

Pursue:
Pursue Unity in the Church
Philippians 2:1-18

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Text Introduction: We are beginning this year in the book of Philippians. We are focusing our attention on the word pursue. Last week, we learned that the greatest aim in life ought to be to pursue Christ. It's really the core message of the author's life.

As we begin this New Year, that will be our focus—Pursue Christ. We begin to add to that central idea, ideas that are rooted in the pursuit of Christ. Today, here is the challenge. Pursue unity in the church!

Text: If then there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ² make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. ⁴ Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

⁵ Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus,

⁶ who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited.

⁷ Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity.

And when he had come as a man,

⁸ he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death— even to death on a cross.

⁹ For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name

that is above every name,

¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—

in heaven and on earth

and under the earth—

¹¹ and every tongue will confess

that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.

¹² Therefore, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. ¹³ For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose. ¹⁴ Do everything without grumbling and arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine like stars in the world, ¹⁶ by holding firm to

the word of life. Then I can boast in the day of Christ that I didn't run or labor for nothing.¹⁷ But even if I am poured out as a drink offering on the sacrificial service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.¹⁸ In the same way you should also be glad and rejoice with me.

Introduction: Pursue! I watched an incredible display of pursuit last Monday night. In the moments following last Monday's College National Championship game featuring Clemson and Alabama, Dabo Swinney, coach of Clemson, (who gave great testimony of his relationship to Christ) announced that they had a team meeting on Friday to begin planning for next season. That's what it means to pursue something. You think about it, you plan for it, you work toward it, you make it your focus, you make decisions accordingly, you build your life around it.

First, pursue Christ. Just this one thing, Paul said in 1:27. Now, here in chapter 2, he begins to expound on corollary ideas for the church that should be part of (expected) if one is following Christ. Notice the string of phrases that begins this passage. The implication is that the exhortation that is coming should be pursued. What is that exhortation? To pursue unity!

As we pursue Christ together as a church, we must pursue together the unity of the church. There is no better time than now for us to revisit the idea of pursuing the unity of the church. Why must we pursue the unity of the church? This passage tells us.

Pursuing unity in the church . . .

Blesses the Leadership.

- Rhetorical Appeal (2:1)

Look at the rhetorical appeal with which Paul began in verse 1. He began with a string of four phrases. You will see in most translations the word "if." The word carries with it the weight of "since." In other words, "if you have gotten anything at all out of being a Christ follower," then do this.

- Main Appeal (2:2)

If you have gotten anything at all out of this, then make my joy complete by . . . (then there is another string of four phrases. We have a goal. We have a purpose. Now, Paul doesn't restate that purpose here in chapter 2, but no doubt he meant the Gospel—the advance of the Gospel.

- Practical Implication (2:1-2, 16)

This is emphatically personal to Paul. If they fail in this pursuit for unity of purpose, he has failed. The measurement of success in communication is not how eloquent the delivery, but how excellent the reception.

Is Basic to Discipleship.

- Practical Appeal (2:3-4)

What exactly is Paul talking about? We see in verse 3 and 4.

- Rhetorical Appeal (2:5-8)

Paul turned to this beautiful hymn focused on Christ as the ultimate example of the humility that he asked the church to strive toward.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote about 7 principles of how Christians should achieve this.

Christians should...

1. Hold their tongues, refusing to speak uncharitably about a Christian brother;
2. Cultivate the humility that comes from understanding that they, like Paul, are the greatest of sinners and can only live in God's sight by his grace;
3. Listen "long and patiently" so they will understand their fellow Christian's need;
4. Refuse to consider their time and calling so valuable that they cannot be interrupted to help with unexpected needs, no matter how small or menial;
5. Bear the burden of their brothers and sisters in the Lord, both by preserving their freedom and by forgiving their sinful abuse of that freedom;
6. Declare God's word to their fellow believers when they need to hear it;
7. Understand that Christian authority is characterized by service and does not call attention to the person who performs the service. (As Printed in Thielman, *NIV Application Commentary*, p. 107.)

Is Beneficial to Evangelism.

Look specifically at verse 15. We are lights in a crooked and perverse generation. Remember what we read last week at the end of chapter 1. Paul argued against the opposition from the outside. Now, he is arguing against the struggles that come from the inside. Evangelism always suffers when the church is not united.

So What?

Let's unify around the Gospel for the progress of the Gospel.

We may not be able to unify around everything, but we ought to be able to unify around the Gospel. We ought to be able to unify around the fact that we want people to be saved. We ought to be able to unify around the fact that I may not be able to sit where I want to sit, go at the time I want to go, or sing what I want to sing, but as long as people are being saved and the saved are being disciple, I am going to rejoice and be glad in it.

A Powerful Example from Philippi

Paul revisits this theme in chapter 4 in a specific manner. Look at Philippians 4:2-3.

I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to agree in the Lord. 3 Yes, I also ask you, true partner, to help these women who have contended for the gospel at my side, along with Clement and the rest of my coworkers whose names are in the book of life.

We don't know who Euodia and Syntyche were. We don't know what the issue was. What we do know is that the issue was big enough for Paul to address. Because of what we read in chapter 2 and then Paul coming back to it, we might even speculate that this was the whole reason Paul wrote. And there is one thing more that we don't know. We don't know what happened. All we have are these two verses.

So, I ask you dear Church. What do you want us to be known for? What do you want our church to be known for?

Do you want to be known as Euodia and Syntyche or do you want to be known as the "true partner."