their heart behind it. And that it was a consolation for him in Christ. And he saw the love behind it, so it was a comfort of love for him. He saw the fellowship that was expressed in it, a fellowship by the Holy Spirit. And it was bowels of mercy, came from the innermost parts of their being, what they felt for the apostle Paul. [00:09:01] And he acknowledges that. It's a good way for us, if we would have to point out some things in believers, as Paul is going to do, first to acknowledge what the Lord had done and what he could acknowledge. And he says in the next verse, fulfill ye my joy, my joy.

He acknowledges that what they had done and what they had been for him was a real joy for the apostle. In his difficult situations, in his service, there were some believers in Philippi who had thought of him and it was a joy for him. That must have been an encouragement for the Philippians when they read this. And now he says, ye dear Philippians, fulfill ye my joy.

He said there is still one thing missing. My glass of joy, so to say, my cup of joy would be overflowing if you would just add to this what is still missing. I'm so thankful and grateful for what you've done, but there's still something missing. [00:10:06] And I'm sure the hearts of the Philippians were opened by this to listen to what he was saying. He says, fulfill ye my joy that ye be like-minded or that ye think the same thing.

There was this lack of unity among them and he said you shall be like-minded. Thinking the same thing is the translation, the new translation gives. Now this does not mean of course that we have to think the same thing on every detail of our lives. Where to spend our holidays, what job to take or whatever. But he says it's the way of thinking you have. It should be the same way of thinking. You should be united in your way of thinking over these things. Like-minded.

Having the same love.

He does not say that love has to be shown in the same way always.

[00:11:03] Paul didn't show his love to the saints in the same way. We've just seen that in Galatians or in Corinthians his love for the saints spoke quite differently from the way he does in Philippians. But he says having the same love.

He is so to say, saying to the Philippians, oh you Philippians, I have seen the love. You have shown towards me in prison. Why not showing the same love among yourselves, among each other? Oh we all know it is much easier to love the far away servant of the Lord than to love the brother or sister sitting next to me in the local assembly. But Paul says you know the same love. If we would be thinking a little bit about those early Christian assemblies, we would find out that their situation they had amongst themselves was in many cases more complex than in most of our European assemblies. [00:12:01] There were some believers sitting there who had been Jews.

Brought up under regulations and rules all of their life. And there were sitting believers from the Gentiles who didn't know anything about the law and had lived in idolatry before they got converted. There were sitting the free man of Rome on the sleeve. A greater social distinction we couldn't think about.

And they were all sitting together in the same assembly. And Paul says the same love.

If you go to some places where the believers come from different backgrounds, and different countries, all in the same assembly, you will realize that it is much easier that tension comes on because of the different ways we were brought up, the different ways we are in matters of practical behavior. I remember a young brother from Germany told me he had been to Australia for some time. [00:13:02] And he was in a meeting. And they were sitting there together having a Bible reading. And after they finished the Bible reading, a cup of tea or something was brought. And he put away his Bible on the floor to take his cup of tea. And just opposite him sat a brother of Egyptian origin. And he was looking at him very strangely. And he said, what have I done? Well, this brother, a former Muslim, a Muslim would never put the Quran on the floor.

And so from coming from this background, he would never put his Bible on the floor. And he was really shocked to see a brother putting his Bible on the floor. I'm not going to give the solution to this problem. I just want to tell you these things come up.

And how to deal with this? Having the same love. To deal with this in a manner that does not destroy the unity of the saints together. Having the same love.

If problems arise because of different backgrounds we might have, [00:14:02] he said, having the same love.

Being of one accord.

We could read about that in the new translation. Mr. Darby says, joined in soul. There may be something of these early Christians in the book of Acts, where it says they were of one heart and soul. Joined in soul. The enemy was not successful in coming in between them, destroying this unity, because they were joined in soul.

Of one accord.

That should be the position amongst the saints. Of one mind.

Thinking the one thing, says the new translation. Thinking the one thing. There's one aim before us. Thinking about the one thing, about one person having before us. We come to that in a minute.

Lack of unity in the local assembly. But in Philippians we have a very special point to consider, I suppose. In Corinthians we said, as an example, a lot of things were the problem. [00:15:03] A lot of disorder, sin was there. In Galatians it was fundamental truth. This was all not the problem among the Philippians. There was no, as far as we know, no gross disorder among them. Then Paul wouldn't have recommended them. And they were not fighting about the way of truth. What was the problem among them? Why was there this problem of a lack of unity among them?

If you study Philippians, all the chapters, you will find out that this assembly was an assembly that was jealous for the Lord. What about these two sisters where he says that they were not of one mind? He could speak of them and say, they have labored with me in the gospel.

And the verse we read in verse 1, in chapter 1 in 27, he said, One spirit with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel. The Philippians had the problem an assembly has that is jealous for the Lord. [00:16:01] And where a lot of the brothers and sisters fail, they want to serve the Lord and live for him. But, just then, the enemy comes in and tries to bring disunity among the saints.

This problem the Philippians had, no assembly will have that is not jealous for the Lord. They are just sleeping. They will now know nothing about this problem. But as soon as the spirit is working and there is zeal for the Lord, the enemy is there as well. And Paul says, be careful when striving for the Lord, when working for the Lord, that this is done like-minded, with the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. He has put before them the positive side first. How it should be.

But now he mentions the other side, as it probably was in their midst. He says, let nothing be done through strife.

In chapter 1, he was speaking about some that preached Christ even of envy and strife. [00:17:06] Not out of strife or vain glory.

Strife means that I am fighting with somebody else because I didn't like what the other one is doing. And vain glory is more the case when I am praising what I am doing. Because that is so important and I think it's not seen by everybody how important I am. And I want to have more honour and glory. Both things are not what the Lord wants to see in the company that he prayed for, for their unity. But he says, there is another way you could do it. In lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than themselves.

In lowliness of mind.

Each one esteeming the other better than themselves. If we turn to the Gospel of Mark, chapter 9.

[00:18:06] Going to read verse 33.

And he came to Capernaum.

And being in the house, he asked them, what was it that you disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace. For by the way they had disputed among themselves who should be the greatest. He had spoken to them about what he was going to do. That he was going to Calvary's cross and he was going to suffer. And then they go on.

The disciples didn't say anything to the Lord. They didn't react.

It says they didn't understand what he was saying. And then they come into the house and the Lord asked this question. What have you disputed about on the way? They get red faces.

They are silent, looking on the floor.

[00:19:03] What a question that was.

Yes, but what was the answer? Why did they not give an answer to the Lord? Because they had disputed on the way who was the greatest. Just the opposite of what we find here. They had disputed among themselves who was the greatest.

That was the problem probably among the Philippians. And Paul says, no.

In lowliness of mind, let each esteem the other better than themselves.

How is it possible to do that?

Well, if I think about my own person. You do not know how bad I am.

I know this better than you do. And I don't know anything about you. So, if I think about my own person in the light of Scripture. In the light of the Word of God. And I see you and I see in you what Christ has done in you. [00:20:01] And what he has given you. And what I can see in you of Christ. Some features of Christ. Then I will esteem you higher than myself.

And that is the way, Paul says, particularly when it is a question of serving the Lord. This is the way for unity. Seeing what the Lord has given to someone else. And to thank the Lord for that.

Esteeming him higher, better than ourselves.

Look not every man on his own things. But every man also on the things of others.

We are living in a society where everybody is looking after his own things.

And where people are taught to do so.

To look after your own things.

A sister once said to me. That her sister-in-law, who was an unbeliever. Said to her, why are you sacrificing all your career and everything for your family? [00:21:01] You must do something for your own. You must look after yourself. You cannot look after your family all the time. Well, that's not what Scripture says. Not only for women. It's the same for man. We are not here to look after our own

business. But looking after the things of others. He says, not after his own things. But every man also on the things of others. And some verses later in this epistle. Paul gives them an example.

Of a man who had done that. He says about Timothy.

In chapter 2 verse 20.

He says about his fellow worker Timothy. For I have no man like-minded. Who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own. Not the things which are Jesus Christ's. Here was a man, he could say. He is like-minded. That was the problem he addressed to the Philippians. He said, Timothy and myself. Both working for the Lord. We are like-minded. And he, Timothy, cares for you Philippians. All seek their own.

Not the things which are Jesus Christ's. [00:22:02] But if there's somebody looking for the things of Jesus Christ. He will look for the things of others. Because that's what he did. As we will mention to them just in the next sentence.

Every man also on the things of others. In serving the Lord.

And he said. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. He said to them. If you want to know. How this is possible. If you want to have this mind. That is possible.

To do that.

Which I've just told you. Then look at the Lord Jesus. Down here on earth.

Here is the example. In what he did.

In the way he did it. In his mind that was seen in that. We are not going to do the same things that he did. But the mind that was shown him. How he did it. His loneliness.

And how he was looking after the things of others. He said.

This is an example to you. Study the life of the Lord Jesus. How he was dealing with men.

And the mind he showed in all this. [00:23:02] And then you will know how to live a life.

In loneliness of mind.

So we've seen that Paul. Sees this problem among the saints. In the local companies.

That the enemy might be there. To destroy the unity.

That is so lovely in the eyes of God. In a general sense.

There is a unity that cannot be destroyed. In one sense. We have seen that. But in the practical outworking of this. That's the great aim of the enemy.

To hinder unity.

Unity among the saints.

That we should be like-minded. Having the same love. Being of one accord. Of one mind.

And we see.

The person of the Lord.

Whom we see in the gospels. And on the pages of scripture. Studying his life.

To find out. The mind in which he did the things. Will help us. To go away like that.

[00:24:02] So may it be that we. On the one hand. Be really occupied and delighted.

By studying these scriptures together. Which show us how the Lord. How God sees unity.

And to praise him.

That this unity is there. And will be there in the future. And the enemy can do nothing about it. It will be seen.

And on the other hand.

How he will be glorified. If we also.

In our practical lives.

Of this unity.

And as I said before.

We are not now talking about all the others. And about all the divisions that are there. This is another subject. But we are talking.

About our own companies. Where we gather to the Lord's name. And where we want to. Be a testimony for him.

That some of this unity. May be seen. In our practical lives.

The next speaker was. Brother Bill Dronsfield. And he read. First of all.

[00:25:02] John chapter 18. Verse 1.

When Jesus had spoken.

To Bill Dronsfield.

And he read. First of all.

John chapter 18. Brother Bill Dronsfield. And he read. First of all.