

PHILIPPIANS BIBLE STUDY

Philippians 2:1-5

Lesson #10

ENCOURAGEMENT IN CHRIST

1 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, 2 fulfill my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, sharing the same feelings, focusing on one goal. 3 Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. 4 Everyone should look out not [only] for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Phil 2:1-4 (HCSB)

INTRODUCTION

In the first chapter of his letter to the Philippian believers, Paul had acknowledged the persecution that they were facing and the hardships of a life that confesses belief in Christ Jesus. But at the same time he had encouraged them by pointing out that the gospel was nevertheless advancing onward despite the opposition.

He pointed out that he himself was in prison in Rome, but that he was even preaching the gospel there and God was doing His work of redemption regardless of the circumstances, nay even rather by way of those circumstances. God was not making the best of a bad situation caused by Satan, but He was using Satan to accomplish His own predestined plan of the redemption of His elect, wherever they might be. If we just understand this we will not be discouraged regardless of the apparent circumstances. Oh, we might be fearful, or even uncertain about what's happening, but we are absolutely certain that our God will accomplish all His good pleasure through whatever is happening. And thus we are encouraged to stand firm and persevere in our faith, and to continue to live in a manner that is worthy of the gospel message we have embraced (v.12) for our certain salvation in the appointed time. And Paul is calling the Philippians to this very thing, as he just said, that they were appointed on Christ's behalf, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him. (v.29)

However, Paul isn't just offering them consultation and encouragement, but he is giving them significant fortifications as well. During times of persecution, differences of opinion and belief may be used as weapons of division against the church. So Paul is encouraging them to be like minded on all the points of the gospel message. To have a clear understanding of what it teaches and all to agree on it. To share the same mind and feel the same way about that glorious message of Christ's divine nature and His redemptive work. To be able to recognize and thus reject the false teachers that he warns them about in chapter three, where he calls them dogs and evil workers.

A sound and clear theology is the very basis for a sound and enduring love of one another, and that love would preserve and protect and encourage them under all situations. Paul is always calling every church to single mindedness and oneness of purpose on their Christian theology, as this is the very foundation of Christian perseverance. Divisions of theology are a death knoll to church unity. In fact, there is no church or Christian unity and single mindedness except that of doctrinal truth, for this is the unity of what we believe, and for which we stand, and in which we have our eternal hope. Any wavering, or uncertainty here will open the door for every kind of evil prey to enter in and build a nest. Such has been the case from the beginning, and continues, even rages until this very day. It is a well recognized fact that internal strife has been more destructive to the churches than external persecutions.

The holy scriptures warn us in advance that in latter times (like now) **the churches** will no longer tolerate sound doctrine, or those who preach it, and will rather assemble pastor search committees that seek out preachers that tickle their ears with pleasant little homilies and custom tailor their preaching to the unbelieving members for the sake of building up and retaining large memberships. They give this practice pretty names like seeker friendliness and other such sweet but foolish labels. (2 Tim 4:3) **(Discuss this practice of search committees and seeker friendliness)** Romans 3:11-12 tells us that there are NO SEEKERS, no not even one. Only those being effectually called by God.

But have we forgotten what the other scriptures teach us regarding this very matter? How is it that we can completely overlook such relevant scriptures that are right on point? Do you remember James 4:4

4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. James 4:4 (NASB)

and again in 1 John:

15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

1 John 2:15-17 (NASB)

Now, to anticipate any objections to these verses as not saying we should not be friends to unbelievers but to the things of the world, I will use some more very specific verses to answer that challenge. Remember the words of Jesus when He told His disciples:

Jn 15:18

18 "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you.

Jn 15:19

19 "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this, the world hates you.

1Jn 3:10-13

10 This is how God's children—and the Devil's children—are made evident. Whoever does not do what is right is not of God, especially the one who does not love his brother. 11 For this is the message you have heard from the beginning: we should love one another, 12 unlike Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his [own] works were evil, and his brother's [works] were righteous. 13 Do not be surprised, brothers, if the world hates you.

1 John 3:10-13 (HCSB)

Because the world hates righteousness, it is inevitable that it will hate those whose works and words are righteous. We can maintain a sort of working relationship with the world as long as we don't openly challenge the works of the world. But eventually we will be forced to make a decision, or perform an action that shows our true beliefs. And it is at these specific points that the conflict with the world cannot be avoided, unless of course we abandon our beliefs and claim agreement with them. Or just keep silent and go along with the flow. I fear we all have become very skilled at this particular art, haven't we? (Discuss issue that arose over Israel with friend in restaurant)

Of course there's the other side too that responds with belligerence, and usually this is because they lack the biblical knowledge to answer calmly and intelligently. Perhaps this is why so many Christians just keep silent, because of the Hebrews 5 & 6 syndrome - the lack of maturity in the faith to respond to situations with any kind of mature biblically supported argument, though they may have been a Christian for 25 years. I can confidently say that most professing Christians today don't really know exactly what they actually believe or why they believe it. They've been told something by somebody at church and that's all they know. The rest they get by their own feelings and opinions.

It is for these reasons, the lack of maturity, the lack of commitment, and the lack of authenticity, that I said last week that I fear that real persecution in the churches of America would lead to a mass exodus that would dwarf that of the Jews from Egypt, and leave a mass of empty buildings strewn out all over the country. What we call Christianity today bears little resemblance to the Christianity that Paul preached and taught when he wrote his epistles to the churches. Although they also suffered from the same maladies as we do today, as his letters indicate.

(Discuss that the issues are still the same - immaturity, false doctrine, false teachers, divisions and discord, etc.)

Jesus, and all His apostles, told us to expect persecutions and make appropriate preparations for it through the principles He provided in the scriptures. These very ones we are studying now in Philippians. Today however, we are told to expect prosperity, wealth, health and the respect and love of everybody. That embracing Jesus is the way to find personal fulfillment, and the means by which to obtain our goals and keep us from losses. How do we get such an idea from the One who said that unless we deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, surrender all that we have, and follow Him, we can't even be His real disciples? (Mat 16, Luk 9)

So, what I am endeavoring to point out is that the verses we are studying are set against the contextual backdrop of persecutions, both from without and from within, and what we are receiving from these verses is the appropriate fortifications that the church must make to weather these storms and maintain her stand amidst all of them.

End of Introduction

A. Encouragement In Christ:

1 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, 2 fulfill my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, sharing the same feelings, focusing on one goal.

V.1 After his acknowledgment to the Philippians that they were indeed appointed by God to suffer on behalf of Christ, in as much as He had already suffered infinitely more on behalf of them; Paul asks them if there is any encouragement to persevere, and any consolation of those sufferings to be found in the love of Christ that they had received and the fellowship of the Spirit with which they had been so blessed. Were the benefits worth the cost?

Think about this. Suppose God the Father were to ask his Son, Jesus, if the bride that He had redeemed (the church) was worth the price He had paid on that cross, the excruciating pain, and the unimaginable humiliation He had suffered at the hands of those whom He had created Himself. Can you even imagine Him answering "No Father, they haven't proven to be worth the price." If that answer shocks you, and breaks your heart, then consider how Jesus would feel if our answer was that His love and fellowship were an inadequate consolation for our current sufferings, whatever they might be.

No, No. His answer is "Yes Father, they are My heart's desire, and everything that I hoped they would be." And therefore our answer to that question is put perfectly by Paul in his letter to the Romans where he declares:

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God's sons to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility—not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it—in the hope 21 that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage of corruption into the glorious freedom of God's children. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now. 23 And not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the first fruits —we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24 Now in this hope we were saved, yet hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience.

Romans 8:18-25 (HCSB)

V.2 Paul continues on with this thought by giving some practical applications of that consolation of love and fellowship of the Spirit by citing how it should be demonstrated.

a. By thinking the same way. Now in context this could be thinking the same way in regards to the persecutions and the consolation of them he is speaking about most directly. But that would seem to be too narrow an interpretation to afford much fortification against the false teachings he is about to address. Rather, it is more reasonable to conclude, that Paul is calling the church to thinking the same way in all matters of life and godliness that characterizes the church and brings glory to Christ and God. It is this kind of commonality of thinking that achieves the goal Paul is seeking for that church, and which fulfils his joy over them.

It is the church that thinks alike on all issues of scriptures that is best equipped to weather the storms of persecution and false doctrines. Even the smallest discord can be an issue of contention which opens the door to a false teacher to exploit for personal gain. How desperately the churches need leaders who are knowledgeable of the truth and able to rightly divide (interpret) the scriptures. It has been said by a very well respected pastor of our time that the greatest need of the church, both today and historically, is genuine discernment. I wholeheartedly agree.

The church has never been able to fully agree on what it believes and why it believes it. And the result is that it never can conclude just exactly what is its primary function and purpose, both now on earth and eternally in the kingdom of God. And the strange thing is that the scriptures are replete with those answers. They aren't buried in cryptic symbolism or deep mystery.

God created mankind to be His beloved Son's mate and His own eternal family. He created the universe to be their place of residence. He orchestrated all the events of creation as the means to adequately fashion and prepare mankind for that final glorious outcome. He recorded the individual names of all those whom He had predestined to be His Son's mate in a book called the Book of life, before He ever created the first molecule of matter. He will not lose a single one of those whom He elected, nor will He bring this age to an end until such time as everyone of them has come to saving faith. Furthermore, none but those who are recorded in that book will want to be saved, and by their own free choosing will reject God's offer of mercy to all who wish to receive it. Not even one will choose to accept that offer. This too is God's doing, and is His sovereign right of choice as King and creator.

If a church cannot wholeheartedly agree on this preceding statement, then it is like a group of cross country racers who begin a race without being able to agree where the starting line is, and what actual route it is that they have to run, or even where the final finish line is located.

Such is the church of today. It is a loose group of runners that isn't entirely sure how it even got into the race, which is headed for a mysterious destination, along an unmarked route, for an unclear prize, that it's not even sure that it really wants to win in the first place.
Pastor Bob Andrews

Discuss that "thinking the same way" has some minimum standards of agreement that are required to participate as a group, and when these are not consistent, then there can only be chaos and loss. Because uncertainty of true purpose will inherently produce uncertainty of direction as well, and much effort will be spent running in the wrong direction for a goal that is incorrectly perceived. If you aren't sure exactly what you're supposed to be accomplishing, that is to say what is your first and foremost priority, then you can't possibly know the right priority of the things to do to accomplish it.

So much activities and efforts are being spent today in our churches on very nice things that are good and scriptural, but at the same time I'm afraid that in the doing of these things, the primary mission is being completely overlooked. It's like Jesus told Martha when He was at her house and she was making food preparations. It was very good to make food for Jesus and the disciples, and I'm sure they all received it and enjoyed it, but in the doing she was missing the better part, the really important part, of what was happening there at that time, which was listening and learning from the words of Jesus, and showing Him the attention and affection that He so rightly deserved.

(Openly discuss this further then close the message)