

Philippians - Part 3

Unity Through Humility

Philippians 2:1-11

Memory Verses: Philippians 2:3

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

You all have heard me speak many times of one of my great hero's of the faith, the pioneering missionary to China, Hudson Taylor, who I named my fourth son. One time Hudson Taylor was scheduled to speak at a Large Presbyterian church in Melbourne, Australia. The moderator of the service introduced the missionary in eloquent and glowing terms. He told the large congregation all that Taylor had accomplished in China, and then presented him as "our illustrious guest." Taylor stood quietly for a moment, and then said, "Dear friends, I am merely a little servant of an illustrious Master."

Winston Churchill, the great leader of England, was once asked, "Doesn't it thrill you to know that every time you make a speech, the hall is packed to overflowing?" "It's quite flattering," replied Sir Winston. "But whenever I feel that way, I always remember that if instead of making a political speech I was being hanged, the crowd would be twice as big."

One of our greatest Presidents, Teddy Roosevelt, lauded by all, would often need to get away from the crowds and the fame. He would walk into a dark field, look up to the sky and stare up at the stars where he would notice the constellation Pegasus. One time, while walking with a friend he pointed to the bright light in the lower left hand corner of the starry winged horse and said, "there it is, the Spiral Galaxy of Andromeda. It is as large as our Milky Way. It is one of a hundred million galaxies. It consists of one hundred billion suns, each larger than our sun." Then Roosevelt grinned and said, "Now I think we are small enough!"

I wonder, do we think we are small enough? Or do we struggle, as most do, with pride and humility? If I had to guess, I think we may benefit this morning from a fresh reminder of our fragility, our mortality, and our human inclination to try to push ourselves to the front of the line, when we probably deserve to be in the back.

Two weeks ago we began our study of the book of Philippians. And what we've seen is that Paul's chief concern for the church at Philippi was their joy. In fact, Philippians could be nicknamed the book of joy. Joy, unlike happiness, is a feeling of contentment regardless of ones circumstances. We don't need happiness, we need joy! How do we find true and lasting joy? Two weeks ago we saw that we find true and lasting joy through ministry. That when we serve one another, we are

supernaturally filled with a joy that is greater than the work of ministry. When you engage in ministry you will inevitably be ministered to more than those you seek to serve.

Then last week we saw how fighting for the cause of Christ, and for the discipleship of the church without fear, gives us life sustaining joy. True Christians will be known for their warfare and the joy which remains through their fight. When we fight, suffer, and even die for the cause of Christ and for the spiritual growth of our brothers and sisters... and we do it with joy in our hearts... the world will take notice and worship our God. We minister with joy, we preach the Gospel with joy, we disciple the church with joy, we suffer persecution with joy.

Today we will once again continue our pursuit of real, life lasting, and wholly satisfying joy by looking at **Philippians 2:1-11**. Here we see that along with ministry, and along with the fight for the faith, humility is the key to finding unity and joy. **Humility is the idea that we understand we are not as great as we may be tempted to think we are**, and in understanding this we live our lives without pride and arrogance while treating others with respect and dignity. Even in such a small sentence, we can see the power of humility to unite people and bring them joy.

Why do we have such racial, political, social, and physical division in our country right now? Why is the division we see when we turn on the television about as bad as we've ever seen it? You can point fingers, or you can look within, humble yourself, and try to be the change you want to see in the world. We will never win this culture war with arrogance. Humility brings unity! Especially in the church, where, without unity the church cannot stand.

So we need humility, but humility is hard. Humility is the one thing that as soon as you claim you have it, you've lost it. As humans, we will always fight the battle within ourselves to stay humble. This morning as we dig through these 11 verses I want you to recognize this one thing...

Church Unity Is Maintained Through Individual Humility

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

So, the first thing we see here in **verses 1-2** is... **The Christian's Joy Does Not Exist Apart From Christian Unity (vs1-2)**. Paul begins this chapter with 4 if-then statements, all having to do with what a healthy church looks like emotionally. The Greek word for "if" is the word Ei. It is used here as a first-class conditional clause, which which expresses the idea, "If this condition is true, and it is, then..." He's saying that this is how we all want to feel when we are with the church body. That God's plan for the emotional health of the church is this.

Let's examine each one of these. The first question; "If there is any encouragement in Christ, and there is." There truly is encouragement in the body of Christ because of Christ. Does the work of Christ in saving you

encourage you? Does the work of the Holy Spirit living inside you encourage you? Do you receive comfort, counsel, and exhortation by those who claim Christ as their Lord? The answer to all of these is, and should be, yes.

Secondly, "Is there any comfort from love? There is. Does the love of Christ and the love of those in the church console you? Yes.

Thirdly, "Is there a unique partnership between those who have the Holy Spirit? Do you feel a bond between yourself and other believers that can't be explained? Have you ever met a stranger who is a believer and you feel as though you are best friends? Do you have an unexplained affection for other believers despite only having one thing in common; Christ? Yes.

Fourthly, "Is there a unique sympathy for others because of the Holy Spirit? Do you have a compassion for other believers within the church? Do you recognize others having a unique compassion for you and your situation? Yes.

Each of the answers to these questions are unequivocally, yes. Of course there will be times where you are hurt by the church, or hurt by another Christian. We are all humans. But for the most part, if you are living according to the Word of God, under the power of the Holy Spirit, within the confines of a unified church... you will experience an untold measure of encouragement, comfort, love, partnership, and sympathy.

And so Paul says, if the answer is yes to these, and it is, then complete my joy. Two things here. One, Paul has just told us what gives him joy... an emotionally unified church full of encouragement, comfort, love, partnership, and sympathy. But he says, complete my joy. Meaning there is something that is missing. What is missing. What does Paul need added to the emotional unity of the church? Well the next verse tells us; theological unity. A complete church where there is complete joy has both emotional unity and theological unity. It's one thing to love each other, care for one another, and be together.... it's something else to agree upon a common vision, mission, theology, and philosophy.

So what does theological unity look like? Look at **verse 2**. It looks like having the same mind. Meaning, we believe the same things. For us here at Stone Creek we have a common statement of faith which can be found on our website and this week, in your worship guide. We agree with each other on many aspects of the faith including; the inerrancy of scripture, the curse of sin, the lordship of Christ, and salvation through grace, faith and repentance, to name a few.

It also means having the same love. It means we value the same things. For us here at Stone Creek we have 6 core tenants that we value above anything else. They are relying on the word, constant prayer, authentic worship, relational outreach, strategic missions, and intentional discipleship.

Theological unity also means being in full accord with one another. That means we agree on the same polity or governance. Here at Stone Creek we agree with our constitution and by-laws.

And, lastly it means that we are of one mind or as the NASB translates it, one purpose. Here at Stone Creek our one purpose is our vision statement which simply says; Depending on Christ we will reach our world with the Gospel to see lives completely transformed.

When we experience emotional unity through encouragement, love, partnership, and sympathy – and we agree in theological unity with the same mind, same love, in full accord and with one purpose... then our joy, our individual joy and our collective joy in the church, is complete! Without both emotional unity and theological unity we will not experience joy the way Christ has designed us to experience it! We pray that if you have not yet, that you would become a covenant partner with us here at Stone Creek and be unified with us emotionally and theologically because... **Unity is a key ingredient to the joy of a Christian! Church Unity Is Maintained Through Individual Humility**

The next thing we need to look at is... **Christian Unity Cannot Survive Apart From Humility (vs3-4)** Just as unity in the body of Christ completes joy, humility completes unity. It would be extremely hard to have the same love, the same mind, and be in one accord and of one mind apart from the components of humility found in these verses.

And this is what humility looks like according to **verses 3-4**. Humility means doing nothing out of selfish ambition. One who is selfish is only concerned about their personal pursuits and ideas. In our current culture selfish ambition is manifested in someone willing to do whatever they must to whoever they must in order to get what they want. Selfish ambition says the opposite of John the Baptist and declares, "I must increase while others decrease." This type of self-first attitude is the worst enemy of unity. **John MacArthur says in his commentary, "nothing can more quickly divide or weaken a church than the unchecked sin of selfishness.... discord and division are inevitable when people focus on their agendas to the exclusion of others in the church."** And it's easy to see how this creeps into the church. Often this selfish myopic focus is from a passion for an important ministry in the church. Someone wants a ministry, that is good, but can't be supported financially or with enough man-power. If they push for it hard enough, against the wisdom of others, there will be division. **Pursuing a ministry apart from unity destroys both the ministry and unity.**

Humility also means doing nothing out of empty or vain conceit. This type of conceit is typified by a highly exaggerated self-view. This attitude is displayed by people who believe they are never wrong. While selfish ambition seeks after personal goals, vain conceit seeks after personal glory. In Greek culture it wasn't considered out of the ordinary for people to be conceited. In fact, it was a mentality that was praised among the culture of

the day. But even the Greeks could see that some people viewed themselves as being way more valuable than they were. They called it Hubris, and they would have agreed with **Gal 6:3 which says** if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. No one thinks you are as great as you do, and no one likes a know-it-all.

So don't live according to selfish ambition, and don't be filled with vain conceit, but in humility, count others more significant than yourself. What does it mean to count someone more significant? It means you view them as important. It's not that others are more important than you in God's eyes, but you should consider them as a person who you should subject yourself. This is perhaps the hardest thing for anyone to do, because we are constantly comparing ourselves to others and our mind naturally makes a pecking order. We are naturally self preservationists who live according to the survival of the fittest. Subjecting ourselves to someone lower on the pecking order than ourselves... seems demeaning. We seek our personal goals, and our personal glory, because we believe in our personal greatness. So how do we counter this sin? We look at our own sin, and how we fall short and rather than comparing ourselves to others we recognize that we have no room to boast.

And lastly, humility means looking not only to our own interests but also the interests of others. Now, don't get me wrong. We are to look out for our own interests to some degree. We are to feed ourselves, clothe ourselves, have good hygiene. We should take care of ourselves physically, spiritually, and emotionally. But, our interests can take a back seat to the interests of others way more than they do. In fact, without looking for opportunities, you will most likely only see a couple of times this week to put this into action. It's not like by doing this you will find yourself overwhelmed by the interests of others, and even if you are, what an opportunity to be a servant. The main point here is that when you see someone else in need or excited about a project and their need competes with your interests, do theirs first and then yours. Most likely Paul had church ministry in mind here, as he was talking about church unity. In the church it is easy to have competing interests. The call of humility and unity is to use those opportunities to serve others and their interests first.

When you look at the 4 aspects here of what humility means you will notice that the first two are countered by the last two. **We counter selfish ambition by looking out for the interests of others. We counter vain conceit by counting others more significant than ourselves.** The bottom line... Unity cannot exist without humility. A healthy church completes our joy. A healthy church cannot exist without unity. The key ingredient to unity is humility. So let's put what we have so far together. The two main aspects of humility support the two main aspects of unity. **How are we supposed to have emotional unity without abandoning our**

vain conceit? How are we to encourage, love, comfort, fellowship, and sympathize with one another unless we look out for the interest of others? How are we to have theological unity without abandoning our vain conceit? How are we supposed to be of the same mind, the same love, in one accord, with one purpose unless we consider others more significant than ourselves? If we desire to elevate the body of Christ corporately then we need to humble ourselves individually. Church Unity Is Maintained Through Individual Humility

The last thing we need to recognize here is that **The Greatest Example of Humility Is Jesus (vs5-8)**. Look at **verses 5-8**. He was God but did not count himself as equal with God. Jesus lowered his standing mentally. He took the form of a servant. He lowered his standing physically. Mentally so we would be attracted to his humility and so we could learn to worship God as he did. Physically so he could relate to us and us to him, and so he could sympathize with our weakness.

And get this... not only did he lower his standing mentally and physically, but he gave his life. He was obedient to death. Why? To pay for our sins and save humanity. **The ultimate act of humility is to live your life or give your life in sacrifice to others. Church Unity Is Maintained Through Individual Humility**

Application

So as we conclude this morning.... let's just recap. Our joy is made complete when we are in unity with one another, and there is nothing in this life that will bring you more joy than being a part of a healthy and unified local church. If our aim then, is to be a unified healthy church we must be unified in emotional health and theological health. Emotional unity means that we encourage one another, love one another, comfort one another, partner with one another, and sympathize with one another. Theological unity means that we are of the same mind, the same love, in one accord and of one purpose. This is what a unified and healthy church looks like.

And how do we maintain the health of our church unity? Through individual humility. Church unity through individual humility! We maintain our emotional unity by abandoning our selfish ambition which means looking out for the interest of others. We maintain our theological unity by abandoning our vain conceit which means considering others more significant than ourselves.

And our example of humility is Christ. Though he was equal with God he lowered himself mentally. Though he was God in the flesh he lowered himself physically. And after doing both of these he went the distance and paid the ultimate price by giving his life for us. And we are called to be like Jesus. To give ourselves to one another. **Church Unity Is Maintained Through Individual Humility**

Conclusion

One more thing to look at here is found in **verses 9-11**. Here we see the end result of being humble. Those who humble themselves will be exalted. Just as Jesus is our example of the price of humility he is also our example of the prize of humility. He didn't exalt himself but in the end God exalted him. And, God will do the same for us. Let's look at verses like **Proverbs 22:4, James 4:10, 1 Peter 5:6, Luke 14:11**. In this way we see that not only does humility complete our joy on this earth but it also completes our joy in eternity.