

INTRODUCTION

This morning's sermon text is part of the key pastoral section of Paul's letter to the church at Philippi. Even Paul's great Christological doxology of **2:5-11** is part of His exhortation to that church toward *corporal ethics*: the behavior of a local congregation – within and without the walls of its meeting place – which stands as the manifested proof of its having taken "*the mind of Christ*". It was Paul's conviction that unity is the primary work of the Holy Spirit in the local church, and that worship, fellowship and disciple-making flow forth from that unity by means of the ministry of the Word, which – anointed by the same Holy Spirit – is empowered to radically transform the minds and hearts of the individual members of the congregation. To summarize:

- Paul wanted to make sure that his good friends in Philippi understood that **unity** is the critical component of the health and missional effectiveness of the local church.
- He wanted them to learn that the members' genuine **love** for one another is the critical component of local church unity.
- And he wanted them to comprehend that authentic **humility** – voluntary selflessness on the part of the individual members – is the critical component of genuine love.

The focus of the modern church in the west tends toward vision, organization, excellence, and programming, – concepts never dreamed of by Paul. The accepted standards of measure for success in many (but not all) of these churches are numerical growth, multiplied staff, and sufficient capital for expansive buildings and lots of parking. This represents a more corporate than corporal understanding of the local church and there is, I think, an important difference.

- The primary concern of the church built along corporate lines is the well-being of the organization itself: that which might ensure maximum benefit for its individual members (its "share-holders", if you will). The "lead pastor" (a relatively new term) in such a church performs much like a corporate C.E.O., overseeing an enterprising staff of ministry "specialists", each of whom is charged with a specific area of responsibility in the church ("business pastor", "family life pastor", "community outreach pastor", etc.). Like all corporations, this church must continually expand its programs, ministries and facilities in order to meet the ever-expanding demands of its membership, whose commitment is based, not surprisingly, on the "consumer" model: "I'll stick with it as long as it continues to provide benefits ('meet my felt needs')". Such a model requires little in the way of unity, love and humility, relying instead on efficiency, innovation, and effective management.

- The corporal understanding of the church is the one declared in Scripture: the church as the body of Christ (“*corpus Christi*”) and each member as an critically important, fully-functional part of that body. Both the primary concern of such a church and the accepted standard of measure for its success are set forth in ***Ephesians 4:12-13***:

“to prepare God’s people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (NIV)

Efficiency, innovation, and effective management are not ruled out in this model; nor is a large and handsome building outfitted with the latest technological tools and devices; nor are lively worship and dynamic programming. But they should not take priority, and they are not required. What is required is the faithful ministry of the Word by the power of the Holy Spirit in preaching, teaching, hearing, and receiving:

.... which produces humility, love and unity in the body,

.... which will be reflected in authentic worship, fellowship and personal holiness,

.... which will issue forth in the committed, sacrificial service of its members,

.... which will produce spiritual fruit in the church, in our families, and in the world,
soli Deo gloria.

This kind of local church is the one Paul desires that the one in Philippi becomes – and that the one in Rohrsersville becomes. Such a church can attain complete success, to the glory of God, no matter how small its congregation, how remote its location, how imperfect or inconvenient its venue.

Paul has already shown us how to begin functioning as an effective church: by the decision of each member to put on “*the mind of Christ*”. In this morning’s text passage he will describe the first-fruits of such a *corporal* decision – one which (according to Dr. Webster) “relates to or affects the body”. Let us pray.

LESSON: *Philippians 2:12-18*

1. Hmmmm..... verse 12 begins with the familiar “*Therefore*”, so we should first go back to the first verse of Chapter 2 and begin our reading there.
 - a. *Therefore....wherefore.... because of this.... in response to these truths*: For Paul, theology – the study of God – could not stand apart from its practical implications for the church.
 - b. In his entreaty he offers an appreciation of the Christian behavior he had observed during his short stay in Philippi and what he had been told about in the years since. Now, he charges the church, during this period of increasing persecution from without and divisive turmoil from within, the mature Christians there must continue in their faithful obedience.
 - c. We must be careful in our understanding of Paul’s exhortation in v.12. He does NOT tell the Philippian Christians to work *for* their salvation or to work *toward* their salvation; he tells them to work *out* their salvation, and to do so “*with fear and trembling*”.

- “The work of the Christian carries the mark of obedience, responsibility and sensitivity. The emphasis on *obedience* comes first. *Obedience* has always been in evidence in their lives and is a duty which belongs to all future time, one which will become even more important as the years pass. It stands to reason that it should be so, for the task of the Christian is to be made in all things like the Son of God, who took His obedience even as far as death, death on a cross.

“Second, it is a *responsible* work in the sense that we are called, ourselves, to shoulder the responsibility for seeing that the work gets done. The care of the individual soul belongs to that individual; responsibility for spiritual growth is committed to the person – not at this point a work of God nor a work of the fellowship, but a work of individual responsibility, laying hold of grace, rejoicing in the benefits of fellowship. *My* responsibility belongs to *me*.

“Thirdly, our work is to be *sensitive*: with fear and trembling. There is a fear of God of which we know all too little and which we lose at our peril – a godly fear, growing out of the recognition of our weakness and the power of temptation; a filial dread of offending God. This is not the fear of a lost sinner before the Holy One, but the fear of a true child before the most loving of all fathers; not a fear of what He might do to us, but of the hurt we might do to Him.”

- J.A. Motyer: *The Message of Philippians*

- *Be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:10-11, NIV)*

2. In v.13 Paul is quick to remind the Philippians that their salvation is entirely the work of God, and that He provides for all believers, by means of the Holy Spirit, both the will and the ability to do whatever He expects of us.
 - “Although the Philippians must work out their salvation, their salvation does not come at their own initiative. They should work out their salvation with a seriousness appropriate to those who look forward to salvation on the final day, but they should remember at all times that the whole process leading to the acquittal on that Day is theirs neither to initiate or to complete. It is God’s from first to last”
 - Frank Theilman: *Philippians* (The NIV Application Commentary series)
 - *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves; it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* (**Ephesians 2:8-10**, NIV)

3. Paul’s specific exhortation in v.14 – *Do everything without complaining or arguing* -- is not often applied in its proper context. Remember, this is a letter to a congregation, NOT to an individual. He is giving instruction to a local church which has begun to feel the divisive effects of internal disagreement. Paul knows – we all know – from experience the corrosive damage which can be wrought in a local church when the disaffection of a few distressed members is allowed to fester. Sides are chosen, lines are drawn and, before long, the entire church is infected and weakened. Its testimony in the world is also damaged, since unhappy church members tend to share their disaffection in casual conversation, even to those outside the faith who may innocently ask them, “So, where are you going to church these days?”.
 - a. “Complaining” (*murmuring* in the KJV) is the verbal response to something about which one is unhappy or dissatisfied: “I don’t like the way we do worship” or “I think he is a lousy elder” or “Why do we have to start the Sunday service so early (or so late)? It is a translation of the same Greek word Jesus used to describe the complaints of the disaffected day labourers in His parable (**Matthew 20:1-16**) and the grumbling of the Pharisees who decried Jesus for his close relationships with “*the tax collectors and sinners*” (**Luke 5:27-31**).
 - b. “Arguing” (*disputing* in some English translations) is used of passing judgment on the quality of someone’s opinion, or of debates over sensitive but non-essential “hot button” issues, or of expressing doubts about another’s sincerity or perspective.

4. Local churches which resist the too-often repeated cycles of divisiveness and schism will, says Paul in v.15 be so unusual as to “*shine as lights in the world*”. The commitment of its members to their church – despite its imperfections – and the joy attached to it – despite their lack of complete satisfaction with their church – will be made manifest.

- “Complaining and arguing are the sins that breed disunity and thus blur the effect of the gospel in Philippi. They are to *do everything* without indulging these attitudes, which reflect ‘selfish ambition’ and ‘vain conceit’ rather than the humility that puts the concerns of others ahead of one’s own. Their conduct is to be *blameless*, so that they might be recognized for who they are, the *children of God*.”

- Gordon Fee: *Philippians* (The IVP New Testament Commentary series)

- “Whoever belongs to Christ cannot but shine in the world. As bearers of the Word of Life they ought indeed to shine, but the Word of Life is death to the poisonous germ to *all* self-glorification. That death is the shining light that becomes visible in them, the reflection of the light of Christ, in which they resemble the stars of the universe that illumine the night because they are themselves illumined by the light of day. By their complete lack of self-glorification, by living by grace in fear and trembling, they represent without any special intention of doing so the order of God amid the disorders into which the unhumiliated person daily falls and must fall – they are the breakwaters of the flood not by their Christian activity, propaganda, agitation, and mission, but by their Christian existence.”

- Karl Barth: *The Epistle to the Philippians*

5. It may surprise us to learn that the simple, deliberate refusal to succumb to the normal human tendencies of grousing and bad-mouthing one’s church can be fashioned by the Holy Spirit into powerful testimony – *holding out the word of life* to a world which so desperately needs it, as Paul teaches in v.16.
6. In vs.17-18 he reminds his readers that his own record of self-sacrifice in pursuit of mission can be added to the things about their faith which are cause for rejoicing. His description of his Christian life being “*poured out like a drink offering*” can be connected to two references in the Old Testament.
 - a. According to **Numbers 15:1-10** drink offerings of wine were added to other offerings specified under the old covenant. Perhaps Paul saw his life of service as a sacrifice pleasing to God which would be added to the work of the Philippian church on the Day of Judgment. If this is so, we should not be surprised. It is typical of Paul to see things from that selfless perspective. In fact, it could be more logically argued that the work of the Philippian church (which he had, after all, himself planted), should be considered as a praiseworthy by-product of his own missionary work.
 - b. **1 Chronicles 11:10-19** records the account of David, recently made king of Israel and already in the midst of a desperate battle with the Philistines, who refused to drink the water drawn from behind enemy lines by three of his “mighty men” at great risk to their lives. Although he was severely parched and in need of it, *he poured the water out before the Lord* as a sacrifice of humble worship on their behalf.

LESSONS

1. "Life without sacrifice is an abomination". Annie Dillard's observation provides us with a divine perspective on the *corporal ethics* of the local church.
 - a. The elemental sacrifice of humility on the part of individual members is required in order that our Lord's "new commandment" be observed and obeyed in a congregation like ours, made up as it is of imperfect people and flawed leaders.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another." (**John 13:34-35**, NIV)

- b. The work of the ministry – that for which the Christians in all churches are to be equipped through the ministry of the Word – likewise requires sacrifices of time, energy and commitment. Service is never convenient. The kind of selfless service modeled by Paul (so necessary to the health of every local church), when offered in true humility (and without "*murmuring*" or complaining) never draws attention itself, and so often goes unappreciated, even unnoticed. But the believer's willingness to rearrange his or her schedule and to set aside personal preferences in order to participate in the work of the church – to have his or her life "*poured out as a drink offering*" – is a sacrifice pleasing to the Lord and of great value in His sight. The purpose of our service, remember, is to bring glory to *God* as we labour on behalf of others.
2. Hoarding, Beloved is a sin! Our heavenly Father, speaking through the prophet Malachi, laid this charge at the feet of His people after He had delivered them from Babylonian captivity and allowed them to return to Jerusalem in the 5th century B.C.

- a. "*Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' 'In tithes and offerings.'*"

- *Malachi 3:8* NKJV

- b. The recent struggles of His people, God went on to say, were being caused by their deliberate withholding of the tithes and offerings He expected of them.
 - c. Yes, God expects us to support the work of the ministry with a small portion of our own money, but He also expects us to make an offering of ourselves – our skills, talents, time, energy and effort. Paul, like our Lord, held nothing back in service to God, and this caused him to rejoice! What are you holding back – hoarding – from God? When did you last "empty" yourself of your "right" to rest and downtime in order to contribute to the tasks and ministries of this church? Let us, each one, be poured out! *Amen.*