

After 18 years of living with my father who, if you were to ask anyone in my home town who knew him, they would tell you that he was a very opinionated person. And in over 30 years in church work, years where I have had to listen to so many, so called experts give opinions, my brain is about numb in this one particular area.

And besides all this, probably another 45 years of concentrated study and observation of human beings and why I think they act, and communicate like they do including at times my own speech, motives, desires, and failures, I have come to some conclusions.

My first conclusion is, sadly as I grow older I find that I am becoming more opinionated and more vocal about those opinions. And if you don't believe me just ask my wife. Yet I don't want to end up like my father, or even many in the churches that I have known over the years.

So today I want to think about a special subject through a study of

Kissing cousins

Doctor to patient: 'You are very sick?

Patient: Can I get a second opinion?

Doctor: Yes, you are very ugly too?

Now we laugh at things like this, but when it comes to opinions they are something we all have, something we all face and something we all have to deal with.

As I thought about opinions, and how they are delivered, they remind me of a special and unique creature in nature called the puffer fish, also known as the blow fish. Puffer fish are generally believed to be the second-most poisonous vertebrate in the world, after the Golden Poison Frog.

The puffer or blowfish is generally unattractive; it has a large mouth and a wrinkled body that looks like worn-out leather. They may bite rather than inflate in order to free themselves. If the fish is small, it may only be an uncomfortable pinch; however, a larger puffer can draw blood, or even remove scoops of flesh.

There are more than 120 species of puffer fish worldwide. Most are found in tropical and subtropical ocean waters, but some species live in brackish and even fresh water. People can often be like the puffer or blow fish which, after years of observation, I see in this area of one's opinions

A little flattery, a little tickling of their vanity and they swell up, giving the appearance of greatness. Pride in our opinions inflates us, and puffs us up like the blow or pufferfish. But I

have also found that there's usually nothing much substantial about them. If we are not careful we may find that, like the blowfish, some times we are mostly a lot of air.

I would suggest that there are several areas where these cousins seem to resemble one another

- They both are dangerous. They poison and can kill those that recklessly come in contact with them
- They are common in the oceans of earth; they are common among the people of earth, especially it seems in the church.
- Neither are necessarily the prettiest fish in the aquarium of life.
- They often have a big mouth and instead of a dried up skin like the blow fish, in the church however they have a dried up heart, mind and spirit.

We live in an age where it seems like everyone has an opinion about something **and** there are many who will not hesitate to share theirs with anyone who will listen.

In those 30 plus years as a pastor, I have found that there are some very overly opinionated believers. People who share those opinions even if it angers the listener, hurts others, or bores them to death.

To address this trend and its examples even from my own life I want to use a couple of special verses from the book of Philippians that I have been thinking about 2:3,4 says *Don't act out of selfish ambition or be conceited. Instead, humbly think of others as being better than yourselves. Don't be concerned only about your own interests, but also be concerned about the interests of others.*

One of the first things from these verses that jumped out at me as I was working on this and trying to think it through is found in the words in V 4 *Don't be concerned only about your own interests*

As I thought about it, the idea came to me that opinions often come from being overly concerned and puffed up about our personal interests and abilities.

Here are the words that came to me. Our own interests are at least four things. Concerned mainly about

- Our own goals
- Our own plans
- Our own dreams

- Our own opinions

But whose opinion is it anyways? Is that opinion right? Does my opinion promote a Philippians 2:3,4 type of church or does it hinder it? What does God think about our opinions and their impact on his church?

I. Definitions First,

The difference between Fact and Opinion

A fact is something that can be proven. It contains knowledge that is based on real occurrences. **For example:** Abe Lincoln was the 16th President of the United States.

An opinion on the other hand is a belief or conclusion that can't be proven. It merely tells how someone feels or what someone thinks. **For example:** I think the leaves are the prettiest in the fall of the year.

I would further suggest that the more opinionated a person is about an issue, the less they know about the facts. Why would I think this way? Because facts don't change therefore, there is no need for opinions which do change.

II. The life expectancy of an opinion

Most opinions live on eternally or at least until the one holding that opinion dies. Those who are very opinionated usually hold on to those opinions long after the world or church has moved on to another set of issues that need to be confronted and dealt with in life.

The extra strong opinion holder is often bound up in the sadness, anger, and bitterness of yesterday. So in a nutshell, opinions live on and on in the mind and heart of the holder and, while in that process, they miss much of life.

III. Thoughts on opinions

Our opinions are not necessarily fact though we might want others to believe they are. Opinions do not make any of us an expert even though we might want others to think we are.

Opinions are affected and **infected** by our attitudes and desires. Sadly most of us suffer from the **Madonna complex** when it comes to opinions. She once said Listen; everyone is entitled to my opinion.

Sadly when it comes to opinions, too many fall into the trap laid out in the observation by President Kennedy who said Too often we... enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought.

IV. Questions relating to the formation of opinions

These questions go right to the heart of the verses we are using as a guide today from Philippians 2:3, 4. How about these for starters and I am sure you can come up with others.

- A. Are my opinions formed by my desire for what I want or how I think things should be? Or are they formed according to what God's plan the church is?
- B. Are my opinions formed by what is best for the group, or just for me, myself, and I?
- C. Are my opinions shared with others as I would want them to share theirs with me?

When it comes to this and how we think and share our opinions, I would suggest that we all think on these questions.

What would happen to me?

If God judged me as I judge others

If God thought of me as I think of others

If God spoke to me and of me as I speak to and of others especially when sharing an opinion

IV. Opinions expressed

A. Expressed from the point of **rights only**.

In other words we all have the right to have, and express, an opinion.

And when expressed from the area of rights only, it often goes like this:

Say what we want, to who we want, and how we want, because it is my right

B. Expressed from the point of **responsibility, respect, and love**.

This is more detailed as we will see in our next point

V. Opinions responsibilities further explained

A while back in a sermon I looked at the difference between freedom and responsibility. Today I want to take a closer look at responsibilities as it relates to opinions.

Especially in the area of opinions one of the things I have observed, heard, and sometimes practiced myself as I get older is, it is my right. When I speak my opinion from that perspective only, I am more interested in my rights, my feelings, my ideas etc. than I am about my responsibility that is found in our verse.

As we get ready to close, it might be a good time to remind ourselves of what God's word says. Philippians 2:3,4 reminds us, *Don't act out of selfish ambition or be conceited. Instead, humbly think of others as being better than yourselves. Don't be concerned only about your own interests, but also be concerned about the interests of others.*

As Paul G. Apple says, in the bigger picture, the secret to humbling ourselves lies in making others great. And to his idea I would also add, and in forming and sharing our opinions and their building up of others, or in causing division and selfish motives

So what must I do to draw an opinion and express it according to responsibility? First,

Where as expressing according to **my rights only**, it is to say to others what I want, to whom I want, and how I want. But we also see that according to responsibility. We have the responsibility to search for the facts and think through an issue and its impact on others, instead of just spouting off how we think and feel on an issue. We have a responsibility to **realize** that not everyone will see the issue like we do. Therefore I have the responsibility to not honestly get mad if they don't.

Also I have the responsibility when encountering an issue to do three things.

- A. Ask myself, is my opinion on the issue based on Paul's admonition which is basically to think it through for the welfare of the other person or persons.
- B. Then think my way through it in love. How did I reason out the facts that brought me to that conclusion?
- C. To express my conclusion in love In other words, expressing my conclusions in a loving tone, rather than in a condescending, snooty, egotistical, or superior, manner.

A passage that comes to mind concerning this point is found in Ephesians 4:29 *When you talk, do not say harmful things, but say what people need—words that will help others become stronger. Then what you say will do good to those who listen to you.*

Sometimes what we say is not as harmful as the way we say it, and what we expect others to do with it. If my opinion is forced onto others or even shared with them and in the process I become condescending, snooty, and egotistical with my words in trying to promote that opinion, I may do more to hurt another person in the body than all of my opinions, no matter how good I think they are, or they might actually be.

VI. The benefits of sharing our opinions in a manner such as this and how it fits into our verses for today.

When we take time to think carefully through an issue, when we look at it in the context of what is best for the group, and when we express our opinions as **our** opinions and express them in love and gentleness, we offer another the chance to possibly learn new information and ways of looking at things in a way that can make their life and walk easier. That is love and it is following our theme verses more closely

When it comes to strongly held opinions remember the words of **Tryon Edwards** who said "He that never changes his opinions, never corrects his mistakes, and will never be wiser on the morrow than he is today."

Someone else said it this way, a wise man changes his mind a fool never does. So in the end, it does not matter what my opinion of you is, or your opinion of me, or our opinion of the church and her people.

What matters is our view of our self about how we conduct ourselves and most of all God's opinion of us and our relationship to our verse with its command being used for promoting a healthy church life not just to hold to our own ideas, especially if the church be damaged in the process.

One final thought: One thing in life is not an opinion but a fact based on the word of God and that is to die without Christ is to simply and finally miss the lifeboat bound for heaven and remain on the Titanic chained to a post as it goes down.

If you would like to be sure you are on the lifeboat bound for heaven then why not follow the facts listed below, do what they tell you and finally be sure your chains on the sinking ship are broken?

Realize you are a sinner Romans 3:23

Understand that the payday for sin is death or eternal conscious separation from God. Romans 6:23a

Know that there is a way of escape for you. Romans 6:23b and John 1:12

Desire to escape and pray this or a similar prayer.

"Dear God, I know I am a sinner. I am truly sorry for my sins, and I confess them all to You [name them]. Lord Jesus, forgive all my sins and come into my heart as my Saviour and Lord. I

receive You right now. Help me from this time forward to live for You. Thank You for hearing and answering my prayer. In Jesus' name. Amen."

On the _____ day of _____ I became a Christian by inviting Jesus Christ into my life to forgive my sin.

Signed: _____

If you have further questions or have chosen to do this, be sure to let us know so we can help you, pray for you and encourage you in your new life.

You can reach us at lapeerchurch@gmail.com Subject line: (Salvation)