

Unity Through Humility
Philippians 2:1-8

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Open with a short story regarding Mary's and my initial visit to Northwest and meeting Paul and Claudia Neel.

Good morning. What we will be talking about this morning is Paul's encouragement in Philippians 2 toward unity through humility and our perspectives on relationships. As we begin the following is a rather telling cartoon that may define some of our outlooks.



There are many character qualities that many of us see as more desirable than humility. We like to be thought of as kind, patient or even just a good person. Truth be told, humility is a quality that we think others should have toward us like, I will be humble with them soon as they are with me. I don't think any of us would actually say this, but it is how many of us approach humility. This may be because we do not understand what humility truly is. A very simple, yet profound definition of humility is, seeing ourselves as we truly are, image bearers of God of great value, but fallen in sin and helpless without God. I am reminded of the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector who were both in the temple to pray. The Pharisee attempted to justify himself, by listing his good deeds while the tax collector's prayer was simply, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner. The tax collector saw himself as he truly was.

When we see acts of humility it often breaks us. Although driving in San Antonio can be treacherous, I do see occasions of drivers courteously allowing others to merge. Sometimes I feel a sense of shame when I remember that just a few minutes earlier I did not allow someone to merge in front of me. (Break) I was on a short-term mission's trip to Haiti a number of years ago. One evening after a devotional by one of the Haitian pastors, he and 8 other pastors washed the feet of all of us who were there on the mission's trip. I understood to a very small degree Peter not wanting Jesus to wash his feet as these pastors humbly washed our feet.

Before we look at our text from Philippians 2, let's look at the background of the Philippian church. Philippi was a Roman city known for its military presence. Paul came here during his second missionary journey around 50 AD. Philippi was the first Christian community established in Europe. It seems that Lydia was the first Christian convert in Europe as described in Acts 16:14. Paul and Silas were then arrested, beaten and imprisoned in Philippi without benefit of a trial. As you may recall, the jailer was saved along with his household. After being released, Paul continued on his second missionary journey. Paul's letter to the Philippians was written 11 years later during another imprisonment which was in Rome. So, we see that the church had been established for a few years when this letter was written.

Paul begins the letter by referring to himself as a bond-servant of Jesus Christ. This is the only letter of Paul where he refers to himself solely as a bond-servant. In his letter to Titus, he refers to himself as a bond-servant of God and apostle of Jesus Christ. In most of his other letters he refers to himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ. I don't think that Paul used this term lightly. Based on Paul's life after his conversion, it is apparent that this was how he defined himself – as one given over totally to his Master, Jesus Christ. For a bond-servant is one who choose to serve his master for life demonstrating total commitment and

loyalty. I believe that Paul introduces himself this way purposefully because of the issues that he needs to address.

Paul expresses great love, admiration and confidence in the Philippian church as he begins the letter. He says in verses 3 and 4 of chapter 1,

Philippians 1:3-4 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all.

I can imagine as the letter was read to the church, that there was much encouragement for those in attendance. There may even have been an opportunity to get a little proud of themselves.

But there is an issue that Paul needs to address. Verse 27 of chapter 1 begins an admonition by Paul in which he encourages the church to “stand firm in one spirit with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel. There appears to be a lack of unity being experienced in the church.

So as we begin our look at chapter 2, Paul continues that exhortation with 4 if statements:

Philippians 2:1 If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion,

Let’s look at each of these.

1. If there is any encouragement in Christ. We know that there certainly is. Jesus is our Lord and Savior who died for the sins of the world. He rose again and conquered death **Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven, having conquered death and sin. He intercedes with the Father on our behalf in our weakness.** I am very encouraged by this. John 3:16
2. If there is any consolation of love. Many translations render this Comfort of love. Paul said to the Corinthians in 2 Cor 5:14 “For the love of Christ controls us having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died. What a comfort it is to know that my sin penalty has been paid!
3. If any fellowship of the Spirit. 1 Cor 2:12 says, “Now we have received not the spirit from the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God”. Yes, we do have fellowship with the Holy Spirit. But this “If” also refers to our fellowship with each other. We have a special bond of unity through the Holy Spirit which indwells us.
4. Any affection and compassion. These 2 terms in the Greek are splankna and oiktirmos. Splanka is a very graphic term and refers to the bowels or innards

of a person, and thus refers to being “churned up inside”. In fact, the word used in the King James is “bowels”. This is the same word used in Matthew 9:36 referring to Jesus emotional state when He saw the crowd as sheep without a shepherd.

With oiktirmos (and its word group), various translations include compassion, mercy, pity. It is used in Colossians 3:12-14 - describing the attitudes Christians are to adopt when, as children of God, we deal with each other. (I will read these verses)

We do see that all 4 of the above are obviously confirmed. **Although Paul has experienced great joy in his relationship with this church, it is clear from verse 2 that there is something missing, that there is a greater level of joy that he wishes to experience.** This being the case, Paul requests the Philippians to make his joy complete. And the way they can do this is through unity, being united. This will be the icing on the cake. So, let’s look at Verse 3

Philippians 2:3 Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent of 1 purpose.

Paul says to make my joy complete by:

1. Being of the same mind. Does this mean that we are all to think exactly alike? Are we to have the same preferences, to cheer for the same teams, to enjoy the same hobbies? Well of course not. Other translations say to be like-minded. Here it means that we as followers of Jesus need to be of the same mind when it comes to our purpose. We understand that we have different gifts and abilities. But as individual parts of the body of Christ we are all working toward the same purpose under the headship of Christ. We serve a function within the body of Christ as mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, teachers, evangelists, greeters, employees, employers etc. It is not just our ministry within the church building. It is all that God has our lives involved with. Our function within the body of Christ does not end when we walk out the door.
2. Maintaining the same love. Love does not come and go. It is not based on feelings. To love is to choose to be loving when I don’t have the feelings. Paul’s admonition to maintain the same love communicates that it is a choice. Do I maintain my love for my spouse in the middle of a conflict? Often, I do not. Do I maintain my love for my children even after giving them the same instruction numerous times?
3. United in spirit. This communicates being of one accord, being harmonious or to be in agreement. How is this possible if there are things that we do not have the same opinion about? **We do this by relinquishing our need to be “right”, by desiring unity more than being right. Nowhere is scripture are we told that we are to be right in**

everything. As we see, over and over we are instructed to be united. We have to get to the point where unity is more important to us than being right.

4. Intent on one purpose. Of these 4, this one to me is the most challenging. Paul does not say simply to have the same purpose. He says to be INTENT. According to Paul, I am to be determined to have the same purpose. Why does Paul use such strong instruction here? I believe it is because if we have the same purpose, unity follows more easily. It seems that Paul is again, as with his point of “Being of the same mind”, is simply encouraging the Philippians in their unity.

Paul’s admonishment could seem very daunting. I am imagining this letter being read to the Philippian church for the first time. The quarrels that some may have been having in the church could have seemed overwhelming. But Paul does not give them the instruction only. He tells the church how to accomplish this in verses 3-4.

Philippians 2:3 – **Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself.**

Paul is addressing the church specifically and the issues detracting from their unity. But he makes it clear that NOTHING should be done from a selfish motive. Paul wants them to understand that the selfishness that they are displaying with each other has no place outside the church either, even with unbelievers. It is not as though we can be humble toward those in the church, but treat those outside the church with selfishness. So, who are those that we treat with selfishness:

- Children with their parents
- Parents with their children
- My spouse
- Employees with bosses
- Bosses with employees
- Other drivers
- People in the grocery store
- Neighbors
- The city digging up my yard – anyone who knows where I live understands that this is a personal one
- It can be anywhere that we interact with people

Our reasons might be just. But reacting with selfishness never is as Paul says to do nothing from selfishness. Maintaining the same love (from above) or choosing to love when I don’t have the feelings, is evidence of considering others more important than myself. What are the evidences of selfishness in relationships:

- Anger
- Impatience
- Shutting down (the silent treatment)
- Defensiveness
- Gossip
- Stubbornness
- Thoughts that run through my head, that I may not say, but that put another person down. As a side note, a great verse regarding our thought life is 2 Cor 10:5.
 - **2 Corinthians 10:5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.**

I believe that if we applied this verse just a little more than we currently do, it would transform our relationships.

Let's look at verse 4

Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also the interests of others.

We see here that it is not wrong to look out for your own interests. God had made each of us with our own likes and dislikes, preferences, talents, gifts and just things that we enjoy doing. Those personal interests are part of what makes us who we are. In that awareness of our own interests, it is critical that we are not only aware of, but that we also take an interest in what others are interested. Why is this important? Because it is so much a part of relationships. It communicates that this person is important to me. That does not mean that I will necessarily get involved in their interests. My wife volunteers at the Alamo. It is not something that I ever envision doing myself. But I love to hear the stories of who she has gotten to speak with that day. It is a blessing to me when she gets to share the story of how she got to share the story of the Alamo with someone who only speaks Spanish. (Mary speaks Spanish better than I speak English).

So how do we genuinely take an interest in others?

Ask questions – when I am engaged in conversation with someone, even if it is someone who I have known for a while, I can get to know them even better by asking questions. When we greet someone with, “How are you”, do we really want to know or is it just a formality?

Engage with someone who you don't know –

Reach out to someone who you may not have seen at church for a while –

Enlarge your circle of acquaintances by introducing yourself to someone you don't know. This is a great time to ask questions.

If you already know what someone else is interested in, you might send them an article relating to that interest. Or you may buy them gift relating to that interest.

Some of this entails getting out of your comfort zone. But in getting out of your current comfort zone, you may find a new one. And besides, where did this idea of our comfort zone come from?

After his admonition to do NOTHING from selfishness and to regard others as more important than myself, Paul gives us the how to in verse 5 and following. This is the key verse in this passage:

Philippians 2:5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus

What is that attitude? We need to look at verses 6-8 to understand what that attitude is:

Philippians 2:6-8 who although He existed in the form of God, (1) did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but (2) emptied Himself (3) taking the form of a bond-servant and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He (4) HUMBLED Himself by becoming obedient to the point of (5) death even death on a (6) cross.

Let's take a look at the levels of humility that Jesus chose:

1. He existed in the form of God. There are 2 words in Greek for the word form. The one used here is *morphe* which is used to describe the outward expression which corresponds to the inner reality of a person or object. So when it says that Jesus existed in the form of God, the Word is stating that the essence of who Jesus is, is God.
But then it says that He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself. This absolutely does not mean that He relinquished His deity. Jesus was still God. But what Jesus did do was lay aside His privileges as God.
To illustrate, there used to be a show called Undercover Boss. The owner of a company would take a job within his or her company. He would work alongside many of the employees so that he could understand the dynamics of how the company operated. He was still the owner of the company, but he set aside his privileges for the benefit of seeing the innerworkings of the company.
2. Taking the form of a bond-servant. Jesus did not just humble Himself to become a man. He became subservient to the Father to do His will. We saw earlier from

Paul's description of himself what a bond-servant is. Jesus freely chose to be subservient to the Father and to do His will. As He said in Gethsemane, "Father not My will, but Thine be done".

3. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death. **"For one will hardly die for a righteous man, though perhaps for a good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:7-8.** Jesus who was sinless died at the hands of sinners, for sinners to pay the penalty for sinners that we as sinners could never pay because of our sin.
4. Even death on a cross. Crucifixion was meant to be a very humiliating way to die. It was use for agitators of the state, slaves who had escaped and committed crimes of those with no civil rights. It was used to make examples and to deter others from committing the same offenses. Why did Jesus have to experience such an excruciation death? I don't know for certain. But think about this. Jesus was taking on the sins of the world. He was paying penalty for sins past present and future. He was not just dying for sin. He was taking on the sentence that our sin deserves.

Paul's instruction in how to consider others as more important than myself is by having the attitude that Jesus had when he was on this earth as a man. Jesus' life was only for others.

For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. Mat. 20:28.

So how do we "Have this attitude in ourselves which was also in Christ Jesus" – this attitude of humility? It doesn't just happen when we are in the moment, when we are in circumstances that cause us to be disunited. It happens outside of the moment, when I humbly confess to God my contribution to disunity. It happens when I go to the person that I may consider beneath me and actively work to build a relationship with them. It happens when I prayerfully consider how I can encourage others. The regarding of others as more important than myself is a mindset that Jesus had constantly, and one that we need to develop. Now, when someone comes up to you after the service to talk, do not assume that they think less of you. This is what Paul meant a few verses later when he said to, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure". The Holy Spirit wants to work in our hearts to develop these sorts of transformations in our character.

As we close in prayer, let's all pray individually that we will allow God to work in our heart to break us of the things that cause strife and disunity in our relationships. In other words, God, help us to stop being selfish. After we pray we will sing the Doxology.

Doxology at end.