

Our Common Life in Christ (4)

Introduction (Text: Philippians 2:1-4)

- A. **As an Apostle and minister Paul is always concerned about the church. He has concentrated on his own situation in chapter 1 because he knows what is uppermost in the minds of his friends at Philippi; he needs to assure them that he is confident in the faith and high in spirit.**
- B. In **1:27** he begins to express his concern for them and the witness they must make. **Whether he ever returns to them or not, they are to live as citizens worthy of the kingdom of Christ. They are to stand fast in the gospel and not be intimidated by adversaries. They are to count it a privilege to suffer because they believe; they entrusted their lives to Christ.**
- C. In the **first four verses of chapter 2, Paul gives a succinct, radiantly clear description of our common life in Christ.** Thus he underscores the challenging fact that the Christian life is always a shared life: **“...striving together as one for the faith of the gospel” (1:27b).**

#1: *The Harvest Yield of Our Common Life in Christ*

- A. Paul begins with an “if,” but the “if” is not used the way we normally use it—as the condition upon which what follows depends: if there is good weather, adequate rain, and sunshine, and if the frost doesn’t come too early, the trees will bear an abundance of fruit. **He turns that around, first naming the harvest and then the conditions that will produce the harvest. And what is the harvest of our common life in Christ?**
- B. The NEB has translated **verses 1, 2, and 3** in a way that makes this metaphor of harvest yield, and seed and conditions which produce or prohibit an abundant harvest clear. The verse begins **“If then our common life in Christ yields anything to stir the heart...”** then goes on to name the harvest yield.
 1. **“...encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love...”** The Greek word is *paraklesis*, variously translated in other New Testament passages as “comfort,” “exhortation,” and “incentive.”
What is to be sensed here is the strong, upholding support that is ours within the Christian community. (As minister, many examples: moving)
 - **Example #1:** Sister, Mother-in-law, Mom and Dad
 - **Example #2:** A minister gives the following example. He writes: “One vivid experience comes to mind. A man was unfaithful to his wife, walked over her, used her, and went his perverted selfish way. But he kept coming back, asking his wife to accept him over and over again until the woman couldn’t take it any more. She committed suicide.

The woman had a friend in our church who had experienced much the same thing with her husband. This church member told the story of her friend's suicide. As she wept she confessed, "That has been my temptation. You don't know how many times I've been on the verge of suicide. **I couldn't follow through on my temptation because of the love and support of Christ through this church. I want you to know that Mary and Jim, Bob and Karen, Ben and Ann have kept me alive.**"

2. **"...if any common sharing in the Spirit,"**

- **"Koinonia,"** the Greek word here for "sharing," may be translated "participation," "communion," or "sharing." Paul used the same to suggest what happens in Holy Communion (**1 Corinthians 10:16**).
- It is the essence of our common life in Christ and implies all that Paul's threefold benediction explicitly states: the grace which Christ supplies, the love which God bestows, and the fellowship which the Holy Spirit creates (**2 Corinthians 13:14**). **The Holy Spirit gives us the gift of koinonia, of fellowship. We do not create it. As Christ supplies grace, God bestows love, so the Spirit creates a deep sharing among us which makes us one.**

3. **"tenderness and compassion"**

- This is a restatement of encouragement and comfort, but with added meaning. In this verse and in **Philippians 1:8**, the KJV says **"bowels"** instead of "affection." While it is somewhat inexact and certainly inelegant, the word gets our attention enough to cause us to want to explore the deep meaning of it. The Greek word *splagchnon*, literally "inward parts."
- As Paul used it, it did mean the viscera, but not the lower viscera, the intestines; it meant the heart and lungs. That becomes a powerful metaphor. The Hebrews used a comparable metaphor for feelings, which literally meant bowels. **"Tenderness" thus takes on far more power than we usually credit to it. This is no light, soft word that is far less than love. It is active love, expressive love, and, for the Christian, nothing less than loving with the love of Christ.**
- Lightfoot paraphrases **1:8** in a fashion that helps us understand what **"bowels"** and **"compassion"** really mean. **"Did I speak of having you in my heart? I should rather have said that in the heart of Christ Jesus I long for you."** Lightfoot then adds the comment, **"A powerful metaphor describing perfect union. The believer has no yearnings apart from his Lord: his pulse beats with the pulse of Christ; his heart throbs with the heart of Christ."**
- What a compelling characteristic of relationship for those who share a common life in Christ. **Tenderness and compassion (*splagchnon* and**

oiktirmos))—the deepest and most tender of feeling for one another, and the manifestation of these feelings in compassionate yearning and actions.

#2: *The Seeds that Produce the Harvest*

- A. **“If then our common life in Christ yields anything to stir the heart, ...”** (NEB). Paul begins. Then he names those things we have been discussing: loving encouragement and comfort, sharing in the Spirit, tenderness and compassion. **“...then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind”** (v. 2), he continues. **I believe Paul is saying that these are the seeds that produce the harvest yield of our common life in Christ. If they are not the seeds, then certainly they are the conditions in which the harvest grows.**
- B. The NEB translates the verse clearly: **“...fill my cup of happiness by thinking and feeling alike, with the same love for one another, the same turn of mind, and a common care for unity.”** Paul is not asking for uniformity of belief, nor is he talking about doctrinal orthodoxy. He is calling for harmony of relationship, mutual concern and love for one another, a caring for the quality of fellowship in order that Christ may perform His ministry through the body.
- C. **Overarching all of this is what Paul says in verses 3 and 4, which capture the burning uniqueness of our common life in Christ.**
- **Abraham Maslow**, one of the giant thinkers of the 20th century, brought a radical shift of perspective to psychology and began an entirely new approach to therapy as he realized the importance for persons to find purpose outside themselves.
 - **Since Freud, practitioners in the field of psychology and psychiatry were oriented toward the pathological. They studied sick people, dysfunctional persons. Maslow took the opposite approach, studying people who were vitally alive and fully functioning, radiantly happy whole persons.**
 - In the process, he developed a theory called **self-actualization**, and described a composite person whom he designated self-actualized. **In his search for the secret of self-actualization he wrote, “Without exception, I found that every person who was sincerely happy, radiantly alive, was living for a purpose or a cause beyond himself.”**
 - Maslow’s discovery has been a great blessing for the cause of mental and emotional wholeness. **It is no wonder he named Jesus as a fully-actualized person.** And it is no wonder Paul, in the style of Jesus, called us to do nothing **“out of selfish ambition or vain conceit,”** and not **“looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others”** (2:3-4).