

It has now been several weeks since we first looked at this passage from Philippians 2:1-4 and *The Joy of Unity*. The reason for Paul's emphasis on unity throughout the book is due to the fact that the church's unity was in jeopardy. He doesn't hesitate to address the issue for the sake of their testimony and the word of life (Phil. 2:14-16). He didn't want to see all that had been accomplished just a little over a decade earlier, simply go down the tubes.

What's interesting is the approach Paul takes as he addresses the issue. He doesn't use his apostolic authority. He calls himself and Timothy, "bondservants of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:1)—literally "slaves" of Jesus Christ. So in this conflict resolution Paul addressed it *humbly*. Secondly, Paul addressed it *truthfully*. He addresses the unity issue in Philippians 1:27; 2:1-11, 14-16; 4:2, 3. In fact, he calls out two women by name, Euodia and Syntyche, and strongly urges them "to be of the same mind in the Lord." Notice that he doesn't address the unity issue abruptly but *gradually*. He waits to make mention of these two women near the end of his letter. Lastly, Paul dealt with it *lovingly* (1:1-8). He followed his own admonition and "spoke the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15).

We have already discovered that the prominent theme of the Book of Philippians is *joy*. However, *unity* is another key thought throughout the book. That makes perfect sense, *unity* and *joy*. In the church, you can't have one without the other! Joy promotes unity, and unity promotes joy.

However, another key theme throughout the book is *the Christian's mind or attitude*. As Paul addresses the issue of unity and the necessity of humility, he gives us the greatest example of humility ever known to man when he writes: "Let this mind [attitude] be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). He then describes the extent of Christ's humiliation for the redemption of the world (2:6-8).

Note the frequency of Paul's use of the believer's mind or attitude:

- "Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind" (1:27).
- Be "like-minded" (2:2).
- Do all things in "humility of mind" (2:3).
- "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus (2:5).
- Attitude is certainly expressed when Paul wrote, "Do all things without complaining and disputing" (2:14).
- Every believer must have the same attitude as Paul: to continually press toward the prize of full-and-complete Christlikeness (3:15).
- He exhorted Euodia and Syntyche "to be of the same mind in the Lord" (4:2).
- After Paul gave us a prescription for a worry-free mind, he wrote, "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (4:7).
- Then in 4:8, Paul reminded us that right thinking leads to right living.

It's a very basic and fundamental fact of mankind: we are the product of our own thoughts. Solomon wrote, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7).

Although the Philippian church was a loving church, Paul prayed that their love would overflow in great abundance. But Paul didn't want to see their love divorced from truth.

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Phil. 1:9-11)

Love for God and love for others should never be isolated from truth. Truth without love becomes cold, rigid, and formal. But love without truth is shallow, unstable, and a mere emotion. We should never compromise truth for the sake of love *or* even for the sake of unity.

The believer is to have a growing and working knowledge of God's Word, resulting in discernment. Discernment isn't just knowing right from wrong; truth from error; or good from evil. Discernment is choosing right over wrong; truth over error; and good over evil.

Listen to the writer's exhortation found in Hebrews 4:12:

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, *and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* (Italics added)

From the text we learn that God's word is actively alive, energizing, revealing, penetrating, and discerning. Although the word of God is completed, it is continually alive and remains relevant throughout the ages. The Holy Spirit continues to speak through His word. But on our part, we are to sift and analyze everything through the word of God—even the very thoughts and motives of our hearts. God's Word exposes any insincerity or self-delusion.

Note what he writes in Hebrews 5:12-14:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use [practice] have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Going back to Philippians 1:9-11, do you see the progression in Paul's words? He begins with love, but then moves to knowledge and discernment. From knowledge and discernment he moves to "approving things that are excellent" (1:10); which means "the ability to discern what is best." God wants us to "recognize the true value of the finer points of Christian living" (Wuest). In other words, we are to serve the Lord with excellence.

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "Test all things; hold fast to what is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). He wrote to the Ephesians and encouraged them to grow in Christ so,

That [they] should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting. (Eph. 4:14)

Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. (1 Cor. 14:20, NIV)

Scripture reveals four stages of spiritual growth in the life of the believer. Obviously, the new-born convert is as a “babe” in Christ. But as each of us mature in Christ, we enter through the various (and obvious) growth phases of a believer. However, there should be concern when spiritual growth becomes stunted or impeded. For instance, the writer to the Hebrews (Heb. 5:12-14; see above) is greatly concerned with their lack of spiritual growth. They were at a point in their spiritual walk where they should have “graduated,” but instead they needed to go back to the “first grade.” They had been believers long enough to where they should have been on the “meat” of God’s word, but instead they were still on the “milk.” So keep that in mind as we consider the following examples.

1. The baby stage

- A baby thinks only of itself.
- His feelings are easily hurt and he is often jealous.
- A baby drinks milk and cannot eat strong meat.
- It tries to talk, but never makes sense.
- A baby needs a lot of attention.
- A baby will pick up anything on the floor and put it in its mouth (no discernment).
- A baby lives to be served, but never serves.

2. The little child stage

- Children are often untruthful, envious, and cruel.
- When corrected, they often make a scene and become resentful.
- Children repeat everything they hear.
- Children like to disagree and fuss.
- Children want to be the center of attention.
- Children like to identify with heroes.
- Children are easily deceived and distracted.

3. The young adult stage (Note 1 John 2:12-14)

- The young adult has “put away childish things” (1 Cor. 13:11).
- The young adult is strong and is well able to overcome the enemy.
- The young adult has a vision for the future and the faith and courage to tackle it.
- The young adult stays focused and sees things through to completion.
- The young adult is energetic and enthusiastic.
- The young adult is not a victim of his emotions or personal impulses.
- The young adult is disciplined and discerning.
- The young adult assumes responsibility and understands that other people are depending on him.

4. The mature adult stage

“This stage of spiritual development can be reached by all, but so few ever attain it. The spiritually mature have peace with God. They know the peace of God. They have learned contentment under all circumstances. They know the only source of true strength. They do not brood over the past, but look to the future. They know that all things work together in their life for their eternal good. They enjoy abundant life now, and will enjoy it in the life to come.” (Master Study Outlines)

CONCLUSION

Remember those growth charts your parents used when you were growing up? Maybe it was just a notch on a door frame or a mark on the wall. There were times of minimal growth, and then there were those times “you grew like a weed.” Remember the excitement each time there was a new mark?

The growth chart for the Christian is the Bible. Not only is God’s Word *necessary for growth*, it’s also what we use to *measure our growth*.

Where are you on the growth chart? I’m not asking where you should be. But where are you presently in your Christian walk? The infant stage? The little child stage? The young adult stage? The mature adult stage? Now, where should you be?

I understand because of the flesh, we sometimes act like spiritual infants or little children. But for the mature believer, such lapses should be infrequent and not the norm. When Jared was younger and at home, I loved those times together playing softball, golfing, running pass patterns, and fishing. It was the fatherly thing to do. But it also brought the “child” out in me too. I had to remind myself that I was a grown man. I had adult responsibilities. Sandy and Jared were depending on me as a husband and a father.

I’ve enjoyed the last week-and-a-half at the National Association and then a few days of vacation. For the most part it’s been restful and relaxing. Sandy and I especially enjoyed the few days we got to spend with our granddaughter, Aslyn. Getting away for a few days is good and necessary for physical, emotional, and spiritual renewal. But I have a flock God has entrusted me with, and you are depending on me. It would be quite selfish and childish of me to carelessly and half-heartedly carry out my role and responsibility as your pastor. It wouldn’t be fair to you, and it would truly dishonor the Lord who called me. By the way, half-hearted and hap-hazard ministry lacks the very presence and power of God.

But that’s true for every believer and not just the pastor. Each of you has a vital and valuable role in the local church. Your presence, your prayers, your place, and yes, your giving are essential for the growth of the Harrison church family. To think otherwise, is a tragic mistake that will have a great impact on you, your children, and the church.

But no matter where you are in your Christian walk, don’t dwell on the past (past failures *or* past accomplishments). When we do, we miss out on present opportunities. That’s why Paul said:

But this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 3:13b-14)

Paul, like a runner, didn’t look back but remained focused. With continuous effort he stretched and strained every muscle, as he bore down on the goal and the prize of full-and-complete Christlikeness. Paul understood that Christian growth wasn’t automatic. He realized it required an aggressive and energetic pursuit.

Pursuing Christlikeness is *your* responsibility. But as you pursue it, there is also divine enablement.

Work out your own salvation [sanctification] with fear and trembling [human responsibility]; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure [divine enablement]. (Phil. 2:12b-13)

Now, get on your mark. Let’s grow!