

Week 4: Gospel Unity

Chapter 2:1-11

So far... we've seen Paul's affection for the Philippian church, his gratitude for their Gospel partnership, and his desire for them to grow in Gospel-centred love. He has re-assured them that his suffering is not hindering but advancing the Gospel, and powerfully articulates his desire to boldly glorify Jesus whether by life or by death.

The Foundation of Humble Unity

"So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind." (2:1-2)

As Paul is about to launch into one of the most famous portions of Scripture - a song of praise, glorying in Jesus humility and grace, he first sets in place a foundation for our responsiveness. He tells the Philippian church - if you've received any of the good gifts that come through the Gospel, if you've experienced any of the goodness of God in church community, then that should be your fuel for copying the example of Jesus in the way that you live. This is no small thing at all - we're talking about a radical counter-cultural way of living that will grate against our natural instincts in all kinds of ways. There's no way we can just sum this up out of the depths of our willpower simply because it's the right thing to do.

Thankfully, Paul is indicating here that we don't have to do that - the radical sacrifice he is calling us to by the example of Christ is as a response to the radical grace that He pours out on us day by day. Take a look at this list - he talks about the encouragement in

knowing Jesus - encouragement that comes from a home waiting for us in heaven, and a Saviour walking there with us. He speaks of comfort in the reality of the love that God has for us, no matter our performance whether good or bad. The word 'participation' could also be translated fellowship, and along with all these things could equally be the realities of relationship with God through the Spirit, or the relationship between believers, joined together in the family of God.

Lastly he speaks of affection and sympathy, or mercy and compassion - in short, if you've experienced any of the multitude of blessings God gives to His children then your response can only be to look at and imitate Jesus. If you've received all these blessings through the humble obedience of one Man, then how can you withhold those same things from others. How can we not unite together in Gospel-centred humility?

For Discussion:

How can we make sure our obedience to Paul's call to humility is done for the right reasons?

Other Verses for study:

- Romans 12:1-2
- 2 Corinthians 5:13-15

The Humility of Christ

"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus" (2:5)

As Paul is urging the Philippian church to humble unity he first gives them some clear instruction. Firstly, not to do anything to further their own interests out of selfishness and an inflated ego. Secondly to humbly consider others as better than them, and thirdly to let both of those things drive them to give their lives away for the good of others. Just on their own these are a huge ask, only remotely possible by the power of the Holy Spirit living within us, but then Paul goes even further - he gives us the greatest example of these things that there could possibly be.

Did Jesus act out of selfish ambition? No, He didn't grasp for status for Himself, even though it was rightfully His. Did Jesus consider Himself as greater than others? No, and He didn't even just consider others as better than Himself, He actually became lower than the majority of mankind. Jesus stepped off His throne and became a servant to the world which refused, and still refuses to recognise who He is. Did Jesus live His life for the interests of others and not His own? Yes, absolutely. In fact Jesus death is the greatest example of someone giving away

their life, and He did it so that we could know forgiveness, freedom, acceptance and eternal life.

There is no higher standard than this. None of us can ever give up all that Jesus did - we'll never come close to His level of glory, and unlike Him, we in no way deserve the exalted place that God has given us as His children. However we will still come across some of the same challenges Jesus did - those we must consider better than ourselves won't always seem deserving, and won't always treat us as we treat them, but Jesus has still given us the ultimate example of what it means to live this kind of life.

Challenging though it may be, because this is God's blueprint for humanity, it's the best way for us to live. It's the pattern of heaven, and as we let go of our temporary lives to serve those around us down here we earn for ourselves a far greater life in the one to come.

For Discussion:

What will it look like in our lives as we practically follow Jesus example of humility?

Other Verses for study:

- Proverbs 22:1-5 • James 4:7-10 • Romans 12:9-21

The Humble Exalted

"Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow." (1:18)

As Paul is urging the Philippian church to Gospel-centred unity, he's just given us the ultimate example of the humility that will lead us down this path. Jesus literally emptied Himself of all the privileges of His divinity and took the place of a lowly servant that He might serve us and ultimately save us from our sin. Now Paul moves on to tell us of Jesus' resulting exaltation and in doing so while reminding us of our responsibility of obedience to the King of kings, while also giving us great hope as we pursue a life of Christlike humility.

The Bible tells us that Jesus Himself endured the cross 'for the joy that was set before Him' (Hebrews 12:2) and a big part of that joy was to be exalted back to the right hand of His Father, back in the eternal fellowship that had been temporarily broken on the cross. The Bible also tells us that a part of our reward for the humility we show here in this life is that God would also exalt us at the proper time - Matthew 23:12 simply says 'those who humble themselves will be exalted'. So as we fight this fight for humility, we both look back at the grace of God poured out on

our lives and we look forward to the coming exaltation of those who give their lives away in humble service just as Jesus did.

While we face the challenges of the radically counter-cultural life God has called us to, we would do well to remember that in the grand scheme of things this life is nothing but a vapour (James 4:14) which is here for a moment and then vanishes away as quickly as it came. We know it doesn't feel like it at the time, but this is the reality - no sacrifice we can make in this life can even come close to being compared to the exalted glory that is coming for the children of God. Every rung down the ladder we climb in this world will be matched and multiplied in the world to come as we are lifted up to reign with Jesus forever. This isn't about us earning an exalted position, it's all of grace as we are simply faithful to the call of God, depending entirely on His work in our lives to produce Christlike fruit for all to see.

For Discussion:

How can we use this principle of humility to exaltation to encourage our obedience in this life?

Other Verses for study:

- 1 Peter 5:1-11 • Hebrews 2:5-9 • Matthew 18:1-4