

The Heart of Humility

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Philippians 2:1-11

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Good Morning Redeemer, It is so good to be with you all this morning! If you have a Bible with you, would you please open it up to Philippians 2 verse 1. Today We are going to work through a passage that is easily one of my all-time favorites. Not only is this an outright excellent passage, but it is also incredibly timely for us to hear. In the beginning of the second chapter of his Letter to the Philippian church, Paul is providing an antidote to one of the most serious plagues to ever face the Church.

Paul is providing a cure to the plague of disunity.

Now, I am sure you can all agree with me that this cure is desperately needed in the Church today. Over the last two years we have seen a significant increase in the amount of hostility and disunity between brothers and sisters in Christ. I do not want to minimize how problematic that is.

Disunity is not always easily spotted. It is easy for us to see the openly defiant and aggressive brother or sister, it is not easy for us to spot the gossiper or the slanderer or the one holding a grudge against another. That is where unity gets broken down. That is what divides the body of Christ!

Disunity and Division in the Church not only hurt those inside the Church, but it mars and discredits the name of Christ!

If Christians can't get along, then what does that say about Jesus? The gospel of Jesus Christ can't be anything special if those who profess faith in it can't stand each other.

The Church witnesses to the world through its unity.

In fact. In the verses preceding our passage this morning the apostle Paul says that very thing. In Philippians 1:27-28 Paul says

”Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.” (Philippians 1:27-28)

Here Paul is instructing the Philippian church that they ought to be united in the face of opposition and persecution. And this is just as true for us as it was for the Philippians. On top of that, Paul actually goes so far as to say that Standing firm in one spirit and striving side by side for the faith of the gospel is part and parcel of what it means to let our manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.

To be a Christian is to seek unity within the Church.

I hope that you have your Bibles open now to Philippians 2:1. As we turn our attention to the text, we will see the antidote for disunity in the Church that Scripture prescribes for us.

Hear now the Word of the Lord from Philippians 2:1-11

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition 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. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by 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. 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. (Philippians 2:1-11)

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

I have already mentioned this morning that Paul is instructing the Philippian church to be united. This is in fact the heart of the entire book of Philippians. It is primarily a letter about unity.

This morning, however, I want to focus in on one aspect of Paul’s instructions for unity.

You see, Paul is demonstrating one of the most important requirements for unity within the Church: Humility. This Morning we will see that Unity is the Result of humility. We will see the Recipe for Humility in Christ, and we will then see the ultimate reward for humility. All of this we will see with the underlying understanding that as we pursue this humility, we must do so with a heart that is also seeking unity in the Church.

And that Leads us to the first thing we see in the text:

The Result of Humility

There is a clear emphasis on unity in the opening verses of this passage. Paul is instructing the Philippian church to complete his joy by being united. He tells them to have the same love, to being in full accord, and to have one mind. This is actually an excellent example of how chapter divisions in our Bibles can sometimes be distracting and unhelpful.

As we saw in verses 27 and 28 of Chapter 1 Paul has already been encouraging the Philippians to be united. He is continuing in the same train of thought right through from chapter 1 into the beginning of chapter 2 here.

G. Walter Hansen picks up on this connection when he notes that

“The result of the experience of unity with one another in the same struggle caused by those who oppose the church (1:27–30) should be an endeavor to seek unity with those who have different interests within the church”.¹

Paul is moving from an external need for unity, steadfastness in the face of opposition, to an internal need: comfort, love, and joy.

The Church must be united. The Church must protect her witness. Christians must support and come alongside one another. The Church Must be united.

I want to take a minute to acknowledge the fact that this is a lofty goal. After all, almost all of Church history has been marked by infighting and division. It seems like Christians can't do anything but fight each other.

¹ G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 106.

How can we possibly find any unity in a church full of sinners like me and you? First it must be said that this is only possible by the grace of God. Secondly Paul gives us the cure for the age-old problem of disunity here in Philippians 2.

The Cure for disunity in the Church is humility.

We see this clearly in verses 3 and 4:

“Do nothing from selfish ambition 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” Philippians 2:3-4

If you want to be a church that is united, then you need to be a church that is humble.

Now, I could easily just end the sermon here. Verses 3 and 4 are the instruction Paul gives to us. Don't be selfish and self-centered. Put the needs of others above your own. That would solve most disunity in the Church.

Just go and do it.

The problem is that this is easier said than done. It is easy to say that we simply must be humble and not selfish. That's pretty obvious to anyone who spends any considerable time reading the Bible.

The Apostle Paul acknowledges this fact, which is why he doesn't simply leave us with this general instruction. Rather, he gives us the perfect example of humility for us to follow.

Jesus Christ demonstrates true and perfect Humility.

As we work through how Jesus demonstrates perfect humility, we will notice the second thing I want to draw out from the text:

The Recipe for Humility

The first ingredient in the recipe for humility which Christ demonstrates is:

1. Inward Awareness

Before we Dive into this point I want to explain what I mean when I talk about humility.

What I do not mean is the kind of self-deprecating, false modesty that we see all around us! I am not talking about the humble brag. I am not talking about the kind of person who constantly makes fun of themselves as a way to avoid coming across as proud.

I want to do a quick survey.

Raise your hand if you know someone who can't take a compliment. Every time they are complimented, they feel the need to make a self-deprecating remark about how they are actually no good at all or something along those lines. I know that I can often be guilty of this.

As I read this passage I could not help but be reminded of the famous quote by C.S. Lewis in Mere Christianity. He writes that

“Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.”

We get this wrong way too often. We are very prone to think that humility looks like making ourselves less.

Rather, true humility understands exactly who we are. It acknowledges our weakness but also our strengths and talents and gives God the glory for them.

Paul Demonstrates this in 1 Corinthians 15:10 when he writes

“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.” (1 Corinthians 15:10)

Paul is able to identify and even express his strength and amazingly hard work, yet he does not take the credit for it.

That is what humility looks like. You can and should acknowledge your strengths to the Glory of God as the source of all that is good in you!

This true humility requires an inward awareness of who we truly are.

Now this idea is not explicitly stated anywhere in the text, But it is implicit in the entire passage.

For us to be truly humble than we must have an understanding of WHO WE ARE.

In verse 5 and 6 Paul writes that

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,” Philippians 2:5-6

In this statement is the idea that Jesus knew that he was God. He was in the form of God. He is Fully Divine. Jesus knew this. He had a clear understanding of who he was.

So too we must have the inward awareness to understand who we are. Gordon Fee picks up on this notion in the text. He helpfully writes that “Rather it [Humility] has to do with a proper estimation of oneself, the stance of the creature before the Creator, utterly dependent and trusting.”²

Humility requires understanding that you are not God. You are his creation, He is your creator. A proper understanding of this will automatically create at least some level of humility in your life. We are not the lords of our life. Human beings are capable of creating many wonderful things. We are constantly exercising our creativity and capacity to create new things. However, we will never be able to create something from nothing. Only God can. Only God is the Sovereign Lord of all creation.

You need to know that you are not God if you are to have any humility.

And you need to know that you are a sinner. Romans 3:23 reminds us that all have fallen short of the glory of God. Psalm 53 reminds us that,

”They have all fallen away;
together they have become corrupt;
there is none who does good,
not even one.” Psalm 53:3

Each and every one of us is a sinner. There is no hope of humility if you have not acknowledged the fact that you have not lived up to God’s perfect standard. Indeed, you cannot.

² Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, vol. 11, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 88.

Yet Paul tells us that Jesus came in the likeness men. He took on the fullness of humanity without giving up his divinity and he died in our place on the cross. Which is the third crucial thing that you must understand about yourself.

If you are saved, if you have put your faith in Jesus Christ and his resurrection from the dead then you are saved through faith BY GRACE. Ephesians 2:8-10 tells us that

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:8-10

A true understanding and application of the gospel to our lives DECIMATES PRIDE. The Gospel is at the very heart of humility.

For if you understand the gospel, then you understand your place before God, A sinner saved by grace alone through faith alone for the glory of God alone! There is no room for pride, arrogance, or selfishness in the mix.

An inner awareness of who we are is absolutely required in order to be truly humble.

The Second ingredient in the recipe for humility is:

2. Appropriate Ambition

This idea builds directly off of our first point of inner awareness. First, we must know who we are, then we must know our place. We see this explicitly in verse 3

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” (Philippians 2:3)

Selfish inappropriate ambition is at the heart of all sin. It is itself the very nature of sin. Sin is after all us trying to be the gods of our lives. It is a refusal to submit to God’s authority because we want to be the ultimate authority of our own lives.

And Jesus is the perfect example of the opposite of this inappropriate ambition.

I want to turn our attention to verses 6 and 7 where we read that

“Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” (Philippians 2:6-7)

There are many scholarly debates about what exactly these verses mean. The specific nuances of these two verses can be tricky to work out entirely and with that it is very easy for us to lose the forest for the trees. This morning I just want to clarify one potential misunderstanding that could seriously harm our understanding of the text.

When Paul writes that Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, he is not implying that Jesus was somehow less than God the Father and could have somehow become equal with him. Rather, Paul is stating that Jesus was in fact equal with the father but that he did not count this as something to be grasped or held on to.

Jesus did not need to reach out and grasp hold of equality with God. HE ALREADY HAD IT! Neither did he feel the need to grasp tightly every single benefit of his divinity. On the contrary he humbled himself and took on humanity in addition to his divinity. Jesus Limited some of his divine attributes. He was no longer omnipresent for example. In the Incarnation Jesus became limited to one physical location.

Jesus is eternally equal with the Father. He is the second person of the Godhead and was never, is never, and will never be less than the Father.

What Paul is really doing here with this language is contrasting Jesus with Adam. Remember that Adam and Eve sought to be like God. That was the temptation of the serpent in the garden after all. We read in Genesis 3:4-5

“But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:4-5)

Adam and Eve sought to be like God. They counted equality with God as something to be seized upon.

Jesus, on the other hand, was equal with God. Yet, unlike us he did not see this as something to be grasped. Rather, as Philippians tells us Jesus emptied himself taking on the form of man!

So what does it look like for us, who are not God, to have appropriate ambition?

It looks like evaluating our desires in life. It is often said that morality is doing the right things the right way for the right reasons. That's what we are talking about here. Doing things for the right reasons.

Are you taking advantage of others to get ahead at work? Are you badmouthing others in order to land that sale or that promotion? Is the only place you are willing to serve at church the worship team because you want people to see you serving? Are you willing to do something for someone else if no one ever knows about it?

Consider what Jesus says to James and John's mother when she asks for them to sit at Jesus's side in heaven. verses 25-28 of Matthew 20 tell us

"But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 26 It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, 28 even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25-28)

I just want to stop for a minute and I want you to picture a community of people whose deepest desires are to see one another blessed and lifted up even at their own expense. Think about what that would look like if we took seriously the word of God here in Philippians 2.

Do you want to be salt and light in this town? Then change your ambitions. Seek not your own gain but also the interests of others.

And this ties directly into the third ingredient in the recipe for humility:

3. A Selfless Attitude

This is the natural progression from the first two points. If you have any accurate understanding of who you are and you have properly ordered desires and ambitions then that ought to result in a selfless attitude.

This is exactly the attitude of Christ. We see this clearly in verses 7-9

"but emptied himself, by 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." Philippians 2:7-9

I think that it is easy for us to understate and underestimate the selflessness of Christ. Which is precisely why this passage is so dear to my heart. You could spend a lifetime plumbing the depths of this passage and never grow weary.

There is such joy, such comfort, such wonder to behold in the selfless humility of Christ.

And not only of Christ but of the Father as well as Gordon Fee eloquently reminds us

"In Jesus Christ the true nature of the living God has been revealed ultimately and finally. God is not a grasping, self-centered being. He is most truly known through the One whose equality with God found expression in his pouring himself out in sacrificial love by taking the lowest place, the role of a slave, and whose love for his human creatures found consummate expression in his death on the cross"

Brothers and sisters, the Second person of the Trinity, the Son of God who created the universe and everything in it. Came into the world as a baby born in a manger and laid his life down for sinners whose hearts were dead in their rejection of him!

The One who is worthy of all Glory all praise all honour gave it all up to be shamed mocked and scorned by those he came to save! There is no greater display of humility possible! This is it! Do you want to know how to treat one another? Here you go! Paul tells us to have THIS mind! Be like Christ! Don't put yourself first, put others first. Think of yourself less.

So much of our lives are consumed with ourselves. Human beings are by default selfish, self centered people. If you're sitting there thinking that I'm being too harsh about this then I would encourage you to spend any considerable time with a two year old.

There is a reason one of the first words children learn is mine.

And that little voice never really leaves us does it? There is always that part of us in the back of our mind crying mine!

We want what we want. We want to do what we want to do and we want to do it when we want.

Now thankfully I am more sanctified than I was when I was two.

Yet I am still a terribly selfish man. I think for sure I am at my most selfish When I'm woken up in the middle of the night by Eleanor crying. There's a solid couple of minutes where I'm desperately praying that she will simply fall asleep, where every fibre of my being longs to roll

over and get back to sleep. There is an initial frustration and selfishness in me that is frankly alarming.

But then I see her sad face in looking up needing help and all that frustration and selfishness disappears.

You see selflessness requires a shift in perspective. It requires looking past yourself, opening your eyes to consider those around you. It requires putting others needs above your own.

You are surrounded by precious people handcrafted by God whom he delights in. People who are so valuable that Christ gave up his life for them!

I am not asking you to never think about yourself. I am asking you to consider those around you for who THEY ARE!

When you consider others more significant than yourself it does not become an impossible burden to serve them. It becomes a joy and a privilege.

One commenter helpfully sums this up saying

"It is not a matter of superiority or comparison, but obedience (Rom. 12:10; 15:1; Gal. 5:13) and mutual submission"³

Mutual submission is the heart of Christian community. It is the result of us trying to resemble Christ to one another. It is the setting aside of my preferences, wants, and needs for yours and you doing The same for me.

It is impossible to truly be humble while continuing to be self centered. Humility requires that we adopt a selfless disposition and have we have seen this morning, Jesus perfectly demonstrates what this looks like.

It looks like laying down our lives for one another.

And as we have also seen, this intense selfishness proceeds naturally from an inward understanding of who we are and from having appropriate ambitions and desires.

These three things are absolutely necessary for true humility.

³ A. Boyd Luter Jr., "Philippians," in Evangelical Commentary on the Bible, vol. 3, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 1041.

This morning we have seen that unity in the Church requires true humility in Christians. We have seen how Christ has demonstrated perfect humility for us. And, with the time we have left this morning I want to highlight the Reward for Humility.

The Reward for Humility

Look in your Bibles with me now to verses 9-11 of chapter two. there we read:

"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." (Philippians 2:9-11)

The first thing we should see here is the word therefore. Paul is using the word therefore to draw a cause and effect relationship with the preceding verses. He is saying that Christ's humility and his death on the cross results in his glorification above every name.

As we mentioned earlier Jesus did not seek to seize upon his equality with the Father. He did not take advantage of his position. Rather, he humbled himself to the point of death upon a cross and That has resulted in his glorification above all the Earth.

Jesus is lifted up by laying himself down. He is Glorified through his humility. As he himself said the

"last shall be first and the first shall be last". Matthew 20:16

Jesus received Glory through his humility and, in doing so, demonstrated the path to glory for us as well.

Do not be tempted to think that there is any glory for Christians here on Earth. The normative pattern for Christianity is not success, wealth, prosperity and glory. No. In fact Jesus tells us in Matthew 6 that those who do good things in order to receive praise and recognition on Earth have no reward in heaven.

Jesus did not come into the world with a crown on his head and scepter in his hand. He did not come as a conquering king! No, he came as a gentle and lowly babe, born in a manger.

He limited himself to identify with his people. He walked with them, ate with them, toiled with them, sweat with them. And he became lower than them! He served them, he suffered for them.

He died for his people! He became the lowliest of the lows. Humiliated in front of all and lowered into a tomb.

Then he ROSE!

Not only to did he rise from the dead, he ROSE TO HIS RIGHTFUL PLACE! He was lifted up from the depths to the sit at the Right hand of the Father. To the place that was always his!

That is the pattern set before us.

Cross before crown. Shame before honour. Pain before pleasure. Down before Up!

This is Christianity in a nutshell. We must follow Christ through laying ourselves down so that we will be lifted up with him.

This is what fuels our humility when it gets hard. This is what allows us to turn the other cheek, this is why Paul instructs the church in Corinth to prefer being wronged to getting their just desserts. Christians are able to consistently put others above themselves because we know what lies at the end of the journey. We know that no matter how hard it gets it is worth every disadvantage and sacrifice!

Paul concludes with the resounding proclamation that at the end of it all EVERY KNEE Will Bow before Jesus. Every single human being will kneel before the one who humbled himself enough to die naked on a cross for the sinners.

Every Knee will bow. EVERY . SINGLE . ONE. You will either bow in adoration and praise of your amazing savior or you will fall to your knees trembling in awe of the one whom you have rejected. So the question is: Which one will you be? Will you continue to live your life on your own terms until you kneel before the Lord of the Universe in judgement, fear, and condemnation? Or will you repent of your sins and put your faith in Jesus so that you will bow before him and enter into Glory with him?

The choice is yours.

IF you choose to follow Jesus then you must count the cost. We have seen in this passage the pattern of humility that Christ demonstrates. WE must take up our crosses and follow him.

If we are to follow after Christ, if we are to have the mind of Christ, then we must have an inward awareness of who we are. We must have appropriate ambition. We must adopt a selfless attitude. These three things are critical if we want to be truly humble people.

There is such a need for this kind of humility in the Church. This is at the very heart of unity within the Church; Christians striving to resemble Christ to one another. Christians laying themselves down for the sake of their brothers and sisters in Christ.

As we close this morning, I just want to reflect on how significant this passage is for us.

What a difference the Church would make in the World if every Christian to live out this text. Think about how much Redeemer City Church would stand out in Orillia. Think about how brightly you would shine for the kingdom of God. Think about how many people would be drawn to the kind of community that exists when people are striving to resemble the humility of Jesus Christ.

I get so excited thinking about what that kind of community is capable of. We have seen today that Jesus is the perfect example of humility. He is the standard to which we must strive. We have seen that he is the reward for humility, he is the recipe for our humility, and we have seen that this humility will result in the all-important unity of the Church.

This is the impossible task that lies before us today. To follow Christ in laying ourselves down for the benefit of others and unity of the Church. We cannot hope to do any part of this by our own strengths. So let us come to the Lord now and ask for his help.

Let's pray.