**LESSON 4** ***January 17–23***

# Unity Through Humility

**Sabbath Afternoon**

**Read for This Week's Study: Phil. 2:1–11, Jer. 17:9, Phil. 4:8, 1 Cor. 8:2, Rom. 8:3, Heb. 2:14–18.**

**Memory Text: "Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" (Philippians 2:2, NKJV).**

Unity is strength. But knowing what is true is not the same as doing it. We all fail sometimes, despite our best efforts at unity. But that's not the same as deliberately undermining unity. No wonder, then, that as Paul continues writing to the Philippians, he wants them to be "of one accord, of one mind."

Paul bases the necessity of unity on the teaching and example of Jesus. It's a theme that we find throughout the New Testament and especially in the epistles. The origin of disunity in the universe stemmed from the pride and thirst for position and power of a single angel in heaven, a sentiment that spread quickly, even within a perfect environment (see Isa. 14:12–14). It then gained a foothold in Eden through a similar discontent with the rules God had put in place and the desire for rising to a higher sphere than that which God had designed (Gen. 3:1-6).

This week we'll look at the biblical basis for unity in the church, focusing especially on the amazing condescension of Jesus, the lessons we can gain from beholding Him, and how we can grow to be more like Him.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 24.*

**SUNDAY** *January 18*

# Disunity in Philippi

**Read Philippians 2:1–3. What factors seem to have led to disunity within the church? What does Paul suggest as a remedy?**

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It must have been a tremendous disappointment for Paul to see the church that he established and loved so much racked with rivalry and consumed with contention. He uses very strong language to describe the problems. “Selfish ambition” translates a word (Greek, eritheia), used earlier in Philippians 1:17 (ESV) to refer to Paul’s self-interested rivals in Rome who were bent on promoting themselves rather than advancing the cause of Christ.
“Selfish ambition” is among the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:20, NKJV), and as James indicates, “where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there” (James 3:16, NKJV). The Greek word for “conceit” is used only here in the New Testament, but appears in extrabiblical literature in the sense of arrogance, hollow pride, and having an inflated sense of oneself. Paul uses a closely related word in admonishing the Galatians: “Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another” (Gal. 5:26, NKJV).

Note the remedies Paul lists for these problems:

1. Consolation in Christ. Paul will proceed to use Christ’s own example as a powerful motivation.

2. Comfort of love. Jesus reveals divine love and commands us to “love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

3. Fellowship of the Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit creates a close Christian relationship like the one that pervaded the early church (Acts 2:42; compare 2 Cor. 13:14).

4. Affection (or compassion). We see this divine quality frequently manifested in the life of Christ (see Matt. 9:36, Matt. 20:34, and Mark 1:41) and described in the parables of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:33) and the prodigal son (Luke 15:20).

5. Mercy. This quality, exemplified by Jesus, is to be seen also in the lives of His followers (Luke 6:36).

6. Being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. What a picture! It is difficult to imagine how Paul could emphasize the importance of unity more strongly. As Paul will point out, the mind we are to have “was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5).

**MONDAY** *January 19*

# The Source of Unity

Think more about Paul's emphasis on unity in Philippians 2:2, saying essentially the same thing in four different ways. Note also his focus on the mind, thoughts, and feelings. While the religious leaders tended to emphasize outward behavior, Jesus focused on our thoughts and feelings. For instance, the rich young ruler claimed to have always kept the law. Yet, by telling him to sell all he had, give to the poor, and follow Him, Jesus tested his attachment to worldly things. He also said it's what comes from the heart (or mind) that defiles a person: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matt. 15:19, NKJV), and "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34, NKJV).

**Read Philippians 2:3, 4. What practical steps does Paul urge to have unity in the church?**

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Paul's words provide a picture of humility: lowliness of mind, esteeming others better than ourselves, looking out for the interests of others and not merely our own. Easier said than done, right? But these are principles important to keep in mind in all our interactions. Often in conversation there is the tendency to concentrate on our reply to whatever is being said, rather than focused on listening in order to understand what the other person is saying and trying to see the issue from their point of view. Often strife arises from simple misunderstandings that could be avoided simply by active listening. We may not agree, but listening and seeking to understand the other person's viewpoint is the first step for fostering healthy communication and trust.

Paul speaks of the unity "[produced by] the Spirit" (Eph. 4:3, AMPC), which creates "the peace that joins us together" (Eph. 4:3, EXB). If there is strife in the church, the Holy Spirit can calm the waters and bring us into unity, creating harmony. In the same chapter, Paul speaks of "the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Eph. 4:13, NKJV). The two are related. Having the same faith, the same understanding of Scripture that springs from knowing Christ and His teachings, is vital for unity to prevail among us.

**What kind of death to self would lead us to where we, indeed, esteem others better than ourselves? How can we learn to do that? How different would our relationships be if we all lived like that?**

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**TUESDAY** ***January 20***

# Mind Implant or Mind Surgery?

An increasing number of companies around the world are working on technology that combines the processing power of computers with the human brain. In other words, by connecting minds to computers, scientists hope to impact our thoughts through the computers. Although implant use with the human brain may promise positive results, which include helping to manage epilepsy, depression, and Parkinson's disease, more sinister uses are not difficult to imagine. Mind control cannot be far away.

In some ways, it's already here. Our mind is like a computer, only far superior. The constant information flow, to which we are daily exposed, "programs" our mind, conditions our thoughts, and guides our actions. When we immerse ourselves in media, the worldly way people think stamps its impression on our minds, and we begin thinking the same way. It's as if other people's minds were implanted or melded into ours.

We are, like Jesus, to be "spiritually minded" (Rom. 8:6). "No one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God," which Paul contrasts with "the spirit of the world" (1 Cor. 2:11, 12, NKJV). Who is our teacher? And what are we learning?

**Read Philippians 2:5. What do you think it means to have the "mind" of Christ?**

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Ultimately, we can change our mind, but we can't change our heart; only God can. The Holy Spirit needs to perform heart surgery on us, wielding the "sword of the Spirit" (Eph. 6:17), the "living and powerful" Word of God, "piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12, NKJV). Only through the Holy Spirit can we really know ourselves because, by nature, our own heart deceives us (Jer. 17:9). The Hebrew word for "deceitful" ('aqov) refers to bumpy ground that trips us up; by extension, it means thoughts that are tortuous, twisted, and crooked. We must be transformed by the "renewing" of our mind in order that we may "prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2, NKJV).

**Why is it so important that we follow what Paul tells us here: "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things" (Phil. 4:8, NKJV)?**

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**WEDNESDAY** *January 21*

# The Mind of Christ

Muhammad Ali once said, “I am the greatest.” In August 1963, six months before winning the world heavyweight boxing championship, he even released a record album titled “I Am the Greatest.” Ali, no doubt, was a great athlete, but he was not an example to follow if one wants the mind of Christ.

In contrast, Jesus was perfectly sinless. Though He was tempted “in all points . . . as we are” (Heb. 4:15), He never sinned, not even by a thought. Nevertheless, Hebrews 5:8 indicates, “though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (NKJV). Jesus’ submission to the Father’s will was always perfect. There was never a moment He refused to submit, though no doubt many times it was not easy.

**Read Philippians 2:5–8, which some consider the most powerful and beautiful texts in Scripture. What is Paul saying to us here? What are the implications of these words? Most important, how do we apply to our own lives the principle expressed here?**

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Jesus, who is equal with God, who is God, not only took upon Himself human flesh but became a “bondservant” (doulou, a servant, a slave) and then offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins! In another place, Paul says that He became “a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13). God, our Creator, died on the cross in order to be our Redeemer as well, and that required Him to become a curse for us.
How do we begin to wrap our minds around what this is saying? Even more so, how do we do what the texts tell us to do, and that is to have the same kind of willingness to humble oneself and to sacrifice oneself for the good of others?

In another place, Jesus said: “But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Matt. 23:11, 12, NKJV). This, in many ways, reflects what Paul was telling us, in Philippians 2:5–8, to do as well.

In more powerfully graphic terms, Paul was saying here what he said earlier about not doing anything “through selfish ambition or conceit” (Phil. 2:3, NKJV).

**How should we respond to what Christ has done for us, as depicted in Philippines 2:5–8? What response could possibly be “adequate” or worthy of what Christ has done for us, perhaps other than to fall on our knees and worship? Why is it so wrong to think that our works can add to what Christ has already done for us?**

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**THURSDAY** *January 22*

# The Mystery of Godliness

A popular verse in the Bible is 1 Corinthians 8:2: "If anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know" (NKJV). There is no subject about which we know everything. We can always learn something more about anything. How much more true is that of eternal realities connected with the Godhead and the Incarnation? Paul frequently refers to Christ's amazing condescension in becoming a human being. It's a subject that even eternity will be inadequate to exhaust.

**Read Romans 8:3, Hebrews 2:14–18, and Hebrews 4:15. What characterized Jesus' condescension and His taking of human nature**

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How was it possible for the eternal Son of God, through the operation of the Holy Spirit (see Luke 1:35), to become a divine-human being in Mary's womb? It boggles the mind how the infinite and eternal could suddenly become a finite human being subject to death. That is the heart of what Paul calls "the mystery of godliness" (1 Tim. 3:16). In the beautiful hymn of Philippians 2, Paul here elaborates on this condescension more fully in some respects than anywhere else in Scripture.

- "Being in the form of God" (Phil. 2:6). The word morphē (form) refers to His divine nature, that Jesus was equal to the Father (compare John 1:1).
- "Emptied Himself " (Phil. 2:7, NASB). The mysterious nature of Jesus emptying Himself of His divine prerogatives—so that He could become truly human and tempted as we are—is astonishing.
- "He humbled himself " (Phil. 2:8). In taking human nature, Jesus moved from universal supremacy to utter servanthood, the opposite of Lucifer's aim.
- "Death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8). There was no more ignominious way to die than the way Jesus chose, having planned it with the Father in the "counsel of peace" (Zech. 6:13), illustrating it beforehand through Moses lifting up the serpent (Num. 21:9, John 3:14), and thus becoming "sin for us . . . that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

**How can, and should, focusing on what Jesus did for us at the cross—seeing the Cross as our example of surrender and humility— make us more humble, as well as more submissive to God?**

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## FRIDAY *January 23*

**Further Thought:** "All the paternal love which has come down from generation to generation through the channel of human hearts, all the springs of tenderness which have opened in the souls of men, are but as a tiny rill to the boundless ocean when compared with the infinite, exhaustless love of God. Tongue cannot utter it; pen cannot portray it. You may meditate upon it every day of your life; you may search the Scriptures diligently in order to understand it; you may summon every power and capability that God has given you, in the endeavor to comprehend the love and compassion of the heavenly Father; and yet there is an infinity beyond. You may study that love for ages; yet you can never fully comprehend the length and the breadth, the depth and the height, of the love of God in giving His Son to die for the world. Eternity itself can never fully reveal it. Yet as we study the Bible and meditate upon the life of Christ and the plan of redemption, these great themes will open to our understanding more and more."—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 740.

"When we are receiving a training, as did Moses in the school of Christ, what shall we learn?—to become puffed up?—to have an exalted opinion of ourselves?—No, indeed. The more we learn in this school, the more we shall advance in meekness and lowliness of mind. We are not to feel that we have learned everything worth knowing. We should put to the best use the talents God has given us, that when we are changed from mortality to immortality, we shall not leave behind that which we have attained, but may take it with us to the other side. Throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity, Christ and His work of redemption will be the theme of our study."—Ellen G. White, Manuscript 36, 1885.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. **What are ways that you have experienced for yourself the reality of God's love? In class, talk about the different ways you have come to know and experience His love.**

2. **What exactly does it mean that Jesus came "in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:7)? Compare Romans 8:3. Discuss these passages in light of each other.**

3. **What challenges to unity does the church in your area face? Whatever the issues, why would a willingness to be humble, to not do anything through "selfish ambition or conceit" (Phil. 2:3, NKJV), be a great way to at least start working through the issues?**

*INSIDE* **STORY**

# Money Never Runs Out

Eleven-year-old Alvan Harold liked hearing coins jingling in his pocket as he walked home from school in Kisumu, Kenya. Then he could stop by a shop and buy some crunchy nuts or a cold ice cream.

One day, the fifth-grade Bible teacher shocked Alvan by talking about his beloved pocket money. “You should not spend all your pocket money on nuts and ice cream,” she said. “Save some to give to God on Sabbath.”

Alvan put money in the offering plate on Sabbath. It was money that his father gave him on Sabbath morning. Teacher spoke about that money, too.

“When you give money from your parents in church, you are only giving for your parents,” she said. “You aren’t giving your own money.” She read Malachi 3:8: “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings” (NKJV).

Alvan thought that Teacher was criticizing him, and he didn’t like that. But then he thought, Maybe she is just a little bit right.

It was Thursday, and Alvan had already spent all his pocket money for that week. He decided to save money for God the next week. But the next week, he again spent all his money.

Two months passed, and Alvan was terribly disappointed with himself. He just couldn’t seem to save money for offering.

One day, he and his 17-year-old brother, Allan, passed an ice-cream shop as they walked home. Alvan had a 20-shilling coin (20 U.S. cents) in his pocket, and he decided to spend it on ice cream.

But his big brother stopped him. “It’s childish to walk around eating ice cream,” he said. “I won’t walk around with someone eating ice cream.” Alvan was annoyed. He wanted ice cream, but he couldn’t argue. So he didn’t buy it.

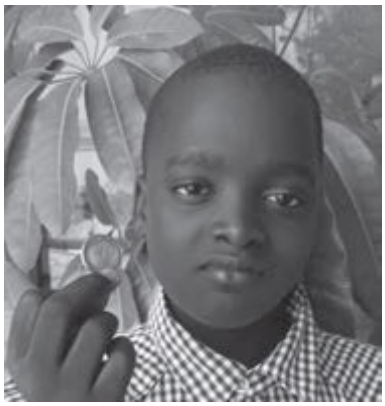
When Sabbath arrived, he still had the 20 shillings in his pocket. He put the coin in the offering plate along with 20 shillings that his parents had given him that morning. It felt good to give his own money to God. He had given up something he really wanted for the offering money, and realized it wasn’t such a loss.

The next week, Alvan managed to save another 20 shillings, and he gave it as offering. He liked the feeling! He decided to give 20 shillings every Sabbath —and he has to this day. To his surprise, he has never run out of money again. Before, he never had enough money to last the week. But now he always has enough money. In fact, he often has

more than 20 shillings left over, and he gives the extra money to Father to put into savings.

Sometimes Alvan is tempted to buy nuts or ice cream, but he reminds himself that he must have 20 shillings for God on Sabbath.

“I remind myself that God’s work is better than what I want,” he said.



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