

## **How To Love Your Church\*** *Even When You Don't Get Your Way!*

By Don Kimbro

Why do good people leave good churches in America today—sometimes with both barrels blazing? I have found that it usually has little to do with the preaching, or the worship or the fellowship of the saints. People today leave good churches, growing churches and sometimes even great churches—and their good friends as well—because they don't get their way. What a shame and what a waste!

I remember a new church I planted a few years ago. In the first few weeks, we had climbed in attendance all the way to thirty-two people. Eight of them were associated with one family. They had joined us a couple of weeks after we started and we were glad to have them, or so we thought. As it turned out, there was a matriarch in the group who didn't like the way we did communion or the selection and tempo of our music and she let us know about it. She fully expected that we would change it because she didn't like it. We didn't, so she left and so did the other seven. We lost twenty-five percent of our church in one day, because someone didn't get their way. I've seen this dear lady since and she was in her third church after leaving us. I would guess she's still trying to get her way!



Sadly, this type of situation is repeated in churches throughout America every week and tragically it will most likely happen in yours—all because some of the brethren have yet to grow up and are still full of themselves. I believe that God has an answer in His Word for this type of mis-behavior by His children and he speaks to it in the second chapter of the apostle Paul's letter to the church at Philippi (Phil. 2:1-16).

He starts with a series of presuppositions. "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose" (Phil. 2:1-2). Notice the number of times that Paul uses the word "if." I believe he's reminding us of the ways that Jesus Christ has touched each of our lives since we came to know him. Has he encouraged you? Has he comforted you with his love? Have you experienced his tenderness and compassion? Of course we have! If that be the case, then we should be like-minded, by demonstrating that same kind of comforting love, tenderness and compassion to one another.

How do we do that? By doing "nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit," while humbly considering others in the body of Christ as better than ourselves. "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4).

"Selfish ambition" — when did it all start? Probably on the day we were born. The very minute we left our mother's womb, we let out a shout demanding everyone's attention—and it worked! Isn't it amazing how little infants and toddlers, could care less whether mom or dad got any sleep last night or might be sick with the flu? Their shrieks for diaper changes, mommy's meals on wheels and "roll me over on my tummy" quickly become a way of life—twenty four hours a day. Babies learn right up front that all they have to do to get their way is to complain. Now that may be excusable for little infants—but for adults?

Today the dominant mood in our society seems to be one of demanding individual rights. You see and experience it everywhere as one group after another insists on some kind of self perceived equity. Unfortunately, this mind set has spilled over into the church, as well. When we became a Christian, however, I believe we gave up our right to be selfish and self-centered—our right to insist on having things our own way. That may be what the church experience is all about—a place where God puts us so we can learn how to become humble, by learning to consider others as better than ourselves. The church is a place where the interests and needs of others should always come first. The church is a testing ground—a place where we can learn how to grow up. Because we belong to Christ we belong to his church as well. We all have been "bought at a price" (1 Cor. 6:19-20), an extremely high price. You and I will spend the rest of our adult lives—if it takes that long—learning the truth about our self-centeredness and correcting it until we all "grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ" (Eph. 4:15).

Jesus is our greatest example. How do we line up with his attitude and his character? He was "in very nature God" but he "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant" and "he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:5-8).

The result of our Lord's humility and obedience to his Father's will was to be exalted to "the highest place" and to be given "a name that is above every name . . . in heaven and on earth and under the earth." There is no higher place. Someday every person who ever lived on the face of the earth (even the rebellious) will confess his Lordship "to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9-11).

Is it possible for you and I to have this same type of attitude in our most difficult times of conflict and confrontation — especially when we find ourselves not getting our way? Let me put that question another way. Would God command us to do something that was impossible to do? Jesus did not demand his rights, neither should we. He emptied himself of his rights. He "made himself nothing." So should we. He was totally subservient to his Father's will, even though he had every right as an equal. So must we be. In the whole process, he demonstrated what God wants us all to become toward one another — a servant. A servant of God and a servant of men.

A servant of God we can grasp but why a servant of men? Because therein lies our greatest difficulty and our greatest triumph when we succeed. Christ's humility in our behalf earned him a humiliating cross. Does he not tell us to do the very same? "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Lk. 9:23).

Paul now concludes with this admonition, ". . . continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." You can't do it on our own but with God's help, working through you, you can " become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation" shining "like stars in the universe" (Phil. 2:12-16).

Learning to let God work through you is the way in which we can work out our "salvation with fear and trembling." In other words, our ultimate deliverance from selfishness means we will become blameless, pure and without fault. Everything we do in our relationships with each other should be done without complaint or argument, so that God's purposes will prevail in the church as we work together to fulfill His calling. In so doing,

we will be different—a positive testimony to the world around us. If not, our continual complaining, bickering and selfishness will eliminate any distinction we may claim to be different than the rest of our culture.

How do we apply the truths we have learned from Paul's instructions? Consider these possibilities: If we don't like something in our church, rather than complaining about it, we have an obligation to help make it better. If we don't like the worship we can become an example of a true worshipper. Why not join the choir or offer to lead a song service? Don't know how—how about learning? When I first became a pastor, I trembled at leading songs of worship. But I learned how and now I love to sing and lead our church in worship. Perhaps you have complained about the quality of fellowship? Why don't you invite some people (not just your personal friends) from your church over to your house and break bread together. Have a cookout. Get to know the new members. You could also make a real effort to show up and support the functions your church does have. Is Sunday School lacking in your church? You could volunteer to teach a class—any class. Is leadership a problem? Why not offer your expertise in organization. Do you wish that your church would pray more? Why not start a prayer group in your home. Does your church lack certain programs for groups in need? You could help get one of them started. Do you have experience your church could use. Why not become a mentor? Jesus said it like this, "let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Mt. 5:16).

None of Paul's instructions ever included, "if you don't get your way, first complain loudly and if you don't get your way — then leave." If God has called you to your church, He's placed you there for a very good reason. It could be for you to learn how to become a humble servant while you mature in your faith. Learn these lessons now or your next stop won't be any different. Neither will you.

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