



Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit? – Part 6
Various Scriptures
GCSP – 03/13/2010

I have been listening to a book on CD, called, "Under God." It is a series of stories from our nation's history, showing how deeply rooted it is Christianity. Some of the stories are tragic and some are inspiring but all seem to have a common trait that we have by and large lost over the last 50 years or so. There used to be a deep and genuine pride in being a citizen of the United States of America; and because of that inner pride the majority of people strove to live up to the moral and ethical standards of citizenship.

We don't see that near as much today. We get glimpses of it, as we did in the first few weeks and months after 9/11, but for the most part the pride and expected conduct of being a citizen of this once, and in certain aspects still, great country is all but gone; there are just little pockets sprinkled throughout our land that still hang on to some of what it means to be a citizen.

There are certain responsibilities that come with citizenship, although I doubt very many even consider that today, let alone live up to them. Citizenship means you will represent your country in a way that is fitting; you will stand up when the need arises and you will live according to the laws of the land. And as an entire nation of citizens stands united under the same principles they will not easily be defeated in any endeavor.

Genuine Christians are citizens of God's kingdom. We have a calling and a responsibility to not only live up to the moral and ethical standards of that kingdom, but also to live up to the spiritual standards of that kingdom. And we have the responsibility to expand this kingdom by spreading the message of hope; the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And while this is an individual calling and responsibility it is also a corporate calling and responsibility; and corporately this objective can only be accomplished as each of its citizen's work together in unity.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Philippians**.

Philippians 1:27-2:2

Let's pray.

At the close of last week's sermon we looked at **Acts 1:14a**, which said, "**These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer...**" The 120 disciples of Jesus who had just been told that they were going to receive miraculous and supernatural and extraordinary power in a few days, and who had just witnessed the Lord ascend into heaven on a cloud, were untied in mind and were devoted to praying together.

These two characteristics and activities mentioned here had some connection to the coming supernatural and extraordinary power that Jesus promised was going to immerse them and soak them and drench them. When Jesus told them they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit, that is the picture; they would literally be dripping with this

extraordinary power, but do not miss the fact that these disciples were united in mind and attitude and devoted to corporate prayer.

Jesus did not specifically tell them to be of one mind and to gather together for corporate prayer, at least not in the account we have in this first chapter of Acts, but He must have told them of this at some point during the 40 days He spent teaching them prior to His ascension for this is not the only mention of this.

Hold your place in **Philippians** and turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Acts**.

Acts 2:42-47

Beloved, there are many activities mentioned in this passage but the underlying theme is unity. All of them were devoted to the teaching of God's Word, they were devoted to fellowship together, they were devoted to partaking of the Lord's Supper, and they were devoted to corporate and private prayer. And because they were all devoted to these same activities, it says in **verse 46** that they were all "**Day by day continuing with one mind...**"

And because of this unity, the power of the Holy Spirit was being manifest in their lives in supernatural and extraordinary ways, and multitudes were coming to Christ; which as you remember, was the first and foremost purpose for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

All of the activities mentioned are vitally important for the church today just as much as they were for this early church in Jerusalem; there must be a priority given to the teaching and preaching of God's Word, there must be a priority given to fellowship with one another, there must be a priority given to the Lord's Supper, and there must be a priority given to corporate and private prayer, but none of these things will accomplish what we see accomplished by the early church through the filling of the Holy Spirit without being of the same mind.

Discord and disunity is the poison that perpetually keeps the church in a state of spiritual sickness that thwarts and blocks the miraculous, supernatural, and extraordinary power of the Holy Spirit from being manifest as God desires for each of His children, and for every one of His local churches individually and as a whole, single Body of Christ.

But instead of being unified and of the same mind, most Christians are engaged in the popular sport of "saint-bashing"; where we see and point out the sins of others much more clearly than we see our own sins (if we see them at all). We hold our brothers and sisters in Christ to a higher standard than we hold ourselves to, even though we typically do not see it that way. We quote "**Be ye holy as I am holy**" and forget to add "**as I the Lord your God am holy**", thus setting ourselves up as the standard of spiritual behavior and the model for others to follow. And the reason we don't see things the way we should, and the reason we set ourselves up to be the standard, is because our hearts are deceitful above all things and desperately wicked according to the prophet Jeremiah (**17:9**). We are deceived and deluded, and thus devoid of the full measure of the power of the Holy Spirit.

So let's look at our text in **Philippians** more closely and glean all that the Spirit desires to teach you and me tonight.

Philippians 1:27-2:2

The church at Philippi was a strong, vibrant, and quality church. In stark contrast to Paul's other epistles to the churches, he really has very little criticism or admonitions for the Philippian believers. Many commentators and scholars call this the epistle of joy because of the nature of what Paul says. For example:

1:3-5

"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now."

In **1:19**, Paul is confident that the prayers made on his behalf from the Philippians will result in his deliverance from jail; pointing out their fervency and power in prayer.

In **2:12**, Paul commends them for their obedience.

In **3:16**, Paul commends them and encourages them to maintain the high standard they have attained.

In **4:10**, Paul greatly rejoices at their concern for him, and in **4:16**, he acknowledges their faithfulness in generously supporting him as a minister of the gospel.

Paul mentions their courage and their love and their knowledge of God's Word and their discernment and their sincerity and their blamelessness and the fruit of righteousness displayed in their lives. And if you went back to **1:1** you would find that by making specific mention of them, this church had qualified and quality leadership in place to boot.

Paul does not go into any doctrinal discussions in this epistle because there apparently were not any doctrinal issues they were lacking in. They had not gone astray in their theology and thus did not need to be corrected. There is no mention of any moral shortcomings or unbridled sin in the church. So we are looking at a church that is doing a lot of things right. They are an active congregation that is learning and growing and maturing in their spiritual walk with the Lord.

But lurking beneath the surface, or in the grass so to speak, was a deadly snake full of poisonous venom; and that snake is the snake of disunity, discord, and conflict; which has poisoned so many vibrant churches through the ages. So Paul brings up the topic of unity in three of the four chapters in this short epistle.

As a pastor, I have learned that two things are of the utmost danger to the church: Spiritual apathy and disunity. Spiritual apathy is when a church becomes indifferent to the things of the Lord, indifferent to truth, indifferent to the Holy Spirit's activity and leading, and simply indifferent to spiritual things as a whole. Spiritual apathy leads to a lukewarm church that is self-deceived into believing they are doing their thing for God.

On the other hand, disunity can destroy a church from within if it not repented of and kept in check. And quite honestly, disunity is the main issue that threatens a church that is primarily on the right track and actively following God's Word.

And again as a pastor and as a part of the leadership of this church, disunity is the issue we probably have to deal with the most. And speaking for myself, I am not exempt from it, and I am sure the other leaders would attest to the same thing.

William Barclay said this: *"There is a sense in which this issue is the danger of every healthy church. You see, it is when people are really earnest, when their beliefs really matter to them, when they are eager to carry out their own plans and their own schemes that they are most apt to get up against each other; the greater their enthusiasm, the greater danger that they will collide."*

So the fact that a church is doctrinally sound and its people are zealous for the Lord does not preclude them from disunity and discord and internal conflict. In fact, because of the zeal and enthusiasm, they may be much riper for disunity and discord and internal conflict.

Unity is an internal issue. For example, if you had a bag full of metal ball-bearings, the mere fact that they are all held together in the bag does not mean unity exists. If that bag were to burst open, the ball-bearings would scatter all over the place. The only reason they are together is because of the container; something on the outside that holds them together but nothing internally keeps them unified.

But, on the other hand, if you have a large and powerful magnet, the ball-bearings would come together and adhere to the magnet and to each other because of the internal force. They are pulled to each other because they are pulled and unified by the same force.

Philippians 1:27

When Paul says to "**conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ**", that word translated as conduct comes from a Greek word that implies being the citizens of the same country. In other words, Paul is telling the Philippians that because they are all citizens of the kingdom of God, act like it. Act like you are all of common heritage having a common goal and a common future together. You should be "**standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.**"

All genuine believers have a common citizenship and a common goal and a common future in heaven, and thus we must not allow the enemy to sneak in and disrupt or destroy the unity we should have at all times. And when Paul says at the end of **2:2**, "**intent on one purpose**" he is referring back to this "**striving together for the faith of the gospel**" of Jesus Christ.

Disunity and discord and conflict arise when we lose our focus. We can attend Bible study every night of the week, have personal devotions and prayer for an hour each morning and evening, actively be involved in the ministries of the church, and still fall

victim to disunity, discord, and conflict by losing our focus on spreading the gospel message of Jesus Christ.

If we are not intently focused on this one unifying purpose our focus will then be diverted to our own personal agendas and issues and ministries. And now because my ministry and my agenda and my focus are different from yours, no matter how needful and important and biblical they are, we are ripe for conflict and disunity.

For example, if you have a passion and a love for genuine heart-felt worship that varies from the level of zeal I have, you may struggle with the song selection I make and how I lead. Now maybe my song selection is less than desirable and maybe I need to be more sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, but because we are on different planes and have different thoughts and ideas and zealousness for worship, the potential for hard feelings and discord exists.

Or, you may have a passion and zeal for children's ministry, or discipleship, or missions, or any number of other valid and worthy ministries of the church. The same potential for disunity and discord and conflict exists because nobody else in the church is going to have the exact same passion and zeal you have. And as long as your focus is more so on your own personal passions and agendas and ministries and not on the primary purpose of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, allowing your passion and zeal for these other ministries and activities of the church to flow from that, the snake of disunity is poised to strike.

Before we move into Paul's instruction for how to have this unity of mind and purpose and attitude, let's look at an Old Testament example of attaining unity.

Hold your place in **Philippians** and turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Jeremiah**.

Jeremiah 18:3-4

Here's a vivid picture of how we can personally do our part to attain the unity that is required to accomplish the power of the Holy Spirit flowing through our lives and through our church: We allow the Potter to mold us and shape us into the vessel that He sees fit.

The Potter is the only One who has the right to determine what kind of vessel we are to be, if we desire to live according to what He wants for our lives. The Potter has the right to take what you are at this very moment and radically change that, if you allow it. If you don't agree with these statements and you are not willing to yield yourself right now to God and His specific calling on your life, then you will most likely become a root of disunity, discord, and conflict in this church at some point; that is of course unless all of us choose our own way, then we will become the apathetic indifferent church I spoke about earlier.

That's pretty harsh I know, but beloved, I know this is true because I've been there and done that. I have at times in this very church been the cause for discord because of asserting my own feelings and agendas instead of yielding to the Potter's hand. I find myself repenting before God every time I read His Word because I see my own

sinfulness for what it truly is. As I yield to God more and more I see the reflection of my sinfulness in the mirror of His Word; I see the need to read and study and pray more than I do, for it is the only way I can allow the Potter to mold me and shape me for His service.

That's the good news. If your life becomes spoiled or polluted by sin, the Potter can put you on His divine wheel and remold you and reshape you; scraping off the impurities and smoothing out all of the rough edges. But this only works when you yield to the shape He chooses and become the vessel fit for use as He desires. As long as you keep trying to make the choice and keep trying to direct the Potter as to what you want to be, what you desire to be your focus, what you desire to be your ministry, you will be of very little or no use to Him; and you will be heading down the road of becoming the cause for disunity and discord and conflict.

And beloved, as long as we continue to choose our own way, and as long as we assert our own will, set our own agendas in the church, make personal determinations for what direction the church needs to move in, and as long as we view ourselves as the standard and the model, and that we are better and higher and holier than our brothers and sisters, unity of mind and attitude and spirit will be nothing but a pipe dream; and the filling and the supernatural, miraculous, extraordinary power of the Holy Spirit will be non-existent.

And if we are not going to be a Spirit-filled, Spirit-infused, and Spirit-empowered church, we will simply join the line of the vast majority of self-deceived and powerless churches in this world who are having very little or no impact for the kingdom of God; even though they may have a vibrant and happy fellowship, and walk out of the service each week feeling fulfilled and good about themselves.

Is that what we want?

I sure hope not.

Philippians 2:1-2

There is not enough time to develop everything Paul has for us in these two verses, so let me simply introduce it to you and entice you to be back here next week.

Paul opens with the word, "**Therefore**", which you all know means you need to know what it is there for. In this case, Paul is referring back to **1:27** which we have already spent some time with tonight. Paul is saying, "Since you are to be conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, and since you should be standing firm in one spirit with one mind, and since you should be striving together for the faith of the gospel, let me show you how to do that." And in the opening eight verses of **chapter 2** he does just that.

If you choose to study this out on your own this week, let me give you one help for **verse 1**: The Greek word used for the word "**if**" that is used four times in this verse would be better translated in the context it is used here as "since" or "because."

“Because there is encouragement in Christ, because there is consolation of love, because there is fellowship of the Spirit, because there is affection and compassion...” We will deal with the answers to this next time.

For tonight, the primary application for us is to do a serious self-examination. We all must ask ourselves:

- Am I pursuing being worthy of the gospel of Christ by ridding myself of personal agendas and personal issues and personal ministries, and instead focusing on the gospel message itself?
- Am I willing to get up on the Potter’s wheel and allow Him to mold me and shape me and fashion me into the vessel He desires for the purposes and ministries He desires?
- Am I willing to ask the Lord to reveal any areas of my life where I have been the source and the cause for disunity and discord and conflict in the church?
- Am I willing to repent and make things right between me and any brothers and sisters I have not been in complete unity with?

These are tough questions. They need honest and heart-felt answers.

Let’s pray.