

WORKING OUT GOD'S GOOD WORK IN YOUR HEART

Studies in the Book of Philippians - Part Eight

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WHAT THE REIGN OF JESUS LOOKS LIKE AMONG HIS PEOPLE

Philippians 2:1-4 - "So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, [2] complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. [3] Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."

Let me take a bit of time setting up this text for our study. "**So**" at the beginning of **verse 1** links up the exhortation of these verses with what has gone immediately before. These Christians have much to stand **against**. The description of what they're up against runs to the end of **chapter one** from **verse 27** - "**Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, [28] and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. [29] For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, [30] engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.**"

It is so easy to miss what Paul really has in mind in these verses. If you read them lightly you will think Paul's concern is that these Christians not be overcome by the adversities set against them. They are to stand. They are to remain firm in the faith. And while Paul **does** want them to stand, it is clearly not the **goal** of his admonition to the Philippians.

He wants them to stand so they will be a "**sign**" to those who **see** them stand - "**....only let your life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, [28] and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God"(1:27-28).**

"If you stand firm," says Paul, "those watching will see they don't share the same solid footing you have. They will be convicted. They will start to fear judgment. And that's a good thing because they may turn to Christ by the strength they see in you - that in life and death - peace and persecution - you have something precious that can't be taken away."

But even this isn't quite the whole picture. Paul's concern isn't just that these Christians stand **individually**. The strength he's looking for isn't just the strength of their **personal convictions** - that they believe in Jesus Christ and nothing will make them change their minds. His concern is that they stand **united** with each other in highly visible **love**. He wants the "**sign**" seen by observers to be a **communal sign** - "**....so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel..."(27).**

The "**sign**" Paul wants the world to see isn't the life these Christians have in their hearts. That's very important, but only **indirectly**. Paul wants observers to see the life these Christians have **together**. In fact, this is **usually** what the New Testament has in mind when it addresses the subject of how the **light of the truth of Jesus Christ** shines in this dark world.

We usually think of the witness of the church as being tied to what is **said** in the pulpit or the Bible studies or perhaps even the altar call. But the **New Testament** almost never has this in mind when it speaks of the witness of the church to the world. The New Testament usually links the church's witness to the world with two things the world can't help but be amazed at. **First**, people who don't believe one bit of what we believe will still sit up and notice the way we respond to suffering and hardship we **don't** deserve. And **second**, they will notice the way we **lovingly bless our enemies**.

By far, most of the time, this is what is meant in the New Testament by shining our light into this dark world. Without this kind of lifestyle there is no witness to the **power** of the gospel even if you and I are handing out tracts twenty-four-seven. Our **words** are important because they tell the world **what** we believe. There is content to our faith. But our **unity with each other** - our **love for fellow Christians** - **all of them** - is what shows the world **what** he believe is **life changing and powerful**.

This is Paul's whole point in **verse 27- 28** - "**Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the**

faith of the gospel, [28] and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.

The sign doesn't function just because these Christians **stand**. The sign shines and points to Christ only as these Christians stand **together** - **"...in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side...."** (1:27).

Now, having set the stage, let's quickly work our way through the first four verses of chapter two:

1) **IF YOU'RE TRULY PASSIONATE ABOUT CHRIST THERE IS ONLY ONE SITUATION THAT SHOULD ROB YOU OF YOUR JOY**

Philippians 2:1-2 - "So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, [2] **complete my joy** by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind."

While the subject of joy is rampant in this letter, this is one of the few places where Paul talks about his **own** joy. And if read carefully, there is something very strange in what Paul says. He calls the Philippian Christians to **"complete"** his joy. They can **effect** Paul's joy greatly. They can **complete** it - which also means they can leave it **incomplete** - which means they can **diminish** its full potential.

This is amazing when you consider the things Paul has already mentioned in this letter that **couldn't** diminish his joy. He writes about being in prison without blinking an eye. He's happy he has a chance to advance the witness of Christ to the Roman guards. He talks about his possible execution and has the nerve to call it **"gain."** He tells of those who are slandering and robbing him of his reputation and says he's joyful that Christ is still being proclaimed.

Then, suddenly, his eyes can fill with tears if these Christians aren't living in loving unity. If there is anything that is stretching them **apart** instead of knitting them more tightly **together** Paul can't stand it. The skies turn gray for him. There is nothing else to make him happy. He can think about the **resurrection from of the dead** and the **Second Coming of Jesus Christ in glory** and **still** not be joyful if these Christians aren't walking in visible love for each other.

The question now is **why**. Why does this one issue of unity so effect Paul's joy that it will be **incomplete** if there isn't genuine love and unity in this church? The answer is simple and striking. This effects Paul's joy more than anything else because he cares about the **greatness and glory of Christ more than anything else**.

Let me try to explain. Paul doesn't just want to go to heaven when **he** dies. And he doesn't want to just have **his** sins forgiven. He wants **everyone** to know how great Christ is, and wants **everyone** to worship Christ, and then wants **everyone** to go to heaven. And the loving, visible, astonishing, durable unity of these Christians is the **sign** that will help point others to the utter uniqueness and splendour of Christ.

Do you see it? My loving you isn't an issue of whether or not you're lovable or whether you've been nice or rotten to me. My loving you is, first and foremost, an issue of whether or not I love **Jesus** and long for **His glory to cover all the earth**. And if that isn't happening it's a **sin** for me to feel joyful. I **ought** to mourn. I **shouldn't** be able to rest at night. The **glory of Jesus** is at stake.

And our durable, constant unitedness in love is the **sign** that will convict people everywhere of how wonderful Jesus Christ truly is. Jesus Christ is so wonderful to us we will gladly swallow all our pride and consider others - even our enemies - better than ourselves. We will honor others above ourselves. Christ's glory counts more than our rights.

That is what points to Jesus Christ. The world doesn't see this kind of love anywhere else. This is a world marked by **personal ambition, pride, and self-assertiveness**. People pursue their **own** rights. Between nations this manifests itself in **war**. In families it manifests itself in **marital breakdown** and a **redefining of the family**. In the world of commerce and business it manifests itself in **labor disputes and strikes**.

All of these are manifestations of **self, pride and greed**. None of these makes obvious the surpassing greatness of Christ. This is why Paul's joy is made complete when there is the display of the new life of Jesus **in the relationships in the body of Christ**. The **sign** finally has a chance to shine. People can see the difference Jesus makes.

2) **UNITY IN CHRIST JESUS DOESN'T MAKE US ALL THINK ALIKE. IT MAKES US ALL MIND THE SAME THING**

Philippians 2:2 - “....complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.”

“**Having the same love**” defines “**being of the same mind**.” We are not all the same. We think differently on different subjects. Sometimes we think **very** differently. But there is one thing we all “**love**” and one thing we all “**mind**,” so much so it **overrides** what would normally disrupt and divide.

We don’t all **think** alike. But we are all devoted to “**minding**” - **tending** - **being governed by** - one passion. We all care **more** about **displaying Christ** than protecting our **own concerns**. We follow Christ when such discipleship is **opposed** to our own emotional reactions of anger or bitterness or greed. We understand “**taking up our cross daily**” is just a New Testament way of saying we lay down all our rights to evening scores and protecting our image.

If you read this sentence as closely to the Greek as possible the rough translation would be something like this: “**Make complete my joy that the same thing you think, the same love having, as ones joined in soul, the one thing thinking**” (2:2).

That’s it exactly. There are **lots** of things which would divide if we were all **thinking** about those things. But we aren’t. We could all **remember** things done to us that would keep our hearts bitter and churning. But we aren’t thinking those things either. We aren’t thinking about these things because we love Jesus too much to grieve Him in thinking those things. We’re all busy “**the one thing thinking**.”

And the one thing is this. **How can we so deliriously, unreasonably, unexpectedly manifest love and grace to everyone in the church that those outside can’t help but know our love is supernatural and Christ-given?**

If I’m thinking about **me** this will never happen. If I’m in love with **Jesus** it can and must.

3) **“LORD, MAKE MY LIFE A SIGN OF YOUR POWER AND GRACE” - HOW THE WORLD CAN TELL IF I’VE BEEN TO THE CROSS OF CHRIST**

Philippians 2:3-4 - “Do **nothing from rivalry or conceit**, but in humility **count others more significant than yourselves**. [4] **Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.**”

Read those words over and over when you get a chance. They are the only measuring stick of whether you are growing in Christ. Not many are willing to pay the price for deep discipleship and conformity to Christ. We know this kind of spirituality is rare because Paul **tells** us it’s rare:

Philippians 2:19-21 - “I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. [20] **For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.** [21] **They all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.**”

When Paul says most people he knew were “**seeking their own interests**” (21), he doesn’t mean they were bank robbers. He means they were professing Christians (it almost sounds like fellow workers) who allowed their **own** concerns and their **own** rights to overrule their passion to please and exalt Christ. You can’t exalt Christ and cater to your personal agenda. Not ever.

Then Paul says Timothy’s devotion stood out very noticeably. He says Timothy had a love for these Christians that was rare. He couldn’t think of another person who cared like Timothy. **Why** did Timothy care and love so much? The answer fits in exactly with what we’ve been studying today.

Timothy cared for these Christians so deeply, not because they were loveable, nor because Timothy was just a gregarious person. Paul says Timothy cared for them so deeply because he was **seeking the interests of Christ** - **Philippians 2:21** - “**For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.**”

Because Timothy loved Jesus - I mean **really** loved Jesus - he was **thinking the one thing**. Paul says Timothy had that rare ability to ask, “**What would Christ be interested in accomplishing in my reactions in this situation?**” He was flying the flag of the difference Jesus makes. He was of one soul and mind with these people because that was what made Jesus look marvellous and powerful in a world full of strife and division.

This is how people know if we've been to the cross of Jesus. They can't **see** our forgiveness. But there **is** something they **can** see. We sing about it all the time when we celebrate our Lord's death. Maybe it's time to stop the music and think deeply about these familiar words:

***"When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride."***