

Humility

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Preacher: Stephen Allison

[0 : 0 0] to that passage that we were reading in Philippians chapter 2. The first time I personally remember really encountering this passage was when I was in late high school and was a trainee leader at a scripture union camp for the first time.

The team leader at that camp used this passage as the basis of his teaching to all the leaders at the start of the week before the campers had arrived. He used it to basically outline the attitude, the kind of ethos he wanted for the entire camp that week to remind us all that we were there not simply for our own enjoyment but to serve God and to serve the campers who came along. But what I remember most isn't so much the way in which he taught on this passage but it was the way in which he demonstrated the attitude of this passage as he led the camp.

The way in which he didn't just delegate tasks to others, he got involved and helped out. He wasn't a kind of distant team leader that just gave orders, he was involved. He told me once that when he was a camper he had a one particular group leader that had made a massive impact on his life and had helped point him towards Jesus. This leader had been great at football and was someone that he really looked up to and respected. And then one day he walked into the toilets at the camp and he saw this leader cleaning the toilets. He couldn't understand why this amazing guy that he looked up to would have to clean the toilets. Surely his time would be better spent playing football and doing games with the campers. And for talking to this leader he was pointed to the reason why this leader was serving in this way and cleaning the toilets. And it came down to his faith in Jesus. And Jesus being the humble one who had taught him humility. The bit of the story that the team leader I knew never told me was that, and I only noticed that actually over several years of doing camps with him, is that at the end of every camp when you had to do the clean-up duties for the whole site, make everything ready for the next week, he was always the one who went and cleaned the toilets as the team leader. To remember what he had encountered, but also demonstrating powerfully that he was not above getting involved and helping out. He was someone who demonstrated humility in the way he led the camp, in the way he led all of us. He took the words of Paul in this passage to heart and they made a real difference in his life. Humility is absolutely central to the Christian life.

Without humility we will never come to God. We'll never recognize that we need a Savior. Without humility we'll never grow in grace because we'll think we've already arrived and we have everything sorted out. Both becoming and living as a Christian requires humility.

In James chapter 4 verse 6 it says, God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble. Quoting from a psalm that we'll sing at the end of the service. Now intellectually I know this. Intellectually I know I'm not perfect, I know I fail God all the time and yet my pride gets in the way and I still at times try to rely on my own strengths, my own abilities and don't rely and rest on God. And I'm sure the same is true for many of us.

[3 : 1 8] There's often a disconnect between the way we know we ought to live and the way we actually live day by day. But that leader I mentioned took these words to heart and they made a difference and so I think the real challenge for all of us this morning is we also need to take these words to heart and see in which they can have the power to transform our lives as words that come from God.

So I want to look at this passage under three things this morning. First of all we'll look at the importance of humility, then the illustration of humility and then finally the implications of humility. So starting with the importance of humility. In verse one of chapter two we get what is perhaps one of Paul's most passionate and personal appeals in all of his letters. If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy. The church in Philippi is a church that Paul knows well. This is a church that he planted. He was the first leader of this church. He went there and he met Lydia, the wealthy purple dealer. She'd allowed him to stay in her house and supported his work. Even when Paul had left this church and when he's later in prison, the church in Philippi sends Epaphroditus to care for him in prison and to look after him. So it's such a terrible journey that Epaphroditus almost dies making the journey. And it's obvious throughout the letter how much Paul is grateful for what Epaphroditus did and grateful for this church. These are people he cares about a great deal. But with all of Paul's letters there's always some issue, something that's not quite right in the church. So what's the issue that Philippians is trying to address? Well it's the lack of unity within the church. There's an example of it given in chapter 4 towards the end where he says, I entreat Eudoea and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. But that seems to be an example of the bigger problem of disunity which has taken root in this church. In chapter 1 verse 27 we see Paul starting to address this. He 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. Paul wants this church to be united, striving together for the gospel. And when he comes to chapter 2 then, this is the problem that he is trying to address. And he gives four reasons in verse 1 as to why they should be united. Firstly, any encouragement in Christ. Now it says if there is any encouragement in Christ. Paul knows that they have this encouragement. Remember he was their pastor, he was among them. So he's really saying, wake up, remember that you have this unity, this union with Christ and that should change the way you live. Because there is only one Christ. It's not like you are united to this Christ and you're united to this Christ.

There is one Christ. So if you have any encouragement from that union, you have to be of one mind. Secondly, any comfort from love. Love is often used in Paul's letters to express the love of God the Father. The one who sent Jesus in his love to save us. Any comfort from that love, any comfort from the gospel, any comfort from what God has done for you. Any participation in the spirit, the spirit being the one who, another word for participation is fellowship, who unites us all together and draws us together.

And so we see in the first three things there, all three persons of the Trinity at work. Both the Son, the Father and the Holy Spirit. And what's Paul saying? If you have any encouragement, comfort, any support from the work that God is doing in your life and all three persons, then be united. So you don't have to put yourself first. Because Christ already put you first.

You don't have to love yourself because God already loves you perfectly. And because the spirit is the same spirit in all of us, we don't have to vie for positions of importance because it's all God's work. All three of those then lead to the fourth reason, which is slightly different.

[7 : 35] Any affection and sympathy. Now this is the fruit of the work of God in our lives, that we have renewed hearts and minds. We have renewed relationships to God and renewed relationships to one another.

So we have affection and sympathy. So on the basis of all four of these things, on the basis of all the work that God has done in our lives, Paul calls the people here and he calls us to be, to complete his joy by being of the same mind, same love, full accord and of one mind. He calls them to unity.

Now, disunity is an infection which really spreads throughout the church. It starts with one or two people being disunited and it quickly people take sides. What's the antidote that Paul prescribes in this letter? Humility. Because at the root of so much disunity in the church is our own human pride and selfishness. It's the fact that we put ourselves above the glory of God and the good of others.

We act out of what Paul calls in verse 3 selfish ambition or conceit. We elevate our own preferences about how the church should be run or our own views on how worship should be done. We elevate all of the stuff above what the church is about. So we care more about how what we get out of church than about what church exists for. Church of course exists to glorify God, to serve one another as we all grow in grace together and to show the love of God to our communities as we reach out with that gospel.

In contrast to our natural appeal to our own selfishness and pride, Paul calls on us to demonstrate humility. He says in verse 4, let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others. He says in the verse before, in humility count others more significant than yourself. So what is humility? Humility in some ways in the Greek world wasn't a virtue. It wasn't something that they actually felt was important and so some people suggest that Paul actually made up the Greek word humility here by throwing together some other Greek words in order to make this word humility. But what concept was he trying to express? It actually goes back to an Old Testament idea, the idea of lowliness which is expressed throughout the Psalms, is expressed in that psalm we sung and will be expressed in the psalm we'll sing at the end. Lowliness is about us comparing ourselves to creator God. When we look to God, when we see how high above us he is, we realize how low we truly are.

[10 : 13] So humility comes about because we rest in his care. We realize that the only way we will survive is by trusting in him and we see ourselves in a true perspective by looking to God. We also see other people made in God's image and that helps us to see that we must care for them as well.

Humility is not some kind of religious facade or kind of false modesty. In reality false modesty is an example of pride because I say, oh I'm not very good at that, hoping that you'll then say, oh you're brilliant at that and build me up. This is not false modesty, this is not a religious facade, but this is a proper estimation of who you are when compared to God. It's recognizing that you're not God. It's recognizing that all the gifts that you have come from God and recognizing your own weaknesses. True humility doesn't think too much or too little of yourself. In fact, true humility takes the focus away from you, as we see in this passage. Looking not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. The Bible teacher John Piper points out in this verse 4, when it talks about interests, the word interest isn't really there in the Greek. It just says, let each of you look to your own. Let each of you look not only to your own, but also to the of others. It's a filler word, interest is the best way in English of expressing this idea of all of life. Because that's what this is really calling us to, every area of our life to be handed over to God. In every area of our life to look to that of others instead of our own. Because far too often we are good at handing over so much of our lives to God. And then we keep this little bit to ourselves, the bit that we're not prepared to give up. So John Piper looks at this verse and he says you could translate it this way to get the full force of it. Let each of you look not only to your own financial affairs, or your own property, or your own family, or your own health, or your own reputation, or your own education, or your own success, or your own happiness. Don't just think about that, don't just have desires about that, don't just strategise about that, but don't just work towards that. But look to the financial affairs, and property, and family, and health, and reputation, and education, and success, and happiness of others. So we need to be in the church alert to the needs of one another. We need to know where each other need help, and help where we can. And the book of Galatians tells us to do good to all, especially those in the household of faith. So we need to do this both within the church, and to our surrounding community. It's humility that leads to unity in the church. Because if I care for you, and you're all caring for one another, and then we are all having our needs cared for, just not by ourselves. And that brings us all together, unifies us. Now Paul could have stopped there. Paul could have ended his sermon there. These are people that he knew well, that he had been their first pastor. They would respect Paul. He had given them the message that they need to be unified, and humility is the way to get to that. He could have ended it there. But he knows what the people in Philippi are like, and he knows what we are like. He knows that we hear these words, and yet we will still go when our pride will take over next week. He knows that we will listen for a moment to what God says, and go out the door, and live our own way. Because we are sinful still. We are still so far from living the way God wants us to live. So what does he do? He gives us the ultimate sermon illustration. He points us to Jesus himself as the ultimate example of humility.

Which leads us to our second point this morning, the illustration of humility. From verse 5, have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus. One of my professors at ETS, Bob Aykroyd, always says that theology is practical. So we should never have theology as an abstract discipline, something that's kind of just in books and only for certain people. All theology should be practical. It should lead you to glory and awe in God more, and it should lead to change in your life. I think this passage is one of the great examples of this.

Because Paul is about to go on and consider some of the deepest and richest theological ground. He's going to look at the mystery of the incarnation, God becoming man, and he's going to use this to show us how we should live in humility. How our lives should be changed by this truth of what God has done for us.

Same mindset, attitude that is in Christ Jesus. Who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. Jesus is God.

[15 : 05] That's what it means by being in the form of God, having equality with God. Jesus is fully God. All the majesty of deity is his. All the functions, privileges of being God are his.

He was loved by the Pharaoh. He was worshipped by the angels. He's invulnerable to pain, frustration, and embarrassment in heaven. In John 1, verse 3, it tells us that through him, all things were made.

Without him, nothing was made that has been made. So Jesus made the universe. He deserves all glory for that. All the power of God is his. Now as human beings, we long for power.

We love to have a little bit of authority to rule over others, to be able to dominate and be in charge. We love to be able to delegate to others the tasks we don't really want to do. And we love to take the credit when the credit is being handed out.

We love power. We love it. We grab it. And we want to hold on to power at all costs. Jesus' approach is so different from that. Even though all the power was rightfully his.

[16 : 11] Even though he is God. And unlike us, he deserves all the glory. He didn't use it for his own advantage. He didn't grab it. He didn't grasp it. Instead, he emptied himself, in verse 7, by taking the form of a servant.

This is the mystery of incarnation. God became man. How exactly that happened? We don't know. But we know the Bible tells us it did. That Jesus was 100% God and 100% man.

Some people take the word emptied in verse 7 to mean that Jesus somehow gave up some of his godness. He became less God. But that's a complete misunderstanding. Because what does the verse actually say?

But he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant. By taking. So Jesus didn't give anything up. He took to himself our frail and weak humanity.

With all its limitations. He was fully God and fully man. So he grew weary and he got tired. He hungered and he thirsted. He felt the throbbing pain of a human body.

[17 : 16] He subjected himself to our messed up world with all its suffering, all its temptations. I don't know if you've ever seen the TV show The Undercover Boss. Basically the CEO of the company goes and works on the shop floor to see what the company is really like.

To see what's really going on. People don't know that he is the boss of the company. This is what Jesus did. He covered his glory. He allowed the world to mistreat him because they did not know who he was.

But not only that. In verse 8 And being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death.

Even death on a cross. Even death on a cross. Crucifixion was the worst form of death in the ancient world. Paul, who wrote this letter would never be crucified because he was a Roman citizen.

He had all the rights and responsibilities that came from that. Jesus died the death of the lowest of the low. There's never been a greater display of humility.

[18 : 21] Nobody ever started out so high as God himself and went so low dying the death of a common criminal. There's a hymn called The Author of Creation which has a verse in it that really sums this up.

It says, Yet you left the gaze of angels, came to seek and save the lost, and exchanged the joy of heaven for the anguish of a cross.

Mark 10 verse 45 says, For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. 2 Corinthians 8 verse 9 says, For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich.

Remember, no one has ever humbled themselves this much. This is the true example. Jesus used the full power of God not to his own advantage but he poured himself out for us.

As Jesus is dying on that cross there are people there who are taunting him. They're telling him to step down from that cross and prove that he is God. And he would have every right to do that but he doesn't.

[19 : 35] He remains on the cross. He chooses the pain, the suffering, the isolation. He uses all of the power of God to stay on that cross and to die freely experiencing the loss of the Father's love, the anguish of the Father's wrath.

Why did he do that? Because he knew it was the only way that we could be saved. And so he went willingly. He knew that we had fallen so far short of God that we had rebelled against God so much that we deserved to be the ones on that cross.

but he knew that we couldn't bear that. He knew that we could not survive that. So he went to the cross in our place. The ultimate demonstration of who God is in his love and grace as he went to that cross and died freely for us.

In Philippi there were some people who were so concerned about their own self-image, their own sense of importance, they wanted people to think well of them. They wanted to be recognised as someone who really was someone, someone who really mattered.

By contrast, the one who did matter, the one who mattered supremely, allowed himself to be mistreated, allowed himself to be misunderstood and allowed himself to be killed. Paul's intention in this passage is that we would gaze upon Jesus, we would gaze upon his example of humility and ask ourselves how can we withhold anything from him given what he has given up for us.

[21 : 06] And then in verse 9 we see the vindication of Jesus. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name. He was raised from the dead, he ascended to be with God.

God declared to the world that this was his son. He vindicated him and he also showed to each of us that although we two will die, we will be raised as well. And verse 10 and 11, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Those are great words but they present us with a real challenge which leads us to our final point this morning, the implications of humility. Those verses in verse 10 and 11 are a promise that one day every knee will bow before Jesus and declare that he is Lord.

Even the most hardened atheist, even the person who says I will never do that. One day they will bow. But for some people it will be too late. The hour of salvation will have passed them by and they will face the eternal judgment of hell.

They refuse to humble themselves in this life. They refuse to trust Jesus now and in the end there will be no salvation for them. The challenge for each of us is how are we going to respond to this Jesus?

[22 : 31] Will we bow and confess him now? Will we respond humbly realising that we are not worthy of what he did for us but resting in the fact that Christ secured the victory? Remember I said at the beginning that humility is essential for the Christian life.

We won't come to God unless we humble ourselves. If you're not yet a Christian here today you need to ask God to humble you to bring you to the place where you're prepared to bow the knee to recognise that Jesus has already done all the work and waits without stretched arms.

You have to stop trusting in your own power to save yourself and turn to him instead. And if you are a Christian you also have to ask yourself are you humbling yourself? Are you still coming humbly to God day by day or do you think you've already arrived as a Christian?

The true Christian community the true church is where believers are all humbly trusting in God and seeking the good of each other. Yet as we said at the beginning as well there can be a disconnect between the way we know we ought to live and the way we actually live day by day.

So how practically can we kill these temptations to pride in our lives? Well first of all we need to be praying because it is a joint enterprise. We cannot do this on our own. We need God's help.

[23 : 44] But we also need to take practical steps. One book that is particularly helpful in this area is a book by Bonhoeffer called Life Together. In it it gives seven practical principles for eradicating selfish ambition from Christian communities.

So you give seven principles which we'll just go through briefly. You won't remember all of these or take all of these in but I want you to think honestly as you hear these seven things is there one or two of these that you know you struggle with and that you can take steps to put into practice in your life?

First of all he says that Christians are using their tongue refusing to speak uncharitably about a Christian brother or sister. Essentially he's saying don't gossip about one another because isn't that the acceptable sin in the church to talk about others?

Second of all he says we have to cultivate the humility that comes from understanding that they like Paul are the greatest of sinners and can only live in God's sight by his grace. Essentially we need to understand the gospel which is what Paul was getting at at the start of this passage.

We need to understand how much God has done for us so that we do not think of ourselves as more important than other people in the church. We need to recognise that we all need to come to God. Thirdly we need to listen long and patiently so that we understand our fellow Christians needs.

[25 : 02] How can we help one another if we don't know one another so we need to listen to one another? Fourthly we need to refuse to consider their time and calling so valuable that they cannot be interrupted to help with the unexpected needs no matter how small or menial.

So we need to not think that our plans for our day are the most important thing. That we cannot stop the plans that we have made because God put something else into our life. An example of this was the Prime Minister William Gladstone.

He was one day preparing one of the most important speeches of his life that he was going to deliver the next day in the House of Commons and a mother comes and chaps on his door and tells him that her disabled son is dying and asks if he will come and comfort her son.

He lays down the papers and he goes to be with her son and he comforts him and he leads that boy to Christ before he dies. He didn't consider his own important job as Prime Minister and all the work that he had to do as more important than spending time with the dying boy.

We need to bear the burdens of our brothers and sisters in the Lord both by preserving their freedom and forgiving their sinful abuse of that freedom. We are sinful and we will let one another down in the church we will sin against one another in the church but we need to forgive one another.

[26 : 16] We need to declare God's word to our fellow believers when they need to hear it. Very often we are actually better at telling God's word to others than we are at hearing it ourselves when we need it.

We need other people in the church to come to us with God's word in times of difficulty in times of trial. Finally we need to understand that Christian authority is characterised by service and doesn't call attention to the person who performs the service.

This final point is perhaps most challenging for those of us who are leaders in the church who have authority and power given from God over people who could insist on using our rights for our own benefit but that's the secular model.

We need to follow our example of Jesus who poured himself out for others. So leaders in the church must serve others must never ask someone to do something they wouldn't be prepared to do themselves must never act out of recognition to be respected or to be looked on highly by others.

And also there's a challenge for all of us in our modern world we have such wonderful access to podcasts to books and to listen to sermons online of all these great Christian preachers great Christian teachers but our temptation at times can be to idolise them as the personalities to care more about the individuals that we are listening to than to do what Paul calls us to do in this passage which is to gaze on Jesus.

[27 : 43] All of that stuff is great when it points us to Jesus just like Paul did. Paul was a great Christian personality a great Christian teacher in his day and he points people to Jesus not to himself.

So when you're tempted by pride when you're tempted by disunity in the church when you realise there are issues between you and another brother or sister in the church turn to this passage gaze upon your saviour remember what he has done for you remember that the one who had no need to humble himself the one who had every right to insist upon his right because he is God chose the humble path chose to go to the cross and to die in our place it was my sin and your sin that led him there surely that knowledge must humble us must motivate us in gratitude to serve our God let's pray do you then around yourself have learnt that and just is there you can where lugares dot the

QUESTION however whatever and so