

**Conducting Ourselves in a Manner Worthy of the Gospel
(Unity and the Church)
Philippians 2:1-4
Part One**

I am glad to be back with you. I have missed the encouragement I receive from you. Certainly there are times when I have experienced disappointment in our church but the encouragement I receive is far greater.

I am encouraged by our care and concern for one another as with the memorial service for Harold Thorsteinson, and what people in the family said. Terry and Kim Riley will be leaving us this week to pastor a church in Texas. It will be hard for us to see them go and I also believe it will be hard on them to leave. I am truly encouraged by the level of care and love that exists in this fellowship.

I am encouraged by our commitment to the Word. We have wonderful teachers who are committed to studying and communicating God's Word.

I am encouraged by the many that are sharing their faith. There are decisions that I have heard of since I returned back from my vacation.

We are not a perfect church but there are a lot of wonderful things that the Lord has blessed us with and it certainly should not be difficult for us to be greatly encouraged by all that we see. We could very easily take all of this for granted, believing that we will always be encouraged by this fellowship. We need to understand that this is in no way guaranteed. Even churches which are presently thriving can very quickly deteriorate into something that, rather than serving as a source of encouragement for its members, can very rapidly become a source of incredible grief.

The most likely source of this grief in a church is internal conflict between its members. No matter how healthy our church might presently appear, no matter how encouraging our present relationships might be, there are no guarantees that it will continue. Even in very healthy, strong churches.

Certainly Paul understood this. Throughout his letters to the various churches we see him continually exhorting them to strive to maintain their unity. And we see this same emphasis in his letter to the Philippians. Even though the Philippian church was a strong church, a healthy church, Paul was very aware of the danger that constantly was lurking at the door of any church in respect to disunity, no matter how strong that church might be.

Let me ask you, how strong did Paul consider the Philippian church? How healthy did Paul consider the Philippian church? Paul considered it extremely strong. Paul considered it extremely healthy. And because of this, Paul was tremendously encouraged by them. I am sure you remember what Paul has already shared with us from the book of Philippians concerning his feelings about the Philippians. What did **Phil. 1:3-5** say "**I thank my God in all my**

remembrance of you, (4) always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, (5) in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.” The church at Philippi was an extremely strong church, a healthy church and a source of encouragement to Paul. But Paul was not naive. He knew that all of what was bringing him such great joy in the church of Philippi could very quickly evaporate if disunity were somehow to enter into the church. And there was in fact that very real possibility at Philippi. We see the potential for this lurking at the door of the church of Philippi in **Philippians 4:2-3**. Listen to these two verses **“I urge Euodia and I urge Synteche to live in harmony in the Lord. (3) Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”** There was a conflict between these two women who were of some prominence in the church and Paul was not about to let it fester at Philippi. He understood the possible consequences of this for the fellowship that he had found so much personal encouragement in. He wants this problem to be addressed and to be addressed successfully. But how would these two women come to the place of harmony? How could this conflict between these two women keep from spreading in the church at Philippi? It has a lot to do with understanding **Phil. 2:1-4**, the passage we will be studying this weekend.

Let us read these verses, **“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, (2) make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. (3) Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; (4) do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”** Paul in these verses is making a plea for unity.

How does this plea for unity fit into the larger context? Hopefully you remember that we are considering what it means to “conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” This theme was introduced to us in **Phil. 1:27** and continues through **Phil. 2:18**. The first element of conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel was “standing firm in one spirit, with one mind.” If we are going to make a claim to living the Christian life as it should be lived, it must include doing this. But what does it mean to stand firm? It means that we will first of all **“strive together for the faith of the gospel.”** We saw this at the end of **V. 27** and it also involves us being **“in no way alarmed by our opponents”** which we saw in **V. 28**. In other words, all of us as God’s people need to be committed to getting the gospel out no matter what the difficulties might be that we would encounter. If we do this we can consider ourselves as “standing firm.”

We are asking the question, “How does the plea for unity in Phil. 2:1-4 fit into the larger context?” Phil. 1:27-30 gives us the first element involved in conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Phil. 2:1-4 gives us the second element involved in conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. The second element of conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel is our pursuit of church unity. If we are going to make a claim that we are conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, all of us not only need to be standing firm in one spirit with one mind trying to get the gospel out no

matter what, but all of us also need to be striving for church unity. If we would think about this for a moment I believe you can see how these two elements are related. In order for a church to effectively stand firm for the faith of the gospel, they first of all must be united (Philippians 1:27 - 2:4).

Over my 28 years at Valley Bible Church we have had two major internal conflicts. One occurred approximately 25 years ago and lasted for approximately 3 years. And the second occurred about 12 years ago and lasted approximately 2 years. Certainly God is faithful to his promise and works all these things together for good and we became a stronger church for having passed through it, but I can very confidently share with you that our ability to stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel during those two periods of time was impossible as a church family when we were divided and characterized by internal conflict.

Could we as a church have said during those times that we were conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ? No! We could not! Why? Because our church was not standing firm in one spirit with one mind for the faith of the gospel. Most of our energies, most of our attention was being focused on addressing internal conflict and healing the wounds within our own fellowship.

These times of internal conflict were not encouraging, they were difficult times for all those who were personally touched by these conflicts. You cannot go through something like this as a church and not be forever impressed with the importance of church unity as a necessary element for a church being able to stand firm for the gospel of Christ.

In order to be described as a church who is conducting themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, we must not only stand firm for the faith of the gospel, we must also be striving as a church to be united (Philippians 2:1-4).

Hopefully we all have an appreciation of the danger of discord in the body of Christ. But how can we keep ourselves as a church from falling into this trap? What is helpful is to understand that Philippians 2:1-4 is not simply a plea for unity but also a formula for unity.

If we value church unity I believe it will be extremely important for us to understand the instruction that Paul gives to us in Phil 2:1-4. I will begin by breaking down Paul's plea for unity into several parts.

We will begin by considering the motives for unity within the church. In other words, why should we be so concerned about striving for church unity? Many different answers could be given but this weekend we will begin by simply looking at the reasons Paul gives to us here in Philippians 2:1-2. Let us go back to the passage that we are now beginning to consider and read the first two verses, **“If therefore 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, (2) make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in the spirit, intent on one purpose.”** Paul is saying, “if these things are true” then be united.

What does Paul mean when he uses the word “if.” In the Greek language there are four different Greek constructions of suppositional clauses that begin with “if.” All biblical scholars agree that the “if” in Philippians 2:1 is a first class condition and therefore should be understood as “since” or “because.” In other words, Paul is in essence saying, **“Because there is encouragement in Christ, because there is consolation of love, because there is fellowship of the Spirit, because there is affection and compassion, (2) make my joy complete and be united.”** Phil. 2:1 is clearly dealing with are motivations for unity.

My hope this morning is that the Lord will use this message to help motivate us in such a way that we would strive for unity in our church even if this means that it involves a great deal of our time, energy and resources. Even if it exposes us to difficult and perhaps unpleasant interactions. But hopefully you would be, as a result of our study of Philippians 2:1-4, more committed than ever to strive to maintain and promote unity in the church even if it might not be easy or comfortable for you. What is the first reason that Paul gives the Philippian church in this section of scripture for being united?

We need to strive for church unity because of the encouragement we receive in Christ. Let us read **Phil. 2:1 “If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ**” What is Paul referring to when he speaks about encouragement? The root meaning of the word Greek word (PARAKLESIS), which is translated “encouragement,” is “a call to one’s side.”

When we came to Christ by faith we were joined to Christ. We were placed into Christ. We were immersed in Christ. This is why we are said to be in Christ. What does **1 Cor. 12:12-13** tell us? **“For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. (13) For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”** Because we have been joined to Christ, he is always with us. What were the last words that Jesus spoke to his disciples at the end of the book of Matthew just prior to ascending to the Father? **“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (19) Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”** As these disciples were being sent out into the world with gospel of Christ. Do you believe that this message of his continued presence with them was meant to be an encouragement to them? And the answer would have to be yes!

Why would it have been such an encouragement to them? Because they were eye-witnesses to his power over all things, even including the grave itself. When you have someone alongside of you like this it is very encouraging. Do you believe that Christ is with you today as you relate to your spouse, to your children and grandchildren, to your friends, neighbors and enemies? Do you believe that Christ is with you today as you encounter various difficulties and hardships? Do you believe that he is with you in the midst of your questions and uncertainties? If you are a child of God, the answer is absolutely!

I am sure many of you have heard the poem entitled “Footsteps in the Sand.” I believe that this

Valley Bible Church
3347 West Avenue J
Lancaster, California 93536
www.valleybible.net

particular poem picks up very well the essence of what is being conveyed in the phrase “if there is any encouragement in Christ.”

One night a man had a dream. He dreamt he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand: one belonging to him, and the other to the Lord. When the last scene of his life flashed before him he looked back, at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times of his life. This really bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it: “Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you’d walk with me all the way. But I noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life there is only one set of footprints. I don’t understand why when I needed you most you would leave me.” The Lord replied “My son, My precious child, I love you and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.”

Why should we strive as a church to remain united? In light of all the encouragement that we have received in Christ, this is what we should want to do. Why should we as a church family strive to be of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose? Why? Because of his continuing help and assistance to us in every situation of life.

Jesus is with us always and this reality should not be devalued by our unwillingness to strive to do those things which are pleasing to Him. And one of the things that is most pleasing to Him is that we commit ourselves to remaining united.

Why should I be willing to work at trying to get along with you? Why should I endeavor to become closer to you and more aligned with you in what we are thinking and what we are doing? Because Jesus, who is my constant companion to encourage me in every situation of life, wants me to. If I choose to remain separated from you in thought, in deed, or in attitude either through indifference, personal preferences, prejudices or spite, I am demonstrating myself to be totally ungrateful in respect to all the encouragement I receive from Christ by virtue of the fact that I am in Him.

Now listen very carefully. Christians need to see their pursuit of unity as a response to Christ’s very gracious encouraging relationship with them. Obedience should not be so much about keeping the law as much as it is about pleasing Christ (Gen. 39:9).

In fact, all obedience should be looked at as an expression of gratitude to Christ more than as a personal victory. How did Joseph respond to the wife of Potiphar when she was attempting to get him to have an immoral relationship with her? He says in **Gen. 39:9**, “**How then could I do such a wicked thing and experience a personal defeat.**” No, rather he says, “**How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God.**” Joseph’s relationship with God was such that he could not fathom performing an act of immorality.

CONCLUSION

May God give us the grace to see his presence in our lives. May God give us the grace to see his hand of mercy upon our lives. May God give us the grace to see his loving compassion upon our lives. If we can see the Lord in our lives in these ways then obedience is not burdensome but rather a source of wonderful joy.