

Gathered in abounding love

The moment we fell, it was every man for Himself.
Yet God calls us into a community of faith,
united in spirit, to encourage each other
to carry each others' burdens.

The moment Man sinned, He not only felt isolated from God, but also felt a gap between him and his companion for the very first time. You can see the gap between them, as Adam blames both God and Eve. Soon after this, brotherly anger would turn into murder. And violence quickly spread as humanity escalated vengeance.¹

Alone. Man felt alone in this world. Not only cut off from the life of God, but also from each other. And that's something that God wants to restore.

Fellowship in Jesus Christ

“If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort provided by love, any fellowship in the Spirit, any affection or mercy, complete my joy and be of the same mind, by having the same love, being united in spirit, and having one purpose. Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition or vanity, each of you should, in humility, be moved to treat one another as more important than yourself. Each of you should be concerned not only about your own interests, but about the interests of others as well. You should have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had” (Philippians 2:1–5).

Let's read through this passage carefully.

If you are in Christ

“If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort provided by love, any fellowship in the Spirit, any affection or mercy...” (Philippians 2:1).

This passage is saying, “If you are a follower of Christ.”

It is saying, “Do you feel Christ's encouragement? Do you experience His comforting love? Do you have fellowship with the Spirit? Do you feel God's affection or mercy? Are you reaping the benefits of a life with Christ?”

If you happen not to experience encouragement in Christ, or comfort provided by His love, or fellowship with the Spirit, or God's affection or mercy, then I'd like you to come talk to me. Because these are the benefits all children of God experience. So, if you're not

¹ Cain encouraged revenge on seven people if anyone killed him (Genesis 4:15); while Lamech encouraged vengeance on seventy seven people should anyone kill him (Genesis 4:24).

experiencing them, I think you owe it to yourself to figure out why. If this describes you, then let me know, and we'll organise to have a chat about it.

But if you are experiencing encouragement, comfort in love, fellowship in the Spirit and affection and mercy, then this passage is talking specifically to you.

Complete my joy

“...complete my joy and be of the same mind, by having the same love, being united in spirit, and having one purpose” (Philippians 2:2).

When Paul was speaking to the Philippians, it was their partnership in the good news of Jesus Christ that brought Paul joy (Philippians 1:4). Paul had a calling in the gospel (Acts 26:16; Romans 1:1). And so too, these Philippians have a calling in the gospel. No doubt the Philippians' call was different from Paul's, yet Paul describes the role as a partnership.

Just as the Philippians were called to a partnership, so are you. For we are all called to be witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). We are called to be priests:

“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

We are called to participate in the one gospel, empowered by the one Spirit, while gifted individually in order to build up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12).

The work of the Lord is not done by an individual, but by all brothers and sisters. We are all holy in the Lord. We all have a calling from the Lord (2 Timothy 1:9). We all have responsibility in the Lord (Matthew 25:14–30). We all belong to a partnership. And being a fruitful member of this partnership brings joy to us all.

We are to be united in mind in at least three ways.

Firstly, we are to have the same love. The abounding love that came from God and embraced us in our sinfulness, is to be in your heart and mine, ready to flow out and embrace each other.

Secondly, “being united in Spirit,” or “participating in the Spirit,” or “having fellowship in the Spirit” describes the relationship by which God guarantees that we are sons or daughters of the King (Romans 8:14–17). But more than that, having fellowship in the Spirit unites us because God's Spirit is actively working in our lives to re-tune us, to recalibrate our hearts. As we are all subjects of this workmanship, we are all being brought into harmony with each other.

Thirdly, our purpose is to be the same as the Lord's purpose, which is to be vessels of glory that pour forth springs of living water that flows to everyone around us, which testify to the compassion and mercy of the Lord (Romans 9:23; John 7:38, 39; James 5:11). Through observing us the entire universe beholds the wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10). We are to be enrolled in this purpose.

Be humble

“Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition or vanity, each of you should, in humility, be moved to treat one another as more important than yourself. Each of you should be concerned not only about your own interests, but about the interests of others as well” (Philippians 2:3, 4).

Unity is destroyed by self ambition, rivalry or conceit. If we consider our wants, our goals, our aims as being most important, we will fall out of harmony with each other.

You know, the wisdom of the world often says, “Look after yourself first. After all, if you don’t love yourself, and look out for number one, no one else will.” Yet this wisdom of the world is shown as foolishness in light of the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:20). For by looking out for number one, we are led to a self-focus that leads us away from the path the Lord has trod.

Instead, we are called to put others’ needs first. We are called to consider others more significant than ourselves. What would our marriages look like, if each partner strove to respect and love and delight the other? What would our church look like if everyone strove to ensure that each others’ needs were met?

We would be focused on building up and ennobling each other.

But there’s sometimes this fear within us, that says, “What if I pour myself out for my husband, or my wife, or my brother or sister in Christ, and they don’t return it? Won’t this result in me suffering?” I’d have to agree with you, there is that risk, and that very well may result in you suffering.

Our calling is not only to enter into the joy of the Lord, but also to enter into suffering for His sake (Romans 8:17; Philippians 1:29). Now, you might say, “But this makes no sense. Nothing is gained by my suffering.” Yet, this is not so. Christ suffered on our behalf, and we are called to take up Christ’s suffering.

Did you know that in suffering for Christ, you both glorify, and are glorified by, God?

“If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you” (1 Peter 4:14).

“If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name” (1 Peter 4:16).

“After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (1 Peter 5:10).

If we all look after each others’ interests, then love is made manifest in fellowship. And if we find ourselves poured out on behalf of someone, but our interests not cared for, then we have shown the love of God in Christ for that person, and the universe is a witness to the transforming power of love of God being shown by you.

“As we reflect the glory of the Lord with unveiled faces, we are becoming more like Him with ever-increasing glory by the Lord’s Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Mature

People who are mature follow this pattern of living.

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is here, do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:4–9).

Let us exhibit the character traits of God when we deal with each other. Let us show the self-emptying humility, the enduring mercy, the unquenchable forgiveness, and the willingness to suffer on behalf of one another. For these are the traits of our humble God.

References:

This message based on Philippians 2:1–5; 4:4–9.