

Paul says in Philippians 2 verse 2: "Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind." And so Paul in this passage is telling the Philippians and us as well that we should be united together, that we should be of one mind. And this unity is more than just being a part of this congregation. This unity is more than just being a part of the church. This unity is a gift of the Spirit. It is a gift of the Spirit that we love the same way. It is the gift of the Spirit that we think the same way. It is the gift of the Spirit that we act the same way. This unity which we have comes from God. And this unity is also something which we need, because without it we would be quickly overwhelmed by the world. But with it, we are able to stand firm. And so the question that we must ask ourselves today is do you have this unity among you?

Because it seems, Christians, that the Philippians were beginning to be divided. They were struggling among themselves. And Paul points to the exact problem when he says in chapter 4, verse 2: "I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord." These two women, it seems, were fighting about something. They were in some sort of disagreement. And this disagreement was spilling over into the rest of the congregation. And I think it's very likely that what was happening was that they were starting to choose sides. Some of them were going with Euodia. Some of them were going with Syntyche. And this division was getting worse and worse. And Paul points to what exactly is happening when he says in other places in the book: "Do all things without grumbling or disputing." Or when he says in chapter 2, verse 3: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit." So in other words, this division was causing them to grumble at one another. This division was causing them to argue with one another. They were more interested in winning the argument than in caring for the other person. That's all they really cared about. All they wanted to do was win. They wanted to be first. And their pride was getting the better of them. And so this was a very serious problem, Christians, that needed to be solved.

And it's a very serious problem especially because it was hurting the whole church. They needed one another, because they were living in a time and a place that was very difficult for them. They were under overwhelming pressure from the world around them. Because the city that they lived in, the city of Philippi, was a Roman city devoted to the emperor. And they called the emperor their Lord and Savior. They treated him like a god. They prayed to him. They worshiped him. They thought that he would take care of him, that he would give them everything that they needed. But obviously that was something that the Christians could not do. The Christians could not call the emperor Lord and Savior, because only Jesus is the Lord and Savior. And so they couldn't go along with a lot of the things that the Romans were doing.

But it wasn't like they could just avoid these things either. They couldn't just ignore it and live out their lives, because religion was an everyday part of Roman society. If you went to a business, for example, you would offer up sacrifices as part of your dealing with that business. If you went to the government, for example, they would offer up prayers and burnt offerings to the gods and to the emperor as part of their work. You couldn't even go get entertainment. You couldn't go to the theater without there being a sacrifice. You couldn't go to the races without there being prayers to the emperor. It was something that they simply could not avoid. And so there was this tremendous pressure upon them to conform, to be a part of this society. Because the Romans figured if you didn't do it, if you didn't call the emperor Lord and Savior, that was un-Roman. We might even say that it was anti-patriotic. It was something that you simply did

not do. And anybody who did these things was a danger to society. They would tear the whole thing apart.

And so the Philippians were under attack at every point in their lives. They were outlaws in their own society. So they needed one another. They needed to be joined to one another. They needed to support one another if they were going to survive. But they were divided. They were fighting with each other. The very people that they should be able to rely on, the very people they should be able to turn to and find help were the same people who were arguing with them, the same people who wouldn't give them the time of day. Their unity was disappearing in the moment they needed it the most.

So Christians, do you understand why this unity is so important? Do you understand why it is so important that we love each other in the same way? Do you understand why it is so important that we think the same way? Do you understand why it is so important that we act the same way? Because we need each other, Christians. We need that support, because our situation is no less difficult than those that the Philippians faced.

Because we also live in a society that is turning against us, a society which is drifting further and further away from the Lord. A society which is pressuring us to conform to it, that wants us to go along with it, to do the things that it is doing. And it puts enormous pressure on us, Christians, to do just that. Sometimes this pressure comes through the words that it uses. Because they might say, for example, "You believe in things like freedom. You believe in things like an individual choice. You believe in things like rights, right? These are all good things." "So why, then," they say, "would you try to restrict the freedom to choose to kill the unborn?" "Why, then," they say, "would you try to deny rights to people like transgenders? Don't you believe in these things? Don't you consider these things to be good?" But don't you see what they're doing, Christians? They are taking something that you consider to be good and attaching it to something that God says is evil. And in that way, they're trying to push you to go along with it. It's propaganda at its finest, because they want you to be one with them.

Sometimes this pressure comes by force, either real or imagined. How often have you heard them say: "You want to be on the right side of history. You don't want to be on the wrong side when they write the history books a few decades from now." That's trying to push us along. Or there might even be actual violence. I'm thinking of all the riots that have happened over the past couple of years, trying to basically force us to go along with pure force. That's one way that they try to pressure us.

And sometimes this pressure comes by calling for our destruction. If you think I'm joking about that, the next time some public figure dies, go on Twitter. Go on Facebook or some other social media. You will be disgusted by the things that they say, rejoicing that that person has died, practically throwing a party because of it. They want you to get on board or to disappear. And that can be very hard for us to deal with, Christians. Because if we're left all by ourselves, if we are all alone, we would very quickly be overwhelmed.

So we need one another, Christians. We need to support one another. We need to be united together, so that we can withstand the attacks of the world. We need to love the same way, to

think the same way, to act the same way, because then we can be a force for good in the world. We can actually change it for the better. Because how do you think that the Roman Empire became Christian? It was because of the unity of the church. Together they changed the world.

But disunity tears us apart. It takes away the support that we need, and it leaves us open to the attacks of the world. When we have a desire to win, Christians, a desire to be first, that not only hurts you, it also hurts the whole church. Whenever we get into a feud that we refuse to end and refuse to be reconciled with the other person, it hurts the whole church. When we refuse to deal with somebody else in the congregation, refusing even to talk with them or acknowledge them, it hurts the whole church. When we tear somebody down through gossip or by grumbling against them, it hurts the whole church. And whenever we think that I can just do whatever I want or think whatever I want or act however I please without thinking about how it affects someone else, it hurts the whole church. And especially, Christians, when we refuse to forgive one another, it hurts the whole church. By not walking in unity with one another, we hurt the whole body in the process.

Because the very heart of this problem, Christians, is our pride. It is the desire to have my way at the expense of someone else. Pride leads me to want to win. Pride leads me to want to be first. Pride leads me to tear apart the body. But the way out of this is humility. As Paul says Philippians 2, 3 and 4: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." Paul is not saying that we should be nosy or a busybody or in other people's business. In fact, he condemns that sort of thing in a passage like 1 Timothy 5. Rather, what he means, Christians, is that we should seek to help one another. We should be so concerned with the other person that we want their interests just as much as our own. We want to build them up in the same way that we want to build ourselves up. And we should be so willing to do this that I would even deny myself in Christian love for the sake of the other person. Because that Christian humility will bind us together. That Christian humility will unite us as one in the Lord.

And Paul shows this, above all, by pointing to Jesus himself. As he says in our reading for today: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." We have this mind, Christians, in Jesus, because Jesus humbled himself. Because as God, he could've had anything. He could've been first. He could've had it all. But he chose to empty himself for your sake, to lower himself to become one of us, and to humble himself so much that he died on the cross for your sake. What humility that is, Christians! That our Lord loved us so much that he humbled himself even to the point of death. That he was so willing to follow the Father in everything that it took him to the cross. And because of that, the Father has lifted him up. He has exalted him to sit down at his right hand. Because in humility Jesus has overcome the world. In humility Jesus is victorious over all things. And the world will bow to him, Paul says. Every knee will bow before him, and all men will call him Lord, all because Jesus humbled himself for your sake. So in him, Christians, you will find humility. In him you will find unity.

So look to Christ, then, because you have been united with him through the working of the Holy Spirit. And if you have been united with Jesus, you have also been united into one mind with him. We think the same way, because we are in Christ. If you have been united with Jesus, then

you have also been united with one another. We are one body in the Lord. If you have been united with Jesus, you are also united in mind with one another. We love the same way, we think the same way, we act the same way because of Jesus, and because our unity comes from him alone.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have united us together into one in your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us always to think as one and to act as one, because we are one body in him. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.