

Christian Unity

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Phil 1:27-2:2

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Introduction

- Illustration from Lord of the Rings
- Sermon Theme: This is an exhortation not just from Paul to the Philippians, but from the Lord to us. It is an exhortation to hold our ground, to not forsake our friends, to not forsake our bonds fellowship. It is an exhortation to stand firm with one heart and one soul courageously striving shoulder-to-shoulder for the faith of the gospel.

I. The Foundation of Christian Unity

- The foundation of Christian Unity is the Gospel. Paul's passion, as we see in the verses preceding our text was the gospel itself.
- Paul wrote to thank the Philippians (1:5) for their "partnership in... the gospel."
- His work (1:7) was "defending and confirming... the gospel."
- His aim (1:12) was to "advance... the gospel."
- His imprisonment (1:17) was for the "defense of... the gospel."
- Here in (1:27) Paul wants the Philippians to strive together "for the faith of... the gospel."
- And it is upon that gospel that we take our united stand.

[1] Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, [2] and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. [3] For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, [4] that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, -- 1 Corinthians 15:1–4

- There can be no Christian unity without agreement upon the gospel.
- We can and should cooperate with all men in whatever is good we can and should extend Christian love to all men--even to our enemies.

...so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (Rom. 12:18)

- Though we adopt a peaceable spirit towards all people, we can forge no enduring unity, no solidarity of heart and soul, no fundamental unity of mind or purpose with those who reject the gospel as it is taught in God's Word.
- Paul warned against...and would not extend a unifying embrace to anyone who didn't have the gospel right. But, Phil 1:15-18, if anyone had the gospel right...even if they didn't like Paul, even if they acted against Paul, even if they sought to afflict Paul, Paul rejoiced that the gospel was preached and refused to break unity with them.

II. The Concern for Christian Unity

- Paul's concern was that the Philippians church might not be divided, but that they would stand together holding their ground in the gospel with one spirit, one mind, and one soul.
- His concern was that they would follow his example, and be full of faith and courage--that they would not be frightened or "spooked" in any way by their opponents.
- His concern was that they would not forsake their friends or the bonds of fellowship, but (using military language here) that they would strive side by side for the faith of the gospel even when it meant suffering!

[1] So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, [2] complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. -- Philippians 2:1-2

- Would you say your Christian life reflects, or shows, a deep concern for Christian unity?
- Do our lives reflect a joyful solidarity with fellow Christians in our local church and beyond our local church?
- We should carry in our hearts a concern for Christian Unity

III. The Way to Christian Unity

How do we stand side-by-side with Christians who may embrace the same gospel we do, but with whom we have real disagreements or who may even be actively sinning against us?

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. (Phil. 1:27)

- How do we make progress towards being one spirit and one mind? How do we make progress towards a more perfect Christian unity? What produces and guards Christian unity -- In this church...and in the wider body of Christ???
- The answer is: living lives worthy of...interacting in ways -- worthy of -- relating together in ways worthy of...the gospel!
- What produces and maintains Christian unity are hearts and minds -- conduct and conversation -- attitudes and affection -- shaped by how Christ relates to us...in the gospel.
- "Let your manner of life in relating to each other" be consistent with the gospel!
- If in the gospel Christ humbled himself for us, and laid down his life for us, and suffered for us, and forgave us -- then we, as undeserving recipients of those graces must, if we are to live lives worthy of the gospel -- extend those same undeserved graces to each other in ways that are costly and sacrificial!
- When we do that...Christian unity is preserved and advanced.

Questions for Discussion/Application

- Re-read the text, Philippians 1:27-2:2. What initial insights and observations do you have from reading this passage?
- The following is the Sovereign Grace Statement of Faith on the gospel:

The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ and all that he did in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension to accomplish salvation for humanity.[1] Therefore, the gospel is not a human action or achievement but rather an objective, historical, divine achievement[2] that remains true and unchanging regardless of human opinion or response. The gospel stands as the core message of the Bible, which in all its parts testifies to God's saving acts culminating in the person and work of Christ.[3] This good news is the power of God for salvation for all who believe,[4] providing hope for the lost[5] and abiding comfort and strength for the believer.[6] There is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved.[7]

- True Christian unity cannot exist apart from agreement on the gospel. Why is this the case?
- How practically can we as believers pursue "being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind (verse 2)."
- What would be some character qualities of a person who cares deeply about preserving unity in a local church?
- Bill said, "If in the gospel Christ humbled himself for us, and laid down his life for us, and suffered for us, and forgave us -- then we, as undeserving recipients of those graces must, if we are to live lives worthy of the gospel -- extend those same undeserved graces to each other in ways that are costly and sacrificial!" Unpack and explain what is being said here.
- What practical steps can we take to pursue Christian unity with brothers and sisters in the Lord?
- Consider taking time to pray, asking God to continue to strengthen us in our pursuit of true Christian unity!