

MAKE MY JOY COMPLETE IN UNITY

Philippians 2: 2 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

As we come to this message, be sure it was deep on Paul's heart. These words as well, are deep on my heart. Most pastors know that the issue of church unity is the paramount issue in their church's future today, as it was in the early church. John MacArthur is not new at pastoring. At age 81, this is what he says, "The thing I most hate in our church, the thing I most hate is spiritual apathy, indifference to the things of the Lord, indifference to holy truth, indifference to spiritual issues. That's the thing I most hate. But the thing I most fear is discord, disunity, conflict, and division. My constant prayer for this blessed church of which we're all a part is that we will never tear asunder what God has joined together. But that is a constant battle. And I would say to you that endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the church is easily the most pressing difficult and constant activity of spiritual oversight. Unquestionably it is the major issue of spiritual leadership."

At the heart of this message on unity, is the fulcrum of the message, the pivot, in Philippians 2: 5. We read, "Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus." Whatever I preach today, it must be rooted in this fulcrum and pivot. Our model for unity in heart, soul, and mind must be rooted in Christ Jesus. Paul defines what this means in Colossians 3: 2 where he commands us, "Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth." The word "**set your mind,**" (**phroneo**) is thinking that has the heart of God embedded in the core of our hearts, our souls, our minds, and our strength. This mind of Christ is illustrated in Philippians 2: 5-8. The heart of the mind of Christ comes with the **emptying of our privileges and rights**; just as Jesus emptied Himself, making Himself nothing. Jesus never emptied Himself of His position as God the Son. But He did empty Himself of His privileges/prerogatives as God the Son.

God is calling us as a church, as married couples, as parents and children in the home, and as brothers and sisters in the family of God, to be united, likeminded. This call to unity always defines the future of every local church. Unity in mind makes the difference in how much and to what extent God will use our local church in the future. Unity of mind is not a call to agree with false doctrine or to unite with those who are angry, proud, bitter, or unforgiving. Unity of mind is the key to the future of our marriages, our families, and our church. This call to unity requires a Christ-like emptying of ourselves. This call to unity requires an emptying of self that is necessary to please the Lord. Think of our church. Have any of us made threats, about what we desire, our way or the highway? God forgive us. We must repent of those threats.

Have we made threats to our spouse on what we promise to do unless things go our way in our home? Angry threats or promised consequences ahead if we do not get our way are critical departures from our marriage vows. Unity of mind is one of the greatest needs today for marriages, families, and churches. In Philippians 2: 2, there are four ways God calls us to empty ourselves of our prerogatives, privileges

and rights as Jesus did. The outline of this message grows right out of our text. It is easy to figure out. (1) We must make ourselves nothing, emptying ourselves (1) to be of the same mind, (2) to have the same love, (3) to be of full accord, and (4) to be intent on one purpose. Will we? I propose four personal questions to each of us.

WILL WE MAKE OURSELVES NOTHING, EMPTYING OURSELVES, TO BE OF THE SAME MIND? (I.)

Paul commands us, “Complete my joy by being of the same mind.” This means coming to think the same thing, being united in what we think, and being one in our thoughts. This is: **MENTAL UNITY**. All of us may suffer from purposely avoiding each other at times. Especially, we may avoid certain subjects with each other. In our honest selves, we might rather die than give in, so we will have the same mind with a certain brother or sister. I have heard brothers in Christ say, “I will die before I am one with another brother.” That is tragic. We sing, “To Be Like Jesus, To Be Like Jesus, All I Ask, To Be Like Him.” Do we mean it? Having the same mind is about surrendering our preference and our wiser ways. Calling us to be of the same mind, is calling us first, to listen to each other, to pray about what each of us is saying and thinking, and then learning to say with Jesus in our Gethsemanes, “Nevertheless, not my will, but Yours be done.” We read about Jesus, in Hebrews 12: 2, “Who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame.” Paul is telling the church in Philippi same mindedness among them is what it will take to make his joy complete. Same mindedness is the road to joy. Paul’s epistle of joy mentions joy 4x in chapter 1, 5x in chapter 2, 1x in chapter 3, and 4 times in chapter 4—that’s 14 times. But here in our text, Paul is telling us, he could not break out in full joy with the thought of factions or opposing minds among the Philippian. Beloved, I know you know, opposing mindedness undermines husbands and wives, parents and children, and members and friends in Christ’s church more than anything else.

Unity in thought continues in unity in speech, which leads to unity in action. This doesn’t come automatically. We each have active fertile minds. We all have free independent spirits. We must guard what we think, what we say, and what we do with God’s call to be of the same mind? Different mindedness is as grating as listening to a piano being tuned. Yet, allowing God’s Spirit to take the time to tune our minds to the same chord on our violins as a couple, a family, or in our church is key. When was the last time when you as husband and wife thought something and the other one said, “Amazing, that is just what I was thinking!” That is where we ought to stop and praise the Lord and thank each other. It is so much easier to point out when our spouse seems to be differing with us, and to camp on that!

With same mindedness, God is calling us together in mind so that even in our initially differing thoughts, we wait, and watch God quietly bring us together. When we wait on God to bring us together, amazing moments may become more and more common and less and less rare. When the same Spirit of God is moving and speaking to us, with each of our minds answering to the other’s mind, we may sense the moments when God is tuning us to each other. Consider an orchestra. There is one leader or conductor and many musicians. By the way, musicians do

not easily come together. Musicians each have their own training and style. They have their own strong opinions about the beat, the rhythm, the blend, and on and on. But what does an orchestra have in common? First, if it's a beautiful orchestra, all the musicians share the same conductor or director. Also, an orchestra shares the same music and musical score. They all play different parts. But when they follow the conductor, the result is not only melody, but harmony. When all the effects of volume, rhythm, beat, and blend are met, it becomes a symphony.

Unity of mind is not the same as uniformity of thought. Being of the same mind in an orchestra doesn't mean every musician is playing the same notes at the same time. Uniformity is what a dictator will command. A director isn't after uniformity. Same mindedness doesn't mean we always think the same thoughts, but it does mean that our different thoughts cannot be opposing thoughts. Same mindedness allows for individuality and style, but there will be no symphony if we are not playing the same music, the same song. If our lives are lived to make our point, to prove our point, and to push our point, we are living a solo. Even one musician refusing to follow the conductor is the death of a symphony. I pray often for us as a church—the words of the song, “Lord, make us a symphony, a symphony of worship, we lift up our minds in Your name.” Will we empty ourselves to be of the same mind one with another? I propose a second personal question.

WILL WE MAKE OURSELVES NOTHING, EMPTYING OURSELVES, BY HAVING THE SAME LOVE? (II.) Paul commands us, “Complete my joy by having the same love.” This is: **MORAL UNITY**. Notice the tearing down of all walls that divide us. The same love. This cherishing of the same love and prizing the same yearning for each other is a moral strength that divides us from the world around us. Jesus said in John 13: 34, 35, “A new commandment I give to you that you love one another, just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” This agape love of Christ, who emptied Himself and gave His life on the cross for us, is a love that purifies our love, that defines our love, so that in love, we lay down our lives, by giving up our rights, our own way, and that we prefer each other to ourselves. This love is without selfishness or empty conceit, and full of humility. (Phil. 2: 3.) Let's go back to the symphony. It takes harmony not only of thinking, but harmony of feeling. I know many Christians put down the importance of feelings. But not God. Unity of thought leads to unity of affection. God's symphonies include a music of both thinking and feeling spheres. That's why God's music moves us. The same note will respond when in key with another instrument. The two instruments will sound different, but when one note is struck, all instruments in key will answer in the same key, but with differing sounds. Each instrument has its own sound or feeling it brings to us, but when all instruments are in key, when our whole church is singing together, and we are in love with each other, that is true worship to God.

A church with division sings, yes, but it fails to worship. Romans 12: 1 tells us that our reasonable service to God is to present our (plural) bodies a living and holy

(singular) sacrifice. Musical natures are super sensitive and high strung. Thus, musicians are always tuning their instruments. Why? We all get out of tune. We each fail to maintain the same love. Beloved, if we are in love with Jesus, and we all share His agape love, selfless, self-emptying love with God, it's far easier to keep in tune with each other. I call each of us today to surrender our jarring chords of, which become a form of immorality. Moral unity is never "this is my way and that's the end of the story;" or, "This is the way it is, and you can take it or leave it." If in your marriage or family, there is not moral unity with the same love, when we come together to worship, those with discernment, can literally feel the spiritual warfare, and worship is marred. I propose a third personal question.

WILL WE MAKE OURSELVES NOTHING, EMPTYING OURSELVES, TO BE IN FULL ACCORD? (III.)

Paul commands us in verse 2, "Complete my joy by being in full accord." Paul says "be in full accord. Some translations say, **not** "united in your spirits," **but** united in spirit. This is: **MUTUAL UNITY**. The word one accord or full accord suggests two hearts beating together in perfect key. It is a symphony of the Spirit of God. Divorces are all about the loss of mutual unity. Husbands and wives get out of tune. This full accord is the unity of souls and spirits, as well as the unity of minds and feelings. Here is the tenderness and persuasiveness of listening hearts. I warn us all. The moment we close our ears, our hearts, or our minds to listen to each other—watch out. Whenever you say, "I've heard enough of you, you and your spouse or you and your family are on the edge of the cliff. When we put our heads down, when we cover our ears, when we close our eyes, when we shake our heads and in effect say, "There you go again," we are at war. We are not emptying ourselves. We are not even on the outskirts of mutual unity. We are miles away. We may be well able to defend our points and prove we are right, or so we think, but we will never convince the Lord. He knows.

Since God has called us to play the same song, to be in the same orchestra, to live in the same family, to love in the same marriage, to work in the same job, and to be members in the same church, mutual unity is not an option. It is as necessary as drinking water is in a hot, barren desert. The phrase, "united in spirit," or "in full accord" is the translation of one Greek word, **sumpsuchos**. Sum means with and **psuchos** is our word from which we get psychology. **Psuchos** means soul. The literal translation would be "with-soul—which means we are both as husband and wife to be, "like-souls" in agreement with the mind and spirit of the Holy Spirit.

Each of us have lived long enough to remember when we have heard and sensed and felt the discord of no mutual unity. Each of us have pointed our fingers or pointed our words directly at each other much too often. God tells us in Isaiah 58: 9, "Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am,' **if** you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness." Being of the same soul, means from Ephesians 5 and 6, husbands, we must love our wife as Christ loved the church, and wives, you must lovingly and respectfully submit to your husband, and children, you must honor and obey your parents, and employers, you must stop your threatening, and

employees, you must serve your employer like you serve Christ. I ask you beloved, will you empty yourself by being in full accord, united in spirit? I ask you all, “Will you listen again to that mother and that dad, obediently, will you listen to that wife, lovingly, and to that husband, submissively and respectfully, to that boss, serving him as you serve Christ, and to that employee, as being your peer and brother or sister, and to your pastors, as a flock that mutually lead and follow? Lastly, I propose a fourth and final question.

WILL WE MAKE OURSELVES NOTHING, EMPTYING OURSELVES, TO BE OF ONE MIND, INTENT ON ONE PURPOSE? (IV.)

Paul commands “Complete my joy by being of one mind, intent on one purpose.” The Greek word **en phroneo**, means, learning to think one way. This is: **MENTORED UNITY**. This one way of thinking is learning to think God’s way. This is slightly different from having the same mind. We must teach this to each other, and be teachable to each other, to be of one mind, and to be intent on one purpose. Beloved, ultimately, only the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, can mentor this into our lives. Not being intent on one purpose in the church or in the home or at work with a fellow believer, is all about one or more of us, failing to obey Jesus. Yet, let me remind you that mentored leadership is set up by God in the church, in the home, in the workplace, and we err when we ignore God’s set up leaders. Paul wrote, in I Corinthians 11: 1, “Follow me, as I also follow Christ.” “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.” Loving leadership when followed, spurs us on to being intent on one purpose. Dr. John A. Broadus, a Southern Baptist dean of homiletics, that’s a big word for preaching, would speak to his student ministers in seminary, saying, “I plead with you today, to do your very best for Jesus’ sake.” And then, with tears in his eyes, and soon in the eyes of his students, he would beg, “Do just a bit better for your old teacher’s sake.” Anyone who is so hard as to be deaf to the love of a mother or father, a husband or wife, or even to a child, is apt to have grown deaf to the love of God. Vance Havner said it well, “Christians are frail, but when they stick together, like snow, they can stop traffic.” Jesus, in His high priestly prayer, just before He died at Calvary, said, in John 17: 20-21, “I do not ask for these only, (speaking of His 12 disciples) but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they all may be one, just as you, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.”

One powerful mentor of unity was General William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army. He led the SA to spread the Gospel around the world, organizing street and evangelistic services. As he got older, General Booth became an invalid. His eyesight failed. One year, he couldn’t attend the SA Convention in London, England. Gloom and sadness swept through the convention, until the moderator received a telegram from him. “Dear Delegates of the SA: Listen to a poem, “Others,” by Charles Meigs. “Lord, let me live from day to day, in such a self-forgetful way, that even when I kneel to pray, my prayer shall be for others. Others, Lord, yes, others; Let this my motto be. Help me to live for others, That I may live like Thee.” Signed, Gen. Booth. What a convention that became! Jesus, give us mental, moral, mutual, & mentored unity until the world is drawn to You.