

## **February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

### **“To Love and Not to Fear”**

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#### **Philippians 2:1-4**

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

**2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.**

**3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.**

**4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.**

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

Let me spend a few minutes dealing with the seminal idea behind preaching. There is a difference between a preacher and a prophet. A prophet repeats the exact words that the Lord speaks to him. In the book of Deuteronomy, God gave the prophet Moses the Ten Commandments. The Commandments start, in **Exodus 20:1-3**:

**1 And God spoke all these words, saying:**

**2 “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.**

**3 “You shall have no other gods before Me.**

The Bible says that God spoke these words. Moses was a prophet, as he relayed to the Israelites exactly that which God said to him. Preachers are different than prophets, in that we are called to take the Word of God that is relayed to us by the prophet, and then give the sense of the Word, so that the people can understand the application for their lives. God’s Word gives us an example, in **Nehemiah 8:4-9**:

**4 So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood [6 preachers] Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand [7 preachers] Pedaiah, Mishaël, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.**

**5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.**

**6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, “Amen,**

**Amen!” while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.**

**7 Also [13 preachers] Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place.**

**8 So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they [this group of men] gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.**

**9 And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn nor weep.” For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law.**

Why would the people weep?

When they heard the Words of the Law, they recognized that they had not kept the tenets of the law; they wept because the Word convicted them of sin. The priests and the Levites read the Word of God because we, in the normative case, do not think like God and cannot begin to behave in the way that God commands until we are specifically educated by exposure to His Word. Because of our natural sinfulness, our sinful nature, our thoughts will not naturally lead us to do that which the Lord wants us to do. Biblical morality and obedience to God do not come naturally to us; we require the instructive intervention of the Word of God. **Isaiah 55:7-11** tells us:

**7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.**

**8 “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD.**

**9 “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.**

**10 “For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater,**

**11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but It shall accomplish what I please, and It shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.**

I generally say, in most sermons, that the that principles that I have gleaned from the Word of God are counterintuitive to us, meaning, that we would not decide to behave as God commands us by our own intuition. This is because we don’t normally think like God. Not only are we handicapped against following the Word of God by the innate difference in the way that we think, we are also intentionally hindered by the activities of the adversary. **1Peter 5:8-11** tells us:

**8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.**

**9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.**

**10 But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.**

**11 To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.**

As we endeavor to conform to that which God desires, we find ourselves with two forces

against us, our own sin nature and the influence of the administration of the adversary. The antidote for these forces is our understanding of the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, both of which are available to us, so that we can make the conscious decisions to live in the manner in which the Lord commands us. To live for the Lord requires a conscious commitment; people generally have to receive instruction in the Scriptures and make a confession of faith in Christ in order to be part of the Church. We are given an example in **Acts 2:36-42**, in which Peter is preaching on the day of Pentecost to the multitude that had been drawn by the activity of the Holy Spirit among the disciples. Peter said:

**36 “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”**

**37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”**

**38 Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**

**39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”**

**40 And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.”**

**41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.**

**42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.**

Active participation in Christianity requires conscious participation in constant spiritual growth.

As long as we are living on earth, we are called upon to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. When we are faced with the fact that our understanding of the truth of the Scripture is progressive, increasing as we increase in maturity, we constantly find ourselves faced with the choice to either maintain the carnal, earthly, self-centered parts of our perspective, or to eliminate them as we embrace an increasing knowledge of the perspective of the Spirit of God.

Yes, I know that you think that you are right; I know you think that you have a good reason to do that which you are doing. We all like to think that we are right and that we can reasonably justify our plans, even if that which we plan to do conflicts with the Word of God, but we should recognize that our knowledge is partial and our perspectives are not perfect, as they come from our short term desires to have that which we want to fulfill an immediate emotional need rather than the long term goal of God, which is our sanctification. James tells us, in **James 1:14-20**:

**14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.**

**15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.**

**16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.**

**17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.**

**18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.**

**19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;**

**20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**

We come into our marital situations with that which I call “preconceived misconceptions”, based upon our own opinions, our previous experiences, that which we read in books other than the Bible and that which we hear in the mass media. When Paul entered Corinth to plant a church there, he faced a culture similar to ours; one with a secular perspective and a great history of education. The Corinthians were trained to think in the deductive manner of the Grecian philosophical culture, but Paul, the preacher, came into Corinth with a different perspective. **1 Corinthians 2:1-5** tells us:

**1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God.**

**2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.**

**3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.**

**4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,**

**5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.**

As we have been discussing relationship politics between husband and wife, we have looked at commandments of God that fly in the face of the thinking of the culture. Let me talk for a moment about men that have extra-marital affairs. I was reading the writing of a marriage and family counselor that is often faced with trying to put a marriage back together that has been torn by the husband’s infidelity. The counselor writes:

“My experience tells me that since men seem to be afflicted with prurient thoughts about sex about seven times a day, the right hussy with the right words and the right moment can easily cause a man to have a moral failure. Having counseled men who have had affairs, I think several things are important to know.

While I have known happy men who have had one-night stands (and all regretted it later), I have never known a happy man who initiated or was involved in an affair. Affairs start and are fueled by something missing in the marriage—and it generally isn’t sex! The affairs that I have known about started with a man who is depressed and alone, crying on a park bench or into an ‘adult beverage.’ A man in tears usually isn’t alone long.”

The men that I have known over the last two decades who have had affairs had been telegraphing their unhappiness to their wives for years before they just gave up. Their complaints fell on deaf ears. Then come the affairs. Then come the wife’s tears about how she’s been wronged and her feelings are hurt.

While this scenario is not at the root of all affairs, it is definitely a common situation. Some men are narcissistic, and/or lack the character to actually maintain their vows, but the majority of men do not fall into that category. Many unfaithful men are very disappointed with themselves because of their moral failure, but are simply starving for the proper type of

companionship. Generally, when the counselor asks a husband that has had affair, “Why?” he usually first says, “I don’t know,” which shifts later into, “It’s about how the woman made me feel about myself.”

Katie was speaking with her counselor about the problem that she was having with her husband.

Katie: I’ve been married for going on six years and we don’t seem to have the ability to stop fighting. But I’m starting to get the feeling that it might be because of me. Usually when I lose control of the fight, I ask him to leave, and he tells me “You always run away from the situation, and you don’t like to face things. Because you didn’t have a dad, you don’t know how to treat a husband, and blah, blah, blah.” I just need some advice...

Counselor: Well, he’s right. Right?

Katie: I think so.

Counselor: You’ve been treating him very badly, and one of these days when you ask him to leave, he’s not coming back. Don’t test him. Don’t test him to see if he’s like your dad. Because if you push hard enough, somebody’s going to fall out.

Katie: But my thing is...

Counselor: Are you listening to me?

Katie: Yes, but my mom was super good to my stepdad. He raised me, basically. She would give him backrubs when he came home and everything.

Counselor: Katie, okay, you saw your mother give backrubs to your stepdad, but why are you mistreating your husband?

Katie: He left my mom anyway.

Counselor: Okay, your stepdad left your mom, but my question was, why are you mistreating your husband?

Katie: I guess I just...I don’t know.

Counselor: Katie, think. This is your life. If you want it to improve, you have to actually think about what you are doing. You are mistreating your husband. You are trying to throw him out. Let’s just jump to the big ‘why?’ How do you think that your life will be better if you’re alone?

Katie: It won’t.

Counselor: Yes, it will in some way, at least in your mind. You won’t have anybody demanding anything of you, or expecting anything of you? What is it? How will your life be better if you don’t have a man?

Katie: I won’t be so scared...

Counselor: Of what?

Katie: Of him leaving me.

Counselor: Do you want him to leave?

Katie: No, I want him to stay, but I’m afraid that he’s going to...

Counselor: Your fear is making you act backwards. I’m scared that my man is going to leave me, so I’ll be terrible to him, he’ll leave, and then I can say, “You see, I was right.” That’s

what you are doing. Everybody is scared that they are going to be left. That is the most natural state of human beings, to want to stay connected.

Katie: But no man in my life has ever stayed long enough...

Counselor: But Katie, your actions are pushing them away. If you keep pushing them away, you'll make it 100 for 100. Let's see. Will a fly stay on the table if you keep swatting at it?

Katie: No.

Counselor: Will a fly stay on the table if you sprinkle sugar on the table?

Katie: Yes.

Counselor: Then sprinkle the sugar on the table if you want the fly to stay. Become the wife you'd rather die than not come home to, and you'll never lose your man. Four Dallas Cowboy's cheerleaders could dance naked on his desk and he'd still come home to you if you act like the kind of wife and he'd rather die than not come home to. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Katie: Yes. It makes a lot of sense.

Counselor: Do you want to keep him?

Katie: Yes.

Counselor: Make him so happy that he doesn't want to go to the bathroom because he would have to leave the room that you're in.

Katie: Okay.

Counselor: That's how you get the insurance policy. Show him admiration, and respect, and appreciation, and a lot of affection and sex, have a good time with him, and he'll be counting the hours until he can come home. You couldn't get him to leave you if you treat him right. Why would he want to leave the one person in the world that he's comfortable with, the one that makes him feel like a man, that makes him feel alive, that gives him a purpose for living. Do you think that he could leave that?

Katie: No.

Counselor: Then, stop pushing him and start pulling him.

Katie: Okay.

Our personal discomforts, our personal self-consciousness, and our focus on the bad experiences in our history all combine to make us defensive. Once we become defensive, we find it difficult to allow ourselves to experience the joy that the Lord has for us in our relationships. Katie's defensiveness led her into an adversarial relationship with her husband, and drew her inexorably toward the dissolution of her marriage that she consciously did not want. **Job 3:25-26** tells us:

**25 For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, And what I dreaded has happened to me.**

**26 I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest, for trouble comes."**

Unfortunately, in our culture, it has become conventional wisdom that women should maintain an adversarial relationship with their husbands so that their independence will not be swallowed up by the husband's dominance. At the opposite pole, men are challenged by the culture to be the "head of the house", in a macho, paramilitary sense, and thus maintain their masculine status. This type of polar adversarial relationship is based upon the fear that if we do

not maintain an adversarial relationship, we will lose status to our partner. The feelings of our adversary, who is also our spouse, then become the least of our concerns; as a matter of fact, we generally obtain a perverse pleasure in seeing our adversary hurting and feel justified in acting in such a way that exacerbates the hurt. After all, we rationalize to ourselves, they have it coming. Everybody says so.

When either or both of the partners in a marital relationship accept the idea that their relationship is supposed to be an adversarial one, their thinking creates a problem in the marriage that is difficult to overcome. When either one of the partners in a marital relationship feels and/or displays disdain, indifference, or a lack of caring about the feelings of the other partner, the display of disdain creates a problem in the marriage that is difficult to overcome.

The major problem with this type of situation is that the adversarial partner, or the partner displaying the disdain, feels justified in their position, and thus is not motivated to correct the misconception. The fact that Katie's stepfather left her mother gave Katie, in her mind, permission to mistreat her husband before he mistreated her. As I mentioned earlier in the message, our negative, ungodly feelings and thoughts are generally reinforced by both our culture and the adversary. Many of the people who run our media culture have had wrecked relationships, and they want others to follow suit so that they can maintain a sanguine attitude toward their own relationship failure. Misery loves company. The adversary wants us to be desensitized to the Word of God and to one another so that he can, for his own perverse pleasure, persuade us to act in an ungodly fashion.

A woman related a story that communicated this truth. As she was sitting with her best girlfriend, chatting, she woke up to the realization that she had never paid much attention to her husband's feelings. She asked her friend a personal question, and ended the question by adding that she hoped her friend didn't mind her asking—that she wasn't offending her or hurting her feelings with the question. Her friend said, "Nothing you do will ever offend or bother me. You're not like my husband, who regularly bothers and offends me."

After hearing this remark, the woman thought about how her own husband had a tendency to frequently get on her nerves. Later that week she got into one of her typical arguments with her husband, complete with defensive, nasty jabs. As she later considered the situation, she said:

"Then, like a slap in the face, it hit me: I was taking advantage of him without considering his feelings. I always considered my girlfriend's feelings because I didn't want to offend her, or make her mad, or lose her friendship, but I didn't have the same consideration for my own husband! I realized that I didn't care about his feelings at all."

The truth of the matter is that we are more likely to give ourselves permission to exhibit a lack of sensitivity to our spouses than to other people. We feel that we have to be polite in educational, occupational or public situations to not be thought of as boorish, and we have to be nice to our friends so that we do not offend and then lose them. Our husbands or our wives, however, resides with us at home, the place in which we can unwind, and they don't really have any place else to go, so they just have to stay there and take it. We can unload on our spouses or ignore them without considering their feelings; after all, what are they going to do about it?

Well, the Lord does not agree with your position. He tells us, in the text, **Philippians 2:1-4**

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

**2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.**

**3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.**

**4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.**

None of our interactions with others are perfect. We live in a world full of flawed people; even the people that we most trust to take care of us are human and have weaknesses and imperfections. When the people in the book of Nehemiah heard the Word of God, they recognized their weakness and wept. When we recognize our flaws we ought weep as did the Israelites in that time.

Jesus wept because of our sinfulness. He not only wept, but He suffered. He suffered so that we could overcome our defensiveness, overcome our faults and our flaws. We are called, not to indulge our fears and our pain, but to cast all of our cares upon the Lord and look forward to the time that He will provide us comfort either by relieving the pressure of the situations in which we find ourselves, or taking us away from the trials altogether. In the meantime, our job is to emulate his example of kindness and perseverance. We ought not push our spouses away and use them negatively, but we ought to emulate Jesus' example and give ourselves to them.

**Ephesians 4:31-5:2** tells us:

**31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.**

**32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.**

**1 Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.**

**2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.**

Let us not be overcome by negativity, but let us understand the flawed, human nature of those that cause us to have negative experiences as did Jesus, and then, rather than act in fear or disdain, let us overcome negativity by our sacrificial giving of ourselves. God has not given us a spirit of fear, so our relationship fears are by choice. We can choose to indulge our fears by shooting first, or we can endure the scary situations and arise victoriously in the end. **1Peter 2:21-25** tells us:

**21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:**

**22 "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth";**

**23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;**

**24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness— by whose stripes you were healed.**

**25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and**



**Overseer of your souls.**

It is a large task to suffer for someone else, but we have a large Savior that died for us. Let us remember Jesus Christ when faced with fear, and emulate His example to bear the burden and love in spite of the fear, to commit ourselves to the mercy of God, which He insures us is ours. Let us love one another, even as Christ has loved us.

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