

Living for Others

Philippians 2:1-4

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

As I feel that all too familiar throbbing in my head I turn over and clumsily smash that dreaded alarm clock. I wish I could say that I feel rested, but I tossed like the waves of the sea all night in fits of anxiety. I know that success comes from hard work, persistence, discipline, sacrifice and late nights but how is on to sleep restfully with all the rejection, passion, failure, doubt, and fear that comes from constantly striving to “one-up” all others?



As I get ready to face those “cutthroat” strategists that merely see me as a steppingstone to their success, I know I must not show weakness but confidence lest they take what is mine! And yet despite my power and prestige, nice home and good retirement fund I cannot help but feel in the pit of my stomach that my life has somehow been a dismal failure. What is this thirst that I feel in the core of my soul that just never seems satisfied no matter what I buy, say, or do? Why do I so often feel like an alien living in a foreign land? Despite being

in a world that celebrates freedom of choice and sees truth merely being the figment of one’s imagination, I still cannot help but feel and are drawn to a singular path that makes sense and gives meaning to my life! While I am tempted to dismiss these questions as merely philosophical meanderings of sleep deprivation, or the product of a second helping of spicy tacos before going to bed, I cannot for I am tired of being depressed, living in fear, and trying to fill the void of love in my heart with things that once obtained fail to satisfy my insatiable longing to know why I exist and what is the meaning of my life?

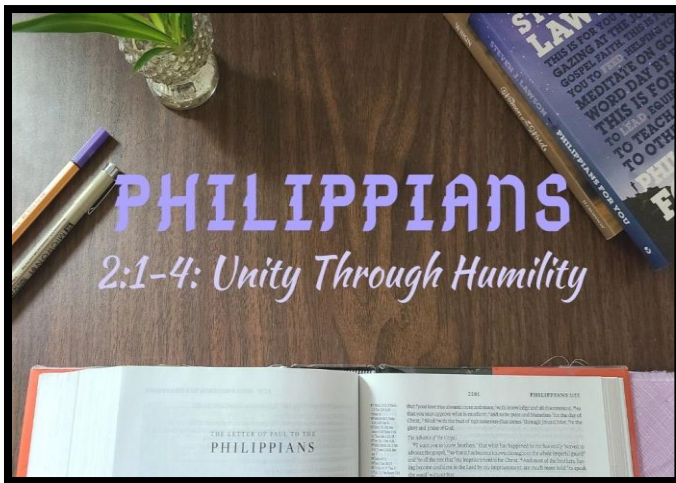
So, as I lie in my bed frightened, confused and craving for that which I am uncertain, an epiphany comes flooding into my mind ... what if those “Bible thumping, foolish Christians,” as I often call them, are right that life has meaning only in the bosom of one’s Creator? In the darkness of both morning and in my soul, I decide I will be either foolish or brave, too which I am not certain, and seek my answers at the local church. Sunday arrives and as I get into my car my head and my heart are pounding so hard, I wonder if they might burst! What could I ever possibly offer God who has everything? Will not lightning strike me dead the moment this lustful, angry, spiteful, self-focused, infatuated person enters His place of worship? Also, I



cannot help but wonder who I will meet when I walk through the doors? If I meet the “judgmental Christian” will he/she quickly see my black soul and place upon my back burdens that I could never bear? But worse than that what if I meet those “pretenders of the faith” that worship only on Sunday and the rest of the time live like I do? I doubt their delusions and fantasies of doing so little and yet “being right with God” will show me the way to fill the gigantic hole in my heart. And what if the church is a “fighting church” or worst yet a “social

club,” either of which might not accept the “real me,” for I am simply too weak and have no desire to keep my “worldly façade” any longer! So, with so many unanswered questions and not knowing what lies beyond I open the door ...

This story of a seeker highlights some of the greatest issues facing today’s churches. If we are to fulfill Christ’s command to let our light shine and invite the fearful, wayward, self-absorbed, lost into a sanctuary that emulates and points to God’s love, then we simply must take



the necessary steps to judge ourselves and be distinct from the world but at the same time be humble enough to forbear in love those who are still bound by the shackles of sin or are just starting to invite the Spirit to remove them! To appease the fears of seekers that they might find either judgment or lukewarmness once they open the doors of the church great care must be taken to ensure that acceptance is not based on combative mastery or social popularity but on faith in a risen Savior! It is not easy to maintain this kind of unity and peace amongst the

body whose members are made up of so many sinners, but it is achievable. Due to evidence of personal conflicts¹ and quarrelsome selfish ambition,² Apostle Paul wrote a letter to the church of Philippi encouraging them “to draw rather clear social, ethical, and theological boundaries

¹ Daniel M. Gurtner, “[Philippians](#),” in *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 585.

² F. F. Bruce, [Philippians](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Peabody, MA: Baker Books, 2011), 61.

around his communities, lest the community not last or, worse, be absorbed into some sort of syncretistic amalgam of Christian and non-Christian beliefs and practices.”³ The following sermon is going to review the sources, the scope and solution to maintaining unity within the church so that its members continuously emulate their love for God and one another!

Sources of Unity

“Since Unity of mind is not easily cultivated when human beings of disparate backgrounds and temperaments find themselves sharing one another’s company,”⁴ Apostle Paul suggests maintaining the bonds of peace members need to constantly reflect on the consolation, comfort, communion, and compassion⁵ that they have received from Christ.

Consolation: Paul encourages the Philippians to use “the memory of past intimacy to heal present disunity.”⁶ Remember all the times when Christ forgave, protected, lifted, and healed your broken heart⁷ and then out of a sense of deep gratitude extend that same mercy to others. Remember before going to the cross Jesus encouraged His own to be one, completely unified (John 17:22-23).⁸

Comfort: “Another spiritual reality which should bind the Philippians together as members of the household of faith is love.”⁹ The love that God has poured out into their hearts (Romans 5:5)¹⁰ ought to compel them to “resist divisiveness in any form.”¹¹ The love Paul talks about is

³ Ben Witherington III, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Company, 2011), 122.

⁴ F. F. Bruce, *Philippians*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Peabody, MA: Baker Books, 2011), 61.

⁵ Archie L. Edwards Sr., *Expository Outlines from Paul’s Epistles*, Sermon Outline Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 40.

⁶ G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 110.

⁷ G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 110.

⁸ Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 11, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 98–99.

⁹ Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 11, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 99.

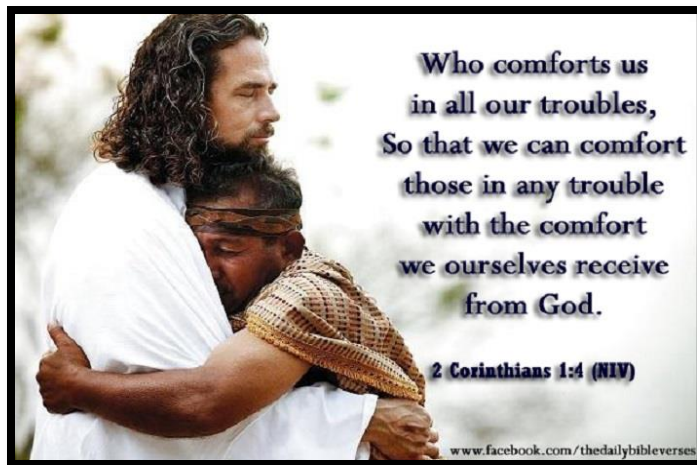
¹⁰ F. F. Bruce, *Philippians*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Peabody, MA: Baker Books, 2011), 61.

¹¹ Homer A. Kent Jr., “*Philippians*,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 121.

“intentionally being united in heart and mind”¹² to one another because the body shares in the common goal of loving God and one another. “Remember it is our life in Christ that provides the resources that in turn make Christian love and unity possible.”¹³

Communion: Paul in his letters to the various churches has stated time and again that since the members of the church share the same Spirit “by whom all were baptized (1 Corinthians 12:13) and one Spirit in whom they all share by virtue of that incorporation into Christ and in their access to the Father (Ephesians 2:18), the members have been divinely enabled to seek and keep unity of the Spirit through the bonds of peace (Ephesians 4:3).¹⁴ Communion in the Spirit¹⁵ is the key to keeping the Christian fellowship, or *koinōnia*, from degrading into a social club¹⁶ because the community focus is unified in seeking first His kingdom through love.

Compassion: The final source of unity Paul talks about is to remember and share with one



another the comfort one has received from Jesus! To the church of Corinth Paul wrote “praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”¹⁷ With the memory of all the trials and tribulations, injustices, and persecution that Christ has comforted one through, with the same tenderness and compassion,¹⁸ passionately yearn

¹² Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Company, 2011), 121–122.

¹³ Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1997), 106.

¹⁴ Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 11, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 99.

¹⁵ Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Company, 2011), 120.

¹⁶ G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 109.

¹⁷ G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 108.

¹⁸ F. F. Bruce, *Philippians*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Peabody, MA: Baker Books, 2011), 61.

to love one another¹⁹ through both word and deed! When the church attains this then acceptance becomes based on nothing less than the communal sharing of Christ's love.

The Scope of Unity



make my joy
complete
having the same love,
by being like-minded,
being one in spirit
and of one mind
Philippians 2:2

received from Christ Paul implores the church of Philippi to “make his joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of the same mind” (verse 2). Paul wrote these words to the church most likely due to some serious internal problems²⁰ between Euodia and Snyntyche (4:2) and possibly others.²¹ “Because friendships are fragile and even close friends are all too easily divided by pride, selfishness, and preoccupation with personal interests,²² getting members on the same page²³ by setting their hearts and minds on “unity and

oneness of soul”²⁴ is the key to maintaining the bonds of peace. Paul is not suggesting that everyone must have the same thoughts and feelings about every issue,²⁵ nor is he suggesting

¹⁹ Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 11, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 99–100.

²⁰ Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 11, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 100.

²¹ Homer A. Kent Jr., “*Philippians*,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 122.

²² G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 111.

²³ Ben Witherington III, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Company, 2011), 121.

²⁴ Homer A. Kent Jr., “*Philippians*,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 122.

²⁵ G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 111–112.

that human creativity,²⁶ personal diversity or the truth should be sacrificed for unity,²⁷ but merely that all “selfish ambition and outperforming the other”²⁸ should be avoided to embrace living the Gospel in accordance with God’s will for their church.²⁹ When believers replace their earthly with a heavenly mindset³⁰ that is bathed in the love of Christ and “takes on a common yoke”³¹ this breaks down walls of division and replaces them with utter joy! “When Christians declare that *to live is Christ* (1:21), *acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord* (2:11) and desire *to know Christ* above all other things (3:8–10), then they will be *of one mind* because they will all be worshipping and serving together the One whom *God exalted to the highest place* (2:9).”³² For a seeker to walk into a unified church with the single minded devotion to love God and each other would absolutely take their breath away for they would truly get to see the Gospel lived rightly!

The Solution to Unity

Now that Paul has given the church of Philippi the sources and scope of unity, he precedes to give two very practical ways to maintain peace in a church: humility and looking out for others. First Paul implores the church to “do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, rather in humility value others above yourselves” (verse 3). Since “selfish ambition stands at the heart of human fallenness,³³ and is the primary cause of dissention inside the church, the antidote to disunity is to humbly recognize our “creaturely dependence upon

²⁶ G. Walter Hansen, [*The Letter to the Philippians*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 112.

²⁷ Homer A. Kent Jr., “[Philippians](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 121–122.

²⁸ G. Walter Hansen, [*The Letter to the Philippians*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 112.

²⁹ Ben Witherington III, [*Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Company, 2011), 121.

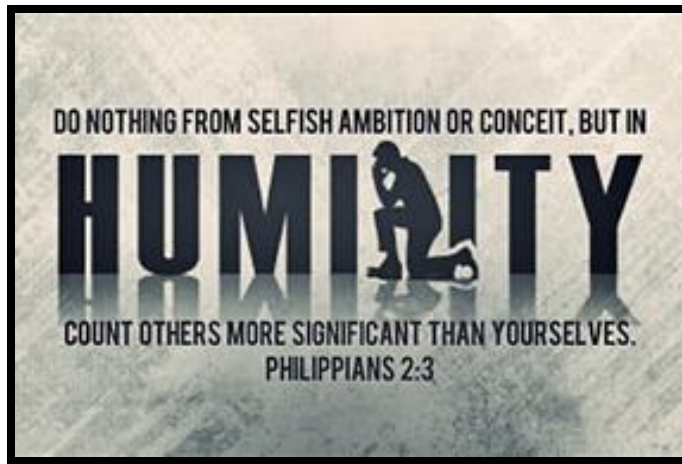
³⁰ G. Walter Hansen, [*The Letter to the Philippians*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 111.

³¹ G. Walter Hansen, [*The Letter to the Philippians*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 113.

³² G. Walter Hansen, [*The Letter to the Philippians*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 113.

³³ Gordon D. Fee, [*Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 186.

God.”³⁴ Even though the Greco-Roman and our current society mostly views “humility with contempt because it connotes lowliness, weakness, lack of freedom, servility, and



subjection;”³⁵ “empty glory gained by selfish ambition stands in absolute contrast to the glory given to God when Christ, who *made Himself nothing and humbled Himself* (2:7–11)³⁶ gave freely His life as a sacrifice for many (Mark 10:45).³⁷ This process of “stepping down” from being a self-promoter³⁸ or divinely anointed “super-Christian”³⁹ is very humbling for it requires one to imitate Christ and take on a servant status for the common good of all other members of the church!⁴⁰ When Paul says the key

to unity is “to consider others better than oneself” he is not saying that one is to have destructive, negative, unrealistic thoughts about oneself⁴¹ but merely that in giving up “introspective, self-absorbed, egocentric thoughts about oneself” one is freed up to think about ways to show the love of Christ to others.⁴² Putting **J** (Jesus), **O** (others) and then **Y**

³⁴ Ralph P. Martin, [*Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 11, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 101.

³⁵ G. Walter Hansen, [*The Letter to the Philippians*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 115.

³⁶ G. Walter Hansen, [*The Letter to the Philippians*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 114.

³⁷ Gordon D. Fee, [*Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 187.

³⁸ Ben Witherington III, [*Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Company, 2011), 128.

³⁹ F. F. Bruce, [*Philippians*](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Peabody, MA: Baker Books, 2011), 63.

⁴⁰ Ben Witherington III, [*Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Company, 2011), 130.

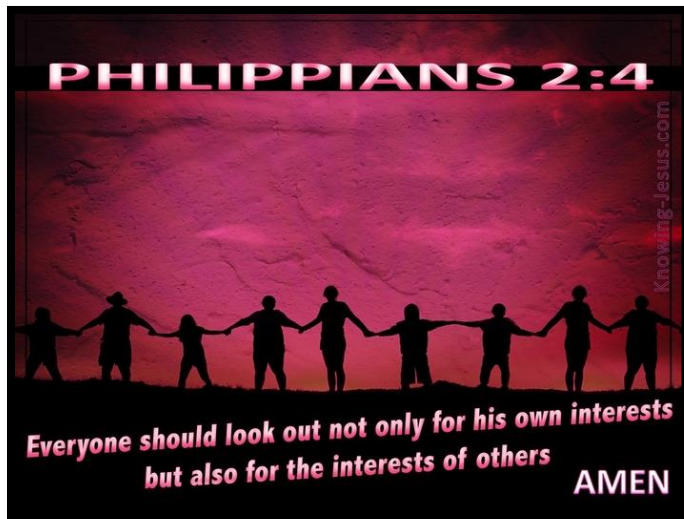
⁴¹ Homer A. Kent Jr., “[Philippians](#),” in [*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*](#), ed. Frank E. Gaebelien, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 122.

⁴² G. Walter Hansen, [*The Letter to the Philippians*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 115–116.

(yourself)⁴³ as your priority order in life represents not only a significant change in mindset over the “look out for number one” mentality of this world⁴⁴ but is also the key to avoid becoming the “fighting church” or “social club” that we often see in so many churches.

Looking out for Others

With a humble spirit Paul told the church of Philippi to “not look to your interests but each of you to the interests of others”



(verse 4). The first step in accomplishing this is to confess in pride⁴⁵ you naturally love and see one’s own self interests as being far more important than that of others.⁴⁶ Since “self-centeredness that considers only one’s own rights, plans and interest”⁴⁷ is ingrained in human nature,⁴⁸ great effort must be taken to look for and bear each other’s burdens so that one might “fill to the full the law of Christ” and please Him (Galatians 6:2).⁴⁹ In the same way that Christ being in the very nature of God emptied Himself and became a servant

of all (verses 6-8), we too are to be devoted in body and soul to the build up in the faith and provide for the needs of the other members in the church.⁵⁰ Paul is not saying that we are to

⁴³ Roger Ellsworth, [*Opening up Philippians*](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2004), 36.

⁴⁴ Ben Witherington III, [*Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Company, 2011), 129.

⁴⁵ James Montgomery Boice, [*Philippians: An Expository Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 106.

⁴⁶ James Montgomery Boice, [*Philippians: An Expository Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 106.

⁴⁷ Homer A. Kent Jr., “[Philippians](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 122.

⁴⁸ James Montgomery Boice, [*Philippians: An Expository Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 102.

⁴⁹ Gordon D. Fee, [*Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 190.

⁵⁰ Ben Witherington III, [*Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Company, 2011), 131.

neglect our own needs or that of our families (1 Timothy 5:8)⁵¹ for the good of others but that in our freedom we are to develop a mindset of faith⁵² that God will provide for us so that we in turn can provide for others.⁵³ What an honor it is to for us to bear with the failings of weaker Christians (Romans 12:10)⁵⁴ or to be asked to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the prisoner or welcome the lonely (Matthew 25:31-56)!⁵⁵ Imagine what it would be like to be a seeker and walk into a church that genuine wants to help you spiritually grow and they possible can to help you with your struggles, not for their own vain-glory but with the attitude that they are in fact bending their knees to “the Lord, who humbled Himself to die on the cross and whom God exalted to the highest place!”⁵⁶

Conclusion

Let me finish this sermon by finishing the opening story of the seeker looking for a church. With all my insecurities, fear and apprehensions firmly gripping the far reaches of my



soul, I grabbed the handle and opened the door of the church. I would like to say it was easy but every single step I took my head and heart pounded even louder and it took all I had not to run away. Thankfully, my desire to know of my Creator was so strong that I simply could not close that opened door until I had some answers! To my surprise I neither met a fighting church nor a social club that day but a family that despite my obvious black soul accepted me because they were truly thankful Christ had first accepted them! They were far from pretenders of the

faith for their love went way beyond the customary superficial smile of a politician. They never

⁵¹ Homer A. Kent Jr., “[Philippians](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 122.

⁵² Ben Witherington III, [Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary](#) (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Company, 2011), 132.

⁵³ Ben Witherington III, [Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary](#) (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Company, 2011), 131.

⁵⁴ James Montgomery Boice, [Philippians: An Expository Commentary](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 103.

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⁵⁶ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 117–118.

stopped looking for and trying to meet the many needs I had in my brokenness. Their love overwhelmed me, so I felt safe enough to ask them why I felt like an alien living in this world? They told me about Christ's sacrificial love, and I gave my life to Christ that day! What exactly happened in that moment is extremely hard to explain for it felt like scales broke free from my heart and my dark soul was introduced to a Light that loved, cherished, and consumed me! Jesus told me this is not your home but one day I will come and get you and forever you will be with me in paradise. Fast-forward a couple of years and now I am the one rejoicing in the Lord and helping others in any way that I can! I often shudder to think where I would be right now if I had met the fighting or social church that blissful day. If you such a church then I implore you for the sake of all those seekers out there, make your faith practical by considering others better than yourselves and sharing the same love and comfort you have received from Christ with everyone in the church. This is the key to becoming the church that truly honors Christ and lives the answer to the seekers question: who God is, and who am I!