

Series: Side by Side
Message Title: ***The Participation With the Congregation***
Date: Sunday, February 11, 2018
Scripture: Philippians 2:1-4
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Location: Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, GA

Introduction

Believe it or not, there was a time when people had to walk across the room to change the channel on a TV set. In a *Peanuts* cartoon strip, Lucy walked in the room and demanded that Linus change the TV channel, threatening him if he didn't. "What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?" asks Linus. "These five fingers," says Lucy. "Individually they're nothing, but when I curl them together like this (fist), they form a weapon that is awesome to behold."

"Which channel do you want?" asks Linus. Turning away, he looks at his fingers and says, "Why can't you guys get together like that?"

"Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27 ESV).

Paul appeals to the church in Philippi to be together for the gospel. In fact, it's as if Paul stops to lift a finger to say, "One thing [like a warning, a charge], live on mission together!"

This appeal is like that of soldiers who stand together and athletes who strive together toward a goal—winning! It is a defining and disciplined unity for the glory of God and testimony of the gospel.

"Believers are making a statement about the gospel not only with their lips but also with their lives. The gospel is about love; therefore, we should be known as a loving people. The gospel is about justice; therefore, we should be known as a justice-seeking people. The gospel is about life; therefore, we should display visible joy and vitality in our gatherings and relationships. The gospel is about liberty; therefore, we should not live as stuffy legalists. The gospel is about humility; therefore, we should be a humble people, gladly serving others."

—Tony Merida and Francis Chan

In the end, the gospel should shape our lives—how we live and what we do. The

gospel is not just something we believe, but something we live. The gospel is not simply something we talk about, but something that defines our walk—our lifestyle, our character (a way of life).

These thoughts on unity and togetherness do not end with the chapter break, but is actually the topic Paul cycles up again:

“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:1-4 ESV).

Paul makes a strong appeal for unity and shared identity in the gospel. Togetherness is a vital part of the attitude and activity of the church. Because of where we are and how life is (Philippians 1:29-30), we are in great need of each other to strengthen, support

and sustain. This is not to be assumed, but to be pursued. The circumstance of conflict and strife in the world calls us to gather and encourage one another.

You will notice Philippians 2:1 opens with the little connective word, "If" (a conjunctive). In our English language, we tend to think of this only as a conditional, but the use here in the Greek is not conditional, but foundational—"Since."

Since we are living in a world filled with strife, suffering and struggle, and since we have Christ (a confidence, comfort and the congregation), we are to lean into these things with intentionality and dependency.

Over last couple of weeks, we have talked about worship as an personal attitude (Philippians 1:21) and as an active response of praise (Philippians 4:4). But today, we need to understand why we need the shared experience of worship—togetherness—as the church.



Four Appeals for Participation in Worship

1. To See Christ Over Circumstance

Since there is encouragement in Christ
The word, *encouragement*, is the Greek word, *paraklesis*—“one called to come alongside.” It is used to describe the work of the Holy Spirit.

“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you” (John 16:7 ESV).

The Holy spirit is the *paraklete*, the One called alongside to be with us.

Here Paul is saying that since you are in Christ and have brothers and sisters in Christ, you are called to come alongside fellow believers to charge, cheer and challenge each other—to get your eyes on Jesus.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the

race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1-2 ESV).

We live in a distracted world with many distracted believers. But the main thing in the Christian life is Jesus and Jesus only. We have shared life in Christ, and we gather to remember and to refocus on the life of Christ in us.

It is vital for us to gather in the Spirit and encourage one another in faith.

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:24-25 ESV).

The same word is used again (encourage = *parakaleo*).

Because we have a steadfast hope in Christ and His consummation of glory beyond the

sad and tragic stories of this life, we gather to encourage, console and cheer one another on in the faith. Because we know Christ, we have confidence beyond the circumstances of life we face each day.

As Paul speaks to the comfort of love, he is affirming what we need to have affirmed day by day in our lives—the steadfast love of God for us!

“But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:21-23 ESV).

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8:35-37 ESV).

We must not, we cannot overlook the assurance of the love of Christ that never fails and the value of our togetherness in Christ in the midst of all of the circumstances life presents.

For this reason, Paul asks (*paraphrased*), “Why can’t you get together like that?” It is vital.

2. To Seek Community Over Individuality

By virtue of this explicit appeal to come together to encourage one another in Christ, there is an implicit application for us all today. It is the need to get beyond ourselves, our circumstances and our concerns, and share in the care and cares of fellow believers.

Paul speaks of “participation in the Spirit, affection and sympathy.” The word here, *koinonia*, is the word we most often translate *fellowship*. This is not just coffee and cookies, but our communal, congregational life as a church.

“For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3 ESV).

Paul links our fellowship through worship because of our life in the Holy Spirit. God places you and me in the congregation of

brothers and sisters in Christ that we might bear up one another and bear through with one another.

“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:1-2 ESV).

We struggle, we stumble, and we strain as we go through life. For this reason, we must not limit ourselves to ourselves, but share in and rely upon the body of Christ.

If I could give a modern translation, I would say, “Because of the Spirit, do life together.”

You are not your own and you are not alone as a follower of Christ. We need tenderness, kindness, mercy and grace. Life can and is often a blow to the gut. It can be easy to get the breath knocked out of you. Here Paul speaks to the need for others who have a gut (literally bowels = seat of emotions) for you: compassion, tenderness, someone who knows and shares your pain.

For this reason, we need fellow believers because of the harsh realities and devastating hardships of life

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too” (2 Corinthians 1:3-5 ESV).

Seek community over individuality. You were made for family and God has put you in His family through the forever work of Christ and the active work of the Holy Spirit.

3. To Show Commitment Over Convenience

“complete my joy”—by what? Same mind, same love, in full accord and in one mind... bend your life and mindset toward this kind of commitment with one another, not just what is easy for you.

“strive toward unity and work together”

If you have ever coached, one of the worst things that can happen is to get to practice and the players don't show or you may get to gametime and don't have enough players. As a result, you have to forfeit or there is little hope of winning because you are so thin. The “no shows” may be because “something came up”—life's detours and distractions took the players away and now the team suffers.

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3 ESV).

Make others more significant than yourself.
Look for the interests of others.

This is going to sound hard and maybe even a bit harsh, but I need to address it. My observation regarding church in America today is that most people are looking out for their own interests and not the interests of others. We can be so self-focused, consumed and absorbed, we do church when it is convenient, but not out of commitment.

Studies today show again and again that most people think of themselves active members of a local church while attending 1.4 times per month.

Think about that for a moment. Better yet, let's examine this.

A chain that is 168 inches represents the hours in a week. All links have the same space—no more and no less. What do we do?

Work 40-50 hours; sleep 50 hours; exercise; eat; watch TV, social media. But if this is a church week, that represents one link in the chain if you attend worship, two if you serve, or three if you are in a Life Group.

Do we really think such minimal commitment and attachment can really aid us in knowing the God of the universe, developing maturity in our faith, or shaping our lives toward the gospel?

I'm not trying to be legalistic, but church is a convenience in many of our lives and not a commitment.

Early in our marriage, we made a commitment to attend church; it was not a choice. Sadly, too many people just make life in Christ and life together a convenience, not a commitment.

“The church’s shared mission is greatly affected by the church’s scattered distractions in our day.”

It’s flu season and we need to be cautious. As a pastor, it is a bad time to preach on this. I know about February and flu. Do what is best, but I’m just concerned about the other 11 months with all the holidays, travel and exceptions and in the end, finding we have little commitment to “seek first the kingdom of God” in our lives. Paul is saying that to worship God is to realize the worth of God and the worth of doing life together in Christ.

4. To Share Contribution Over Consumption

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3 ESV).

Each year during Christmas, we see horror stories where stores have a limited quantity of sale items (TVs, toys, etc.) and people camp out, line up and dash in to get their deals. Many times we see rivalry and conceit in action.

Far too many come to church with this mentality—especially for worship. “I’m here to get something... I want to get it for me... I want to get it quick... and I don’t want to have to think about others.”

Paul reminds all of us that the church is not about you. It’s not about your attendance, your preference or providing you with service. It’s about your engagement in the faith of the gospel.

The church is not just here to minister to you; we are here to focus on mission together.

For this reason, a shared sense of priority, humility, sensitivity and servant-hearted activity all mark the ministry of the church in every gathering of worship.

Our focus is to be on gratitude for the grace-gifts God has given us and use our gifts to serve and support the needs (interests) of others in and through the congregation.

For this reason, Paul calls upon us to pursue and practice humility. I cannot separate this from worship because the first and foremost life-adjustment needed to worship God is that of humility in light of His sovereign and supreme authority over life.

Life is brought into harmony and unity when we share and surrender to God's authority in worship, and focus on our identity together in Christ.

Awards show season: People's Choice, Critics Choice, Screen Actors Guild and the Oscars. One of the most important and common categories at the Oscars is *Best Original Musical Score*. Music makes the picture!

As great as the actors and the effects are, without music there is no interpretation and feeling. Typically it is symphonic. While many do not go to the symphony, almost all love the symphonic sounds of the cinema—*Star*

Wars, for example.

The symphony is not a stage of instruments all playing the same note or playing their own separate compositions. The symphony is the combined blend of different instruments, making different sounds and playing different parts in a common score resulting in harmony, led under the respectful submission of a single conductor.

God has gathered us in “full accord” (literally united in soul or as a symphony of souls) in accordance to the score of God’s Word and the conducting of the Holy Spirit so that we might participate in worship where Jesus is exalted and His name magnified through us to the glory and praise of God.

In the end, Paul made a personal appeal to the church at Philippi. It was not a threat, but an appeal of pastoral love, and today, I make Paul’s appeal to you my brothers and sisters, and Warren, and I eagerly await your response...