

# 32 - the Unity of Christ's Body

by Ben Torrey

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*The unity of Christ's body is a fundamental aspect of the Christian life, and it can only be achieved through the cross of Christ, by dying to ourselves and accepting his sacrifice for us.*

**Duration:** 10:00

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, John 13:34-35, Romans 12:10, Galatians 5:13, Ephesians 4:2, Philippians 2:1-4

**Topics:** "Unity"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of unity within the body of Christ. He believes that unity is crucial for the preparation of opening North Korea to the Gospel. The speaker focuses on a passage from Paul's letter to the church in Philippi, where Paul urges the believers to be of the same mind, maintain the same love, be united in spirit, and have one purpose. Paul emphasizes the need to not only look out for one's own interests but also for the interests of others, just as Christ did when he humbled himself and became a servant.

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## Transcript

Good evening, this is Ben Torrey with you once again. As I continue with this series on what God requires of us in our fundamental relationships, I will speak on a topic that I know is especially dear to the heart of Christ, the unity of His body. I've spoken on this in these programs in the past.

I've mentioned how the Lord has impressed on me that this is the most important preparation for the opening of North Korea. Last week, in my talk on New Commandment love, I touched on it as well, for it was the subtext on our Lord's words to love one another. Tonight, I am going to take one passage from Paul's writings about this unity.

If you look carefully, you see unity as a consistent theme through all of his letters. Over the weeks ahead, I will speak about several of these passages. This evening, we begin with his words to the church in Philippi.

Let us turn to Philippians 2 verses 1 through 7. Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, attaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves. Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the

interests of others.

Have this attitude in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of mankind. Before examining this passage, to see how strong Paul's words are, it would be good to think for a moment about the people to whom he is sending it. Philippi was the primary city of Macedonia.

It was named for Philip of Macedon, Alexander the Great's father. You may remember that when Paul planned to go deeper into Asia during his first missionary journey, he had a dream in which a Macedonian appeared to him and urged him to come across to his country. Taking this dream as a message from the Lord, he did just that and arrived at Philippi.

There his church planting efforts were most successful. The Philippian church was perhaps his favorite church. His letter to them is the only one of Paul's epistles that does not deal with some sort of crisis or theological issue.

It is full of words of love, joy, and appreciation. It was in Philippi that he met Lydia, who was the only person able to prevail on him to accept hospitality. Paul's rule was to pay his own way, to support himself wherever he went, paying for his own food and lodgings everywhere except Philippi.

There he accepted Lydia's hospitality. With this background in mind, we now read this passage that speaks of Paul's strong desire that the Philippians be unified with each other. His words are very strong.

If he would speak to them so forcefully on the issue, how strong must he have felt about it? There is no evidence that the Philippians lacked unity. Rather, the evidence just shows how important it was to Paul. Let's take a look at the passage now, starting with the first verse.

Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, if, if, if, if there's any encouragement in Christ, in other words, if Christ Jesus has anything for us in the way of encouragement, anything to say to us at all, if all our dedication to him has any meaning, if my dedication to Christ has ever blessed you, and he goes on, if there is any consolation of love, again, in other words, if all my love for you and yours for me has any meaning at all, brings us any sort of consolation, any sort of comfort, is more than empty words. Continuing, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, I will speak another time about what this word fellowship, translating the Greek word *koinonia*, means. It is a very strong word, but for now, just think that he is saying that if our coming together in the Spirit, drawn together into a committed relationship in him, totally dependent upon one another, if this is the relationship that you and I have, continues, if there's any affection and compassion, Paul just keeps going on.

If you have any trace of love, concern, or affection for me at all, if you care about me, if your love for me and mine, for you, mean anything, this is the kind of language that he's using in this verse. It tends to lose strength in translation, but the Greek words that Paul used in this passage carry this kind of weight. He is using strong language.

So what is he leading up to? What is the thing that he wants that causes him to pour out his art in this rush of words? We see in the next verse, make my joy complete. Make my joy complete. Something's missing.

You can add it. How? By being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in Spirit, intent on one purpose. Paul's heart's cry to his friends in Philippi is that they be one with each other.

His own joy will always lack something, will be less than it should be. His joy will not be complete if they are not of one heart and mind. He's still piling word on word in his urgency, in his passion.

Being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in Spirit, intent on one purpose. No simple plea for unity here. No saying be one, then moving on to other topics.

He embroiders and adds and piles on meaning. He lists every aspect of what he means, ending the sentence with a practical exhortation to work and think together for the same purpose, intent on it. In verses three and four, he gets very specific, elaborating on what this unity is, what it means, what it demands.

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind, regarding one another as more important than yourselves. Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. He is still repeating himself.

Regard the others as more important than you are. Don't look out for yourself. Look out for them.

He calls for humility in relationships and rejection of pride and selfishness. This is the fabric of unity. Unity is impossible, true godly unity, if we do not do this.

And then he goes on to call us to emulate Christ in all this. Have this attitude in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bondservant and being made in the likeness of man. Empty yourself.

Lay aside all prerogatives, all privilege, all importance, and put yourself down to the lowest level with others. If you recall my comments last week on New Commandment love and how uncompromising it is, you may catch the same sense here. Unity in the Church is not a luxury.

It is not optional, at least not as far as Paul is concerned. Without unity, all our protestations of love and fellowship are worthless or worse. Yet how do we achieve this unity? Again, only God can bring it about.

Our sinful nature balks at this, at this call to submit to one another, to put ourselves down. Paul gives the key in his invoking the memory and acts of Jesus. It is only through the cross of Christ that we can die to ourselves and attain this unity.

The road to unity is a bloody road. It is only through the blood of Christ and our grabbing hold of that cross, of his bloody legs, and accepting his sacrifice for us that we are able to come out the other side with his life in his Spirit and able to be one with all those others who have come through that same gateway. I want to leave you tonight with the encouragement to think who you need to be at one with and go seek that unity.

Next week, I will share more of Paul's comments on this subject. Until then, good night.

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