

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor

THE SUBSTANCE OF SPIRITUAL HEALTH

Philippians 2:1-11

January 26, 2020

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I have two points to my message today:

- Unity is essential for church health.
- The mindset of Christ is essential for church health.

INTRODUCTION: Just about any magazine has at least one article about health - exercise and fitness, nutrition, sleep, weight loss and on and on. Infomercials show people new fitness gadgets and weight loss products. Every month, there are dozens of new books about health.

There are many schools of thought about health. One article might contradict another. New research renders previous research obsolete. When it comes to church health, however, I don't think any Christian church would disagree with Philippians 2 on what makes a spiritually healthy church.

In chapter 1 of Paul's letter to the Philippian people, we learn about his affirmation of the church at Philippi. He shares with them his gratitude, the fact that he was in jail, and how he wanted to live a life worthy of the Gospel. He loved the people of this church and wanted them to continue growing in the Lord.

In chapter 2, Paul goes deeper, as he builds a case for how the church is supposed to be. While he writes with optimism about their congregation, he reinforces what they are doing well.

UNITY IS ESSENTIAL FOR CHURCH HEALTH

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 2:1-2

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in 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 of one mind.

EXPLANATION: I like how Paul sets up his case about relating to one another with the word “if”. Good relations depend on “if”.

I trust all of you have gained encouragement by being united with Christ, because without him we have no hope whatsoever.

A lot of scriptures talk about being united with Christ. Romans chapter 6 is one of them.

I trust all of you have had common sharing in the Spirit. What does this mean? The book of Acts talks about that.

I trust all of you have experienced tenderness and compassion.

Paul said if you have had any of these things, then make his joy complete by doing what? Cooperating! Except he says it in terms of being like-minded, loving each other, and being unified. That’s what he means – cooperation!

APPLICATION: What does he mean by making his joy complete? He’s merely sharing the heart of a pastor. It brings joy to a pastor knowing that his congregation is unified and cooperating. Think about what you do for a living. If you are retired, think about what you spend your time doing now. Doesn’t it bring joy to you when you know there are fruits of your labor? How horrible it would be to have a life-long career, only to look back and think it was a waste of time.

ILLUSTRATION: Notice here that nothing is said about the age of the church members. This might sound unrelated to this passage of scripture but indeed it relates. The church should be multigenerational. We have a whole lot of senior adults but it’s not because anyone here dislikes younger adults. This past week, I heard about a church that asked the older people to leave so they could grow. That conversation could be unpacked in many ways. Maybe the seniors in that church are

entrenched and refuse to change... maybe the seniors dominate everything. If that's true, then I can understand why they may be impeding growth.

EXPLANATION: In this same line of thinking, if the younger people think that simply ousting the older people is the key to growth, then I believe they are mistaken. It's not either/or in the family of God, it's both/and.

Look back at verse 2: *being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind*. I believe this is the organic, or natural, result of verse one. Let me give you the Paul Gunn paraphrase: Unity and cooperation are the results of being unified in Christ, sharing his love, tenderness, and compassion with one another.

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 2:3-4

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Paul instructed the young impressionable church to go against the world which says: "Be selfish and conceited. Be inflated with pride and value yourself above others. Put your interest above others as well."

ILLUSTRATION: Earlier this week, I went to visit my son Matt at his college. My other son, Aaron, went with me. We had a great discussion about several things including personality types. I pointed out there is a particular personality type that is rather self-serving. People of this personality type tend to talk about themselves and their needs all the times. I said, "I'll guarantee you they are not the ones volunteering in the food line at homeless shelters, volunteering for mission trips, or helping in other ways where they are not seen." My advice to my sons was to gravitate toward people who are more concerned about others' interests and don't allow every conversation to be dominated by their own interests. (Incidentally, I call this mentoring "Dad-vice".)

APPLICATION: Circle verses 3 and 4 and write this in the margin: "Live this way and spend time with people who live this way." If your energy is being drained by others, consider gaining more friends who live out verses 3 and 4.

THE MINDSET OF CHRIST IS ESSENTIAL FOR CHURCH HEALTH

Paul goes deeper in his relationship talk. He says to put on the mind of Christ Jesus. By saying “Christ” first, he means “risen Lord.”

Please look at the handout.

Philippians 2:6-11 The Mindset of Christ Jesus!	
	New Testament parallels
In his letter to the church at Philippi, Paul’s second chapter speaks about relationships. In verse one, he told everyone to have the same mindset as Christ Jesus. Then he defined the mindset:	
Verse 6: Who, being in very nature God...	John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John 14:9 Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’”
...did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;	John 5:18 ...they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.
Verse 7: ...rather, he made himself nothing...	2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.
...by taking the very nature of a servant...	Matthew 20:28 ...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.
...being made in human likeness.	John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. Hebrews 2:17 For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.
Verse 8: And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!	Matthew 26:39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”
Verse 9: Therefore God exalted him to the highest place...	John 19:18 There they crucified Him, and with Him two other men, one on either side, and Jesus in between.
...and gave him the name that is above every name...	Ephesians 1:21 [God has placed him] far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.
Verse 10 ...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...	Romans 14:11 It is written: “As surely as I live,” says the Lord, “every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.”
...in heaven and on earth and under the earth...	Matthew 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...”

Verse 11 ...and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord...	John 13:13 “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am...”
...to the glory of the Father.	John 12:27 [About the crucifixion, Jesus asked the crowd] “Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” ²⁹ The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

What we learn is that the mind of Christ is different than the minds of people. When putting on the mind of Christ, the scripture isn’t even hinting that we are equal with God...such thinking would be a complete misrepresentation of the scripture. What it *is* saying, however, is that are to empty ourselves, like Christ did. We are to consider ourselves as nothing, taking on the nature of a servant, humbling ourselves and being obedient, putting others’ needs before ours.

When I say, “We are to consider ourselves as nothing,” someone is going to get all worked up. “What about my self-image? Oh no! I’ve worked so long to have a healthy self-image and now you are telling me to consider myself nothing.” I believe in counseling, I believe in therapy, but I believe if people put on the mindset of Christ, a lot of counseling would not be needed.

Putting on the mind of Christ has several benefits:

- It gets “me-ism” out of the way and yields to the will of God.
- It is the answer to selfishness because I put others’ needs before mine.
- It is the answer to pride, because I realize I am nothing without Christ and am dependent on him, not others.
- Collectively, if we all put on the mind of Christ, then personal agenda goes away.

What is the answer to selfishness? What’s the answer to being self-absorbed? It’s putting on the mind of Christ!

What’s the first step in putting on the mind of Christ? Here it is: verse 7—making yourself nothing. If Christ can do that, is it too much for us to do such?

Last week I talked about how Paul addressed individuals as well as the overall church. In English, we just have the word “you” which means “you, the individual” and “you, the group”. I mentioned how we would look more this Sunday about how the personality of a church is the overall, general personality of the members of the church. If we have collective individuals who are angry, that will be the personality of the church. If we yield to others and to the spirit of God, then the mindset of Christ will take over.

Listen to this: If a church is to have the mindset of Christ, individuals must have the mindset of Christ. For a church to be spiritually healthy, its individual members must be healthy.

ILLUSTRATION: Most of you have never been in this sanctuary when no one is in here. I have, many times. Do you know what this sanctuary is like when no one is here? It’s just a big empty, lonely room. Sure, I have a sense of reverence based on what I know happens in here, but aside from that, it’s just brick and mortar. Most of you have not had any reason to walk the halls at a time when literally no other person was in the building. I have. Do you what it’s like? It’s just a big old empty, lonely building. It’s not sacred. It’s just concrete and carpet and copper wiring and plumbing. Elements.

The church is the collective group of the individuals who are a part of it.

Now, please consider—If we walk through the empty space of a church without any knowledge of the church, we would not know whether the congregation is healthy. Looks can be very deceiving. Oh, we may find some clues here and there, but really, we wouldn’t know the church until we talked with some of the individual members of the church. And then the question of what the church is would be answered by those individuals, and whether or not they have the mindset of Christ.

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Thanks to Jennifer Anderson for her editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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