

## ***HOW TO GET ALONG IN THE CHURCH***

**Philippians 2:1-4**

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The title of this sermon is “How to Get Along in the Church.”

The church is extremely important to Jesus Christ.

It is the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, the pillar and foundation of the truth, the temple of God, the family of God.

The Bible says that Christ loves the church, died for the church, provides and cares for the church, and is building the church.

The church is extremely important to God.

So it is no wonder that the Bible tells us over and over again to pursue unity in the church.

In **John 17:21** Jesus prayed for us to be unified. “May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me.”

**Romans 12:16** says, “Live in harmony with one another.”

**1 Corinthians 1:10** says, “Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, that there be no divisions among you, and that you be united with the same understanding and the same conviction.”

**Ephesians 4:3** says, “making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

**Philippians 1:27** says, “Just one thing: As citizens of heaven, live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, in one accord, contending together for the faith of the gospel.”

And today we’re going to see the topic of unity come up again.

What does it mean for the church to be unified? **Unity means getting along and working together.**

Think of a basketball team. What does it mean for the basketball team to be unified?

It’s not enough that they aren’t fighting with each other. That’s just one part of unity. Unity is not merely the absence of conflict.

It also means that they are working together on the same project, or mission, or goal.

That’s what it means for the church to be unified.

It means that we are getting along; we aren’t fighting against each other;

but it also means that we are working together on the same mission.

What’s our mission? To help people far from God become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

That’s the most important mission that an organization can have. We are working to save souls from hell. And that’s why unity in the church is so important. Our mission is so important that we must pursue and protect unity. Because **if we can’t get along, then we can’t get things done for the Lord.**

Today we're going to get some very helpful instructions from Paul, the writer of Philippians, about how to achieve unity in the church, or how to get along in the church.

Turn with me to Philippians 2:1-4. Let's read.

1 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, 2 make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

Paul is saying if you are genuine Christians – you are encouraged by Christ, comforted by His love, have a relationship with the Holy Spirit, and as a result have affection and mercy – if you are genuine Christians, then pursue unity.

“Thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”

The NKJV Study Bible summarizes verses 1 and 2 like this. "Paul was strongly emphasizing the unity that should exist between believers and how they must single-mindedly strive together to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ."

Now in the next two verses Paul is going to teach us four actions that foster unity in the church. Let's read.

3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. 4 Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

#### **4 Actions That Foster Unity**

##### **1. Don't be selfish.**

**Verse 3** says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition."

What does it mean to be selfish?

I like **Randy Alcorn's** definition in his book *The Treasure Principle*. "Selfishness is when we pursue gain at the expense of others."

Selfishness is not self-love. Self-love is natural. Self-love is healthy. Self-love is good.

Think of self-love as self-care. It is taking care of yourself.

Getting enough rest. Grooming yourself. Feeding yourself. Getting exercise. Dressing yourself. Brushing your teeth. Going to the doctor. Getting a haircut. Shaving. Getting an education.

These behaviors aren't selfish.

In fact, it's selfish to not adequately love yourself. When you don't take care of yourself, we call that irresponsibility. And when you don't take care of yourself, you force others to take care of you – to do things for you that you should be doing for yourself. Your irresponsibility becomes someone else's responsibility.

Self-love is not selfish because if you don't take care of yourself, you won't be able to serve God and others.

Think of what love is.

Love is doing what is best for others, not what makes them feel good.

So self-love means doing what is best for yourself, not what makes you feel good.

Love can also be defined as giving people what they need, not what they want.

So self-love is giving yourself what you need, not what you want.

So when you think of self-love that way, then self-love is not bad.

In fact, the reason that many people are struggling in life is that they aren't good at loving themselves; they aren't good at caring for themselves.

**Selfishness** is when we pursue our gain at the expense of others.

In other words, it is when we pursue what we want, even if it will hurt others.

Probably the most obvious example of selfishness is **abortion**.

Abortion is when the woman pursues what she wants, to not be a mother, at the expense of another human being – her unborn child.

Another obvious example of selfishness is **suicide**.

I have a coworker whose husband just committed suicide in July. He didn't leave a note. He showed no signs of depression or thoughts of suicide. He just decided to kill himself. That's extremely selfish.

He pursued what he wanted – to stop dealing with the hardships of life – at the expense of his wife and children.

Selfishness is a unity-killer.

When we pursue our own gain at the expense of each other in the church, it will divide us.

When we say, "I'm going to do what I'm going to do, and I'm going to say what I'm going to say, and I don't care what people say," then you are being selfish, and you are going to cause division in the church.

So instead of being selfish, we need to be considerate.

**Philippians 4:5** (NLT) says, “Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do....”

To be considerate means to be careful not to inconvenience or hurt others.

It means before you do or say something, consider how your actions might impact others, and be careful not to do anything that would inconvenience, hurt, offend, or bother others.

## **2. Don't be prideful.**

**Verse 3** says, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit.”

The word “conceit” just means excessive pride.

What is pride? Pride is thinking too highly of yourself; thinking that you are better than everyone else.

How can you spot a prideful person? They're the first ones to say, “I'm not prideful.”

How else can you spot a prideful person? Look in the mirror. We all struggle with pride.

Why is pride so destructive to unity?

Pride is what prevents people from volunteering, because they think they are too important to work in the nursery, or to set up equipment. They think everybody should be serving them.

Pride is what causes cliques in the church. Some people think they above others in the church, and so they refuse to fellowship with them.

Pride is what prevents a person from being open to confrontation and church discipline. They can't see their mistakes; they are not open to criticism; they refuse to apologize; they refuse to change, because they already have it all together. And they certainly aren't going adjust their behavior for you, because they are much more important than you.

Pride prevents a person from following the leaders in the church, because they think they are smarter than the leaders, and that everyone should be following them.

Pride is what prevents someone from being consistent at church, because they don't really need a church family; they think they are strong enough to succeed all alone.

Pride is what prevents someone from growing spiritually, because they think they are already perfect. They aren't teachable.

How do you avoid pride? Pursue humility. That's the next one.

### **3. Be humble.**

The second part of **verse 3** says, "but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves."

I love this verse because it not only tells us to be humble, but it tells us what humility looks like in real life.

First of all, what does it mean to be humble?

The **NKJV Study Bible** says, "What Paul was calling for was an honest evaluation of one's own nature."

The **Life Application Study Bible** says something similar. "True humility involves having a true perspective about ourselves."

Remember that pride is thinking too highly of yourself, or thinking that you are better than everyone else.

**Humility is seeing yourself accurately.** And to do that, you have to see yourself as God sees you.

How does God see you?

You are priceless, but without God you are hopeless.

You are important, but no more important than anyone else.

You are very talented, but your talents are a gift from God, and He gave them to you to so you could serve Him and others.

You have many strengths, but you are very weak without a devoted relationship with God, and without a close connection to church family.

You have an amazing mind, but you are foolish without the wisdom of God's word.

God wants you to have a full and meaningful life, but that is only possible if you live in total submission and service to Him.

So how do you live a humble life in relation to others in the church?

Paul tells right here in **verse 3**. "But in humility consider others as more important than yourselves."

Other people are not more important than you. We are all equal.

But to overcome pride and act with humility, treat people as if they are more important than you. Treat people as if they are more valuable than you.



Imagine a sinking ship, like the Titanic.

Our custom in the West is to get the women and children to safety first, and then the men will take care of themselves last.

The women and the children are not more important than the men; we are all equally important to God.

But the men are treating the women and children as more important.

That's humility. In all your interactions with others, in the way you speak to people, in the way you speak about people, in the way you think of others, and in the way you treat others, treat them as more important, more valuable than yourself.

#### **4. Look out for the interests of others.**

**Verse 4** says, "Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."

A person who looks out only for his own interests is self-centered.

It's not the same thing as selfish, although they are sisters.

Selfishness is when you pursue your own gain at the expense of others.

Self-centeredness is when you are only focused on yourself, and you never invest time and energy into helping others.

God doesn't want us to live like that. Instead, he wants us to look out for the interests of others. He wants us to always be helping others.

**Galatians 5:13** says, "For you were called to be free, brothers and sisters; only don't use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love."

**Galatians 6:2-3** (NLT) says, “2 Share each other’s burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ. 3 If you think you are too important to help someone, you are only fooling yourself. You are not that important.”

**Galatians 6:10** says, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith.”

We just recently studied Titus 3:1. “Remind them to submit to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work.” We are to be constantly, always, ready, willing, able, and equipped to do good works – to serve God and others.

This is what the church is supposed to be like. It’s a community of Christ-followers who are looking out not only for their own interests, but looking out for the interests of one another. Always ready to jump in and help one another in any way possible.

When someone is low on funds, we help out. When someone needs a job, we put our heads together. When someone is mourning, we mourn with them. When someone is need of any kind of help, we help.

I told this story recently, but if it’s good enough to tell once, it’s good enough to tell twice. Awhile back there was a lady in our church ran into some financial trouble, but she didn’t ask for help. Frankly, she was a new Christian and didn’t know that she could and should ask her church family for help. But that week I shared with our Home Group that she was having trouble (without saying her name), and put a bowl on the table so that people could donate if they wanted to. And they donated several hundred dollars. Then I also took some of the money from the Benevolence Fund to give her. And that evening after Home Group we brought the money to her. She didn’t want to accept it. But I told her that’s what church is all about. And then about one year later she gave an extra offering above her tithe specifically to replenish the Benevolence Fund.

That’s how we can get along in the church.

If we treat each other like that consistently, looking out for the interests of others, we'll always get along.

## **CONCLUSION**

Unity is not natural.

That's why the Bible commands us to unified, and tells us how to achieve it. It's not easy. It's not natural.

But we need to be unified because we have a very important mission – to reach the world for Christ.