

October 20, 2015

The Marks Of Spiritual Unity

Philippians 2:2 (NASB), **“make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”**

In today’s verse the apostle Paul implores the Philippians to **“make my joy complete,”** sadly far too many people would not describe life in the church as joyful. This is because many churches are lacking the four essential marks of spiritual unity that the apostle lays out for us here.

The first essential mark of spiritual unity is **“being of the same mind.”** The phrase comes from the Greek *to auto phronete*, which literally means “to think the same things,” or “to be like-minded.” Thinking right is the bedrock of spiritual unity that is a major theme of Philippians – of the twenty-six occurrences of the verb *phroneo* in the New Testament, ten are found in this letter.

The issue that is being addressed here is not doctrine or moral standards. **“Being of the same mind”** as it is being used here means to actively strive to achieve common understanding and genuine agreement. How is this even possible? Look at verse 5 here in chapter 2 and you get the answer: **“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.”** In 1 Corinthians 2:16 it says, **“For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.”** It is through God’s Word and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that believers can know the **“mind of Christ.”**

In Philippians 3:12 and 14 Paul declares his determination to **“press on so that I may lay hold of that for which I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus... [and to] press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”** In Philippians 3:15 Paul writes, **“Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you...”** In verse 19 Paul says that those who have an attitude contrary to this have **“set their minds on earthly things.”** In chapter 4 verse 8 Paul gives us some practical advice for **“being of the same mind:”** **“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.”**

The second mark of spiritual unity is **“maintaining the same love.”** This mark flows out of an augments **“being of the same mind.”** To have the **“same love”** is to love others equally. We know that on a purely emotional level this is impossible, because people are not all equally attractive. *Agape* love, however, is the love of will, not of preference or attraction. *Agape* love is based upon an intentional, conscious choice to seek the welfare of its object. Since *agape* love is based on the will it can therefore be commanded.

To have the **“same love”** it says in Romans 12:10, 13 is to **“be devoted to one another in brotherly love; [giving] preference to one another in honor,”** and this includes the desire to

serve others by **“contributing to the needs of the saints, [and] practicing hospitality.”** Paul goes on to say in that passage that *agape* love embraces unbelievers as well – even those who persecute are to be blessed rather than cursed it says in verse 14. But in the text here in Philippians, Paul is focusing on **“the same”** special and mutual **“love”** that believers are to have for each other, the love that he is writing of in 2 Thessalonians 1:3 is **“the love of each one of you toward one another [that] grows ever greater.”**

The third mark of spiritual unity is being **“united in spirit,”** which is closely tied to having the **“same mind”** and **“maintaining the same love.”** The Greek word that is used here for **“united”** is *sumpsuchos* which literally means “one souled” and is used only here in the New Testament. It has the same emphasis as **“one spirit”** in chapter 1 verse 27. To be **“united in spirit”** is to live in selfless harmony with other believers. This then is to the exclusion of personal ambition, selfishness, hatred, envy, jealousy, and the all of the other evils that run alongside self-love.

Like every other Christian virtue, unity of **“spirit”** has to be solidly grounded in the objective truth of God’s Word. That being said, this also has a subjective quality as well. This kind of unity involves a deep and passionate concern for God, His Word, His work, His gospel, and His people. No two Christians – no matter what their level of spiritual maturity and their level of Scriptural knowledge – will understand everything exactly the same. But if they are controlled by humility and love, they will be legitimately **“united in spirit.”** This means that they will not allow unimportant differences to divide them or to hinder their service for the Lord.

The final mark of spiritual unity is being **“intent on one purpose,”** which is the natural companion of the preceding three marks. **“Intent on one purpose”** translates from a form of *phroneo*, which Paul used earlier in this verse (**“being of the ...mind”**) and uses again in verse 5 (**“have... attitude”**). The phrase to **“intent on one purpose”** is literally translated to mean “thinking one thing” and it is virtually synonymous with having **“the same mind.”**

In this one verse Paul presents to us a full circle of unity – from one mind, to one love, to one spirit, to one purpose. These four basic marks of spiritual unity are complementary, overlapping, and inseparable. The same basic idea is expressed in four different ways, each of them with a somewhat different and important emphasis.

The challenge for us as His church is to immerse ourselves in His Word, which is the fuel that the Holy Spirit uses to change us so that these marks are who we truly are. When this happens then the fellowship of the elect is truly joyful.