



## Complete My Joy

Series: *Philippians – To Live Is Christ*

Philippians 2:1-5

July 19, 2015

Pastor Nick Shaffer

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The text that we are looking at this morning is a continuation of the section that began in chapter 1 and verse 27. There, Paul wrote: ***“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”*** (Philippians 1:27–30, ESV)

Now remember, Paul knew the situation, the social context that the Philippian church was dealing with. Philippi was known by the nickname “little Rome” and it was a nickname that was well earned. It was a pagan city in the middle of Pagan Europe. To the north and west, for thousands of square miles were a people who had no saving knowledge of Christ, who were in the grip of idolatry and massive ungodliness. It was a culture famous for its sexual indulgences, for its cruel treatment of children, women, the physically infirm and slaves. It was a dark, dark place – morally and spiritually. Violence, abuse, political oppression, religious discrimination against and marginalization of the followers of Christ, occult practices – this was the culture in which they lived. It is no different from where we find ourselves. It was in this atmosphere that the church in Philippi was established. And Paul’s desire for them was that they would stand firm, courageous, faithful and strong – no matter the cost.

That was Paul’s heart for them. But he knew, deep in his soul, he knew that the only way that the Philippians could persevere in the midst of the outward trials that were coming upon them as the people of God was if, and only if, they were united inwardly. They had to

be of one heart, one mind, one spirit, and one hope. They had to be united inwardly as the people of God, they had to be in this together, if they were going to persevere in the face of the social and cultural pressures they were facing and if they were going to bring the gospel to bear outside in a culture that desperately needed it, they would need to be united within. That makes sense, doesn't it? A house divided cannot stand. And that is the heart of what we are looking at today. This is Paul's encouragement to this church, and to us, unto unity, to solidarity, to true camaraderie and durable fellowship – a communion that was especially needful to the Philippians and which will be especially needful for us in the days to come. So let's look at this...it's just great stuff. Paul starts by reminding the Philippians of the blessings that they have received through faith in Christ. He reminds the Philippians of the dynamic realities of grace which they have all experienced.

**The Dynamic Realities of God's Grace (1)** Paul says: ***“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,”*** (Philippians 2:1, ESV) This first verse is an incomplete thought, but what Paul is doing is setting up the Spirit-inspired entreaty that he is going to make of them in a moment. This four-fold question that he asks is really a rhetorical one and should be understood as “Since you have experienced all of these things...”

Had they experienced the encouragement that comes from being in Christ? Of course they had. That expression – in Christ – was Paul's favorite way of describing all that it means to be a Christian. To be “in Christ” is to share in all of the blessings that Christ has gained for us through His death and resurrection from the dead. It includes being chosen in Christ before the world began: ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”*** (Ephesians 1:3–4, ESV) It includes being redeemed from the slavery of sin and forgiven of our rebellion against God. ***“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,”*** (Ephesians 1:7, ESV) It includes the promise of heaven, of an inheritance with Him in the age to come, ***“an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,”*** (1 Peter 1:4, ESV) It includes not only our forgiveness but our ***“adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,”*** (Ephesians 1:5, ESV) It includes the incredible truth that we ***“were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”*** (Ephesians 1:13–14, ESV) And it includes promise

that **“by God’s power (we) are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”** (1 Peter 1:5, ESV)

There is great encouragement in being in Christ. What encouragement it is, in the midst of this present darkness, to know that joined to Christ by faith, each of us share in all the blessings that Christ has gained for us by His death on Calvary. We have an entirely new life and so are enabled by Christ to live in manner worthy of the gospel – **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”** (2 Corinthians 5:17, ESV) Each one of the Philippian believers had experienced this grace.

They experienced the comfort of the love of God in Christ. They had felt the grip of Christ’s love for them – He laid down his life on their behalf so that they may live. **“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”** (1 John 4:9–10, ESV) God’s love for His own is eternal, unchanging, without limit and without end. It is a love that pursues His people to redeem them from sin and make them His own, that labors with them to make them holy, that provides for every need, that really does pursue what is best for those whom He loves. God’s love, expressed fully in Christ, is the source of every good thing from His hand and the Philippians had experienced the comfort, the security, of being the objects of God’s eternal and everlasting love.

They knew the joy of participation in, really the better term would be “fellowship with,” the Holy Spirit. They knew what it was to be joined to the Holy Spirit, to be filled with the very same Spirit who dwelt in Christ – the Spirit who labors with us and in us to make us more and more like Christ, the One who comforts and convicts us, Who enables and empowers us to live in a manner worthy of the gospel, Who sanctifies us and gives to us and stirs up in us the Spiritual gifts that are to be used to for the edification and building up of the body of Christ – the same Spirit who dwells in all believers in Christ.

Paul even points to two very specific evidences of the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives – the affection and sympathy that he personally had experienced from them. Their love and

sympathy toward Paul had not been in word or sentiment only; they had acted on their love and sympathy by caring for him while he was imprisoned in Rome.

So Paul begins by affirming the reality of God's grace in their life as the people of God and it is because all of these things were true in them individually and as a church, as a fellowship, a family of believers in Christ, that they must now receive the admonition that he was going to give to them. Paul is saying in essence, "Look, you guys are the real deal. You have personally and corporately experienced the blessings of being in Christ -- all of you -- so now do this, "Complete my joy..."

**Complete My Joy (2)** Paul says in verse 2, "**Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.**" (Philippians 2:2, ESV) What Paul is calling the Philippians to is an indivisible, resolute, inseparable unity, a harmony, a solidarity, a cohesion and camaraderie -- a united front -- in the face of the social, political and cultural pressures they were facing -- pressures that were only going to grow. You can see how timely, in God's providence, this letter is for us, can't you beloved? It's just what we need to hear.

Now, Paul's joy is not his primary concern -- it's the way that he expresses his heart to the Philippians. It's along the lines of saying, "The greatest news that I could ever receive..." His real concern is that they would stick together. His joy and delight as an apostle is bound up in their well-being, the spiritual strength, their perseverance together, and their joy. It would break Paul's heart to see them splinter and fall apart as a church, but it would give him insurmountable joy to see them stand united, to be truly indivisible as the people of God and so he speaks to them of the stuff of real unity. And I want to emphasize that -- this is the stuff, the guts of real unity and cohesion.

I want to emphasize that because we see the counterfeits of true biblical unity all throughout our society. We see, for instance, the displays of superficial unity in loyalty to our favorite sports teams. It's a superficial unity. You can see it in common efforts for a charitable cause of some sort. You see it in the face of a common threat -- in our country after 9/11 for a month or so. You can see it in the face of an imagined slight or offense. My football coaches were masters of the whole "Nobody thinks you can do it. Everybody is

against you. The only people who believe are in this locker-room, now go show them.” I could never reconcile that with the people in our stands with signs, the old men at the coffee shop that treated us like war heroes or the free pizza that we got at Passeri’s after the games...but whatever. You can see it in gangs or in the “in” group. You can see it in the unity in our society in rebellion against God – the LGBTQ. The point, beloved, is at some point all of those forms of false unity break down. At some point they fly apart. And the reason is that they are really all forms of self-centeredness, convenience, or momentary necessity. And it is because they are not rooted in anything eternal, anything transcendent, or anything supernatural.

But the true unity of the people of God, experiencing the real camaraderie of the saints is something altogether different, altogether more glorious, and altogether more satisfying. Paul is calling the church to solidarity in Christ of which all the world’s forms of unity are superficial shadows at best.

He calls the church in Philippi, and us, to be of the same mind. That is, we are to be like-minded, literally thinking the same thing. That doesn’t mean that we are all clones, all robots, and that we all like the same things and dress the same way. The idea behind what Paul is saying is that we have our thinking and our perceptions controlled by the Word of God, to have our minds and our opinions, all of our beliefs, saturated by gospel truth. We pursue the same mindset, the same attitude the same perception. In Colossians 3:16, Paul wrote: **“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” (Colossians 3:16, ESV)** How do we, as a church, let the “word of Christ” dwell richly in us? It starts with the pastor. I must preach the word of Christ faithfully and fully. You must be willing to receive that word – as what it is, the word of Christ, the truth, not a suggestion or opinion, but what it really is – the authoritative, binding, God-magnifying, Christ-exalting, obedience-demanding, life-giving word of God. As we grow in our understanding of God’s Word together, increasing wisdom and clarity will draw us together. We will see the truth more clearly and see eye to eye more and more. This is one of the foundations of true unity and solidarity in the church of God, but there is more.

Paul calls on them to have the same love. What is the “same love” that Paul is talking about? He talking, first, about having the same love for Christ, the same passion for His glory, the same love for His name, for His honor, for His praise – a love that constrains us -- **“For the**

***love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.” (2 Corinthians 5:14–15, ESV).*** He calls us and them to a love that captures our desires, that makes us want to be obedient and loyal to Christ – a shared love for Jesus that binds our hearts together. But he is also referring having the same love for God, the same love for one another and the same love for the lost that Jesus has – that love that led Him to the cross.

Then he calls them to be in full accord and of one mind. That might sound like just a repeat of what he has already said, but there is a nuance here that speaks of being one in spirit and in purpose. It is the idea of being together, of sticking together, heart and soul. It speaks of souls in harmony with one another. In other words, it goes beyond merely agreeing with each other theologically, to caring for one another deeply and actively because our souls are united to God and to one another. This strong and indissoluble bond, grounded in the truth of the gospel, stabilizes and steadies us and focuses us on pleasing God and loving one another so that we cannot be fractured because we share a transcendent vision for the advance of the gospel and for Christ’s glory, and so we will not allow anything of lesser substance to come between us. Nothing.

Think of it like this. It is the idea of being for God and for His glory and for Christ in all that we are and also being for one another in all that we do, being able to say with honesty, “I am for God and His glory and for you and your good.” And if we all shared that same vision, what a glory that would be. That is the idea of being in full accord and of one mind.

This kind of unity is what Paul is envisioning, what he is longing for and what he is expecting of the Philippians and by extension, of us as well. What makes this unity so much greater in degree and character than any superficial unity in this earth is that it is rooted in eternal things – things that are eternally valuable, eternally meaningful, eternally significant, eternally precious things – a common allegiance to God and to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Paul envisions a people who are passionate for God’s truth; passionate for the advance of the gospel, passionate for Christ – that He would receive the glory due Him, bound together in their souls by a deep affection and sacrificial love for one another. So much so that they cannot be pulled apart, their togetherness cannot be fractured or splintered. And you can see why this is so, so important, can’t you? It’s important both from an eternal perspective and a very practical one as well.

First of all, if the gospel was to have any weight in that pagan society, if it was to have any power, if it was to have any traction in the city of Philippi, then the church in Philippi was going to have to exhibit the kind of unity that Jesus prayed for when He said: ***“The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”*** (John 17:22–23, ESV) When the world sees a community where people stick together, where they are united in heart and mind, where they cannot be fractured or splintered despite their faults or failures, despite political, social or cultural efforts to break them, people will be forced to account for what they see and that is when the gospel will have real power. If we who claim to be united with Christ and in Christ are splintered and fractured, how can we offer them the gospel in sincerity and integrity? We are called to be an evangelistic people and we must be – our church must be diligent and courageous and purposeful in sharing the gospel and we need to strategize ways to do that – but the basic prerequisite is that we must be united as a church in real and evident ways. That’s the first thing.

The second, practical issue – if you will, is this – this unity and solidarity that Paul calls for and which God empowers is a one of our greatest needs and blessings in the midst of a hostile and attacking world. We need this. I need it. We cannot survive without it. More and more in our society we are going to see clearly – These are my people. This church, these followers of Christ, these are my people, through thick and thin, through joy and trial – these are my people. This unity is vitally important to our spiritual strength and endurance. And that is why Paul is so passionate about it. Paul understands the vital necessity of this and it is why he emphasizes that these Philippians must:

**Trade the Way of the World For the Way of Christ (3-4)** Paul writes in verses 3-4: ***“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”*** (Philippians 2:3–4, ESV) There is nothing more destructive to solidarity and unity in Christ than these two things – selfish ambition and conceit. Those two phrases encompass the mentality and the way of the world. The phrase “selfish ambition” comes from a word that was used to describe the self-seeking pursuit of public office by unfair and underhanded means. It is pride that is intent on advancing itself at the expense of other people. It sounds

very much like our own politicians – using other people to advance a personal, self-benefiting agenda.

And that phrase pairs well with the word conceit. Though conceit is a good translation, a better translation is vainglory, empty glory. It is the word “kenodoxian.” Do nothing, Paul says, out of hunger for empty glory. Someone who is kenodoxia is starving for glory, hungry to be important, hungry to be recognized. We don’t have to look far to see that hunger in our society today. The whole mindset of our culture is “Think about yourself. Talk about yourself. Use ‘I’ as often as possible. Labor hard to be seen in certain light. Live for the praise of others. Listen hungrily to what people say about you. Expect to be appreciated. Demand to be honored. Demand your way. Be jealous and envious. Be sensitive to slights – real and perceived. Never forgive a criticism. Be the measure of right and wrong. Insist on attention and deference. Demand agreement with your own views on everything. Pout if people are not grateful to you as you think they should be. Pout if they don’t celebrate you like you celebrate you. Be angry if they do not regard you like you regard you. Never forget anything that you have ever done for anyone. Insist on your rights.”

We can see that in our society, can’t we? But do we see it in ourselves? CS Lewis makes a very interesting observation in his book, *Mere Christianity*, where he writes: **"There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else. Pride is spiritual cancer, it eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or even common sense. If anyone would like to acquire humility I can I think tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud. And a big step too. At least nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed."**

I don’t know if you have ever seen the comedian, Brian Regan. He is hilarious and he has this one skit that he does where he talks about being at a dinner party and where there is somebody he calls a “me-monster.” You know that guy – the one who has more, has done more, knows more important people, has a better story than anyone else in the room. You know the kind. In his skit he says, “I’ve always wished in those times at a dinner party that I were one of the twelve men who have walked on the moon. They must love knowing they can beat anyone’s story, whenever they want. I could just sit there eating my hors d’oeuvre, kind of chewing, while the guy went on and on about how many cars and how many houses and how many vacations, his global enterprises, speeding down the Autobahn... and then I



could just say, “Yeah. I walked on the moon. You know you mentioned driving on the Autobahn that reminded me. Once I was driving on the Sea of Tranquility in my lunar rover. I, too, was worried about our speed and I said, ‘Wait, we’re the only ones on the moon!’”

Paul puts his finger here on one of the real issues inside the church that would weaken and break them in the face of mounting social and cultural pressures. And we have to beware of this selfish ambition and glory-hunger too. We may think that it is not a real threat. Maybe it isn’t something that we have ever considered, but we should. We need to be asking ourselves: “Why do I do what I am doing in service to God in my home, in the church, in my workplace? Am I driven by self-centered motives even while I am doing something “spiritual?” Am I self-serving in the use of my gifts, wanting and hoping to be noticed, so that I receive the appreciation and recognition that I think I deserve? Do I nurse resentment when I do not receive what I think I deserve, if I don’t have the weight, or position, or influence that I ought to have?” Those are serious questions and there are many more. To be glory-hungry is extremely destructive of true community life.

The way to defeat these two unity-killers, Paul says, is to practice humility, to count others as of more importance than us and to deliberately look to their interests. It is to trade the way of the world for the way of Christ. We need to put away “selfish ambition.” It’s not that we should have no ambitions at all. That’s not it. Our ambitions must be godly ones. There are good and godly ambitions that we should all share – to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. To love our neighbor as ourselves. To glorify God and enjoy Him forever. To present our bodies as living sacrifices. To do all things to the glory of God. Those are good ambitions.

What we need to do away with is seeking our own glory, trying to magnify our own worth, striving to be recognized. Jesus took care of that for us on the cross. When Jesus laid down His life in our place, when He bled and died, our eternal worth to him was revealed fully and completely. We are the precious possession of Christ. You are **“a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”** (1 Peter 2:9, **ESV**) What self-manufactured glory can compete with that? When you are secure in who you are in Christ, you don’t need to pursue your own glory. That’s Paul’s point.

Instead, we are freed to practice true humility. Biblical humility is seeing ourselves as we are. Humility is the proper response to beholding the holiness of God and the glory of Jesus Christ and His gospel. John Stott says: **“Every time we look at the cross, Christ seems to say to us, “I am here because of you. It is your sin I am bearing, your curse I am suffering, your debt I am paying, your death I am dying.” Nothing in history or in the universe cuts us down to size like the cross. All of us have inflated views of ourselves, especially in self-righteousness, until we have visited a place called Calvary. It is there, at the foot of the cross, that we shrink to our true size.”** Beloved, he is so right. When I look at the cross, when I consider the perfect, matchless Son of God, the darling of heaven dying for me – that it must be so because of my profound sinfulness if I am to be saved – I must realize, “I’m not all that. He is everything but I am not.” If we would stick together in this growing climate of ungodliness and contempt for righteousness, this growing climate of hatred of good and love for evil, if we would stand together and survive in a hostile and fracturing culture, we must bow before the cross together. It was true for the Philippians and it is true for us.

It is this humility, that right regard for Christ and lack of regard for ourselves, that Paul says is expressed in two things – counting others more significant than ourselves and looking to one another’s interests. We see this sort of mindset repeatedly in Paul’s writings. **“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:2, ESV) “Let love be genuine... Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.” (Romans 12:9–10, ESV) “We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.” (Romans 15:1–2, ESV)**

Counting others more significant than ourselves – what does that mean? It just simply means to treat others as more important than yourself. It is that God-centered, gospel-based, grace-enabled shifting of our attention away from ourselves and onto others. How might I serve them? How might I bless them? And look, it is specific in nature. When Paul says that we are to look to one another’s interests and not just our own, he has a gospel purpose in mind. It is not just material interests that are at the forefront of his mind – those things are important and we should alleviate those kinds of needs in the lives of our brothers and sisters, as we are made able by God’s grace. But his main focus is this: How can I help fit and build up my brother or sister for service to God and enable him/her to glorify and enjoy Christ? How can I advance the interests of his/her life before God? How do I help them become more and more mature and confident and joyful in Christ? That’s what we must pursue.

And the basis for his argument is the life of Jesus Christ. Followers of Christ must have the mind of Christ. The mind of Christ that is illustrated in verses 5-8: ***“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”*** (Philippians 2:5–8, **ESV**) We will get into this incredible hymn of Christ next week, but the thrust of what Paul is saying is this: You can’t say that other believers don’t deserve your love, because you didn’t deserve Christ’s and yet he poured it out to you. You can’t live as if your interests are more important because Christ’s interests were certainly more important than yours, but He laid them aside and looked to yours instead. You can’t say you love Jesus if you love to please Him and what pleases Him is to have his followers love one another. You can’t experience Christ’s love in your heart and then have a cold heart toward the saints. You can’t rejoice in Christ’s love for you and God’s mercy to you and be unloving and unmerciful toward others God has loved and Christ has shown mercy. You can’t take Christ and leave his people. The love of God in your heart and the love in your heart for other believers is part and parcel of the great salvation you have been given. Oh, beloved, it makes perfect sense.

Do you see how these words from Paul, put into practice, weld a church together?

Do you see how they make the church strong and vibrant and solid?

Do you see how it gives validity to the gospel that we preach and confess?

Do you see how it strengthens us, comforts us, and encourages us in the looming fight?

At peace amongst ourselves, within the church, we can deal with the turmoil of the world outside. It works like this: I’m looking out for you and loving you and serving you and seeing how I can bless you and everyone in the fellowship and you are doing the same for me and everyone else and we are all doing it as we look to Christ together, loving Him and being steadfast as we follow Him and serve Him and look for ways to advance the gospel in the

world. Then we can fulfill the command of Paul: ***“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.”*** (Philippians 1:27–28, ESV)

This is Paul’s prescription for hanging tough together as the church, for advancing the gospel in the world, for staying faithful to Christ in the midst of mounting pressures. It’s more than a good word for us. It’s God’s Word for us. Let’s pray.

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