

Do you have a relationship with Christ where you know he is encouraging you when you are down, exhorting you when you need a challenge, imploring you when you need extra motivation, and urging you to press forward in your life? Christ wants to be all of those for us.

22 Phil – God’s Resources for Unity and Peace in the Church

Paul speaks openly about one of the needs in the church at Philippi. He speaks about unity and he shares four resources available to all Christians. If every believer, **every believer** would focus on these resources, what a difference that would make in every church – 90% of all disputes would disappear and there would be greater peace, love, and unity and a greater witness for Christ.

Listen to Paul again in Philippians 2:1 and the first part of verse 2. *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, make my joy complete by being of the same mind.*

- Encouragement in Christ
- Consolation of love
- Fellowship of the Spirit
- Affection and compassion

When Paul says, “if there is,” i.e., “if these exist,” he doesn’t mean maybe they exist and maybe they don’t. Rather, he is using a figure of speech to drive home a point. He is saying, “if there is any encouragement in Christ ... and we know there is and if there is any consolation of love ... and we know there is,” then make my joy complete by being united.

The first resource – encouragement in Christ. The Greek word for encouragement is **paraklesis** and it literally means to call someone to your side. This could be an official calling where a teacher would summon a student to his side to give a report, or it could be someone asking for help. It is one of the most versatile words in the New Testament and no matter what translation you use; you will find it rendered in a variety of ways.

For example, in Romans 12:1 Paul says, Therefore **I urge you**, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.

In 1 Corinthians 1:10 – Now I **exhort** you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you

In 2 Corinthians 5:20 - Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were **making an appeal** through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

In Ephesians 4:1 - Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, **implore** you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,

As you can see, translators render this word in a variety of ways depending upon the context of the passage. And perhaps, all of these meanings and more are in Paul’s mind when he asks the

Philippian Christians to consider the encouragement that is in Christ. Now let me ask you, are you experiencing the encouragement of Christ in your life? Do you have a walk with Christ where you know he is encouraging you when you are down, exhorting you when you need a word of challenge, imploring you when you need extra motivation, and urging you to press forward in your life? Christ is all of those for us. Christ wants to be all of those for us.

And so let me ask you again – is Christ this way for you? If not, it could be one of three reasons. First, it could be that you don't have a relationship with Him. Maybe you have knowledge about him, but you don't have him. Have you ever received Christ as your Savior? Is he just a religious figure that you admire or is he your personal Savior and the Lord of your life.

Pray for people

Here is a second possibility why you may not be experiencing this kind of relationship with Christ. You may have Christ as your Savior but you have not grown as you should have. Hebrews 5:11 uses a phrase that describes immature Christians – dull of hearing. And the reason for this dullness, according to the writer is that Christians do not practice their faith. How interesting – dullness does not come from a lack of information but from a lack of obeying the word of God. Obedience sharpens our spiritual sensitivity. There are other reasons for spiritual dullness such as lack of prayer, or too much time in front of the TV, but for now let's move to the third reason why we may not be experiencing the encouragement of Christ.

We don't realize that he is for us. Most major translations use the word, "encouragement" here. Christ is an encourager, but many times we don't believe this. Yes, we know in our heads that he is our Savior and that we are forgiven and justified before him, yet we too easily lapse into old ways of thinking that are not trained by grace. And, may I encourage you to get a copy of our book on developing grace in our lives – learning how to live by grace and think by grace. God is for us! Christ is for us! Listen to these words from Romans 8:31-34.

What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? ³³ Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; ³⁴ who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

This is the idea in Paul's mind when he asks the Philippian Christians, is there any encouragement in Christ? And of course there is – Christ is always there to encourage us, to exhort us forward, to cheer us on, and if this is his stance toward us shouldn't this be our stance towards our brothers and sisters in Christ? If we experience this with Christ, then we will have the strength to be very gracious and uniting towards our brothers and sisters.

Let's move to the second resource he mentions:

If there is any consolation of love. Some translators render this comfort but the effect is the same. God's love towards us is there at all times to lift up our fallen spirits and give relief to our body and

mind. It's so easy for our spirits to be cast down. They can be cast down by our circumstances or by our failures.

Years ago, I took a position at a company for a certain amount of pay. There was some negotiation and I was surprised that the company agreed to my salary request. But when I received my first paycheck I noticed it was less than I should have received and so I went to the front office and told them of their error only to discover that I was the one in error. Miscommunication caused me to receive a lower salary than I thought.

My immediate supervisor called me into his office and sincerely apologized for the confusion. He left me alone in his office to think about what I would do and while there I went through a myriad of emotions. I was downcast and humiliated. I was not as valuable as I thought, but rather than let these distressing circumstances control me, I rallied my spirit as I reflected on the truth that I was highly valued by God. My soul was deeply wounded but I opened myself to the love of God which poured into my soul, and this gave me strength to face the situation with grace. I was experiencing the consolation of God's love but only because I knew the truth of my position in Christ. The distressing circumstances were not a reflection of who I really was and I faced the situation with great grace rather than with bitterness. And by the way, to my total surprise, the company – on the spot, that day – increased my salary. I was happy and it is a day I'll never forget not just because of the increase, but more so because of God's consoling love.

My brothers and sisters – there is consolation, there is comfort, there is a lifting of the spirit and the body by the love of God. Open yourselves to God's love and you'll find amazing strength to overcome bitterness and petty squabbling and you will become an example for others to follow.

Let's look at the third resource Paul mentions. Is there any fellowship of the Spirit? Ah, the Holy Spirit. Now we have the third person of the Trinity involved. Encouragement from Christ at the right hand of God, the love of God that comforts and consoles, and now, the fellowship of the Spirit. I believe what Paul is after here is the daily interaction with the Spirit of God. I believe what he has in mind is the continual awareness of the presence of God in our lives. How sad, that for some Christians, their experience of God is limited to one hour a week when they go to church. But God wants us to know his presence 24/7. I know – we can't always sense the presence of God. I don't. There have been times when I am busy with my work and may not give much thought to Him or seasons of life when God seems distant. This will be our experience this side of eternity where we only see eternal things dimly. But, God has given us His Spirit so that we might have continued fellowship with him. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "I will ask the Father and He will give you another Helper that He may be with you forever, that is the Spirit of truth."

Friends, when you walk side by side with the Spirit of God and enjoy fellowship with him, then you will find strength to be a uniter, a peacemaker, and someone who contributes to the overall health of the church rather than someone who takes away from it.

Finally, Paul mentions affection and compassion. The word affection has to do with our innermost parts. Paul is saying, as you look within yourselves, as you dig deep do you see the affection of God in your life and do you see affection rising up within you? As you look within yourselves, as you dig

deep do you see the compassion of God in your life and do you see it rising up within you? Go to that resource. Go to those headwaters and drink deeply of them and then you will find amazing strength, the strength of the love of the Father, the encouragement of the Son, and the fellowship of the Spirit within transforming you into a person of affection and compassion for God's people.

What riches he has given us to bless the body of Christ! Let's use them for His glory!