

## “THE ROAD MAP TO UNITY”

Philippians 2:1-4

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### INTRODUCTION:

1) An ancient fiction story: Some of you might have read a story like this as I did: Satan, the arch enemy of our Lord Jesus Christ, was so upset that Jesus told his disciples that he will build his church on the foundation of the confession of Peter that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of the living God. (Matt 16:16) And Satan got more furious when Jesus commanded his disciples to go to all corners of the world to make disciples and build churches. (16:18) So Satan sent out his agents to do all they could to disrupt the work of Jesus on his followers and their churches. So, all the little devils were busy to stir up the churches with heresies, created a lot of distractions so Christians were too busy to do what Jesus told them to do. The devils even worked so hard to make some churches become social service organizations, political partners with the governments and politicians. One day the Great Satan went out to see how his little devils were doing, and he found all of them were very busy working on their schemes to divert the ministry of the churches to many other things except sharing the gospel and saving souls.

When he came to one church and saw the devil was taking a nap on top of the steeple, not do anything to disrupt the church, and he asked the devil why didn't he get busy to disrupt the church. That little devil led Satan to look inside that church and he saw the Christians inside were fighting each other on almost everything, big and small, and they got so exhausted, have no energy or time or interest to do what Jesus wants them to do.

2) A modern day true story: One of the families who moved away from our church to other states, called me sometime ago called me and told me about the chaos in their church. God has blessed that church in past years that their numbers has increased and space for worship, teaching and parking became a problem: too small. They need more space to grow the church. Then Satan got a foothold on the issue: their plans of a church building program. That issue has become so divisive that in all the meetings to discuss the issue turned into wars on words. The church was so divided in all levels: First, the Building Committee was divided; then the congregation was also divided to the point some people questioned the leadership of the committee, the pastor and their elders. Many of the usually supportive to the church were so tired of the infighting and had left the church. Others were confused, disheartened

and discouraged. The joy of worship and fellowship was all gone, and no one knows what to do next.

The need of unity was in the heart of Jesus before he went to the cross. He prayed a long prayer for his disciples on this issue in John 17:20-26. History testifies again and again that the lack of unity is the most damaging weapon Satan uses to disrupt, divide and destroy the church of Jesus Christ. In his writing to the early churches, Paul stressed so much on the importance of unity among God's people. Today, we will study the formula and necessary ingredients of protecting the spiritual unity from Philippians 2:1-4.

### THREE BASIC FACTS ON UNITY:

1) The foundation of unity: The foundation of church unity is in the trinity of God when Jesus prayed that his people “may all be one, even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they may be one in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.” (John 17:21) That prayer was answered when the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and afterward came down to dwell in all believers, bringing to them the eternal life in which all believers are partakers (1 Cor 6:17) That essential unity of all believers in the body of Christ should be lived out in practice by all Christians everywhere and in all times.

2) The danger of a fractured church: The danger of disunity among his people deeply grieved the Lord. It should be every pastor's, church leaders' and church members' prayer that men and women in the church will not tear asunder what God has divinely put together in the body of Christ. Because dividing the church is the most fierce objective of Satan. The challenge to preserve the unity is constant and difficult. A divided, fractured and bickering church is a weak church in spirit and in functioning. To restore a fractured church is ten times more difficult than to prevent it from being fractured.

3) The roots of fracturing a church: Few churches got divided on doctrines or on moral ground or on commitment to the Lord. Many churches got fractured and eventually destroyed on ideas, approaches, what to do and how to do it issues. Issues like these are mostly preference and personal choice and opinion. But these issues can and had divided many otherwise strong and productive churches. To insist on one's own way in such things is sinful because it senselessly divides believers in the body of Christ. It reflects a prideful desire to promote one's personal view or agenda.

FOUR PREREQUISITES TO PROMOTE UNITY: Unity isn't part of human nature. We all were born with strong individualistic capacity: We want to see

things done OUR way. But in Christ, we can and need to build bridges that will promote and preserve the body of Christ. Here is the how to:

1) First, the encouragement in Christ: “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ.” (2:1a) Encouragement, *paraklesis*, means to come along side to give assistance when someone else is in need. Often times it takes more than words but also actions of help to meet the needs. The best example is the Good Samaritan. Jesus used this word, *parakletan*, to show us the purpose of sending the Holy Spirit as a helper. (John 14:16) Just as the Holy Spirit comes to help us, support us when we are insufficient and weak to handle things in our life, we need to help and support each other in serving the Lord in His church. How many of us can and want to play a supportive role in the church instead of being the shining star, the one who will say the last word on things of the church. Paul understands that this isn't in our human nature to do this, so, he set the pretext: Being united with Christ, to help us know that we need to seek strength from Christ, and we do it for Christ. With out being united with Christ, none of us is able to preserve unity with others. This is about being humble and willing to treat a brother when we are in dispute or disagreement.

2) Then, the comfort in love: “If any comfort from His love.” (2:1b) Comfort or consolation, *paramuthion*, to speak closely and softly to someone to give comfort, consolation in love. This is similar to give encouragement, but more on the soothing of a wounded spirit. This is how God shares with us His love in comforting us when we are in need of strength to keep going. Again, Paul reminds us that only “in His love” we may be able to give comfort to those who are in need of that. This is about being kind and loving to one another when we are in disagreement in serving the church.

3) Third, the fellowship with the Spirit: “Any fellowship with the Spirit.” (2:1c) Fellowship, *koinonia*, also means partnership, mutual sharing or work together, in this case with the Holy Spirit. The center of the fellowship, or partnership or working together is in “with the Spirit.” Paul has so much to teach us on the power, the ministry and the fruits we may bear if we allow the Spirit to indwell in us. This isn't about superficial unity like any religious entity, association, convention or organization, no matter how noble it may sound. This unity is totally on and in the Spirit of God, so we call it spiritual unity: In the Spirit, for the Spirit and by the Spirit. Many churches suffer disruption, conflict and even fracture is because there is too much human emotion and too little Holy Spirit in their midst. When human emotion takes

over a church, things begin to disintegrate. But the Spirit will keep us united.

4) Last, tenderness and compassion: “Any tenderness and compassion.” (1d) Tenderness or affection, *splanchna*, actually is the bowels in the human body known to ancient Greek as the weakest, softest and most tender inner organ in human body, known today as emotion. Tenderness is a good translation. Compassion, *oiktirmos*, may be better translated as mercy, the attitude we need to have in forgiving the offense, short-coming or sin on others. This is about our duty to forgive one another as God has forgiven us.

Pastoral heart on church unity: “Make my joy complete.” (2:2a) The apostle Paul added a personal desire in 2:2, to so reward a faithful servant and apostle of Jesus, and a pastor/elder of the church. This should be a legitimate goal for all believers in all churches to have. The Bible clearly teaches that churches and believers are to love, honor, respect and appreciate their human leaders. In 1 Thess 5:12-13, Paul admonished them: “We request of you, brothers, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord, and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.”

Nothing may grieve pastors and church leader more than a fighting church no matter for whatever reason, except false doctrine and immorality. When we obey and honor pastors and leaders in the church, we obey and honor the Lord who appointed them and sent them to shepherd us for our good.

FOUR SIGNS OF A UNITED CHURCH: These are measurements of a united church, or the opposite of it when they are missing. Paul didn't list the above four prerequisites of a united church for doctrinal study, he did it to ask that the church at Philippi to practice his instruction, to demonstrate the signs or evidences he looked for that their church is united.

1) They think in the same mind: *Auto phronete*, to have the same thing in mind or like-minded, is the first key to achieve unity. This is the number one sign or condition to achieve unity. Of the 26 occurrences of *phroneo* in the New Testament, 10 are found in this book. This isn't about anything on doctrine or moral issues, it is about the need to be “on the same page” in their common understanding and genuine agreement.

Human beings are not born in the condition to think on the same way or in same mind. We all have our unique ways to see the same thing but come up in different understanding. To achieve this, Paul said we need to “have the

mindset in us which was also in Christ Jesus.” (2:5) This means we have to allow the attitude or mindset of Jesus to indwell in our mind to achieve this. When we allow our individual human attitude to direct our mindset, we cannot achieve the “same-mind” in serving the Lord in His church. This means we need to allow the mind of Jesus to control our mind, to obey His will and his way so we can show and achieve unity in our church.

2) They love in the same way: “Having the same love.” (2:2b) *Apape*, is love of the will or mind, not of the emotion. We all know that not all people are equally attractive or lovable to our affection on emotional level. But we are to love people by spiritual intention, not by human preference. To love one another is commanded by our Lord so that “the world will recognized that we are his disciples.” (John 13:34-35)

To love the agape way is to take them in, to accept the way they are and to look out for their interests as our own interests, as God did it for us. This is one of those things that are very difficult to anyone of us. Paul commanded this for a purpose: to create and maintain the unity in the church, to satisfy the heart of the Lord that we will love one another, and be united. It is never easy, and it will take lots of effort and may be sacrifice. But it's for a great cause, and we do it for the Lord. In almost all cases, we are divided when we put personal preferences and value above the command of the Lord, and that isn't a sign of true discipleship of the Lord. Remember this: We are to take up our cross to be his disciples and this is one cross we need to take.

3) They unite in the same spirit: “Being one in spirit”. (2:2c) “One spirit” is from *sum-psuchos*, same-soul, or soul-mate, in today's words. This is used only once here in the whole New Testament. When we were born again, we were given the same spirit from the Lord. So, if we are to be united in his church, we are to keep that one-soul relationship all through our life. It is later in our Christian life, instead of growing that one-soul spiritual nature, we add our human, personal preferences into that perfect relationship and certainly that will fracture the unity God demands from us. Paul is asking something that is virtually impossible for any human to do. That is why we need to abide in that mindset of Christ, to submit ourselves to His will, and to love the unlovable. This is a constant struggle in all of us: whether we want to live our life on our own or we live it for the Lord and His purpose and glory. It is a battle we will face everyday, and need to win every time.

4) They intend in one purpose: “Intend on one purpose” *to en phron-ounte*, is the ultimate result of unity: We want to achieve the same purpose, same goal,

for the Lord. Most of us have the same or similar purpose for the Lord in His church: To spread the gospel, to make disciples, to grow the church and to glorify God. It is very important that we all need to know what is the purpose in the mind of Jesus when he said he will build his church. We have seen the universal church of Jesus Christ is divided in many ways for many purposes. We need to come back to the Bible and seek what is the purpose of Jesus for his church. This is also closely related to the purpose of our Christian life, and the purpose of our being member of a church. What do you think is the purpose of Jesus in your personal life? And what is the purpose of Jesus to lead you to this church? Do we all have the same purpose in these? We need to. In 3:15 of this book, Paul advised us this way: “All of us who are (claim to or want to be) mature, should take such a view of things. If on some point you think differently, God will make it clear to you.”

**BEWARE OF DANGERS TO UNITY:** Since unity isn't a natural component of human nature, the dangers of damaging or tearing down a united church is always there. In the wisdom of God, Paul lists here four immanent dangers we all face everyday that can easily destroy an otherwise harmonious and productive church if we are careless to fall into these traps.

1) **The danger of selfishness:** “Do nothing from selfishness.” (2:3a) Being selfish is being human. We all are selfish one way or another. Paul placed it first on the list, that could be the root of all sins and the greatest danger of disunity. The Greek word, *eritheis*, means persistent in seeking advantage for personal gain regardless of the effect on others. It is about unfair pursuit and self-serving purposes.

Selfishness is a consuming and destructive sin and the first casualty is the selfish person before it harms others. Selfishness breeds greed, jealous and resentment. No church, even the most doctrinally sound and spiritually mature is immune from the threat of this sin.

2) **The danger of empty conceit:** *Kenodoxia*, is from *kenos* (empty) and *doxa* (glory), KJV rendered it “vainglory”. It is a highly exaggerated self-view of glory or acclaim, an over inflated self image. A person who sees himself in such a way will always insist on his right and expects others to agree with him. Empty conceit is arrogant pride, being “wise in your own eyes,” Paul told us in Galatians 6:3, “If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing he deceives himself.” If someone or ones always insist on his right for his personal glory, how can he work with others to keep the unity of the church?

3) The danger of “my way”: “In humility consider others better than you.” (2:3b) *Tapeinophrosune*, lowliness in the mind, humility is a good translation. Again this isn't part of human nature either. We all love to think we are better, we know more, our ideas are higher, so, everyone else must listen to us and follow my way. The mindset of pride often times pushes us to over rule all opinions and methods others suggest or do things. When things don't go our way, we fight or quit. How can a church keep her unity when people insist on their way be done instead of God's way be done. One way to overcome this is to see the wisdom and value in others who may be better, more important than us. Many churches ended up shattered because of this kind of people: “My way or highway.”

4) The danger of personal interest: “Each of you should look not only to your own interest, but the interests of others.” (2:4) “Look”, *skopeo*, means to see, to give close attention and consideration. Paul is here talking about our nature of “self caring”. We all are responsible to take care of our own needs, to care our well-being and to preserve and protect our interest, in a responsible way. But there needs to be a balance in this pursuit when it comes to work with others in the church. Being responsible for ourselves cannot be the only goal of our life pursuit when it comes in conflict with the interests of others. This is a very important goal and practice for all Christians to work together in the church: not to insist only on our well being to the point we ignore or degrade the interests or well-being of others.

### THINGS WE SHOULD NEVER DO:

1) We should never break Jesus' heart: “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will also believe in me through their message, that all of them will be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (John 17:20-21) This is Jesus' final prayer for his disciples, before he died on the cross, and the theme is unity. Whatever we may face in our church, we should never break the heart of Jesus by breaking the unity of His body, the church.

2) We should never lose heart on the church: “On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” (Matthew 16:18) In the past over 2,000 years, the church of Jesus Christ had gone through countless attacks and turmoils but she still stands stronger than ever before. Regardless of all of our weaknesses, Jesus will sustain His church until the day he will come to take her home to be his glorious bride. Let us be faithful to Jesus our

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