



Can't We All Just Get Along?

Introduction

Philippians 2:1-4

An ad in the Lawrence, Kansas, *Journal-World*, purported: "We will oil your sewing machine and adjust the tension in your home for only \$1." (In *Reader's Digest* [5/85], p. 190.) Who cares if they oil the sewing machine--if only someone could adjust the tension in our homes, I'll bet we'd all gladly pay \$100!

We all crave harmonious relationships, but they seem to be a rare commodity. We enter marriage with high hopes for harmony: "This adorable creature I'm marrying is so easy to get along with! We're in love, so we won't have any serious problems!" But then a few months into reality, I discover that she's not quite as adorable as I had thought! In fact, she's got a few problems that I need to help her work on. One of her main problems is that she doesn't see things my way! As I seek to help her with her problems, I discover that she has another problem, namely, that she is stubborn and won't change.

We want harmonious relationships with our children, and yet the alienation between parents and their teenagers is proverbial. We want harmony in our church, but those people at church are so unloving! "Why, do you know what so-and-so said to me? I don't know who she thinks she is! After all the times I've helped her, and then she acts like that toward me! See if I ever do anything for her again!"

I'm glad that the Bible was written to real people with real problems. It doesn't paper over their problems and offer superficial answers. The church at Philippi was a good church, but it wasn't perfect. None is. If its first three converts were any gauge, it was a motley crew that gathered for worship in Philippi: a sophisticated, wealthy businesswoman; a career Roman military man; and, a former slave girl who had been into the occult. It was a built-in formula for conflict, and some tensions were surfacing among the members (4:2). So Paul gently urges them to work through their differences and he gives some principles for harmonious relationships that apply both to the church and to the home.

But, I'll warn you: It's a painful, difficult cure! Like chemotherapy, you may wonder at times if the cure is worth it. But it's the only cure and if you don't take it, the disease will ultimately cause great suffering and result in death. Briefly stated, the principle is: **The key to harmonious relationships is to put self to death and to regard others more highly than myself for Jesus' sake.**

As Pogo observed, "We have met the enemy and he is us." The source of quarrels and conflicts is self (James 4:1-3). The cause of divorce, according to Jesus, is hardness of heart (Matt. 19:8). And, before you say, "Yes, my ex-mate really did have a hard heart," Jesus says, "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye" (Matt. 7:5). Alexander Maclaren put it, "To live to self is the real root of every sin as it is of all loveless life" (*Expositions of Holy Scripture* [Baker], 14:252). If we want harmonious relationships, each of us must confront self, put self to death, and live to build up others.¹

¹ Sermon excerpt entitled "Harmonious Relationships" by Steven Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-10-harmonious-relationships-philippians-21-4>

Open it

1. Growing up what extracurricular activities were you a part of? What things did those groups or activities teach you about life?

Read it

Philippians 2:1-4

Explore it

2. What could the Philippians do to make Paul's joy complete?
3. What things might keep the Philippians from being unified?
4. What will humility lead us to do when it comes to others?

Apply it

All By Myself?

Paul wants his readers to be united, and he carries through with his theme by giving them several ways to do that: by being humble and selfless. How? He first lists Jesus as the ultimate example. Then he points to himself, Timothy, and Epaphroditus as examples of those who are living selflessly, who offer a pattern for harmonious relationships. Sprinkled among Paul's examples are wonderful insights for unity: seeing the benefits, seeing others as better than yourself, and refraining from grumbling and complaining. Paul never lacks practical and inspirational ideas for his themes. We'll be challenged by his exhortation. Let's see what he says in order for us to accomplish God's goal for us.²

5. **Are you one who likes to work alone or is it more natural for you to work with others? What are some of the strengths and weaknesses to each approach?**

"The Power of Love"

Within every Christian, there is an ever-increasing triumph and abundant supply of each one of these conditions that we read about in verse 1. Has the Lord brought you encouragement when you have been downcast? Has his fellowship been real when others have forsaken you and you have felt all alone? Has his consolation elevated your spirit and picked up your heart? Praise God for the times you can look back to and about which you can say "yes"; and pray that these realities might be more and more the realities of your experience, and the realities that you rest upon.³

6. **Paul begins this section of scripture by reminding them of four benefits that come with being a follower of Jesus Christ. What are they and when have you experienced one of these benefits?**

² Miller, Kathy Collard. Paul and the Prison Epistles (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series) (Kindle Locations 3093-3098). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

³ Lawson, Steven. Philippians For You: Shine with joy as you live by faith (God's Word For You Book 18) (p. 91). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

7. If these four benefits are available to all believers, why is it that many believers are not experiencing them on a daily basis? What advice would you give to someone who is missing out on these blessings?

*All four characteristics in this verse are indisputable facts - certainties not "maybes" and are reminders of the resources God has provided for us. There was not a hint of doubt in Paul's mind as he penned these thoughts. In these four succinct clauses Paul sets forth a powerful motive for harmony in the Christian community. Because the saints at Philippi are each recipients of these four benefits, they have the **resources** as well as the **responsibility** to carry out what Paul is about to command in the next verse, the end result being **unity** which makes Paul's joy full.⁴*

8. What does it look like for a church to live out these four God given resources? How might this type of church experience be attractive to a watching world?

"My Heart Will Go On"

Paul uses two Greek words to describe the kind of feelings we should have when it comes to others around us.

(Eleeo)—to feel sympathy with the misery of another, especially such sympathy as manifests itself in act, less frequently in word; whereas (Oikteiro) denotes the inward feeling of compassion which abides in the heart. A criminal begs eleeos of his judge; but hopeless suffering is often the object of oiktirmos.

9. When have you found yourself feeling a sense of great sympathy for someone else. Did those feelings lead to any kind of action?

⁴ Study notes found @ https://www.preceptaustin.org/philippians_21-4#2:1

10. What will happen to a church if we lack affection and sympathy with our fellow members? What can a church do to grow these two essential attributes?

“That’s The Way It Is”

The word "united" ("in full accord" ESV translation) here means to be "one-souled." This requires that their spirits should be knitted together with mutual love for Christ and living in harmony with one another. Christians should be one-souled— their souls should be welded together with a common acceptance of each other. He further adds that they must be "intent on one purpose." Though not stated, this one purpose is their common pursuit of the glory of God (v 11; 4:20). They must be collectively pursuing the exaltation of Christ as the chief focus of their lives.⁵

11. Does the idea of being “in full accord and one mind” rule out our individual callings and personalities? In what ways can Christians with such diverse backgrounds and temperaments find unity with one another?

12. How can ministry become more effective when everyone is walking together in the same direction?

⁵ Lawson, Steven. *Philippians For You: Shine with joy as you live by faith* (God's Word For You Book 18) (pp. 92-93). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

To be of one accord does not mean you have to be a duplicate. You don't have to be a Xerox copy of someone else, nor do you have to be a "yes man." It does mean that believers should seek a common ground of agreement. You can disagree on minor points of doctrine and still be "of one accord."⁶

13. What does it take for believers to experience this oneness? Is your present engagement with other believers in the church enough to achieve the oneness that Paul is speaking about?

"Just Walk Away"

Paul says that Christians must "do nothing from selfishness (rivalry) or empty conceit" (2:3). Selfishness means to have a party spirit, or to campaign for office. A politician tries to build a following for himself by building himself up and, if need be, by putting his opponents down. It's the same word Paul used in 1:17 of those who were preaching out of "selfish ambition."⁷

14. What issues or personal preferences can become unity killers in a church? What can a church do to protect itself from allowing these items to become landmines?

15. When is it all right to criticize something a church is doing? How might a person who is selfishly seeking their own following approach the issue that bothers them? How might a humble person approach it differently?

⁶ J Vernon McGee, *Probing Through Philippians*, 32.

⁷ Sermon excerpt entitled "Harmonious Relationships" by Steven Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-10-harmonious-relationships-philippians-21-4>

“I Surrender”

Someone once asked St. Augustine, “What is the first mark of true religion?” “Humility,” he replied. “And the second mark?” “Humility.” “And the third mark?” “Humility.” True religion always begins with humility because unless you humble yourself before the Lord, you can never be saved. The proud go to hell because they will not bend the knee to Jesus Christ. Only the humble can ever be saved.⁸

16. How would you define humility? Why is humility such an essential attribute of a Christian?

Humility is a by-product of completely trusting God. When we believe He can lift us up if that is appropriate, we don't need to try to parade ourselves before others as worthy of credit. Instead, we can be content behind the scenes, knowing our God sees everything done in secret and rewards those who serve Him with a humble heart. In addition, humility is not something that we actively develop by concentrating on it. Saying, “I'm going to be humble today” only makes me focus on myself. But by saying, “I'm going to meet the needs of others today,” we inadvertently fertilize and loosen the soil where the seeds of humility will grow deep.⁹

17. Humility takes our eyes off our own interests and looks to the interest of others. How do we know when to say “yes” to our needs and “no” to the demands or needs of others without being selfish?

⁸Sermon excerpt entitled “Getting along with Cantankerous Christians” found @ <https://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1998-10-18-Getting-Along-With-Cantankerous-Christians/>

⁹Miller, Kathy Collard. Paul and the Prison Epistles (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series) (Kindle Locations 3185-3192). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

Ray Pritchard asks some probing questions that every Christ follower should ask regarding their fight for humility:

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| 1) Do I love to argue too much? | 7) Am I too quick to criticize others who are different from me? |
| 2) Do I worry whether others recognize my contributions? | 8) How much time do I spend talking about myself? |
| 3) Am I secretly envious at the success of others? | 9) Is it becoming easier for me to say, "I was wrong?" |
| 4) Do I secretly rejoice in the misfortunes of others? | 10) Would anyone call me a cantankerous Christian? |
| 5) Am I too conscious about what others think of me? | One final question: Would anyone read this text—and think of me? |
| 6) How do I respond when someone else gets rewarded for my work? | |

18. As you look at the preceding questions, which ones would you answer "yes?" What are some of the triggers that cause you to be "less than humble" in those situations? What can you do to change this pattern?