

Please turn in you copies of God’s Word to Philippians chapter 1. We are picking back up where we left off in this letter after a short time away, but I trust that the context is still fresh in your memories. If you recall, Paul is writing this letter as a encouragement to the Philipian believers to guard themselves from the discouragement that could come from his being imprisoned. We have seen the heart of the Apostle in the opening verses of this chapter in his exhortation to the saints to persevere unto the end. We have seen the need for believers to grow in their Christian lives. We have seen the reassuring and emboldening promise that the Gospel will advance. It is building upon these things that our text this morning comes. Hear now the pure Word of our Holy God from Philippians chapter 1 beginning at verse 15.

***Read Philippians 1:15-18*
*Pray***

Friends, divisions and rivalries are plaguing society today. But what if I were to tell you that the same thing that we are seeing in society has plagued the Church as well? I’m sure you heard the news about Queen Elizabeth II passing away and King Charles III ascending to the throne. Let’s take a brief moment to consider what was going on in the Kirk of Scotland during the reign of his previous namesake King Charles II. In 1660 King Charles was restored to the throne, but he came back with many scores to settle. He blamed the Reformed Presbyterians, the men of the covenant, for the execution of his father for treason. Though having previously sworn the Solemn League and Covenant himself, it soon became apparent that Charles II was a wicked covenant breaker. In the name of vengeance he set out to eliminate those whom he saw responsible for his father’s death. This led to one of the worst periods of persecution against the Reformed that we see in church history known as the Killing Time. In 1669 he offered a means by which these Covenanters could continue to preach within recognized churches; this was the indulgence. If these preachers would make some compromises then they would be able to continue to minister. And

many did so. But this led to a division between those who had chosen to take the compromise and those who had refused. Despite the fact that Christ was faithfully preached by those compromising ministers it became ‘us vs. them,’ the Covenanters vs. the compromisers. What was eventually seen was not only was Christ being proclaimed by both sides, but began preaching against one another either for compromising or for being too strict in their doctrinal convictions. There was division and rivalry.

But this wasn’t something new to the 17th century. In fact, Paul had to deal with it within the 1st century Church as well. Remember that Paul spoke of such divisions and rivalries in his letter to the Church in Corinth. He says in 1 Corinthians 1, “For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” And he is dealing with it again here in the Church at Philippi. There were those who saw the occasion of Paul being imprisoned as an opportunity to go into business for themselves, and this caused division among the body. We must look to this as an example to us to guard ourselves from falling into the same trap as those saints in Philippi. The exhortation to you as we consider our text this morning is to seek unity in the fact that Christ is proclaimed. I want us to consider this under three headings: first, looking at the insincere proclamation of Christ; next, looking at the sincere proclamation of Christ; and lastly, seeing we are to rejoice in the proclamation of Christ.

So first, let us look at the insincere proclamation of Christ. Paul says in verses 15 and 16 that there are those who “preach Christ even of envy and strife,” who “preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds.” If we look back at the passage that our last sermon was on we are reminded that some found great boldness in the fact that the Gospel was

advancing even though the great Apostle was sitting in a Roman prison. But here Paul tells us that some saw the occasion as an opportunity and had preached the Gospel for no other end than that of drawing away his disciples, and thereby adding affliction to his bonds. They were seeking to amass for themselves a following out of the Church at Philippi, but it was no false gospel that they were proclaiming like those false teachers in Galatia, but instead the true Gospel but proclaimed from impure motives. They were secretly pleased when he was laid up in prison, that they might have the better opportunity to steal away the people's affections; and they went forth preaching Christ, that they might gain for themselves the reputation that they coveted after in Paul. It is sad that there should be men who profess the gospel, especially who preach it, who are motivated by such things, who should preach Christ in spite to Paul, and to increase the affliction of his bonds.

But we must not be so naive as to think this isn't happening in the Church today. Charles Simeon writes, "There were, in the Apostle's days, some who 'preached Christ of envy and strife;' and who affected an union in sentiment with him, only with a view to subvert his power. And such preachers exist at this day; adopting and proclaiming the Gospel itself, for the purpose of diminishing the influence of those whose principles are more pure, whose aims are more exalted, whose lives are more heavenly." Brothers and sisters, you must be on guard against such preachers. You must be able to see the warning signs that a cult of personality is forming, and you must flee from it. It is easy to see when a false gospel is being preached. It is easy to see when it is not Christ who is being proclaimed. Remember the Gospel which saved you from your sin and misery. Guard against all perversions of the doctrine of Christ: see to it, that, in your view of it, the sinner is laid low, even in the dust, and that the Lord Jesus Christ alone is exalted: and, having once embraced that, let it be all your salvation, and all your desire. Understand that you, outside of Christ, are under the wrath of God; that you can never atone for your own sins; that it is impossible for

you to be renewed in you own nature; that your hope must be altogether in God’s mercy, through Christ.

But there are those who proclaim Christ insincerely which are much more difficult to recognize. Some preach Christ for personal gain; to make the proclamation of the Gospel an office, a job, a profession in order to obtain a livelihood. “For filthy lucre sake” do they engage in this service, and not “of a ready mind.” There are others who preach Christ for popularity, taking on the style and the rhetoric of what their listeners desire. They preach in order to tickle ears and to make men happy so that they can build a following to feed their appetite for recognition. There are even those who preach Christ in an attempt at sheep-stealing, to steal away from other congregation members to add to their own fold. Such was happening at the Church in Philppi, and such is happening in the Church in America today. Friends, it is abhorrent that some would take on this sacred office out of insincere motivations. If you have suspicion that this is going on within the Church then bring it to the elders. An insincere preacher will wreak havoc in a congregation and cause spiritual and emotion harm to those within the pew. You must be on guard against the insincere proclamation of Christ.

But not all who take on this sacred duty do it from insincere motivations. There are those who are pure of heart and sincere in their motives. This leads us now to look at the sincere proclamation of Christ. Pauls says in verses 15 and 17, “Some indeed preach Christ ... of good will ... of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel.” There were those who saw the occasion of Paul’s imprisonment, not as a means of selfish gain, but as a means of emboldening them to proclaim Christ with greater fervency. They are said to have preached Christ of good will. It was not for the glory of man but the glory of Jehovah that these men proclaimed Christ. They knew that the Gospel of Christ is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” (Romans 1:16) There was no hint of seeking out monetary gain or building up a group of followers or seeking the

recognition of the masses which drove them to proclaim Christ, but instead it was a sincere heart which motivated these faithful men to spread the Gospel in every circumstance.

We're also told that they did it of love. It was love for Jehovah and His work of redemption, it was love for Paul to carry on the good work that he had started, and it was love for people to see them come a saving knowledge of Christ Jesus that motivated these men to boldly and sincerely proclaim Christ. Seeing the love of God in sending His Son to die in your stead ought to spur you on in love to tell the world of what He has done for you. How many of us speak so freely, so promiscuously, of the good things we have experienced in this life. Yet, will we not more freely, more promiscuously, speak of the greatest thing that could ever happen, that great redemption we have found in Christ? Has the love of God so enraptured your heart so that you cannot help but constantly speak of His great mercy in salvation? If it has not, then there is cause for great concern, dear friends. If you are not captivated by a love for God that you cannot help but proclaim Christ in every circumstance then you ought to examine your heart to see if you truly have experience that love which is found in the Gospel. Do you see your brothers and sisters in chains for the sake of the Gospel and are motivated and emboldened to carry on the work that they have begun? Friends, persecution is rising throughout the world and even here in America. This will soon, if the Lord does not see fit to grant repentance to this land, become a very real and present reality. Do you look around you and see the miserable state in which the world is in, recognizing that the vast majority of people you encounter are on the path which leads to destruction? Does your love for them cause you to be willing to face ridicule, to face dismissal from your job, to face whatever may come your way in order that they may hear the good news of what Christ Jesus has done to save sinners?

This preaching Christ, this proclaiming Christ, is not simply the job of the pastor. It is not simply to be done through the ministry of the Word each Lord's Day. No, this is your obligation as well, and

you must do it with a sincere heart. When I was ordained to this office I took a vow which states, “So far as you can know in your own heart, is it the call of Christ, the glory of God and the welfare of the church, and not any selfish object, that moves you to undertake this sacred office?” This office is not intended to make one a celebrity preacher, a famous blogger, or, to use a more modern term, an influencer. No, it is for the glory of God and the welfare of the Church that Christ ought to be proclaimed. And while it is only those who are ordained to office within the Church that must take this vow, each and every one of you ought to be able to say that this is your motivation as well. You may never stand behind a pulpit and preach the Word of God to a congregation, but you have a duty to proclaim Christ in the place in which He appointed you and to do it with sincerity of heart. If you are a mother, sincerely proclaim Christ to your children. If you are a father, sincerely proclaim Christ to your family. If you are a student, sincerely proclaim Christ to your classmates. If you are an employee, sincerely proclaim Christ in the workplace. If you are a Christian, sincerely proclaim Christ in whatever the circumstance. There must be the sincere proclamation of Christ.

Hearing all of this you may be thinking to yourself that there is cause for division. Why would we not want there to be division between those who proclaim Christ sincerely and those who do so insincerely? While we should never be okay with someone proclaiming Christ from insincere motives, we must recognize that we cannot always rightly judge someones intentions. Instead, we must look to what we do know, and that is the fact that in either circumstance Christ is proclaimed. This leads us now to to consider that we must rejoice in the proclamation of Christ. Look with me once again at verse 18, “What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.” Paul knew that there were those who were preaching the Gospel from an insincere heart, and yet he rejoiced in the fact that the Gospel was being preached, Christ was being proclaimed. Simeon says, “However unworthy the preacher of

it may be, God may work by it; as we have no doubt he did by the ministry of Judas, as well as by the other Apostles: and, in as far as truth is diffused instead of error, ‘we do rejoice in it, yea, and will rejoice in it.’” It is the truth, and not the minister, that makes us free: it is Christ, and not the preacher, that saves the soul. If Christ is being proclaimed, if the Gospel is advancing, if sinners are coming to Christ, who are we are to be upset that it is not by someone within our own circle? How blasphemous it is to not rejoice in the proclamation of Christ, no matter who the herald may be. I love Calvin’s remark concerning this, “As the wicked disposition of those of whom he has spoken might detract from the acceptableness of the doctrine, he says that this ought to be reckoned of great importance, that they nevertheless promoted the cause of the gospel, whatever their disposition might be. For God sometimes accomplishes an admirable work by means of wicked and depraved instruments.” Brothers and sisters, We ought to rejoice if God accomplishes anything that is good by means of wicked persons.

But that does not mean that we ought to simply follow whoever because Christ is preached. Those who clearly proclaim Christ out of the insincerity of their hearts should never be placed within office in Christ’s Church, and we ought not look to them as faithful and lawful ministers of the Gospel. This is why that ordination vow is there. This is why our presbyteries take such great care in examining men before ordaining them to this sacred office. Unfortunately, because the courts of Christ’s Church are not impervious to error, men have been ordained to this sacred office who are motivated by selfish means. Friends, we must pray that the Lord would preserve His Church from such men. We must pray that the Lord would preserve those who are already ministers in His Church, who have undertaken this sacred duty out of a sincere motivation, from having their hearts captivated by the wooings of worldly gain. This is a real and dangerous temptation for ministers, and so we must pray for them that their hearts remain pure and their proclamation of Christ remain sincere.

But perhaps our temptation in this is not to seek to divide from those who are insincere in their proclamation of Christ, but instead to be the ones who cause division by our own insincerity. There is a real danger in becoming jealous over the success of other people's ministries. We can look at a congregation like Southside RP in Indianapolis and become envious of the way the Lord has blessed them with great numerical growth. We can begin to wonder why the Lord is not blessing us in that way and begin to grow bitter towards our brothers. Or we can become angry when an OPC or PCA congregation down the street is thriving. They may have a mature dynamic preacher who is well known, who had published several books, who has a popular YouTube channel, and they are drawing in people en masse. It can become easy to view them as a threat to the life and vitality of this small congregation, but we must be careful not to do so. They are faithfully preaching the Gospel. Christ is proclaimed from their pulpit just as much as He is proclaimed here. Each week we pray that the Lord would win this area for Christ. Why then would we be against our allies in other congregations seeking the same thing? Friends, do not let Satan use the success of other congregations to cause a root of bitterness to spring up within your heart. Listen to the words of James in chapter 3 and verses 14-16, "But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work." Let us not be a people that sows division when the Gospel is being preached, but instead let us rejoice in the proclamation of Christ.

Brothers and sisters, the world wants there to be divisions and rivalries, discord and disunity. This is the work of Satan who is the prince of the world, who seeks to use these things as a means by which the body of Christ may be divided in order to make easier prey those whom he seeks to devour. Guard yourselves from this great evil. Examine your hearts to see if your proclamation of Christ is from sincerity or selfish ambition. Let your love for Christ be the driving force in what motivates you to spread the Gospel in your

respective places. And pray for the protection of the Spirit to guard you from jealousies or insincerities which can cause divisions and rivalries even among brethren. Beloved, let us go forth and seek unity in the fact the Christ is proclaimed.