

Philippians XI – “Remember the Mercies of God” (Phil 2:1)

Introduction – “Once there was this perfect church, and then something happened that ruined it – I joined.” Truth is, there is no perfect church for every church is made up of sinners. No church is free from sin, nor against the need of dealing with sin when it is found. And Philippi was just such a church; this church that was commended throughout Paul’s writings as a faithful, godly, example-setting church, committed to the work of spreading the gospel, had sin that needed to be addressed. As Paul begins now to address this problem, he first points them to the motivations and keys to solve the problem. The great remedy for the lack of love for one another is to consider the mercies of Christ.

The Text – *Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy,*

Therefore – Paul has been graced to suffer, both from within the church and from outside the church, and the Philippians are “*having the same conflict*” (1:30). He has told them to not be “*terrified by your adversaries*”, and he will exhort them now with regard to ‘body-life’ in the church (2:2-4) and to the perfect example of this in the Lord Jesus Christ (vv5-11).

A Protasis of Truth – A protasis is the ‘if’ clause in an if-then statement. The context and grammar structure of this verse shows that Paul is not saying, ‘who knows if we have or do not have these things’, but rather, ‘if we have these things (and we do) then my command (to make my joy complete) must follow.’

Consider the Consolation In Christ – It is far more important to Paul that we understand that we are ‘in Christ’ than that we are ‘Christians’. Our union with Christ is a source of infinite consolation/encouragement.

In Christ – we were chosen and given every spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3).

In Christ – we were baptized into His death and raised in His resurrection (Rom 6:3-4. 6-7).

In Christ – we share in a new creation in which all things become new (2 Cor 5:17).

In Christ – we are loved in spite of who we are, in spite of what we have done, in spite of what we will do (Rom 5:6-8).

In Christ – we are kept forever (John 6:37). Like the drunk in the bar, we deserve to be bounced time and again. There is no bottom to the mercy of God.

In Christ – we are made acceptable to the Father, clothed in our Righteousness, the Lord Himself. Redeemed. Reconciled. Accepted. Enjoyed. All because of Christ.

Consider the Comfort In Love (of God) – It is the love of God by which we were chosen, predestined by our Father (Eph 1:4-5). God’s love was never conditioned by something you did or would do in the future. God looked down the corridors of time and saw that you were spiritually hopeless, dead, and lacked any potential at all. Then, in love, He chose you.

This Secure Love – Because it depends on you not one iota, Paul teaches us that nothing can ever separate you from that love, for God never changes (Rom 8:38-39).

Each Sunday – we gather, not to impress God or earn something from Him. We gather at His summons, we are washed by His blood, we are cut up and remade by His Word, we are brought to commune at His Table, and we are sent with His blessing. Each Lord’s Day service is a work of the Father’s initiating love upon us in Christ by His Spirit. God is dealing with us and He is doing so not because of something in us, but rather because of His unchanging love.

Consider the Fellowship of the Spirit – Our *koinonia*, our participation and partnership together with and of the Spirit is that which binds us together as a church, the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13). He is our Comforter, our Encourager, our Rebuker. He stirs us up to love righteousness and hate sin. He works in us like no other friend can, for He can work upon and in our hearts. And only by the Spirit do we find that we believe the same things (1 Cor 12:3), love the same things, and seek the same end. There is no unity apart from the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:3-4).

Consider the Affection and Mercy (of God) – The ‘bowels’ were, in the Hebrew mind, the place of the tender affections, benevolence, sympathy and compassion. “*It tore up my guts to hear the news...*” we might say. Jesus demonstrates this (Matt 9:36). The mercy, or mercies of God are the foundation of our walk with God. It is “by the mercies of God,” that we are commanded to present our bodies as living sacrifices (Rom 12:1). These two are sometimes likened to the ‘inward compassions’ and ‘outward affections’ of God and Christ and the Holy Spirit. Which leads us to one other important consideration.

Trinity Formula? (compare with 2 Cor 13:14) – If this is the God we know, Son and Father and Spirit, and we know that God is at work in us as a community, in communal love that the Trinity shares, then and only then (the apodosis) will we be in a fit state to ‘make Paul’s joy complete.’

Where Is Paul Going – Paul is about to command you to do one of the most difficult things for any human being. He is going to command you to love me. The gospel is all about the love of God poured out upon you. But the gospel doesn’t end there. God’s love changes our love, or lack thereof (1 John 3:11-12, 4:20-21). To refuse to love your brother or sister in Christ is to deny your salvation. You must hear the warning and you must repent. But the remedy for the situation is not found in you. It is found in Christ.

Beloved, remember how God has loved you. Remember how God – Father, Son and Spirit - loves you.

Dave Hatcher – April 4,

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