

Principles of Godly Persistence

Imagine a warship travelling through enemy territory during wartime. The signals room has warned of enemy boats and submarines in the area. However instead of being alert and being prepared for battle some of the crew have had disagreements and are busy fighting with each other. Others have gone below deck to indulge in drinking, whilst others have decided to take a nap. Would this ship make it through the enemy waters if attacked? Churches are often like such a warship. If a church is to be a church that persists no matter what trials and tribulations it goes through then it needs to have some basic principles that need to be adhered to.

Philippians 4: 2 – 9

1) The Principle of Unity

- Some of the believers in Philippi had some kind of a dispute and weren't getting their issue resolved.
 - These weren't some nominal Christians – these ladies, Euodia and Syntyche, had contended at Paul's side in the cause of the Gospel
 - Paul also refers to Clement, the rest of his fellow workers, whose names are written in the book of life.
 - These were strong, committed believers
- It is quite common for there to be disputes and disagreements in churches however the call to sort out differences and be united as the body of Christ is the heart of God.
 - John 17: 20 – 23 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.
- Jesus knew that there would be conflicts in the church but He intends that all conflicts be resolved and unity regained – hence His numerous teachings on forgiveness.
- Jesus taught that a divided kingdom would collapse
 - *Matthew 12:25* Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand
 - Historians tell us that the mighty Roman Empire fell because it collapsed from within. The Empire was rife with divisions and immorality and thus fell in on itself.
- When the church loses its primary focus of existence – the Gospel of Jesus Christ – and allows divisions within it it will collapse. It will no longer persist in its purpose.
- The parties who had the disputes weren't able to sort out their disagreements by themselves and thus Paul pleaded with "loyal yokefellow" (Syzygus) to mediate to help them reconcile their relationship and bring unity back into the fellowship of believers.
 - There are times when a neutral mediator needs to be brought into a church to help resolve disputes.

2) The Principle of Godly Attitudes

- A joyful attitude
 - True joy is not a thing of moods, not a capricious emotion, tied to fluctuating experiences. It is a state and condition of the soul. It survives through pain and sorrow and, like a subterranean spring, waters the whole life. It is intimately allied and bound up with love and goodness, and so is deeply rooted in the life of God.
- RUFUS MATTHEW JONES (1863–1948)
- Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.
 - A person who has lost their joy will soon lose their ability to persist through life issues as they will see everything as a tremendous burden to carry

- We should not allow disputes and disagreements in the church to rob us of our joy in the Lord. Remember that Paul's exhortation to rejoice in the Lord comes directly after an exhortation to disputing parties in the church to reconcile.
- A gentle attitude
 - Proverbs 15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.
 - The KJV uses the word "moderation" of which Adam Clarke states in his commentary: "Moderation," says Dr. Macknight, "means meekness under provocation, readiness to forgive injuries, equity in the management of business, candour in judging of the characters and actions of others, sweetness of disposition, and the entire government of the passions."
 - We ought to live as such knowing that the Lord is at hand.
 - Gentleness is a characteristic that is lived out in relationship with others and will be evident when done so.
- A trusting attitude
 - Matthew 13: 22 The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful
 - Isaiah 30: 15 In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength
 - .When we stop trusting God and start worrying about our lives we stop being fruitful in the kingdom
 - We stop persisting through the issues of life because we think that it is up to us to get us through forgetting that we can take everything to God in prayer and leave them with Him
- The outcome of a joyful, gentle and trusting attitude is the peace of God which transcends all understanding that will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus
 - John Wesley failed decisively in Georgia, but the experience proved to be important to his future career. The preface to this American disaster came during a violent storm on the voyage from England. Wesley was cowering in fear of death yet witnessed the unexplainable peace experienced by a group of Moravian Brethren who were his fellow travelers. An interview with the Moravians' leader upon landing in Georgia set in motion John's search for the living reality of the doctrines he preached.

Who's who in Christian history

 - Do we have the peace of God in this way although the world around us may be in chaos?

3) The Principle of Right Thinking

- So often we think about the wrong things and the problem is that we normally become what we think.
 - It is not that we consciously become what we think but when we think on certain lines we believe it to be true – sometimes objectively true – however internalise the truth of the matter to make it subjectively true.
 - If we constantly think about the negative issues in our country and that is all we think about we become angry, bitter and negative people.
 - This is the case for all thinking
- We are thus exhorted to think about what is true – according to God's Word – noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable
 - Not are we only to think about such things but we are to put them into practice – we are to become them
 - This is why meditation on the Word of God is so important – that we might become what we think and may that be the character of God
- If we are to be a church that persists then we need to be a church of right thinking.