

**"Pressing on with the Mission"  
Together for the Gospel  
Philippians 1:27-2:4**

**Introduction**

- [Slide #1] You've heard the adage "cleanliness is next to godliness." According to researchers at BYU now there's proof. The smell of citrus-scented household cleaner can, researchers claim, make a person more virtuous.
- The study, which involved nearly 130 undergraduate students, divided participants into two rooms — one unscented and one filled with the smell of citrus-scented Windex.
- Researchers then conducted two experiments. In the first, each person in both rooms was given \$12 cash and asked to divide that money evenly with an anonymous person. The people in the clean-smelling room were more honest and gave back nearly twice as much money as those in the non-scented room.
- In the second experiment, participants in both rooms were asked how willing they would be to donate time and money to Habitat for Humanity. The clean-smelling room people were not only more willing to volunteer time but 22 percent of them were likely to donate money to Habitat compared to only 6 percent of people in the unscented room.<sup>1</sup>
- If this research is valid, that smells can turn sinners into saints, the possibilities are mind-boggling. Think about it. Lower crime and vandalism rates in cities where clean scents are pumped into the streets. Good behavior, more productivity in the work place as office cubicles and factories and office complexes are scented like lemon groves. Fewer behavioral problems among students as the air in schools is wafted with citrus scents. Marriages saved through great smelling citrus candles. The applications are endless.
- Hopefully you sense the sarcasm. Do we really believe smells can make people moral, virtuous creatures? Are we that far off true North, are we so longing for answers, for reasons as to why this world is so messed up that our hope for a better world is in citrus-scented smells? That's all we got?
- My hope for a more virtuous life, my hope of a better world is this thing called the gospel-- my vicarious death to sin in the death of Christ. My hope of a virtuous life is his resurrection that I too might be raised to newness of life.<sup>2</sup> All other fixes, all other codes of ethics, all other attempts at making or coercing or tricking people into being more moral, ethical, virtuous people are superficial fixes. They fail to address humanity's real problem.
- Christmas reminds us that the hope of this world is a baby in a manger. Immanuel. God become flesh, crucified and raised to life. That is the fragrance of life.
- Turn to Philippians chapter 1. In **Philippians 1:27-2:4** Paul sets forth for the Philippian church an ethic, a way of life, a code of conduct that is based on this thing called the gospel—the only thing that really changes people. This code of conduct is summarized by

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<sup>1</sup> Nothing to Sniff at: Clean smells inspire virtue," by Diane Mapes, © 2009 msnbc.com. URL:  
<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/33522872/ns/health-behavior/>

<sup>2</sup> Colossians 3:3

governing verse in this section, [verse 27](#). Look at the text. *Whatever happens*, Paul says, *conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ*.

- Paul’s big idea for the Philippian church, and by extension for us, is that...[Slide #2]

### Big Idea

- **Missional churches behave together in a way that promotes the gospel**
- The reason for Paul writing this letter is this ongoing partnership between him and the Philippian church for the sake of the advancement of the gospel; the mission given to every believer to take the gospel to new peoples, new nations, new cultures so that they might know and experience the life-changing power of Christ-crucified.
- The theme verse for this entire letter is back in **Philippians 1:5**. *In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now*. Paul’s express purpose for writing this letter is to see this partnership, for the sake of the gospel, continue; to see this church stay on the mission with him.
- Part of what that means relates to personal conduct how the Philippian church behaves—how they function together as a church, how they relate to each other. Which is why Paul says in [verse 27](#), *whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ*.
- That word *conduct* “refers to the sort of life expected of people as citizens in the community to which they belong.” It’s a word used to describe a faithful citizen.”<sup>3</sup>
- I want you to think for a second about the kind of behavior that’s expected of people who live in this community, the kind of behavior that makes a person a good citizen of Richland Center. Walk with Grace. A supporter of school athletics. Supporting the local farmers through June Dairy days. In the summer, my favorite, eating lots of brats to raise money for different causes. Volunteering for the Star Spangled weekend.
- Paul co-opts a word that would have normally been used to appeal to a person’s civic duty and applies it to the kind of behavior necessary of a good citizen of the kingdom of God. *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ*.
- What Paul seems to be saying is that in order for the mission to go forward among a particular group of Christians, think us as a church now, that group must have a certain kind of behavior together. Conduct worthy of the gospel of Christ. What does that mean?
- “Conduct worthy of the gospel is above all conduct that promotes the gospel.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, above all, at all cost, whatever happens, Paul says, make sure you live in such a way that your behavior, your conduct as a church, as a group, promotes the growth and expansion of the gospel. That’s what it means to be a good citizen of the kingdom. *Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ*. **Missional churches behave together in a way that promotes the gospel**.

### Transition

This morning I want us to focus on...

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<sup>3</sup> Carson, p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> Carson, p. 55.

## Organizational Sentence

- **Two kinds of behavior that are conducive to promoting the gospel and the mission Jesus launched**

## Transition

Look at [verses 27-30](#). This is Paul's first description of conduct that is worthy of the gospel, consistent with the gospel, conduct that promotes the gospel. [[Slide #3](#)] The [first](#) is **teamwork for the sake of the gospel**. Listen.

## Main Points

- *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel 28 without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved--and that by God. 29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, 30 since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.*
- The kind of teamwork that is conducive to promoting the gospel is specified by three phrases. Look at the text. Stand firm in one spirit, [verse 27](#). Contend side by side *as one man for faith of the gospel*, also [verse 27](#). And, meet your opponents head on without fear, [verse 28](#). These three things fall under the rubric of teamwork, don't they?
- Churches that care about the mission, the mission of spreading the life changing news of the gospel, engage in certain kinds of behavior. Teamwork. Teamwork that is characterized, Paul says, by standing firm in one spirit, contending side by side for the advancement of the gospel, and meeting opponents head on without fear. Show this, live this, act this way as a church and the gospel is promoted. Camaraderie, teamwork for the sake of the gospel.
- Let me say a few words about each of these three descriptors. Stand firm in one spirit. Hearing that the Philippians would have thought of a soldier who refuses to budge even an inch from his post.<sup>5</sup> The implication is that a group of people that call themselves will be unable engage in conduct that promotes the gospel if they are not of one mind. Paul calls the Philippians to stand firm in one spirit; meaning they are to have a common disposition and purpose together and a refusal to budge even an inch from that purpose. It's wonderful picture of corporate resolve. A gritty togetherness for a common purpose.
- Contending as one man for the faith of the gospel is a phrase that has gladiatorial overtones. Think of the arena and a group of people contending, struggling together for something. Too frequently when the church adopts this posture we're contending against the culture or against this person or that cause. No. We're called to contend for the faith of the gospel. If all people observe us doing is contending against things it means that we aren't contending for what we need to contend for, *the faith of the gospel*. We are to contend for people's faith which is based on the gospel. The Philippians are to contend as one, united, in their struggle to promote the faith that is based upon the gospel.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Reinecker, p. 548.

<sup>6</sup> O'Brien, p. 152.

- And finally, they're to do so courageously, without fear, regardless of who might oppose the promotion of the gospel. [Verses 28-29](#) hint that the situation in Philippi was much more difficult opposition wise than what we face. In fact, Paul says something absolutely amazing here; that should we, because our teamwork, face opposition for the sake of the gospel, Paul says that's a privilege. Suffering for the sake of the gospel is one of the surest signs that God that looks upon us with favor.<sup>7</sup>
- Let me just say a word about what we are to suffer for, because many Christian develop this martyr complex and suffer needlessly and for things not worth suffering for—and they think they are honoring God in the process. If we suffer we are to suffer because we have labored in promoting the gospel, for the sake of advancing the gospel, for the sake of taking the gospel to people and places that do not yet have the good news. God keep us from suffering because of ignorance or because of stupidity or because we needlessly bring conflict upon ourselves.
- Back to the text. Putting all three of these things together listen to how [Eugene Peterson](#) in the Message renders the teamwork Paul describes in [27-30](#). *Stand united, singular in vision, contending for people's trust in the Message, the good news, not flinching or dodging in the slightest before the opposition.*
- I don't know about you, but my take on things is that many churches are far too individualistic and consumer driven for this kind of team behavior to take place. Speaking for myself, I long for an experience of the church that is more like what Paul describes here, more team-like, more purposeful and less individualistic. More resolved, more focused on a togetherness for the sake of the gospel and less focused on causes and projects and agendas that have nothing to do with the gospel.
- My experience is that the kind of camaraderie, the kind of teamwork Paul calls the church to here, happens more among sports teams. It happens in tight-knit small towns that pull together during difficult times to accomplish something bigger than themselves. It happens in small, innovative corporations that are laser focused on a particular goal. But it happens less frequently in the church. And when we settle for less than what Paul describes here we are selling ourselves short.
- As a church, our individualism and an inability to function as a team without a common purpose will kill the mission. We have to pull together for the sake of the gospel. We have to work together for the sake of the gospel. We have to contend together for the faith of the gospel. Teamwork. Teamwork. Teamwork. Teamwork. Teamwork. Anything great worth doing for the kingdom is going to require us to up the ante on our ability to work as a team for the sake of the gospel. Whatever we need to do to help this generation to hear the gospel we need to do together.

### Transition

This togetherness for the sake of the gospel is expanded upon even more in [2:1-4](#). Look at verses 1-4 of chapter two. The [second behavior](#) conducive to promoting is unity. [\[Slide #4\]](#) For the sake of the gospel, Paul says, **be on the same page about everything.**

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<sup>7</sup> Reinecker, p. 548.

- *If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*
- Paul says in these verses that if certain things are true for the Christian believer, notice the string of if phrases, he says if these things are true, and they are, then believers in Christ are obligated to behave in such a way that they are **on the same page about everything**.
- For the sake of argument Paul says, if a believer in Christ has received any encouragement whatsoever from being united with Christ—from having a personal relationship with Christ, if they have in any way been comforted by God’s unending, unfailing loyal love for them, if in any way the believer in Christ has experienced this bond of fellowship with the Holy Spirit—this participation in the Spirit, if they’ve in any way experienced the warmth and affection, the compassionate concern and care of other believers, if these certain things are true, and they are, Paul says, then behave this way. Be united. Be on the same page about absolutely everything. In other words, if believers can collectively say they have this experience of God, and these things are true for every believer, then “the obligation lies upon them to live in a particular way in relation to one another.”<sup>8</sup> Be on the same page about everything.
- Which is what Paul describes starting in [verse 2](#). *Then make my joy complete*, Paul says, *by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Unity is behavior that is conducive to promoting the gospel.*
- Even now after having looked at these verses all week, I’m astonished at the degree of unity we are called to in Christ. We are called to think alike—a common way of thinking. *Be like-minded* the text says. Scholars have found an inscription with that word *like-minded* on an ancient tombstone of a married couple buried together that read this, “we spoke the same things, we thought the same things and we go the inseparable way in Hades.”<sup>9</sup> In our life together as a church we are called to this kind of perfect unity of thought, of mind.
- We are also called to *have the same love*—to have a common love for one another. We are called to have a common attitude or a common set of goals—*be one in spirit and purpose*. And we are to do all this with a measure of humility as we consider others better than ourselves, [verse 3](#). Humility, an un-inflated view of self is really the source of Christian unity.
- I’m going to go out on a limb here but I don’t think this is far off. The greatest hindrance to the mission of God today, the greatest hindrance to us as a church promoting the gospel is not faulty Christian doctrine but faulty personal relationships.<sup>10</sup> It’s the jealousies and bickering and in-fighting and the *selfish ambition* and *vain conceit*, as [verse 3](#) puts it, that destroy our unity in Christ.

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<sup>8</sup> Marshall, p. 43.

<sup>9</sup> Reinecker, p. 549.

<sup>10</sup> Marshall, p. 36.

- **Boniface**, an 8<sup>th</sup> century Englishman who labored to take the gospel to Germany once said, “The Church is like a great ship being pounded by the waves of life's different stresses. Our duty is not to abandon ship, but to keep her on course.” We fulfill our civic duty as citizens of the kingdom and keep the church on course when we stand united—on the same page about everything.
- In his book *The Church of Irresistible Influence* author **Robert Lewis** tells the story of the building of the Chunnel, the tunnel that underneath the English Channel that connects England with France. The French had the perfect word for the project: *bicephele*, two-headed. There were two mammoth firms built from scratch to complete the project: one charged with finance and operation, the other responsible for building it. Each of these companies was also two-headed: equally French and British.
- No one was allowed to take charge. Leadership, more times than not, was reduced to the management of conflict. Said a high-ranking executive, "The project...created a lot of tension because it [was] not geared to solving problems; it [was] geared to placing blame." The English yelled at the French, and the French yelled at the English. Said another executive, "There were nervous breakdowns galore."
- The problems were primarily from a lack of shared standards. The two countries had a different word for everything. The French had their accounting system, so did the English. The French ran on 380 volts, and the British ran on 420. Instruction manuals were bilingual. There were even two different standards used to measure sea level.<sup>11</sup>
- More often than not, the way the church operates is *bicephele*—two headed. No common purpose. No common resolve. No togetherness for the sake of the gospel. The kind of behavior that is conducive to seeing the good news of Christ spread and grow is unity; unity of purpose, of love, of thought, all bent in one direction—the promotion and advancement of the gospel. We all have to be on the same page. We all have to be about the same stuff. We all have to have the same goal and work together toward that accomplishing that goal.

## Conclusion

- I think that nothing would honor God more this Christmas season than for us as a church to demonstrate complete and total unity of purpose for the sake of the gospel. *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.*

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Lewis with Rob Wilkins, *The Church of Irresistible Influence* (Zondervan, 2001), pp. 205-206.