

Live in harmony with one another Philippians 2:1-11

¹ So if there is any encouragement in Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being united in spirit, and having one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility consider one another better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look carefully not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Indeed, let this attitude be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. ⁶ Though he was by nature God, he did not consider equality with God as a prize to be displayed, ⁷ but he emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant. When he was born in human likeness, and his appearance was like that of any other man, ⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

When our nation was involved in civil war, our nation's leader, President Abraham Lincoln, maintained one purpose throughout this bloody conflict. He wanted to maintain a union. Southern states that made up the confederacy didn't care much about union. They felt they could exist on this continent as a separate nation. But President Lincoln would not have that. So during the early 1860s, when this congregation first began, he sent out hundreds of thousands of troops to fight to keep the confederate states a part of the United States. It became one of the bloodiest wars known to man.

What our 16th president wanted for our nation, God also wants for his church. It is important to him that we stay united. That's because we also are involved in war. The church on this side of eternity is labeled the church militant. The Apostle Paul describes the scene in another epistle: *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms* (Ephesians 6:12). So we can stand our ground against these dark forces of evil, we need to maintain a united front. That is what God had Paul encourage in his letter to Christians in the ancient city of Philippi. Paul urged the Philippian Christians to live in harmony with one another. What God wanted for his 1st century church is the same for his 21st century church. Paul shows us in this Scripture how to maintain unity. Appreciate how Christ humbled himself to win us eternal life. Then imitate Christ's humility in dealing with others. That's how you live in harmony with one another.

Taking a look back at our nation's short history helps us understand and appreciate all that it took for us to become the United States of America. In a similar way, Paul wanted his Christian readers to understand and appreciate how they became united. Paul writes, *"So if there is any encouragement in Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being united in spirit, and having one mind."* In these opening verses Paul is not questioning the Philippians' unity. He is reminding them of the harmony they had with one another, and especially with our God. Being united with Christ and comforted by his love and enjoying fellowship with the Holy Spirit did not come naturally for any in Philippi. It doesn't

come naturally for anyone. By nature we don't live in harmony with our God or with anyone. But our first parents did once. When God created them, he made them in his own image. That meant that life in the Garden was perfect where they enjoyed a perfect unity with God. They thought the way God wanted them to think. They did the things God wanted them to do. And they wanted only what God wanted for them. And the unity they had with God was also seen in the harmony they enjoyed with one another.

But sadly, that harmony was lost when sin entered our world. With a serpent's cunning the evil one deceived our first parents. They gave up their perfect life for a bite of forbidden fruit. As a result, God's image was lost in them. Instead, they brought God's eternal wrath and punishment on themselves and on all their descendants. That includes you and me. We were born in sin. We live in sin. We'll die in sin. Because of sin we have earned eternal separation from our God. There's no more harmony. No more unity. There's only an eternity alone and away from God forever.

Before God sent the first sinners out of the Garden to die eternally, he brought them close to him with an incredible promise—the woman's seed would crush the serpent's head. A few thousand years later, God made good on his promise. Paul reminds the Philippians of that when he writes, *"Let this attitude be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. Though he was by nature God, he did not consider equality with God as a prize to be displayed, but he emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant. When he was born in human likeness, and his appearance was like that of any other man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. The only way God could rescue us from our sin's punishment was for him to become one of us. The writer to the Hebrews tells us, "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in our humanity...For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might make atonement for the sins of the people"* (Hebrews 2:14, 17). God is holy. He expects nothing short of holiness from his children. He accepts nothing less. And God is just. He must punish sin. The problem is: every one of us are sinners. We've broken his law countless times. None of us comes close to the holiness he requires.

But God found a way to maintain his justice and bring us close to him forever. Paul told the Romans, *"What the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering"* (Romans 8:3). Jesus Christ is true God in every way. All the fulness of the Deity dwells in him (Colossians 2:9). His purpose in coming to earth was not to display his divine glory. Paul told the Corinthians, *"You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor"* (2 Corinthians 8:9). Leaving his glorious throne in heaven, he took up residence on earth for a while. As King of all kings and a descendant from King David, he didn't grow up in a palace. His first bed was normally used to feed animals. His adult life wasn't much better. By our standards, you'd could count him among the homeless. He suffered in life. He suffered through every temptation to maintain his holiness. He got hungry. He went without sleep. He lived that way emptying his use of divine power. He had the power but rarely used it. He did use it with his miracles that built up the faith of his followers. And he did display his glory on a mountaintop for three disciples to see. But he mostly hid his glory.

He made himself nothing becoming a slave. He didn't come to be served but to serve. He came to give his life for us all. And he gave up his life in the worst imaginable way—by a death on a cross. That death was reserved for criminals. And his came worse than that. His death came loaded with God's curse. Paul told the Galatians, "*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree'*" (Galatians 3:13). Christ humbled himself to become the curse for all mankind. He knew what was waiting for him on that cross. The very idea of going there tormented him. But he went anyway. He went willingly. And he died the death we deserved.

God was pleased with his Son's sacrifice. Paul tells the Philippians, "*Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* Now Jesus sits in glory ruling everything in heaven and on earth for the good of his church. His rule is "*far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come*" (Ephesians 1:21). As Kings of kings and Lord of lords, he will return in glory on the Last Day, Every knee will bow before him. Every tongue will confess he is God.

While we Christians eagerly await his return, Paul urges us to live in harmony with one another. Appreciate how God's Son humbled himself to unite us with him in his everlasting kingdom. Paul encourages us to live in harmony by imitating Christ. Jesus humbled himself by putting everyone's needs ahead of his own. To imitate Christ, Paul urges: "*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility consider one another better than yourselves. Let each of you look carefully not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*" Paul urges us to show our appreciation for the unity you now have with God. Do this in the way you treat others. Leave no room for selfishness in your life. Your needs are not as important as everyone else's needs. And you have the greatest model for such humility in your Lord. When did he ever think of himself first. In less than a day from his terrible death, he's washing the feet of his disciples. While he's dying on the cross, he's making sure his mother is cared for in life. When we consider how Christ humbled himself, we have no alternative but to do the same. By humbling yourself and putting everyone else first, you live in harmony with one another.

Can you imagine what a church we'd have if everyone of us put our needs aside and looked at the needs of others? We'd have no problem making decisions about what is best for God's kingdom. We'd have no trouble getting volunteers to help in anyway. We'd have no need to host a weekend seminar on outreach because everyone would be involved in doing outreach with the people in their lives. We'd have a church that was a model for every church—a church whose members live in harmony with one another.

Abraham Lincoln saw how necessary it was for thousands to shed their blood so our nation would be united. God saw how necessary it was for his Son to shed his blood so we sinners might be united with him forever. Consider Christ's humility. Appreciate it. Imitate it. What harmony we'll have with one another.