

[tank warfare]

:: philippians 2.1-4 ::

We've got some hard-hitting verses this morning as we begin chapter 2 of Philippians.

Philippians 2.1-4 - Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Bible commentator H.A. Ironside remarks on this passage and points out the whole section can be summed up by the last word in verse 4: **others**.

In life, we are surrounded by others. Whether in the family, at the workplace, in a local church, even here in this room, we find ourselves amidst others.

As Christians, we find that we are **called** to love and to serve others. We're sent to them to share the filling we received from God.

But, despite that calling, we find that within ourselves we have a great **capacity** to damage the others around us.

In his writings, Paul frequently points out the struggle within ourselves between the flesh and the spirit.

This analogy is a bit simplistic, so I hope you forgive me, but we're like a vehicle with 2 gas tanks. Two reserves and sources of fuel. Two propellants that we choose between throughout our day. The first is the one that came stock when we were created. The flesh. The sin nature. Paul explains how this tank operates in this section.

The second fuel tank is an add-on. It was installed by the Master Craftsman, Jesus Christ, when we gave our lives to Him. And, as far as add-ons go, it's a pretty plum deal. Not only did it increase our value, but it comes with a lifetime supply of fuel and an eternal guarantee along with it.

That's the condition of our hearts. But, as we move forward in life, we're still given the option. We're still presented with that A/B Fuel switch labeled BC and AD. The power of the flesh *before* Christ and the power of the Spirit *in* Christ.

The problem, of course, is that when we choose to live in the flesh, drawing on sinful, worldly reserves, we cannot accomplish the work that God has for us to do. We can't move forward with Christ. And we can't be unified with the others around us.

This is what Paul teaches us about as he opens this chapter.

Philippians 2.1 - Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy...

As many of you know, lots of times when the Bible says 'if' it really means 'since.' This is one of those times. There is no question to the reliability of these characteristics which God supplies by His Spirit. We're given consolation, which is another word for encouragement. We're given love. We're given fellowship of the Spirit. We're given affection and mercy from heaven. Those incredible resources ARE pumped into our lives right now. They reside in that spiritual fuel tank. They're part of our relationship with God through the Holy Spirit and therefore are available to us day in and day out.

Because of that, Paul says in verse 2:

Philippians 2.2 - ...fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

I like this verse because it's pretty clear that Paul is attempting to drive home his point. Be like minded. Have the same love. Be of one accord. Be of one mind.

Paul is speaking about unity and our love for one another. He's very plainly saying, "Look...you need to do this. You need to be unified in Christ." And he's repeating it again and again so that we won't miss it.

So let's unpack this a little bit.

First, it's important to see and recognize that we have great capacity, great potential to heavily *encourage* or heavily *discourage* the people around us. Our behavior and our example, even a single word can do incredible improvement or incredible damage to the others God has placed around us. Our lives are not lived in a vacuum. Our words are heard. Our habits are seen. Our tweets and status updates are read and felt by those around us. And even a few short words can either stumble others *or* can push them nearer to God.

This is a hard truth to internalize. But, if we focus on the fact that we're part of something greater than ourselves, we're part of this massive building project, this massive initiative by God to redeem the world, then it will cause us to filter our lives in such a way that we will intentionally speak to edify and encourage and avoid those areas where we might complain or break down or discourage a person.

Second, Paul calls us to be like-minded. Obviously, even as Christians, we're going to have differing opinions. But we can be like-minded in our desire to disciple Christians and reach unbelievers. Even here we find disagreement within the Church. So how do we do those things? How do we reach and disciple and be like-minded?

This is an area where we have to step back and realize that we cannot accomplish this kind of mission and this kind of unity without Divine intervention. Luckily, we have that filling, that full fuel tank from God, which moves us forward in this calling He's given us.

1 Corinthians 2 verse 16 explains to us that we've been given the **mind of Christ**. There may be disagreements, but we're called first to take on the mind of Christ. To switch from the BC tank, the mind of the flesh, and move forward in the mind of Christ in the power of our Lord.

After like-minded, we're to have the same love. What love?

Well, the love that Paul had, even for those who were trying to compete against him using the Gospel in chapter 1. The love Jesus had for even Judas Iscariot. A love that is unconditional even when it is rejected. That's the love we're called to. That's the love we're saved by and that's the love we're filled with by the Spirit of God. We're ALL to love each other this way, purposefully.

Then, being of one accord. Actually being *together*, sharing our lives with one another. Discipling each other and sharpening each other within the Church. Not being individualistic 6 and a half days a week then coming together in the Church like it's a social club, but understanding that the Church is an incredible organism that is connected throughout the week and across the world personally and powerfully.

Then, again, Paul says to be of one mind.

This repetition is helpful. What God is dealing with in this passage is very important. In our sin nature, we're wired for individualism and selfishness. The Spirit *rewires* us for relationship and service. We are living members of God's Body on the earth. So, when we decide to fuel our lives with the flesh, using that BC gas tank, it causes horrific damage to the Church at large and the relationships in our lives.

God has come and said, "No, what I want for you is unity. I want your life to be characterized by the kind of love that I showed to Judas Iscariot. The kind of love that I showed for lepers and Samaritans. That's what I've filled you with. That's direction I want you to go."

Philippians 2.3 - Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

The flesh is about selfish ambition, conceit and self-centeredness. Those characteristics are enemies of unity and therefore are enemies of the Church. Jesus Christ came to earth, not seeking fame. Not seeking fortune. Come to save and serve, not be served.

Selfishness, self-ambition, conceit are **ungodly** and they are **not eternal**.

Muhammad Ali used to say, "I am the greatest." He accomplished some impressive feats from a human perspective. He's a man who had great confidence, great conceit. Great pride in himself. He laid hold of personal fame and fortune. But today, he's a diseased, feeble old man who has a name and a few good stories. To my knowledge, he is a practicing Muslim. He's done nothing for heaven. Nothing for his Creator. Nothing of eternal value. He epitomizes what it means to be a vapor in the eyes of heaven. You're a name, a story and a crumbling body. And nothing you've done in these last 68 years will last. It's all nothing. Some human notoriety and wealth, all about to vanish as you move into eternity.

If we want God to increase, we have to decrease. That one of God's laws of spiritual physics.

We have to daily purge pride from our hearts and minds. We have to purposefully esteem others better than ourselves. We need to take on the reserves of meekness and humility that God has provided so that our lives will have heavenly weight. So that we're not standing in the way of God using us. So that we find ourselves investing in heaven not to magnify ourselves, but to glorify Jesus.

Matthew 5.16 - Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

That's what life is about. But we have to choose to operate under the influence of the Spirit, not under the selfishness of the flesh. We have to be willing to humble ourselves and take on servanthood. We have to jettison selfish ambition, because it is incompatible with a life lived for Jesus Christ.

Finally, verse 4:

Philippians 2.4 - Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

It's important to point out that, with all this talk of humility and self-sacrifice, serving others, all that, God is not calling us to asceticism. That's not the point of our lives or the Church. It's not whoever gives up the most material things or thinks the least of himself who God is most pleased with. You are to look out for your own interests, meaning that you're allowed to live life and take care of yourself and your family. But, there must be the constant remembrance in our minds that we can serve others and build them up. We can direct people to Jesus and nudge them nearer to Him. We can work together to further the Kingdom, person to person, place to place.

But, to do that, to be full of the Spirit and full of the incredible life we read about in God's word, we have to avoid the allure of self. That sinful vanity that we all have in our hearts. That craving for notoriety and glory.

And what Paul is showing us is that, when we became a Christian, that desire for personal glory didn't magically go away. The pride of life didn't go away. It persists within us. BUT, we've been equipped and overhauled. Given a new purpose. Given a new worth. Given a new direction and a new fuel tank to go along with it. But we choose. We choose which source will feed our lives today and our decisions and our words.

God offers a continual filling as we pour out what He's given us. As we invest in heaven, He's faithful to fill us up. If I want a fresh filling, the place to start is here, with others. Pouring out what I have so that God can replenish me with more. Putting the needs of others truly before my own. Not relating to people based on how they can benefit me, but really loving others. Choosing to love. Choosing to encourage. Choosing to build. Choosing to own up to the fact that I'm not as great as I think I am, but God is and He wants to fill me and move me. He wants to use me and direct me. That's what He wants. That's what I want.

The homework?

Encourage someone today. Find a Christian and purposefully lift them up with a word or a prayer or a service. And stay fueled by the power of God. Don't click back to the reserves of the sin nature and its cravings. Go toward Jesus and bring others with you.