

COMPLETE MY JOY STAYING UNITED

(Don't Disrupt What Is Dearest to the Heart of Jesus-the Unity of His Church)

Philippians 1:27-2:5 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Today, God has led me to preach on the one great danger of every healthy church. It is the danger of all the people of God who are in dead earnest for Jesus, who are zealous for the Lord, whose beliefs are right on, who are orthodox in every respect, and whose enthusiasms and eagerness are to follow Jesus. The danger is that God's people who love Him, will quit loving each other and will get crossways with each other, that they will collide, and that they will quit being honey bees, and start being stinging bees, that we will be willing to break God's heart in what Jesus prayed in His high priestly prayer, "that we all would be one," John 17: 20, "just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one so the world will believe that the Father sent Jesus." Pastor John MacArthur was recently asked, "What do you hate most in the church and what do you fear the most?" His response was, "What I hate the most is apathy, indifference the things of the Lord, to holy truth. What I fear the most is discord, disunity, conflict, and division. Beloved, I know the apostle Paul felt the same way. Every time Paul wrote to a church, in 9 of his 13 epistles, he brought up the ominous enemy of disunity. In Romans 12: 16, Paul wrote, "Be of the same mind/live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight." To the church in Corinth, Paul wrote in I Cor. 1: 11, "I appeal to you, brothers, by the Name of our Lord Jesus, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment." Then Paul ended his second epistle in II Cor. 13: 11, saying, "Be like minded/agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you."

To Galatia, Paul wrote, in Gal. 5: 15, "If you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed, by one another." To Ephesus, Paul wrote in Eph. 4: 13, "that we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God." We are preaching on his letter to the believers in Philippi. To Colossae, in Colossians 3: 13-14, Paul wrote, "Bearing with one another, and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so must also forgive. And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." To Thessalonica, Paul wrote in I Thess. 4: 9-10, "Now concerning brotherly love, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more." In II Thess. 1: 3, Paul adds, "We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing."

One of the best things I did in preparation for this message was to listen to Pastor Nathan Brasington, for he truly pastored the flock, on August 7th, Sunday evening. I encourage you all to listen to his message again on Sermon Audio. I took notes as I listened to his awesome message on John 17. Jesus prayed that we all would be one even as the Trinity is one. Let me quote Pastor Nathan. He asked the questions, "Are we loving each other like the Trinity does? Do we delight in each other as the Trinity does? Do we honor each other like the Trinity does? Do we count each other

as greater than ourselves as the Trinity does? Do we submit to each other as the Trinity does?” He added, “Pray for God to help us love each other, to forgive each other, and to give grace and mercy to each other the way God has given them to us.” Then ending his message, he said, “Someday, with God’s triune love controlling us, we will be back a Garden where sin cannot enter with our Holy God with His Holy people, in His holy place.”

As we come to our text to the church in Philippi in Philippians 1:27-2:5, remember that Paul was writing as a prisoner in his first imprisonment in Rome. He didn’t know whether he would live or die. When this good church in Philippi heard about his situation, their hearts were broken. It seems the immediate occasion for Paul to write to the church in Philippi, was to say, “Don’t worry about me. I am rejoicing in prison. That’s why this epistle is about joy from front to back. Remember, the church had sent one of their best encouragers, Epaphroditus, Phil 2:25-30 to go to Rome and minister to Paul in prison. With Epaphroditus, the church send a sacrificial gift, and Paul wrote in chapter 4 to thank the church for the gift. Paul also sent Epaphroditus, their ambassador to him, back to them, as he almost died in ministry to Paul, so Paul sent him back before he might have died. Paul said, “He was indeed near to death, for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in their service to him. But the epistle is chucked full of exhortations to “rejoice always, and again I say, rejoice,” and to pray and praise with joy. In this epistle Paul used the word “joy” or “rejoice” 19 times. Yet in our text, the word joy is only used once in Phil. 2: 2, as Paul said, “Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord, and of one mind.”

Paul gives no doctrinal instruction in this book, for there was no sign of doctrinal error. There is no mention of immorality. What a quality group of believers who were devoted, consistent, doctrinally sound, but lurking in the church were the beginning evidences of a deadly snake with venomous poison. The deadly snake of disunity is evidenced as lurking in the shadows, and this issue was and should be not only a great concern for Paul but for us all. In chapter 1: 27, Paul states, “that I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel.” In chapter 2:2, Paul calls the church to be of the same mind, the same love, in full accord, and of one mind. In Phil 3:1-2, Paul says, “Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord...Look out for the dogs—these were the Judaizers trying to divide them insisting Gentiles must be circumcised. And in Phil. 4:1-2, Paul takes on the beginning of two sides in the church, saying, “I entreat Euodia, and I entreat Syntyche to get along/to agree in the Lord...help those women...who have labored side to side with me...whose names are in the Book of Life.” Paul’s book full of joy is yet, as Jesus’ high priestly prayer, a plea for unity. In our text, Paul gives us the key to joy in church leadership—which is godly unity, and Paul gives us a pattern for having godly unity in our church too. My constant prayer as your pastor for this blessed church is that we will be one, and that no man, woman, boy, or girl will seek to tear asunder what God has joined together in our church, in our homes, in our marriages, and in our relationships. What is this divine pattern of unity our church and every true local church needs?

UNITY COMES AND REMAINS WHEN OUR MANNER OF LIFE IS LIVED IN A WAY THAT IS SUITABLE TO THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. (I.) Phil. 1:

27, says, “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.” The old English word for manner of life is conversation is the root of our word, polite. It is **politeuomai** and it means how we behave in our walk and talk as Christian citizens of our heavenly kingdom. This polite Christian walk is a walk of (2) **consistency**, not just for show, but 24/7. It is a walk of (b) **cooperation** from which we get our word team athletics, “with one spirit and with one mind.” The Greek is **sunathleo**— meaning to strive with, or to be involved in a team activity requiring cooperation, such as a relay race. It is also a walk and talk of (c) **confidence**. Notice verses 28-30, because Paul calls us to confidence in the face of opposition. He wrote, “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. 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, engaged in the same conflict in that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.” This consistency, cooperation, and confidence in unity needs to be defined also as what it is not.

Biblical unity is **not uniformity**. It is not everyone in the same uniforms, using only one Bible version, and separating from anyone that is not point blank, just like us. Uniformity is an extreme form of legalism and sets us apart from walking in grace. Biblical unity is **not forced conformity**; it is not a show of force. Many a church has been known to see which side has the most votes and then cursing the darkness on the other side and casting the other side out. Forced conformity is simply war, or a war game in which believers, apart from Holy Spirit direction seek to prove that they will with Peter, take out their swords. Jesus pleads with us as He did with Peter, “Put up your sword into its sheath.” God wants us on the same side, “His side,” v. 30 -- “in the same conflict” not against each other, but against the enemies’ tactics. Biblical unity is **not nonconformity**. Many times, in God’s church, we get sideways with each other, and we refuse in pride and obstinance to agree with one another. This breaks God’s heart. Biblical unity is **not self-centered deformity and enormity**. A few examples of such disunity are these kinds of words, “Step outside, and we’ll settle this. Go ahead; have your own way, but I’m out of here. Try that once and you’ll wish you hadn’t. I don’t have to listen to you another second. Get out. Go ahead, give me your best shot, and I’ll make mincemeat out of you. If you’re staying, I’m leaving.” No, a thousand times no! Paul said in II Cor. 10: 4, “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, or of the flesh, but have divine power to destroy strongholds.” 2ndly,

UNITY COMES AND REMAINS WHEN WE OBEY THE

COMMANDMENTS OF THE WORD OF GOD. (II.) Notice the commandments in our text. (1:27) “Stand firm, (2:2) Complete my joy, (2:3) Do nothing from rivalry, (2:3) Count others more significant than yourselves, (2:4) let each of your look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others, (2:5) and have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” Joy, unity, and obedience are not competitors. They are not contradictory. They don’t fight each other. Obedience doesn’t squelch joy, but rather it brings joy to fullness. Let me tell you a last Friday illustration of how a lack of obedience brings not unity and joy, but chaos, grief, pain, sorrow, and terrible consequences. In Oklahoma, last Thursday, a man with a great job, the superintendent of a large construction company, had a wife who was running

around, going out til' late each night, and not coming home until he was asleep in bed. This man I will call Edward, his real middle name, took his gold and silver out of his safe, 31 pounds of silver bullion, pockets full of gold, and hundreds of hundred-dollar bills, and left his wife, fed up with her and his life. Now this man is a professing believer and God's word says in I Corinthians 7:10-11, "The wife should not separate from her husband, but if she does, she should remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to the husband should not separate from or divorce his wife."

Edward left Oklahoma on his motorcycle and headed for a relative's home in Eugene, Oregon. Just west of Superior, on I-80, he was following a truck with some kind of liquid that is poison or irritating. In spite of a face shield on his motorcycle, a mist of something awful was emitting from the truck ahead of him, and his eyes began to fog up. He could barely see. Up ahead, there was in the one lane traffic under construction—both ways, a dip with gravel in the road. Edward hit it and rolled his motorcycle. His bike was totaled. It ripped part of his pants into at the right knee, which was bleeding and apparently broke something in his foot. The police were called, contacted his wife, and boss, and the boss sent a small plane to pick Edward up and take him back to his wife. Edward said to me, "I read the signs the way I saw them, and not as God saw them." Then he looked at me and said, "Use my story to help someone not do what I have done, run away from my vows, my wife, my job, and my, has God ever stopped me." Joy, unity, and obedience are not competitors or contradictory. Thirdly,

UNITY COMES AND REMAINS WHERE GOD'S PEOPLE ACT AND RESPOND BASED ON WHAT THEY HAVE IN CHRIST. (III.) Notice Phil. 2:

1. Before I read this verse, be aware that Greek scholars agree this if clause is in what they consider the first-class conditional form, which means, that the best translation should not be if, but since. Dr. Ligon Duncan thus understands this to be saying, "Since there is encouragement in Christ, since there is comfort from God's love, since there is participation with us by the Holy Spirit, and since there is God's affection and sympathy, be unified. This means that the encouragement of Jesus coming alongside to help us by His Holy Spirit, is our motive for striving for unity. Paul is saying in essence, "Because you all have received such continual gentle encouragement, exhortation, counsel, and help from Jesus since the moment of your salvation, since you have been given so much, doesn't that spur your on to give back to Jesus that which is precious to His heart? Are we so ungrateful after all God has given us, that we will take from Christ, take, take, take, take, take, take, take, take, but never give back to Jesus? Beloved when we become divisive, and we strive for sides to win, for disunity to reign, this is a terribly ungrateful response of a believer to our most personal relationship with Jesus.

When we choose disunity, we are not necessarily violating our creed, but rather when we become divisive, we are literally violating the intimacy of our relationship with Jesus. We are ignoring and dishonoring Jesus' high priestly prayer before He died for us on the cross. After all Christ has given to us, would we stubbornly refuse to give back to Jesus what is most precious to His heart? Are we so ignorant of all God's grace in our lives, are we so unstimulated by the outpouring of God's encouragement to us that we would sin against Jesus' love? Disunity is not a sin against the church primarily, or a sin against doctrine, or against moral law. When we choose to separate

ourselves from each other, it is a sin against our relationship with Jesus. It is a sin of ingratitude disregarding Jesus' heart for His church. 4thly,

UNITY COMES AND REMAINS WHEN WE COMPLETE JESUS' JOY AND OUR PASTOR'S AND ELDER'S JOY WHICH IS CHURCH UNITY.

(IV.) Listen to Paul. He is not abusing this church, battering them, hammering them, pounding them, or threatening them. He is just echoing the joy of Jesus, and speaking for every spirit-filled pastor saying, "Complete my joy." This was the plea of Paul's heart. Can we receive all Christ has given us, remembering before He died for us, His prayer for unity, and not give back to Jesus and to our leaders what is most precious to Jesus and to all our hearts? How treacherous it is to violate the heart of Jesus, to kiss him like Judas, while planning an act of treachery, turning our heel on our Savior. How do we complete Paul's joy and Jesus' joy—Hebrews 12:1-2? As Jesus left heaven, emptying Himself of His rights as the divine Son of God, and taking on the form of man, there are four ways we empty ourselves. How can this happen?

We must empty ourselves by being of the same mind. (1) This is **mental unity.** to be united with each other in what we think, by only thinking as the scriptures teach us. This means surrendering our preferences and our seemingly wiser ways. For us, this can be our Gethsemane, to say, "Not my will, but yours be done, Lord Jesus." Opposing mindedness undermines marriage and church unity. Would we turn our back, like Jonah, on God's call to our Nineveh, biblical unity, and set sail in the opposite direction? As in an orchestra, we don't go off on our own, but we watch our director, and play only the parts on our score. When we follow Jesus, our conductor, the result is not melody, but harmony, a symphony. Mental unity is not that we never have opposing thoughts. God allows us to have individuality and style, but there is not symphony, unless we are all playing the same song. Even one musician refusing to follow the conductor, is the death of a symphony. **We must empty ourselves by having the same love.** (2) This is **moral unity.** This is Jesus new commandment in John 13: 34-35. Moral unity is not only unity of thinking, but unity of feeling, unity of affection. One person is a church who refuses to love or receive love, is violating the heart of Jesus.

We must empty ourselves by being in full accord or united in spirit. (3) This is **mutual unity.** Mutual unity is two hearts beating together in perfect key. It is the symphony of the spirit. Divorces are all about ignoring the heart of God to help us to keep mutual unity. The moment we close our ears, our hearts, or our minds to listen to each other, in marriage, or to each other as brothers and sisters in the church, we are choosing to have a mutual divorce. We are on the edge of a terrible cliff. When we put our heads down, cover our ears, close our eyes, shake our heads, and say, "There you go again, we have chosen war—we have in opposition to Jesus, taken our swords. **We must empty ourselves by being intent on one purpose, or of one mind.** (4) This is **mentored unity.** Paul is using his very imprisonment with the church in Philippi; he is pulling out the stops now, saying, "Let me rejoice in shackles because you have guarded your unity of one mind and one purpose. I quote Vance Havner as I once have before. He said, Christians are frail, but when they stick together, like snow, they can stop traffic. I pray, "Lord, let us live from day to day, in such a self-forgetful way, that even when we kneel to pray, our prayer will be for others, until as Jesus prayed in John 17, people look at us at Rock Springs EFC and are drawn to receive Jesus. Amen