**Live a gospel-centered life in the world and in the church**

Philippians 1:27-2:4

Key verse 1:27a “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

I feel I have to share with you why I chose this passage for today’s sermon. When I chose this passage around 2 months ago, I thought that Pastor Paul Choi would be still in Korea when I would deliver this message. But here is he! If he had to stay in Korea longer or forever, what would he say to the UBF church in St. Louis?

While writing this letter to the Philippian Christians, Apostle Paul was in prison in Rome waiting for his trial and possible martyrdom. After hearing about the urgent issues of the church, Paul wrote this letter.

Though the church in Philippi had problems, Apostle Paul was confident that God himself began a good work in the Philippian Church and that God himself would carry it on to completion. (1:6) In view of God’s faithfulness, Apostle Paul now says in verse 27a, **“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”** The church is told to live a gospel-centered life. God’s people are to live a Jesus-centered life not only in the church on Sundays, but also in our families, schools and work-places, while driving cars, everywhere and all the time, even in your private life and in your dreams. When God’s people live a gospel-centered life individually and corporately, God’s purpose upon the church on earth will be realized. May the Holy Spirit teach us how to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ both in the world and in the church.

1. **The church’s gospel-centered life in this world (27-30)**

The Philippian Christians were worried about Apostle Paul in prison. What did Paul say to them? Let’s read the verse 27. **“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit,striving together as one for the faith of the gospel.”**  Paul heard that they had enemies outside (28). In chapter 3, Paul called them dogs, wild street dogs. They were Judaizers who demanded them to be circumcised in order to be saved. The church was about to be divided because of the doctrine issue. Do you know about the strategy lions, hyenas and street dogs take in catching their preys? They scatter the herd and attack one or two separated from the herd. In our days, our enemies also try to divide us with doctrinal issues, and with all kinds of cultural and political issues. What was worse, the Philippian church had another problem within. In 4:2, Paul said, **“I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.”** These two powerful women were fighting against each other. Some church members ignored their struggles. Others sided with one of them. The church was about to be divided from inside. These two problems were obvious. In the church there always happen many problems unexpectedly. Thus, Apostle Paul says, “Whatever happens!” He might not come back to them. That might be one of their problems. In fact, there always happen many problems, challenges, dangers and stimulus. Life is always out of control. However, there is something that is under our own control and responsibility. What is it? It is how we respond to them. We are free to choose our own responses to them. If so, what should we Christians choose to do while the enemies of the church challenge us without and within?

Apostle Paul exhorts them to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel. How can the church live a gospel-centered life in the midst mounting problems? They are to stand firm in the one spirit (Spirit), striving together as one for the faith of the gospel. How can we, a church composed of many different people with many differences, stand firm in the one spirit as one for the faith of the gospel? The answer is to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

By the way, what is “the gospel of Christ”? “Of Christ” can be understood as “about Christ,” The gospel is about a person of Christ and his accomplishments through his death and resurrection. The gospel of Christ can be accepted by faith as our own as we confess him as our Lord and Savior. In this way, we are united with Christ in his death and resurrection by faith. Each of us is different in our personalities and gifts and talents, however, all of us share one common denominator, Jesus Christ. If each of us is united with Christ, then isn’t it true that we all are united with one another through Christ? Christ makes us one in the church, his body, with Him as our head. We have also received the same Holy Spirit both individually and collectively. We, the church, is the vessel of the Holy Spirit.

It is important to acknowledge our corporate spiritual identity as the church. When Apostle Paul tells us to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, he means that we are to live out our corporate identity as the church.

One of many serious but unnoticeable problems in our modern Christianity is to overemphasize our personal salvation. They say, “What matters is your personal faith in Jesus, Jesus’ forgiveness of your sins and your eternal life. You are a child of God.” Of course, these doctrines are important. However, if our corporate identity as the church is not preached and taught with the same emphasis, we Christians live in islands isolated. Satan is like a roaring lion ready to devour Christians wandering from the church.

We Christians need to gather together in Jesus’ name by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Image here is an orchestra with many different instruments. Each person plays a different music piece without a conductor. Their beautiful pieces, once combined, become terrible noises. However, when each instrument obeys its conductor in humility and trust, the whole orchestra can make a beautiful symphony in a way the conduct interprets the music. In this way, we the church, can gather together in the name of Jesus and stand firm under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The church becomes the most powerful, loving and world-changing organ on earth.

Throughout human history, humanity has witnessed to many powerful leaders, nations, political systems, philosophers, ideologies, religions, cultures, wars, technologies and mega companies, etc., that have tried to unite people and change the world. Now many believe they can be one when they tolerate others. What have happened to their attempts? They all have failed. However, there is one community that God himself initiated and now works on and will complete. It is Jesus’ church, his visible body on earth that will never fail because God never fails.

In truth, the church is the visible image of the Trinity, three persons in one God who exist and live in perfect harmony, peace and unity. We human beings were created in the image of the Trinity. When the first man sinned and his descendants gathered together to build a tower for their own names, God scattered them over the whole world confusing their languages. Humanity has failed in becoming one and living as God’s image. But God never fails. Jesus is the very way through whom God’s redeemed people can become one new man in God’s image. It is through his church that God accomplishes his purpose in restoring the fallen world. When the world sees the church, they are to see God, his glory. For this purpose, we, Christians, are called to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ in the world. We are not reactionary to the problems and challenges in our own ways. Rather we proactively conduct yourselves individually and corporately in a manner of the gospel of Christ, which will solve any problems and challenges.

What message, then, does the united gospel-centered church proclaim to the world? In verse 28, Apostle Paul says, **“This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved – and that by God.”** The Jesus-centered united church is the sign of God’s victory over Stan and the world.

On the other hand, Apostle Paul talks about what the church will experience suffering in the world. Look at verses 29-30. **“For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him,since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.”** The world hated Jesus and crucified him. In the same way, the world hates and persecutes his disciples. In fact, when we suffer for Jesus’ name’s sake, our suffering is the very sign that we are truly his disciples and victors. Thus, we rejoice inasmuch as we participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that we may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. (1Pt 4:13)

While Christians, the church, walk in the real world, we have many things to do. According to Paul, however, what is prior to all other missions of the church is to build up a Jesus-centered loving community, which is the very image of God and which reveals God’s glory. In that way, the church can give a true and living hope to the world that is broken and divided and dead.

As we suffer in this world, therefore, we are to make every effort to gather together all the more in Jesus’ name and in love. Sticks in a bundle can't be broken but sticks taken singly can be easily broken. There is strength in our corporate unity in Christ. Let us pray that we can conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ that unites us while the world ruled by Satan does its best to scatter/divide/destroy the church.

1. **The church’s gospel-centered life within a church community**

The church, by definition is gathering of believers in Jesus’ name. In fact, God has gathered different people from all kinds of different backgrounds, cultures and generations, and with different characters and gifts and talents, weaknesses and flaws. Why has God gathered imperfect sinners together in the body of Christ. And if God has put us together, how shall we live together without divorce, complaints and divisions? Again, the answer is this. **“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”** We practice the gospel of Christ within the body of Christ. The gospel of Christ is much more needed to Christians than to non-believers. We forgive one another according to the gospel. We accept and love one another according to the gospel. It sounds very easy to do so. But it is not. Therefore, Apostle Paul teaches us how to do so in four steps in verses 2:1-4.

Look at verse 1. **“Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion…”**  The word “If” may be confusing, like Paul is asking us whether we really have these things. However, “if” can be translated as “since” in Greek.  Therefore, since you do have these blessings: encouragement, comfort, common sharing, tenderness and compassion from the Trinity.  **The first step in living a gospel centered life is to know what we have.**We have already received them from the triune God: encouragement, comfort and common sharing, we can now be tender and compassionate toward others. These spiritual blessings become our foundation and power source in all our relationships with others in the church. Sometimes, you may not feel you have those blessings immediately. But listen to this! God puts you in a situation where you need to exercise such spiritual qualities. You are to exercise them by faith though you may not feel you have them. Then you will know that you do have them.

If we enjoy those spiritual blessings from the Trinity, we don’t try desperately to soak up affirmation and good opinion and encouragement from others like a dry sponge. But if we begin our relationships with others in the church with something else than what we have received from God, we become easily hurt, indifferent, critical, confrontational, defensive and disrespectful toward others. So, hold onto any encouragement, any comfort and any common sharing in the Spirit, any tenderness and compassion from God, no matter how little or small they may be. For our comfort, love, and encouragement from God is the true and living source for our spiritual health and relationships with others. When we believe that we do have those blessings from the Trinity and exercise them, we feel safe and secure, confident and victorious, just as Paul said, **“I can do all things through him who strengthens me”.** (Php 4:13)

What then will happen when we exercise those spiritual blessings in the church. Look at 2. **“…Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.”**  **The second step to live a gospel-centered life is: to be one in mind and love and spirit.**  If any of you thinks of such unity in the church as impossible to have, remember the example of an orchestra again. It is possible for us to develop a beautiful/God-glorifying community when each of us follows our conductor, Jesus. We don’t follow our feelings and emotions. We don’t follow our common senses and ideas, our current cultures and traditions. We let Jesus be our conductor in our community.

If you still think it is very hard for the church to become one in heart and mind and spirit, why is it so? Look at verses 3-4. **“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”**  Selfish ambition, self-centered (vain) conceit, ­self-value and self-interest above others’ break the unity in the body of Christ. And **the third step to live a gospel-centered life in the church is this: know the true enemy-self.**

Some may think of others as their enemies. My boss, parents or children, pastors and elders, or my spouse are my enemies!  But in truth, our real enemy is self**.**  Next time when you get in a conflict with someone, say to yourself, “She is not the enemy. My enemy is “myself.” Satan always tempts us to say, “Take care of yourself, your life, your ideas, your opinions, your interests, your health, your money, your time, your families, your sleep, etc., are more important than any others.” Self within us, precisely our old self, cries out, “I, my, me, mine! What about me?” The Bible, however, says, **“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”**How can we overcome our selfishness and pride?  Apostle Paul says that it is “in humility.” The fourth step to live a gospel-centered life is to live in humility. What is humility? If self is our enemy, then “selflessness” is humility, isn’t it? C.S. Lewis said, **“Humility is not thinking less of yourself** (I‘m no good, I’m useless, I’m full of sins)**, it’s thinking of yourself less.”** More importantly, humility is thinking of Jesus more. We think of his interests and his business above all. The true and utmost humility is to let Jesus dwell in us and in the church as our Lord and Savior, nothing else. Then we think of others next, loving our fellow Christians as ourselves. Then we think of ourselves last. In order to do so, we empty ourselves of our old ego through Jesus’ cross. We crucify our selfish and proud ego daily. Apostle Paul says in Gal 2:20 as follows, **“I have been crucified with God, therefore I no longer live, but Jesus Christ lives in me.”**

While we who are still sinful and selfish gather together with other sinners in the church, our sins and their sins will be exposed more experientially. But as we conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel in these 4 steps, we can grow individually and corporately in holiness and righteousness experientially.

In conclusion, the church is to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel both in this world and in the church. God has left the church in this world according to his purpose. As the church lives a gospel-centered life in the world, the church will reveal the glory and love of the Trinity. When God’s people live a Jesus-centered life in the church in four ways, we can grow to be like Christ. May God protect our church community from the enemies without and within! May the Holy Spirit empower us to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ both in the church and in this dark world.