

One of the richest chapters in the Bible is Romans chapter 8. Paul wrote the letter we know as “Romans”, to a blended church in Rome, made up of Jewish and Gentile believers. Many of the Jewish believers held on to the Mosaic law and taught that to be a true Christian, you needed to follow the Law in addition to faith in Christ. While the Gentiles came from many different pagan religions and held to faith in Christ alone.

Paul wrote to a church that struggled with unity, giving them a theologically rich letter on which to establish the growing church. We need this letter as much today. Paul wrote a letter to the church in Philippi, where he stressed the unity that believers have in Christ.

Encouragement in Christ

Philippians 2:1 begins, “*If there is any encouragement – In Christ...*” Being in Christ is our position as Christians, our standing before God. Being In Christ is one of the primary ways Paul describes what it means to be a Christian. This is our vertical resource; we experience encouragement because of communion with God through the Holy Spirit. This is the first and primary position for unity in the Church.

Comfort in Love

“*...if there is any comfort from love...*” When you become a follower of Jesus, your attitude changes towards other people. The first Fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22 is love. Love is the natural byproduct of a life controlled by the Holy Spirit. The Greek word for love used here is a love that is governed by a willful decision to seek the highest good of the other individual.

Participation in the Spirit

“*...any participation in the Spirit...*” This is fellowship that is more than simply sharing a meal together, this is unity because we are united by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. When we become followers of Jesus we are baptized into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 12:13).

Affection and Sympathy

“*...any affection and sympathy*”. Because of the tenderness, mercy and compassion that we have received from Christ, we display this to one another. To not have concern for others, is a very clear indication that a person is not in a right relationship with Jesus Christ.

Joy through Unity

In Philippians 2:2 we see that the first result of unity is joy. Paul was overjoyed by their response because he knew that as the Philippian church grew in unity, they would become

more effective as a church, being used by God to proclaim the good news of Jesus. Paul was joyful because he knew that they would be like-minded. This unity is not temporal, based on feelings and situations, rather, we remain in unity, because the message of the Gospel is what binds us together. We have a common message, we have the same Holy Spirit, thus we have unity.

This does not mean that we never have disagreements. It is quite normal to expect differences of opinion on certain methods of church activity, but we never compromise on the essentials of our faith and the truth of the Word of God. When we have differences of opinion, the governing principle must be love, the preferential love that always seeks the highest good of others.

In Full Accord

"...being in full accord and of one mind". To be in full accord and of one mind means that the church knows their purpose and mission. At Grace Point we have the Four Pillars that we come back to; Worship, Word, Mission and Compassion, this is what we exist to do. The mission of the church always superseded our personal preferences, that is Holy Spirit unity.

Avoid Selfish Ambition

Paul gets to the heart of the matter in verse 3, addressing issues that destroy unity. The first sin he attacks is selfish ambition, *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit"*, conceit is vain glory, this is the person who makes amazing claims about themselves and their ability, while at the same time putting others down (see Proverbs 27:2). Our culture teaches people to promote themselves, but this destroys unity.

Promote Others

"...but in Humility count others more significant than yourselves." Jesus demonstrated this by, putting others first when he died on the cross for our sins. When we display humility, we will see unity and love flourish in every relationship in our lives. It has been said, *"the Christian in right relationship with the Lord treats others as if they were his superiors."* That is the key to living as a part of the body of Christ (see Matthew 20:26-28).

Serve Others

Philippians 2:4 continues, *"Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."* A follower of Jesus must be counterculture, they should stop seeking their comforts and their own self-interest, rather looking out for the interest of others. This is the normal Christian life. The social media culture has created a generation of people

who only look at themselves. But the Kingdom of God tells us to look out for the interests of others, to have genuine concern for others, even promoting the interests of others (see John 13:35).

Unity is so much bigger than simply getting along in the church, it is spiritual warfare, we need to fight to prefer others, we need to wrestle with our flesh to look out for the interests of others.

When we study the original fall of Satan, his primary sin was pride. The sin of pride and self-seeking is the root of all sins. So, to walk in the opposite spirit of humility goes against the spirit of this world.

It is worth it, for the unity of the church and for the glory of God.