

## Rethinking Your Ambition

### A Study of Philippians 2:1-4

Characteristic of Completeness: Love

Big Idea: The love shown to you must flow through you.

Related Scriptures: Isaiah 58:10; John 13:34-35; 15:11-12, 17; Romans 12:10-13; 2 Corinthians 1:3-5; Ephesians 4:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Hebrews 10:23-25; 1 John 3:16; 4:19

Introduction:

- A. I arrived a little early to the meeting and sat next to the Elementary School principal. I didn't know I was about to squirm.

You see, in the late eighties and early nineties I served on the School Board of Scottsdale Christian Academy. I was a businessman at the time, not a pastor. At the beginning of each Board meeting, one of the members would lead a short Bible study or devotional time.

I arrived a little early to this particular meeting and sat next to the Elementary School principal. He asked me if I was ready to lead the devotional, and I realized that I had completely forgotten about it. It was my turn, and I hadn't prepared anything. I began to squirm.

A wiser person would have simply confessed and apologized for not having prepared. Not me. I decided to wing it. When it was my turn, I flipped to ► Philippians 2:3-4. I read,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 2:3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

And then I said something insightful and profound, like, "So, let's be humble and unselfish, okay?" I hadn't given it much thought. I hadn't prepared. I hadn't really applied it to my own life. I just read the verses and chased them with my own cliché.

And so, naturally, I went on to become a preacher. ☺

My colleagues on the Board smiled politely. I knew what they were thinking: "Yeah, whatever. Yada, yada, yada."

- B. I'm probably not alone in quoting Philippians 2:3-4 without much thought. The verses are so clear and noble and compelling that just quoting them can be impressive. They sound a call to humility. A call to unselfishness. A call to serve others.

But I didn't fully realize until preparing for this sermon that Verses 3 and 4 were never intended to stand alone. And trying to make them stand alone robs us of important motivation and application that is provided in the preceding context. You see, in Greek, the original language in which this was written, Verses 3 and 4 constitute the tail end of a single sentence that started back in Verse 1. Our translations often break up long Greek sentences into shorter English ones to make the text more readable.

- C. Paul's unit of thought comprises the one long sentence of ► Philippians 2:1-4. That is our text for the morning.

Philippians 2:1-4 is actually an ► "if-then" logical argument. Paul is saying, ► *if* certain things are true, ► *then* we are obligated to do certain things. To serve one another humbly and unselfishly is one of the resulting obligations. Verses 1 and 2 tell us why and how we should do so.

- I. Before he gets to the "if-then" argument, Paul ► says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 2:1a Therefore . . .

The word, "therefore" links the "if-then" argument he is about to make to what has gone before. You may recall that in the immediately preceding context, Paul has just encouraged the Philippians to rethink their purpose in life and to rethink the suffering that accompanies it. As to purpose, Paul has just said Christ is to be the center of every believer's life.<sup>1</sup> As to suffering, Paul has said every believer should expect it.<sup>2</sup> So, in light of this singularity of purpose and certainty of suffering, Paul presents his "if-then" argument.

- II. The "if" part of the argument comes in Verse 1. Four ► conditions are presented. You can't see it in English, but the way these conditions are presented in Greek shows that they are first-class conditions; that is, they are assumed to be true.<sup>3</sup>

- A. In the ► first condition, Paul says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 2:1b . . . if there is any encouragement in Christ . . .

1. What is unspoken but assumed is that there certainly is encouragement in Christ.<sup>4</sup>
2. And this is not a detached, impersonal idea that somehow there exists some encouragement in Christ somewhere in the world out there. Rather, it is a

<sup>1</sup> Philippians 1:12-26.

<sup>2</sup> Philippians 1:27-30.

<sup>3</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Robertson Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament*, s.v. "Philippians 2:1," (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1934).

<sup>4</sup> Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians, Black's New Testament Commentary*, ed. Henry Chadwick, (London: A & C Black, 1998), 104-105.

direct appeal to the ► personal experience of the Philippian believers.<sup>5</sup> In effect, Paul is saying, “if you yourselves have experienced any encouragement in Christ, and you certainly have . . .”

3. The term, “encouragement” literally means “a calling to one’s side.”<sup>6</sup> In this context, it can be taken to mean one of two things,<sup>7</sup> or perhaps both.<sup>8</sup> It can be an act of coming alongside to exhort or to embolden or to strengthen.<sup>9</sup> Or it can be an act of coming alongside to comfort or to console or to lift another’s spirits.<sup>10</sup>
4. How had the Philippians personally experienced encouragement in Christ? We’re not told exactly, but we can safely infer that they experienced encouragement both directly and indirectly. Let me explain.
  - a. From other Scriptures we know that Christ encourages or comes alongside every believer in certain ways. This is ► the *direct* encouragement of Christ. For example, Jesus says some things that apply to all believers in every age.

(1) In ► John 14:18, He says,

<sup>NAU</sup> John 14:18 “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

(2) In ► John 16:22, Jesus says,

<sup>NAU</sup> John 16:22 “Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one *will* take your joy away from you.”

(3) In ► Matthew 28:20, Jesus says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Matthew 28:20 “. . . lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

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<sup>5</sup> D.A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 59; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text, The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, eds. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 167.

<sup>6</sup> W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, unabridged ed., s.v. “comfort, παράκλησις,” (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing, n.d.).

<sup>7</sup> W. Bauer, F.W. Danker, W.F. Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., s.v. “παράκλησις,” (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), hereinafter abbreviated BDAG.

<sup>8</sup> Bockmuehl, 106.

<sup>9</sup> BDAG, s.v. “παράκλησις.”

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

- b. In addition to the *direct* encouragement of Christ, there is also ► *indirect* encouragement that comes through other believers. Fellow believers had come alongside to provide strength and comfort to the hurting Philippians.<sup>11</sup> Certainly, Paul and Timothy and Silas and Luke had done so.

Paul even demonstrates such encouragement in the introduction to his letter to the Philippians, when he writes in ► 1:6,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 1:6 *For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*

- c. All ► this gives us some important information about how and why we are to serve others humbly and unselfishly.
- (1) As to how, we are to serve others by encouraging them.
  - (2) As to why, we are to encourage others because we ourselves have received encouragement in Christ, both directly and indirectly. We're going to get to some practical applications of this in a moment. For now, let's continue to trace Paul's argument all the way through.

- B. Paul adds ► a second condition, saying,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 2:1c . . . if there is any consolation of love . . .

1. Once again, as is that case for all four of the conditions, this means that the Philippians had certainly experienced the "consolation of love."
2. The term, "consolation" is very similar in meaning to "encouragement." It describes solace or comfort or alleviation of a burden.<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere in the Bible the term is used of consoling those grieving the loss of a loved one.<sup>13</sup> It is used of a father comforting his child.<sup>14</sup> It is used of encouraging the fainthearted.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Carson, 59.

<sup>12</sup> BDAG, s.v. "παράμυθιον."

<sup>13</sup> John 11:19, 31.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Thessalonians 2:12.

<sup>15</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:14.

3. The term, “love” stands as the source of consolation.<sup>16</sup> Here, it is most likely the love of Christ.<sup>17</sup> The consolation comes from the love of Christ.

4. How had they experienced the consolation of love? Once again, they had experienced it directly and indirectly.

a. Listen to these Scriptures that provide the consolation that Christ does, in fact, love us directly.

(1) In ► John 15:13, Jesus says,

<sup>NAU</sup> John 15:13 “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”

(2) In ► Romans 5:8, it says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

(3) In ► 1 John 3:16 and 4:9, we are told,

<sup>NAU</sup> 1 John 3:16 We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us . . .

. . . and . . .

► <sup>NAU</sup> 1 John 4:9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

(4) In ► 2 Corinthians 1:5, it says,

<sup>NAU</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:5 For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.

b. The Philippians had also experienced the consolation of the love of Christ indirectly, through other believers.

Paul demonstrates such consolation of love in the introduction to his letter to the Philippians, when he writes in ► 1:3 and 1:7,

<sup>16</sup> I take it as a subjective genitive.

<sup>17</sup> O’Brien, 172.

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 1:3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you . . . 7 . . . I have you in my heart . . .

- c. Once ► again, this gives us some important information about how and why we are to serve others humbly and unselfishly.
- (1) As to how, we are to serve others by consoling them.
  - (2) As to why, we are to console others because we ourselves have received consolation in Christ, both directly and indirectly.

C. Now Paul presents ► a third condition. In Verse 1, he says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 2:1d . . . if there is any fellowship of the Spirit . . .

1. The term, “fellowship” comes from the Greek word, *koi-no-NEE-ah*. It describes a close relationship or participation or partnership.<sup>18</sup>
2. The term, “Spirit” probably refers to the Holy Spirit.<sup>19</sup> Thus Paul is speaking of the believers’ close relationship or partnership with the Holy Spirit.
3. How had they experienced the fellowship of the Spirit?
  - a. Various Scriptures speak of how all believers experience the fellowship of the Spirit directly.

- (1) In ► John 14:16, Jesus says,

<sup>NAU</sup> John 14:16 “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; ► 17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.”

“Helper” is derived from the same Greek word for “encouragement” in our text. “Helper” can, therefore, be translated, “Comforter,” or “Encourager.”

- (2) In ► John 14:26, Jesus also says,

<sup>18</sup> BDAG, s.v. “κοινωνία.”

<sup>19</sup> O’Brien, 172-173.

<sup>NAU</sup> John 14:26 “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”

(3) In ► Romans 5:5, we’re told,

<sup>NAU</sup> Romans 5:5 . . . the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

(4) Galatians ► 4:6 says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Galatians 4:6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

(5) First ► John 3:24 says,

<sup>NAU</sup> 1 John 3:24 . . . We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

b. Such fellowship was also experienced ► indirectly, through other believers.

Again, Paul alludes to this in 1:4 and 1:7, where he gives thanks for the Philippians’ fellowship or partnership with him in the gospel of grace. The words, “participation” in 1:4 and “partakers” and 1:7 are built off the same word for “fellowship” in 2:1.

c. Once again, this gives us some important information about how and why we are to serve others humbly and unselfishly.

(1) As to how, we are to serve others by entering into fellowship, offering ourselves as partners.

(2) As to why, we are to have fellowship with others because we ourselves have enjoyed the fellowship of the Spirit, both directly and indirectly.

D. In the last part of Verse 1, Paul presents the ► last condition, saying,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 2:1e . . . if any affection and compassion

1. The term, “affection” describes a deep feeling of sympathy.<sup>20</sup>
2. The closely related term, “compassion” describes mercy or “display of concern over another’s misfortune.”<sup>21</sup>
3. As with the other conditions, it seems best to take the affection and compassion as that which comes from the Lord.<sup>22</sup>
4. How had they experienced affection and compassion?
  - a. Some Scriptures speak of the direct affection and compassion we receive from the Lord.
    - (1) For example, ► Psalm 40:11 says,
 

<sup>NAU</sup> Psalm 40:11 You, O LORD, will not withhold Your compassion from me; Your lovingkindness and Your truth will continually preserve me.
    - (2) Psalm ► 103:2-5 says,
 

<sup>NAU</sup> Psalm 103:2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits; 3 Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases; ► 4 Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion; ► 5 Who satisfies your years with good things, *So that* your youth is renewed like the eagle.
    - (3) Second ► Corinthians 1:3 says,
 

<sup>NAU</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,
    - (4) Hebrews ► 4:15-16 says,
 

<sup>NAU</sup> Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, ► but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are, yet* without sin. ► 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that

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<sup>20</sup> BDAG, s.v. “σπλάγγιον.”

<sup>21</sup> BDAG, s.v. “οἰκτιρισμός.”

<sup>22</sup> O’Brien, 176.

we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

- b. Once again Paul also shows the kind of affection and compassion the Philippians had received ► indirectly. He says in 1:8,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 1:8 For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

- c. Once again, all ► this gives us some important information about how and why we are to serve others humbly and unselfishly.

(1) As to how, we are to serve others by offering affection and compassion.

(2) As to why, we are to offer affection and compassion to others because we ourselves have received affection and compassion from the Lord, both directly and indirectly.

- II. Having presented the “if” part of his “if-then” argument, Paul now presents the “then” part in ► Verse 2, saying,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 2:2a make my joy complete . . .

This is the only command in the text. But I don’t think Paul’s primary concern is his own joy; rather, this is a polite and tactful way of encouraging them fulfill their obligations. Paul’s joy will simply be a byproduct of their obedience. Paul wants the Philippians to make his joy complete by sharing an unselfish mindset, by having a common others-oriented ambition, by selflessly serving each other. That’s what he means ► when he says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 2:2b . . . by being of the same mind . . .

The rest of the text merely explains how this is done.

- A. And at the ► top of the list is . . .

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 2:2c . . . maintaining the same love . . .

What is the “same love” to be maintained? It’s the “same love” Paul has just been talking about—the love characterized by 1) encouragement, 2) consolation, 3) fellowship, and 4) affection and compassion. These are all manifestations of Christ-like love. And so, our ► Characteristic of Completeness for the week is love. That’s what we’re talking about.

And the ► big idea is this: The love shown to you must flow through you. That's Paul's argument. If love has been shown to you, and it certainly has, then that love must flow through you. The love shown to you must flow through you.

B. Paul says this love ► includes being . . .

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 2:2d . . . united in spirit . . .

. . . operating as a team.

C. This love ► includes being . . .

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 2:2e . . . intent on one purpose.

Partnering in the gospel of grace.

D. This love ► includes doing . . .

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 2:3a . . . nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;

I don't think this means that we are to be self deprecating or have a low opinion of ourselves relative to everyone else. Nor do I think this means that our life's agenda should be at every turn dictated by the whims of others. It simply means that we are to have an attitude of unselfishness. We are to be others-oriented. I believe ► Verse 4 qualifies it, saying,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 2:4 do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

The love shown to you must flow through you.

III. How ► can we apply this? A great starting point would be to simply go back to the four conditions Paul presents and use them as cues: 1) encouragement, 2) consolation, 3) fellowship, and 4) affection and compassion. Is there anybody you know who could really use this kind of love from you right now?

A. A week ago last Friday, I had the privilege of speaking to the student body and faculty of Phoenix Seminary at the Fall Chapel. Afterwards, one of my former professors, Norm Wakefield, came up to me, his smile and arms open wide. He hugged me and then looked me straight in the eye and said, "Bob, I'm so proud of you." It was such a simple thing, but it recharged my battery, and it still recharges me when I think about it.

The love shown to you must flow through you.

- B. I'm pretty good at being on the receiving end of encouragement and consolation and fellowship and affection and compassion. But I've got a lot work to do in letting it flow through me to others. My receiver is great; my transmitter is busted. Loving others does not come naturally.

Earlier in the summer, some friends of ours moved to Seattle to attend school. Caleb and Elisa are a young couple with whom Cathy and I spent lots of time in premarital counseling and Life Group and postmarital encouragement. They're like our adoptive children. And they don't know anyone in Seattle.

Last week, Cathy encouraged me to call Caleb to see how he is doing. That kind of thing doesn't normally occur to me; remember, my transmitter is busted. Or rather, I think it's clogged up. Clogged up with tasks. One hundred and fifty four active tasks waiting in Microsoft Outlook to be checked off. Tasks that tend to cover up opportunities to love other people because such opportunities rarely cry out for attention with the same urgency as some other tasks on my to-do list.

But I decided to do something very simple. I shoehorned into my task list, "call Caleb" and gave it priority. So I called on the very day I scheduled it. We talked for a good while about jobs and marriage and money and theology and adjustments and who we are in Christ. We prayed together on the phone. And then I asked him what I could do to help him besides pray. He said, "calling is good." And I thought to myself, "Calling is such a simple thing. Why didn't I think of it before?"

As I recounted to Cathy my conversation with Caleb, I was thinking, "Cathy's going to be so proud of me because I actually did something relational." She *was* pleased. But she asked me a question that revealed that I'm still a rookie. She said, "Did you tell him that you love him and that you're proud of him?"

Drat. I hadn't. I felt like that would be breaking some kind of "man-law." And her question made me so uncomfortable that I immediately broke into a mocking rendition of that sappy Olivia Newton John song, "I Honestly Love You." "If we both were born in another place in time, this moment might be ending with a kiss . . ."

But I realized how hypocritical I am. I instinctively mock the thought of giving out such encouragement and consolation and affection, but I sure don't mind receiving it from guys like Norm Wakefield.

The love shown to you must flow through you.

- C. In spite of my relational retardation, I think, as a church family, we are very good at providing consolation and comfort in crisis situations. For example, I'm very proud of the way you responded to the Demchik family in the recent death of their son and brother, Stephen.

If Moon Valley were a hospital, our Emergency Room would be great. But I suspect we have more room to grow in treating people with the more ordinary, run-of-the-mill, everyday kind of ailments we all face—ailments that could use the healing touch of a simple comment, a call, a note, a hug. It can be as simple as recognizing something good in another person and praising it.

The love shown to you must flow through you.

- D. The Gallup Organization has recently conducted extensive research into measuring the strength of a workplace.<sup>23</sup> They wanted to discover the core elements of a workplace that attracts and keeps the most talented employees. They whittled it down to twelve questions or statements that are most predictive of the strength of a workplace. Of these twelve, six are the most strongly predictive of workplace strength. The top six include these three statements: “In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work;” ““My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person;” and “Someone at work encourages my development.” Compensation did not make the list of Twelve, let alone the Six. People are starving for the kind of love Paul is prescribing for the Philippians—a love that includes encouragement, consolation, fellowship, and affection and compassion.

The love shown to you must flow through you.

- IV. It is interesting that it is the Philippians who were experiencing affliction. You may recall that for them the joy had leaked out of life. And yet, Paul calls them to love unselfishly. The ones in need of love are called to love. It’s as if loving others humbly and unselfishly is a prescription for our own woes. You want get joy? Give love.

If the love shown to us is not flowing through us, we are prone to “spiritual indigestion,” which can manifest itself in things like depression, loneliness, anxiety, and boredom.

- A. Samuel Shoemaker, a cofounder of Alcoholics Anonymous, ► said, “We are not lonely because we are not loved, but because we do not love.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> “Over the last twenty-five years the Gallup Organization has interviewed more than a million employees. We have asked each of them hundreds of different questions, on every conceivable aspect of the workplace. . . . We wanted our statistical analyses . . . to pry apart strong workplaces to reveal the core. We could then say to managers and companies, ‘If you can bring all of these core elements together in a single place, then you will have created the kind of workplace that can attract, focus, and keep the most talented employees.’ So we took our mountain of data and we searched for patterns. . . . When the dust finally settled, we made a discovery. Measuring the strength of a workplace can be simplified to twelve questions. These twelve questions don’t capture everything you may want to know about your workplace, but they do capture the *most* information and the most *important* information. They measure the core elements needed to attract, focus, and keep the most talented employees. . . . These twelve questions are the simplest and most accurate way to measure the strength of a workplace” (Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman, *First, Break All The Rules: What The World’s Greatest Managers Do Differently*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 27-29).

<sup>24</sup> Samuel Shoemaker, quoted by Jamie Lash, “Dispelling the Gloom of Loneliness,” available from <http://www.lifegivingwords.com/jan-2005-enews-2.htm>; Internet; accessed 6 September 2006.

B. The Bible confirms the link between loving others and experiencing joy ourselves.

1. Isaiah ► 58:10 says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Isaiah 58:10 And if you give yourself to the hungry And satisfy the desire of the afflicted, Then your light will rise in darkness And your gloom *will become* like midday.

2. In ► John 15:11, Jesus caps off an extended discourse<sup>25</sup> on the need to love one another by saying,

<sup>NAU</sup> John 15:11 “These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full. 12 This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.”

Notice ► the connection. One of the reasons Jesus calls us to love one another is so that we might experience the fullness of joy ourselves.

The love shown to you must flow through you.

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<sup>25</sup> A discourse that began back in John 13:34, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”