

**ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL**  
**Philippians 2:3-5**

**INTRODUCTION**

**A. The Man of the Past.**

1. 300 years ago, John Donne penned these words: *No man is an island, Entire of itself, every man is a piece of the continent, A part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less . . . Any man's death diminishes me, Because I am involved in mankind, And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee.*
2. Donne's words reflect something about the rural man of the past.
  - a. People once were "connected" to each other in community.
  - b. Families extended, neighbors permanent, friendships lifelong.
3. That sense of permanence had a major impact on the way people of the past viewed reality, their commitments to people, and even themselves.

**B. Oh the times, they are a-changing.**

1. In 1965, *Paul Simon* penned a hymn in praise of the individual, proud of his freedom from the group. *"I am a rock, I am an island."*
2. Transience is the norm of life today.
  - a. Transience in *place*: In each year since 1948 one of five Americans changed his address, picking up his children, some household effects, and starting life anew at a fresh place. ~Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock*
  - b. Transience in *occupation*: Department of Labor - "the average twenty-year-old man in the work force could be expected to change jobs six or seven times."
  - c. Transience in *relationships*: Our friends float past; we become involved with them; they float on, and we must rely on hearsay or lose track of them completely; they float back again, and we must either renew our friendship—or find that they and we don't comprehend each other anymore. ~John Barth

**C. Transition:** This sense of transience impacts the way we view reality, our commitments to people, and ourselves.

1. We don't make decisions on the basis of what would be beneficial for the group.
2. We've become a people who evaluates everything in terms of how it will affect *ourselves*.
3. We are no longer a "part of the main." We are rocks; We are islands.

**I. INDIVIDUALISM AND THE CHURCH.**

**A. Teaching "me" to think "we".**

1. An essential challenge of the church today is to teach the **individualist** how to act as "a piece of the continent, a part of the main."
  - a. The church is faced with teaching the "me" generation to think in "we" terms.
  - b. People reared in a culture that worships individualism must now learn how to behave in the context of a group – the church.
  - c. A new set of attitudes and skills is demanded if the individual is to become a part of "the body," as described in 1 Cor. 12:12-27.
2. Most people coming into the church today are not equipped to think in group terms.
  - a. Dependency is weakness; accountability is slavery; submission is demeaning.
  - b. The very notion of denying self to promote the group is alien to modern mind.
  - c. To say the unity of the church may be more important than individual interests and freedoms is equivalent to cultural heresy.
3. Unfortunately, the contemporary church has not come to grips with this reality.
  - a. New members are required to learn some basic theology and to conform to a

basic code of ethics, but rarely taught how to "*conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God*" (**1Tim. 3:15**).

- b. When converts are brought in, we assume they already know how to think and behave in corporate terms.
4. Most church members are individualists in Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes.
  - a. They still think in "me" terms.
  - b. They act, not on the basis of what is good for the group, but on the basis of personal preference.
  - c. In the mind of the modern Christian, the needs of the many often take a back seat to the needs of the one.
5. ***But this is nothing new.***
- B. The Early Church had its Share of Individualists.**
  1. Paul fought just this kind of individualistic thinking plaguing the church today.
    - a. The problem of "self" centeredness as opposed to "group" centeredness is not unique to our time.
    - b. Paul addressed this problem among Christians at Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, and Philippi.
    - c. Many of them, like many of us, did not know how to live in the kind of community envisioned by Christ when he established his church.
    - d. Learning to "die to self" and to behave in a manner that "builds up the body."
  2. While Paul wrote to an audience 2000 years removed, the lessons he taught are tailor-made for the church today.

## **II. TROUBLE IN PHILIPPI.**

### **A. Individualism at Philippi.**

1. Almost ten years after founding the church in Philippi, Paul received word that serious problems had arisen.
  - a. Two dedicated women at odds with one another, their bickering was causing difficulties in the church (Phil. 4:2).
  - b. Pride and selfish ambition had reared their ugly heads, and the unity of the body was at risk.
2. Paul wrote immediately to the Philippians, and (though he did not mention the rift between Euodia and Syntyche until chapter 4) used the entire letter to teach some important lessons on corporate living.

### **B. Transition:**

1. **Phil. 2:2-8** - Paul reminded his readers of some basic rules for thinking in "we" terms.
2. Paul's aim was to kill the individualistic thinking in the church.
  - a. Unity, not self-actualization, is the goal of congregational life.
  - b. It is the **body's** good, not the fulfillment of the individual, which must motivate each member's thoughts and actions.
  - c. As members of a body, Christians must learn to subordinate themselves for the benefit of the congregation.
3. Only then can the tyranny of the "I" yield to the fellowship of the "we."

## **III. A PRESCRIPTION FOR PHILIPPI.**

### **A. Be One (Phil. 2:2).**

1. Four times in this single verse, Paul stresses the importance of thinking in group terms: Think alike, Love alike, Be of one soul, Be of one mind.
2. The quest for oneness:
  - a. *My* thoughts, emotions, soul and mind are incorporated into the personality of the congregation.

- b. The individualist marches to his different drummer, the Christian makes every effort to be one with the rest.
  - 3. **Oneness is not sameness.** He is saying that the Christian longs to move in the same direction, work for the same goals, share a common purpose and affection.
  - 4. How is this kind of "oneness" possible? What can individual Christians do to make such unity a reality? Paul shares some practical attitudes and skills that will foster this kind of group identity.
- B. Be Humble (Phil. 2:3).**
- 1. Paul strikes at the "Me" orientation so common in our culture.
    - a. It is dangerous to insist that nothing should be done "out of selfish ambition" in a society that buys millions of copies of a weekly magazine called *Self*.
    - b. And it is almost blasphemous to command that we should consider others better than ourselves in a society that made *Looking Out for Number One* a runaway best seller.
  - 2. But if the church is serious about real unity, Paul's comments on humility must be taken to heart.
    - a. Oneness in the local church is impossible so long as ambition and conceit characterize her members.
    - b. At the core of both vices is the individualism that destroys unity because it cares more for *self* than for the *body*.
  - 3. Paul advocates a radical humility—one which goes so far as to count others "better" than self.
    - a. This is the "group attitude" counteracting individualistic pride.
      - i. This humility is not a lack of healthy confidence.
      - ii. Nor is "considering others better" an overestimation of their abilities or a blindness to their faults.
    - b. What Paul proposes is a conscious decision to sit at the foot of the table so that others may be honored.
- C. Be Concerned (Phil. 2:4).**
- 1. One of the prime symptoms of a "me" mindset is tunnel vision - a narrow and exclusive focus on personal agendas, hobbies and interests.
    - a. "My" programs must be advanced, "my" priorities must take precedence, "my" perspectives are most valid.
    - b. The individualist fails to recognize that others have legitimate interests.
  - 2. A "we" mindset yields a very different attitude.
    - a. Because we are "group" centered, priorities of our brothers become priorities for us.
    - b. We are as concerned to see the interests of others advanced as we are to see our own affairs prosper.
  - 3. Christians cannot blindly pursue personal agendas.
    - a. We are one in spirit and purpose.
    - b. We consider one another as better than ourselves.
    - c. As a result, we pay attention to the things which interest each other.

#### IV. HAVE THIS MIND AMONG YOU.

##### A. The Example of Jesus

- 1. There is no greater argument against individualism than the life of Jesus.
  - a. Throughout Scripture, Jesus shows Himself to be the supreme "we" thinker.
  - b. Each of the rules Paul gives for living in the body is exemplified in Christ.
- 2. Phil. 2:5-8

##### B. Jesus was the Supreme "WE" Thinker

- 1. He valued oneness

- a. He became like us so that He could reach us.
  - b. He prayed for oneness: "that they may be one," John 17:22.
- 2. He showed humility
  - a. He "made Himself nothing, taking the nature of a servant."
  - b. He always put others' needs before His own.
- 3. He was concerned about us
  - a. His love for us was the motive for the cross.
  - b. He considered us "better than" Himself.
- 4. Had Jesus been part of the "me" generation, He would have clung to His preeminence. Had He been the individualist, He would never have emptied Himself and taken on the nature of a servant. Had Jesus been looking out for Himself, He would not have gone to the cross.

## **CLOSING**

- A. This is the attitude Christians must imitate. If the church is ever to be a body - a living, breathing, vital organism - members must recognize that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.
- B. So, be one – do everything in your power to keep step with your brothers. Be humble – put the wants and needs of others ahead of your own. And be concerned – learn to appreciate and value the priorities of other Christians.
- C. Above all, be Christ-like. Pour yourself out. Become a servant. Lay down your life. When this is accomplished, there will be no more individualists in God's one body. Instead, our motto will be, "All for one and one for all." Easy? No! But if the three musketeers could do it, a few committed Christians should be equal to the task.