

1. The Necessity of Thinking Together (2:1-2)

As Americans we have a tendency towards individualism.

When I was in seminary, I met a lot of Korean students
who really struggled with this.

In their culture, the way that you learned
was to adopt your teacher’s way of thinking and talking.

For them, that was honor.

In the US, that’s called plagiarism!

What Paul is talking about in Philippians 2 is a way of thinking together
that is quite different from the modern American way of thinking for yourself.

In a span of 4 verses, from 2:2 to 2:5 Paul uses the word “phroneo” three times.

The word “phroneo” means “to think” –
and the ESV translates it “mind” in all three instances.

It is not always possible to do this!

After all, the same word is found in 1:7,
where Paul says “it is right for me to *feel* this way about you.”

The word there is “to think”!

The word *phroneo* – in this context – means to think a certain way,
to have a certain perspective or mindset.

Paul is saying that your way of thinking about one another
is to be the same as Christ's way of thinking about you.

So if Christ is at work in you, then his attitude--his mindset--his perspective on life--
should characterize all of you.

In verses 1-2 Paul sets forth a fourfold if-then statement.

*2:1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ,
[if there is] any comfort from love,
[if there is] any participation in the Spirit,
[if there is] any affection and sympathy,*

If these four things are true –

if being in Christ produces encouragement and comfort,
if sharing in the Holy Spirit produces love, affection and sympathy,
then Paul says, complete my joy in four ways:

*2 complete my joy by being of the same mind,
having the same love,
being in full accord*

and of one mind.

These four things are the expression of the encouragement that we have “in Christ.”
These four things flow out of the love that we share in the Holy Spirit.

Be of the same mind –

literally—“have the same thoughts.”

Christians are to think alike –

we are to have the same mindset, the same perspective.

And the reason why is because we have been united to Christ,

and his attitude--his mindset—his way of thinking has become ours.

Notice that the second result flows from the second “if” –

if there is any comfort from love--have the same love.

When you experience the love of God – practice the same love!

And the third result flows from the third “if” –

if there is any fellowship with the Spirit—then be united in your very souls--

be harmonious (“of one accord”)

because the same Holy Spirit indwells all of you.

And finally, if there is any affection and sympathy, be of one mind,

and here again we have the word *phroneo*--"think the same thoughts".

If Christ has united you to himself, then you should think the same thoughts together.

What does Paul mean by this?

Is he saying that we have to agree on every point of theology?

No, keep reading.

What sort of thoughts should you think?

2. Oh the Thinks We Think! (2:3-4)

This is the second point:

The chief characteristic of this attitude--this mindset--is humility.

3 Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Paul insists that you are not to do anything out of selfish ambition,

out of rivalry or vain conceit,

but rather that you are to consider others as more significant than yourselves.

In verse four, all translations water down the force of what Paul says:

Paul did not say "Each of you should look not *only* to his own interests"
he said, "Each of you should look **not** to his own interests,
but to the interests of others."

Literally, "each looking not to his own things,
but rather each to the things of others."

There is a curious grammatical point that is hard to render into English.

In verse 4, the first "each" is singular,
but the second "each" is plural!
English doesn't have a plural for "each"!

In other words, "each of you (singular) should look not to his own things,
but rather each all of you (plural) should look to the things of others."

What does this mean?

Paul is saying that you may not have an individualistic way of thinking about life.
You may not look after your own interests!
Rather, y'all (or maybe y'each is the plural of each!)
but all you each's must think first of the interests of others.

Why am I making such a big deal about this point of translation?

Why do I insist that you may *not* seek your own interests?
Look down to v21.

Paul says that he has no one like Timothy –
who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.
"For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ."

It's the same construction as verse 4.

Timothy is not interested in his own things – but the things of Christ.
Therefore he is genuinely concerned for their welfare.

Paul is saying that the Christian has no business looking after his own interests--
after all, as we will see,

Jesus Christ was not concerned with his own interests,
but with the interests of his people.

Even so, you are not to seek your own good,
but the good of others.

True humility (verse 3) puts aside all rivalry, ambition, and conceit,
and seeks to encourage and love others,
putting their needs and interests first.

You all probably know someone who is "married to his job".

Such a man often thinks that needs to do this to provide for his family.

He is concerned with status, standard of living,
"keeping up with the Jones's" --

but if it interferes with his responsibilities as a husband and father,
then it is nothing but selfish ambition.
if it damages the interests of his wife and children,
then it is simply vain conceit.

More subtle perhaps is the way we interact in the church--
too often we are more interested in promoting our own concerns,
then with humbly submitting to the interests of others.
The church turns into a battlefield of competing interests--
everyone convinced that his or her way is the right way,
and true humility becomes hard to find.

True humility is willing not only to give assistance,
but is also willing to ask for help when it is needed.

But that can only happen when Christians are willing to put down their defenses,
and reflect the encouragement,
love,
participation in the Spirit,
and affection which we have in Christ.

But how can we do this?

How can we be truly humble?

How can we put aside our selfish ambition,
and really consider others better than ourselves?

Paul answers by pointing us to Jesus Christ.

3. Humility and Humiliation (2:5-11)

Our third point is that true humility is rooted and grounded in the humiliation of Christ--
in his incarnation, his suffering and his death.

5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

After all, consider the heights of his glory throughout all eternity past
as he dwelt in perfect unity with the Father before all ages.

6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

The humiliation of Christ, according to the Westminster Larger Catechism,

"was that low condition, wherein he for our sakes, emptying himself of his glory,
took upon him the form of a servant, in his conception and birth,

life, death, and after his death, until his resurrection."

It was not that he emptied himself of his deity--
had he done that he could not have saved us--
rather, he veiled his glory by taking on the form of a servant.

He who was God--the eternal I AM--
came as a man,
for the glory of God,
and the salvation of his people.

This is the most amazing act of humility--
God--the immortal, eternal, holy, wise, unchanging Creator of the Universe,
became a creature.

The Divine Lawgiver became one under his own law.

He who knew not sin,
whose very nature was righteousness in itself
became sin for us--and for our salvation.

He who had life in himself--who had given life to all creatures--
died, was buried, and descended into hell.

He who had existed in perfect communion with the Father from all eternity
was forsaken by his Father.

How often do you stop to consider what really happened in the incarnation?

How often do you stop to think about what happened at the cross?

The spotless lamb of God took upon himself the sins of the world--
the holy one of Israel now bore the brunt of God's wrath against sin.

Yes, the physical pain of crucifixion was excruciating,
but the isolation of the eternal Son of God from the Father,
and the outpouring of the Father's wrath,
was greater than any agony known to mankind.

Yes, he has two natures – God and man – but in one person!

But the communion of properties between his two natures is such,
that whatever happened according to the properties of his humanity,
happened to his person.

It was the whole Christ that suffered.

Nothing less would do.

As man, he had to pay the price for our sin--
yet only his true deity could give his sacrifice infinite worth.

Why did the Eternal Son of God do this?

Because he considered you to be more important than himself.

That used to shock people--

but today we seem to think that it makes perfect sense.

Of course God loves us--why shouldn't he?

Because we are rebels and traitors --

we are wicked and despicable sinners.

WE take every opportunity we can to further our own interests--

Talk about selfish ambition!

Just look around you!

Our whole society has become consumed by greed!

Why has this happened?

We seek for happiness and blessing from any number of sources--

setting our hopes and desires on people, our work, or ideas,

and not setting our hopes and desires upon God alone.

Jesus said to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul,

all your mind, and all your strength--

yet we give our hearts and minds to all sorts of other things.

So why should God love you?

He doesn't need you.

You stink in his nostrils.

You have rebelled against his commandments,

ignored his grace time and again,

and you have preferred your own interests to his--

what should stop him from sending you straight to hell?

Fortunately, God is not a man--

he is not a creature, that he should think like we do.

He does not reward us as we deserve,

but rather he shows mercy,

and displays before us the very humility which we have failed to exhibit.

He placed your interests--your salvation--

above his own interests.

Christ Jesus--the eternal Son of God--

did not regard being equal with God a thing to be grasped,

something to hold on to--

but willingly emptied himself of his glory,

and became a man--

just so that you and I could be saved.

It is this humility which Paul calls us to.

And yet Paul does not stop there--

Paul goes on to point us to the exaltation of Christ in verses 9-11

9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

If all we had was the humiliation of Christ,
it would be a poignant, tragic illustration of humility,
but also a rather hollow one,

because Christ's death only has meaning in the context of the resurrection.

And in the exaltation of Christ,
his victory gains meaning for us,
because it is the resurrected and ascended Christ
who sat down at the right hand of the Father, on the throne of David,
inaugurating the kingdom of God

He was given the name above all names.

What does this mean?

It means that Jesus Christ has been made Lord of the universe--
not merely as God--he was that before--
but now as the human king over all things.

It is at the very human name of Jesus that all creatures will bow,
and every tongue will confess that the Messiah, Jesus is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

This means that humanity has been restored to favor with God--
and all who bow the knee to Jesus Christ,
and humble themselves before him,
will also be exalted with him.

The Eternal Son of God has returned to the right hand of God,
but something new has happened.

There is now a man sitting at the right hand of the Father as well.

Jesus Christ, the one who is true God and true man,
is now the sovereign Lord of the universe,
and everyone who belongs to him will share in his glory.

Conclusion: Work Out Your Salvation with Fear and Trembling (12-13)

Therefore, Paul is saying, if this is the sort of God and Savior that you have,
keep working out your salvation with fear and trembling
because God will accomplish his good purposes--
and he is the one who is at work in you.

Verses 12-13 return us to the original thought of verses 1-4.

You are to have the attitude, the mindset, the perspective, of Christ Jesus.

This attitude is chiefly characterized by humility--

and humility is defined by the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, because you are in Christ,
continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,
because it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

This fear and trembling is the fear and trembling that should come when you realize
how awesome God really is.

Paul is saying something like this:

"If one day all creation is going to fall on their faces at the name of Jesus,
shouldn't we experience a little of that fear and trembling now?"

Further, this fear and trembling is not to be confused with terror.
Only five verses later Paul is going to call the Philippians
to rejoice in the middle of their trials,
so clearly this is not some sort of terror.

But rather let us consider the reason why Paul tells them to work out their salvation
with fear and trembling.

It is because God is at work in them both to will and to do for his good pleasure.
For Paul, that is a reason for fear and trembling.

Perhaps you and I have become so used to thinking about God being at work in us
that we forget how incredible that really is.

Before the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost
it was a rare thing for God to work IN his people.

In the OT, the Holy Spirit only worked upon a few--
usually the leaders--the kings and the prophets or judges.

It was only because of what Jesus Christ did in his death and resurrection
that God was able to pour out the Holy Spirit upon all his people.

Now, the Holy God can work in the hearts of sinful people,
because Jesus Christ has taken away our sin, and given us his righteousness.

Finally, I would like to call your attention to a small point of grammar,
which indicates a huge point in theology:
the "you" in verses 12 and 13 is plural.

Paul is not simply telling individuals to work out their salvation independently,
rather he is telling all of you to work out your salvation together--
for it is God who works in you--or perhaps we should translate it,
"it is God who works among you"
to will and to do for his good pleasure!

This goes back to what Paul said in chapter 1, verse 19,
that their prayers would work out for his salvation.

Paul understood that he was not an island--
he was not a Lone Ranger Christian.
He needed the Philippians.
In fact, Paul needed them so much that he said that the Philippians' prayers
would result in his salvation.
That is how much you need each other.

Salvation includes not merely justification, but also sanctification and glorification.
Your salvation is already accomplished in Jesus Christ,
but in the ongoing application of redemption,
God uses other believers for his purposes in your salvation.

Your prayers for one another have an effect--
when the church is strong, it is because Christians are praying for each other
when the church is weak,
it is often because Christians are cold in their prayers.

So all of you, together, as Michiana Covenant Church,
are to work out your salvation—together.

Why?

Because it is God who is at work in you--
and he will bring to completion the good work which he has begun in you.

But if God is at work in you, then your lives ought to show it.

It will take time--
you--like everyone else--are a stubborn, selfish, greedy, unkind sinner,
and it's going to take time--
but you must begin to put into practice the attitude of Christ--
the mindset of humility.

Don't let our selfish and greedy culture lure you away--
put the interests of others ahead of your own.

One commentator has said
that the only obstacle to unity in the church is selfishness.
We would do well to think about that!

If you will honestly put the interests of others ahead of your own--
and resist the temptation to insist upon having your own way,
but with humility and gentleness, you seek to be united in spirit and purpose,
then I cannot imagine any obstacle
that could hinder your love for one another.