

Unity's Necessity

Philippians 2:3-5

Introduction: This past week I had the opportunity to travel up with Grace Elementary to their 6th grade science camp to observe what was going on for a day and a half (which was simply pulling pastoral privilege to be with my daughter). I was reminded at how great this age group can be. They are still growing up so they are not too big yet, and though they can be squirrely, have not gone into full blown too-cool-for-school-and-you mode. They actually participate and get excited about all the activities, like doing the gray squirrel dance when they got mail (ask Mr. Marvin to do the dance later). This was a particularly great group of kids and parents, so the marks from the staff and the camp were very positive. What was of interest to observe in thinking through Philippians 2:1-4 was the fact that this group played out realities, positively and negatively, and they did not even realize it. I watched kids act out of insecurity and selfishness, some girls being caddy and others being left out while some boys acted out and tried to be the center of attention when they simply needed to sit and control themselves. But I also observed some huge times of **unity and encouragement** as kids overcame fears of heights by launching themselves off the zip line or up the rock wall to the chants of enthusiastic classmates. Overall we watched a disparate group of students who came together in a concentrated time to learn about God's hand in nature, but also learn to work together and in turn, put aside all of the individual interests and supported each other in a way that you could easily say it was, **loving**.

What was simply glimpsed in a camp setting can be tasted, experienced, and reveled in with God's church. We are called to this incredible mission, to glorify God by living out the reality of the gospel in every aspect of our lives, making much of Christ because He is the most valuable, precious, and central part of us. We know this is not our home and the church is not about trying to **keep people in but training and sending them out**. What we do will be misunderstood, hated, and seen as a threat which will lead to mistreatment, separation, and threats. This is nothing new since we are united with the same struggle for centuries as a message of **love** and a life of **purity** will be threatening to a world that longs for but cannot understand it. Because of this call, we must remember:

- **The gospel is transformative, not additive** - We will not understand our mission, the church, or the book of Philippians if we miss this part. To live a life **worthy of the gospel** (1:27) means that we do not add Christ to our tidy life, but Christ is all, and He transforms us through the Holy Spirit who shapes us through the Word, so that our hearts and minds move from idolatry to worship, from hard-hearted selfishness to soft hearted response, from self-love to volitional love, choosing to love others from our love of God.
- **Unity is essential** - We were never called to walk this life alone, but were called into the family of God and are to live life together, loving each other, standing firm, striving side by side, having the same mindset and moving in the same direction together. This is the challenge for any church that has more than one person: bringing a rag-tag group to not just get-along and co-exist, but to move together on the same mission. This means we will walk together through **suffering** and **agonize** together since life is complex and hard.
- **Humility and Selflessness are necessary** - What is essential for this to happen, and why can the world only find this is war, athletics, or making money? It takes **humility of mind and a life lived for the sake of others**. This is one of the most counter-intuitive realities in scripture since it runs opposite to our natural mind and heart. This is why we were reminded that we have been encouraged by Christ, have been comforted in love, have participated in the Spirit, and experienced affection and sympathy (2:1).

In order to truly experience unity, we must first have self evaluate, making sure that we see ourselves properly before God and others. Only when we all walk in humility and selflessness can we experience the beauty of unity and the joy of the church.

Fighting Against the Enemy Within (2:3)

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit...

Identifying Selfishness & Pride

Pressure and conflict will always potentially divide us from without: those who oppose, unplanned circumstances, and living in a broken world will make everything difficult. Yet the greatest threat to our relationship with God and each other resides **within**. This means that **why we do** what we do matters, perhaps more than our external actions. Our **motives matter**. The word used for "selfishness" here was used for one who persistently sought personal advantage and gain regardless to how it affected others. It was associated with *rivalry, quarrel, and strife*. This is the motive that one will use flattery, deceit, and even false accusation to promote self to the detriment of others. But selfishness is merely the **symptom** to the root cause, and that is **pride**. Translated as "conceit", the literal word is *vain* or *empty glory*. This means that someone not only seeks his own glory, he sees himself through the lens of that glory. Arrogance or being wise in ones own eyes (Rom. 11:25) is the root cause or driver in selfishness.

The command is as inclusive as it is difficult: *do not do one thing from selfishness and pride*. Paul keys on these two since from these, all other sins flow. In order to identify selfishness and pride, we must first realize what we are up against:

Self-Deceptive

The problem with these sins is that they are by nature *self-deceptive*. We can do good things for others externally but when our motives are driven by self-glory, it is not only invalidated, it actually is offensive to God. In fact, the problem with a verse about pride and humility is that we initially apply this to someone else rather than our selves. It is so much easier to recognize the pride and selfishness in someone else rather than acknowledge and admit it in our own hearts.

These two come from an *idolatrous belief that we are due more than we received and that we are worthy of more honor than we're getting*. Every time we think of ourselves as better than others we are actually declaring that **we in fact are God**. Any time we believe we have it all figured out, that we can act independently or with superior knowledge, we are operating out of selfishness and pride. This is nothing new, and in fact was the source of the first sin:

Look at **Genesis 3:1-6**. The ploy and temptation that came from the *crafty serpent* was the same appeal used today: God is keeping something from you and does not want to share His glory. So if we'd simply take matters in our own hands, we too can be happy. After Eve answered the first inquiry about what God had commanded (inserting the fact they could not touch the fruit - which God had *not said*), the serpent said, "**You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God knowing good and evil.**" She then saw the fruit was pleasing, looked good, and could bring wisdom, she ate and gave some to her husband who was (lazily, passive, abdicating) with her.

Do you see the appeal? It is not just that you will **feel better**, it is that you will in fact **be more like God**. Sin offers to feed our selfish desires and grant us glory --- you will be like God because you ARE GOD. This is happening incessantly today. God gives clear commands for our good but we believe we know better. Last night we were at the CPC banquet and heard one of my new favorite speakers, a woman

named Gianna Jesson, who survived an abortion but was born with cerebral palsy, which makes life, walking, and marriage difficult prospects. She reminded us that there is a pervasive thought when it comes to sex and relationships that we can merely do whatever we want, forsaking the commitment to marriage, or making it optional, and simply ask for forgiveness later, having our cake and eating it too. When we willfully sin this way, we are exercising selfishness and pride ignorantly, knowing that God is opposed to the proud and HATES our pride (Prov. 6:16-17; James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5). Our pride lies to us, and when we believe that we are the highest good, we willingly and whole-heartily believe the lie, even when it leads us to a slow and sure death.

Pervasive

The second problem with pride and selfishness is how pervasive it is. It is an ***equal opportunity sin***, affecting every generation (the greatest to millennial), every tribe, tongue, and nation, and it does not care if you are rich, poor, or middle class. It does not discriminate. It does not simply go away on its own and can only grow if left unchecked. It keeps us away from some people and causes us to look down at others. It focuses on personal agendas to the exclusion of others in the church.

Disunifying

Ultimately, pride and selfishness kill relationships, both divine and human on every level. The result of sin is more sin, and our pride and selfishness will move from the suppression of the truth to the claim of wisdom over the knowledge of God, in which God will give over us over in the lusts of our hearts to impurity (Rom. 1:18-24). When left unchecked, the consequential result of our pride is we are free to **run in the imagination of our own heart**, pursuing what we think is right and best that we believe will make us happy. However, just like with Adam and Eve, it only leads to other misery and sin:

- **Blameshifting** - We blame others for our problems, failing to recognize our own culpability in our sin and responsibility to love, forgive, and strive to be at peace with all people. This kills relationships, particularly marriages. Blame shifting means we are not willing to admit and acknowledge our own sin but keep pointing the finger back toward others, circumstances, and even God for our problems
- **Self-Justification** - When we fail to admit our own pride and selfishness, we move to justify ourselves that we ARE right, THEY are wrong, and there is no need for US to change. This leaves us not only blaming others but elevating ourselves. When we are elevated above others, there is no sense of conviction or motivation to change, and we rather expect others to change first.
- **Victim or martyr mentality** - We convince ourselves that we have been wronged and ALWAYS have received the short end of the stick. It's always someone else's fault, and we admit nothing, accuse the accuser, and deny everything.

Does this sound familiar to you? If it does, you are actually in tune with your own heart. If not, pride may be killing you without realizing it. After doing marriage counseling and experiencing marriage for the last 17+ years, **diagnosing marital problems has become easier and quicker**. When one or both members of the marriage believe the problem lies outside of themselves, the conflict will continue and get worse. When one spouse begins to acknowledge their sin, confesses, asks for forgiveness, and turns from self, that is the leader in the marriage. When this is the husband, our wives feel the freedom to respond in kind, and when both members of a marriage humble themselves, conflict will go away and joy is the satisfying replacement.

Killing Selfishness & Pride

- **Fear the Lord alone** - *"The fear of the Lord is the hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate."* (Prov. 8:13) *"...by the fear of the Lord one turns away from evil."* (Prov. 16:6). When we fear the Lord, we fight by faith to believe that God is exactly who He says He is, that we are not Him, and that He does not share His glory with another. When we are focused on God, we trust Him and are wary of our own heart and mind, and we run to His Word for guidance rather than our own thoughts and way.
- **Understand the lie** - When we fear the Lord, we recognize who we are and what we deserve. When we remember that we deserve only judgment, we can take everything else by the hand of God by grace. We can stop playing the losing game of **"if only _____, then I will be _____"** Insert whatever you think will make you happy (job, spouse, money, material) into the equation, and if you think it will breed satisfaction, completion, ease, or make it better, you are operating in a lie. God offers Himself as the ultimate satisfaction, and when we are satisfied in Him, we no longer believe that only if our spouse changes can we be happy.

Ultimately it is what we replace selfishness and pride with that will lead to unity. That is why Paul focused on humility of mind and selflessness toward others that brings real and lasting change.

Seeing ourselves (& others) properly (2:4)

...But in **humility** count others **more significant than yourselves**. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but **also to the interests of others**."

Mindset of Humility

Humility is hard. It can be an elusive prospect, one that once you think you've attained it ("I'm not humble!"), you lose it. Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but rather thinking of yourself less. Humility does not mean we are passive or lack courage. In fact, when we are humble we can stand firm, stand up, and stand together. Humility has everything to do with **how we think**, how we see ourselves and others.

- **View ourselves in light of God's grace** - *"Fro by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you **not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment** each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned."* (Rom. 12:3) How highly is that? We are a product of God's grace alone. If I was left by myself to myself, I would run headlong into judgment away from God, all along thinking that I have life figured out. When I realize that I am a product of God's grace, I don't look up too far up or down in pride (too highly, I look down at others, too lowly I believe even God can change or save me). Rather, I look at Christ for my worth, value, and identity. This is where **worship is derived**, as I remember that I am nothing but in Christ I have been made a son, an object of God's love, one who is fully known and fully loved.
- **View others in light of who we are in God's grace** - This phrasing in this verse is tremendous. ***Consider others as having surpassing value GREATER THAN yourself.*** Pride is by nature condescending. We think of ourselves first and better than others. When we understand who we are as products of God's grace and mercy, we begin to see others properly. Think about this. If other people around you in this church, if your spouse, if that one who you have conflict with is viewed as having surpassing value greater than yourself, then some amazing things start to happen:

We listen to understand each other more - When we understand where others are coming from, we stop passing judgment, or draw quick conclusions, or make blind assumptions.

We grow in empathy - *"Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep."* (Rom. 12:15) When we view others as more significant, we move toward them to understand, and when they hurt, we hurt. Cold heartedness toward others is the blinking red light of pride.

We are willing to move toward the lowly - *"Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight."* (Rom. 12:16). This means we are willing to move toward those that others would consider lowly or have no upside in our economy, and we are willing to do the lowly tasks, those that others would deem beneath them. No one and no task is beneath someone who views themselves through the lens of God's grace. We miss out on such deep joy and growth when pride keeps us away from people and from service. When we refuse to engage with either, we exemplify pride and selfishness and function out of our own strength rather than the grace of God.

Pursuit of Selflessness

Not only do we view others properly, we seek their interests rather than our own. Notice here that Paul is not advocating some weird version of asceticism, self-emptying without any action on our part. We are to care for our own souls, pursuing Christ, paying attention to what we know and how we live (see 1 Timothy 4:12-16). But what Paul is advocating is seeking out the interests of others rather than seeking out our own first. This keeps us away from huge unity breakers:

- **Problem with preferences** - We all have preferences, those things that we feel strongly about, areas we'd even be passionate about. These can be areas of theology, practice, or programs. We feel so strongly about these that we think EVERYONE should as well. This moves us to push these preferences even when others are not as passionate or have competing preferences. When nothing changes, others become roadblocks to our agenda and are seen as the problem. However when we adopt a humble mindset, we can not only think about others more significantly, but **their preferences as well**. ***"Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor."*** We seek to prefer one another in love and honor. That means I seek to appreciate your passions and even seek to enhance them. When we all hold our preferences loosely, we are no longer bound by conflict caused when we do not get our way.
- **Unmet expectations** - Unmet expectations are silent killers. Expectations are those things that we can assume everyone knows and should understand, whether we have communicated them or not. I've learned in ministry that most people have a certain expectation of the pastor, and will judge him based on whether he lives up to those expectations or not. We've had people leave the church throughout the years because the pastor did not make it to the hospital, or did not call, or did not visit like was expected. Unmet expectations are killers in relationships. What is the solution? When we live with a humble mindset and seek the interests of others, life is no longer about us, but about **Christ, others, and the gospel**. Though we cannot erase expectations, we can choose to respond graciously toward others when they fall short of them. We are willing to give the benefit of the doubt, willing to extend patience, or even simply to prefer them when they did not come through the way we thought they should. It is when we walk humbly that conflict is resolved and unity thrives.

Looking to our Savior (2:5)

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...

Example of Jesus

Next week we will look at the example of how this mindset plays out by looking at the author and perfecter of our faith, Jesus Christ. We are to adopt the same mindset that God the Son had when He became a man and died in our place.

Union with Jesus

Does all of this sound impossible? It should. Battling pride and selfishness is a wearying exercise, knowing that we will wage war until we die. These two twisted and intertwined sins are the bane of my existence that sprout up in multiple ways at inopportune times. Yet, it is because we have the same mind in us that was in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 2:16) that we can battle every day. So we do not lose heart, but keep **evaluating, keep putting our sin to death, and continually humble ourselves** before the mighty hand of God.

Questions for Discussion:

- Where do you see selfishness and pride play out in your mind and heart? How does it affect your relationship with God? With others?
- What would be different about this church if we were truly united out of humility and selflessness? How would evangelism be different? How would discipleship be different?
- Read Romans 12:1-16 - What would our homes/church look like in playing this list out?
- Are there any preferences that you have that have caused conflict with someone else? How about an unmet expectation? These can cause bitterness and grudges against others. Is there a time when this happened or is there anyone you need to talk to as a result?

Counseling Thought:

Humility is not thinking less of ourselves but thinking of ourselves less. God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). Humility only comes two ways: God humbles us or we are willing to humble ourselves (1 Pet. 5:6). When was the last time you actively humbled yourself? When was the last time you viewed your pride like a silent assassin in your soul, one that you either kill or will kill you? Consider repenting of your pride, turning to trust the Lord, casting all your cares (worries) on Him, for He cares for you.