

CHRIST OUR EXAMPLE

Philippians 2:1-5

Paul was delighted with the genuine friendship of the Philippians, but he was not entirely satisfied with them because of the lack of complete harmony in the church. The discord was not very pronounced. His words were too tender for that. He did not rebuke or warn them, but he did exhort them. Their lack of unity was comparatively insignificant, but the threat of disunity was a matter of great concern to Paul. There is a sense in which disunity is the danger of every healthy church. Against this danger Paul sought to safeguard his friends at Philippi.

The relationship of Christian to Christian is important. When they are not in right relationship with others no song comes from the heart or lips. The maladjustment in this realm is like a dislocation of a bone in that as long as it is dislocated there is not any ease or comfort. Paul was anxious that this question of relationships should never spoil, disrupt or halt the work of the Lord in any church.

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 four grounds of appeal is in the form of a conditional clause, which assumes in each case that the condition is true. The "if" does not express uncertainty. Rather, it means "in view of the fact."

Response to stimuli is the sign of life. The absence of it is the proof of death. Life in Christ should stimulate one to the noblest effort and best work for Him.

- (2) The incentive of love. 1b.
"If there be any comfort of love." Surely the love of Christ for you should be a sufficient incentive for action. The love of Christ which flows out of His heart through yours should cause you to live for Him.
- (3) The fellowship of the Holy Spirit. 1c.
"If there be any fellowship of the Spirit." From the Holy Spirit believers have received new life, and then gifts and graces. As a result of the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration and His control over the believer who has yielded himself to Him, there is a mutual and active participation in the things of God. To the extent that we yield ourselves to Him we shall have a common character, common interest and common work. The common character is godliness; the common interest is Christ; and the common work is glorifying God. When and where people are led by the Holy Spirit bickering and strife are absent.
- (4) The compassion in the heart. 1d.
"If there be any compassions and mercies." With the graces of tenderheartedness, compassionate yearnings and deeds in the lives of the Philippian believers would cause them to live at peace with one another. True Christians manifest affection and sympathy, and refuse to participate in bickerings.

This four-fold appeal apparently says, "If there is anything to your Christianity; if the Saviour is real to you; if the Holy Spirit is in charge in your life; if the love of God dwells in your hearts; be sure that you obey this precept."

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

If the Philippians would only be of the same mind, cherish mutual love, cultivate harmony of spirit and follow one master purpose, then Paul's cup of joy would overflow. His friends understood that his joy was found in their welfare. It was like the joy of a parent in the well-being of a child. The Philippians could certainly increase Paul's joy through unity of thought, purpose, disposition and affection.

(1) What qualities should be cultivated?

a. Humility.

Conceit is carnal and stupid. Oneness or unity cannot be achieved without lowliness or humility. Paul made it clear that the Lord would have us to have an honest sense of unworthiness and to refuse to push ahead of others. By pushing ahead of others strife is generated and factionalism is fostered.

Many have a strong desire for personal prestige. The desire for empty glory is for many people an even greater temptation than wealth. But the aim of the true Christian is not personal display, but self-obliteration. The genuine Christian does not try to focus the eyes of men upon himself, but upon God. Concentration on self inevitably means elimination of others, so the object of life is not to help others up but to push them down.

A school girl surprised her friends by a motto which she placed on the wall of her room which read: "I am willing to be third." With her God was first, others second and self third. That was the spirit of Christ. That was the attitude 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." This does not mean that a man should not attend to his own business. If one does not do his own work, no one will do it for him. Paul was not advocating our being busy-bodies in the affairs of other people. He meant that one must not fix his eye upon his own interests to the exclusion of those of others. The Christian does not have any right to conduct his life by the law of the jungle. He must not look out simply for "number one."

"Look not every man on his own things" has been translated, "Look not on the circle of you." This is so expressive of a self-centered life. "I," "myself" and "me" constitute a vicious circle which covers a small area and does not hold any good. We go in circles and become dizzy over ourselves. Self-interest goes to the head and makes us unbalanced. Our whole outlook becomes so circumscribed by self that we cannot look at anything except with a what's-in-it-for-me slant.

In living for self Christians find their greatest pleasure and satisfaction in the gratification of their lustful desires. As long as everything pleases us, we care little if God is pleased or if others are happy. We should cease to yield to selfishness.

(2) What qualities should be avoided?

a. Strife.

Paul was anxious that strife never be allowed to distress the church at Philippi. He knew that there is no surer way of wrecking a church than by the rule or ruin policy.

b. Vainglory.

This always 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 and success of any church.

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

1. His way of thinking. 2:5.

"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, or 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.