

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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THE NECESSITY OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Philippians 1:22-30

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Here are the two points of my sermon today:

- Paul viewed Christian community as a way of life.
- Christians are strengthened through community.

Last week I left off in Philippians chapter one, and I broke down the verse that says, "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain." That is a loaded verse, packed with meaning. Paul continues with his debate over living or dying. I want to launch right into the message today. The basic background to the message is that while Paul was in jail for preaching the Gospel, he wrote a letter to the good church in Philippi.

PAUL VIEWED CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AS A WAY OF LIFE

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 1:22-26

If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

EXPLANATION: Paul had gotten to the point in his life that he believed whether alive on this earth, or living after dying -- in whatever state, God had a plan for him, and he'd be living within that plan. I believe Paul was so close to the Lord that he was certain it wasn't his time to die yet and so therefore he would continue on. I like "but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body."

Paul loves the new Christian communities that had sprung up around the known world. He wrote openly about his thoughts regarding living or dying. As long as he was alive, he'd make every day count for the Lord and for them.

Philippians helps us understand that sometimes God is glorified through a person continuing to live and sometimes God is more glorified through a person's death. Whatever our mission after death, if we have one, we don't know. God has revealed some things about the afterlife in the Bible, but not a whole lot. In Paul's case, he knew he had more work to do. Paul's remaining life would fulfill two purposes as far as the Philippian church was concerned: for their progress and for their joy. You can see the sense of community in his words.

Look at verse 25: *Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith.*

The Greek word for "progress" here is *prókóptō*, a word which means "to advance by chopping down whatever impedes progress." This is the only time this word is used in the New Testament. It's a word that was used in antiquity of pioneers and armies -- the clearing away (chopping down) of forests in order to reach their destination.

APPLICATION: For the individual believer and the community of believers, this means cutting through obstacles by the Lord's power. For the most part, I believe we Christians are a bunch of wimps when it comes to seeking, discerning, and knowing God's will. At the first sign of trouble, it's easy to tuck tail and run. We move forward and the first door shuts, and we think that's God's answer and he must not be in it.

But if we see the image implied by the original language in which Paul wrote, we see getting to a destination will probably require us to chop down some trees. If we hear someone say, "Well God must not be in it because..." and they give some reason, perhaps we need to encourage that person and say, "Or maybe God is requiring you to chop down some trees." Discerning God's will is not for the weak of heart or for those who are easily distracted or for those who are quick to throw in the towel. You might say that knowing God's will is hard... but not knowing his will is even harder.

EXPLANATION: Paul goes a step further by adding joy to the sentence. *I will*

continue with all of you for your... joy in the faith. The scripture is clear: the word "joy" is the most common emotion in the New Testament. You've heard me say it. I firmly believe that while we face days of sadness, despair, or whatever emotion you want to name... Christians should return to joy as the default emotion.

But this word "joy" means more than just happiness. The Greek word here is pronounced "khara". While I am not a linguistic expert by any means, I learned that this word is a cognate, which means there are other words like it that derive from another older root word. The best way for me to explain the meaning of this word "khara" -- that's translated into the English word "joy" -- is that it is joy as a result of God's grace at work in a person's life. Joy surfaces in the believer because of the believer's awareness of what God has done for him or her.

APPLICATION: I've met some terribly grouchy people along the way, haven't you? And some of them claim to be Christians. Not all joyful Christians have had perfect lives, yet they have genuine joy. I have to ask... if there is no joy in a person's life, has there been any salvation?

EXPLANATION: Listen as I expand verse 25 from its rather limited English translation: *Convinced of this, I know that I will remain alive for now, and I will continue with all of you for your progress in the faith, chopping down whatever impedes you, and I will continue with you for your joy in the faith, as we reflect daily upon what God has done for us through Jesus Christ.*

In other words, Paul longed for heaven, but decided to make every single day on this earth count for something great. He had no plans to just sit and wait to die. While alive, he wanted to be faithful to the Christian community.

CHRISTIANS ARE STRENGTHENED THROUGH COMMUNITY

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 1:27-28

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 the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel²⁸ without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.

EXPLANATION: In English we have the word “you” which means individual, or “you” which means “all of you.” Paul writes to both the individual and the community. Individually and corporately, Paul told the church to conduct themselves worthy of the gospel of Christ. Those are strong words because, on our own, none of us are worthy of the gospel of Christ. None of us. I can take no credit for salvation... nor can you. We did not earn it in any way.

Exactly what conduct is worthy of the gospel of Christ? When answering such a difficult question, we can ask the question in a different way to help us answer the more difficult question. What conduct is not worthy of the gospel of Christ? That's an easy question to answer, isn't it? We recognize that behavior, don't we?

Do you hear the call to unity here? Standing firm in one Spirit, striving together as one. Unity is necessary for a church to be effective and to survive. If churches are not unified, then as I've observed, God gives them a period of time to pull together, and if not, then they either dissolve or continue as a non-church disguised as a church.

Please notice the sequence: Unity among believers is followed by not being frightened by the opposition. Unity builds confidence.

ILLUSTRATION: We are moving forward with the senior adult housing that we've talked about. There is a lot involved with it. Some wonder what's taking so long, but it's been less than a year since we officially began. Being your pastor, I would not have moved forward if you had not wanted to do it. We took several votes on different matters related to it and each time the vote was overwhelmingly in favor. The unity of the congregation gave me confidence as we faced some opposition. Some of the opposition was legit and some of it was just... well, bizarre.

There are two types of opposition: pleasant and unpleasant. Each time I was faced with unpleasant opposition, in the back of my mind, I remembered you and your overwhelming support. "We're behind you, Pastor." I don't take words like that lightly!

EXPLANATION: Go back to the last part of verse 28. Paul wasn't talking about opposition by people who don't want to see a senior living facility built. No. He was talking about those who opposed the spreading of the Gospel. Paul knew this type of

person all too well. He knew what motivated them and what kept them going. How did he know this? Because he was once one of them. He knew the goal of the opposition was to make people afraid and break up their groups. In Acts chapter 9, after he was converted, people saw Paul and were afraid because they knew his history. He had been successful in making people fear him as a murderer of Christians.

To the church at Philippi, Paul telling the believers to stand in unity and not be afraid was his indirect way of exposing the strategy of the enemy and that was to break them up and make them afraid. It's important to know the enemy's strategy and to have a counter strategy. How better to learn the enemy's strategy than from a former enemy?

Paul knew the enemy did not want to see people standing firm. Look at the last part of verse 28 following his statement on unity and not being afraid: *This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God.*

Folks, as hard as it may be, do not cower down when you are being attacked for your faith in Jesus. Do not be afraid. Stand together.

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 1:29-30

For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in 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.

"Granted" comes from the Greek word that means "to show favor". God has shown favor to you to believe in him and suffer for him. We like the first part, that is God's favor toward us that allows us to believe, but we don't care for the second part, do we? Think of it. Because God has shown favor to us, it is a privilege to suffer for him. Our gospel presentations talk about believing in Christ, but what if they included being allowed to suffer for him?

If you are committing to Christ, it means that you are putting yourself at his disposal to do whatever he wants with you.

Paul was encouraging the church at Philippi, because there were people there who

were being persecuted as he was. Paul as a leader didn't ask people to do things that he hadn't done. No matter what happens today or in the future, stand firm.

This truth about Christian community is so important to all of us. We come together as individuals with different backgrounds and personalities, and we merge in this body of Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ brings us all together to accomplish his purpose in Christian community.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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