

CHRIST OUR EXAMPLE

Philippians 2:1-11

This message is the fourth in the series of sermons which I am preaching from Philippians. It is the second of the practical exhortations from 1:27--2:18. The first of these was an exhortation to steadfastness. This one is an exhortation to unity (2:1-4) and to the imitation of Christ (2:5-11).

In the genuine friendship of the Philippians Paul felt a keen delight. He was especially delighted to find a church in which the lives of the members were patterned after the will of God. They had begun well and were doing splendidly, on the whole, but Paul was not entirely satisfied with their attainments. He longed for them all to see the possibilities of growth in Christ and to be shaken out of a pious complacency. There was one element which caused Paul real concern and that was the signs of strife in the church at Philippi. Rumours of the contention or lack of harmony existing in the church had come to Paul probably through Epaphroditus. The discord could not have been very pronounced. The tone of the apostle's words are too tender for that. He does not rebuke. He does not warn. He only exhorts.

The lack of Christian unity at Philippi was comparatively insignificant. It had only begun to develop. There was not so much a division in the church as there was the threat of it. Yet the threat of it was real, and it is not at all difficult to imagine the causes which may have produced discord. It was a church composed of strongly contrasted elements. The beginning of its history would indicate that. The first converts included a wealthy purple dealer from Asia, a slave girl of Macedonia, and a jailer in the service of Rome. These were examples of the diverse elements of which the church was composed. A group of persons so diverse in race, in culture, and in social standing might easily be divided into factions, especially if there appeared among them individual men and women of masterful dispositions animated by something of ambition or pride.

I. The Exhortation To Unity. Philippians 2:1-4.

1. The grounds on which this exhortation to unity is based. 2:1.

(1) The stimulus in Christ. 1a.

"If there be any consolation in Christ." Each of these grounds of appeal is in the form of a conditional clause, which assumes in each instance that the condition is true. The "if" does not express uncertainty. It rather means "in view of the fact." If one's own life in Christ does not stimulate the soul to the noblest effort, it is useless to go on with the appeal. Response to stimuli is the sign of life. The absence of it is the proof of death.

(2) The incentive of love. 1b.

"If there be any comfort of love." The idea is that tender persuasiveness of love. If love has any power by its tenderness to stir your hearts, then listen to me. It is the incentive that springs from love. If the love of Christ flows out of His heart through yours, there you have an incentive to live for Him.

(3) The participation in the Holy Spirit. 1c.

"If there be any fellowship of the Spirit." As believers in Christ they have become partakers of the Holy Spirit. They have received from Him new life and gifts and graces. If we have any partnership in the life and blessings of the Holy Spirit, then we are ready to listen to Paul's plea for unity. It is exceedingly important that Christians be under the control of the Holy Spirit. When people are led by the Spirit of God, bickering and strife are absent.

(4) The compassion in the heart. 1d.

"If there be any compassion and mercies." This basis for the appeal is found in those emotions which the Holy Spirit Himself inspires, namely, "tender mercies and compassions." They have experienced and manifested Christian

affection and sympathy. Let such now be shown toward one another and toward himself. Let them now prove themselves to be tender-hearted and full of compassion and pity.

2. The nature of this exhortation to unity. 2:2-4.

If the Philippians would only respond to Paul's fourfold appeal, then indeed his cup of joy would be full. There is nothing selfish in basing his plea on his personal happiness. His friends understood that his joy was ever found in their welfare. It is like the joy of a parent in the well-being of a child.

It is evident, then, that the Christian unity for which Paul pleads is something far deeper than assent to a common creed, or union in a form of worship, or fellowship in a common task. It underlies all these. It is a unity of thought, and affection, and a mutual feeling.

(1) What qualities should be cultivated.

a. Humility

Absolute humility we learn at the feet of Jesus. It indicates not merely modesty but self-forgetfulness, or such a lowly view of self as enables one to form rightful views of others, to take an interest in the welfare of others, to lose self in the service of others. A school girl surprised her friends by a motto on the wall of her room which read: "I am willing to be third." God was first with her, others second, and self third. That is the spirit of Christ. That was the secret of the life of David Livingstone who died in the heart of Africa.

b. Unselfishness

Proper self-respect does not demand selfishness. "Not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others." Paul does not mean that a man should not attend to his own business. If one does not do his own work, no one else will do it for him. Paul is not advocating our being busy-bodies in other people's affairs. But he means that one must not fix his eye upon his own interests to the exclusion of those of others. The Christian has no right to conduct his life by the law of the jungle. He cannot look out simply for "number one."

(2) What qualities should be avoided.

a. Faction

Faction is a partisan spirit which engenders strife. Paul is anxious that it shall not be allowed to distress the Philippian Church. There is no surer way to wreck a church than by the rule or ruin policy.

b. Vainglory

This denotes boastful pride. It is the spirit which inclines one to make great claims for himself and to disparage others. Literally, it indicates emptiness of ideas. Ambition and vanity can destroy the harmony of any church.

II. The Exhortation To The Imitation Of Christ. Philippians 2:5-11.

1. His way of thinking. 2:5.

"For let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." The word "mind" generally denotes that power in man which conceives thought, weighs it, and forms conclusions. Having the mind of Christ means to have His moral temper, His way of thinking, and His unselfish devotion. When Mrs. Adoniram Judson once read to her husband some newspaper items in which he was compared to one or other of the apostles, he was exceedingly distressed with such praise. But then he added, "Anyway, I do not want to be like them. I do not want to be like Paul, nor Apollos, nor Cephas, nor any mere man. I want to be like Christ."

Since it is our aim to be like Christ, let us observe some of the characteristics of His mind.

- (1) Eminent humility.
He said, "I am meek and lowly in heart." Where this Christlikeness is lacking there is suitable soil for the growth of pride, presumption, selfishness, envy, covetousness and high-mindedness. Man fell by pride, and can only be raised by humility. Upon this Christ has ever insisted.
- (2) Sublime benevolence.
His influence never made it harder for anybody to do right, or easier for anybody to do wrong. He never opened His mouth in complaint about His lot in life. He always sought to show kindness, to offer help, and to do good. He was ever thinking and planning for opportunities to help others.
- (3) Supreme devotion.
His ambition was to do the will of God in everything. His devotion was exhibited in His resignation, His prayerfulness, His abhorrence of sin, and His absolute fearlessness. He braved public opinion, persecution and death.

If we are to have the mind of Christ, it will be possible only by union with Him through faith, and through a diligent study of His precepts and example, with the aid of the Holy Spirit.

2. His humiliation. 2:6-8.

- (1) The nature of it. 2:6-7a.
It was the will of the Father for Him to come down from those dizzy heights of glory, and to live in the midst of our sin and shame and pollution. We get accustomed to it, but it was terrible for Him, the infinitely Holy One. He came only at the will of the Father. The Saviour said, "Neither came I of myself, but my Father sent me." And He was held here in the will of the Father. He emptied Himself, but not of His deity.
- (2) The manner of it. 2:7b.
"But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." The idea of a servant here is not usefulness, but of obedience, being told what to do. While with the Father and the Spirit in glory, the Lord Jesus had never been told what to do.

As a man He humbled Himself. With no home in which to be born, He was born and laid in a manger. He became a poor man with no place to lay His head. He did not become a rich man. He did not become a man who was highly honored. He did not take the highest office among men.

- (3) The extent of it. 2:8.
He became a man, a poor man, a despised man, and a dead man. He did not die quietly among His friends. He did not die a heroic death on a field of battle. He was hanged. In that day death on the cross was as shameful as death on the gallows today.

3. His exaltation. 2:9-11.

- (1) In the past. 2:9a.
"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him." "Wherefore" can be translated "for this reason." Because He went to the depths, God exalted Him to the heights. The Lord Jesus Christ made the journey from the throne to the manger, then, from the manger to the cross and the tomb, and from the tomb back to the throne from whence He came. So great was the lowliness of His mind that Christ voluntarily emptied Himself, but God saw to it that He was exalted. That is always the way. Not only did He raise Him from the dead, but He welcomed Him to the glory which He had shared with Him before the world began.
- (2) In the present. 2:9b.
"And given Him a name which is above every name." Today, in glory, He has a name which is above every name. This name denotes all that He is now known to be, as Son of God and Son of Man. There is no name of mortal man so great

in the history of the world that it may not be equaled by another. But when we mention the name of Jesus, there is no one to stand beside Him. He stands alone, august, unique, supreme. Comparison between Him and any other being in the world is impossible.

"The name of Jesus is so sweet,
I love its music to repeat;
It makes my joys full and complete,
The precious name of Jesus.

"Jesus," oh, how sweet the name!
"Jesus," every day the same;
"Jesus," let all saints proclaim
Its worthy praise forever."

(3) In the future. 2:10-11.

"That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth. And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." Note the terms, the knee and the tongue. We do not bend our knees enough. I think we have very largely gotten away from kneeling before the Lord. And we do not confess Him very much, considering all of the time we have, and all the words we use, and all the talking we do. What a glorious triumph awaits our Lord when every tongue shall confess that Jesus is more than man, that He is Christ and Lord "to the glory of God the Father." All honor paid to Christ must be "to the glory of God the Father."