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To Model the Messiah

2: 1-4

To model the Messiah DIG: Reading between the lines, what do you think was the problem with the church in Philippi? What are the right motives for spiritual unity? What are the right marks of spiritual unity? What are the right means for spiritual unity? How is this unity related to humility? How does Yeshua exemplify what Paul means in verses 3 and 4? How did Messiah show humility in the Gospels?

REFLECT: How would things change if you consistently applied these verses in your family? Messianic congregation? Church? Work? Which do you need to work on now? What is the difference between humility and being a “doormat?” What is true humility? Why does selfishness never bring joy? Why is pride the great enemy of the godly life? Ministry that costs you nothing accomplishes nothing? Why?

Be of the same mindset, united in spirit.



For such a brief epistle, **Paul's** letter to **the Philippians** contains many majestic mountaintops for believers of every generation. **His** cheerful assessment of **his** imprisonment and possible execution reaches such a summit when **he** proclaims: **For me to live is Messiah and to die is gain (1:21)**. In **2:5-11**, **the apostle** guides our climb to the heights of mystery in the incarnation, humiliation, and glorification of **Messiah**. In **3:3-11**, **Paul** displays a Mount Everest of **the Gospel** grace, as **he** reports **his** escape from the legalistic bondage of the perversion of the Torah (see the commentary on **Galatians**, to see [clink Bd - Through the Law I died to the Law](#)). Other memorable pinnacles rise above the clouds: **I press on toward the goal to win the heavenly prize for which God has called me in Messiah Yeshua (3:14)**, **Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God (4:6)**, **I can do all things through him who strengthens me (4:13)**, and others. By contrast, **2:1-4** may seem, at first glance, like dusty flatlands surrounded by snow-covered ranges because it lies between: **To live is Messiah and to die is gain (1:21)** on the one hand, and **at the name of Yeshua, every knee will bow (2:10)**, on the other hand, and thus seems to bring us down from soul-stirring heights to the flatlands of everyday life. Here we read instructions such as, "get along with each other, stop being selfish, care as much about others' concerns as you do about your own." So mundane, so down to earth.⁶³

The church at **Philippi** was, for the most part, theologically sound, devoted, moral, loving, zealous, courageous, prayerful, and generous. However, it faced the danger of discord that often is generated by only a few people. Such **troublemakers** can stir up the contention and strife that fractures an entire congregation. **He** had just expressed to **the Philippians** **his** hope to **hear that [they] are standing firm in one spirit, with one mindset striving together for the faith of the Gospel (1:27)**. So because disunity is so tragically debilitating, **Paul**, gently but firmly, pleads with **believers** to constantly guard against that trap.

In **2:1-4 Paul** gives what is perhaps the most concise and practical teaching about **unity** in the B'rit Chadashah. In these four powerful verses, **he** outlines a formula for spiritual **unity** that includes three necessary elements on which that **unity** must be built: **the right motives (2:1-2a)**, **the right marks (2:2b)**, and **the right means (2:3-4)**. Through **them**, **he** clarifies *why* believers should be **one spirit and one mindset**, *what* is meant by **one spirit and one mindset**, and *how* they can truly become of **one spirit and one mindset**.⁶⁴

The right motives for spiritual unity (2:1): Therefore, as a consequence of

what **Paul** has just said, **since [the Philippians] had [already] been walking worthy** (see [At - Walking Worthy](#)), there were four things that **they** have already experienced because of **the Gospel**. In the Greek, there are four if's in **2:1**. The word "if" (Greek: *ei*) is the translation of a conditional particle referring to a fulfilled condition. So one could translate it **because**. The four conditions mentioned in this verse are not hypothetical in nature. They are facts.⁶⁵

Because you have been encouraged from being united in Messiah (2:1a Greek): The type of **encouragement Paul** has in view here is **encouragement in Messiah**. The phrase **in Messiah** is one of **the apostles'** favorite ways of expressing the sense of close association with **Messiah** that believers experience through **the Gospel**. Thus, **Paul** is assuming that believers have **encouragement** by the very fact that they are **in Messiah**; it is an outworking of the positional and experiential reality of being **in Messiah**. And given all of the blessings that come from being **in Messiah** (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Bw - What God Does for Us at the Moment of Faith?](#)), it is easy to see how believers should be **encouraged**.

Because you have found comfort (Greek: *paramythion*, meaning *consolation, relief or support*) **from love (2:1b Greek):** A moving example of this word is found in a second-century AD letter in which a mother says to her son, "Write to me continually concerning your well-being so that I may have **comfort** in my trouble." The kind of **comfort Paul** has in mind here, however, is not that which comes from favorable circumstances, but rather **from love**. Without further specifying the object of that **love**, it's probably best to see it as including both **ADONAI's love** for the believer and the believer's **love for ADONAI** and others. **Paul** has already prayed that **the Philippians' love would overflow more and more (1:9)**, and some believers in Rome were preaching **the Gospel** because of **love (1:16)**. But here in **2:1**, **Paul's** point is similar to that of **John**, who wrote that those who have experienced **God's love** show it by their **love** for others: **Let us love one another, for love comes from God** (see the commentary on [Romans Af - The List of "one another" Commands](#)).

Because you have a common fellowship of the Spirit (Greek 2:1c): Just as believers have **fellowship** (Greek: *koinonia*) with **the Good News (1:5)**, they also have **fellowship** with the **Ruach**. The point here is not so much that believers participate in **the Spirit** and **His** benefits, but rather that we experience a close and deep relationship with **the Spirit**. **The apostle** accepts (as a given) the reality of the believer's fellowship with **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh**. **He** never got over the

wonder that **ADONAI** had given **His Spirit** to **His** people as a down-payment, guaranteeing their final inheritance and salvation (see **Second Corinthians An - God's Seal of Approval**). **Paul** implies as much in **Galatians 3:1-5**, where he assumes that **the Galatians** have experienced **the Ruach** because **they** had believed **in Messiah**. Such **fellowship** with **the Spirit** happens on individual and corporate levels, though the context of **2:1-4** suggests that **Paul** is emphasizing the corporate level.

Behind these first three right motives behind the believers' experience, we can see **the Trinity** at work. **Messiah** and **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** are explicitly mentioned, but we must infer a reference to **the Father** behind the phrase: **you have found comfort from love (2:1b)**. Perhaps the best support for this view is the parallel in **Second Corinthians 13:14: The grace of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah, the love of God and the fellowship of the Ruach Ha'Kodesh be with you all**. This **Trinitarian** perspective provides a foundation for life within the church (also see **The Life of Christ Mo - The Great Commission**).

Because you have experienced affection and sympathy (Greek 2:1d): By affection, **Paul** means the deep impulses of **love** and concern that **ADONAI** produces in believers for each other and those around them. **The apostle** has already used this very same word to express **his** own concern for **the Philippians**, attributing such **love** to **Messiah Yeshua** at work in **him (1:8)**. Such **affection** is closely related to **sympathy**, or perhaps more literally *mercies*. The Greek word *oiktirmos* speaks of a *display of concern over another's misfortune*. When it occurs in the plural, as it does here, it often refers to concrete expressions of *mercy (Romans 12:1; Second Corinthians 1:3; Philippians 2:1; Hebrews 10:28)*. It is unclear whether **Paul** is talking about the **affection and sympathy** extended to believers or the **affection and sympathy** that believers extend to others, so it's probably best to allow both to be considered. It is **ADONAI**-produced affection in the soul of the believer that compels tangible concern for others, but this is only possible because of **Messiah's** own **affection** and *mercies* for **His** people produced by **His** incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.

How astounding is it to reflect on what **God** has granted us in **the Gospel!** And how tragic it is that we are so quick to forget or to take such realities lightly! All these treasures are ours **in Messiah**. How can such realities not change the way we think, feel, speak, and live? Surely their abundance reflects our own intimacy with **Messiah**, from whom these treasures come.

The right marks of spiritual unity (2:2): Because the realities in **verse 1** are true, **verse 2** indicates the logical response that **the Philippians** should **make [Paul's] joy complete**. The **joy** that **he** speaks of here is the **joy** that comes from **his** common participation in **the Gospel** with **the Philippians**. But that **joy** is not static; it is dynamic in that it is capable of increasing. **Paul** uses similar expressions elsewhere to refer to **joy** being completed or filled up, whether in a prayer for the believers in Rome (**Romans 15:13**) or in expressing **his** desire to see **Timothy (Second Timothy 1:4)**. This concept of **joy** being completed or filled up is especially prominent in **Yeshua's** parting address to **His apostles** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ko - The Upper Room Discourse**), where three times this same expression refers to the inseparable connection between **the joy** of **Yeshua** and that of **His** followers (**John 15:11, 16:24, and 17:13**). This **joy** is also closely connected to the spiritual growth of **God's** people in **John's** letters as well (**1 John 1:4 and 2 John 1:12**).⁶⁶

In this single verse, **the apostle** gives four essential marks of spiritual **unity**. The first is **being of the same mindset** (Greek: *auto phronete*, meaning *to be like-minded*). Spiritual **unity** is a major theme of **Philippians** - of the twenty-six occurrences of the verb *phroneo* in the B'rit Chadashah, ten are found in this letter (**2:2a Greek**). **Paul** is not talking here about doctrine or moral standards. In this context, **being of the same mindset** means to actively strive to achieve common understanding and genuine agreement. A few verses later, **the apostle** declares that the only way to have such harmony is to **have the same mindset as Messiah Yeshua (2:5)**. Later, **Paul** gives some practical advice for **having of the same mindset: Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things (4:8)**.

A second mark of spiritual maturity is to **love** (Greek: *agape*) **one another (2:2b Greek)**, which flows out of, and enhances the idea of **having the same mindset**. To have the same **love** is to **love** each other equally. On a purely emotional level, having equal **love** for others is impossible. *Agape love*, however, is the **love** of the will, not of preference or attraction. It is based on an intentional, conscious choice to seek the welfare of its object. It is because *agape love* is based on the will that it can be commanded. As **Paul** goes on to say, *agape love* embraces unbelievers - even those who **persecute** are to be **blessed** rather than **cursed (Romans 12:14)**. But in the present context, **Paul** is focusing on **the mutual love** that

believers are supposed to have for each other, **the love** that **he** speaks of in another letter as **the love that each one of you have toward one another is increasing (Second Thessalonians 1:3)**.

A third mark of spiritual maturity is being **united in spirit (2:2c Greek)**, which is closely related to **being of the same mindset** and **loving one another**. **United** (Greek: *sumpsuchos*, literally means *one-souled* and is used only here in the B'rit Chadashah). It has the same emphasis as the **one spirit** spoken of in **1:27**. To be **united in spirit** is to live in selfless harmony with fellow believers. By definition, it excludes personal ambition, selfishness, hatred, envy, jealousy, and the countless other evils that are the fruit of self-love. Like every other godly virtue, **unity of the spirit** must be grounded in the objective truth of **God's Word**. But it also has a subjective aspect. Such **unity** involves a deep and passionate concern for **ADONAI, His work, His Gospel, and His people**. No two believers - no matter what their level of spiritual maturity and knowledge of Scripture - will understand everything exactly alike. But if they are controlled by humility and **love**, they will be genuinely **united in spirit**. They will not allow minor differences to divide them or hinder their service to **the Lord**.

A fourth mark of spiritual maturity is being **intent on one purpose (2:2d Greek)**, which is a natural companion of the preceding three. **Intent on one purpose** translates a participle form of *phroneo*, which Paul used earlier in this verse: **being of the same mindset**, and uses it again in **verse 5**, saying: **have the same attitude**. In this one verse, **the apostle** presents a full circle of **unity** - from **one mind**, to **one love**, to **one spirit**, to **one purpose**, which, as just noted, basically refers again to **the same mindset**. These four principles are complementary and inseparable. The same basic idea is expressed in four ways, each with a somewhat different, but important, emphasis. **Paul** summarizes these marks of spiritual **unity** in **Colossians 3:12-16**.⁶⁷

The right means for spiritual unity (2:3-4): Paul draws a contrast between self-oriented focus and an others-centered mentality to describe an additional means by which **the Philippians** are to share a common **mindset**. Negatively stated, believers share a common **mindset** by **doing nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit (2:3a Greek)**. By **selfish ambition**, **Paul** refers to an attitude which only evaluates situations and circumstances in terms of how it benefits me. It is the same attitude that motivated some in Rome to preach (see **Ap - Paul's Critics**), and it characterizes a life lived in **the flesh** rather than in **the spirit (Romans 2:8; Second Corinthians 12:20; Galatians 5:20)**. Words,

thoughts, and/or deeds that are motivated by **selfish ambition** or **vain conceit** are the direct opposite of **Messiah**, who emptied **Himself** to redeem **His** people and so that **the Father** would be glorified (**2:6-11**).⁶⁸

Rather, the Philippians display **their** common **mindset** by **regarding others more important than yourselves in humility (2:3b Greek)**. **Regard** is a verb that means more than just having an opinion. It refers to a carefully thought-out conclusion based on the truth. **More importantly** translates a participial form of *huperecho*, which incorporates the Greek word form in which the English word *hyper* is taken. It intensifies and elevates what is in view, so that it means *to excel, surpass, or be superior to*. In **Romans**, **Paul** uses the word in speaking of the **governing [literally supreme] authorities** to which **every person is to be in subjection (Romans 13:1)**. Similarly, **Peter** uses the word in commanding believers to **submit themselves . . . to a king as the one in authority [literally as being supreme] (First Peter 3:8)**, and to proclaim that **the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Messiah Yeshua (4:7)**.

It is clear that **Paul** has in mind a view of others that is not natural to us and is extremely difficult even for believers to achieve. Perhaps the best way to approach this seemingly unrealistic and impossible challenge is for us to consider our own sins. We know far more about our own hearts than about the hearts of anyone else. Recognizing our own sinfulness should exclude **regarding others more important than yourselves**. If **Paul** viewed **himself as the least of all apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle (First Corinthians 15:9)**, **the least important of all God's holy people (Ephesians 3:8)**, and even **the foremost of sinners (First Timothy 1:5)**, how could any of us honestly think of ourselves in any higher way?⁶⁹

Of course, such a **mindset** is only possible **in humility**. In fact, it is so important that **Paul** placed this phrase at the beginning of the Greek text to emphasize that this is how **the Philippians** were to regard one another more highly than **themselves**. **Humility** was the natural contrast to the selfish and arrogant mentality that **the Philippians** needed to avoid. In a world that operates on the principle of looking out for oneself and seizing opportunities for self-promotion, the Gospel calls us to humbly **regard others** as being **more important than ourselves in humility** as evidence that we truly know **the One** who **humbled Himself** to the point of death on a **Roman** cross (see [Av - Obedient to Death](#)).

The final means by which **the Philippians** could share a common **mindset** is stated in the form of another contrast. Negatively stated, **the apostle** writes: **Not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others (2:4 NIV)**. The verb **looking** (Greek: *skopeo*), has the sense of exerting some effort in continually acquiring information regarding some matter, with the implication of concern as to how to respond appropriately. **Paul's** meaning is clear enough: do not be consumed with our own interests, since to do so is inevitably to neglect the needs of others. **Paul** doesn't advocate the complete denial of our own interests; rather, **he** assumes that our default position is to look out for ourselves. Every human being is born with a sin nature and is inherently selfish. Therefore, **the apostle** is arguing here that part of the work of **the Spirit** in a believer's life is to overcome that natural tendency to be controlled by self-interest in every action, thought, and word. Part of the beauty of **the Gospel** is that it not only forgives us for our own destructive self-interest, but empowers us through the indwelling of **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** to intentionally and proactively look to the needs **of others**. How is that reality showing up in your life?⁷⁰

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** for **Messiah's** modeling such wonderful and self-sacrificing **love**! It is a joy and comfort to be united with **Messiah**. **Unity** with **You** should lead to **unity** among all believers. The world is watching. As the **Ruach Ha'Kodesh** sanctifies us, we will grow in **love** for **You** and love for others. People model what they see when they were raised and **You** raise **Your** children with a wonderful example of awesome **love**! Thank **You** for **Your** example of **steadfast love (Psalms 36:5, Psalms 63:3)** that was not mere lip service but was action that cost **You** greatly. **Lord**, give me the wisdom to follow **Your** example of **love** to show the world a **unity** that draws the it close to **You**. By following **Your** example, there will be **unity** among believers, filling us with shalom! In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*