

Imitating Christ
July 2, 2017

Philippians 2:1-8
4th Pentecost

Generic Sermon

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1 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, 2 make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. 5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, 8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross.

I grew up Roanoke where I was a member of the Church of the Brethren which emphasized living a life as dictated by the Scripture. They put a high value on the Bible and taught that they Bible is highly prized, the greatest value, the word of God. The overall attitude of the religious environment was lifestyle that is influenced by the Holy Spirit and uses the Bible as a guide to live by. All of the preaching that I was exposed to was Bible based with a sound theological context. From a theological perspective and faith practice perspective they were very much like the Disciples of Christ. There was no creed, only a commitment to follow Christ. They taught things that I strongly believe in; peace, compassion, sympathy, benevolence, and love.

When I moved to Lynchburg I experienced a much different environment. The difference was a matter of biblical interpretation. We all have to some degree a preference for some Scripture over others. I will repeat that for emphasis because many do not realize this about themselves. We all have to some degree a preference for some Scripture over others. I came from an environment that preached love and peace (with a focus on the love, peace, compassion, and mercy of Jesus) and moved into an environment that preached the condemnation of sin, shame and blame on the sinner, and pointing fingers at the other. Well, I have always believed that preaching should be Scripture based. It should not be twisted to suit the wants of the speaker or the audience. The Gospel should always be interpreted as truthfully and objectively as possible.

The Scripture today is focused on love. The author of the letter is the Apostle Paul. There is a lot of variety in the things that he preaches about but one thing that I (and he too for that matter) preach on is love. In the introduction of the letter Paul states "this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight." In analysis by stating this is his prayer he is demonstrating its importance. He shows how much it means to him, he really wants this for them, it is his hope, his dream, he wants it so very much it is a prayer. His wish for them is not that they will just have love but love will be overflowing. How do you describe or define overflowing? He says it is overflowing more and more.

There is an internal lesson in here. As you read and study the Scriptures you will gain more knowledge and insight. It has a compounding effect that feeds upon itself. The more you learn the more you know and the more you know the more you learn. Paul's desire is that the audience of his letter gains knowledge and insight as they learn the gospel of Jesus is all about love. The love God has given to us is the marvelous gift of Jesus. The love of Jesus is demonstrated by his tremendous act of love, the sacrifice on the cross. Our love for one another is one of the most important lessons taught to us by Jesus. We know the gospel is all about love. The Apostle Paul put an emphasis on the concept of love. He set up a worthy goal that love

should be overflowing more and more. Love then is demonstrated in a positive correlation with knowledge and insight. As they increase in knowledge and insight love will also increase. Not just increase some but will overflow more and more. That's the kind of foundation that I grew up with. The Bible is not hate speech; the Bible is love speech.

The question of Scripture interpretation is a matter of focus. People focus on what they value. Again I will repeat for emphasis. We all have a preference for some Scripture over others. We also have a preference for an attitude of interpretation. The question is what do you value? I will use a real life story. In 2007 I was talking with a man that is a part time preacher. We were talking about the war in Iraq and I expressed a concern that we should never attack or invade a country that has not attacked us. This man said that he does not mind war because war is in the Bible. I did not have the opportunity to go into the details of his fallacious reasoning. In life I truly appreciate the rare opportunities to help people reflect on their own Visceral attitudes. To put our involvement in Iraq in biblical perspective. This makes us the Romans. We are to model Christ, we are not to be the ones that crucified him.

The Scripture is written by the Apostle Paul when he is in a precarious position; he is chained in prison. He could choose to speak on the harshness of reality, the doom of his current situation. However, in the Scripture the Apostle Paul offers pastoral advice. The audience is to behave in a code of conduct that models Christ. There are four ifs. If there is any encouragement in Christ. If there is any consolation from love. If there is any sharing in the Spirit. If there is any compassion and sympathy. If these conditions exist then make my joy complete. In other words. Happiness is found in being of one mind, in full accord, in love.

To sum up today's message. It is a whole lot easier to judge someone than it is to practice the love of Christ. When I moved to Lynchburg I heard that it is a sin to listen to Rock and Roll records. It is a sin to dance. It is a sin to smoke cigarettes. And I heard a number of things that God hates. It took me a long time to understand this but what I heard was not about me, it was about the attitude of the speaker. People judge you not according to who you are but according to who they are. We are to live in a manner that is worthy of the gospel. Live your life and conduct yourselves in a manner that is worthy of Christ. Love one another sharing in the Spirit. Love with compassion and sympathy. Show your love by looking to the interests of others not your own. That is the way of Jesus Christ.