

The Essence of the Church

Philippians 2:1-2

1 Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, 2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

Paul is addressing the church and has been since verse 27.

Philippians 1:27-30 (NKJV) 27 Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, 28 and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God. 29 For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, 30 having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.

He continues on in chapter 2. And it is unity that he is concerned with. The church does not seem to be in doctrinal error as were the churches of Galatia. And the divisions in the church are not nearly as bad as at the church at Corinth. But still there are two women that are causing problems.

Philippians 4:2 (NKJV) 2 I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.

Unity is a problem that all churches face. Human nature tends toward conflict.

William Barclay perceptively observed that the one danger which threatened the Philippian church was that of disunity. There is a sense in which that is the danger of every healthy church. It is when people are really in earnest, when their beliefs really matter to them, that they are apt to get up against each other. The greater their enthusiasm, the greater the danger that they may collide. It is against that danger Paul wished to safeguard his friends. (The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians. Rev. ed., [Louisville, Ky.: Westminster, 1975], 31)

The church is like a family. As a matter of fact, every real church member is a part of God's family of the first-born or regenerated. But each local church is only a microcosm of the family of God. But in the church all the dynamics of a family come into play whereas the dynamics in the family of God are much different. Or as one person said. To dwell above with saints we love, oh that will be glory. But to dwell below with saints we know, now that's another story.

This past week I went to Kentucky with my brothers and sisters. We had a good time. Now you need to know that I have not always gotten along with some of my siblings and there have been many things that we did and do not agree on. But you cannot get out of the family. You have to learn to accept how people are and adjust your actions accordingly.

But in churches, people often either leave, thinking they will not encounter the same problems at a new church. Or sometimes they will stay and fight it out. Both of these is the wrong way to go. And sometimes the compromises churches make are just silly. As in the church with the thread-worn carpet in the front of the church because they could not agree which side the piano should be on so they moved it each week to keep everyone happy. But there is a better way. Listen to the Word.

- I. If is not If here.
- A. The word “if” is the translation of a conditional particle referring to a fulfilled condition. One could translate “since,” or “in view of the fact.” The four things mentioned in this verse are not hypothetical in their nature. They are facts. Wuest, K. S. (1997).
- B. Conflict in the church was always a concern of Paul.
1. 2 Corinthians 12:20 (NKJV) 20 For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults;
 2. Romans 15:5-7 (NKJV) 5 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, 6 that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.
 3. Romans 12:5 (NKJV) 5 so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.
 4. Romans 12:16 (NKJV) 16 Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.
 5. Ephesians 4:1-6 (NKJV) 1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.
- C. Apparently the Philippian church faced the danger of discord and division from the personal conflict between Euodia and Syntyche (4:2). Disunity is a potential danger for every church, a danger Paul addressed to some extent in every one of his letters to churches. MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Philippians.
- D. The If is based on the union of the believers with Jesus Christ and all that He has bestowed upon them.
1. As an analogy, consider a bag filled with marbles. There are many marbles of various colors, sizes, and composition packed closely together. But they are bound together exclusively by the container. If the bag is opened or ripped, the marbles spill out in all directions, because there is nothing internal that binds them to each other. In contrast, consider a magnet placed into a pile of iron shavings. By their nature, the shavings respond to

the power of the magnet and are drawn together. If some outside force causes them to be pulled apart, the attractive force remains and they will reunite as soon as the separating cause is removed. In the same way, faithful Christians who are separated by circumstances beyond their control will maintain their mutual attraction through the "magnetic" power of the Spirit working within them. Like a close human family that is tragically divided by war or natural disaster, they will continually seek to be reunited as the spiritual family they are. That divinely empowered internal unity of spirit is essential to the church's joy and effectiveness. MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Philippians.

II. 4 foundations for Christian unity. (From Boice)

- A. Because there is “encouragement,”
- B. Because there is a “comfort from his love,”
- C. Because there is a “fellowship with the Spirit,”
- D. Because there is an experience of the “tenderness and compassion” of God.

Let us be honest at this point. We will always be tempted to divisiveness in ways that will injure our witness. But in such situations our natural reactions must constantly be overcome.

. . . there are constant pressures from sin within Christians. These will eventually destroy Christian unity and render our witness useless unless they are offset by the supernatural realities of Christian comfort, fellowship, love, mercy, and compassion. Have you found these things real in your relationship to God? Of course, you have, if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. In that case you are also to allow them to become realities in your relationships with other Christians.

Paul knew that Christians are hard to get along with. But he also knew that Christians have a duty to see more than another Christian's faults. Christians must also see the person, and they must love him or her with a love patterned on the love with which God the Father loves us.

The person who really loves the other Christian in this way will not seek to separate from him because he is cantankerous or because she sees some minor doctrine differently. He will seek to know him, to learn from him, and to help him on spiritually as together they advance in the Christian life.

In fact, your love is actually to be an outpouring of his love through you as you are transformed by the indwelling presence of his Spirit.

John 13:34 (NKJV) 34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

Does God cast away the one who offends him or makes a doctrinal mistake or sins? On the contrary, his love reaches out even farther as he seeks to draw the sinner to himself. That love must flow through you, and it must be your pattern. It must be your incentive as you live with other Christians.

John 13:35 (NKJV) 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Boice, J. M. (2000). *Philippians: An expositional commentary* (99). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.