

Phil. 2:1-4, 14-18

The Apostle Paul listed, in verse one of our text, four incentives. All four are stated as "if" clauses.

**If you have any encouragement, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion...**

By using the word "IF," obviously, there were Christians in the church who were not functioning well together as a unit. We have evidence of this when you read, later, in **Phil. 4:2**, when Paul said, **I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.** The problems these two ladies had, had nothing to do with doctrinal issues. The problem was about their relationship and attitudes with one another as Christians. Broken relationships affect the church family. And it is no small matter.

What makes this letter to the church in Philippi unique from all the other letters that Paul wrote? Instead of rebuking this church, he is teaching and guiding them. He is cheering them on and encouraging them to inspire one another on – to keep pressing on.

Paul mentions encouragement, love, fellowship, tenderness and compassion. These are the marks of unity that are to be expected in the church.

In verse two, Paul goes on to say, **then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.**

Paul said, "MAKE MY JOY COMPLETE BY BEING LIKE-MINDED," again, one can conclude that there was a problem of disharmony within that congregation. They were not practicing to be like-minded.

How are we to be like-minded? First of all, Paul teaches that we are to be in a vital union with Christ. This is an obligation placed upon each and every one of us. Secondly, by focusing on the comfort of Christ's love for us, by His suffering, death and resurrection, this should prompt us to refrain from being divisive, and instead, join together in the common action. What does

this mean by “common action?” Action is the function of the church led by the power of the Holy Spirit.

What is the function of the Christian church? Listen, if you will, to the verse in **Phil. 2:5**. Paul said, “**Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.**” What attitude did Jesus have? **Verses 7, 8 & 11** explains what that attitude is: **taking the very nature of a servant, he humbled himself, and became obedient to death...** And Paul concludes by us **confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

How are we to carry this out? This is where, sometimes, people confuse FUNCTION with FORM. I first learned of this fact at Concordia College in Milwaukee, and was reminded of it again when I attended the seminary. And over the years, I have observed how people of church confuse the difference between FORM and FUNCTION. The function is most often the easiest for people to agree with. As a Christian church, we are to be humble servants, obedient to God’s Word, and we are about confessing Jesus Christ. The purpose of the church is all about Him. The Word and Sacrament ministry is seeing the Holy Spirit at work.

What causes problems and division in the church is not so much about this function. What people often trip over is the many FORMS of carrying this out. The reality is — there are different kinds of forms and ways the Holy Spirit works. One of the best way to explain this is found in **1 Cor. 12:4-6** **There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.**

What does God’s Word teach us about these different forms, these different kinds of gifts, service and working? In **1 Cor. 12:11**, Paul writes, **All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.** NOTICE: Paul did not say as the church determines or as the church leaders or staff determines, but as the Holy Spirit determines. This is also consistent with what Paul said in **Phil. 2:13** **for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.**

In verse 3, of Phil. 2, Paul goes on to say, **Do nothing out of selfish**

**ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.**

Selfish ambition or vain conceit brings discord. Instead, Paul teaches us to exercise humility, to "consider others better than yourself." This does not mean that you must have false or unrealistic views of your own gifts as compared with those of others. Rather, your consideration for others must PRECEDE concern for yourself. The Apostle Paul reminds us of this in **Rom. 12:10**. For he said, "**Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.**"

Paul is stressing the importance of spiritual unity – THIS IS HOW WE ARE TO FUNCTION – to be one in spirit and purpose. No one should be so concerned about making a good impression, meeting your own needs, pushing your own philosophies or ideas in a way that strain relationships in God's family in the process. This can ruin a church. But an attitude of humility is what builds it up.

On to verse 4 of our text. Paul writes, **Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others...**

Don't be self-centered in such a way that you consider only your own rights, plans, and interests. Instead, the Christian is to have a broader outlook, FORMS, that includes the interests, passions, and gifts of other fellow Christians. When each member of the Christian community exercises this mutual concern as one body, a tool with multiple forms, problems of disunity quickly disappear.

The truth of the matter is, like the church in Philippi, the composition of the Christian church today is reflected by great diversity. The function of the Christian church is the same, to **confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father**. But the forms for carrying this out is quite different and diversified. The people, the church, come from a variety of backgrounds and walks of life. The young and the old, the poor and the rich, red, yellow, black and white, blue collar and white collar workers— all precious in God's sight through Christ Jesus.

What the Apostle Paul is teaching us to guard against is any selfishness, prejudice, or jealousy that might lead to dissension.

How are we to encourage one another? The Apostle Paul explains it well in **Eph 4:1-3**

**As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.**

In Phil. 2:14-16, Paul says, **Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life...**

It is Jesus Christ who unites those who trust in Him. The function of the people of the Christian church is to be light-givers, so that the world can see Christ Jesus. What did Paul mean when he said, “you shine like stars?” This is a present fact. We are not TOLD to shine, but are reminded that we already do. As Jesus said in **Mt. 5:14**, **“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.”** The challenge was to let His light shine out unhindered.

We are to proclaim Jesus Christ who said in **Jn. 8:12** **“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”**