

Philippians 2:1-4

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/phil/phil-2/philippians-21-4/>

Paul tells the Philippians that the best way to help him when they serve Christ is by adopting Jesus' perspective and by obeying His commands.

Paul now admonishes the Philippian believers toward *being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose*. The *one purpose* that God desires the Philippians to have is to follow the same basic approach to life that Jesus took. The approach Jesus took that Paul desires the Philippians to take is:

1. To view themselves as servants to a great mission, as did Jesus
2. To not view anything God asks them to do as being beneath them, but do whatever God asks
3. To be a servant of God, fully humbling themselves
4. To empty themselves of self-seeking purposes, and instead seek to fully serve the mission God gave them

What Paul will assert, paradoxically, is that if believers do these things, they will gain the most from life, even sharing the same amazing reward Jesus gained. This fits the paradox Jesus gave, that the way to gain our lives is to lay them down (Matthew 16:24-25).

Paul asks his Philippian brothers and sisters in Christ to *make my joy complete by being of the same mind*. This also seems paradoxical for Paul to ask them to make *my joy complete*, since this entire section focuses on serving others. However, it is consistent, because Paul will argue that serving others is completely in our ultimate, enlightened self-interest. Paul will tell us in the first half of Chapter 2 some specific steps to take in order to fulfill Jesus' admonition to take up our cross daily, and to lay down our lives that our lives might be found. He will argue that these difficult steps are actually in our great (longterm) self-interest. This fits with Jesus' admonition from Matthew:

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.’”
(Matthew 16:24-25)

In Chapter 4, it will become clear that the Philippians took specific interest in Paul's ministry, and had provided financial support for him throughout his ministry. In fact, the impetus for Paul to write this letter might have been his receipt of a financial donation to help him pay his expenses, including the house he stayed in while in Rome (Philippians 4:10).

Paul will express gratitude for the financial gift. But he will be even more enthusiastic because of the eternal reward he believes the Philippians will receive for their participation in the gospel

(Philippians 4:17). This is because he loves the Philippians, and seeks their best. And Paul believes it is in his best interest to seek their best interest.

Chapter 2 will focus on choosing a perspective of life. God granted moral choice to humans. That is part of how they are made in His image (Genesis 1:26; 2:17). It can be observed that there are three primary areas of stewardship for choices each person manages. We all choose who or what to trust. We all choose what actions to take, or not take. And we all choose a perspective, how to look at things. Many choose a perspective without actually being aware they have done so. Paul is very specific here in exhorting his beloved Philippian partners in the gospel to be very intentional in choosing a perspective. The perspective Paul desires us to choose is the same perspective that Jesus chose. Jesus chose to view His best interest to be fully obeying His Father, and doing something that would from all appearances be undesirable and beneath His station.

It appears the Philippian believers sought to support Paul without being asked (4:15-16). They now have done so again, sending funds to support him while in prison. This shows particular love, because Paul is under house arrest in Rome, pending the hearing of his appeal before Caesar (Acts 28:18-19). This could put them in jeopardy: guilt by association. They apparently are fearless in this matter. Perhaps the influence of the retired Roman soldiers within the number of Philippian believers translated courage from their former life into this new arena of spiritual warfare.

This fearless and faithful support by the Philippians is part of the reason Paul considers them to be full participants and partakers with him in the ministry of the gospel (1:5,7).

Paul now tells them how they can best minister to Paul: by becoming like Christ.

Paul introduces some ways to *make his joy complete*:

- *Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ,*
 - The Philippians can encourage Paul, he will tell them how.
- *if there is any consolation of love,*
 - The Philippians can love Paul, he will tell them how.
- *if there is any fellowship of the Spirit,*
 - The Philippians can fellowship with Paul fully, in the Spirit, Paul will tell them how.
- *if any affection and compassion*
 - The Philippians can have *affection* for Paul, in his imprisoned state, and have *compassion* on Paul in his distress; Paul will tell them how.

Paul tells the Philippians that they can *make his joy complete*, which will also accomplish conveying to him *affection, compassion, fellowship, love, and encouragement*. And this is how the Philippians can accomplish all that for Paul: *by being of the same mind*.

The phrase *same mind* is a translation of the Greek word “*phroneo*,” which occurs in some form ten different times in this letter. It means “to adopt a mindset” of some kind. Paul says his *joy*

can be made *complete* by the Philippians adopting a unified mindset toward life. That mindset, as will be explained shortly, is a mindset of radical obedience to Christ.

There is an implied question by the Philippians: “Paul, how can we help you? How can we love, encourage, and partner with you?” Paul answers, “The best way to help me is to be unified in purpose, to choose a common mindset of radical obedience in the Spirit.” The Philippians best help Paul when they serve Christ in two ways a) by adopting Jesus’ attitude/perspective and b) by obeying His commands.

He expands the purpose of unity: to *maintaining the same love*. Paul desires them to maintain the *same love* one to another. Jesus chose to love humanity, and give the ultimate sacrifice of laying down His own life, out of obedience to His Father. Jesus chose this mindset (“*phroneo*”). Paul wants the Philippians to also choose that mindset. He desires them to be *united in spirit, intent on one purpose*. That *one purpose* will be to walk as Jesus walked. To constantly seek to serve the best interest of others. To do all God asks of them, knowing that (in spite of appearances) that is the very best path for themselves. It is a radical expression of faith that God is benevolent, and only asks us to do that which is best for us (even when that appears impossible).

Paul exhorts them to *Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit*. We are of course all born with a bent to *selfishness*. We are oriented toward ourselves. This is recognized in the second greatest commandment, to love others as we love ourselves (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39). The presumption in this command is that we already love ourselves. If we fail to recognize there is something greater than ourselves, and only follow our own way, it simply becomes *empty conceit*. Paradoxically, when we recognize that God knows what is in our best interest better than we know for ourselves, and then follow His ways, it actually ends up serving our true self-interest.

The proper perspective to choose is to have *humility of mind*. This is the opposite of *selfishness or empty conceit*. We serve our true self-interest when we obey the commands of Jesus, and *regard one another as more important than ourselves*. This does not mean that we no longer love ourselves; the command to “love others as you love yourself” still functions fully. Rather, this means that we shift focus off ourselves and onto others. Accordingly, we will then *not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others*. The exercise here seems to be to make a conscious shift away from “what do I want?” and to replace it with “what is in the best interest of the people with me?”

This seems to be a practical application of choice of attitude, in order to align our mindset as Jesus instructed. During His earthly ministry, Jesus told the disciples: “If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9:35).

Paul here is actually telling his beloved Philippian partners-in-the-gospel the way to be first. To be great. The way to the greatest reward. The path to our truest self-interest. In doing so he is instructing all believers. The way to true greatness is through service to others. This requires *humility of mind*. A single Greek word is translated *humility of mind*. The root of the “humility” part of that word is also found in 1 Peter, which states:

“You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”
(1 Peter 5:5-7)

The all-caps part of 1 Peter 5:5-7 appears to be a quote from Proverbs 3:34 from the Old Testament. So this is a concept that is sprinkled throughout scripture. The Hebrew word in Proverbs 3 translated “humble” is also translated “humble” in Numbers 12:3, which states that Moses was the most humble man in all the earth. If we study Moses’ traits, it becomes apparent that one of the core attributes of humility (if not the very essence) is the ability to see reality as it is. To set aside self-justification and embrace truth. One of the great truths is that we are very limited creatures who have been given the great gift of making moral choices. Paul exhorts us to recognize this reality, and choose to trust God, who has unlimited wisdom, rather than our own limited capability.

It is worth noting that humbling oneself is an active decision. It involves a recognition of God’s sovereignty, along with faith that He knows what is in our best interest. If God allows something into our lives, He will somehow turn that to our best. In order to do this, we must set aside self. To rely on self rather than God is *empty conceit*. It is *empty* because there is no substance there.

It is worth further noting that if we choose to make the deliberate decision to have *humility of mind*, and trust that God’s ways are for our best, God will reward that greatly. As the Apostle Peter stated, God will “exalt you at the proper time.” When we operate from *selfishness or empty conceit* we will always demand that we be exalted in the way we demand and at the time we demand. This will result in us being brought low.

In the next section Paul will expand significantly on the subject of how to develop the kind of attitude he exhorts believers to adopt. It is the same attitude that Jesus chose. Each of us is given the choice of how to look at things, what perspective to choose, what attitude to adopt. How we steward that choice is at the root of who we become. Paul exhorts those whom he loves to make this choice wisely.

Biblical Text

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,² make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.³ Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;⁴ do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.