

Philippians 1:27-2:4
Be Church to One Another

Main idea: Being the church to one another is about showing Jesus to one another.

Like many of your homes this last week, my family was hit with what many people were referring to as the plague. While I don't think it would be beneficial to go into too much detail, I will say that it wasn't pretty. In fact, on Wednesday, I really don't know which room I spent more time in: the bedroom, or the bathroom.

But there is one beautiful thing about being sick at our house. When you're sick, someone takes care of you. You're allowed to lay in bed all day, and other people in the family bring you your medicine, and your meals, and you're allowed to get out of any schoolwork or chore, just by saying, "I'm sick."

Now, kids, if you end up saying you're sick every day for the next month, your parents won't believe you. So I'm not sharing this little secret with you in order for you to take advantage of your family, but so that we would all recognize the beauty in serving those who are sick. And in a very real way, we're all sick, not with a physical plague, but a spiritual one. And we're all called to care for the sick in our church.¹

Two weeks ago, I preached a sermon that I titled, "Be Church at Church."² My message today is kind of like the second part of that sermon. In that message, we looked at how one of the purposes for which we gather is to glorify God together by loving one another and growing in our faith together. But how do we do that? It's great to say that we want to do these things, and even to make it a goal to love and grow together with your church, but how do we practically do them together? That's what we're going to be talking about today.

Philippians 1:27-28.

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. (Philippians 1:27-28)

In verse 27, Paul wrote to the church that we ought to live our lives in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, whether someone is watching or not. That means that in everything we do, we ought to represent the good news of Jesus. In everything, point to Jesus as being the one who saves us from our spiritual plague.³ So then Paul named three ways that show that we're living that kind of life, and they all have to do with being the church to one another.

The first way that we be the church to one another is to stand firm together. Paul wrote that he wanted to hear that the Philippians were standing firm in one spirit. In other words, your devotion to God isn't something you're to do by yourself, but together with your church. It's all too easy to make your spiritual growth a personal journey, and not see it as the collective pursuit as the people of God.

This is why we have things like Bible studies on Sunday mornings, and prayer groups on Wednesday nights. These are opportunities not just to grow in your own faith, but to help your family in Christ grow as well by

¹ James 5:14

² You can listen to it here: <https://graceisgood.org/sermons/church-church/>

³ 1 Peter 2:24

encouraging them and praying for them. At both of these times, we break up into smaller groups than we have during our morning worship service, which allows each person to ask and answer questions, and each person can be used by God to strengthen another person's faith.

And it's amazing how that happens. Often, you have no idea how you encourage someone else just by being present. I teach the youth on Wednesday nights, and we do this thing I call "Good Question."

[Good Question logo]



Every week, we simply sit down with the Bible and attempt to answer a question that the youth text me. Sometimes we answer one question, but then have several more questions that come up, so they text me those also. And often when they ask a question, I'm just stumped, and I have to say, "I've never thought of that before! Let me think about it, and we'll talk about it another week." So this causes me to study the Scriptures, and so I find that my faith is often strengthened just by being challenged by their questions. I love it! Proverbs 27:17 says this:

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another. (Proverbs 27:17)

In those days, when your iron axe got dull or beat up from use, you would heat it up and then pound on it with an iron hammer in order to get it to the right shape again. In the same way, as we come together, we sharpen each other through questions, and answers, and prayers, so that we would all together grow as the body of Christ.

So I encourage all of you, not just for your own spiritual growth, but as a way to encourage your church family, to come and participate in both Sunday School and Wednesday night activities. In fact, if you haven't been coming to either, I encourage you to at least pick one and just jump into it this next week. I think that you'll be blessed, and you'll be a blessing to others.

And let me just say this about that, too. Even if you think you're doing okay spiritually and you really don't need another church service in your week, can I be honest? If you can at all make the time, please come and serve even if you don't feel like you need to be served. I don't mean quitting your job or running yourself totally ragged, but I mean if all it takes to make the time is to give up watching an hour of Netflix or of playing on Facebook, or if it just means a small rearranging of your schedule or getting here one hour earlier on Sunday morning, I encourage you to make that very small change because it can really make a huge difference. There are so many ways, big and small, that we would be so grateful for you to serve. Take your pick! On Wednesday nights, we need help with children and preschool, or you can come and help with kitchen clean up, you can find the worn out mom that needs encouragement and sit and encourage her over dinner. If you like to cook, you can volunteer to take a night off of Sarah's plate and make the dinner, or take a night off Abby's plate and make the dessert. You can listen during prayer request time and really truly commit to praying for the needs mentioned and also pray and ask God other ways you can help be an answer to those prayers. If you

think that you don't need the fellowship on Wednesday night or during Sunday School, can I tell you, we do need your fellowship. And I think that as you come to serve and encourage your faith family, you'll realize you needed them more than you thought. Don't show up looking for these Sunday night and Wednesday night church services to wow you, show up looking to be a servant to the others at church. Show up looking to serve, then God will bless you even as you seek to be a blessing to others.

The second way that we can be the church to one another is when Paul wrote that we're to strive together side by side. So while many people believe that they can be Christians without being an active part of a church, and they're technically correct, it's also not healthy or obedient.⁴ Part of what we're to do as Christians is simply to come together with other Christians to worship and serve God together.

You see, there's a difference between association and participation. Association is being with people, sharing some of the same experiences, and hearing the same things. Association is kind of like riding an airplane together: you're all together in the same place, and even going to the same destination, but beyond that, you don't really know each other, and once you get off the plane, you all go your separate ways. And if we're honest, we sometimes treat church as if we're simply together by association. We come to the same place, hear the same message, but then we go our separate ways until next week. Is that all it means to be the church? Association?

But participation is more than that. Participation is like being on the same football team: it's working together with the same goal. It's rejoicing at the team's successes and not making it all about you. And that means that it's always about putting the needs of the team above your desires.

Now, I don't know all the ins and outs of football, but I was reading an article this past week about one person's opinion regarding the value of each football position.⁵ Of course, the writer of the article put quarterback at the top of the list because a competent quarterback is usually seen as an absolute necessity to having a good team. And so the article went on to list all the positions in order of importance: quarterback, designated pass rusher, left tackle, and so on. And the list when all the way down the line, and listed at the very end what he considered to be the least important position on the team: the return specialist.

Does anyone know what the return specialist does? The return specialist is the player who catches the ball after a kick-off, and either attempts to run the ball toward toward the end zone, or else simply puts his knee on the ground to end the play.

Now, once again, I don't know a lot about the game, but if this player made the game all about him, he'd always try to run the ball, right? I mean, go for the glory! Go for a touchdown! All eyes are on you! Nevermind that you could fumble, and the other team could recover it. Nevermind that if you and your team would be in a much worse position. If it's all about you, then do whatever you want, no matter if it hurts anyone else!

But being on team means putting the team above your own desires. So the return specialist often simply catches the ball and takes a knee. And this is so important for the team!

But of course, I'm not really qualified to talk about football. All I'm saying is that we need to work together. Being the church is more than association; it's participation. It's striving together, serving side by side, standing firm in one spirit as a witness to the lost that salvation is only through the gospel of Christ.

⁴ Hebrews 10:25

⁵ <http://x.co/NFLRanks>

There's often so much divisiveness and competition, even among Christians. We're usually so fast to point out how we disagree, while we ought to be united in spirit and love, so that we will serve side by side.

This is why we do things like serve at the Nokomis Christian Missions nearly every month. It can often seem like such a small thing: simply sorting through a few donations, doing some cleaning, and fixing things around the store. But in it, we're once again coming together to serve, getting our minds off of ourselves in order to minister to our community in such a way that we get absolutely zero credit for.

I've thought about whether that's the kind of thing we should be doing. Maybe instead of working so much behind the scenes, we should do more highly visible ministries, like a free back-to-school party at the pool, or a free hourly daycare, or even delivering a free lunch to several business owners a few times a month, just as a way of saying thanks for working so hard in our community.

I recently heard about one church that permanently decorated an extra room in their building for birthdays, and they told their community that if anyone wanted to use that room for their birthday parties, they could use it for free, and someone in the church would even bake them a cake for free as well. Isn't that a great idea? They were simply using what God had given them to bless their community.

I think there's a place for those kinds of things, and even that we probably should do more things to bless our community in big ways, but I think serving at Nokomis Christian Missions behind the scenes is maybe even more important because it gets us to stop thinking about what's in it for us, and causes us to serve simply out of the joy of being loved by God, so that we also begin to love God and others.

That's a big task. Serving, without expecting anything in return.⁶ But being the church goes even beyond that. According to verse 28, the third way that we're to be the church to one another, striving to live in a manner worthy of the gospel, is to not be afraid of our opponents. No matter what the threat, if you have faith in Jesus, you don't have to fear men. And Paul tells us why at the end of verse 28:

This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. (Philippians 1:28b)

The reason we don't have to be afraid is because we're saved! And as we stand up for truth, we testify to Jesus, who is the Truth, and we show by our fearlessness that Christ is the only way they can be saved and avoid eternal destruction.

So as the church, we stand firm together, serving together, and encourage one another not to fear anything, because God is good, and He saves us by grace.

And yet, that doesn't mean that life will be easy. Verse 29.

For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. (Philippians 1:29-30)

⁶ Luke 6:35

Paul invited the church in Philippi alongside him. Paul was in prison for his boldness in sharing the gospel. They accused him of disturbing the city,⁷ and agitating the Jews all over the world,⁸ but really this just means that unbelievers, whether Jews or Greeks, just got angry that Paul preached that salvation is only found in Jesus Christ.

Are you willing to stir up our city with the gospel? Even if it means people getting angry with you, so much that they accuse you of things in order to shut you up?

You see, another way that we're to be the church is to suffer. No one likes this idea, but if you think about it, it makes perfect sense. If we want to follow Christ, and Christ suffered and died on the cross, why should we think that our Christian lives would be easy?⁹

As Christians, we suffer for many reasons. We suffer because of our sin, because of the sins of those around us, and because of the general presence of sin in the world. But no matter what the reason, all suffering helps us to identify more with Jesus in His suffering, and should cause us to long for heaven. Sometimes we get far too comfortable here. We kind of like it here. So suffering here actually helps us by refocusing us so that we long more for heaven, where there is no more sin or suffering,¹⁰ so all suffering is meant to turn our eyes upward in anticipation of how God will answer.¹¹

And once again, if you've been suffering, don't think that you have to do it alone. Your church family is here to support you, and pray for you, and even suffer alongside you as we strive to serve God together in this broken world.

But lest we think that being the church is all about serving and suffering, Paul then went on to describe a beautiful relationship that we can only have with one another as Christians. Chapter 2.

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. (Philippians 2:1-2)

We might say that this is impossible. How can we possibly have the same mind, one mind, and be in full accord, with no conflict whatsoever? How can we possibly get along this well?

Well, notice that this kind of relationship isn't really something we do naturally. We don't naturally get along perfectly. That's not in our nature as fallen human beings! And yet, because we have the same Holy Spirit inside each one of us, and if we each have even the tiniest amount of comfort, love, affection, and sympathy from the Spirit working in us, Paul encourages us to embrace love and unity for our church family not because these things are natural to us, but because Christ has encouraged us through His life and death for us. We love because He first loved us.¹²

And it's not just about warm fuzzy feelings, either. Paul goes on to write what this looks like practically. Verse 3.

⁷ Acts 16:20-21

⁸ Acts 24:5

⁹ Acts 14:22

¹⁰ Revelation 21:4

¹¹ Romans 8:18

¹² 1 John 4:19

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.
(Philippians 2:3-4)

Do NOTHING from selfish ambition. And yet, that's how most people operate in the world. We're constantly trying to get ahead, and trying to collect enough for ourselves, and we're usually not too concerned with whether the people around us have much at all.

But Paul flips this completely upside down! Instead of putting ourselves at the top, he tells us to put ourselves at the bottom, considering others as more significant. And he's not saying that we can't meet our own needs, but rather to consider how we might also meet the needs of others, even if that means suffering for them.

I recently attended a pastor's conference and was encouraged by several pastors from their wisdom and experiences. One pastor shared his story about his struggle in attempting to revitalize a dying church. He had actually successfully planted churches before that grew leaps and bounds, so he thought he had it all figured out, but when he attempted to do those same things in this other church, nothing seemed to work, and he just got more and more depressed to the point that he thought about just giving up, even though he really didn't feel like God was leading him anywhere else.

One day, he was admitting some of these struggles with a few men in the church, and one of the men told him, "Pastor, I think you might be more in love with the church you wish you had rather than the church that God has given you."

As a pastor, that really hit home. And that same principle applies to all of us. We can get so fixated on what we want, and on how things could be better from our perspective, that we miss what God has put right in front of us. God has blessed us with amazing blessings and opportunities to serve Him and others, but we have to be humble enough to set aside our own desires, and even what we consider to be our own needs, in order to love others, and even suffer for them.

Sunday school, this church service, Wednesday night, serving at the Nokomis rehab, serving at the mission, maybe none of these things are run the way you think they should be run. Maybe they lack what you consider to be essential elements. Or maybe use used to like them, but they've changed, and you just haven't been able to get behind them anymore. Can I ask you to come along your church family though, and serve anyway? To set aside your own desires about who should be there, how it should be run, what music should be played, what the teacher should be saying, and just come and love God and love others? This is something I need to remind myself of frequently. I often have big dreams and often MY vision for what I think we should be doing doesn't come to fruition. But that doesn't mean I can just stay home and tell God nevermind. He takes these imperfect situations and uses them. He uses them to grow others and to grow me. So instead I say, "God, help me be humble. Help me to come and serve others." And sometimes I walk away exhausted, and sometimes a little disappointed. But even when I have to set aside my will, and suffer in some very small inconvenience, I know that by God's power and grace, His will is done, and not merely mine.

But why should we live this way? What sense does it make to willingly put aside your desires in order to serve others? Well, it's because Jesus lived that way. He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.¹³

¹³ Philippians 2:8

You see, being the church to one another is about showing Jesus to one another. That's what all these other things are about: striving, serving, not being afraid; they're all about how Jesus gave Himself for us, and therefore we ought to give ourselves to Him and one another. So many people in churches seem to operate as if church isn't about Jesus, but about themselves. They want to pretend that they're the only one that's sick. But the Bible is clear that we're all sick, that all sin and fall short.¹⁴ But Jesus came to bring the cure!¹⁵ Therefore, we're all to take care of each other, caring for one another as Jesus has cared for us.

And how did He do that? He gave us His body and His blood.¹⁶ He went to the cross to save us from our sins. To wash us clean. He loved us and served us even to the point of death.

Are you willing to go that far in serving your church family?

¹⁴ Romans 3:23

¹⁵ Romans 5:18

¹⁶ Matthew 26:26-28