

*How to Have Joyful Community (Phil. 2:1-4)*

What are the differences between enjoyable workplaces and dysfunctional workplaces? There are many answers to that question, but I would place a spirit of teamwork high on the list. If your job features people who have some measure of care for one another and who share common goals, then your workplace will be a place in which there is real opportunity for joy. On the other hand, if your job features people who often get into arguments or who do not share common goals, then your job will feel like drudgery. The movie theater I worked at in high school was of the latter category. Management did not try to foster teamwork. People were often selfish. Workers routinely slacked off or grumbled about their jobs (which were relatively undemanding). A certain chicken restaurant I know took a different path. Lots of communication of common goals. Lots of motivation. Lots of sharing of burdens. Lots of trying to help one another out. People would leave their shifts with an odd mix of exhaustion and satisfaction. Churches can move in these directions as well. Churches (like any relational context) can steal joy or give joy. **Paul asked the Philippians to make his joy complete by living with a spirit of humility and togetherness in the service of Jesus. We can form this kind of joyful community when we embrace our blessings in Christ.**

Making that statement reminds me, however, we too easily forget the blessings that we have in Jesus. What are the blessings that we have in Jesus according to our passage? Do you remember Paul's exhortation in 1:27 that we live our lives worthy of the gospel? In that case the good news about Jesus is the indicative, and the call to live worthy of it is the imperative. In 2:1, Paul has a similarly structured exhortation. He writes, "If you have (and he lists various blessings), then make my joy complete." The power to complete joy flows out of what has been received in and through Jesus, as the ability to live worthy reflects the good news of the gospel. **Our obedience flows out of the reality of God's grace.** Four blessings are here listed: encouragement through our union with Christ, the consolation that comes from love, participation or fellowship with the Holy Spirit, and tenderness and compassion. Because of what Jesus has done Christians have access to encouragement, an awareness

of divine love and compassion, and a real sense of God's presence with them. We didn't earn these things. They are given to us as part of the inheritance that we receive by God's grace received in faith. If Christians recognize these blessings, then we will live a worthy life which brings joy to one another.

So, what stops us from remembering our inheritance? As we discussed briefly last week, we are in a conflict zone, beset by the world, the flesh, and the devil. The world is what you get when you go with the flow that pours forth after Genesis 3. It is a way of life which is less than God's best. It is the cumulative habits of people who are in rebellion against God's will. The world wants you to be motivated by other thoughts. Do what makes you happy. Take care of yourself first. Tear down authority. But these thoughts will rob us of joy. Our own fleshly impulses war against our inheritance of grace. Sin appeals to a sense of deficit inside of us. It makes the false promise that doing something contrary to God's direction will make up for that sense of lack that we have. If we remember what we have securely in Christ, then sin will lose some of its attractive power. The devil wants us drowning in despair and guilt. If we remember the blessings, then we will remember that his power has been broken. The first big point from this passage is: **if you want joyful community, then remember the blessings!**

The workplace analogy helps us here as well. It is far easier to have a workplace full of teamwork and humility if the workers feel like they are treated with respect and provided for. If employers provide an adequate wage, a sense of dignity, and respect for each person, then the employees are far more likely to work together with care for one another. **If a church drinks deeply of gospel promises, then the community that forms is far more likely to be healthy and welcoming to the outsider.** Bad theology, however, will produce ineffective community.

Paul asks the Philippian Christians to make his joy complete. His instructions demonstrate that joyful community requires both positive and negative behaviors. Let us look at both.

**Positive commands.** Paul first counsels them to be like-minded in v. 2. Like-mindedness is then fleshed out with three additional instructions. First, they are to have the same love. I think this should be understood subjectively as the

love for God and for one another that they are each to possess. Such love comes as a fruit of the Holy Spirit's presence in them and with them. Second, he calls them to be united in life, spirit, or maybe even soul. The Greek word could woodenly be translated as "with-souled." To have one's soul tangled up with others means that you have the same values and that you are moving in the same direction, motivated by the same relationship with Jesus Christ, and headed to the same eternal destination. Third, they are to share in a common purpose. All these things together create true like-mindedness. Then in vv. 3-4, he offers the additional positive commands: in humility think more highly of others and look out for the interests of others.

**Negative commands.** Paul knows that joyful community requires more than these positive behaviors. There must also be a refusal to participate in certain behaviors which are destructive of joyful community. He lists two things which must be avoided in vv. 3-4. First, nothing is to be done because of selfish ambition or conceit. Such character flaws are the opposite of the humility which Paul calls on them to possess. Second, no one is to look out for only his own interests. There is an interesting connection to the first chapter here. Do you remember how in 1:15-18 Paul acknowledged that there were some preaching Christ out of selfish ambition to fill the vacuum left by Paul's imprisonment? Even though they were preaching for their own interests Paul was able to rejoice because the gospel was still being preached. Bringing these chapters together teaches us an important lesson. God can still use a church in which people are selfish and self-interested. God in his grace often uses deeply flawed leaders to grow his kingdom. However, though God is merciful, these communities will often lack the deep-seated joy that comes from true like-mindedness. I am so happy that God uses flawed ministries to reach people. There are TV preachers that are downright disgraceful but who still have an impact for the kingdom that is to be celebrated. Nonetheless, I think it is far better from a biblical perspective to have few gifts and small impact with joyful, loving community than to have a big reach, lots of resources, and selfish hearts.

Now that we have seen both the positive and negative, it remains to make two final kinds of comments – **practical application and theological reminder**. First, let us cover practical application. How do we make a community in which we complete one another's joy? I think we need at least four elements.

First, we need **common doctrine**. Doctrine is not a distraction. I commend to you study of and support for the Westminster Confession of Faith, as the doctrinal statement which we follow in the EPC. Second, we need a **shared mission**. This church needs a couple of ministries which we support with a spirit of unity. I think in the coming months it would behoove us to clarify what works we are most willing to support and then support them. Third, we need to have **vibrant worship**. We need excellence in our music and care in our preparations for Sunday morning. But we also need a spiritual atmosphere, something that can only come through sustained prayer. Do you pray for our worship services? Do you pray that you will worship in Spirit and truth, and that others will as well? I commend to you the regular practice of praying for our corporate worship. Fourth, we need to have an **attitude of service**. We should not be asking, “How can I get my needs met?” Instead, we must think, “How can I help meet the needs of others?”

Second, let me offer a theological reminder. You cannot produce this joyful, joy-completing community on your own. **If we try to do this in our own strength, then it will fail**. This takes us back to the start of our exposition of the text. Remember the blessings that you have in Jesus. Remember the good news of what Jesus has accomplished on your behalf. Remember that the Holy Spirit has come to live with us and make God’s love real to us not just intellectually but experientially. This also points us forward to next week’s message. The kind of humility necessary to complete joy starts with a big vision of the humility and condescension of Christ. He came down from heaven that we might be lifted up out of the pit, that we might return to heaven with him. And so we will pick things up in 2:5 next week.