



Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit? – Part 8
Various Scriptures
GCSP – 04/03/2010

It is expected of most pastors that they preach a sermon about the birth of Jesus Christ at Christmastime, a sermon about mothers on Mother's Day, a sermon about fathers on Father's Day, and a sermon on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter.

For those of you who have been around me over the last several years or more, you have no doubt discovered that I do not necessarily follow that schedule in any given year. Many times I feel the leading of the Holy Spirit to continue on with the current series instead of interrupting for the sake of a specific date on the calendar.

As you can see by the image on the wall behind me, tonight we will continue in our series on the Holy Spirit. But, thanks to the Holy Spirit, the passage we are in the midst of studying speaks of the cross and that kind of underlies everything else we have been and will be looking at in this passage; so we will be able to continue our series while at the same time have that which Jesus Christ has done, and what we celebrate at this time of the year, being at the heart of tonight's sermon.

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

Philippians 2:1-11

Let's pray.

In our continuing study of the Holy Spirit, we are currently dealing with the topic of unity, or unity in the Spirit. In **Ephesians 4:1-6**, a passage we will study through in the very near future, Paul commands us to be "**diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**" (**4:3**).

Unity is impossible apart from the Holy Spirit. Each and every one of us has such varying ideas and thoughts and preferences and likes and dislikes and goals and agendas and a myriad of other differences of opinion that we could never be in complete unity about everything between any two of us, let alone the whole church.

And here is one reason unity is so elusive: Even though to some extent we understand these differences, we are always waiting for the other person or persons to come into line with our way of thinking; and beloved, that is going to be a very long wait. It is foolish for us to have the attitude that everyone and everything is going to fall into our neat little theory of how we believe things should be. And no amount of fussing and fighting and manipulating and stomping your feet and pounding your fist and stirring up trouble will change that.

The spoiled child may get his or her way on occasion when they pitch a fit, but the older we get the less those kinds of tactics have any effect other than to stir others up as well. Back a bear into a corner and it is not going to submit to your way of thinking; it will come out fighting and you will not win, but instead you will be the cause of many

wounds and damage. It's the same way with people, manipulation may get some temporary results but in the end things will be worse than at the beginning.

I can wish and hope that you change to my way of thinking and you can wish and hope that I will change to your way of thinking, but in the end neither of us will change and we will have wasted a lot of energy and emotions and brainpower for nothing; and if we are really hell-bent on getting our way, we will cause major divisions and disunity in the church.

The Holy Spirit is the only hope we have for true unity.

There have been times in my life that I have been either the cause or I have contributed to discord in some of the churches I have been part of; and the higher up the chain of leadership I have been the more opportunity there is because my life gets scrutinized at a much greater level. One thing I have learned though, besides the fact that I mess up a lot more than I would like, is all of us resist authority to one extent or another, especially if we have been the ones used to being in authority.

In most instances of major discord and disunity in churches, the one stirring the pot the most comes from a background of having tremendous authority in a past church or in his or her vocation.

In one of the churches I have been a part of, a former pastor of a different church was the one who gave the pastor of this church fits. In another church, the pastor was younger than the other leaders in the church and submitting to the pastor's God-given authority was a constant source of contention. In other churches I have had privy to, it was leaders of major corporations and industry who were at the root of most problems in the church.

But you do not have to come from a background of authority to cause disunity in the church. You could just be upset with how certain things are handled, or about how people treat you, or about the style of music, or the fact that the pastor's wife didn't come to your Tupperware party. In other words, whenever your expectations are not met, regardless of if they are realistic expectations or not, especially by those in leadership and the pastor and his wife, the seeds of discord are sown. And whether or not those seeds get watered and fertilized is up to you.

In **1 Timothy 3** and in **Titus 1** we have a list of qualifications for elders and deacons. Some look at those lists and almost believe the men selected for these positions need to live perfect lives, or that they have a different standard to live by. And while these characteristics should obviously be a normal part of their daily lives, every one of the characteristics, apart from one, are found in other passages of Scriptures as the expected behavior of all Christians. And that one exception has to do with teaching the Word of God for elders.

James warns those who desire to teach to be very careful, for the content of their teaching will be thoroughly examined and judged (**James 3:1**). The writer of Hebrews warns that the leaders of the church are to be obeyed for they will give an account for your souls, and they should be able to give this accounting with joy and not with grief;

and the implication is that you are the cause and thus responsible for whether or not the accounting will be one of joy or one of grief. Even in this passage it is also implied that the watching of your souls is based on the content of their teaching (**Hebrews 13:17**).

Before we dive into our passage again in Philippians, let me remind you of a passage we looked at two weeks ago.

Hold your place in **Philippians** and turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of **John**.

John 17:20-21

As Jesus is about to face the horrific pain and agony of torture of the crucifixion His main concern is our unity. And if that isn't enough to shake you out of your boots, He says the reason we must live in unity is so the world will believe that God sent Him to this earth! Do you fully understand the implications of that statement? The measure to which the lost and dying world will believe that God the Father sent Jesus Christ to this earth for their salvation is directly related to the measure in which we are unified.

Let that sink in the next time you are at odds with a brother or sister in Christ. Read that verse the next time you gossip or speak badly about them to someone else instead of following the mandates of Scripture and going to them alone to air your grievances. Consider this prayer the next time you are tempted to stir up discord or disunity or conflict in order to serve your own agenda or push your own ideas.

Let's get back to **Philippians** now.

Philippians 2:2

Paul's first mark, or first characteristic, of unity is **being of the same mind** (**verse 2**) which we briefly looked at last time. Literally it means to think the same way. Paul is not speaking about doctrine, even though being in agreement as to what the Scripture says is important, but is instead speaking of having a common attitude (**verse 5**).

This was the problem with the Philippian church and this is the problem in most healthy churches today; our attitudes are all over the place. And unfortunately, until we align ourselves 100% with the thoughts and attitude of the Holy Spirit, each of our individual and vastly different attitudes about anything concerning the church is a time bomb for disunity and discord and conflict.

Romans 12:3 says, "**For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.**" Basically that verse tells us when we are thinking too highly of ourselves, which is pretty much any time you place yourself above someone else, we will not be able to think with sound judgment.

Thinking with sound judgment means to think objectively not subjectively. Thinking subjectively means you will be coloring your thinking with your agendas, your priorities, and your ambitions. It is thinking from the perspective of your turf or your kingdom, so to speak; a position in which you will more often than not be maintaining and defending.

And what's at work when your priority is your own little kingdom? – Pride. And nothing good comes from a position of pride.

Conflict in the church is rarely over doctrine or moral principle, conflict is almost invariably over sinful attitudes. It is the collision of mind of the flesh and the mind of the Spirit; and we are to have the mind of the Spirit or the mind of Christ as it says in other passages like **1 Corinthians 2:16**.

Let's quickly go over there while holding your place in **Philippians**.

1 Corinthians 2:16

If you are a genuine Christian you have the mind of Christ. The problem is we rarely access it, choosing to instead rely on our own mind, and our own ingenuity, and our own tangible experiences. And what are the results of thinking apart from the mind of Christ?

1 Corinthians 3:1-4

When we operate in our own strength and ingenuity and mind we are fleshly; and the evidence of that is jealousy and strife among us. We may think we are spiritual and are feasting on the meat of God's Word but we are back to spiritual infancy having trouble not spitting up the milk when we are in conflict and discord with one another. Divisions and schisms and factions among us put us in the category of spiritual babies. We make mountains out of molehills in order to assert our own agendas.

At the end of his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul says, "**Finally brethren, rejoice, be made complete (or mature), be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you**" (**2 Corinthians 13:11**). Part of being a truly mature Christian is being like-minded and living in peace.

Kind of makes you re-evaluate that "thinking more highly of yourself than you ought to" as we read earlier, doesn't it? Immaturity is allowing yourself (your flesh) to get in the way and poison your attitude; maturity is having the same attitude and living in peace.

And **Colossians 3:2** sums it all up for us: "**Set your minds on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.**"

Again, the conflicts we will more often than not have in the church will be collisions of attitude, and there are no collisions in the Trinity. So when collisions happen it is because one party or both are operating in the flesh. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have one mind, one attitude, one will, and one purpose; if we operate in the mind of Christ and the mind of the Spirit there will be no discord, no disunity, no conflict; period end of story.

Back in Philippians, Paul then says we are to be about the business of **maintaining the same love**.

Another mark of spiritual unity is maintaining the same love, meaning to love everyone the same. That tells us something right off the bat, we are not talking about emotions

here. It is impossible for any of us to have the same emotional love for everyone in this room; even when we are walking in the Spirit. So it must mean more than that.

Romans 12:10 helps us out in this regard: "**Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.**" New Testament love is expressed by acts of service; meeting one another's needs.

Turn with me to the Book of **1 John**.

1 John 3:16-17

Love acts on behalf of someone else by supplying their need. This passage implies that if a need is presented and you close your heart to that need, the love of God does not abide in you. So maintaining the same love flows out of being of the same mind because when we have the mind of Christ and are operating in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, we will be doing the things Jesus did, and His whole earthly life and ministry was about loving others through service.

When conflict comes, whether it is at the level of lay person against lay person, lay person against leadership, or leadership against leadership, it is because someone feels something other than love in their heart toward the other. Bitterness, envy, jealousy, personal ambition, personal agenda, protecting your turf, and even hostility will likely be the outward manifestation when love is not present.

I have to ask God to fill my heart with the love I need to have toward all of my brothers and sisters in Christ. I can't do it in my flesh. My flesh refuses to do that and the Holy Spirit refuses to not do that. So every time I collide with a brother or sister I must immediately check to see if I am acting in love; if not, whether or not my brother or sister is operating in the flesh doesn't matter because I am. And I am responsible for me, not him or her in that regard.

Back again in Philippians, Paul then repeats his primary point by saying we are to be **united in spirit**. The Greek word literally means "one-souled." It means having the same passions and desires and ambitions.

When one person has a passion and desire to see the Spirit of God in control of all things and another person has a passion and desire to be in control of all things, you have collision. When one person has a passion and desire and heart-felt hunger to see Jesus Christ's church united and another person wants the whole world to know that they have been offended, you have collision.

If there is one driving passion for the glory of the church, then there has to be one driving passion for the unity of the church. If there is one driving passion for the exaltation of Jesus Christ, then has to be one driving passion for the unity of the church. If there is one driving passion for the unity of the Holy Spirit, or the glory of God, or the Gospel of Jesus Christ, then there has to be one driving passion for the unity of the church.

And everyone can hopefully say "Amen" to that and yet we still stand our ground and believe whoever we are in conflict with is the one who has to change; and we are still choking on our milk.

Paul then tells us we are to be **intent on one purpose**. And this is where the passion fleshes out.

What's your purpose? People in conflict and discord and disunity always have a purpose; and it's a different purpose than the other person has, and more than likely it's a vastly different purpose than the Holy Spirit has.

This may sound conflicted or contradictory, but there are a lot of things that fall into this category of having one purpose; but all of them can be summarized in the fulfillment and advancement of God's Kingdom. If your purpose fits into the fulfillment and advancement of God's Kingdom then you are in alignment with being **intent on one purpose** as Paul states for us in this passage.

So if the marks of unity are being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, being united in spirit, and being intent on one purpose, how do we get there? **Philippians 2:3-4** tells us that.

The first point is to **do nothing from selfishness**. The Greek word means selfish ambition and has an implied meaning of strife; and that should be obvious because once you are operating out of selfishness you are technically at war with everyone else. It is the kind of self-seeking that leads to quarrels and arguments and contentions. And by the way, this same word is listed as one of the deeds of the flesh in **Galatians 5:20**.

It is egotism intent on advancing your own purposes and agenda; which will always be destructive and disruptive. So we must start by slaying the dragon of selfishness, and that manifests itself in so very many ways.

If you get offended, if you feel neglected, if you feel slighted, if your feelings have been hurt, if someone has done something that has your nose out of joint, and you cannot be happy or satisfied until your form of justice prevails, then you are operating out of selfishness; and unity is out the window.

When your focus at the church has to take precedence over the focus of others, you are operating from selfishness. When the church leadership makes a decision you don't agree with and you choose to ignore that authority, you are operating out of selfishness. When your prayer group, or your small group Bible study, or your ministry is pushed aside or needs to be shut down for the overall purposes of the church, and you hoot and holler about it and raise all sorts of ruckus, you are operating out of selfishness.

A passage we started earlier in 1 Corinthians had all of the earmarks of selfishness when we saw the Christians at Corinth dividing themselves up into groups: "I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas, I am of Christ..." This happens in every church, especially when there are multiple Bible study groups and prayer groups, etc. Well I'm of the Monday night group, well I'm of the Wednesday night group, well I'm of the Praise & Prayer group, etc. And naturally some will have the tendency to look at their group as

the best or the most spiritually mature, etc, and we have selfishness and disunity running rampant.

Paul then adds to selfishness, **empty conceit**; which simply means seeking personal glory. This is a tough one. There are many ways in which we seek personal glory. Sometimes it shows up in the disguise of giving a testimony when the point is to get a pat on the back or to have everyone look at the great things you are doing. Sometimes it shows up in more subtle ways when we think we are saving the church from some evil by asserting ourselves into a matter that really didn't concern us and needs to be handled in a Biblical manner by the main parties involved.

This also fits into the aspect of desiring a leadership position in the church for the purpose of being recognized as a leader.

There's more to say but we need to stop here tonight.

Christ's example is that of humility and service and sacrifice, which culminated in His death on the cross on behalf of you and me. And in light of what He did and in light of the prayer He made on our behalf which we read earlier, the matters that cause discord and conflict and disunity that we at times find ourselves championing are pretty ridiculous.

Let's pray.