

YOU CAN'T HAVE ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER

The Book of Philippians #11

We are in the book of Philippians. In chapter one Paul let us know that persecution for our faith was to be expected. Because of this Paul requested that we conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel for which we are suffering.

In chapter two Paul instructs the Philippians on how this conduct should be manifested. He begins by giving specific instructions regarding unity, humility and personal attitude, and provides the foundational truth for their obedience.

He speaks of Encouragement, Consolation, Fellowship, Affection, and Compassion and asks us to make his joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, and intent on one purpose. And all of this was to be manifested in the face of opposition and persecution.

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-2

“Therefore, if 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, maintain the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”

We spoke of being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, being united in spirit and intent on one purpose last week so I will not go into it again this week. Except to remind us that misunderstandings can arise over the simplest of things and we must guard our hearts against discerning things from only one perspective – our own. We must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger (James 1:19), and we must not be so quick to judge another servant of the same God whom we serve (Romans 4:4). Instead, as Paul says, we should strive, as far as it depends on us, to be at peace with all men (Romans 12:18).

But last week I also asked for help. I gave you an assignment to help me discern how our church is doing in light of Paul's admonition to the Philippians. I prepared four questions and handed them out to you for your feedback. They were:

#1 - Are the leaders, the teachers, the servants, and the members of our church of the same mind? Do we maintain the same love? Are we united in spirit and intent on one purpose?

#2 - When the worship service is led by different people, do they manifest the same purpose in their teaching and leading? Are they building on each other's thoughts and actions? Are they driving or headed in the same direction?

#3 - Do the teachings at The Refiner's Ministry complement each other or are they random teachings which reflect the thoughts and intents of individuals with no cohesiveness in their themes?

#4 - Do we as a church hear the same thing from the One Spirit and follow and lead accordingly in our teachings, leading, worship and personal actions?

So before I begin today's sermon I want to ask for your feedback. How did you answer these questions? How do you think we are doing in the areas of being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit and intent on one purpose?

(Feedback was positive. All agreed we are of the same mind and moving in the same direction. There are no conflicting messages between the various teachers and leaders. It was noted that we especially see the united movement of the Spirit during our Preparation Sunday services in the choosing of the songs, the sharing of Bible verses and the teaching.)

As we move back into our Scripture I want to continue our discussion because I think there is more to glean here than what we gleaned last week when we simply looked at the definitions of encouragement, consolation, fellowship, affection and compassion. I want to look at them again today but in a slightly different light because with our modern society's obsession with media and social networking, these and other related terms are thrown around with callous abandon causing them to be frequently misunderstood and misinterpreted. As a result they have come to mean less and less to the daily user.

The context in which these instructions were written was one of persecution and Paul is addressing how they should behave in the midst their suffering. However, as we shall see, the five things Paul mentions in chapter two are not limited to times of persecution. Encouragement, for instance, should be an everyday occurrence.

So let's look first at **ENCOURAGEMENT** (in Christ)

In 1 THESSALONIANS we read,

"We urge you brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone."

And in HEBREWS 13:13 it says that we should,
"encourage on another daily (or day after day)."

We should never grow tired of encouraging one another, particularly in light of persecution. But persecuted or not no matter how old or how young we are life can get discouraging. And maintaining purity and holiness in the midst of a perverse generation is difficult. We need to be encouraged to continue in the faith because we all grow faint of heart at times and discouraged at the lack of progress we are making and the resistance we encounter to our faith. Even those that appear strong can grow weary from the work and hungry for some encouragement. You'd be surprised at the amount of opposition that those who appear strong go through just to maintain their strength. A little encouragement can go a long way toward refreshing weary hearts and spirits, even for those whose discouragement is unseen and unspoken.

Paul said in his weakness he was made strong (2 Corinthians 12:10) and that he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him (Philippians 4:13). He was not unappreciative of the encouragement from others and instructed us to be those who provide encouragement to others. But he knew that true encouragement originates from Christ. And whatever encouragement we receive from Him is the same encouragement that we are able to give to others.

When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness and in the garden of Gethsemane, God sent His angels to strengthen and encourage Him in His ordeal (Matthew 4:11; Luke 22:43). If Jesus needed encouragement in the midst of His trials certainly we do too. Hebrews 1:14 says that angels are *"ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation."* And God

is asking us to go and be His ministering angels as well, to render service to those who will inherit salvation - our fellow believers – by encouraging and strengthening them for the journey that lies ahead.

Let's look next at **CONSOLATION** (of love)

In 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-7 we read of God's comfort.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.

But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort.”

The Greek word “paraklesis” translated here as “comfort” is the same Greek word translated as “consolation” in Philippians 2:1. So the God of all comfort is the God of all consolation. And He consoles us in our afflictions so that we will be able to console those who are in any affliction with the same consolation which we ourselves have received from God. Comfort and consolation are interchangeable words here.

If you have ever been ill for a long period of time or if you have ever lost a loved one then you know how needed comfort and consolation are in these times. As a result you are more sensitive to the need to console others who are going through similar difficulties. Comfort can take different forms for different people. Some may not need what you need when they are in the midst of their suffering. But all of us need to be comforted and consoled when going through difficult times. And what these verses from 2 Corinthians tell us is that the consolation that God provided to us is now available through us as a result of going through our own difficulties.

We should never feel at a loss for words when we seek to console someone. A hug, an arm around a shoulder, a meal, a clean house, clean laundry or a clean car can mean so much to someone who is spending all their energy coping with the curve ball life just threw at them. Simply taking care of the routine things for which they have no energy can speak volumes to those experiencing grief. They may not recognize your efforts at first because they are still in the process of surviving the loss. But as the fog begins to clear they will be grateful that you helped maintain their equilibrium in the midst of their changing circumstances.

I remember the time a friend came over and told me his wife had left him and wanted a divorce. I had very few words for him but even if I had a sermon ready he was in no mood to listen. He was melancholy and in shock. So I just sat down next to him and put my arm around him. We stayed that way for about half an hour. He needed comfort. He needed consoling. He needed someone to understand his pain. He needed a friend, not a lecture. So that is what I gave him. I gave him the consoling compassion of a friend.

Words can be uplifting and encouraging. Reminding believers of the promise of an eternal reunion can be a precious thing in the midst of the loss. Praying with them to receive the strength and comfort of the Holy Spirit can also be a good consoling tool. Helping them to give their sorrow to Jesus to carry can

also help relieve the depth of their sorrow while they maneuver their way through the maze of grief.

Words can be powerful tools to use to comfort and console others. But you don't always need words. You just need to show compassion and be willing to be a consoler (not a counselor but a consoler). But no matter what form it takes, the comfort which you received from God is now yours to give to others. As God consoles us in our grief, so we too console others in theirs.

FELLOWSHIP (of the Spirit):

Have you ever had difficulty with another believer? Have you ever come across someone who professed to be a Christian yet seemed to have a hard time manifesting the attributes of a fellow believer? Perhaps you have even been one of those causing the struggle. If you have ever wondered why this occurs you are not alone. Yes it is true that you shall know a tree by its fruit. But Christians do not always produce perfect fruit. Some even go through dry spells before any fruit is produced. But there is an underlying factor at work when fellowship among believers is strained. John tells us what it is in 1 John 1:6-7.

1 JOHN 1:6-7

“If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

John is saying that fellowship is not simply something that happens because people who claim to be Christians gather together and do the same thing. Yes, we can say we are in fellowship with one another but if we do not practice the truth, if we do not do what God requires of us, then we lie when we say we have fellowship with God's people. When we walk in the darkness of disobedience we cannot possibly walk in the light of those who are putting into practicing the word of God.

Fellowship comes from the Spirit of Christ dwelling within us causing us both to will and to do His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). If we do not desire and do what pleases God then it is not possible to have fellowship with those that do. It is walking in the light of Jesus that causes fellowship to occur.

Fellowship with one another is not possible without allowing the blood of Jesus to cleanse us from all sin. This cleansing may be available to all but if some do not take advantage of forgiveness or continue to walk in darkness, then, as 2 Corinthians 6:14 says, *“What fellowship has light with darkness?”*

There can be a fellowship of darkness and a fellowship of light. But there can never be a fellowship of darkness and light, between those who practice the truth and those who do not. If we walk in the darkness and say we have fellowship with the light, we lie and do not practice the truth. And no amount of saying it is or wanting it to be can change that.

I was once in a church where a family was constantly belittling the worship leader. They were very negative and worked to undermine his efforts, even writing a very vindictive letter to him expressing their disgust at something he had done. This couple also challenged the teaching of the pastor. When the husband was personally confronted he initially replied with humility. But the next Sunday the entire family left the church with no explanation. After their departure they continued to speak ill of its leaders even among those who remained in the church. Fellowship was not possible because repentance was not present and reconciliation was not sought. Darkness had arisen in their hearts and was choking out what little light they had.

So wonder no more why some who profess to be Christians feel out of sync with others who profess faith in Christ. Profession does not bring fellowship. Obedience brings fellowship. And if we are to maintain the fellowship of the Spirit each and every one of us must walk in the light of obedience. And when we falter in that obedience we must confess our sin so that the blood of Jesus can cleanse us from all unrighteousness. By walking in the light of His forgiveness and cleansing, fellowship is established and fellowship is maintained, because the Spirit of Christ is active among all.

AFFECTION

Last week I mentioned that the Hebrews regarded the place of human affection as the bowels. Like them we believe our emotions stem from our innermost being. We say these are genuine emotions if they “come from the heart”. Affection is the foundational emotion out of which tenderness, kindness, benevolence and compassion arise.

When Paul writes to the Thessalonians he speaks of affection in this way:

1 THESSALONIANS 2:7-8

“We proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives because you have become very dear to us.”

Paul says the affection which he, Silvanus and Timothy had for the Thessalonians was the same as a nursing mother had for her children. It was tender and nurturing. It was loving and sensitive and carefully handled. Their affection motivated them to tell the Thessalonians the gospel so their eternal destinies could be changed. It also compelled them to give their own lives in service to them. The focus of Paul, Silas and Timothy was on their children in the faith and they willingly kept that focus while among them. Like a mother who cares for her children they did not abandon them when difficulties came but rather drew near to them with great affection in order to strengthen and nourish them in the faith.

This affection is similar to that which the Lord has for Israel. We read about this in Deuteronomy.

DEUTERONOMY 10:14-15

“Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. Yet on your fathers did the Lord set His affection to love them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day.”

God created all things and all peoples yet he chose to set His affection on Israel. What this tells us is that God made a decision as to whom He choose to set His affection upon. And God gives us this same choice.

It is not that God does not love all people for we know that *“God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). And 1 John 4:8 tells us that *“God is love.”* He has even chosen to love the world through Christ so that all may find His favor. So it is not a matter of love, it is a matter of affection. And God, it says, set His affection on Israel.

We humans say with great frequency that we love chocolate or we love “Star Wars” or “Star Trek”. We love our new car, new home, new TV. We even love the Bulls or the Rams or the 49ers. We have our favorite blouse, or shirt, or suit or shoes which are made by our favorite designer. Because of our love for these things we affectionately wear their brands, their logos, their jerseys and their caps, buy

their corresponding movies and music, furnish their insides and polish their outsides, all because we are emotionally invested in what they bring to us and what they say about us to others. These things bring pleasure, esteem, even fellowship with fellow fanatics, and we love them for it. But while this may be a genuine expression of appreciation it is an affection that is misplaced in material things and not at all what God had in mind when he said we should be affectionate toward one another.

Godly affection is an emotion arising out of the depths of our being which then sets into motion a course of action. God set His affection upon Israel and led them out of slavery and into the Promised Land. God set His affection on us and rescued us from slavery to sin and promised us a place in heaven. Godly affection sets in motion a course of action.

That is why Paul expresses the type of affection he has for the Thessalonians in words that we can relate to. It is like a nursing mother tenderly caring for her own children. And it resulted in sharing the truth of the gospel and in sharing the struggles of their lives.

COMPASSION

Compassion is closely related to affection but it is affection expressed in a specific action. God gave us the first example of compassion in action when he rescued Lot and his family from Sodom. We read about this in Genesis 19:15-16.

GENESIS 19:15-16

“When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, ‘Up, take your wife your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the punishment of the city.’ But he hesitated. So the men seized his hand and the hand of his wife and the hands of his two daughters, for the compassion of the LORD was upon him; and they brought him out, and put him outside the city.”

God had great affection for Abraham and did not want to hide from him what He was about to do to Sodom, since he knew that Abraham’s nephew Lot lived in that city. When Abraham backhandedly asked for mercy for Lot and his family, God promised he would not destroy Sodom if ten righteous people could be found there (Genesis 18:17-33). Unfortunately there were not even ten righteous people living there so God destroyed the city, but not before rescuing Lot, who was either the only one or one of only a handful of righteous people in Sodom (2 Peter 2:7-8).

This story illustrates the compassion of God even in the midst of great evil and destruction. Yet it is not an isolated incident, for compassion is something of which the Lord has no lack. James says:

JAMES 5:11

“We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.”

Though Job suffered much loss, God never lost His compassion or mercy. When the time of suffering was over God restored Job’s health, family, and property, increasing all that he had twofold. Scripture says, *“The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning”* (Job 42:10, 12). His lovingkindness never ceases and His compassions never fail. They are new every morning. Great is God’s faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22-23)

Jesus demonstrated this same compassion multiple times when He healed the blind (Mathew 20:34),

cleansed the leper (Mark 1:41), taught those without a shepherd (Mark 6:34), fed the hungry crowds (Mark 8:2), and raised the widow's son (Luke 7:13). In each of these instances Scripture says that Jesus felt or was moved with compassion and then performed some act of compassion.

Compassion is something God gave the world through Christ. It is something which God continues to give to the world through His Spirit dwelling within us. God is compassionate by nature. And we can tap into this same compassion because Peter tells us that through Christ we have become partakers of this same divine nature.

2 PETER 1:3-4

“His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.”

Drawing from the well of our emotions may not always bring forth compassion. But drawing from the well of God's Spirit will because that is where true compassion dwells. And this compassion can be a compelling force for action when it is driven by the God given affection we have for one another.

Several years ago we received a phone call that someone we knew had been in a car accident near Boise, Idaho. We were just as shocked as anyone but what concerned us is that the family had no way of reaching their loved one. Information was coming in incomplete spurts and we knew the family may have to make life-saving decisions quickly. Fortunately we knew some believers who lived in Boise. So we called to ask them to buy a pre-paid cell phone and take it to the hospital so the injured member could communicate with their family. We would reimburse them as soon as we knew the cost.

This family did one better. Instead of buying a phone they gave their personal cell phone to the injured. And, because their daughter was a nurse, she volunteered to go to the hospital to apprise the parents of what was actually happening. All of this was done within the first hour after they received my call. This was compassion in action. And this continued for several weeks until the injured was able to be transported home. They did not know this person but they had compassion. They responded to our request because of their love for us. They also responded because the love of God within them compelled them to do what they could for a family in desperate need of compassion.

But compassion not only arises out of empathy or relatable circumstances. It also arises out of the undeserved compassion which God showered upon us in Christ. It is able to be given because it was first received.

COLOSSIANS 3:12 says,

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

God has given us His compassion to wear. It is the garment of salvation we now wear and it is the white robe that we soon will wear in heaven as a sign of our eternal and everlasting redemption. We love because He first loved us. We act out of compassion because He first acted out of compassion for us. Who better to understand compassion to the weak than those of us who have been shown compassion in the midst of our weakness?

So Paul tells us to put on this garment of salvation; to put on compassion, along with kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. It is His compassion shown through His forgiveness in Christ that allows and compels us to have compassion and forgiveness for others. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, a living demonstration of God's great compassion, so that we might find hope and eternal life. We are told to have this same compassion and forgiveness for others. Not because they deserve it any more than we deserved it. But what we have received we are told to freely give.

And this holds true of all five of these attributes of salvation – encouragement, consolation, fellowship, affection and compassion. All are a direct result of what we have received from Christ Himself.

Last year I had an uncomfortable experience with a fellow believer who was very unhappy with me and spent about 90 minutes telling me how bad I was and why. I could not comprehend why they were being so negative because it had come out of the blue with no warning. I sat there and listened to all the negativity without interrupting because they had asked me not to interrupt and I had innocently agreed to this stipulation. It was one of the hardest things I have had to do – to listen and not try and defend myself, even if I felt falsely accused – to listen and not get angry or incensed at the words I was hearing and the betrayal I felt coming from a friend and fellow believer. I am not Jesus nor was my life in danger, but I kind of felt a little like Jesus must have felt when Judas gave him the kiss of betrayal.

What made this even more painful was that I was not feeling convicted of anything I had done wrong. Rather I was feeling condemned for what that person perceived I had done wrong. (We talked about perception last week and how wrong we can be when we see things from our limited point of view.) I have enough experience to know the difference between the conviction of the Holy Spirit and the condemnation of the flesh and what I was receiving was pure condemnation.

The only thing holy that was present in that meeting was the power of God's Spirit holding back my tongue, my anger and my disappointment. The One who was giving me the ability to listen and carefully evaluate what was going on while it was going on, was the same One who was keeping me calm in the midst of the storm. It was the power of God's Spirit living within me. And I clung desperately to it during every moment of that conversation.

Nearly a year later I am still getting over some of the effects of that conversation. But what I was convinced of at the time was this. It is Satan's purpose to steal and destroy, to divide believer from believer and to foment discord among them. I may not have agreed with the other person's opinion of me but I was not going to allow Satan to divide the body of Christ. I would not allow them to have any kind of foothold in my life or in the church for which I was responsible.

So I went to God and asked for His compassion and understanding for me and for the offending party. I also asked for the strength to forgive and to persevere in the relationship. I still had affection for this person but it was mixed with pain so it was not easy to be with them without being both positively and negatively stirred.

Yet there were several verses that kept coming to mind and these are the ones I clung to:

“(Jesus) was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). Jesus knows what it is like to be misunderstood and rejected. He is very well acquainted with grief. I can go to Him with my sorrows because He understands them;

“Cast all your anxiety upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). God cares about what I care about. He is concerned about the things I am concerned about. He does not want me to be anxious about anything, no matter how uncertain I have been made to feel. I know that I can cast all of these anxieties upon Him and He will help me to bear up under the weight of them.

“Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world” (1John 4:4). There is no power on earth greater than God who lives in me. Nothing that lives in this world has the power to overcome me. God is greater than any hurt, disappointment, or lost friendship.

“Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). If the devil is in the midst of this he must be resisted. Even if he simply wants to use this he still must be resisted. He cannot stay when I resist. He can never be a permanent resident in my life. He can only be a visitor.

“Forgive one another just as God in Christ also has forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32). My emotional reaction may vary from moment to moment but the reaction of my will must be in line with Scripture. If Jesus forgave me, and if Jesus forgave those who spitefully used him, then I can do no less. Obedience must supersede feelings. I must forgive.

A few other verses also helped me to put this incident in perspective.

EPHESIANS 6:12 says,

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

And Paul says in 2 CORINTHIANS 2:10B-11

“If I have forgiven anything I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.”

It helps to be aware of Satan’s schemes and not ignorant of them so that we do not fall victim to them. Knowing that this was a bigger spiritual battle than it was a personal one certainly helped me in this instance. I was compelled to forgive by the Spirit which resided within me. And I was compelled to fight against the enemy’s plan to divide us by this same indwelling Spirit. Sometimes compassion and forgiveness go hand in hand. As the old song says, *“You can’t have one without the other.”* (“Love and Marriage”, words and music by James Van Heusen and Sammy Cahn, lyrics © IMAGEM U.S. LLC)

This is what Paul says in Philippians 2:1 which takes us right back to where we started.

PHILIPPIANS 2:1 (NIV)

“Therefore, if 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, maintain the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”

Sometimes it is hard to be of the same mind, to maintain the same love, to be united in spirit and intent on one purpose when it seems we are headed in different directions and fellowship is being broken. But God requires this of us. And we must do all we can to maintain what God has so freely given us through His Son.

As I close I want to leave you with this Scripture because it seems to sum up what I have been talking about this morning.

COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

“As those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”

The key to our unity is to let the peace of Christ rule in each of our hearts and the word of Christ to richly dwell within each one of us. From His peace and His word comes our unity. From our will and desire comes our obedience. “You can’t have one without the other.”