

Philippians – Chapter 2 Verses

Last week we covered:

- Paul's love, gratitude, and prayers for the Philippian believers and their generous gift to him.
- His approval that as long as Christ is preached, regardless of the purity or impurity of motive, that's a good thing.
- We heard Paul's dilemma of to live is Christ but to die is gain.
- Suffering is a necessary component of serving Jesus.

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.

I'm going to go backwards on these two verses to, hopefully, help better highlight what Paul is saying here. He is writing about how the Philippian people can fulfill his joy. They can do this by being united in like-mindedness, having the same love, and being of one accord. Christian unity is a beautiful thing....when it happens. You can see how unity could be possible if we all thought the same way and loved Jesus the same way – sacrificially.

What gets in the way of this utopian concept? People. We've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. In other words, each person has a sin nature driving them to think and love exactly the opposite of what Paul is looking for from the Philippian people. Our sin nature wants us to think of and love only ourselves. It's pretty hard to love Jesus and others when we're too obsessed with loving ourselves.

So, how does a group of sinners who, while they are saved by grace, are fighting against their sin natures that seek to only think for themselves? What can bring people together to overcome their selfishness? Now, let's breakout the resources Paul is offering in verse one:

- If there is any consolation in Christ
- If there is any comfort in love
- If any fellowship in the Spirit
- If any affection in mercy

Each of these statements begins with "if." What's the significance of that little preposition? *If* means there may be something available to choose. In other words, there is a possibility of something that exists and is attainable. The Greek word for consolation is *paraklesis*, which can also be interpreted as calling near, comfort, exhortation, or the act of emboldening another. *If* you seek to combine these four components, you get being comforted in Christ and love through the fellowship in the Spirit, which springs forth an affectionate mercy.

Where I believe Paul is going with this opening is unity in Christ can only be accomplished *if* people are committed to their respective relationships in Christ. I've used the word sanctification several times in the last few weeks, and it is a life-long process of being set apart from our sin nature and being placed into our new holy creation in Christ. We are all being transformed into the image and likeness of Jesus. Should we choose to seek to dedicate living like these four bullet points display, we will be far more likely to unite in like-mindedness and love.

³ Let nothing *be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

In these two verses, Paul digs deeper and confirms the mindset of those who choose to live, be comforted, and love in the Spirit. His first warning to those who attempt to deepen their commitment to Jesus is to release or let go of their commitment to themselves. Our efforts are to not be done out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind to esteem others better than ourselves. Jesus said in Matthew 11:29, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” So, what Paul is saying is that we are to copy, or emulate, Jesus’ character of being humble.

To get more specific, we’re to develop the mindset of being a servant. I’ve been talking lately about the concept of being a bondservant – a lifetime of dedication and commitment to serve a master. The foundation of such a selfless dedication must be a heart that is humble and lowly. I won’t speak for each of you, but I’m not always humble and lowly. What gets in the way? My pride. My selfishness.

For me, the only way I can break these influences is to revisit the cross periodically. I see my Lord and Savior dying for me. I see what He gave up for the purpose of making it possible for me to be reconciled to the Father. I see Him making me a new creation and setting me on a path of my true purpose in this life. I see Him giving me the promise of eternal life at peace with Him. I look forward to the day when I don’t have to spend quite so much time at the cross. This hope isn’t because I will stop appreciating what Jesus did for me. My prayer is I won’t have to go back so often because I don’t need to as I’m resembling Christ’s lowliness and esteeming others above myself.

⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men.

For even the seasoned or life-long believer, taking time to consider what Jesus did for each of us is not just a good exercise but also an important one. The opening line of John’s gospel is, “In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Revelation 19:13 tells us Jesus is the Word of God. Therefore, Jesus is God. The entirety of salvation hinges on the truth that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. Why salvation is so perfectly tied to Jesus is for Him to be the only acceptable sacrifice for our atonement to the Father, He had to be the fulfillment of the requirements of the sacrificial lamb laid out in Exodus 12:5. The lamb had to be without blemish.

Being born sinless as a result of Mary’s immaculate conception from the Holy Spirit and living a sinless life, Jesus was the only one qualified to satisfy the requirement of being without blemish. As the Lamb of God, God the Father placed His stamp of approval on the acceptance of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross by resurrecting Him – defeating the curse of death not just *for* Him but also for every person who chooses to believe *in* Him. Therefore, Paul is correct in his statement in verse six that Jesus did not consider it robbery to be equal with God because He was, and still is, God!

For many years I struggled with what Paul was saying to the Corinthians in his second epistle, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (3:18) The part of this verse I was unsure about was this notion of going “from glory to glory.” In preparing for this teaching, I believe I now understand what this means. Jesus, before He became a human being, was in glory – at the right hand of the Father in heaven. When He ascended back to heaven after His resurrection, He returned to glory. He went from glory to glory.

When God reveals something to this hard-hearted and hard-headed sinner saved by grace and I actually get it, I've come to call these "2x4 moments." In other words, the Lord has to pull out a 2x4 board and whack me upside the head to get a truth through my thick skull. Others might call these revelations as "a-ha" moments. My 2x4 moment here on the phrase "from glory to glory" was what Jesus had to go through to get from His original glory to His return to glory.

You may have heard messages on the "dash." The dash is the line between the date of birth and the date of death on a tombstone. The dash represents the journey that person lived from birth to death. Substitute this dash concept with the "to" taken from the phrase glory to glory with the dash concept, and you find yourself thinking about Jesus' journey of going from glory to glory.

This is what Paul is alluding to in these verses. This is Christ's "to" in going from glory *to* glory. His journey was one of servanthood and sacrifice – complete selflessness. The Son of God went from glory to making Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a, wait for it... bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. Our finite minds cannot fully comprehend the magnitude of such a step down from being on the throne of God in heaven to becoming a helpless human baby born in poverty. This is going from the highest of the highest to pretty much the lowest of the lowest. Why in the world would Jesus do this? We read on.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient *to the point* of death, even the death of the cross.

So, Jesus has made Himself of no reputation by humbling Himself. I can't think of a greater humbling than going from the Son of God reigning in heaven to a human bondservant. Furthermore, He became obedient to the point of the death of the cross. Wait a minute. If Jesus was being obedient in going to the cross, that means He was following someone's instructions. You can't be obedient to something if there aren't commands in which to be obedient. For those people who wrongly want to place the blame of Christ crucified on the Jews, this verse puts a bullet hole in that thought process.

The instruction or command that Jesus was being obedient to came from His Father. This is a huge stumbling block for many non-believers. They hear this and ask, "Why would I would want to believe in a God who would send His own Son to die on a cross?" That's a very fair and reasonable question to ask – without the concept that there is more to life than this one. Without an eternal understanding, this complaint about God the Father sending God the Son to die is wholly legitimate. However, with the eternal concept, this opens the door to the consideration of the idea that there may have been purpose in Jesus' obedience.

What's that purpose? Love. First and foremost, there is the highest love possible, and that is within the triune Godhead. A pastor once wisely recommended not to spend too much time trying to understand the Holy Trinity – God the Father; God the Son; God the Spirit. This infinite relationship is not fully knowable to a finite mind. We are told to take it as both a mystery and a truth. Jesus' obedience to the Father was rooted in His love for the Father which comes from His complete trust in His Father's love.

While I wasn't in on this conversation, I'm speculating that God the Father, before Jesus left His throne and descended into a manger, laid out the salvation plan to His Son. I have fun thinking about Jesus' response to the Father when first hearing this plan. After learning the entirety of it, I imagine Him saying something like, "You want Me to do what?" or "What did I do to deserve this?" All fun aside, I don't believe for a moment that Jesus would respond like that. The love and trust He has for His Father was more than enough for Him to agree to the salvation plan.

But the love that He has for His Father was not the only love that drove His obedience to the death of the cross. That additional love was for each of you. God loves each of you because you are His creations. King David's Psalm 139:13-16 confirms this beautiful truth, "For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them."

God loves you. You are His creation, and He loves what He creates. You may not think you're very loveable at times. Should you ever start feeling like this, go to the cross and be reminded that while you were still a sinner, Christ died for you. He did this because He loves you.

⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

There will come a time, and I believe that time is coming soon, that Jesus will return – as promised. As opposed to His first appearance which came humbly and quietly, His second coming will be the exact opposite. Everyone will know He has returned. For the hardest-hearted nonbeliever, even he/she will drop to his/her knees and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Praise the Lord that each of you have done this and received the promise Paul outlined in Romans 10:9, "that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." This is a confession of salvation.

For the nonbeliever when Jesus returns, such a confession won't be for salvation. It will be for condemnation. There's no faith in believing what you see. Faith comes from believing in what you don't see. The people who don't believe in Jesus when He makes His triumphant return will be confessing they were wrong about Him. It will be too late for them.

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.

I spoke a couple of weeks ago about this concept of living out our faith life – working out our salvation with fear and trembling. As a reminder, the word fear Paul is using in the Greek is one of awe and wonder. It is not to be interpreted as to be afraid – especially of God. I believe one of Jesus' primary goals in His first visit was to dispel the notion that we should be afraid of God. If God is love, how can we be afraid of Him? This is why the Scriptures tell us that perfect love casts out all fear. We absolutely should be in awe and wonder of Him, but we have no need to be afraid of Him because fear causes torment and condemnation. There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

Some pastors and teachers use verse 12 as a motivator to do works for the Lord. They migrate from *work out* your own salvation to *work for* your own salvation. Invoking our teaching from Ephesians chapter 2:8, we are saved by grace through faith alone – *not* of works. It is the gift of God. These pastors and teachers are excluding the words in verse 13, "for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure." God does not save us and then abandon us. He gives us the Holy Spirit and continues working in us to give us the desires of our hearts. These desires are targeted at tapping into the gifts and abilities the Lord has given us.

These desires serve a purpose, or purposes. These purposes are for God's good pleasure. That may seem a little self-serving, but only if we have the wrong view of God's thoughts towards us. Jeremiah 29:11 reminds us of how the Lord is thinking about us, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope." I'm fully confident that the desires that God puts in my heart that are for His good pleasure are also the best possible way for me to live. They not only are for His good pleasure, but they are also for mine. I believe this because of what Jesus said in Matthew 7:11: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!"

¹⁴ Do all things without complaining and disputing, ¹⁵ that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

Starting in verse 14, Paul starts to fill in the blanks of what it means to work out our own salvation in fear in trembling. It's interesting, as well as convicting, that the first set of instructions are to do this without complaining and disputing. I would like to tell you that all my service to the Lord is done free of complaining and disputing, but that would make me a liar. Once again pulling in this notion of being a bondservant – one who has committed himself/herself to complete obedience to his/her Lord or master, there should be no place for complaining or disputing. If we're doing this, why did we sign up to be a bondservant?

Our service to God should be without complaining and disputing for two primary reasons:

1. When we complain or dispute when serving God, we are effectively questioning God's authority and goodness behind what He's asking us to do to serve Him and His kingdom. I'll just let that painful truth sit with you and let it run its painful course in your conscience – like it did mine.
2. There is a strong likelihood our complaining and disputing is not being kept to ourselves. We're probably verbally sharing our grumbling with others. What do you think that does to our witness – especially to the nonbeliever? You can hear them asking, "Why would I want to serve God if what I'm being asked to do will make me complain?"

Paul emphasizes my second point that we're to become blameless and harmless, children of God – we're to become shining lights. Our lights dim when we complain and dispute in service to God. Perhaps this is wrong of me, but when I see a child repeatedly being a brat, my mind goes to the parents and their qualifications. I know this isn't completely fair, but whether we like it or not, our children are a reflection of us. So, it is the same for us as God's children – we are a reflection of Him.

We see the shepherd in the Apostle Paul in verse 16. He's giving this counsel of not complaining but being shining lights to his sheep – the Philippian brothers and sisters. He's telling them of his rejoicing in the day when Jesus returns that he can present to Christ these shining lights in a dark world.

¹⁷ Yes, and if I am being poured out *as a drink offering* on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. ¹⁸ For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

In verses 17 and 18, Paul reminds them that his current imprisoned state is part of his sacrifice that he's willing to pay to demonstrate to them his faith is to be an example for them. Notice that he's not complaining about this sacrifice. He's rejoicing! He then encourages that they should rejoice with him. Celebrating or rejoicing with others is far more fulfilling than it is when you do it on your own.

I gave a presentation in my old job to the people who were working for me. I first showed a video clip of Tiger Woods winning the Masters. Yes, the crowd was excited, but he was by himself in his celebration. I then showed a video of when the US hockey team from 1980 beat the Russians. The way they celebrated together was so much more fulfilling. Paul's alone in his imprisonment, but he can find real joy in the thought that his Philippian flock is rejoicing in his acts of faith.

¹⁹ But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. ²⁰ For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. ²¹ For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. ²² But you know his proven character, that as a son with *his* father he served with me in the gospel. ²³ Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me. ²⁴ But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly.

Timothy was Paul's protégé – his mini-me. Paul is sending Timothy to them to get an update from them with the expectation that he will return to Paul and provide that update. The apostle then shares that he has no one in his life who is like-minded who will sincerely care for the Philippians state. Each of us is different. We think differently. We care differently.

Before I met and married Vickie, I was living life on the surface. I wasn't saved, and I wasn't living in reality. My beautiful wife is all about reality – the good, the bad, and the ugly. Now after almost 37 years of loving and living with her, I think differently – much more like her. I won't pretend to approach her level of depth of thinking, but part of why we love each other and get along as well as we do is we think a lot alike.

I can hear Paul's grief in this lament that he doesn't have someone who thinks about or cares about the Philippian people like he does. There's a loneliness that often comes with leadership. He confirms his words in his letter to the Romans that we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God in verse 21, "all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus."

In the world of shepherding, there is something called a hireling. Jesus spoke of this type of person, someone who seeks his/her own, in John's gospel, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep." (John 10:11-13)

Paul was a true shepherd – he completely identifies himself with his sheep. He rejoices with them. He grieves with them. This is what we should be looking for in a shepherd – in a pastor of a church. Praise God we have this in our spiritual Good Shepherd in Jesus.

²⁵ Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; ²⁶ since he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. ²⁷ For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

I mentioned last week in my introduction to this epistle that, as opposed to most of Paul's other letters which were instructional/correcting in content, this was a message of thanksgiving and love to the Philippians. They had put together a very generous offering for Paul, and they sent Epaphroditus to deliver it to him. Along the way to Paul, Epaphroditus became so sick he almost died. God mercifully healed him. Note Paul's love for this man in saying that God's merciful healing of Epaphroditus was also an extension of mercy to him.

In preparing this teaching and specifically this section of today's Scriptures, I found myself wondering why God heals some people, but He doesn't heal others. I don't have an answer to that. Why do seemingly anti-God people get healed while innocent children or beautiful believers don't get healed and suffer terribly and die? For me, this forces me into an effort to attempt to understand God's sovereignty. Let's take a look at a few Scriptures that speak to the truth that God is sovereign.

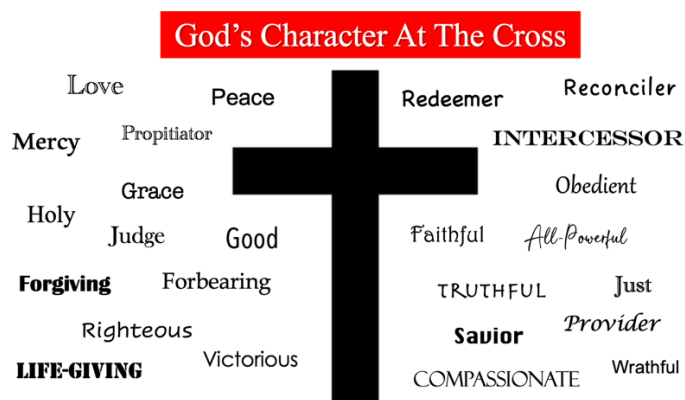
Psalms 103:19: "The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all."

Daniel 4:35: "All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?"

Job 42:2: "I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You."

This is why we must call Him God Almighty. Nothing and no one can stand against Him. If a nonbeliever was to simply focus on these verses and nothing else, I can see how that person might develop, at a minimum, a fear of God. In this case, the fear I'm speaking to is that of being afraid of Him. Let me share an aspect of His sovereignty – it's not fully knowable. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9)

While these verses clearly describe God as sovereign and that sovereignty is often a mystery, they only present a component of the totality of God's character. This is why we must try to read all of the Bible as it presents, as much as we can understand, a more complete picture of the Lord's character. I like to keep things simple, and I like pictures. For me, the most vivid and complete picture of God's character is found at the cross. I shared the below in this last Summer's teaching on Mark's gospel.



The Bible is often described as God's love letter to His creation. The cross is the exclamation point to the Lord's message that He loves you. If we factor in these other aspects of God's character along with His sovereignty, we can be more at peace with God being sovereign. This does not mean we'll understand everything about the Lord and what He does or doesn't do. However, if we choose to believe in and trust in the other components of His character such as love, goodness, kindness, and forgiveness, then we can learn to not let the things that we don't understand about Him overrule those things that we do understand and believe.

For me, I need to go through this process when I see suffering that I know God has the power to heal, but for reasons only He knows, He doesn't. Without the cross, I can easily see how people drift away from the Lord.

²⁸ Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful. ²⁹ Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; ³⁰ because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.

God did heal Epaphroditus, and he delivered the generous offering to Paul. The apostle is sending him back to the Philippians that they may rejoice that he is healed. One more time, listen to this shepherd's heart. Paul senses and feels the sorrow the people must have had over the news of Epaphroditus' illness. His sorrow for them will be unburdened when theirs is upon seeing him. Paul held this man in high esteem and asked that the Philippians treat him as such because he was willing to lay down his life for Paul.

The second half of verse 30 is curious to me, "to supply what was lacking in your service toward me." Now I may be wrong here, but I take this that Paul was expecting the Philippian people to provide for his needs. For him to say to a people that he deeply loved that the offering they were supplying to him was filling the gap of what was lacking in their service to him, that is pretty bold. Being completely transparent, at first when I read this, I was a little uncomfortable with Paul's mindset.

This brings up the topic of giving. Before I say one more thing, please, please do not interpret what I'm about to say as a pleading, prodding, guilt, or any other overt or covert attempt to force you to give to God or the church. This is not at all where I'm going with this. A component of any healthy church is to send people out into the mission field to share the gospel and minister to others. There are some instances where the person being sent out is expected to get a job and provide at least a portion, if not all, of their day-to-day needs while they are doing their missionary work.

There are those, though, that are sent out with no expectation of getting a job. Their efforts are to be 100% focused on sharing the gospel and being a witness to Jesus' love. For these missionaries, they are completely reliant on the generosity of those from the home church that is sending these people out. Therefore, when a church chooses to send out an individual, or individuals, who is/are going to be reliant on the church's giving to do God's work, there should be an expectation that the church will provide for their needs. To Paul's point in verse 30, if they are not meeting this expectation, their service to him is lacking.

Asking people to give money to someone they don't know for a work they don't understand or maybe even don't support is a real challenge. Now let's go back to where we started at the beginning of this chapter. What were Paul's words of encouragement to the Philippians? They were to be like-minded, having the same love. This is where a church's leadership must do its job in communicating the reason and the need to send people into the mission field that will require financial support. A failed effort on the initial and ongoing communications for missionary support will result in strife amongst the church members. When we're like-minded, good things will happen, and giving becomes less of a challenge.

Questions:

1. Why is it so hard to be like-minded as believers?
2. What goes through your mind when you attempt to think to what extent Jesus went through to make your salvation possible?
3. How do you reconcile God's sovereignty to His love for you?