**CHRISTIAN UNITY**

**Pastor Mike Thompson / Fish Lake Chapel / Oct 27th, 2024**

**Philippians 2:1-2**

**READING THE TEXT**

**2:1 Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort provided by love, any fellowship in the Spirit, any affection or mercy, 2complete my joy and be of the same mind, by having the same love, being united in spirit, and having one purpose.**

**INTRODUCTION**

 There are many things in this world that will intentionally discourage believers. If you come to faith in Christ and are not expecting people to discourage you, then you’ll be shocked when it happens.

**John 15:20 Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you;**

 When I came to faith in Jesus Christ, I was euphoric and filled with joy. I was amazed that a personal relationship with Jesus was possible. The feeling of being completely forgiven was remarkable and almost overwhelming. I could not wait to share my faith with others. Surely, they would see my newfound joy and every person I met would embrace faith in Christ like I had.

 What I found instead is that some did not want to hear about my faith. They liked their life the way it was. Others mocked me and even plotted to make things challenging for me.

 What I learned is that even though there is great joy in Christ there are people and demons whose goal will be to discourage you and silence you and shut you up.

**Eph 6:12 12For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens.**

**Matthew 5:11-12 11 “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil things about you falsely on account of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because your reward is great in heaven, for they persecuted the prophets before you in the same way.**

 Many believers fall into the trap of fault finding one another. That is like getting hit with friendly fire in a war zone. There are enough enemies in the world and spiritual realms that we should do all we can to avoid nit picking, gossiping, and slandering each other. We have enough enemies and don’t need more. This can happen when we fail to stay connected to God, or fail to focus on winning people to Christ. When no one is coming to Christ or growing in their faith we get bored, and the temptation is to turn on each other.

 In this passage Paul implores believers to stand together in unity. We are in a spiritual war zone and believers must stand together in unity. Not false unity of putting of a fake smile, but true unity that is fueled by Jesus and the love He gives us for one another. Unity is needed in times of war when we do hard things together, and in times of peace. So, let’s get our heads around this text and how unity can occur.

**PREACHING THE TEXT**

 If you want a chair that holds weight you need 4 solid legs. Remove one of the legs and you will fall over in a heap. As a larger than normal person I can testify to this. In this passage Paul shares the solid legs of unity in Christ.

Here are 4 Solid Legs of Unity in Christ (found in this passage)

1. Encouragement: “**if there is any encouragement in Christ,”**

**Jn 14:1-4** Jesus gave his disciples support.

***John 14:1 “Do not let your hearts be distressed. You believe in God; believe also in me. 2There are many dwelling places in my Father’s house. Otherwise, I would have told you, because I am going away to make ready a place for you. 3And if I go and make ready a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me, so that where I am you may be too. 4And you know the way where I am going.***

 There is encouragement in Christ. Jesus knew that with all the opposition and difficulties they faced, even his own disciples needed encouragement and reassurance. If the apostles who are the foundation of the church needed encouragement, then every believer needs words and gestures of encouragement.

 When we intentionally encourage others, we build unity and strength in the church of Jesus. We can pray before we go to church, “God give me an encouraging word for someone today.” That will build unity.

1. Comfort from His love **any comfort provided by (his) love**

Can you think of a time that you received comfort from the love of Christ? When I have faced challenging times the love of Jesus is a great comfort. Knowing Jesus loves me means that he will look out for me and care for me.

Our love for others is an overflow of God’s love that is directed at others. Do you feel the love of God in your life? If so, let that love of Jesus overflow into love for other people. When we love others, unity will result. We are in this together because we love Jesus together and love one another. We don’t have to fake love. We gather love from God as we pray and read his word and then we take the love he gives us and redirect that love toward other people.

1. Fellowship in The Spirit “**any fellowship in the Spirit”**

Christian fellowship is created by God. Christian fellowship is not the idea that we grudgingly attend church or church functions because we are supposed to. It is the idea that we have fellowship with God. God shows up and is present with believers. His presence is something we love and can count on. And this fellowship of knowing that God is with us is turned and directed toward other believers. I can’t wait to be with other believers who also experience the presence and fellowship of God.

 We know God will always be with us even to the end of the age and we can feel that through the work of the Holy Spirit. And as we gather in God’s love with other believers, we know others will be there with us in the good and difficult times.

ILLUSTRATION: when I moved into my house in Hayward, nearly 15 men showed up from the church to help me. That was an extension of the fellowship we have with Jesus. We are not alone in this life and our challenges. And these men made that truth into a living illustration by showing up and inviting us into the fellowship of the church.

I recall driving down the street sometime later and noticing a couple loading up a moving van all by themselves. That could have been a result of not belonging to a church. I felt so sad for them.

1. Experience tenderness and compassion of God “**any affection (tenderness NIV) or mercy”**

***Titus 3:5 5he saved us not by works of righteousness that we have done but on the basis of his mercy, through the washing of the new birth and the renewing of the Holy Spirit,***

Salvation IS an act of mercy and compassion. Paul is calling for us to pass along this mercy or compassion to others as a sign that we are saved. By passing along the mercy and compassion of God to others we show off the mercy of Jesus. As we show mercy to others rather than keeping track of wrongs, we will build unity. And we glorify God.

**Romans 15:5-6 5Now may the God of endurance and comfort give you unity with one another in accordance with Christ Jesus, 6so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

**SUMMARY / APPLICATIONS**

 So, let’s pull all this together and summarize. Paul is calling for God’s people and God’s church to be unified. In both times of war and times of peace we must be unified to keep our good witness and glorify God.

 Paul tells us to consider how Jesus treated us and then calls us to treat others in the same manner. Jesus constantly provides us encouragement. Thus, we are called to encourage others. Jesus provides us comfort by show us love. Thus, we are called to provide comfort by showing love. Jesus is always present, and we have fellowship with God. He is calling us to be there for one another and gather in Jesus’ name and build unity. We are in this life together. And Jesus saved us based on his mercy and tenderness and compassion. We can show what Jesus is like by being merciful rather than vindictive.

Question: What will keep us from unity?

 The biggest thing that will stop us from living in unity is that we live in the flesh instead of the Spirit. When we take Christ for granted and stop seeking him in prayer and bible study and fellowship then we begin to take on a worldly, secular mindset. We think of ourselves first and put the needs of others out of our mind or in the back seat.

 The second thing that will prevent unity is pride. We begin to be prideful that we have our act together. We forget about God’s grace and think highly of ourselves and how good we are doing compared to others. In that mind space we begin to see the faults of others and nitpick and take on a critical spirit. Can you think of the last time you talked in a critical way about other people? Was there a solution or plans to encourage and support that person so they could turn things around? Or was it just criticizing and tearing down that person with no thoughts of helping them? Who are you encouraging and building up?

**TAKING IT HOME**

1. What are the ways that the love and presence of Jesus has changed your life and helped you through difficult time? Name a few of these times in your mind.
2. What are specific ways that you are giving away love and encouragement to others?
3. What are some acts of encouragement that you thought about doing but have not acted upon yet?