

Better Way Apostolic Church- Bible Class

Subject: Working together in Unity: Philippians 2:1-4

The Church As a Team

Everything we do takes teamwork and trust. Every person in the local church is valuable and needed. The church is a team, and together we can build for the Lord.

People can rob us of our joy. Paul was facing His problems with people at Rome (Philippians 1:15-18) as well as with people in Philippi, and it was the latter who concerned him the most. When Epaphroditus brought a generous gift from the church in Philippi, and good news of the church's concern for Paul, he also brought the bad news of a possible division in the church family. Apparently there was a double threat to the unity of the church; false teachers coming in from without (Philippians 3:1-3) and disagreeing members within (Philippians 4:1-3). What Euodia ("fragrance") and Syntyche ("fortunate") were debating about, Paul does not state. Perhaps they both wanted to be president of the missionary guild or the choir!

Paul knew what some church workers today do not know, that there is a difference between unity and uniformity. True spiritual unity comes from within; it is a matter of the heart. Uniformity is the result of pressure from without. This is why Paul opens this section appealing to the highest possible spiritual motives (Philippians 2:1-4). Since the believers at Philippi are "in Christ," this ought to encourage them to work toward unity and love, not division and rivalry. In a gracious way, Paul is saying to the church, "Your disagreements reveal that there is a spiritual problem in your fellowship. It isn't going to be solved by rules or threats; it's going to be solved when your hearts are right with Christ and with each other." Paul wanted them to see that the basic cause was selfishness, and the cause of selfishness is pride. There can be no joy in the life of the Christian who puts himself above others.

The secret of joy in spite of circumstances is the single mind. The secret of joy in spite of people is the submissive mind. The key verse is: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better [more important] than themselves" (Philippians 2:3). In Philippians 1, it is "Christ first" and in Philippians 2 it is "others next." Paul the soul winner in Philippians 1 becomes Paul the servant in Philippians 2.

It is important that we understand what the Bible means by "humility." The humble person is not one who thinks meanly of himself, he simply does not think of himself at all! (I think Andrew Murray said that.) Humility is that grace that, when you know you have it, you have lost it. The truly humble person knows himself and accepts himself (Romans 12:3). He yields himself to Christ to be a servant, to use what he is and has for the glory of God and the good of others. "Others" is the key idea in this chapter (Philippians 2:3-4); the believer's eyes are turned away from himself and focused on the needs of others.

The "submissive mind" does not mean that the believer is at the beck and call of everybody else or that he is a "religious doormat" for everybody to use! Some people try to purchase friends and maintain church unity by "giving in" to everybody else's whims and wishes. This is not what Paul is suggesting at all. The Scripture puts it perfectly: "ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5). If we

have the single mind of Philippians 1, then we will have no problem with the submissive mind of Philippians 2.

Unity:

Faith That Saves

"In an English town," says Dr. A. C. Dixon, "a report got out that the bank was about to fail. Five hundred people ran for their deposits on the same day. The pastor of the dissenting Church in the town was invited by the bank directors to meet them. They said to him, 'Sir, if these people press us to the wall, they will lose their money. If they don't press us, we will pay every dollar.' The pastor said, 'I will help you; I have some money, and I trust you.' He went home, got his money, came to the bank door, and, standing on the step, said, 'Friends, you all know me; I have been living here twenty-five years, and I believe in this bank. Here are three hundred pounds that I am going to deposit. I believe that the bank is good.' In less than thirty minutes every one of those people had dispersed, and the bank was saved by faith. Unbelief as to that bank was about to ruin it. The moment faith was implanted, the bank was saved. Railroads are saved by faith. Steamboats are saved by faith. Your business, friend, is saved by faith. Every good thing on earth is saved by faith. And when the infidel rails at the religion of Jesus Christ because we are saved by faith, he is railing at every institution this country holds dear."

Christian Unity

After the battle of Gettysburg, one of the most disastrous in the American Civil War, a man went into a hospital bearing with him aid and comfort which Massachusetts had sent, and he went around from cot to cot inquiring, "Any Massachusetts soldiers here?" Not a word. Nobody answered. But by-and-by a voice cried, "No! only United States Soldiers here." So in the great campaign it is our glory and distinction, not that we are members of this or the other denomination; we are Christ's Soldiers, carrying on His holy war against all evil.

Don't Give Up

An elderly lady was once asked by a young man who had grown weary in the fight, whether he ought to give up the struggle. "I am beaten every time," he said dolefully. "I feel I must give up." "Did you ever notice," she replied, smiling into the troubled face before her, "that when the Lord told the discouraged fishermen to cast their nets again, it was right in the same old spot where they had been fishing all night and had caught nothing?"

Laborers Together

An old legend tells of a noisy carpenter's shop in which the tools of the trade were arguing among themselves. Brother Hammer was told by his fellow tools that he would have to leave because he was too noisy. To which he replied, "If I am to leave this carpenter's shop, Brother Gimlet must go too; he is so insignificant that he makes very little impression."

Little Brother Gimlet arose and said, "All right, but Brother Screw must go also; you have to turn him around and around again and again to get him anywhere."

Brother Screw said, "If you wish, I will go. But Brother Plane must leave also; all his work is on the surface, there is no depth to it."

To this Brother Plane replied, "Well, Brother Rule will have to withdraw if I do, for he is always measuring others as though he were the only one who is right."

Brother Rule then complained against Brother Sandpaper and said, "I just do not care, he is rougher than he ought to be and he is always rubbing people the wrong way."

In the midst of the discussion, the Carpenter of Nazareth walked in. He had come to perform His day's work. He put on His apron, and went to the bench to make a pulpit. He employed the screw, the gimlet, the sandpaper, the saw, the hammer and the plane and all the other tools. After the day's work was over and the pulpit was finished, Brother Saw arose and said, "Brethren, I perceive that all of us are laborers together with God."

Is it not wonderful how God uses all of us and our unique gifts in the building of His pulpit!

Fasting:

The Bible presents fasting as something that is good, profitable, and beneficial. The book of Acts records believers fasting before they made important decisions.

(Acts 13:2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.³ And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.)

Acts 14:23). And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

FAST- Christ taught the need of purity and simplicity of motive.

Fasting and prayer are often linked together (Luke 2:37;5:33). Too often, the focus of fasting is on the lack of food. Instead, the purpose of fasting should be to take your eyes off the things of this world to focus completely on God. Fasting is a way to demonstrate to God, and to ourselves, that we are serious about our relationship with Him. Fasting helps us gain a new perspective and a renewed reliance upon God.

Fasting should be limited to a set time, especially when fasting from food. Extended periods of time without eating can be harmful to the body. Fasting is not intended to punish the flesh, but to redirect attention to God. Fasting should not be considered a "dieting method" either. The purpose of a biblical fast is not to lose weight, but rather to gain deeper fellowship with God. Anyone can fast, but some may not be able to fast from food (diabetics, for example). Everyone can temporarily give up something in order to draw closer to God.

By taking our eyes off the things of this world, we can more successfully turn our attention to Christ. Fasting is not a way to get God to do what we want. Fasting changes us, not God. Fasting is not a way to appear more spiritual than others. Fasting is to be done in a spirit of humility and a joyful attitude. Matthew 6:16-18 declares, "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you

are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

Christians were also encouraged to undertake their own self initiated fasts. Their purpose was to benefit the soul at the expense of the body, which the Church called mortifying the flesh. The word mortify was derived from the Latin mortificar, meaning to kill. Thus the devout Christian expressed a sort of symbolic death of all personal or selfish goals.

The whole range of fasting or abstinence preached by the Church was intended to reduce or control selfish impulses. Fasting fulfilled a number of purposes that included practicing self-control, purify oneself, and atoning for sin.

The principle of fasting is simple. When the intake of food is temporarily stopped, many systems of the body are given a break from the hard work of digestion. The extra energy gives the body the chance to heal and restore itself, and burning stored calories gets rid of toxic substances stored in the body.

The digestive tract is the part of the body most exposed to environmental threats, including bacteria, viruses, parasites, and toxins. It requires the most immune system support. When food is broken down in the intestines, it travels through the blood to the liver, the largest organ of the body's natural detoxification system. The liver breaks down and removes the toxic by-products produced by digestion, including natural ones and the chemicals now present in the food supply. During fasting, the liver and immune system are essentially freed to detoxify and heal other parts of the body.