

# PHILIPPIANS BIBLE STUDY

Philippians 2:1-5

Lesson #11

## THINKING THE SAME WAY

*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

Last week we got into this thought that Paul conveyed to the Philippians that the churches practical means of fortification and defense when under assault from external persecutions, or internal false teachers, or both simultaneously as the Philippians were at that time; that defense is rooted in an unflinching faith that expresses itself through a commonality of thinking, loving, feeling, and focusing, on the unseen spiritual things taught by holy scriptures and the Apostles of Jesus Christ, which they had come to accept as absolute truth, and upon which they had all set their eternal hope and committed their very lives.

Last week I started to discuss the first of these (4) points which is “thinking the same way”. And I made reference to the situation that we have within Christendom wherein we have such a broad range of perceptions of what is our primary mission and objective. And this is of paramount importance, because our subsequent actions will be predicated on our perceptions of what our primary objective is. Like I also said, it isn’t that the primary objective is the only thing we will do, we still all have to work and eat and do our everyday chores and duties, but our perception of the primary objective will be the major controlling issue of our lives and the principle emphasis of the church.

Now, if you will permit me, I will attempt to put this issue of *thinking the same way* into a perspective whereby we can logically examine its meaning and thereby contemplate the implications, especially in light of contemporary thinking.

First let me say that “in principle” I believe that we all do agree that we should all think the same way, we should all have the same love, we should all share the same feelings, and we should all focus on the same goal. In principle we are probably all in full harmony and agreement. So then, what’s the problem? The problem arises when we try to apply the principles to a specific “object” of those principles.

*(Everyone agrees we should all think alike - until we pick a specific object or subject on which we wish to think alike)*

We find that it’s when we try to apply those common principles to any specific “Object” that we lose the harmony. It is in the application that the principles break down. Our dilemma, of course, is that we have no other choice, we must use our human faculties of reason and understanding to make the applications, and these human faculties have been damaged by the introduction of sin, intrinsically injected into mankind’s mental and biological make up.

If all we had to work with in defining and understanding this “object” about which we seek agreement was our human capabilities, we wouldn’t even have a chance. But, we are given the inerrant holy scriptures, and a renewed mind, fashioned in the likeness of Christ’s, though infinitely lesser at the present, with which to labor and painstakingly decipher, in our efforts to rightly comprehend this “Object” on which we are told to agree and pursue.

This is no small task. It isn’t just something that we are intended to work on in the background as we pursue our more pressing goals of life. So now for the sake of clarity, at this point let me attempt to give a very general definition to that “Object” about which I’m speaking, and about which we are admonished in scriptures to seek agreement.

The "Object" could be defined as that body of truth concerning God, and His Son, Jesus Christ, and all the holy scriptures that speak of and reveal Him to us, from cover to cover. It is these holy scriptures, all of them, that must be the object of our pursuit of unity of thinking, of loving, of feeling, and of determining and setting our goals and priorities. The use of anything else, especially our personal feelings and our own preferences will not bring us to a commonality of thinking that is according to divine and eternal truth.

And we cannot, and must not ever attempt to edit them to suit our own interests, or to try to avoid conflicts and perhaps make them more appealing to others, but we must take them in their totality, and diligently seek to understand every aspect and nuance in their revelation of the nature and character of our glorious and sovereign God and creator.

In light of what we all know about the basic human character, we already realize that unless there is an external absolute authoritative standard provided to us by someone else, we will never on our own come to a commonality of thinking on anything. There are just too many individual opinions and perspectives for this to ever happen.

Therefore, having made this observation, how can Paul call the Philippian believers to all think the same way, to all have the same love, to all share the same feelings, and then to all focus on one goal. To do this we would all have to have the same exact mind wouldn't we? Yes, we would, and that's the call of the holy scriptures. To have the same mind as that of Christ. To think like Him, to love like Him, to feel like Him, and to focus on a single goal as He Himself did.

How many times did Jesus say things like "I only do those things that the Father has shown Me, and I only do those things that please the Father?"

***29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;***

Romans 8:29 (NASB)

***11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.***

Eph 4:11-16 (NASB)

Therefore, thinking the same way cannot possibly mean pooling our own mental resources and coming to a final decision based on a majority opinion. It is not something we get by taking a vote at a business meeting. Sadly, this is the common practice of just about every church that I've attended to make decisions, by convening a business meeting and opening up the floor to everyone who wishes to present an opinion, and then trying to devise some compromise position that everyone can live with. Now there might be some merit to this if everyone who wishes to speak were required to open up their bible and read their supporting verses Before they were allowed to present their argument. No supporting scriptures, no permission to speak. But, in 30 years as a Christian, I've never seen or heard that happen.

The one and only defense against false teachings is true teachings. And the only way to know the difference is to be familiar enough with the truth to recognize error when you hear it. And there is no substitute source for knowledge of the truth other than the holy scriptures, the bible. Truth is not intuitive. It doesn't just come to you out of the blue. Nor does one get it from the Holy Spirit by some kind of divine zapping of the mind.

Truth is acquired through a life long intense study of the scriptures and a willingness to subject oneself to their teachings. This is how the Holy Spirit imparts knowledge and wisdom to the elect, through an understanding of the Word of God when it is read and studied. There is no other way to come to know the mind of God but to study His holy scriptures.

A simple casual familiarity will not be ample to protect anyone from false doctrines and false teachers, as we were warned in the passages from Ephesians 4. The immature will always remain victims waiting for the prey.

Thinking the same way, and having the same love, and feelings and goal, requires bringing all parties involved into conformity to a single external authority, and all sharing His thinking, His love, His feelings, and His goal for our lives. It means denying ourselves any authority, or influence, or pet preferences, and totally submitting our wills and thinking to His absolute unquestionable authority. True born again believers are those who are willing, even eager to do this very thing, to follow Jesus Christ and be part of His kingdom. Absolute submission to His authority, which includes believing and doing all that He taught isn't an option, it's a necessity for all who would be His disciples.

Now, having made that statement concerning absolute submission, I must do as the holy scriptures always do also. That is to immediately warn about false prophets and teachers. The gentle submissive nature of the Christian makes him a prime target for false teachers and preachers to exploit him for personal gain. It was like that then and it is like that now. So, I repeat my warning and admonition to the biblically immature to diligently study the scriptures.

Only when the scriptures are elevated to the position of absolute final authority for all matters of doctrine and teaching, and life and godliness, can any measure of thinking the same way, and having the same love, and sharing the same feelings, and focusing on one goal, ever be even close to attainable. And this brings us to the situation at the forefront of current day church controversy, which is actually and old one that has been ongoing for centuries and goes like this:

Some believe that the bible teaches that evangelization is the primary purpose of our lives as believers, and must be the first and highest priority of our lives. And they can cite scriptures to support their position. Yet, others say that the bible teaches that holiness of life with corresponding spiritual maturity is what the bible teaches as the first priority of believers. And they too can cite scriptures to support their position.

Both would probably agree, in principle, that either way it is all to the glory of God. But what all would also have to concede is that it can't be both. *(Two Masters)* At best it can be one or the other. At worst it might be neither. Both sides could be wrong, but both sides can't be right. So, if the primary objective in the day to day life of a believer is in fact "primary" then it seems like we would be able to figure out and agree on what that objective is, doesn't it?

But alas, after 2000 years of New Testament history, we still don't seem know for sure just what is the nature of this race we are running, and what exactly are the rules by which we are governed. Let alone where the finish line is, and what lies there when (and if) we ever arrive. *(Like the Hebrews, we are a 2000 year old body of spiritual infants)*

### ***The Evangelism vs Sanctification Controversy***

Which is more important, evangelism or sanctification? Well, this is really a moot point, in as much as they are a package deal. Neither can exist apart from the other. That is, evangelism must precede sanctification, as there can be no sanctification of the unsaved. But evangelization that does not produce sanctification is fruitless and barren. There is an apparent chronological order, in as much as the gospel precedes, but the gospel is in actuality a call to sanctification through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. So then, how does a church determine its current priorities?

Paul's initial ministry was indeed that of evangelization, as he was sent as the first true Apostle to the gentiles to proclaim the message of forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus Christ in places and to peoples where it had never been preached or heard before. And the Lord did indeed save many gentiles in those cities by bestowing the gift of saving faith on many who heard and understood that new message of eternal life. Speaking in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas declared:

***47 For this is what the Lord has commanded us: I have appointed you as a light for the Gentiles, to bring salvation to the ends of the earth."***

***48 When the Gentiles heard this, they rejoiced and glorified the message of the Lord, and all who had been appointed to eternal life believed. 49 So the message of the Lord spread through the whole region.***

Acts 13:47-49 (HCSB)

Without argument, evangelization was the first priority of Paul and Barnabas on their initial trip to the gentile cities and provinces they visited. Obviously, unless there are some believers there, then teaching the principles of Christian living to pagan unbelievers would be senseless.

Paul and Barnabas went on a circuit through that whole region that took him several years presenting the gospel message to those who had never heard it before. The Lord established many new churches for Himself through the preaching of Paul and Barnabas on that mission trip. This was the Apostle Paul's first missionary journey.

Then, after some time had passed, he asked some brothers to accompany him to go back to those same places and visit the churches again for the purpose of teaching, and encouraging them to persevere in their faith and to warn them about false teachers and destructive doctrines. This second visit was not for the purpose of visiting more unbelievers, but specifically for visiting the existing believers for their edification and progress in the faith.

Having done his initial evangelistic work, he then turned to the lifelong task of ministering to those churches, which he did for the remainder of his life. Now he didn't stop evangelizing, but he did refocus the vast majority of his time and efforts off of evangelizing and onto the task of teaching the saints how to live their lives in a manner that was worthy of the gospel. (Phi 1:12) He did not continue to re-present the same message over and over and over again to the same people who had already heard it and freely rejected it. That's just not what he did.

But that's precisely what so many churches believe they are supposed to be doing. Forever repeating the basic gospel call to forgiveness of sins, but never ever moving on to teaching the sanctification of life that that gospel message demands as part of that forgiveness of sins. We have come to actually believe that there is forgiveness without repentance. That there is salvation without sanctification. But with crystal clarity the Bible absolutely refutes any such foolish notions. (Mat 7:21-23)

So how does your church establish its current primary objective? Simple. Is your church located in a place where the gospel message has never been presented before. If so, then preaching the gospel is your primary objective until such time as all who desire to do so have had the opportunity to hear it and make a response accordingly. This won't happen in one day or one week or even one month, but eventually those who wish to hear will hear and respond. And those who don't will never come and hear no matter how long you preach.

Now It's true that a small number will continue to trickle in as time goes by, and this is why evangelization work in a church will never completely cease, but the initial work of evangelization must mature into a teaching ministry for all those who have come to faith through the hearing of the gospel. The baby brought forth through evangelization must then be continuously and even painstakingly raised and taught and educated, or the evangelization will have been to no avail.

However, if your church is located in a town that already has many churches that are presenting the gospel every week, then your first priority must be that of raising, teaching, educating, warning, and encouraging the members to grow up in the faith and seek to gain the maturity that affords them adequate protection from the multitude of false teachers and equips them to live in a manner that is worthy of that gospel they've received. Because this is why the Lord sent out the evangelists in the first place, that He might come to have a whole family of brothers, and sisters, who are being matured and transformed into His own likeness. (Rom 8:29, Eph 4:13)

Otherwise the whole purpose of evangelization is nothing but fire insurance for wayward sinners, when the bible presents evangelization as an initiation into a blessed and chosen group who have been selected by God to become regenerated and transformed in nature and behavior to match His own Son, and by virtue of this transformation and regeneration be suitable to accompany Him for eternity in His eternal kingdom as the children of God. This is why He saved us.

God has chosen to gift His elect as He pleases. Some are given the gift of evangelist, and that will be their principle calling as long as they live. And every church should have some of these in their body. But the body is more than evangelists. It is also teachers and preachers and other various helps, and all for the primary work of building that body up in spiritual maturity to the fullness of the stature of Christ Himself. (Eph 4:13)

Perhaps one of the most common mistakes of this day is the perception that a city or region that has had churches preaching the gospel every Sunday for decades, but has had very few converts, is still white for harvest and prime mission territory. The fact is, that's just no so. Jesus knew when His message wasn't wanted, and His response was to leave and go where it was wanted. (Demon possessed man of the Gadarenes) He told His disciples to shake the dust off their shoes and move on when they encountered a city that didn't want to hear the gospel. *(Discuss this)*

A new territory that has never heard the gospel is in fact white for harvest and begging for missionaries. But after the initial presentation and establishment of a church that believes the gospel, then the harvest has been reaped, and there is only the gleanings remaining. Unbelievers who have heard the gospel repeatedly and rejected it, or know where to hear it but just aren't interested, are not a field that is ripe for harvest. They are simply staunch unbelievers. But we refuse to make that distinction. We refuse to get in our boat and leave, we refuse to shake the dust off our feet and move on; Instead, they are to us an eternal ripe mission field, that just needs the right type of presentation, and then they'll all respond in faith. *(Kind, compassionate, loving, Yes - But just not true to God's plan as revealed in scriptures)*

We refuse to take "no" for an answer. We're sure we can change their minds if we just get another chance to present the gospel with a slightly different spin. Something culturally relevant to them. If we can just find that secret key to their heart then we can convince anyone to believe, as one famous pastor has said. If this is so, then why couldn't Jesus find that secret key and save everybody who heard Him? Is it possible that He knew that nobody could come to Him unless His Father was specifically drawing them? Oh no, perish the thought.

But as for us, We will not accept the simple biblical fact that not all have faith; in fact very few receive faith according to the sermon on the mountain (Mat 7:13-14) and there's nothing we can do or say to make them have it. Its got nothing whatsoever to do with our presentation, it's altogether the sovereign calling of God. If the presentation was the problem then Jesus suffered from the same deficiency. Was that His problem, that He just couldn't quite figure out how to be all things to all people so that He could win them all to salvation? But maybe we can do better, you think? Maybe we can learn from His mistakes and improve on His performance.

We need to understand and agree on the basic ground rules of the gospel. Is it entirely of God, as Jesus and the rest of the bible says, or does man have the will and ability to decide to believe by himself? What does the bible say? And It does say. Repeatedly.

For a church, or an association to become forever locked in an endless loop of evangelization, over and over again, to the same group of disinterested hearers, and never make the transition into a caring parent and teacher over its own young believers, is tragic, nay even sinful, as neglect to feed the sheep placed under his care is dereliction of duty, for which a shepherd will be held accountable. Too many shepherds are so concerned with trying to numerically increase their flocks that they are neglecting to feed and protect the ones they have. Is this perhaps why the statistics show that we are losing them faster than we are winning them? Perhaps we should be much more concerned with caring for the sheep that we have, and less concerned with possessing those that we don't. Maybe then the existing churches would stop shrinking. Or maybe not, but at least they would be healthy flocks, even if they are small.

Now I have taken this group of passages about thinking the same way, having the same love, sharing the same feelings, and focusing on one goal, and have put them into an actual contemporary setting. Because, to be perfectly honest, we don't all think the same way, we don't all have the same love, we don't all share the same feelings, and therefore we aren't all focused on the same goal. In fact, to be truthful, we're not even close.

And unless we come to terms with this, we aren't going have much of a Christian testimony. It all starts with allowing diverse interpretations of the scriptures by those who seem to mean well but are missing the point. Every time the truth is compromised, even just a little, the door is opened and error comes rushing in like a tidal wave. We are quick to say that everyone has the freedom to interpret the scriptures as he or she sees them, but the fact is, there is only one true interpretation of scriptures, whether we understand it or not, and every other interpretation is wrong. Therefore, a diligent pursuit of the truths of scripture form the groundwork of any healthy church. Without this there is only chaos.

Today's churches could much more accurately be described as an anarchy rather than a theocracy. Everyone is allowed, even encouraged, to do whatever is right in his or her own eyes. And like the Pharisees, we twist the scriptures as necessary to justify our actions and beliefs. We use terms like "the priesthood of the believer" to justify every diverse opinion that arises, and force a kind of tolerance for error that we then re-label as "Christian unity." If it weren't so sad it would be humorous. It's kind of like changing the label on a bottle of "poison" to say "medicine" and then actually thinking that is okay to drink it, because we've changed the label. Obviously, this isn't new, it's just business as usual.

Unless and until we have a single authoritative document, (a specific body of absolute truth) upon which we all can agree on the meaning, it is not going to be possible to all think the same way. And if we don't think the same way, then we certainly won't have the same love, or share the same feelings, or pursue the same goal. Because all four of these terms are really one and the same. Either we have them all or we cannot have any. And it starts with thinking the same way. And thinking the same way can only be achieved when the scriptures, rightly interpreted, are the single and authoritative source of our thinking.

There has always been error, and there always will be error, until the perfect King returns and takes control. But meanwhile, the only defense against error is truth, and the only source of truth is holy scripture. And only right interpretation of that scripture is truth, every other opinion and interpretation is error. If the church ever expects to focus on one goal, then it must first decide what it believes, and then define that body of truth clearly and succinctly. Only then can it share the same love, have the same feelings, and finally focus on one unified goal that is scripturally sound, pleasing to God, and beneficial to mankind.

To God be the Glory.

Amen