

Please turn with me in your copies of God's Word to Philippians chapter 2. As I made mention last time, at the end of chapter 1 Paul made a shift from prayer for the saints at Philippi and exhortations flowing from personal experience to a more doctrinal teaching on principles of the faith, in our text this morning we see a continuation of that principle teaching. What we see in our text today must be understood in the context of what has previously been written. With that in mind turn your ear now to hear the Word of the living and true God from Philippians chapter 2 beginning at verse 1.

Read Philippians 2:1-4

Pray

Throughout the history of the Church there have been many efforts by the evil one to bring about her destruction. This should come as no surprise to us, for Satan roams about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. I once heard Dr. David Whitla, professor of church history at our seminary, say, "Heresy has slain it thousands, and persecution its tens of thousands." This is true, though I would argue that the numbers are far too low. Heresies have plagued the Church since the very beginning, and we see through history that countless number of people have fallen prey to its wicked doctrines. This is still evident today with neo-gnosticism, arianism, pelagianism, popery, and federal vision all still seemingly having an influence upon the modern Church, leading people down a path which leads straight to the pit of hell. And as if that were not enough, Satan is seeking the destruction of the Church, not only by means of drawing people away from the truth once delivered unto the saints, but also by the hand of those who persecute and put to death the faithful for their holding onto the truths of the Scriptures. Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary estimates that somewhere around 70 million Christians have died the martyr's death over the last two thousand years. Today we have brothers and sisters, even our very own Reformed Presbyterian kindred, throughout the world who are facing severe persecution even unto death. Yet, when we

look at how the Church is being attacked today, when we look to see what is the primary cause of the decline in Christianity worldwide, I would argue that neither heresy nor persecution are the primary cause. There is a danger which is far more subtle and which is far more prevalent even among the most solid of churches. That danger is disunity and schism. John Owen is helpful in understanding what exactly schism is. He defines it as “causeless differences and contentions” that are “contrary to” or “interrupt” the “exercise of love” within the church. This is what Paul is addressing in his letter to the Church at Philippi. While there is much that Paul praises these saints for, this is one area in which instruction must be given. It is a theme which he returns to later on in the letter when he calls out two within the church by name. Saints, it is an area in which we must be careful to guard ourselves here at Westminster as well. So the exhortation to you this morning is let your lives be marked by unity and humility. These are the two things Paul gives as the remedy for schism within the Church: unity and humility. We will consider this exhortation under three headings: first, unity strived for; next, humility displayed; and finally, the Gospel as the grounds.

First, let us focus our attention on unity strived for. Look with me at verse 2, “Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” It is curious that Paul uses this phrase, “Fulfil ye my joy.” It is not as though he is saying that he is lacking joy on account of the Philippians. In fact, if you take a look back at chapter 1 you will quickly see that the exact opposite is true. It is not that Paul is lacking joy, but instead that he wishes to experience greater joy. Think of it in the same way in which you understand being filled with the Spirit. Upon coming to Christ you are immediately filled with the Spirit; that is one of the great benefits that comes from being united to Christ. Yet we are told in Scriptures that if you are of Christ you are being filled with the Holy Spirit. You are filled and are being filled. This is the same idea Paul has in mind in regards to his joy for the Philippians. He has joy and desires and increase of joy. It is as though he is saying that he desires his cup of joy to run over, to overflow with joy. It is

the lack of unity which is being shown within this congregation that is preventing Paul's joy from being fulfilled, that is keeping his cup of joy from running over. How easy it is to see how disunity among brethren can suck the joy from the body. What should be a place of mutual edification, encouragement, and rejoicing quickly turns into a dreary cold place of anger, hostility, and animosity.

Paul exhorts the saints to strive for unity. He says, "Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." He uses these two phrase 'be likeminded' and 'of one mind' as sort of bookends in this list of characteristics. This is what believers are to strive for, and what we see in the middle are ways in which this is accomplished. The first thing that Paul says you are to have if you are to be 'likeminded' or 'of one mind' is 'the same love.' Brothers and sisters, love is the key to everything in this life. Disunity in the Church occurs when our loves are disordered. Disunity happens when we overemphasize certain loves while neglecting others. What is the first and greatest commandment? "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." If you are not unified in your love for God then rest assured there will be disunity in the Church. That love for God encompasses a love for the things of God as well. There must be a love for the Church as the bride of Christ who our Lord Jesus shed His blood to purchase. How can you say you love God if you do not love His most precious possession? There must be a love for God's Word. How can you love God and the things of God if you are not in His Word, seeking to know more about Him? There must be a love for the truths of God's Word. How can you say you love God if you do not love His truth and the doctrines which He has revealed unto His people?

But do not forget that there is a second great commandment given by the Lord as well. "And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." If you do not have love for one another you cannot sit there and claim to be of Christ. Without love for one another the body of Christ will descend into chaos. It is a

disordered or absent love for one another which inevitably leads to divisions within the Church. Think of how often someone within the Church says a snide comment about another brother or sister within the body, or how often a wicked lie is spread through the gossip of pew talk and how that always leads to discord within the body. Friends you must have the same love, the same love for God, the same love for one another. The same love that we are required to express to others, others are bound to express to us. Christian love ought to be mutual love. Love, and you shall be loved. To neglect one of these is a guaranteed way to ensure that disunity will wreak havoc on the congregation. There must be a balance, with both love for God and love for one another maintained to the highest degree. It is both the purity and the peace of the Church which we must endeavor to preserve and promote. This can only be accomplished through having the same love.

The second thing that Paul says you are to be if you are to be 'likeminded' or 'of one mind' is 'of one accord.' This is something that can very easily get misunderstood. What Paul is exhorting these believers unto is not uniformity in all things. He is not seeking to create little spiritual clones who are like robots with the same programming. Instead he is saying there must be a harmony among one another, a unity of the soul. To say we are to be of 'one accord' with one another really misses much the beauty of the original language. Paul says they are to be literally 'one-souled' in their fellowship together. That means that your minds, your hearts, your affections, your attitudes are united under a singular cause which promotes Christ among you. This is the unity which must be strived for. And remember that how you conduct yourselves in the church, the unity or lack thereof which is found among you will directly affect how the world views you. How can non-Christians be convinced that Christ reconciles us to God if we are not reconciled to each other? Disunity always has the effect of turning a Christian fellowship in on itself, wasting energy on itself. When we devour ourselves in that way we have little energy left to be shining light

and preserving salt in a needy world. Brothers and sisters, you must strive for unity.

That unity strived for must be equally matched by humility displayed. Look once again at verses 3 and 4, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” Paul begins this call to Christian humility by putting forth what must be avoided. The first of these is strife. Strife is contention; it is quarreling; it is discord. This is the fruit of not having what Paul had just listed. Strife occurs when the minutiae of life gets elevated to the grand stage. I’m from Alabama, the deep south, where you pass by ten different churches in a span of three blocks. People joke about how the sentiment is if you don’t like something at this church just go start another. Unfortunately, this sentiment is all too true. I know of a congregation which split over the color of the carpet. How petty. How absurd. How sad it is that we let such trivial things sow strife in the congregation. Perhaps you’re sitting there thinking this will never happen to us. We are Reformed; we’re above such trivialities. Paul has instructions for you as well. Not only must you avoid strife, but you must also avoid vainglory. Vainglory is self-conceit; it is selfishness; it is pride. There is no greater enemy to Christian love than pride and passion. Calvin writes, “Vain-glory tickles men’s minds, so that every one is delighted with his own inventions. Hence the only way of guarding against dissensions is – when we avoid strifes by deliberating and acting peacefully, especially if we are not actuated by ambition. For ambition is a means of fanning all strifes. Vain-glory means any glorying in the flesh; for what ground of glorying have men in themselves that is not vanity?” Brothers and sisters, Christ came to slay all enmities; therefore let there not be among you a spirit of opposition. Christ came to humble you, and therefore let there not be among you a spirit of pride.

So what is the remedy for strife and vainglory? The remedy is godly Christian humility. “Let nothing be done through strife or

vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” Grant me just a brief moment to address a potential misunderstanding. Humility is not passivity. Humility is not becoming a human doormat so that you allow others to walk all over you. Paul doesn’t instruct the Philippian believers to be passive in their attitudes and actions towards one another, but instead instructs them in true humility. Humility begins with a lowliness of mind. If you think highly of yourself then you are in great need on humility. If you are haughty of mind then you are not exhibiting the fruit of one who has been born again, but instead you are exhibiting the fruit of one who is still dead in your sins. Cry out to the Lord to search your heart, try your affections, examine your mind to see if there be a haughtiness which must be brought low. Look at the example of Paul who considers himself the least among the apostles, the least among the saints, and even the chief of sinners. But be careful not to take on an insincere false humility which boasts in it own humility. That is simply another form of pride which will destroy your soul and harm the people of God around you. Plead with the Lord to truly bring a lowliness of mind, asking that you would decrease so that Christ Jesus would increase.

You will know the difference between a false humility and true humility. We are told in our text that true humility produces fruit. “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” You are to value others so much that you willingly place yourself at a disadvantage for their welfare. Their interests are as important to us as our own. Matthew Henry says, “A selfish spirit is destructive of Christian love. We must be concerned not only for our own credit, and ease, and safety, but for those of others also; and rejoice in the prosperity of others as truly as in our own. We must love our neighbour as ourselves, and make his case our own.” This means laying aside whatever it is that seems important to you in order to aid your brothers and sisters. It means being willing to leave the

comforts of your home on your day off in order to help with the needs of others. It means thinking of others more highly than yourself, viewing them and their actions and motives in the best positive light. It means being willing to slow down in your own personal theological studies in order to come alongside others who have not grasped the truths of Scripture with such depth as you have. There is a common phrase ‘playing second fiddle.’ True humility is not simply being content with playing second fiddle, but being joyful at the fact someone else is playing first fiddle. Friends, you must display humility.

You have seen what you must do, that you must strive for unity and display humility. But these are the walls to the house, and without a solid foundation that house will fall. The motive behind striving for unity and displaying humility must be pure, it must be true. This leads us now to consider the Gospel as the grounds for unity and humility. Look back at verse 1, “If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies...” We could easily look at this string of four ‘if’ statements and come away with the conclusion that Paul is making a conditional ‘if-then’ argument. But that is not the case. The formula that Paul is using is not conditional but causal. He is saying because of these things, because these things are true, you must strive for unity and display humility. This is the foundation upon which the house is built. If these things are not true of you then you have no hope of true unity or humility. It is this foundation, this solid and sure rock, which you must lean on in your living the Christian life. This foundation is not something man-made which will fall away, but instead is rooted in the trinitarian work of Jehovah Himself, something which is unfailing and unending.

Paul points to the encouragement or consolation we have in union with Jesus Christ, the comfort that comes to us from being beloved of God the Father, and the fellowship and partnership and communion we have with the Holy Spirit. The last two terms, the stand alone terms, “bowels and mercy” are comprehensive summary

statements, telling us what it means to live in communion with the triune God. It is to live as the daily beneficiaries of divine affection and sympathy. The sweetness you have found in the doctrine of Christ should sweeten your spirit. Do you expect consolation in Christ? Have you received the comfort of the love of the Father? Do you experience the fellowship of the Spirit? If you have not consolation in Christ, if you have not any comfort of love in the Father, if you have not fellowship with the Spirit, where else can you expect it? If you yearn over the troubles and disunity within the Church, and have your “bowels and mercies” moved at the distresses of those around you, you will never willingly contribute to disturb the harmony of the Church by doubtful disputations. You will strive for peace; and in that exercise of love will reap in your own souls the richest reward. If you have been brought from death unto life, if you have experienced these things which are only found in union with Christ, then let that be the grounds upon which you strive for unity and display humility. Any other grounds, and other foundation, will be as the fool who built his house upon the sand. The wind and the waves came and the house was destroyed. Do not let the wind and the waves of this life destroy what you have built here in this place. Cling fast to the Gospel as the grounds for your unity and humility.

But perhaps you do not have that firm foundation. Perhaps you have never experienced the consolation in Christ, the comfort of the Father’s love, the fellowship with the Spirit. If that is you today, if you are still dead in your trespasses and sins, if you have never had your cold stony heart removed and been given a heart of flesh, then you will never know what true unity and humility are so long as you remain in your miserable estate. You have not received these benefits of being in Christ because you are not in Christ. If that is you then the call to you is different. The call to you is to see the ugliness of your sin, the vileness of your thoughts, desires, and actions. You must see that you have committed treason the King of the universe, and you deserve death. But thanks be to God that He sent His Son to die in your stead if you would just receive Him.

Christ Jesus bore your sin and shame and nailed it to the cross. If you would just cry out to Him then He would have you to be part of His people. Then you too would be heir of these great benefits and could live your life in service to the Lord. “Repent ye, and believe the Gospel.”

Brothers and sisters, without these marks in your life there is a danger that the evil one will use you as an instrument in his endeavors to see the destruction of Christ’s Church. If you love the Lord, if you love His people, then unity and humility must be marks in your life. Let your prayer be that of Christ Jesus in John 17. Let your self be mortified and subdued, and love will reign; yes, it will so reign, that your union with your brothers and sisters will resemble that which exists between the Father and Christ Himself. Friends, let your lives be marked by unity and humility.