

Philippians 2.1-4 Sermon / COB / 09.11.16

Introduction

- † **[1: Title]** Last week, we had a strange topic: we learned that suffering for Christ is a gift to us from God the Father. I have to say, it's encouraging you all came back after that! Today we move from suffering for Christ to sacrificing for each other and the church.
- Paul does not say outright that sacrifice is a gift, but it is an obligation, part of the Christian life, necessary for the church to thrive, necessary for each of us to survive the opposition of persecution and deception that awaits us out in the world.
 - And, since Paul ties this passage together with the previous one, sacrifice is part of how we live worthy of the gospel, and perhaps sacrifice is a subset of the suffering we do for Christ and his gospel mission.
- † Think of one of the biggest goals you have for your life. It might be about the job or career path you want, a goal you have about family life, something you hope to achieve or obtain, like owning your first house, whatever, just something you greatly desire to see happen for you. Are you willing to sacrifice other things to realize this dream?
- When I was young, what I wanted most was to read books. I went to college and graduate school for economics, and in my free time I read everything, from mysteries to biographies to music theory to chaos theory. To do this, I was willing to sacrifice my finances: I rarely had a paying job, I saved nothing, and I even ran up credit card debt. So at the age of thirty, I was well read, but my net worth was negative and I found myself living for a while in a roadside motel.
 - LeeAnn, on the other hand, really wanted to build solid financial health, and she was willing to sacrifice for that goal. She worked all through high school and college, she lived at home through most of her college years, she only ate out when men bought the meal, she drove an old car that she got for free, she never bought new clothes, and she saved every penny she could. So at age twenty-two, when I met her, she had about \$60,000 saved up, in today's terms. She bought a house, which she lived in and then we lived in and now the rent from that house pays our mortgage here.
 - My goals changed when I met LeeAnn, partly because I was embarrassed at the contrast in our finances. LeeAnn loaned me the money to pay off my debts, so I made paying her off quickly my new goal. So I bought fewer books [I won't say I bought none, but I bought fewer], I worked at developing my career in banking, I stopped spending money frivolously, even our dates were limited to pizza and sitting on my floor listening to music or reading, because my goal was to pay her back. If something matters to us, we are willing to sacrifice to get it.
- † Can you think of a goal for which you would be willing to sacrifice so much, that it might be called suffering? I think of the parent who works a job s/he hates, putting up with harassment, tedious or gross tasks, the kind of job that can sap your spirit if you let it, because that parent is determined to provide for the children, not only with food but also with opportunity to do better in life. I think of missionaries, who abandon a sensible career and much of what is good about life here, to go shine God's light in the darkest and most dangerous parts of the world. I think of soldiers, who risk their lives to defend the interests of our country.

- So what if, as we discussed last week, your biggest goal was to live worthy of the gospel? We learned last week that this is Paul's command for us, which we can accomplish by living righteously, by confirming and defending the true gospel, by standing firm when people persecute us for our beliefs or when people argue against those beliefs, and by pursuing the gospel mission of making new disciples for Christ.
- I finished my sermon last week, all choked up, confessing that I *yearn* to accomplish what God has for me to do; I want to live worthy of the gospel. If that is true for me or for you, would we be willing to sacrifice to achieve that goal? Would we be willing even to suffer if that was necessary? That's what Paul is talking about in the passage we studied last week and now today. If we are living up to the gospel, living out our true faith, we will be willing to sacrifice and even suffer for the goals God gives us.

Exposition

- † **[2: 2.1-4]** Let's take a look at our passage: you can open your Bible to Philippians 2.1. As I mentioned last week, I intended to preach 1.27-2.4 as one passage. It is one thematic paragraph in Paul's letter, so we have to consider how these four verses tie into the previous four verses.

Philippians 2.1-4 NET: Therefore [based on all that we talked about last week], **if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort provided by love, any fellowship in the Spirit, any affection or mercy, complete my joy and be of the same mind, by having the same love, being united in spirit, and having one purpose. Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition or vanity, each of you should, in humility, be moved to treat one another as more important than yourself. Each of you should be concerned not only about your own interests, but about the interests of others as well.**

- † Paul connects these verses to the ones just before them by saying "therefore." In light of all the Philippians having received the grace of salvation and the grace to suffer together for Christ, this is how they shall live worthy of the gospel.
- † Paul starts with four "if" statements. If these things are true, then they should do what he asks. And these things are true, that's the point.
- **[3: encouragement]** Is there any encouragement or comfort in Christ? Yes. Our salvation in Christ gives us hope even when we are suffering. Paul was in prison, possibly on his way to execution. But he never gave up hope, because he knew he was right with God through Christ, and therefore he knew he could serve Christ even in prison and his death would bring him to Christ's presence in Heaven. There is encouragement in Christ.
 - **[4: comfort]** Is there any loving solace in Christ, the comfort provided by love? Yes. When we turn to God amidst our suffering, his love in Christ provides solace or comfort. When I was in that roadside motel, at the lowest point of my life, I was comforted by God's love as I learned to depend on him again. There is solace, comfort in Christ.
 - **[5: fellowship]** Is there spiritual fellowship or spiritual partnership in the church for those who are in Christ together? Yes. We have a strong bond of love and unity that grows as we live for Christ together and we build each other up, and this spiritual fellowship helps sustain us in times of suffering. Is there fellowship with the Holy Spirit? Yes. Those who are saved in Christ enjoy spiritual unity with God to empower us through our times of suffering. There is fellowship with the Spirit and there is spiritual fellowship in Christ.

- **[6: affection]** Is there affection and mercy for those in Christ? Yes, those saved in Christ receive constant affection and mercy from God and from each other in the believing community as the body of Christ, and this also helps sustain us in times of suffering. One reason small groups are so successful in helping people recover from grief, addiction, and any other affliction of life, is that the body of Christ provides constant affection and mercy in Christ.
- † **[7: complete]** All these are divine gifts through Christ, and thus certainties. The way Paul wrote this in Greek makes it obvious we are to assume these things are true. Since these things are true and shared by all believers, Paul says the Philippians should complete his joy.
- The phrase “complete my joy” is an attention getter to point to the main thought, which is to “be of the same mind,” or “think the same thing.” Paul has said he prays with joy based on their past partnership with him in the gospel mission and he will rejoice as their prayers continue to empower him to exalt Christ in all that he does. Now he says they can complete his joy by thinking in unity. Because they love him, this gives them an extra motivation. It is like a beloved father saying to his children, “Please, for my sake...”
 - This unity Paul desires is not that everybody would think the same way about everything. It is good we have diversity in the church, diversity in how we dress, what music we like, even to have diverse input on how to get ministry work done. The unity Paul seeks is about the gospel and the purpose of life. That unity requires – and results in – a relational unity, relational peace, within the church.
- † **[8: love]** Paul gives four ways they can live out this unity and thus live worthy of the gospel. First, they are to have the same love together which God has shown them through Christ. At the men’s breakfast, we talked about this kind of love: it is a love that is sacrificial, unconditional, and as we will see in the next passage, humble.
- What would this love look like here? I think everyone might take a turn cleaning the church once per year, so we could share the burden of presenting our best without spending thousands of dollars to do so.
 - I think everyone would find a way to serve each other in the church, at least monthly. Dot is eighty-three years old, but she prepares the communion table every month. Robert and Irina are not yet members, but they clean the church every other month, Robert plays on the praise team, and they are among the first to volunteer for any need.
 - If we had the same love for each other as God has shown us, would we have to make ten phone calls when someone needs a meal or a ride, or would ten people be calling the office to volunteer? Email me to get on the list of who is willing to be called for meals, who for rides, who for urgent house or yard or car help, and so on.
 - I knew a woman who came to our church in Florida for a few months, but then left because she didn’t feel a connection with anyone. She never joined a ministry team, never participated in a small group, she didn’t even stay for the food after the service to meet anyone, so to my mind she never really gave the church a chance. If you come here but don’t plug in, you also are not giving yourself a chance to show Christian love to the rest of us.
 - Today, please think of how you could show love for the rest of us more *intentionally*, so we do show the love of Christ to each other.

† **[9: united]** The second way the Philippians can live out this unity and thus live worthy of the gospel, is by being united in spirit. In Greek, this is one word, *σύμψυχος*, literally “one soul,” which meant to have a harmonious relationship.

- We do not have too many relational difficulties in this church, thankfully. Still, let’s talk about how we could live this out. If you were determined to live harmoniously in the church, would you be interested in constructive feedback about how you might be less irritating to others or how you could relate to others more biblically and effectively? I think you would.
- If you wanted to live harmoniously here, but you had an issue with someone else in the church, would you let it fester, would you spread negative propaganda about that person, would you avoid that person and be rude when you did meet? I think instead you would resolve your differences biblically, you would learn to love the unlovable, you might even make a point of working with that person on a ministry team or in a small group, so you could truly understand each other and learn to relate to each other.
- LeeAnn and Al came back from the missions trip singing each other’s praises. But what if instead they couldn’t stand each other? What should they do on the trip in that case? Should they try to gain leverage over each other, pressure each other, speak sarcastically to each other? Or should they find a way to work productively together, forgiving and giving each other the benefit of the doubt, remembering to love even those you might not always enjoy? This is a good lesson for those of you who are married too!
- Today, think of how you might be more tolerant of each other’s idiosyncrasies [choose to love!], and how your own eccentricities might be tempered to be less annoying to others.

† **[10: purpose]** The third way the Philippians can live out this unity and thus live worthy of the gospel, is by sharing one purpose. Based on what we have learned so far, Paul wants them to live for Christ, to be image of Christ, righteously reflecting and representing God, and reproducing God’s image through pursuit of the gospel mission.

- What if we shared that purpose? At the least, this would mean every one of us would be intent on learning how to share the true gospel, and we would make reaching out to unchurched people a priority in our daily life. We would regularly pray for them, be intentional about building a relationship with them, and look for opportunities to share spiritual truth with them. And, hey, when your unbelieving family or friends come to visit, don’t skip quiet time or church to accommodate them: rather, make a point of doing those things, to show them how important this is to you, and to provide them with the opportunity to experience them with you.
- If we shared Paul’s purpose, we also would take seriously God’s vision for us to grow into mentors and teachers of others in the church. We need more of you to teach the children and the youth; we need to develop some of you into adult small group leaders and teachers. Those of us who are doing these things already were not born into it, you know; we once were just like you, but we heeded God’s command and pursued biblical understanding and spiritual growth, and then took risks to help others.
- Wouldn’t it be nice to offer a weekly mentoring session to every person who comes in as a seeker or new believer? Wouldn’t it be nice to have a monthly youth group invitational activity? Wouldn’t it be nice to have a young adults ministry in Parkesburg? Wouldn’t it be nice if we could offer multiple small groups for men, women, and couples, throughout the week? Do you know what is holding us up in offering these things? We need you to step up.

- When LeeAnn and I first started hanging out together, we found a church we both liked. But I told her not to even ask me to join a small group, I was not into that. We ended up going to one because a pastor invited me, and I felt awkward about saying “no.” It went ok, we met some nice people, but they all prayed out loud together! That was a little freaky to me at the time. Then the pastor announced that since I was a college teacher, I would teach the lesson the next week. What?! I knew and could explain economics, but I didn’t know much at all about the Bible and had never taught it. A few months later, the pastor surprised me again by naming me leader of the group. My point is that I had no experience in these things. You never do, until you do them, and then you do. You learn as you go along, and you learn faster if you ask questions and are open to input from your pastor or mentor. Twenty years ago, I started reading my Bible regularly and today I am your pastor; I am as surprised by this as anyone; what might God want to do through you?
- † **[11: 2.3-4]** The fourth way the Philippians can live out this unity and thus live worthy of the gospel, is by putting aside selfish ambition and vanity, to adopt humility, such that they treat one another as more important than themselves, being concerned about each other’s circumstances or interests, not just their own.
- **[12: vanity]** The Greek word *κενοδοξία* meant “vanity,” “conceit,” or “delusion.” It was formed by putting two words together which meant “empty glory.” If we are motivated to glorify ourselves, if we boast in ourselves, that glory is really empty glory, without substance. In contrast, we will learn in the next passage that Christ chose to empty himself, to pour himself out for us, yet he is full of true glory. He was humble and thus full of true glory; when we are vain, we thus are empty of true glory. So we should adopt his attitude of humility and servanthood, and boast only in him.
 - **[13: ambition]** Selfish ambition reflects our self-interest and self-promotion at the expense of others; it reflects our values and behavior as fallen flesh. Again, contrast this with the attitude of Christ, who is the Son of God, yet chose to bless us. Contrast this with the attitude of Paul, who was one of the top people in the church, and had done more for the gospel mission than anyone else, yet continued to put aside his own comforts and desires to minister to others in Christ’s name.
 - To have unity, believers must stop thinking in ego-centric ways, with selfishness and empty vanity. These are divisive and self-oriented; Paul wants the Philippians to be unified and generously other-oriented. Paul notes in other letters that selfish ambition and vanity cause disruption, disunity, and conflict in the church. Instead we should have humility, and be motivated to bless others humbly in Christ’s name.
- † **[14: humility]** Humility was not valued quality in Greek culture, nor is it in ours.
- Our movie heroes are the warriors who kick butt, who shoot first and ask questions later. Our sports heroes gain popularity by bragging about their abilities and putting down those who play the same position on other teams. The business people who inspire us usually are those who gain our attention by their conspicuous consumption rather than by their generous giving.
 - In Greek literature, the word for humility [*ταπεινοφροσύνη*] rarely occurs, and when it does it is seen as a negative characteristic, a weakness or lowliness to be avoided. Scholar Walter Hanson says, “the Greeks despised humility because they sought to elevate humanity to nobility far above lowliness and weakness caused by afflictions...”

- † **[15: proverb]** Paul's view was different. From his Jewish upbringing, Paul knows that God humbles the proud, but exalts the humble.
- **Proverbs 11.2 NET: When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.** The proud will walk by bottom line human reasoning, and thus disgrace themselves by not honoring Christ; the humble will seek out God and his ways [top line] and gain wisdom from God's revelation.
 - If we humbly acknowledge we are mere creatures, fallen into sin, unable to be righteous without Christ, in need of God's salvation and empowerment through gifts of grace we do not deserve, then we trust in God instead of ourselves, we submit to Christ and follow his example, and we allow the Holy Spirit to win over our fleshly desires, so we learn to value others and minister to others instead of promoting ourselves and our own interests.
 - As we discussed earlier in this letter, we have tremendous value because we are created in God's image, saved by the blood of Christ, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but all that value comes from the triune God, not ourselves. Humility is recognizing our position: we are helpless and worthless without Christ, while we are valuable as saints with Christ.
 - **[16: others]** Later in this letter, Paul will describe the humility of Christ, our true hero whom we should seek to emulate. If we are humble, we will not act out of selfish ambition or empty conceit, but rather seek to value others above ourselves, to bless them, even if we have to sacrifice to do it, to take care of their needs, as well as our own.
- † Scholar Peter O'Brien wrote, "If this Christian grace of 'humility' denotes 'other person-centeredness' by those who have humbled themselves under God's mighty hand, then it will come to expression in a true estimate of fellow believers, that is, by regarding them better than oneself."
- We think of others as more important than ourselves by being concerned about their circumstances, their interests, not just our own. We don't neglect our own welfare, but we do not pursue it at the expense of taking care of each other. If we all had this attitude, we would be a unified and supportive community.
 - How can we do this here? We could be more willing to meet the needs of the church and of the people in the church. We need more maintenance help around here, cleaning help, gardening help. We need people to get out of their comfort zones, like Al did on the missions trip and Steve did teaching in CSB, so we can offer more ministry. Think also about your commitment to attending church and small group: if you stay home to satisfy your whim or your desires, you take away an opportunity to bless everyone else who is here; so come even when you do not feel like it, make church and small group a priority in your life.
 - This is what Paul wanted for the Philippian church, that they would be a unified and mutually supportive community. Why? Because unity with each other in fellowship and unity in pursuing one purpose and unity about doctrine are necessary for success of the gospel mission Christ gave the church.

Conclusion

- † **[17: title]** Before we close, let's reiterate some principles we can apply from last week and this week, so that we can live worthy of the gospel we have received.

- First, let us learn to stand firm for the faith of the gospel, as individuals, yes, but also together, in unity. Let us make this a strong church, with strong biblical convictions and strong relationships.
- Second, let us be willing to suffer for Christ, for our faith. Let us not shy from standing firm so as to avoid social repercussions or other suffering. Let us not be intimidated by those who oppose us or our faith.
- Third, let us be determined to live up to the righteousness we have been given. It is an impossible task, but God wants us to really try. This will allow us to walk in his light in fellowship with him, and to shine his light to others.
- Fourth, let us be willing to sacrifice to preserve unity with each other. Let us learn to share Christ's love together, live harmoniously with each other, and share the same purpose of living for Christ. Let us learn to sacrifice to bless each other instead of living for ourselves.
- Let's pray . . .