

The Humble Church

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Bible Verse: Philippians 2:3-4
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Well, Communion is certainly a good entrée, a good introduction into what we want to consider here this morning as we consider and continue our study of the book of Philippians in Philippians 2, and I'll read the first four verses of that text to set our time here from God's word. In Philippians 2:1 it says,

1 Therefore if 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, 2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. 3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

And I think I'll continue and read the portion that Andrew read to open our service because the whole passage is premised on what follows. Verse 5,

5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Now in this text and we're going to focus on verses 3 and 4 here this morning, Paul is calling attention to the attitude of humility that should permeate a true body of believers in a church and he's calling the Philippian church to do that. Look at these verses here in verses 3 and 4 where he says, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." That's the

text that we're going to try to unpack a little bit here this morning for our time in God's word but, beloved, fresh off the Communion Table as we are, fresh off those wonderful hymns, you know, "Wash all my sins away. O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise," and all these others that we've sung, and in light of the Communion meditation that we had on substitution, he did something on our behalf, there's something really vital and critical that you need to see about the Lord Jesus that sets the tone for everything that Paul is saying.

What else could we say about our Christ in his crucified victory over sin? What else could we say about him except in his sacrifice on the cross for us, but there was one who was not acting out of selfishness, right? It was not out of selfishness that Christ went to the cross, it was out of selflessness. It was not out of a conceit that he went to the cross because the cross was an instrument of torture and humiliation, it was associated with the vilest of criminals and the dregs of society and that's what Christ went to. There was nothing to flatter his image by going to the cross. It was an act of selflessness. It was an act of complete humility. What else can we say about our Christ except that when he went to the cross he regarded his people as more important than his own self-interest. You remember, don't you, that in Gethsemane he prayed, "Father, if it's possible let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless not My will but Thine be done." You remember, don't you, that the contemplation of the horrors of the cross caused him to pray earnestly and to sweat drops of blood as he contemplated it. This was one acting who considered his people as more important than himself. In that great moment of his tribulation, in that great moment of his suffering, he was not looking out for his own personal interest, beloved, he was looking out for yours, for mine, looking out for the interests of his people. In a moment that would crush him, in the words of Isaiah 53, the Lord was pleased to crush him, Christ preferred to be crushed than to see his people perish. He gladly undertook at the highest of infinite personal cost in order to redeem us from our sins. That's who he is and that's what he did and that's why we love him, and that's why we revere him, and that's why we worship him. That's why the hymn writer said, "For a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise." And even if we had a thousand, it wouldn't be enough. That's why the hymn writer said as we sung earlier, "If I owned the whole realm of nature in order to give in response to Christ, it wouldn't be enough. It wouldn't, the gift of nature wouldn't be commensurate with the greatness of his sacrifice, the greatness of his humility, the greatness of his love, and the eternity of the benefit that I receive from Christ for something that I did not deserve." You see, you're overwhelmed by these things when you contemplate them rightly. Finally we have one in the midst of our political season that's coming up over the next several months, here we have one who did not act in his own personal interest but he acted for the sake of others. Christ did that supremely and we love him for it.

Now that is what gave birth to the church. The church is born out of the sacrifice of Christ and the subsequent application of that to his people by the Holy Spirit, and that has consequences for us as we live life together in a local body like this. It has consequences for the people of Christ. You see, the attitude that motivated Christ to go to the cross is now intended by God to be replicated in his people. That same selflessness, that same

spirit of sacrifice, that same sense of putting others ahead of self is what's to motivate and to mark the people of God particularly in their relationships with one another.

Now as I said last time as we spoke about the united church, the church in its unity, you know, I'm speaking today as a pastor blessed to have a congregation that I believe is united, that does reflect this unity as we stand here today. I certainly don't know of anything that would contradict that in the life of our body and I thank God for that, I thank God for each one of you that contribute to that with your selfless love, your selfless service so that you understand the spirit from which I'm speaking here today. But it is important for us to ground our unity and to ground our life together not on good feelings toward each other because those will come and go; there will be challenges that come to that, you know, in the future it's inevitable in this fallen world, but to ground our understanding of unity and humility in the person of Christ and to drive the foundation of our unity even deeper in the contemplation of this passage and that's what we want to do. We're preaching, if you are new to our church, you're just visiting, we've been preaching through Philippians and so we come naturally to this. This is just the next text up for us, so that's what we're here to do today.

So what can we say about unity in Christ? Unity grows in a humble church that is shaped by the knowledge of Christ. If we know Christ, we have all the momentum we need toward unity and a spirit of self-sacrifice amongst one another. Now I want to say this: churches, and I think that experience across the nations and across the generations would prove this to be true, churches are not naturally unified. Christians need a renewed mind to manifest this priority. As we come together in a body, we bring our own carnal thoughts and our own remnants of things that have not yet been sanctified in us, we bring this all together and when you bring that in for a few dozen or a few hundred people and you start to multiply this, there's a lot of opportunity for conflict to take place. That was happening in the churches at Philippi as we've seen many times and I'm not going to take the time to review that here today. But here is the challenge that each one of us need to understand that we're part of the problem here, part of the potential problem that Paul is addressing in Philippians 2. The challenge for us is that we are naturally preoccupied with self, we are naturally preoccupied with what we are doing, how we are perceived in all of those matters. We're naturally like that and so the question becomes how do you cultivate humility to grow a unified church? Notice and remember that Paul is pleading for unity.

Look at verse 2 with me in Philippians 2. He's pleading for unity as he says in verse 2, he says, "make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose." He is saying your purpose at a church is not simply to receive the benefit of the ministry for yourself, your purpose in the church has a far greater purpose in that you are meant to be a contributing factor to growth in unity, growth in your fellow Christians, and to bring the gifts and resources and time and abilities that God has given to you, you are meant to contribute to the body of Christ, to add to the ministry that is taking place, and to do that with a sense that is elevating the importance of others over your own significance in it, and we'll see this as we go along. But beloved, here's the thing, this is really critical: the way that a church thinks about

these things is the way that a church will live, and everything about this text is directed toward the mind and directed toward the way that you think, and Paul here in these two verses is expressing the critical importance of humility in the church and he explains it with a pair of contrasts that we are going to look at as we go on.

There's just two points for this morning and the first point is that Paul gives a contrast of perspective. A contrast of perspective. Now we've seen that the Philippian church had a measure of strife in its midst. Paul still loves the church, he finds joy in the church, but they are falling short in this area and what Paul does here as he goes through this text, Paul does not tell them, "Stop fighting." He doesn't tell them to get along with each other and just addressed to their volition the correction that needs to take place. Rather he does something far more profound and far more effective, he is pointing them to Christ in verses 5 to 11, and he calls for right thinking to change relationships, and what's true at a local church level would be true in a family level as well, true in individual relationships. Paul is pointing to Christ and calling for right thinking to change relationships and I want to show you this. The emphasis in this passage is on thinking. It's on inner disposition. It's not telling us primarily what to do, it's telling us how to think and what to shape our motives by. And you can see this, look at chapter 2, verse 2, where you can see this emphasis on thinking, this emphasis on perspective. He says you need to be of the same mind. At the end of the verse he says you need to be intent on one purpose. Intention, a matter of the heart not a matter of conduct. It's a matter of what is motivating you to do what you do. Then in verse 5 he says, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." So same mind, intent on one purpose, this attitude.

Now I'm going to show you something here that's not evident from reading that translation of the English text. All three of those verbs that I have just quoted to you, be of the same mind, be intent on one purpose, have this attitude, they are all from the same Greek verb, *phroneo*. We don't need to talk about the Greek aspect of it so much but I want you to see that all of those phrases are translating different forms of the same verb and what does that verb mean? Well, I'll quote you three different lexical sources here. One describes it this way, it means to engage in the process of mental activity. Another one says it means to think; to form an opinion; to hold an opinion. An older source says it means to agree together; to cherish the same views; to be harmonious in terms of how it's used in this particular passage. Here's the point in all of this, beloved, you see Paul's emphasis by his using of the same verb throughout this, you have to think this way, you have to consider, you have to have your mind anchored in these kinds of things that I am talking about, and he's addressing this in a plural way to call for harmony in the church.

Look at chapter 2, verse 3 with me. There at the end he says, "regard one another as more important than yourselves," plural. He's calling for people to think about themselves in relationship to the others that are in the body of Christ. That's the point. The question is how do you as you come into the life of the local church, how do you think about yourself and your role and the part that you play in it, how do you think about that, how do you consider yourself about that in the midst of these broader relationships that you are engaged in here? What I want you to see is, you know, I said there was a contrast. Look for that three letter word "but" in the middle of verse 3. He says, "Do nothing from

selfishness or empty conceit, but," there's a strong contrast in the original language, "but," instead of that do this, "with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves." So he says don't be selfish here, don't have the mindset that is simply interested in what promotes your own well-being and your advantage in the local body, or what you necessarily want for yourself or what you want to see happen. Don't come and focus on your desires in the local church because self-promotion and ambition have no place here.

And how can you say that, how can you know that that's true? Well, let's just step back and think theologically just a little bit here. Who is the head of the church? Christ is the head of the church. Christ is the fountain from which all else flows. What was Christ's disposition as he did what was necessary to save the church? It was one that had no self-interest involved. It was a spirit of sacrifice. It was a spirit of humility. So since Christ is our head and he gave himself for us, we follow his attitude of self-sacrifice in the context of the local church. "I'm not here for what I can get out of it," we say to ourselves, "I'm here to give of myself to this local body."

Now I've said multiple times, you know, this is foreign to the spirit of evangelical Christianity today, that caters to every niche interest that might attract people into within their walls. You know, you can do that but if you attract people based on their selfish desires, what you're going to have is a selfish church and eventually you're going to have a divided church because people who are selfish are going to be in conflict with one another. Paul recognizes that. The Bible recognizes that. In James 3:16 it says, "where jealousy and selfish ambition exist there is disorder and every evil thing."

Go back to verse 3 here, Paul says in verse 3, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit." It's a word that refers to vanity or self-estimation, and when you take these words of selfishness and empty conceit together, here's what he is saying, this is kind of a summary of the first half of the verse here, taken together this conceit means this, it means the way that I think about myself and it causes me to emphasize myself and my interests above others in the local body.

What might that look like? Well, let me suggest a few things to you here, what it looks like and what Paul is speaking against. You can see empty conceit in those who come speaking about their past accomplishments or the people that they know and the influence that they have had in the past, and people like to speak that way, "Here's what I've done. Here's who I know. Here are my connections." Calling attention to self and in a conceited way making themselves seem more important than the ones around them. "You know, I've got connections that other people don't. You're so blessed to have me in your midst." Well, Scripture doesn't see it that way. I don't either. You can see this selfishness, this empty conceit in those who talk repeatedly about their ambitions for ministry, their ambitions for service, "Here's what I want to do. This is what I'm after." You can see it in those who complain about how they have been overlooked in the church and, "You know, why can't I have what I want? What about the things that I've said?" And you just see this putting forth of self, this emphasis on the way that I think and on what I want. We could multiply it by 100 other kinds of things, but you get the idea. This is human

nature. This is human sinful nature, selfishness, vanity, self-promotion, putting myself forward. And beloved, I just want to say and I know that you'll agree with me, we see that enough in the business world around us, we see it in the political world, we see it all around us in the world. Pride is considered a good thing in the world. Well, you'll agree with me when I say that when we come into the church, it is so refreshing to step into a different realm where that's not what is highlighting and motivating the people that we're with, and that's the whole point, the church is meant to be distinct from the world in many areas but especially here in the way that we think about each other.

So what Paul does, having set forth selfishness and empty conceit and said, "Don't do anything from that perspective. Let that be foreign to your motivation of heart amongst the people of God because, after all, Christ was separate from those sinful motivations in what He did for you. Don't do that," he says, "but," contrast, "have a different perspective about it all in your approach." Look at it there with me in verse 3, he says, "but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves." What is this humility of mind? That's a single word in the original language. Well, it's the opposite of self-importance. Humility of mind is a modesty of manner and expression. What Paul is doing here, beloved, he's cultivating a way of thinking inside the walls of the church and if I can just make it really simple, the attitude that he's calling for is, "It's not about me, it's about others." For Christ it wasn't about him as he went to the cross, it was about others. That's how simple this is and yet it is so profound in the outworking of its implications. We consider others as more important. They have surpassing priority over me. For a Christian in the context of a local church, Christians have the mindset that they defer to others. They have the mindset that they want to make sure that others are taken care of. And why would we think that way and forget about ourselves in the context of the body of Christ? We do so gladly because, beloved, it is what Christ did for us and out of worship and adoration for him, out of love and appreciation that he sacrificed himself on my behalf as I enter into a body that belongs to him anyway, it's his body not mine, then all I want to do is I want to reflect the attitude of Christ here, I want to reflect an attitude of self-sacrifice, I want to be like Christ and that means that I have an attitude of putting others ahead of myself in the context of his body.

Humility, then, is the opposite perspective of selfish conceit. In 1 Peter 5 it says this, "all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." And so we can't help but ask the question, can we, "Why am I here? Why am I here? What am I looking for here? I'm looking for a way of making it better for the others that I come into contact with, and if I'm overlooked in the process, that's okay because that's not what I'm after in my service in the church." So it's a contrast of perspective that says, "My mindset is the other person is more important. That's what Christ did. That's what I want to be like and that's how I will live in the context of a local body." It's a contrast of perspective.

Now point 2 here this morning, you get a contrast of pursuits as well. The contrast of pursuits. Look at chapter 4 with me. It's another contrast. It's a second contrast that he makes in this call to humility. Look at verse 4 he says, "do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." "Look out for" is indicating

what you consider. What is it that you're looking at? What is it that you're searching for? What is it that you have your radar operating for as you come to the local church? What is it that you pay attention to? What is it that you take note of? All different ways of saying the same thing. Paul says, "do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but for the interests of others as well." It's a sharp contrast so that, beloved, our perspective in the context of our relationships is that we're considering how the other person is doing. This is what Christian life is about, "How can I support them? How can I encourage them?" He says it in a firm way. It's like Paul is doing this, it's like he is going up to each one of us and tapping us on the cheek, "Pay attention here. This is important. You've got to pay attention and grasp this. Settle it in your thinking that you are here to seek the well-being of others and to keep your eyes on that in church life."

Now there's a contrast here so let me just draw out the contrast a little bit. That is so different, that is so completely opposite of the mindset that says, "I didn't get anything out of this. This doesn't do anything for me." Well, I'm sorry if that's the case but that's really secondary to the point of why we gather. You come with your strength so that you're able to minister to one in weakness. Maybe you come and your resources and you have opportunity to help someone who is struggling and you have that as your mindset. Maybe you come with a matter of understanding and you are able to share that with one who does not see it clearly. But all of this is a mark of humility that says, "I am here to serve. I am here for the benefit of someone else," and it is the utter opposite of empty conceit. This consideration of others contrasts with selfish ambition.

Now Paul says, look at it there in verse 4 with me, he says, "do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others," and just to be clear here, beloved, it's not that we never think about the needs of ourselves or the needs of our family. In 1 Timothy 5:8, in fact, it goes so far as to say this, it says, "if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." Scripture says we have a responsibility to provide in these ways for those that are under our authority and within the circle of our care. Paul's not denying that in what he says here in Philippians 2. It's not that you never think about that that would be absurd. But here's the thing, beloved, here's the pivot point for all of it: you and I do that, do what? You and I think about the needs of self and our families, you and I to that naturally. We don't need to be instructed to think that way because we do that naturally. That comes to us. Scripture tells us to have a higher pursuit in the body of Christ, to not merely consider what ministers to you but to have a mindset that says, "What is it in me that might minister here?" Maybe it's on a wider platform of leadership eventually. Maybe it's in small individual congregations and we have multiple people like this and I love each one of you that are like this, that just quietly minister to individuals without calling any attention to yourself, and I love seeing that. You don't have to sound a trumpet before you minister to someone, before you provide for a need, before you call and show your kindness to them. That's awesome. The point here, Scripture is telling us to seek a higher pursuit. One writer said this and I quote, he says, "Paul calls for a Christian concern that is wide enough to include others in its scope. When each member of the Christian community exercises this mutual concern, problems of disunity quickly disappear." It's hard to be in conflict with people that you're serving. It's hard to be in

conflict with people that you are voluntarily intentionally putting yourselves under, and that is the whole point. The person of Christ and the work of Christ naturally produces people who think that way, and as Christ unifies his church in his person and his work, and we all share in the common benefits of his work, we all share in the common spirit of God, then there should be a reflection of unity in a healthy church that has the Gospel at its center.

One of the things that encourages me about our congregation is this, one of my many, it's not so much about numbers. I don't even look at attendance numbers. I could not tell you how many people attend our church because I don't watch that. I deliberately avoid that so that I don't get caught up in that. What I think I see happening here is people coming together and people having this kind of disposition, and the spiritual reality of that is far more important than the numbers that are attached to it. You know, if we never grew beyond the size that we have, you know, whatever. Numbers can belong to the Lord. What we have responsibility for, what we have some measure of control over, speaking individually, is the attitude that we bring to it. And it's sweet. It is sweet to be in a church where you're not hiding from people that are walking toward you because you're in the middle of a conflict with them. It's sweet to know that you can go to somebody and have a conversation that is not going to be dominated by someone that is after their own interest, that's not going to be after somebody complaining about what they think should be happening. All of this is a reflection of the kind of disposition, the perspective of humility of mind that Paul is calling for here in the first four verses of Philippians 2. It calls for unity and those first two verses, he says be united, and what he's done here in verses 3 and 4 is what is it that produces unity, what is it that produces unity that makes a local body a sweet place to be and a sweet place to minister. It's not simply an external conformity that he calls for, he goes to this inner disposition of humility. It's kind of a reverse engineering that's taking place in this passage. He calls for unity. He says what will produce unity is a prior attitude of humility, and then what the attitude of humility is grounded on is the person of Christ and that's what we're going to look at in more detail next week. But just by way of preview, look at verse 5, having called for this humility of mind in verses 3 and 4, he now says in verse 5, "Have this attitude in yourselves." What attitude? This attitude of humility that I've been talking about. And where can I find that attitude? Verse 5, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." Then he goes on from there.

So beloved, we contemplate Christ and we understand that God in human flesh suffered for sinners in the most ignoble manner of death conceivable, even death on a cross. Though he was God, he suffered as a criminal in order to bring benefit to those that he was acting on their behalf. We look at that and we say, "Wow, that's humbling to realize that I was included in the ones that He did that for. It's humbling to realize that when I was an enemy of God, Christ died for us, Christ died for me. This is really humbling. I pour contempt on all my pride," as we sang a little bit earlier. "Oh, to be separated from, to put to death that self-assertive boasting person that I use to be and to put that all to death. I'm humbled by that and I want to be more like that. I don't care if the world notices me. I don't care if the broader Christian world notices me. I don't care if people in the church notice me. I just want to be like Christ. I want to reflect the humility and life

and the humility of character that he manifested." And as that works itself out in the hearts of individuals, each one of us being like that, then that humility starts to spill over and expresses itself in unity of relationships in the church.

You see, when a church is experiencing conflict and division, it's not to be avoided. It needs to be dealt with. It needs to be resolved. But also it just can't be papered over and say, you know, and just try to do that which will silence and satisfy the grumpiest person in the congregation. No, no, no, that's not what you do. You have to go past all of that, come back to Christ and cultivate that sense of unity and humility that Christ gives birth to.

Well, beloved, we'll consider the example of Christ more next week. Paul points us to Christ as we consider these things. Two things as I close here. I just continue to emphasize this so that I'm not misunderstood. I thank God because I believe this is the kind of church that Truth Community Church is and what it is becoming more and more with each passing day. I wouldn't say that if I didn't think it was true because I'm accountable to God for what I say and I need to be truthful in what I say. We are blessed to be a part of this body. I'm blessed to be the pastor here. Praise God for that. What we want to do is cultivate it even more in our own individual hearts and to cultivate it as we look forward to the future. Not take it for granted but to guard that and cherish it and protect it as something of inestimable value, which it is because it is a work that Christ is producing among us. I thank God for you and the part that you play on it. I pray to God that he would continue it and protect it going forward.

Let's pray together as we close.

Lord Jesus, You are the Lamb of God and You gave Yourself in love for us. I pray that You would help us live that out in Your church. The church belongs to You, Lord. It's not ours. We share in it, we're stewards of it for a time, but it belongs to You. Cultivate that attitude and perspective in us. Thank You for the unity that You've given us here. We pray that You would deepen it still more. We pray for those like-minded churches that across our land that we share in doctrine together, we share in ministry together. Father, we know that some of them have fractures within them. We pray that You would bless them and help them and give their leadership wisdom to find their way through these things. But for now, Father, we just humble ourselves before You. We commit ourselves to the perspective and the pursuits that Paul has identified for us here in Scripture, and we pray that You would deepen all of this still more in us in the days, months and years still to come. For Your sake and for Your glory we pray. Amen.

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