

PHILIPPIANS: REPLACING SELFISH AMBITION WITH GODLY ACHIEVEMENT

Part IV: Explaining And Encouraging True, Selfless Unity In The Church

(Philippians 2:1-4)

I. Introduction

- A. The Philippian believers lived in a city marked by a history of selfish competitiveness. When the long discord between Rome's aristocracy and the poor over the unequal distribution of wealth erupted in civil war between Caesar Augustus and Brutus, some of the soldiers under victorious Augustus saw their lands seized in the war by Brutus, so Augustus tried to compensate them by relocating them to Philippi and declaring the city a Roman colony, giving its citizens rights equal to that of Rome's citizens, Zon. Pic. Ency. Bib., v. Four, p. 760.
- B. Such a compensation likely seemed inadequate for many of the soldiers, leading to enhanced selfishness in the city's culture, so the Philippian believers inherited an attitude of selfish ambition and strife, cf. Philippians 4:2.
- C. To lead his readers to exchange deep-seated selfish ambition with selfless, godly ambition, Paul explained and encouraged true, selfless unity to occur in the church in Philippians 2:1-4. We view it for our insight:

II. Explaining And Encouraging True, Selfless Unity In The Church, Philippians 2:1-4.

- A. Having exemplified selflessness in his own life and ministry in Philippians 1:12-30, Paul shifted his focus to his readers, urging them to function in selfless unity with one another, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 653.
- B. However, "(t)his unity" that is urged in Philippians 2:2-4 "is possible" **only** "because of the reality of the four qualities mentioned in 2:1," Ibid., and we view those four qualities (as follows):
 1. "The 'if' clauses" that introduce each of these four realities, "being translations of first-class conditions in Greek, speak of certainties" where "if" may be translated 'since.' Paul wrote here about realities, not questionable things," Philippians 2:1; Ibid.
 2. Accordingly, these four qualities are **essential** for **true unity** to **exist** among *believers* (as follows):
 - a. The first quality of Christian unity is the **supportive consolation** that is **in Christ**. (*paraklesis*, U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 683; Theol. Dict. of the N. T., vol. V, p. 799; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to Philippians 2:1) Only as a believer views himself and others in the sphere of Christ's supportive consolation can he be free to unite with others of like viewpoint. Otherwise, if a combative, manipulative attitude exists in a party, it threatens the welfare of other believers who justifiably avoid him.
 - b. The second quality of Christian unity is the **comfort produced by genuine love, paramuthion**, Ibid., U. B. S. Grk. N. T.; Ibid., Theol. Dict. of the N. T., p. 820-823. Similarly, only if a believer enjoys the comfort of God's love as expressed in himself and in other believers can he be free to unite with them.
 - c. The third quality of Christian unity is the **"fellowship" (koinonia)** of the **Holy Spirit**, the result of not only the Holy Spirit's indwelling, but also the believer's reliance on the Holy Spirit to produce the fruit of the Spirit in terms of His "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness" and "self-control," Galatians 5:22-23 ESV. All true believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but only as they mutually rely on the Holy Spirit by a life of faith can they unite in true spiritual fellowship, Gal. 5:16-18.
 - d. The fourth quality of Christian unity is what Paul in his culture called "bowels and mercies," what we would understand as **"affection and sympathy,"** Ibid., Ryrie. There of necessity must be genuine affection and sympathy for one another for real unity to occur. Otherwise, in the case of a false spirituality, there is only a forced, artificial "unity" that is effectively futile!
 3. Paul then applied these qualities of true, selfless unity to admonish real unity in the body, Philippians 2:2-4:
 1. The apostle then urged his readers to **apply** the above-clarified building blocks of real unity to be like-minded, having the same love for one another, being of one spirit and of one purpose, Philippians 2:2.
 2. Revealing the self-centeredness in the church, Paul then urged his readers to let nothing be done out of selfish ambition (*eritheian*) or "empty glory," Philippians 2:3; Ibid., Bib. Know. Com., N. T., p. 653.
 3. In a positive sense, he then urged his readers in humility to consider others better than themselves, to concentrate on the interests of others versus being preoccupied with their own interests, Philippians 2:3-4.

Lesson: *True, selfless unity is characterized by the supportive consolation that is found in Christ, by the comfort of real love, by the fellowship of walking in the Holy Spirit's power and by the affection and sympathy that flows from a godly walk. It is expressed in mutual love, unity, singleness of purpose that functions free of selfish ambition and vain glory, but in humility considers others better than themselves and is occupied with the interests of others.*

Application: *May we then rely on the Lord for His qualities of true spiritual unity and express it in our walk.*