

The word of God is able to pierce to the deepest parts of our human nature and change us, but when the Spirit of God takes the word of God and points to the people of God who are living it – that has the greatest impact of all.

21 Phil – The Power of Example

Paul wants the church to be united. He had been giving hints about it.

- First, he called himself a servant. In most other letters he identifies himself as an apostle, but with this church he has no need to assert apostolic authority, such is the closeness of their relationship. And so he starts by telling them that he and Timothy are servants of Christ. And of course, the implication is that if the church members would think of themselves in that way, as servants, that would go a long way toward solving their problems.
- Second, he expresses confidence that God is going to complete in the church what he has started. We take this from 1:6 which says: *For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.* We often take this verse in an individualist way – that God will complete in me what he has started – and that is a great application of the verse. But when Paul originally wrote it, he had the church as a whole in mind. What God had started in the Philippian church he would carry on until the day of Christ. Rather than the church be torn apart by disputes, it would continue to mature.
- Third, he prayed for the church's love to grow more and more in all wisdom and discernment. If the Philippian church followed Paul's example and started praying that for their church, what a profound difference it would make. What a difference it would make in our churches.
- Fourth, he demonstrated great humility by his attitude in prison. While some of the members of the church in Rome were trying to cause Paul distress in his imprisonment, probably by advancing their theological agenda or advancing their influence in the church at his expense, Paul chose to rejoice! As long as they were preaching Christ he was going to rejoice! What an example for the parties in Philippi to follow.
- Fifth, he made a direct appeal to them in 1:27 – Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.

Now, Paul is going to be more direct, and he does it in a very wise way. First, in verses 1-4 he gives his appeal for unity, but in the rest of the chapter he gives four examples of men to follow.

The first is Christ in verses 5-11 in the famous words about the humiliation and exaltation of Christ. The second is Paul himself in verses 12-18. Paul speaks of himself as being poured out a drink offering in their behalf. Third, is Timothy. Paul speaks of him as a son serving a father in a trade. We will look at his example in verses 19-24. Fourth is Epaphroditus in 25-30 and Paul refers to him as a brother, fellow worker, fellow soldier, and their messenger and minister to help Paul.

There's an important lesson here for us. We can hear verses from the Word of God that we should obey and apply to our lives, but the most powerful impact upon us comes when we hear verses and

see them lived by others. Don't you agree? The word of God is living and powerful and able to pierce to the deepest parts of our human nature and change us, but when the Spirit of God takes the word of God and is able to point to the people of God who are living it in front of our eyes – that has the greatest impact of all.

A young couple wanted to reach the husband's father for Christ. He was a hardened, rough sinner. One day they invited a loving and wise Christian man to join them in a visit to this hardened father. They were together all that day visiting and working around the house. This loving and wise Christian gave of himself all that day. He served, he asked questions, he showed interest, he had a joyful spirit. At the end of the day, I'm not sure how much closer the hardened father was to Christ, but the young couple had their lives revolutionized as they saw love and humility in action. Had they heard verses on love and humility before? Absolutely! Had these verses had an impact upon them? Without doubt because they wanted to show love to the father and reach him for Christ. But when they saw love in action, their growth in Christ accelerated to new levels. And so let me say this again, when the Spirit of God takes the word of God and is able to point to the people of God who are living it in front of our eyes – that has the greatest impact of all.

Who do you have in your life that you look to? I'm not saying to put men on a pedestal because all men will fail – except for one, Jesus Christ. But it is so important to look to wise men and women in the faith who are ahead of us on the journey and who live the word of God. Sometimes, reading biographies can do this for us. Recently, I read *Portraits of a Radical Disciple* by Christopher Wright which is a collection of essays the friends of John Stott who wrote about their friend, mentor, and teacher. My life was enriched by these people who wrote about this man – his practices, his ministry, his love for God's word, his deep desire to see that pastors in poor parts of the world received good theological training.

One of the stories that touched me most was when Stott was in India. A friend asked if he could visit his mother who lived in a very poor part of this land. They made their way to the city and then, asking for direction after direction, made their way through a maze of slums and ramshackle houses. Finally, they found the house and at the door was a little, old Indian woman. The men explained who they were and why they had come. With a big grin she opened wide the door and invited the men to come into her humble abode and sit on the floor with her. Then, John Stott gave a Bible lesson from John 3:16 just for her and they fellowshiped together. Here was a world famous Bible teacher taking time to minister to one small, poor Christian. Yes, verses are great but watching God's people live the verses has the biggest impact of all.

I must mention one other resource and I would highly recommend that you get it. It is called "50 People Every Christian Should Know" by Warren Wiersbe. The subtitle is "learning from spiritual giants of the faith." A staff member in the church where I most recently pastored gave me a copy. I think God really wanted me to read it because I remember seeing it in a store one day, picking it up, and thinking that I should buy it, and then putting it back on the shelf. But as I said, the staff member shortly after that gave it to me as a gift and am I glad. As I read about these great men and women of the faith, my heart was enriched as I saw them not just talking about the word of God, but living the word of God.

Let's listen, now, to Paul's words in Philippians 2:1-4.

Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, ² make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. ³ Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴ do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Beautiful words, aren't they? Let me point out several things to you about the structure of these four verses and in our next broadcast we will examine them in depth.

First, there is a goal in the passage – Paul says, “make my joy complete”. Paul has been telling them how much joy he has in them. He told them in 1:4 that he always offered prayer with joy for them. And in 1:25, he told them that he was convinced that God would deliver him from his imprisonment so that he could remain on earth and continue with them for their progress and joy in the faith. But now in 2:2 he says I want my joy to go all the way, to be complete over you and the way you can make me completely happy is by being a united church. Then, in the rest of verse 2 through verse 4 Paul looks at unity in eight ways by giving eight short commands.

- Be of the same mind
- Maintain the same love
- Be united in spirit
- Be intent on one purpose
- Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit
- Regard others as more important
- Do not look out for your interests only
- Look out for the interests of others

What a way to live! What a way for a church to operate! Where can we find the spiritual strength to experience this? This is what verse 1 is about. In 2:1 Paul lists four resources that God has provided us to live with such harmony and peace and this is where we will begin in our next broadcast! I hope you will join us then as we look deeply into this great chapter.