

Surely there is no greater expression of God’s love than in the giving of His own Son, Yeshua, to save sinners and to bring them into the family of God for eternity.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Messiah died for us. (Rom 5:8)

We who belong to Him because of His love in giving His life for us, ought likewise to love each other, for in doing so we demonstrate our love for Him.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1Jn 4:11)

... *if there is any fellowship of the Spirit*, – The word “fellowship” (κοινωνία, *koinōnia*) is often understood to mean “fellowship” as the NASB translates it here, meaning to be together, talk together, etc. But the primary aspect of the word is that of “sharing in” or “participating in” something (usually with someone else).¹ Thus, the fellowship that Paul is describing here undoubtedly involves sharing together the essential aspects of life in Yeshua. It incorporates the work of the Spirit, not only gifting every member of the community to serve the Lord and each other, but also to recognize the essential aspect of encouraging one another, coming to the aid of each other, and striving for unity within the community as a whole.

... *if any affection and compassion*, – The common expression to denote “affection” in the Greek of Paul’s day was to reference the σπλάγχνον (*splangxnon*), that is,

the inward parts of a body, including especially the viscera, inward parts, entrails.²

For it is often in the region of one’s midriff that emotions of fear, joy, anticipation, etc. are felt. Thus, the KJV woodenly translates our text as “bowels and mercy.” In Col 3:12 Paul uses the similar expression “heart of compassion” (NASB) which utilizes the same terms as in our Philippian text, i.e., σπλάγχνα οἰκτιρμοῦ, “affection and compassion.” That the NASB and ESV translate this Colossians text with the English word “heart” appears to be an accommodation to the modern usage of “heart” as the

1 Gordon Fee, *Philippians in IVP NT Commentary* (IVP, 1999), p. 84.

2 BDAG, “σπλάγχνον,” p. 938.

seat of human emotions even though in ancient Greece, the midriff, not the heart, was considered the place from which emotions came. The NIV, on the other hand, simply translates it “compassion [and] kindness.”

Some have suggested that the two terms “*affection and compassion*, [σπλάγχχνα καὶ οἰκτιρμοί (*splangxna kai oiktirmoi*)], function as a hendiadys,¹ i.e., two words joined together to describe a single idea. However, it seems more likely that Paul uses these two words to give a fuller understanding of his intended meaning. “Affection” is that which begins in one’s thoughts and intentions, while “compassion” comprises the actions which result from one’s desire to show affection. Referring to our text (Phil 2:1), Köster gives this explanation of the two terms [*affection and compassion*] used together.

In this sense σπλάγχχνα (*affection*) is to be differentiated somewhat from the parallel οἰκτιρμοί (*compassion*). σπλάγχχνα καὶ οἰκτιρμοί is thus a pregnant phrase in which “love from the heart” and “personal sympathy” comprehensively describe the essential elements in Christian dealings.²

Here, in our Philippian passage, Paul is once again affirming that within the body of Messiah, “affection and compassion” for each other ought surely to be an overarching characteristic. For the primary goal of all who comprise the true assembly of believers is that each one would become more and more conformed to the very person of Yeshua. And He demonstrated the ultimate measure of “affection and compassion” by giving His life for those He would save.

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (1Jn 3:16)

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1Jn 4:11)

Of course, the primary issue that impedes the local gathered body of Messiah to be known as having such affection and compassion toward each other is the remaining corruptions of the sinful flesh. For the sin nature seeks to put “self” as having priority and thus diminishing

1 See BDAG, “οἰκτιρμός,” “Of humans: w. σπλάγχχνα (hendiadys) Phil 2:1., p. 700.

2 Köster, “σπλάγχχνα” in TDNT (Eerdmans, 1971), 7.256.

the needs and welfare of others as secondary. It is clear that maintaining unity in within the local assembly of believers is only possible as those each one grows in their life of faith and thereby are strengthened to put to death the desires of the flesh and to demonstrate in their actions toward each other the love of Messiah by which they have been made new.

... *make my joy complete by being of the same mind*, – Paul began his letter to the Philippian community by emphasizing the loving relationship they had together. He thanks God as he remembers their time together, offering prayers with joy for them, always giving thanks for their desire to aid him by supplying his needs through the agency of Epaphroditus.

These “descriptions of the access, the open, inner road between Paul and the Philippians” provide a strong incentive to build unity in the community. The memory of past intimacy should heal present disunity. Paul pleads with them, “If we were such close friends concerned to help each other in the past, let us tear down the walls that divide us and be reunited in love.”¹

We also see in this phrase an excellent example of how a leader can encourage those he leads to strive for that which pleases the Lord. He does not begin by reprimanding or scolding them for what might have been their failures, but rather reminds them of that which is most important, namely, the unity and love among community members which thereby gives a watching world the truth about being “in Messiah.” And he appeals to them by reminding them of how joyful their relationships together have been, and how this likewise heightens his own joy and gratefulness, even while being in prison.

Paul now gives us three essentials that enable believers within a given community to strive for unity in order to honor the Lord Who has saved them from destruction and granted them eternal life.

1. ... *being of the same mind*, (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε) – To be “of the same mind” means to have the same goals and the same path to that goal as one’s primary desire. This requires knowing what God has revealed to us by means of His word, for it is in the Scriptures that we are taught God’s truth and how we are to live it out, thus becoming the very

1 Hansen, Walter G. *Philippians in Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Eerdmans, 2009), p. 110.

characteristic of our lives.

And what is that “same mind?” It is the overarching desire to please the Lord in all things and thus to put away the things of the flesh and the world, constantly striving to have the mind of Messiah and to submit to His will. Paul will emphasize what is the “mind of Messiah” in the following context (vv. 5–8).

FOR WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Messiah. (1Cor 2:16)

What we often fail to consider is that friendships are fragile, and even close friends can be divided when pride, selfishness, and preoccupation with personal interests take a top priority. To “have the mind of Messiah” means to be willing to do all in one’s power to maintain the “unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3). Ultimately this means first that we must know what pleases God and how we are to conform our lives to His will. This requires spiritual growth which means gaining victory over the weaknesses of the flesh and putting into practice those things that honor Him.

2. *“maintaining the same love”* (τὴν αὐτὴν ἀγάπην ἔχοντες) – The ultimate picture and expression of love is that of Yeshua giving Himself for those He would save (as we will see in the following context of this chapter). When the NASB has “maintaining the same love,” the translators have sought to capture the fact that the Greek word ἔχοντες (*exontes* < ἔχω, *exō*, “to have”) is a present participle which emphasizes an “on-going” action, i.e., a love that keeps on loving. Paul’s point is therefore obvious, and it is this: genuine love, patterned after the love with which Yeshua has love us, is to be that for which His people are to strive. It is to be the life-attribute by which those who confess Him to be their Savior are known.

What does Paul mean by emphasizing “the same love?” This undoubtedly is tied back to the phrase of v. 1, “if there is any consolation of love,” which (as noted above) is best understood to refer to God’s love in sending Yeshua to be the Savior of His people. What then is the primary characteristic of God’s love? It is a love given for the good of others and a love which is on-going, does not give up, and thus love that overcomes difficulties and succeeds. It is this kind of self-giving love, divinely portrayed in the coming of Yeshua, which is to be the goal of all who are “in Messiah.”

3. *“united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”* – While the NASB considers this to be two phrases, it seems best, on the basis of the Greek itself,

to understand this to be a single phrase describing the unity for which a believing community should strive.

The opening phrase of the NASB, “united in spirit” actually translates what is a single word in the Greek, *σύνψυχοι* (*sumpsuxoi*), which is found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures and is not used in the Lxx. It is a compound word made up of the preposition *σύν* (*sun*), “with, to associate with” and *ψυχή* (*psuxē*), “soul, being, life.” This harkens back to 1:27 where Paul writes: “standing firm in one spirit, with one mind” where “mind” is actually “soul” in the Greek. He then adds “intent on one purpose,” (*τὸ ἐν φρονοῦντες*) a phrase which utilizes the Greek verb “to think” and therefore portrays the sense of “being of one mind” in the sense of “agreeing together with the truth.” Here Paul combines the two aspects of ones “feelings” with one’s “knowledge.” For surely within a community people have different backgrounds, different personality traits, different stations in life, etc. But unity comes when we submit our wills and our desires to the Lord and seek to honor Him by putting into practice the very wisdom of the Scriptures as we are led and enabled to honor our Lord and Savior through yielding ourselves to the leading of the Ruach and submitting to the truth of the Scriptures.

3 – Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;

Here Paul pinpoints the primary means by which unity is achieved and maintained within the local assembly of believers. It is the desire, willingness, and resolve to put to death the desires of the sinful flesh and then to serve others from a spirit of true humility as servants of the Lord Himself.

Do nothing from selfishness... – He begins by emphasizing that which is the desire of the sinful flesh and which must constantly be overcome and conquered. First is “selfishness,” which is *ἐπιθειά* (*epitheia*) in the Greek, the same word Paul used early in 1:17 to describe those who “proclaim Messiah out of selfish ambition,” that is, in an attempt to displace Paul’s position of authority while he was imprisoned. It seems very likely that he uses the same word here in our text to describe those who seek positions of authority or public notoriety within the local assembly of believers, either by defaming the current leadership through gossip and *lashon hara* (evil speech) or by usurping their own voice and actions in hopes of gaining a following by which their self-proclaimed “expertise” would be recognized. In essence, such “selfish ambition”

is the precise opposite of humble service with the goal of giving honor and glory to Yeshua.

... or *empty conceit*, – The Greek word translated here by the NASB as “empty conceit” is *κενοδοξία* (*kenodoxsia*), a compound noun made up of *κενός* (*kenos*), “to be without something material, empty” and *δόξα* (*doxa*), “fame, renown, honor, glory.” Thus in our verse it is used by Paul to describe someone who proclaims himself (by whatever means) as being “great and worthy of honor” when, in fact, their claims and actions are “empty,” proven by the fact that they seek to honor themselves rather than humbly serving others and allowing the hand of God to open the way for them to serve Him and His people as He desires.

Paul uses this same word in his Epistle to the Galatians:

Let us not become boastful (*κενοδοξία*, *kenodoxsia*) challenging one another, envying one another. (Gal 5:26).

The point Paul is making in our text is clear: self-centeredness is the opposite of true, humble service and such attempts to put oneself forward by boasting of one’s abilities or achievements is contrary to God’s purposes and His divine will.

... but with *humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves*; – In the words “humility of mind” (*ταπεινοφροσύνη*, *tapeinophrosunē*), which is actually one word in the Greek, Paul once again emphasizes that proper actions flow from correct thinking. For it is only when a person is convinced of the truth in his or her own mind that proper actions will be forthcoming. To accept for oneself the truth, for instance, of what Paul proclaims in Rom 7:18, it is necessary to foster true humility in the service of God and His people.

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. (Rom 7:18)

What Paul means by this statement is that apart from God’s saving work in the life of the believer, there would be no ability to do that which would be proclaimed by God Himself as “good.” For without faith in Yeshua it is impossible to please the Almighty.

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. (Heb 11:6)

And what is it that genuine faith, the very gift of God Himself, makes clear to the child of God? That without Him we could do nothing that would please Him, that is genuinely “good” in His sight. This means that saving faith also brings humility to the child of God, for we know that it is not of our own doing that we have been enabled to be righteous before Him and to honor Him with our lives, but it is entirely the gift of His grace through the saving work of His Son, Yeshua, that we are His and thus endowed with the ability to honor Him in all aspects of our lives.

... *regard one another as more important than yourselves* – It is important to note that the English word “regard” is, in the Greek, a present participle (ἡγούμενοι, *hēgoumenoi*) which indicates that this action of “regarding” is to be an on-going, always present reality in the life of the believer. Considering others as more important than ourselves is to be an evident characteristic of all who have been redeemed by God’s matchless love and grace. Thus, through God’s gift of salvation, we are given the ability and by the Spirit in our lives are enabled to consider others as more important than ourselves. By this Paul means that we consider the needs of others as having a higher importance than our own needs, knowing full well that God will meet all of our needs as He has promised. This frees us to serve others as a primary way of giving glory to our Lord, the One Who has redeemed us unto Himself.

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Mic 6:8)

4 – do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

The Greek text itself might be more woodenly translated: “Do not look out only for yourself but also for other persons.” The English translations feel the need to supply words like “interests” or “things” but when we speak of a person’s “interests,” we have in mind hobbies, etc. and not essential needs. The Greek wording would emphasize primarily the needs of others, which is much broader than “interests.”

The import of this verse is the obvious conclusion of the exhortations given in the previous verses and it is straightforward. As believers in Yeshua, we are not only to look after our own needs and give our life energies to those things that pertain only to ourselves, but we are to also seek to help others with their needs and also encourage them in

their service to the Lord as well.

Paul speaks to this in Gal 6:2.

Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Messiah. (Gal 6:2)

And what is the "law of Messiah" that we fulfill when we bear each other's burdens?

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. (Jn 13:34)

One commentator summarizes our verse in this way:

If one regards the brother very highly, he will wish to look to his interests in order to help him in every possible way. The apostle surely implies that a believer should look to his own interests. But he should obey the command, "You must love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 19:19), a commandment which receives added stress when the neighbor is a brother in Christ (John 13:34; Gal. 6:10). The more one realizes how fervently Christ loved the brother, and went all out to save him, the more he will wish to advance that brother's interests. Thus, too, true unity will be promoted, and before the world the glorious fellowship will begin to stand out in all its beauty, as a mighty testimony.¹

1 Hendricksen, William. *Philippians in Hendricksen-Kistemaker NT Commentary* (Baker Book, 1962), p. 100.