

DISUNITY WITHIN THE BRIDE OF CHRIST BREAKS THE HEART OF GOD THE FATHER!

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Philippians 2:1-4 (NASB), *"Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if 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 consider 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."*

Definition: Bride of Christ = The imagery and symbolism of marriage is applied to Christ and the body of believers known as the church. The church is comprised of those who have trusted (placed their faith) in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and have received eternal life. Christ, the Bridegroom, has sacrificially and lovingly chosen the church to be His bride (Ephesians 5:25-27). Just as there was a betrothal period in biblical times during which the bride and groom were separated until the wedding,

so is the bride of Christ separate from her Bridegroom during the church age. Her responsibility during the betrothal period is to be faithful to Him (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:24). At the rapture, the church will be united with the Bridegroom and the official "wedding ceremony" will take place and, with it, the eternal union of Christ and His bride will be actualized (Revelation 19:7-9; 21:1-2).

One of the most interesting character traits of our Lord Jesus is his love for mankind, his fellow companions, his family, friends...and even his enemies who hated him. He died on the cross not only to complete his purpose to fulfill his Father's desire to provide a way for God's creation to enter into God's Kingdom, but to show others that it is imperative for us to care about others as we care or should care for ourselves. Caring about others' welfare and their needs were of great interest to our Savior. It should be of great interest to us also. However, Jesus did not just care for those living in his time; he had all future inhabitants on planet earth interests too. He died to set man free...past, present and future. As with all of God's creation, man must make a choice to be free from sin and eternal death. This should be a valid and viable lesson for all who have been set free by our belief in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. We are to share our faith with others...desiring for others to enter into the presence of God as we have.

Disunity of the brotherhood (Christian brothers and sisters) breaks the heart of God. We are to rejoice with our Christian friends in Christ when one comes to the saving knowledge of Christ...no matter what denomination one chooses to worship and hear the Word of God.

Paul's final word in this particular passage of Scripture (Philippians 2:4) is especially relevant: *"Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others"* (2:4).

A prominent and most relevant word is the verb "look" (skopeo), which means "to pay careful attention to, look out for, notice." Just as you might take out a magnifying glass and observe in detail (look) at the old pictures you or someone else took of your family many years ago, you know what it is like to look closely at the details of the loved ones you cared and still think about, even though many are already with the Father.

Just as we are interested in studying and observing in detail pictures of our earthly family, God wants us to study and observe fellow believers to an even greater extent. I think maybe He then wants you to prioritize their interests before you do your own. This will fulfill the Scripture, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

With this in mind, we should realize that it is our responsibility to live lives worthy of being called a Christian. We are to strive to be like Jesus in our walk with him. No, we are sinners saved by grace and we will never be sinless as Jesus was while he walked on planet earth. However, we can pursue holiness and godliness as we "stretch toward the mark of the high-calling of God." Yes, we are to tell others about Jesus...meaning that we are to be open to the Holy Spirit's prompting to witness and give testimony as the Spirit gives us the opportunity to be a faithful and ready witness.

Many Christians, however, assume that we are to pursue the interests of others with all that is within us... and yet, end up neglecting those who are most important to us. Although loving others and helping them in time of need is an admirable Christ-like quality to have, it is important to understand that this can often lead to the neglect of one's marriage, family, and personal walk with Christ. Sad to say, this is done in the name of ministry!

It is far better to care for your own physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs so that you can care for others for many years. However, Paul is telling us to not be selfish and unbecoming to fellow travelers in this world by always taking care of self before opening ourselves up to sharing our gifts, our testimony, and time with others.

Do you look out for the interests of others? When you talk to others, do you talk about yourself or them? God gave you two ears and one mouth for a reason. He expects you to listen much more than you talk.

The goal should be to ask questions such as:

- How are you doing spiritually?
- How is your marriage and family?
- Is work going well?

- What has God been teaching you?
- How can I be praying for you?
- Do you pray more for others than you do yourself?
- Do you find satisfaction in seeing your spiritual children surpass you in the work they are called to do?
- Do you want other life-giving evangelical churches in your community to succeed as much or more than your church?
- Do you study the persecuted church and lift these precious brothers and sisters in Christ up in prayer? If so, you're applying this verse.

Comment: On the hit TV show, Extreme Makeover: Home Edition, whole communities work together to provide a new home for a family in need. It is amazing to watch the cast and crew of the show as they rally the town, the builders, and each other in order to complete the project within seven days. Then, when it's time to bring the family home, all those people get the chance to celebrate the accomplishment together. Even viewers feel they have a chance to participate in the celebration.

Now, imagine the excitement and joy we would experience as a community of believers if we banded together in the name of God to effect change in our homes, communities, states, nation, and world! It would be remarkable to see what would happen if we all worked together for God's purpose.

TRUE JOY WOULD BE EXPERIENCED BY ALL WHO WERE TOUCHED BY THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE TO WORK TOGETHER TO BLESS OTHERS!

Life is full of observations...good, bad, and ugly. The question is, "How will we handle what we see, hear, and experience?" Will we just let God handle it...or will we do our part and "partner" with God to bring about what is "that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God?"

Paul gave us some specific instructions on how we are to conduct ourselves in this fallen world. He gave the instructions; but we are to accept and do them!

Those who
walk with God,
always reach
their destination

