

Message #10

Philippians 2:1-2

There is tragic, true story about something that happened in a church in Dallas, Texas. A congregation in a certain church in Dallas became divided. The division became so serious that each side filed a lawsuit against the other side in order to get the property.

The litigation went into the newspapers and many people followed the events with great interest. The judge finally ruled that it was not a matter to be resolved by a civil court and he demanded that the high authorities in the denomination determine who should get the property. So both sides went before the denominational leaders and presented their case. Finally, the denomination determined which group should have it and the losers withdrew and started another church.

One particular newspaper, which had carefully followed this whole story, was very interested in what started all the trouble. They decided to track down various people to find out what caused the squabble. They discovered that the trouble began when an Elder of a church was at a church dinner and he received a smaller slice of ham than a child seated next to him. That is what started the whole mess. The church ended up splitting over the size of a piece of ham. All the people of Dallas got a good laugh at the church over that. The name of Jesus Christ was not exalted by that disaster (J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Joy of Living*, p. 55).

It is so sad, but the things of the church that make the world laugh and happy are not the things that make God laugh or happy and the same is true for us. Let's see if we can put this into your world. When you have had a rough day, there is nothing more delightful than being able to come home and enjoy a peaceful, harmonious, quiet evening in your own home. But after a tough day, there is nothing more miserable than to come home and find family members fighting with each other. There is nothing more draining than to go home and face a bunch of whining, nagging friction. You are tempted to get in the car and drive away.

The Philippian church was a good church. Of all of the N.T. churches, it was perhaps the best developed. But there were some rumblings in the church of Philippi among the brethren and those rumblings can lead to problems. There was some grumbling (2:14). There were some troubled people (3:17). This church needed more harmony (4:2).

Paul was facing some very serious personal issues. He was in jail and he didn't know if he would live or die. He was under pressure. One of the things that brought some joy to him was thinking about this church in Philippi. There were not many churches like that. This church brought him so much joy that he even prayed for it with joy (1:4). He would later say in this very book that the people of the church were "my joy" (4:1). Think of that the people of the church brought this Apostle joy, when he did not know if he would live or die.

Of all the churches and of all the people, this one church brought him tremendous joy and he wanted the church to bring him "complete" joy (2:2). So he says, "make my joy complete." **Those words mean that Paul wanted the Philippian church to fill up his joy to the full and complete level. The way they would do that was by their united harmony.**

Now united harmony does not mean total toleration of everyone and every thing. There were to be some things and some people this church was not to tolerate (i.e. 3:17-19). **United harmony means to strive for a harmony that conforms to the Word of God and the Spirit of God.**

What Paul says here is this:

BELIEVERS OF A CHURCH THAT REACH THE ULTIMATE LEVEL OF BRINGING JOY TO GOD AND TO THOSE SPIRITUAL ARE THOSE WHO DEMONSTRATE A LOVING UNITED HARMONY THAT CONFORMS TO THE WORD OF GOD AND SPIRIT OF GOD.

Frankly, what Paul communicates here goes against the grain of much contemporary thinking. For example, if you were to ask most people who go to church, what do you think we can do to make God really happy, you might be shocked by the answers.

Some would say the best way to make God happy is to win souls—stress evangelism. Actually we know the Philippian church did defend the Gospel (1:7).

Some would say the best way to make God happy is to increase numbers—become a mega church and pack in the people and God will be pleased.

Some would say the best way to make God happy is to have more programs—develop programs for every age group and every possible social class. Have programs for children, singles, young married couples and older people. Have programs for people who have had addictions and various problems. That will make God happy.

But just imagine Paul saying the thing that makes God the most happy is that the church has a loving, unified harmony that is based on the Word of God and Spirit of God. That is precisely Paul's message to the Philippians.

In these two verses, there are two main thoughts Paul presents:

THOUGHT #1 – Believers are to make God's joy complete by being unified because of what God has done for every believer in Christ. **2:1**

Now what you will immediately notice in **verse 1** is that there are four "if" clauses. I love something the old Lutheran Greek grammarian of the early 1900's, Richard Lenski said, we must always remember **Greek is not English**.

In English, when we see an "if" clause we immediately think the thought is "iffy," meaning it is not certain. But in Greek, that is not the case.

In Greek there were different types of “if” clauses. The Greeks loved to use different types to make their point. It was part of the beauty of their language. They had four ways to use “if” clauses, which we may illustrate for you:

- 1) If you have a church service tonight, I’ll go, meaning probably I won’t go (4th class).
- 2) If you have a church service tonight, I’ll go, meaning probably I will go (3rd class).
- 3) If you have a church service tonight, I’ll go, meaning I won’t go (2nd class).
- 4) If you have a church service tonight, I’ll go, meaning I definitely will be there (1st class).

Now all of the “if” clauses used in verse 1 are first class conditional clauses, which means the clauses are definite reality. These are not “iffy” clauses of probability or possibility, these are if clauses that express reality. In other words, all four “if clauses” are realities. Every believer in Jesus Christ has experienced these things and that should be impetus for us to strive for unity:

Reality #1 - The encouragement we have in Christ should cause us to strive for a loving, united harmony. **2:1a**

The word “encouragement” is one that not only speaks of encouragement but also comfort. This word carries with it the idea of a friend who comes to you in some low moment and brings you encouragement, comfort, consolation (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 340-341).

What Paul is saying is that if you have ever received any encouragement or comfort from Jesus Christ, and I know you have, then you need to strive for a loving unity in the church.

If Jesus Christ has in any way comforted your soul, and He most definitely has if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, then you need to obey the command of God and strive for unity and bring great joy to God.

Do you remember the way Christ comforted your soul when you first came to faith in Him? It was as if some heavy burden or weight had just been taken off your shoulders. Since then haven’t we discovered that Christ has comforted us and forgiven us time and time again in moments of weakness and failure? Haven’t there been times when we have been sick of ourselves and sin and we went before God in confession and the Lord forgave us and comforted us and washed us clean? Since Christ has done that for us, the least we can do is to strive for a unity in His church.

If we know that this makes God happy, then we should do our best to make this happen in view of all He has done for us.

May I say before we move on that if you want comfort and encouragement in your soul, regardless of your circumstances, believe on Jesus Christ and invite Him into your life and He will do it.

One of the most amazing stories I have ever read of comfort that can be found in Jesus Christ was the story told by a black man about himself, in an Illinois prison, whose name was Ernest Gaither. Ernest was a criminal who was sentenced to die in the electric chair for robbing and killing the owner of a liquor store on the west side of Chicago. One night, while in prison, he trusted Christ. He said while he was in his prison cell, he said he asked God to be merciful to him a sinner and a murderer and he said he believed on Jesus Christ. Pete Tanis, missionary from Pacific Garden Mission, was allowed to visit Ernest the night of his execution. Here is what he said happened: "As I entered, Ernest smiled and greeted me. ... He gave me the Book (Bible) and asked me to read. I selected the first chapter of Philippians. Ernest leaned forward intently as I read: 'For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain....for I am straight betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.' A moment later a black hood was slipped over his head and he began the last mile. At each side the guards, both noticeably nervous. Ernest sensed it: 'What are you fellows shaking for? I am not afraid.' Finally at 12:03 AM, the first electrical shocks flashed through his body. By 12:15, five doctors had paraded up, and one by one, confirmed the death. But I knew the real Ernest Gaither still lived..."

Now where do you get comfort when you are facing your own execution for committing the worst of criminal acts? Who can give you that kind of comfort? There is only one Person, Jesus Christ.

We are all sentenced to die because we have all sinned and there is only one Person who can give you comfort in the face of this and that is Jesus Christ. For those of us who have believed, we have the responsibility to strive for unity after all He has done for us.

Reality #2 - The consolation of love should cause us to strive for a loving, united harmony.
2:1b

The word "consolation" is one that refers to a very persuasive exhortation and encouragement (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 342). I understand this to refer to specific loving things that have encouraged us, which God has done.

The word "love" is agape, which is the highest kind of love. All who are here today have received at least two specific demonstrations of this kind of love:

- 1) God's Son came to this world because God loved us. John 3:16
- 2) God's Son died on the cross because God loved us. Rom. 5:8

Those two specific demonstrations of love right there are all we need to strive for a unity that pleases God. Stephen Grellet, a Frenchman in 1855, said these famous words, "I shall pass

through this world but once. Any good that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now and not defer it. For I shall not pass this way again.”

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Does the fact that God loves you encourage you?

The love that God has shown to us should motivate every one of us to strive for unity.

Reality #3 - The fellowship we have with the Spirit should cause us to strive for a loving, united harmony. **2:1c**

The word “fellowship” is the word koinonia. This word fellowship implies at least four things:
1) Communication with someone; 2) Communion with someone; 3) Contribution to someone;
4) Companionship with someone (*Ibid.*, p. 251).

What Paul is saying is since the Holy Spirit has taken a personal interest in us and has fellowshiped with us, we have a responsibility to strive for unity.

Now let’s stop and think for a moment as to whether or not the Holy Spirit has ever done any of these things and has actually had fellowship with us. Let us consider how important the Holy Spirit has been to your life.

A. Communication: Conviction, Comprehension, Confidence

- 1) It was the Holy Spirit that convicted us of our need to believe on Jesus Christ (John 16:7-11).
- 2) It is the Holy Spirit that enables us to understand God’s Word (I Cor. 2:14).
- 3) It is the Holy Spirit that convicts us to know we have grieved or quenched Him (Eph. 4:30; I Thess. 5:19)
- 4) It is the Holy Spirit that gives us the confidence that we are in a covenant relationship with God (Heb. 10:15).

B. Communion

- 1) It is the Holy Spirit that indwells us and seals us forever (John 14:16-17; Eph. 1:13).

C. Contribution

- 1) It is the Holy Spirit who gives gifts so we may serve God (I Cor. 12:7-11)

D. Companionship.

- 1) It is the Holy Spirit who abides in us forever (John 14:16).
- 2) It is the Holy Spirit that enables us to walk in life not dominated by flesh (Gal. 5:16).

We can legitimately conclude that the Holy Spirit has in fact had fellowship with us. That thought should motivate us to fellowship with each other.

Reality #4 - The affection and compassion we have experienced should cause us to strive for a loving, united harmony. **2:1d**

The word “affection” has to do with a heartfelt mercy and pity (*Ibid.*, p. 414). The word “compassion” refers to having a compassionate and merciful heart (*Ibid.*, pp. 313-314). Vine says that these words describe being compassionate and merciful to someone and showing pity on them when they are in a distressful situation (W. E. Vine, p. 218).

This particular word is used of God having pity and mercy on us when He saved us (Rom. 9:15). In other words, your salvation was in fact due to the compassion and mercy of God.

The point is since we believers have experienced the great mercy of God, the least we can do is to strive for unity that pleases God.

THOUGHT #2 – Believers are to make God’s joy complete by continually demonstrating a unity. **2:2**

There are four ways we demonstrate this unity.

Way #1 - This unity is demonstrated by continually being of the same mind. **2:2a**

God wants His people thinking as one.

Way #2 - This unity is demonstrated by continually having the same love. **2:2b**

God wants His people loving as one.

Way #3 - This unity is demonstrated by continually having one spirit. **2:2c**

God wants His people united in spirit as one.

Way #4 - This unity is demonstrated by continually having one mind. **2:2d**

God wants His people with the mindset of one.

Two Questions:

1. Do I seek unity or do I seek my own way?

2. Is my primary focus at church to please myself or to glorify Jesus Christ?