



**STRIVING
TOGETHER**

FOR THE CAUSE OF CHRIST

PAUL CHAPPELL

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

There's nothing like synergy. Even the strongest, wisest, and most talented people accomplish more on teams than they do individually.

Two churches in the New Testament provide examples of both the consequences of division and the rewards of synergy.

The church at Corinth was filled with problems. Some of the Christians were immoral, selfish, and worldly. But one of the first issues Paul addressed was their division. They had formed cliques around personalities—leaders who never even sought or desired this man-focused devotion.

The division was a virus that perverted their time to remember the Lord's death on the Cross. Instead of provoking awe and humility before the

Lord, the observance of the Lord's Table became a shameful display of wanton selfishness.

So Paul told the church of Corinth, "For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:9). He cried out to this disjointed church, "You belong to God, and you must work together for His glory!"

A contrasting church to Corinth was the church at Philippi. Paul had a special love, respect, and appreciation for this model church. It was one of the most mature churches described in the New Testament. Joy permeated their character. They held up the Gospel in their own community and supported missions work abroad.

It is impossible to read the epistle of Philippians without noticing the great unity Paul both saw and encouraged in the church. Paul encouraged this spirit when he wrote Philippians 1:27, "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel."

In this tale of two churches we can draw two important conclusions: nothing will destroy God's work as quickly as carnal division, and nothing can stop God's work when His people are striving together with one mind and one spirit.

Accomplishing the work that God gave the church requires a joint effort of the entire body. When the church family fully invests in a unified declaration of the Gospel, the results are unparalleled.

As Henry Ford said, “Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, working together is success.” A successful church has learned to work together and to make a difference for His glory *together*.

Let’s look more closely at Philippians 1:27 and see how we can develop the same degree of local church unity today.

TOGETHER IN OUR STAND

We live in a day when truth is scorned, and even Christians stand silently by as our society resists and mocks Christianity and biblical morals. Instead of standing boldly and speaking the truth to our confused culture, Christians as a whole are becoming more confused. Rather than proclaiming the truth in love, they are practicing the version of tolerance that insists “truth” is defined by personal preferences and experiences.

It was this very tolerance that Paul prayed the church at Philippi would reject. Writing from prison in Rome (because he stood for the truth), he shared with these Christians what he was praying for them: “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in

all judgment” (Philippians 1:9). Paul wanted these Christians to practice love, but he wanted them to couple it with discernment. He continues, “That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ” (Philippians 1:10).

Churches must abound in love—the kind of love that embraces truth and rejects error. The result of love without discernment is a church that is confused and ineffective. A post-modern refusal to define truth and a fear of anything “judgmental” are part of most Christians’ thinking.

A series of surveys conducted throughout 2010 by a Christian organization led them to this conclusion: “Our biblical illiteracy and lack of spiritual confidence has caused Americans to avoid making discerning choices for fear of being labeled judgmental. The result is a church that has become tolerant of a vast array of morally and spiritually dubious behaviors and philosophies.”

What happens when Christians stop standing together for the truth? The research team concluded: “The influence of Christianity on culture and individual lives is largely invisible.” Without truth, our love has no influence.

But just how do we stand together for the truth? Philippians 1:27 provides the answer—two specific ways in which we can influence our society and do the work of God.

Stand with Godly Character

Paul explained to the church at Philippi that their very lifestyle should draw others to the Gospel. The first part of Philippians 1:27 says, “Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ...” God’s desire is that we would live lives that correspond with the truth we teach and preach.

God calls us to live blamelessly so we can shine as lights and proclaim the Gospel. Philippians 2:15 says, “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.” Our character is a vital part of our testimonies and more importantly the testimony of Christ.

When the world observes Christians, they assume we are a reflection of the One whom we follow. Nothing hurts the faith like inconsistent Christians. Skeptics and scoffers may sow doubt, but they cannot cause nearly as much damage to Christ’s name as one who claims Christ but whose life undermines the very message of the Gospel. This is why Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:1, “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.” Are you walking worthy as a “full-time Christian”? Is your lifestyle becoming to a Christian? Do your business dealings, relationships, and activities reflect Christ?

The phrase *your conversation* in Philippians 1:27 is translated from the Greek word *politeuomai*, which means “to be a citizen.” In this context, it speaks of behaving like a citizen.

Citizenship in Rome was seen as a coveted privilege. Roman citizens took great pride in their status and looked upon it, not as a coerced subjection, but as an opportunity and responsibility to contribute to the community.

We, too, have been privileged to be a part of a kingdom—one of a higher and eternal nature than even the strongest of kingdoms on earth. Colossians 1:12–13 says, “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.”

As heavenly citizens, our conversation—our lifestyle—should reflect the glory of our God. Our lives should be lived in such a way that others quickly see that we belong to Christ. Our daily living and our dealings with others should validate the message of the Gospel.

Stand with Godly Consistency

In addition to admonishing the Christians at Philippi to stand with godly character, Paul asked them to stand with consistency. He explained that he wanted

their character to be the same “whether I come and see you, or else be absent.”

Too many Christians relegate God to individual days or hours of their week. They may attend church and even serve in church ministries, but through the rest of the week, no one would look at their lives and see Christ through them. Like a chameleon, they assume church lingo and responses when around godly Christians, but they perfectly blend into the world when they are with unsaved people or carnal Christians. This lack of consistency dishonors Christ and defames the Gospel.

Later in Philippians, Paul reminded the church that they were ultimately accountable to Christ—whether or not Paul came to see them: “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12).

Christ’s desire for His church is that members would stand together with a consistency in their lives that would actually strengthen the message of the Gospel. While the presence of the pastor or other Christian leaders does encourage us to live godly, we should be even more motivated by our accountability to Christ. Second Corinthians 5:10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things

done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”

America desperately needs Christians who will stand together with integrity. Every Christian who is willing to stand alone for the Lord can make a difference. But when an entire church stands together with godly character and consistency, they add credibility to the message of the Gospel. As we'll see in our next chapter, it is proclaiming this message that must be the unified purpose of every church.

TOGETHER IN OUR SPIRIT

Just ten days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, five hundred residents of North Platte, Nebraska, gathered at the train depot. Early that morning, a rumor had spread that soldiers from their town would be coming through on a passing train. The entire town rallied to encourage their boys with homemade food and other supplies.

When the train of soldiers finally arrived late that afternoon, the men were surprised to see the crowd waiting for them. The townspeople were surprised too—these soldiers were not the group they were expecting. These were not their sons, brothers, and neighbors—they were simply soldiers passing through.

No one seemed quite sure to know what to do. Should they tell these men that the reception was not for them? One woman bravely stepped forward. "Here," she said, as she gave one of the soldiers a basket of brownies, "I hope you enjoy these. We're praying for you men." Soon, others followed her example, and the boys were showered with gifts during the brief ten minutes they spent at the North Platte depot.

That moment sparked an idea, and the train of soldiers that rolled through North Platte eight days later, on Christmas Day, was welcomed by an organized and expectant committee. These boys, too, were showered with fruit, Christmas gifts, cakes, and letters.

For the next four-and-a-half years, until after the end of World War II, the North Platte Canteen welcomed soldiers. This town welcomed over six million soldiers through those war years.

The trains only stopped at that depot for ten or fifteen minutes of maintenance, but the impact on the soldiers was felt for years. For in that brief stop, the soldiers received far more than a hot meal or a button sewn on a shirt. They received love and support.

Decades later, when soldiers who had passed through North Platte were interviewed and asked if they remembered the North Platte Canteen, they

immediately wept. Their lives had been forever touched by the unified love of this town.

A local church with a pure Gospel message has an even greater opportunity to impact lives. We carry the message of unconditional love and unlimited forgiveness. We tell others of the free gift of salvation and eternal life. We minister to hearts and lead people to the One who gives both hope and healing.

Yet these efforts will only reach their full potential when the entire church strives together, when we “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind” (Philippians 1:27). Let’s see how this can take place.

A Spirit of Unity

Many believe that unity comes by a common goal—and they are right. But lasting unity needs more. We can temporarily pull together for a common cause or a joint project, but that bond does not last. It’s simply not in our sinful, proud nature to agree with each other. We need a stronger bond than temporary goals if we will have lasting unity.

Unity without the Spirit is impossible for any length of time. Our human spirits can only be unified through our bond in the Holy Spirit.

In ancient Roman towns, the common fellowship took place at the town well. There was often one source of water—one well—from which everyone would drink. No matter their position or

wealth, they drew from the same source. Even so, we as Christians have all been made to drink from the Holy Spirit. Within the church body, we find unity as we each draw from the same well.

Just as an orchestra tunes itself to the pitch of a single piano, harmony comes through matching our hearts to the Holy Spirit. When we are in fellowship with the Spirit, we are in fellowship with each other. Paul wrote it this way in Philippians 2:1–2, “If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.”

Of course, as we yield our hearts to the Holy Spirit, we will share the common goal of fulfilling the purpose Christ gave the church—soulwinning and discipleship. And we’ll do it in a spirit of unity.

Church members unified through the bond of the Spirit will work together to witness to the lost, minister to the needy, and offer encouragement and training to young Christians. They will gladly give of their resources to accomplish the work of the Lord as a team.

How important to Jesus is unity among His disciples? When He prayed to the Father before His betrayal and execution, He prayed this for them, “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the

world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one” (John 17:21–22).

Of course, this unity must be predicated by truth. Just before Jesus prayed for unity among His disciples, He prayed, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). Unity based on anything other than truth is sure to collapse. The spirit of unity Paul wanted the church at Philippi to know was one based around the truth of the Gospel—not a false unity that would disregard truth in order to practice tolerance.

When a church strives together in unity, the work of God goes forward. But when Christians stop listening to the Holy Spirit and pursue their own agendas, the results are tragic—they actually destroy each other. Galatians 5:13–15 describes it: “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.”

The word *devour* used in this passage is the same word, both in English and Greek, that describes the work of Satan (1 Peter 5:8). The church becomes its own enemy through discord, and the pride of each individual destroys the whole.

Carnal Christians hinder the work of God as they bicker and fight. But Spirit-filled Christians propel God's work forward with the synergy that comes through harmony. A church in unity will stand together to make a difference in their community for the honor and glory of God. Each member may fill a different role in service, but together they will reach for a common objective—reaching their community for Christ.

A Spirit of Understanding—One Mind

Have you ever noticed that two people who have the same goal don't always have the same ideas on how to reach it? Even churches, whose main goal is preaching the Gospel, are sometimes divided because members can't agree on methods. Rather than being co-laborers who strive together for the Gospel, they each want to see ministry happen their way. They fail to understand and appreciate one another, thus little work of lasting significance takes place.

Paul's first instruction was to stand together "in one spirit," but he followed this with the instruction to also stand fast "with one mind." Standing through the unity of the Holy Spirit for the spreading of the Gospel is something many Christians have already considered. But standing together with *one mind* presents a more difficult challenge.

Philippians 2:2 instructs, “Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” How can many people with different upbringings, preferences, personalities, and perceptions all become likeminded?

Paul shares the answer to this question in Philippians 2:5: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” Just as we gain a spirit of unity by yielding to the Holy Spirit, so we gain a spirit of understanding for one another by developing the mind of Christ.

A likeminded church will exemplify the spirit of Philippians 2:3: “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.”

Unity requires humility. And humility requires Christ-likeness. By gaining the mind of Christ, we put away pride and begin to think as God thinks. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation...” (Philippians 2:5–7).

But just how can we have the mind of Christ? Perhaps the best illustration I know to share how this takes place is that of marriage.

When Terrie and I were first married, there was much about her that I did not know. But over the years, as we have spent time together, I have learned a lot. I’ve learned that her favorite soda is Diet Coke,

and she likes to drink it in a glass of ice with a straw. I've learned there are times that she wants my help as she shares a need, and there are times that she just wants me to listen. I've learned that there are times she wants me to pull out a calendar and make definite plans, and there are times she wants to talk through the possibilities. But the only way that I've learned my wife's preferences has been by spending time with her. Our marriage has grown in unity as Terrie and I have both spent time together and worked to understand one another.

In a similar way, we develop the mind of Christ by spending time in His Word and in prayer. If we will spend time in God's Word, we will have an understanding of His mind. Thus, for a church to have a spirit of understanding, sharing the mind of Christ, members must individually make God's Word a central part of their lives and thoughts.

Unity in the church comes as each member is filled with the Holy Spirit and is operating from the mind of Christ. This should be the goal of every church. If we will stand fast in one spirit and with one mind, we will be able to strive together for the faith of the Gospel.

T H R E E

TOGETHER IN OUR
STRIVING

Victories take place when teams function as a single unit against the same opponent. But let one teammate become confused about who is on his team and whom he is striving against, and the entire team is in for a setback.

The words *striving together* in Philippians 1:27 are from the Greek word *synathleō*. This compound word is composed of the preposition *syn*, meaning “with” and the noun *athleō*, meaning “to compete in a contest.” It emphasizes teamwork, and it reminds us of the need to sacrifice one’s own welfare that the team might win.

God has given each of us precious resources including time, energy, money, and spiritual gifts. As

we are willing to sacrifice these resources to the cause of Christ, we can, as a team, reach spiritual victories.

Too many Christians see themselves as an island—their lives unconnected with and having no significant relation to the rest of their church family. We must recognize, however, that the church is to be a team—striving together for the faith of the Gospel. As a group, we all have a common adversary and a common goal.

Striving against a Common Foe

Conflict is an inevitable part of life and of victory. Yet we usually misunderstand the source of the conflict. Husbands and wives assume the root of their marriage problems lies with their spouse. Church members who are at odds blame the other for a damaged relationship. Friends encounter a misunderstanding and hold resentment over the other person's mistreatment.

We must understand, however, that our enemy is not one another—it is Satan. The devil would like nothing more than to pit us against each other while God's work ceases. Ephesians 6:12 warns, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

Next to division, Satan's greatest weapon against us is fear. Fear of man stops Christians from sharing their faith. Fear of loss stops us from giving what God has generously given to us. Fear of the unknown prevents us from trusting God by faith. We can strive together, or we can fear—but we can only choose one.

We think we are avoiding pain by listening to fear. But in actuality, there is no upside to fear—we only hinder ourselves. This is why we are told, “And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God” (Philippians 1:28). Be prepared—the world will fight a church that stands for truth and proclaims the Gospel.

Division and fear are not Satan's only weapons, however. Even when we strive together in faith, he tries yet another weapon—false doctrine. There are many so-called Christian teachers who deny the very basics of our faith, encouraging “tolerance” and “inclusion.” Of course, every Bible-believing church wants to reach the entire community with the Gospel, but we can't reach people by changing what the Bible says!

Second Peter 3:16 speaks of those who twist Scripture to further their own causes: “As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do

also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.” In the end, the false teachers self-destruct, and no one benefits from churches that are empty of truth.

Alone, Christians are stray sheep waiting to be devoured by the adversary. Together, the church is a protected body that even the gates of Hell cannot prevail against (Matthew 16:18). This is why we must strive together.

Church members must determine to strive together against Satan and his methods of attack. We must join in a unified spirit and mind to proclaim the truth.

Striving for a Common Faith

We are at the center of the greatest purpose God has designed—the redemption of man. God has given to us, His church, the ministry of reconciliation. When we recognize that the issue at stake is not our own personal status, but the souls of men, we will shun division within our local churches.

We must unify around the faith of the Gospel. It is our standard and rallying cry. We do not compromise the message, because it is the power of God unto salvation. It is what binds the members of each local body together.

At the end of Paul’s life, he was able to honestly say, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7). Paul

knew what it was to strive with others for the faith. Throughout his ministry, he partnered with others—the other apostles and those he had led to the Lord and disciplined—to both protect and propagate the Gospel. Paul was careful to address issues of importance in the churches (such as the many problems at Corinth), but he didn't become sidetracked from the larger goal of reaching the world with the Gospel. And he trained and encouraged others to join with him in the work.

Has God given you a vision for the work He wants your church to accomplish? Do you long to see your community reached with the Gospel and your church family strengthened and growing in spiritual maturity? The answer is to strive together as a church for the faith of the Gospel!

C O N C L U S I O N

Remember that Paul wrote this admonition to strive together to what we would consider a model church. Though they were poor, they were generous; and though they were persecuted, they were faithful; though they encountered heartache, they were joyful.

Yet, as Paul wrote the epistle of Philippians to this faithful church, he wanted to help them finish well. And he knew that to finish well, they must finish together.

Are you striving together with your church—with one spirit and with one mind? Christ's last command was to the church: "...Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). His plan for us to fulfill this Great

Commission is for us to “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27).

Striving together is God’s plan for victory.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



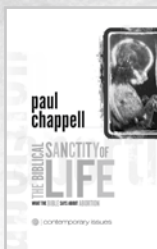
Paul Chappell is the senior pastor of the Lancaster Baptist Church and president of West Coast Baptist College in Lancaster, California. His biblical vision has led the church to become one of the most dynamic independent Baptist churches in the nation, and his Christ-centered leadership philosophy has become a model for hundreds of future leaders currently training at West Coast Baptist College.

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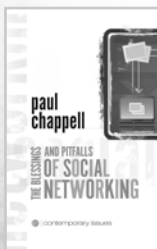
The Biblical Sanctity of Life

When does life begin? Nobody wants to answer this question. Our courts cannot decide. Our government cannot decide. Our educational institutions cannot decide. Even our pulpits are growing more and more silent on the value of life in the womb. But God answered this question a long time ago. Have you ever heard His thoughts on the matter? This booklet opens the pages of the Bible and allows God to clearly and powerfully answer the question—when does life begin? (40 pages, booklet)



Does God Care What We Wear?

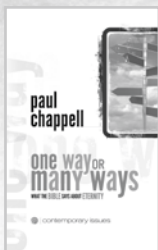
God accepts us just as we are—His love is unconditional and independent of our behavior or appearance. But does this mean that He doesn't care about our clothing choices? Our culture is continually dressing down—"sleazier and sloppier" seems to be the motto of the day, even for Christians. But is this really pleasing to God? Does it even matter to Him? After all, He sees the heart, right? The pages of this booklet will challenge your thinking with eleven biblical principles and well-applied truths. Together we will explore what the Bible really says about what we wear. (32 pages, booklet)



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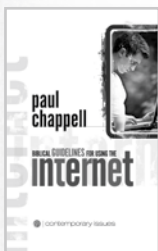
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One Way or Many Ways

Do all religious roads really lead to the same place? Many people have bought into the philosophy that, so long as you're sincere, it doesn't really matter what you believe. In this thought-provoking booklet, you will be challenged to examine the "all roads" theory in light of what Jesus actually said. If you are hungry to know the truth about the "many ways" of religion, in contrast with the one message of Jesus, these pages will help you answer some of life's toughest questions.

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Biblical Guidelines for Using the Internet

The internet has changed our twenty-first century world! It has changed relationships, homes, businesses, and individuals. The challenges of using the internet appropriately are growing every day, as is the cultural and generational divide between parents and children in how they understand and use the internet. This booklet will provide you with a biblical perspective and practical steps for using the internet safely and appropriately as a Christian. (48 pages, booklet)

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