

Congregation,

A couple of weeks ago, as I was starting to think about this sermon, I saw a movie. Normally, when Patsy picks a movie, it's going to be a love story of some kind so I wasn't counting on my reaction. But during this particular movie, I was getting angry and more and more bothered.

What upset me is the way the father in this story used his authority in his family to bully, rather than serve. This man was a soldier who tried to run his house like the military. He demanded obedience but didn't earn it. I hurt inside as I watched him order his 18 or 19 year old daughter around like she was a slave. Most discussions ended with the spirit of "Because I said so!" He could not have a reasonable discussion. His control of his daughter was motivated by his desire to keep her from dating "bad boys." Not a bad concern. But from his experience in the military, all the young recruits were bad boys with only one thing on their mind.

When the daughter started dating a soldier behind her parent's back initially, she eventually went with her boyfriend to the army chaplain for advice on how to deal with her bullying father. The chaplain's advice further angered me. His main line was for the daughter and her boyfriend basically to submit to her bully father and win him over with their gentleness which sounds good but I don't think it is.

My emotional reaction to the movie forced me to puzzle over my feelings. I began thinking about this sermon and how Paul tells us that Christ humbled himself and became a servant—obedient, even to death on a cross. I think the chaplain in the movie was trying to get this young couple to imitate Christ in humbling themselves before this father. And I think that's where the rub came for me because the couple is humbling themselves for a bully who also claimed to be a Christian. But in humbling themselves before this controlling father, the young couple was further empowering and validating his abuse. And that's not the lesson I see Paul teaching here. In fact, in v. 4 he makes it clear that "Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also the interests of others."

That's something the father was not doing. It was his way or the highway. It bothered me that the father's words and actions in the show were not motivated by genuine good for his daughter but by fear and prejudice of army cadets based on his assumptions that they were all a bunch of ill-intentioned dragons wanting to devour his daughter. He forced the boyfriend to work for him in an effort to break his will to be with his daughter. He threatened him and eventually used his power on the military base to get the young transferred far away from his daughter. But the young man stood strong. He stood faithful to his girl, regardless of the abuse hoisted on him by her dad. The young man was much more Christ-like than the father.

I think the whole telling of Jesus' suffering here in Philippians 2 shows the humiliation and injustice he endured willingly to save us. The young man in this story did that to win his girlfriend. That was noble. But the father in this movie was supposedly a Christian as well and simply did not act with selfless love and Christ-like humility. He was, plain and simple, a bully. And that's putting it nicely. He was an ungodly Christian who was not letting the mind of Christ shape his thoughts and actions. No matter how kind his daughter and her boyfriend were, he continued with his abusive words and actions.

As it turned out, the bullying didn't stop until the daughter stood up to her dad instead of being a doormat. That brings us to what we see here in our Bible reading. We could say there were bullies in Philippi as well. Even Christian bullies. People who knew Christ but didn't act like it. People who wanted their own way, not the good of others. And Paul stands up to them. He calls them out for it.

Reading the opening verses of chapter 2 makes it clear that divisions existed in the church in Philippi. That's why Paul calls the church to be like-minded at the beginning of v.2. Selfishness and conceit and pride are tearing at the fabric of the church, threatening to break apart what has been granted to them—and to us—in Christ.

The Gifts We Have in Christ

Paul starts chapter 2 by assuring the Christians that we have a basis for encouragement, comfort, fellowship, tenderness and compassion. We have them in common. These are blessings we receive through Christ and those blessings set us up well to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel, as he says in 1:26. We are united in Christ to really live a life that makes a difference in our world. So let's look at those four blessings Paul spells out in v.1 before moving on.

1. Encouragement in our Unity with Christ

To begin, Paul says that **we receive encouragement from being united with Christ**. The believer's union with Christ is central to the Christian faith. Paul teaches elsewhere that being united with Christ means we are new creatures. When God looks at you, he sees you attached to Jesus. You're united with him. You're connected. What happens to him happens to you. In Romans 6 Paul paints a fuller picture of this unity when he says,

*all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴
We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that,
just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we
too may live a new life.*

We are free from sin's mastery and power over us. Christ's union with us means he is always in us and with us to help us fight sin and do good. His victory is ours. That's so encouraging!! Our lives are tied directly to Christ. We are one with him and one in him. Our lives are wrapped up with Christ's. That's what we celebrate in the Lord's Supper. What wonderful encouragement!

2. Comfort in Christ's Love

Related to this, Paul reminds the Christians that they also have **received a great comfort or source of consolation in Christ's love**. Knowing that Jesus loves you ought to bring you incredible joy and comfort. Just imagine: though we are but a small part of the world, the Creator of the world loves each one of his children! Yes, says Paul to his Christian friends, Jesus loves me and you. Now no matter what sacrifices I have to make, or what pain I have to face, or what sin I have to begin to put to death, I can do it because the One who loves me strengthens me. I hold fast to Christ as he holds fast to me! We can face situations we've never faced before—like this Covid pandemic—without staying awake all night. We must remember that Christ loves us. Nothing can change that, not even a bad decision, a bad actions, a bad illness or even death. *Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*. What a great source of comfort to us as we seek to live for the Lord today.

3. Fellowship with the Spirit

But wait. It gets better. That sounds like an infomercial line, doesn't it? 😊 But it's true. Thirdly, says Paul, we **have received from Jesus fellowship in or with the promised Spirit**. The Holy Spirit applies the work of Christ to us. "He is Christ in action on earth," one of my seminary professors would say (C.Plantinga). He is the author of fellowship in the church. He is the one that binds us together, working in our hearts stirring us up to utilize our gifts for the benefit of the whole body. He helps us to appreciate each other, remembering that he gives some people wisdom, others knowledge and still others the gifts of faith and prophecy—to name but a few. We should recognize that we're not in competition as believers but called by the Holy Spirit to grow in fellowship with one another, and equipped to complement and complete each other. Then we should listen to what others are saying and try to learn from them, rather than just dismissing their ideas without prayerful consideration.

I remember when our boys were small. We were going through the aisles of a store and they were selling fancy jars full of candy. When one of the boys stopped and looked at the jars, I said, "That's great, eh! You buy the jar and get all the candy with it." And he said, "No, Dad, you buy all the candy and get a free jar with it." In the same way, different perspectives from different Christians can help us better hear what the Spirit says to us in our situations today as we seek to apply the Scriptures to our lives and church.

The Holy Spirit draws us closer to God. He's the reason we gather for worship. He's the reason we hunger for a closer walk with God. He's the reason we feel bad about our sin and desire to change. He's the one who reminds us about Jesus when we sometimes get attracted to the world or discouraged by our situation. He's the one who gives us courage and strength to do the things we do in Jesus' name—things that we'd never be able to do otherwise. And what he does in me, he does in my sister and brother as well. Therefore I ought to respect and

listen to and learn from him or her too. Oh, praise God for the Holy Spirit and the fellowship he creates.

4. Tenderness and Compassion

Finally, Paul **reminds the believers that they also have received tenderness and compassion.** The Greek literally translates "bowels and mercies" which basically means compassion or sympathy that comes from the gut or from the heart. The reason we can care for and about each other is Jesus. The reason you can cry with those who cry or give an encouraging word is Jesus. The reason you can be a caring husband or father is Jesus. The reason you can be a compassionate elder or deacon is Jesus. The reason you can lend an ear to a hurting person at work is Jesus. The reason you can give an encouraging word to people feeling the pain of isolation these days is Jesus. He's the one who helps us be the best we can be. Without him, we'd be insincere and selfish people. Tenderness and compassion are visible signs of the Lord's work in us.

In summary, then, Paul is saying, we have received these four benefits-- saved by Christ uniting himself to us, filled with the Holy Spirit, enjoying the fellowship of the Spirit, especially in the church, and blessed with tenderness and compassion so we can love others better.

Now we must respond.

Responding with Unity in Mind

Will we simply say thank you very much God, and go on with life? Or will we respond to him in the best way possible? As a Christian, we really have no choice. We have received these gifts from God not to bury in the ground, but to use for the purpose God intends. If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, any comfort from his love, and if the Spirit of God is really living and working in you then you will seek to respond gratefully and appropriately. You will undoubtedly fail at times. Even many times. But because you realize that life without Jesus is no life at all, you will strive to respond in a way that pleases him. To say thank you very much God and just go on with the old way of life doesn't fit the pattern of the truly grateful Christian.

An ungrateful attitude breaks down the Holy Spirit's work of moving Christians toward greater harmony and unity. When we act as if God owes us something and he should be thankful to have us in the church, rather than the other way around, then we'll also treat other people that way. We won't serve others. We'll want them to serve us. And we'll want everything "my way", like the father in the movie I mentioned, regardless of how others feel. No, we'll think less of ourselves and better of others, like Jesus did. He came not to be served but to serve.

That's why Paul says in v.1, if we have these four blessings, ***then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.*** Paul reminds us, there is one Lord of the Church—Jesus Christ—and we

should have his mind. Do what he did. Love what he loves. Serve as he serves. Live following his example. A Christian church ought to be united with the mind of Christ. His purposes and goals should be ours.

1. What Not to Do

Before Paul describes to the Philippian church what the attitude of Christ is that we should follow, he first says what it should not be in verses 3 + 4. Addressing the factions in Philippi, Paul says, *Do nothing out of selfish ambition.* Do nothing out of strife or quarrelsomeness that arises from self-interests. Self-ambition is sinful and therefore has no place in the church. It must be weeded out. We need to put such selfishness away through prayer and dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit. Then put on the new nature which is shaped after the mind of Christ.

2. What to Do

Paul tells us to look to the example of Jesus while on earth: v.6 *Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, i.e., stolen, but took on the form of a servant.* Clearly, it is the example of our Saviour that shows us how to live for others. In dealing with one another in the church we need the attitude of Christ that Paul elaborates on in verses 6-11. And what better example is there? Who was it that did nothing, absolutely nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit? Only Jesus in laying down his life for us.

We should follow the example of the Head of the Church. For in him we see perfectly that unity of purpose between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit drove Jesus to humble, loving service. Christ was a humble servant who for the love of the people gave up everything wonderful in heaven and suffered the pain of earth and finally of hell itself. What a Saviour! What an example of a humble servant.

We must yield ourselves to the work and purposes that God has in mind for us as his people. We must look to the Holy Spirit to help us in this task of serving in the home, at work, at school, in the church and, perhaps now more than ever, in our community. In this way the light of Christ shines in our world and, we hope and pray that people see how our unity in Christ helps us to really live a full and joyful life.

So may God help us to be a church that is out of our mind and into the mind of Christ our Saviour in every way.

And all God's people say, Amen