



An Exploration of Christian Joy

THE JOY OF THE UNITED BODY OF CHRIST

Philippians 2:1-2

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Our unity and our intellectual pursuits are to focus on Jesus. We are to examine his life. We are to ponder on the meaning of his death. We are to read all of scripture in the light of God's Son coming to us and dying and rising for us as the culmination of God's self-revelation, and the fullness of his love.

Scripture

Philippians 2:1-2

¹If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ²then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. NIV

If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care— then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends.

- The Message

Sermon

In my third year at my former church I did a survey with the guys who came to our men's ministry breakfast. The survey asked about their interests; their interests in music, in their professions, in their family life, and with their hobbies. There were about 20 guys who take the survey and we came up with 20 very different profiles. We had a country rockin' married with no children civil engineer who loved to cook, we had a classical music loving married man with a melded family of three oil worker, we had duck hunters and fly fishermen, we had single guys who had never been married, guys who had been married so long that they couldn't remember ever being single, bank executives and maintenance workers, and life long Presbyterians and guys who had not yet learned how to spell "Presbyterian."

Obviously, this was an incredibly diverse group. And yet here we all were, gathered together at eight in the morning on a Saturday. Something had to be uniting us; and there was one thing that united us, which led to what we held in common. What united us was that we all knew, at some level, the Lordship of Jesus. The outcome for us was that Christ had called all of us from these different places and backgrounds to this one church where we had fellowship with each other.

I am sure that if I took that same survey this morning, we would find that we are just as diverse or more so a group here. Yet, the truth is, and what we confess, is that we are family here. And, if we heed the call of Christ here from our brother in Christ, Paul, we will be a unified family.

Paul speaks with great passion and great tenderness here in the opening of the second chapter. His passion is found in this stirring call to unity; his tenderness comes with the way in which he phrases the call. Calvin says of verse one, "There is an extraordinary tenderness in this exhortation..." Calvin goes on to explain that Paul speaks here with rhetorical questions, as a tender brother, rather than with a stern admonition that he equates to paternalism. Again, I think this reflects on the good relationship that Paul has with the church in Philippi, and serves as a goal for our relationships with each other.

Paul's gentle rhetorical question begins with, "If then there is any encouragement in Christ..." As I read this my mind reminded me of those times when I have tried to start an older car (maybe particularly in cold weather?); you *encourage* the car. You talk sweet to it, even as you are turning the key, or if it is a much older car or a diesel, as you are manipulating the choke. You want the engine to start, to roar into life. That is what Paul wants to see in Philippi and he lovingly encourages his brothers and sisters there. It will, he seems to say, make his joy complete to see the engine roar to life and the church to focus on Christ.

Paul speaks his message lovingly, but we still need to pay heed to the message itself. The message, found in verse two, is that we are to be of one mind and one accord. We are to be unified.

Once again, in a surprising fashion, Paul is highlighting the intellectual content of our faith. Remember in 1:9 Paul says, "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight..." Here he asks that we may be of the same mind and of one accord, a word meaning understanding.

What then is to be the object of our intellectual query? Where are we to focus our minds? It is the same source of the encouragement that Paul states in verse one, it is in Christ. Our unity and our intellectual pursuits are to focus on Jesus. We are to examine his life. We are to ponder on the meaning of his death. We are to read all of scripture in the light of God's Son coming to us and dying and rising for us as the culmination of God's self-revelation, and the

fullness of his love. And, then, in light of whom Jesus is the question becomes for us (together), how do we respond? Our intellectual pursuit of Christ never leaves us completely contemplative, our understanding of Christ and his love compels us to love one another in unity because of Christ, and to live out Christ in the world.

I go back to the illustration of encouraging the engine to start. As I pray and listen concerning First Presbyterian Church, I have a vision of this being a time when we are encouraging the engine to start, sweet talking it, and praying about what will happen when the motor comes to life and begins to purr.

Here's my observation: This is a strong motor here at this church. The more I see around here, the more I believe that the Lord has blessed this church with some incredible gifts. I have heard from many of you and I see your passion to have Christ known and the love of Christ lived out.

What would it be if we were encouraging each other to Christocentric like-mindedness? What would that look like in our small groups? And in our fellowship times together? And in our common mission work? It is time for us to focus our minds on Christ, to live in accord with one another. We need to be praying and asking the Lord what it is that King Jesus would have us to do here coming out of this church. How do we unify our minds on Christ? And how do we, with our unified Christocentric minds follow Jesus as we advance his Kingdom of love and grace. I want to ask you to be in regular prayer for to "be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind."