

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Motives for Spiritual Unity

Scripture: Philippians 2:1-2

Code: 50-12

Open your Bible now, if you will, for our study from Philippians chapter 2. We're looking at the second chapter of Philippians which is the most familiar section in this wonderful epistle.

Now let me say as you prepare to examine Philippians 2 that the congregation of Christians at Philippi was a quality church, much like our own church, I believe. And as Paul thought about them and even as he wrote to them, his thoughts and feelings were positive. The Philippians had a special place in his heart and he in their hearts. Their positive feelings are basically revealed in the text of the letter. For example, chapter 1 verse 3, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you," every time I think about you I'm thankful. Verse 4, "Every time I pray for you it is with joy." Verse 5, "Grateful for your participation in the gospel, from the first day until now, consistency, endurance." And then you'll notice also in verse 8, he says, "I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus." There was a genuine love bond between the Apostle and this church.

Chapter 1 verse 19 he says that I know your prayers shall result in my deliverance and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Commending them for their love and their prayers, their endurance, their consistency in the faith had joyous memories of them. In chapter 2 verse 12 he says, "You have always obeyed and I want you to continue to obey." And he commends them for their obedience. They had a pattern of obedience. When he was there they obeyed and he wanted them to continue doing it even in his absence.

In chapter 3 verse 16 he says, "Let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained." He says to them, just keep living by the same standard you're already living by. And again he commends them for the high standard of spiritual commitment that was the pattern of their life. In verse 10 of chapter 4 he rejoices in the Lord greatly because they had shown their concern to him. When given opportunity they had sent him a very generous offering. Down in verse 16 he says it isn't the first time you sent me an offering, even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.

All of his thoughts about this church were positive. All of his feelings were warm and affirming. And the church had a very special place in his heart. It is also true that they very likely had quality leaders. Back in verse 1 of chapter 1 he addresses the letter to the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi and he includes the overseers and the deacons who by such an introduction are certainly commended as noble servants of the Lord and the church. In verse 5 when he affirms their

participation in the gospel, he is noting for us that they were genuine believers. Verse 7 speaks of their great courage because even in Paul's imprisonment and defense and confirmation of the gospel they stood with him as partakers of grace. Verse 9 indicates that they had a real love which only needed to abound more and more. It was already abounding. In verse 19 again we remind ourselves that they were prayerful. And as I pointed out in chapter 4, they were very generous.

There is a very obvious lack of doctrinal exhortation in this epistle because there was apparently no doctrinal deviation. They had not gone astray in terms of theology. They didn't need to be corrected. There is no immorality in the congregation which is confronted in the epistle. So generally, this is a quality group of people. This is really a devoted consistent doctrinally true church.

But, in spite of all of that there is lurking in that church a deadly snake with poisonous venom. And that deadly snake is the snake of disunity, discord and conflict which has poisoned so many many churches. In all of Paul's expressions of joy, in all of his positive affirming characterizations of this Philippian church, there is still lurking in the shadows an issue that is of grave concern to him and it is this issue of discord and disunity in the church. And he frames the letter, in a sense, with that issue. For example, in the first chapter he speaks of it, verse 27, when he says, "I want you to stand firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel." In chapter 4, the last chapter, he speaks of it in verses 1 and 2 when he says, "Stand firm in the Lord, my beloved, and I urge you Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help those women."

So, in chapter 1 is an urging toward one mind and one heart. In chapter 4 another urging toward one mind and one heart, harmony in the church. And then in the middle is this second chapter. And the opening verses of chapter 2 also deal with the issue of unity in the church. This is a plea for unity. In fact, it is the pattern of unity given. It is the formula for spiritual unity, as we have entitled our sermon.

Now let me give you a little bit of a personal response at this point. From my own personal viewpoint, the thing I most hate in our church, the thing I most hate is spiritual apathy, indifference to the things of the Lord, indifference to holy truth, indifference to spiritual issues. That's the thing I most hate. But the thing I most fear is discord, disunity, conflict and division. And I'm quite sure that Paul must have felt the same way because every time he wrote a letter to a church he brought up the issue of unity. When he wrote the Romans he brought it up at least three times. Romans 12:10, Romans 12:16 and then in Romans chapters 14 and 15 it's the topic of those two chapters. And when he wrote the Corinthians in the first epistle verse 10 of chapter 1 and the second epistle verse 11 of chapter 13 he brought up unity again. In writing to the Galatians in chapters 5 and 6 he brings it up. In writing to the Ephesians in chapter 4, the Colossians in chapter 3 he brought it up. In writing to the Thessalonians in the first letter, chapter 4 verses 9 and 10 and the second letter chapter 1 verses 3 and 4, and here he brings it up in writing to the Philippians because it is always a lurking potential disaster in the church of Jesus Christ.

My constant prayer for this blessed church of which we're all apart is that men will never tear asunder what God has joined together. But that is a constant battle. And I would say to you that endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the church is easily the most pressing difficult and constant activity of spiritual oversight. Unquestionably it is the major issue of spiritual leadership.

You say, "Well, wouldn't it really not be a problem in a good church, in a doctrinally sound church where people were committed to ministry and committed to the Lord?" Not necessarily so. In fact, William Barclay had an interesting thought about just that kind of church. He said this, "There is a sense in which this is the danger of every healthy church. You see, it is when people are really in earnest, when their beliefs really matter to them, when they are eager to carry out their own plans and their own schemes that they are most apt to get up against each other. The greater their enthusiasm, the greater the danger that they may collide," end quote.

So, the fact that a church has true doctrine and zealous people does not preclude the possibility of discord. In fact, it may invite it in some ways because of the zeal of such people. But I say again, my greatest hatred in the church is for spiritual apathy. My greatest fear in the church is for disunity. And I'm not under any illusion that because a church is doctrinally sound, spiritually committed and active in ministry that no such disunity could occur, I know better. I know better.

Now let me go a step further and say to you that the unity of the church is inward not outward. When the Bible talks about unity it is not talking about some kind of outward unity, it is talking about an inward unity. It is talking about something that is internally compelling, not externally controlled. It is more heartfelt than credal. It is not particularly verbal as much as it is emotional, spiritual. It is the union of hearts and minds and souls in common cause. It's not people just being united because they're in the same container, it's people who are literally attracted to each other because they're pulled by the same power.

Let me see if I can illustrate that. If you have a bag filled with marbles you have a certain unity. You have one bag full of marbles and all those marbles are pushed against each other, packed together. But that which binds them into unity is the container. It's something on the outside that holds them. As soon as you tear the bag, the marbles are everywhere because there's nothing intrinsic or internal to keep them together. It's purely the package they're in, the container.

But on the other hand, if you have a magnet and you put that magnet into some metal shavings, the shavings will all adhere to the magnet. Not because there is an external container but because there's an internal force. And they are pulled to each other because they are all pulled by the same force pulling through each other. And that's how the church is to be, it is not a collection of marbles in the same bag, it is people who are pressed against each other because they're all magnetized by the same force, which is the power of Jesus Christ. That's the internal unity of the church. We are pulled

to each other because we are pulled through each other by the power that pulls, which is Christ.

Now what Paul wants to see is not marbles in a bag, people who are all together because the container has brought them together, but he wants to see people who are drawn by the power of Christ to each other because they're drawn to Christ through each other. And this is the inward magnetic unity that is essential to the church's joy and effectiveness. This is the true unity of the spirit. And it's very fragile, oh is it fragile. That's why in Ephesians 4:3 Paul says, "Endeavor," and he uses the verb spoudazow which means to make every constant effort. He says, "Endeavor or make every constant effort to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." It takes tremendous effort. As I said, it is easily the greatest task of spiritual oversight and leadership.

And so, as Paul writes the Philippian church as good as it is, as zealous as it is, as loving as it is, as courageous as it is, as passionate as it is, as sympathetic as it is, prayerful as it is, there's still the lurking danger of discord. And discord is such a tragedy in the church, such a debilitation in the church that he pleads with them to do all they can to avoid it.

In chapter 1 verse 27 he said, "Standing firm in one spirit with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel," and there he introduces the subject of unity. Having introduced it in verses 27 to 30 he now goes on to give us clearer insight into the elements that make up this unity in chapter 2. In the first four verses of chapter 2 we have a tremendous section on the formula for spiritual unity. It flows out of what he has just pled for in chapter 1 verse 27, that's why "therefore" is there in verse 1 of chapter 2. It is based on that plea, "Therefore having pled for you to have unity I now instruct you how to have it." This is very practical.

And as we look at verses 1 to 4, we're going to notice three things...the motives for unity, the marks of unity and the means of unity. Those are the three points we're going to focus on. Now for this morning we're going to look only at the first one because it is so rich and profound and so important. The motives for unity answer the question why. The marks of unity answer the question what. And the means of unity answers the question how. Why should we seek unity, what is unity and how do we experience unity? That's very simple, very direct and very practical. And I think absolutely vital for our church.

Look with me at those four verses. "If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness and empty conceit but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself, do not merely look out for your own personal interests but also for the interests of others."

Now the heart of this passage is the phrase "being of the same mind." That's the main emphasis here and we'll see that in more detail next time. But that's the thrust. I want you to be like minded. It's the same thing he said in chapter 1 verse 26, one spirit, one mind, striving together. And now he tells them why he wants them to be of one mind, what he means by one mind and how they can be of one mind. Very practical.

Let's look, first of all, at the motives. Why? Why is it important for us to be of one mind? Why is it important for us to maintain unity in the church? Why is it important for us to have one spirit? To be striving together? To eliminate conflict? Discord? Disunity? Why is it important? Here are four motives in verse 1 and then an additional one in verse 2. Four motives in verse 1 to start with.

Notice them. "If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ...if therefore there is any consolation of love...if there is any fellowship of the Spirit...if any affection and compassion." Now there are the four motives for spiritual unity.

Now let me give you some insight into the technical aspects of this verse. The word "if" introduces in the Greek what is called a first-class conditional clause. The Greeks have different conditions in their "if" clauses. And based upon the construction of the Greek, you can tell what that "if" means. For example, if it's a first-class conditional it means "if and it is true," or "if as the fact is." There is a conditional clause that means if and it might be true, there is one that means if and it is possibly true, but the first-class conditional form of the Greek means if and it is true. So you could substitute another word all together for if and make it clearer, it would be the word "since." Since there is encouragement in Christ, since there is consolation of love and so forth. Or better yet, let's use the word "because." And that's exactly what it means. Because there is encouragement in Christ, because there is consolation of love, because there is fellowship of the Spirit, and because there is affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind. Because of all of these things, these are the driving motives, these are the truths that should compel you.

Now let me take it a step further. He is not speaking of doctrinal abstractions. He is speaking, now note this, of present spiritual experiences. Because you have received encouragement from Christ, because you have received the consolation of love, because you experience the fellowship of the Spirit, because you receive affection and compassion. This is not abstraction. This is not distant theology. This is present spiritual experience that becomes the motive for unity.

Now let's look at the first one and you're going to see how this unfolds and how it applies. Because there is encouragement in Christ. The first one is encouragement in Christ, that should be our first motive. The word encouragement, paraklesis, means to come alongside and help somebody. The Holy Spirit is called the paraclete, the one who comes alongside and helps. It has the idea of coming alongside someone to encourage them, to counsel them, to help them, to exhort them. And what he is saying is, you who are in Christ have experienced His help. He has come alongside you. You who

are in Christ have benefited from the union with Christ through the intended, encouragement, exhortation, counsel and help that you have received. And what he is saying here is because Christ has so consistently and faithfully helped you this is how you ought to respond, by being of the same mind. If the great blessing encouragement of Christ, if the great blessing of His constant forgiveness and constant strength and constant wisdom and constant blessing and constant benediction in your life means anything, certainly you should respond by endeavoring to be of the same mind. Why? Because that was Christ's great prayer. In John 17 He said, "Father, I pray that they may be one that the world may know that You and I are one." In John 13:35 He said, "By this shall all men know that you're My disciples if you have love one for another." The great passion of the heart of Christ was the unity of His people.

And so what is Paul saying? He's saying this, "Because you have received such continual gentle encouragement, exhortation, counsel and help from Christ since the moment of your salvation, since you have been given so much, does not that spur you on to give back to Christ that which is precious to His heart?" Does the influence of Christ in your life move you to obedience? Or are you so ungrateful that you will take, take, take, take but never give? That's the issue.

By the way, this is a very powerful point and a very far-reaching spiritual principle because it focuses, mark it, it focuses on obedience...follow this...as a very personal response to a very personal relationship. You see, when you sin, it is not so much that you are violating a system of religion, it is not that you are violating a system of theology, it is not that you are violating a credal structure, it is not that you are going against the organization of the church. When you sin you are literally violating the intimacy of a relationship between yourself and Christ. If you have received, and you have, constant encouragement, counsel, exhortation, wisdom from Christ, is not that motive that you should give back to Him what is precious to His heart? He has constantly by grace given you everything precious to you, can you not give Him back what is precious to Him? Mark it, when you bring discord into His church you violate not so much the church and not so much the doctrine of unity as the relationship with Christ. He's saying, "Are you not stimulated by the influence of Christ in you? Are you not so stimulated by His outpouring of encouragement to you? His gentle gracious constant blessing? Are you not so moved by that that you will not respond by maintaining the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace? If you won't, then know where your sin is placed, it is not a sin against the church, it is not a sin against doctrine, it is not a sin against moral law, it is a sin against your relationship to Christ, it is an act of ingratitude that disregards His personal desire for His church. So know your sin for what it is, get it straight."

The gracious blessing, the gentle encouragement of Christ has so generously been poured out to us, His exhortations to us are so clear and compelling, including His exhortations to unity that we should respond stimulated to pursue the harmony He desires in His church for the sake of gratitude and love if for nothing else. That's so basic...so basic.

Look at the second principle. If there is any consolation of love, is the second one. What does he mean? Well this is the second incentive and what he is saying is, since the loving tenderness of God in Christ has been all of our experience as Christians, since in salvation and sanctification we have known His love and the comfort of His love, we have known that comforting loving forgiveness and mercy and grace, and it has been so abundant to us, shouldn't we be constrained to seek that which is precious to His heart, namely the unity of His people? That's the same idea.

By the way, I believe the first two relate to Christ and the second two the Holy Spirit. The first one mentions Christ, the second one flows out of it, the third one mentions the Holy Spirit, the fourth one flows out of that.

The word here for consolation is worthy of note, it's the word paramuthion. I like one translation of it in a lexicon, gentle cheering...gentle cheering. Some have translated it comfort. Basically it has the idea of tenderness, tender counsel, literally what the word means if you just took the component parts is to speak to someone by coming close to his side, to come close to someone and whisper in his ear. And by the way, this word is never used in the New Testament in any other than a friendly way. It's a word about friendship. It's a word about intimate love. And that's exactly what we intend to see here. The word agape has to do with the greatest love, the highest love, the supreme love and so what Paul is saying is, "Look, because you have been so constantly encouraged in your relationship to Christ, because you have so frequently and so often had the gentle cheering of Him coming alongside to speak words of friendship into your own ear, because of that intimate relationship in which He has poured His love and grace into your life, shouldn't you be compelled to give back to Him that which His heart desires?"

And frankly, I say again to you, because I don't want you to forget this, that your sin against the unity of the church is not primarily a sin against unity as an entity, it is not primarily a sin against the church as an organization, it is a sin against your intimate personal relationship to Christ and it is the ultimate act of ingratitude to one who unceasingly has poured out both encouragement and comfort in to your life since the moment you were saved. So look at your defiance of that for what it is, it is gross ingratitude of the worst order. You are saying, in effect, Christ, I take everything You give, I want everything I need, I will take all that You supply but do not ask anything in return, do not ask me to give back to You that which is precious to You. It is a violation of a relationship. See it for what it is.

And this is not just the sin of disunity, this is every sin. That's why David said in Psalm 51 about his sin when he sinned against Bathsheba, he sinned against Bathsheba, yes, he sinned against Uriah her husband, yes, he sinned against the nation Israel because he was king, yes. He sinned against God's revealed law, the Mosaic code which forbade that kind of thing, yes. But he said this, "Against Thee, Thee only have I...what?...sinned." And that is the focus that every man or woman must have about sin. It is not that I have violated a code nearly so much as that I have violated a relationship.

And Paul speaks in such tender words because he feels such tenderness in his heart toward these people. There's no abusiveness here. He's not battering them. He's not hammering on them with judgment. There are not threats here. He does not pound on them with the fear of punishment. He asks them to look at the love of Christ, to look at the constant gentle cheering encouragement of Christ in their life, the constant outpouring of grace and remember that Jesus prayed for unity and it was the plea of His heart. And then he asked the Philippian believers, can you take all of this from Christ and not at least give Him back that which is most precious to His heart? Because if you can't, you have violated the relationship, the severest of all acts of treachery. You have turned your heel on your own familiar friend. You have betrayed the one whom you have kissed. It is a form of Judas treatment.

Then thirdly he moves to the Holy Spirit in the third motive. He says, "If there is any fellowship of the Spirit," koinonia, partnership, communion, sharing. Because, to put it in the first class conditional and give it the right word, because you have experienced the fellowship of the Spirit....now he moves to the Holy Spirit. You think the Holy Spirit wants unity? Sure, the unity of the church is called the unity of the Spirit. We have all been baptized by the Spirit into one body and we've been all made to drink the self same Spirit, 1 Corinthians 12:13, we've all been made of one Spirit, we are all the temple of the Spirit of God, the habitation of the Spirit, we are one in the Spirit. The Spirit desires unity. The Spirit is the source of unity. And Paul is saying you fellowship with the Spirit.

What do you mean by that, Paul? You've received all that a union with the Holy Spirit could provide. Think about it. You have the indwelling Spirit. You're the temple of the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 6 says. You have received all His benefits, you've been sealed by the Spirit. He has become the guarantor of your eternal inheritance. You're filled with the Spirit. You're empowered and enabled for service by the Spirit. You've been gifted by the Spirit. You are continually being cleansed by the Spirit. The Spirit is always praying for you with groanings which cannot be uttered in a language that cannot be understood by man but is the language of the trinity in which He prays unceasingly for you according to the will of God which you don't know and that's why you know not what to pray for as you ought, the Spirit therefore makes intercession for you. The Spirit has done everything for you, think about it. Paul says, "Because the Holy Spirit has affected your regeneration, because the Holy Spirit is effecting your sanctification, because the Holy Spirit is guaranteeing your eternal glory, because the Holy Spirit is unceasingly praying for you with groanings that can't find human words, because the Holy Spirit is gifting you, filling you, producing fruit in you, because He is teaching you, because He is enabling you to resist temptation, because the Holy Spirit has given you the Word, because He is filling you with holy impulses, because He has given you everything pertaining to life and godliness, will you disrupt that which is most dear to His heart, the unity of the church?"

See it for what it is. It is a violation of a relationship. It is quenching the blessed Holy Spirit. It is a form of doing despite to the Spirit of grace. You are saying, "I take all the Spirit gives, I give nothing back." May I say to you, sin...sin in the life of a Christian in its simplest definition is a tragic act of

ingratitude and a violation of a relationship, that's what it is. It says, "I take all You give but don't expect me to give You back what You desire." It says, "I want grace upon grace and mercy upon mercy, I want encouragement, I want consolation, I want all the ministry of the Holy Spirit but I also will defy Your will and do exactly what I want." Sin is ingratitude in action.

So, he says look at your discord for what it is. It is a defiance against Christ. It is a defiance against the Holy Spirit. Then he says, fourthly, the fourth motive, if any affection and compassion...he plunges deeper into the Holy Spirit's ministry here, just as the second one reflected on Christ, this fourth one reflects on the Spirit. He says the Spirit has given you both affection and compassion.

What does he mean by affection? Just that, the word in the Greek is splanchna, it means gut, viscera, bowels it's translated. But it has really to do metaphorically with affection. Did you ever think about that? Did you know the Holy Spirit has affection for you? You say, "Well what does it mean?" Well it's more than love, love is sort of a cognitive thing, affection is a feeling. It's a longing. It's the word that would be used, for example, in the Song of Solomon in the Septuagint where when the husband sees his wife and they're ready to come together in that beauty of the conjugal relationship, he begins to feel all the longings toward her. That's the word that's used there in that section. It's more than a cognitive appreciation, it's a longing. And I sense here that what he is saying is you have received the longings of the Spirit, deeply felt affections. The bowels were seen by the Jews as the seat of emotions. It's where you felt things.

And so, we as believers, think of it, have received the longings of the Spirit. What He longs for us we have received. That's part of His prayer ministry, Romans 8:26 and 27, He's making intercession for us constantly according to the will of God. And God is hearing and answering Him because He's always praying according to God's will and we're receiving the things the Spirit is asking for us to receive. What we're seeing then is that what He longs for us to have He gives. So he says since you have received the affections of the Spirit. What a thought.

It's not that...I think we don't understand this relational aspect. It's not that just God is this cold, hard, indifferent deity who functions like a machine and if you happen to be a Christian the machine spits out good things. No. It is a relationship and Christ is there encouraging and exhorting and ministering and giving grace upon grace and comfort and encouragement and cheer and blessing. And when you fall He picks you up. And when you sin He forgives you. And when you need strength He infuses it. And when you need wisdom He grants it. And it's that personal thing because He loves you. And when you sin you violate that relationship, that intimacy. Same with the Spirit. The Spirit is not a floating fog that sort of mystically makes things happen. The Spirit is a person who lives in you. And the Spirit longs for your good and your blessing. The Spirit longs to pour out benedictions upon you. And it is the longings of the Spirit that you have received through the grace of God.

And then he adds the word compassion. Beautiful word, oiktirmos, it's used four times by Paul. Two of those times it's translated really the mercies of God, the tender mercies of God. And here I think it means the same thing. You've received the longings of the Spirit for you and the tender compassionate sympathy of God through the Spirit. God has been sympathetic to you. Hey, let's face it, God gives us way way more than we deserve, is that not so? Pours out grace upon grace, mercy upon mercy, He has a heart of pity toward us, a heart of tenderness toward us. And so here is the Holy Spirit and we are fellowshiping, we share the life of the Spirit in us, it's His life in us. He regenerated us. He sanctifies us. He gives us the gifts and the power and the resources and the fruit to do everything we do, everything we do that turns out to be an honor to God is the product of the Spirit. And then He shows to us compassion, tenderness, mercy, sympathy, pity, tremendous care. And Paul says because you have received all this, shouldn't you be of the same mind? See your discord for what it is, a violation of this intimate relationship and a gross act of ingratitude. You come into the church and divide the church and you have been terribly disloyal to a loving Christ and a loving Spirit who long for the unity of the church. So see your agenda for what it is.

You say, "Well, boy, I'm going to get my pound of flesh. I think this is the way we need to go and I'm going to do this," and so forth and so forth. Just see it for what it is. And as I said, Paul's approach here isn't threatening. It would be like this, let's say you wanted your son, I'll take it as a father, I'll approach this thing from a father's view, you wanted your son to conduct himself in a certain way. You could call him in and you could say, "All right, son, you've got two hours to change your conduct or you're out of this house for good, out of here and I'm serious." Or you could say to your son, "Look, you've been doing the wrong thing, I want you to learn a lesson to do the right thing, so bend over, I'm going to wail on you within an inch of your life."

Now, I'm not saying that either of those are necessarily wrong. But Paul's approach is different here. There's no threats. There's no rod like he wanted to pull out with the Corinthians. It's very tender. It would be like this. A father sitting down with his son and saying, "Son, have you been loved in this family? Have your mother and father loved you faithfully? Have we encouraged you? When you were down and sad, have we come alongside to offer you compassion and care and sympathy? When you were hungry have we provided food for you? Have we clothed you? Have we nurtured you as you grew from a little child? Have we provided all the medical care you needed to live a healthy life? Have we given you a warm environment in which to live? A bed to sleep? A room to dwell in? Son, have we shown you deep affection? Have we been gracious to you in the times when you were disobedient and rebellious, gracious to forgive you and love you and restore you? Son, have we shown you sympathy? Have we shown you mercy? Have we been patient with you while you were learning how to do things right and often did them wrong? Have you known our affectionate compassion? Have you experienced our goodness to you? Son, since all those things are true, isn't it reasonable that we ask you to live in such a way that would bring us joy?" It's pretty reasonable, isn't it? Be pretty hard for a child to deal with that, given that all those things were true.

And that's the whole point of Paul's plea, you see. It's all based on the goodness of the Lord. And he can take that approach with the Philippians cause they're good people, it's a good church. So he doesn't want to blast them from pillar to post. And it's such an appropriate one for you here because I see so much of a parallel. I can tell you that in the time of my being gone that I too thank God in all my remembrance of you, that I was always offering prayer with joy on your behalf. And I was rejoicing over your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. And I was thankful that it was your prayers and your provision that had sustained my life, just like Paul said. And that you were courageous to stand with me in the hard times. And I see you as the Philippian church to whom my heart is bonded. And when I call you to unity it would not be with threats but it would be to call you like Paul does from the highest and holiest motive of love, gratitude, honor and loyalty to a relationship that you have with Christ. Such a strong point.

This was a such a good church. And the bond between the church and Paul was so close. And they understood relationships. And so that's the approach he takes and it's the highest approach. And you can't always take the highest approach because some people aren't willing to live on the highest plain. But what he says is this, all our present experiences with Christ and the Holy Spirit should motivate us to the same mind. Why? Because that's the Spirit's longing, that's the Lord's longing.

Then he adds one more. This is so good, verse 2, he says, "Make my joy complete by being of the same mind." You say, "Well now what is this?" Well he's saying, "Look, if you can't get in touch with your intimate relationship with Christ and you can't quite get in touch with this idea of your intimate relationship to the Holy Spirit, if you can't do it for Christ's sake and you can't do it for the Spirit's sake, do it for...what?...myself." That's condescension. I mean, he's come a long way down.

But there's something warm about that. He's talking to them as a pastor and he's saying what I would say to you, "Look, beloved, do it for Christ's sake, for the sake of the relationship that He longs to have with you to which He has been so faithful, don't be unfaithful to that relationship. Do it for the Spirit's sake to which He has been so faithful to you, don't be unfaithful to Him and then do it for my sake, will you? Do it for my sake?" I understand why he said that. Make my joy complete.

My greatest fear for the church is disunity. Make my joy complete, beloved, will you by being of the same mind? Hebrews 13:17, a very important verse along this same line, says this, "Obey your leaders and submit to them for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief." Make your leaders happy, that's legitimate. Paul's appeal again is very personal, it's very relational. They knew him, they loved him, he loved them. They had an incredible bond, he says in verse 8 of chapter 1, I long for you all with the bowels of Jesus Christ. I have those same longings for you. I love you. I cherish you. I have this profound affection for you.

So, he says will you do it for my sake so that I don't have to have a ministry of grief? And he tugs at their heart in all these cases. And everything is relational. Keep the unity of the church because your relationship with Christ calls for it, your relationship with the Spirit calls for it, your relationship with the pastor calls for it. It's a pastoral plea.

There's a lot of pathos here. Paul when writing was a prisoner, first imprisonment in Rome. He didn't know whether he was going to live or die. The Philippians heard about him being in prison and their hearts were broken and the whole occasion of this letter was for Paul to write the Philippians and say, "Don't worry about me, I'm happy." That's why he talks about joy from front to back, they thought he'd be sad. They were worried about him being broken-hearted and despondent and sad and so they sent Epaphroditus who is mentioned in chapter 2, who was one of their members and they said, "Epaphroditus, you go and be with Paul and take care of him." And with Epaphroditus they sent a lot of money, an offering. And they said, "Buy him whatever he needs and make him satisfied and bring joy to his heart." And Epaphroditus did that, he came with the gift and Paul thanks them for the gift in chapter 4 which was obviously very generous. And he thanks them in chapter 2 for sending Epaphroditus and Epaphroditus was such a faithful ambassador of the Philippian church that he almost died in his service to Christ. He was so busy trying to help Paul it almost killed him. Paul said, "I'm sending him back before he dies." And when he sends Epaphroditus back he sends back this letter and the whole tenor of the letter is, "Don't worry about me, I rejoice." He starts out in the very beginning...joy, joy, joy, rejoicing. He ends up in chapter 4...rejoice always, and again I say rejoice, I'm happy, don't worry about me. But, he says, if you want to make my joy complete, then maintain this unity...maintain this unity. This is a very very significant statement he's made. This is the pinnacle of the epistle. I'm happy but I could be happier. I'm rejoicing but I could rejoice more if you just maintain the same mind, that will really fill my heart with joy.

You see, I believe as I said earlier, that that's the compelling thing that the pastor carries in his heart, this fear of disunity in the church, trying to keep the flock together. Why? Why are we motivated? I'm motivated because that's the desire of Christ and that's the desire of the blessed Holy Spirit. So, beloved, I submit to you that what the Apostle Paul says here is very practical. Know this, that we who have received the encouragement of Christ, the consolation of His love, the fellowship of His Spirit, the deep longings and affection and compassionate sympathy of His Holy Spirit should in reciprocation for such unending grace and kindness do everything in our power to give back to Christ and back to the Spirit that which is the deepest longing of their heart, namely the unity of the church.

And then Paul says, "And after all your concern about my joy, if you really care about me then for my full joy you'll maintain the unity of the church."

And then somebody says, "But what is the unity of the church? And how do we maintain it?" And if you're asking those questions, I'll answer them next Sunday. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, help us to see our sin for what it is...violent acts of ingratitude, the violation of an intimate relationship with our dear Christ and the blessed Spirit of God. Help us to see our sin for what it really is, against Thee and Thee only have I sinned. And, Father, protect our church from discord. We who have received so much encouragement in Christ, we have received so much comfort of love, so much gentle cheering, so much goodness, we who have received so much in the intimate communion and partnership of the Holy Spirit and through His longings and His sympathetic compassion. Save us from the unthinkable ingratitude of the disunity that is born out of selfish desire. And may we go to all extent to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace and be of the same mind that the dear Savior and the Spirit may be pleased. And for the sake of those who shepherd us that they may do it with joy. Lord, help us to live in the light of the relationship, not a creed, not a system, not a code, not an organization but a relationship, to see that we are loyal to the relationship in our purity and disloyal to the relationship in our sin. And may we not be those who take everything You give but refuse to give back what You desire. May we be faithful in this area of unity. Protect us, Lord, and give us a heart that longs to honor the one who has so blessed us and do nothing that would be ungrateful or in any way abuse such a loving relationship. Work Your work in every life, we pray for Christ's sake. Amen.

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