

Series: The Church — A People with A Purpose

Title: The Unified Church

Text: Philippians 2:1-2

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Verse 1

At the beginning of Philippians 2, Paul transitioned to encourage his readers to develop a spirit of Christian love in their midst. To do so, he first described the basis of Christian love. He said, “If, then, there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy...” (Philippians 2:1). Notice that Paul used four conditional statements. Each is represented in our English rendering by the word “if.” It is important to note that “if” is probably not the best translation. In the Greek, Paul used what is now known as a conditional statement of the first class. Such a conditional statement was one that was assumed to be true.¹ It is probably more appropriate to translate each occurrence of “if” in verse 1 as “since.” The meaning would then be, “*Since* there is encouragement in Christ, *since* there is consolation of love....”

In effect, Paul encouraged the Philippians to love one another because of the love they had received from God. His thinking was in alignment with that of Jesus. Our Lord once said, “I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35). The church at Philippi had struggles in regard to Christian love and unity. Paul appealed to the love of God. When one considers the character of God (1 John 4:8) and the work of Calvary (John 15:13), strife amongst God’s children should be seen as nonsensical. Paul’s argument regarding this matter was built upon four Christian realities.

First, Paul used a conditional statement to speak of “encouragement in Christ.” The original language of the text used a word (*paráklēsis*) that depicted one comforting or consoling a grieving individual.² Paul was focused on Christian comfort that provides real-life strength and stamina for godly living. Such comfort is a part of God’s disposition toward His people, and Christ is the means by which such comfort is communicated. The same verbiage from Philippians 2:1 is used in Luke 2:25 to speak of Christ’s appearing. There, the Messiah was referred to by the title “Israel’s *consolation*.”

In the New Covenant, Gentiles have been given the opportunity to partake of the blessings of Israel (Romans 11:17-18; Ephesians 2:11-22). In 2 Corinthians, Paul used the Greek term for “encouragement” in Philippians 2:1 to say, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all *comfort* (2 Corinthians 1:3). Christ has given great consolation to the people of God. Though they were formerly dead in sin and prisoners of deceit, they have been made alive. They have been given truth, knowledge, and hope through Christ. No matter what happens in life, they have the consolation of Christ in their hearts.

¹ Robertson, 443.

² Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, 296.

Interestingly, the word for “encouragement” in Philippians 2:1 is used elsewhere in the New Testament in reference to the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures (Romans 8:15-16; 15:14). The meaning for us is clear. The Bible and the Third Person of the Trinity are two means through which we now practically experience Christ’s comfort. Calvary positionally purchased our spiritual comfort, but God’s Spirit and God’s Scriptures help us practically experience it.

Paul’s rationale in our current text is that the encouragement the Philippians had received from Christ should have prompted them to encourage one another. Those who were being rude and divisive had lost sight of the cross. They needed to think about all that Christ had done for them. Paul used the same rationale when writing to the Corinthians. We made reference to 2 Corinthians 1:3 earlier. After calling God “the God of all comfort,” Paul would go on to say, “He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 Corinthians 1:4). The encouragement of Christ is a grounds for mutual encouragement amongst the body of Christ.

Paul’s second conventional statement focused on “consolation of love.” The Greek term translated “consolation” is similar to the one used for “encouragement.” This term, however, depicted heightened levels of tenderness.³ In addition, the word was often used of persuasive addresses in the first-century world.⁴ Thus, as used in our text, it depicted encouragement that involved verbal affirmations. One has said that the idea was “comfort through speech.” Interestingly, the English “paregoric,” a term that refers to a soothing medication, was derived from the Greek term in our text.⁵

Paul qualified the “consolation” he had in view with the word “love.” He used the famous *agápē*, a term employed for Christian love throughout the New Testament (John 3:16; 15:12-13). Paul’s intent was to remind the Philippians that they had received great consolation through the soothing love of Christ. How could some remain at bitter odds with one another?

The third conditional statement in Philippians 2:1 emphasized “fellowship with the Spirit.” The word translated “fellowship” was the Greek *koinōnía*. It was used of sharing, or a participation in a common endeavor. Paul was concerned that his readers had an appropriate recognition of the tie that binds believers together. Just a few verses earlier, he had made mention of the need for the church to stand firm “in one spirit” (Philippians 1:27). Now he elaborated on that point further, emphasizing the Spirit’s role in such unity.

When believers are born again (John 3:3), the Holy Spirit of God takes up residence in their hearts (Galatians 3:2). He serves as a connector and unifier of individual believers. Paul used the word “fellowship” to speak of how the Spirit binds the body of Christ together. The same term was used by John in one of his letters. He used it to speak of the continual closeness believers have with God and one another. He said, “If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have *fellowship* with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

³ Zodhiates, 1111.

⁴ Robertson, 443.

⁵ Zodhiates, 1111.

In our current text, Paul's rationale was simple. The fellowship found in God's Spirit was the remedy to the disagreements in Philippi (Philippians 4:2-3). The church needed a reminder that they had fellowship with God and one another. Jesus Himself had upheld such things as a hallmark of the Christian faith. When praying for future believers, He said, "I am in them and you are in me, so that they may be made completely one, that the world may know you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me" (John 17:23). For love to be renewed in Philippi, members of the church needed a revival of Holy Spirit fellowship!

The fourth conditional statement of Philippians 2:1 coupled two words together — "affection and mercy." The first term was used literally in the ancient world to speak of human intestines. It spoke of the inward parts of the human body, the viscera, and the stomach. In the Hellenistic world, such anatomy was regarded as being the seat of human emotion. It was the place from which the deepest feelings emanated. At some point in your life, you may have had the sensation of "butterflies in your stomach" because of heightened emotions? Or perhaps you have been sick to your stomach when upset? Paul used language that referred to such deep feelings in order to portray the great love we have experienced from Christ.

The apostle's purpose was to use such affection as a basis for loving other believers. He used the same term rendered "affection" in 2:1 to speak of his affection for the Philippians back in 1:8. Christ's affection for us should move us to have affection for our brothers and sisters in Christ. This was John's teaching in 1 John 3:17 — "If anyone has this world's goods and sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him—how does God's love reside in him?"

Paul paired the word "mercy" with "affection" in his fourth conditional statement. The Greek of the New Testament employed a word that referred to sympathy or pity shown to another. More specifically, it conveyed a disposition that showed compassion to those facing suffering.⁶ Such mercy involved tender feelings and compassionate yearnings and actions.⁷ It resulted in gracious kindness toward others.⁸

Perhaps some in Philippi were being hard and unruly. Maybe malicious words had been spoken. Since Christ had been so merciful and kind to the church, believers needed to show mercy and kindness to one another. Paul's words to the Colossians had application for the church at Philippi — "Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, *kindness*, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive" (Colossians 3:12-13).

⁶ Zodhiates, 1034.

⁷ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 450.

⁸ Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, 279.