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“Unity through Humility”

Philippians 2:1–11

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All relationships take work. Whether inside or outside the church—in marriages and families, and between friends, co-workers, and neighbors—wherever you have two sinners, you have the potential for disagreement and conflict. Our human default is selfishness, which leads to division. But in Philippians 2, Paul tells us that unity comes from humility, and humility comes from following the example of Christ. Follow along in today’s study as we look at Christ’s example to encourage us to walk in His humility.

1. Context

a. Paul’s purpose in writing Philippians

- i. Paul wrote from prison in 62 A.D. to the Believers in Philippi, Greece.
- ii. Paul wrote about joy, and the word “joy” or some form of it appears 14 times in the 4 chapters of Philippians.

b. Believers’ reasons to rejoice

- i. God will finish what He began in us (**Philippians 1:6**).
- ii. God will use our chains for His divine purposes (**Philippians 1:13**).
- iii. To live is Christ, to die is gain (**Philippians 1:21**).

2. **Philippians 2:1–11** – “[1] Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, [2] fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. [3] Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. [4] Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. [5] Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, [6] who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, [7] but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. [9] Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, [10] that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, [11] and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

3. Harmony and division

a. Paul’s appeal

- i. Paul began his letter to the Philippians by making an appeal.

- ii. Paul rejoiced when Believers could put aside their differences and unite in Christ.
 - 1. The implication is that unity in relationships brings us joy.
- b. God's math
 - i. God uses addition.
 - 1. **Acts 2:47** – *“The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”*
 - ii. God uses multiplication.
 - 1. **Matthew 14:16–20** – Jesus multiplied the fish and loaves.
 - iii. God uses subtraction.
 - 1. **Acts 5:1–11** – God judged Ananias and Sapphira for lying.
 - iv. But division is Satan's game.
 - 1. Satan knows that if he can divide, he can conquer.
 - 2. Satan loves division in the church specifically, but he also seeks to cause division and strife in all relationships.
- c. The source of unity
 - i. Unity comes through humility, and humility comes from following the example of Jesus (**Philippians 2:2–5**).
 - ii. **DISCUSS**: Why is humility such a powerful deterrent against strife (**Philippians 2:3; James 4:1**)?
- d. Not a hypothetical division
 - i. Paul called out two women by name for quarreling.
 - 1. **Philippians 4:2** – *“I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.”*
 - ii. Paul was not unfamiliar with quarrels.
 - 1. **Acts 15:36–40** – *“[36] Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.’ [37] Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. [38] But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. [39] Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; [40] but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God.”*
 - 2. The disagreement between Paul and Barnabas was so sharp that they parted ways.
 - 3. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them on their mission trip.
 - a. John Mark was related to Barnabas.

- b. Some translations say John Mark was Barnabas' cousin.
 - 4. But Paul did not trust John Mark, because he had left them during a previous missionary journey.
 - e. The inevitability of disagreements
 - i. Disagreements are bound to come wherever you have relationships.
 - 1. There is not always someone who is right or wrong.
 - 2. People can see and interpret things differently.
 - 3. We must value unity and peace over being right.
 - 4. **DISCUSS:** How can you reframe the purpose of your arguments from winning and being right to finding solutions and living in harmony for the good of the relationship?
 - ii. To argue is human, which is why **Philippians 4:2** ends with *“be of the same mind in the Lord.”*
 - 1. We need Jesus' help to live in unity.
 - 2. **DISCUSS:** How does submitting to the Lord lead you to change how you deal with conflict?
 - iii. **Romans 12:18** – *“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”* (NIV)
 - 1. Unity is easier to find in Christ, for we follow the same Lord.
 - 2. But unity is not always possible.
 - 3. We must seek peace as far as it is possible, regardless of whether the other person is a Believer.
 - 4. **DISCUSS:** What does it mean to pursue peace? And how can you be faithful to obey the Lord when your search for peace seems one-sided?
- 4. **Ephesians 4:1-3** – *“[1] I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, [2] with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, [3] endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*
 - a. What does and does not come naturally
 - i. Selfishness leads to division, and both come naturally.
 - ii. Humility leads to peace, and both do not come naturally.
 - 1. The word *“endeavoring”* implies that harmony in relationships takes work.
 - 2. That is why in Ephesians, another of Paul's prison epistles, he focused on teaching the same principle of unity.
 - 3. **DISCUSS:** What is one way you tend to fall into selfishness? How has that created division in your spirit and relationships? How has the Lord shown you a better way?
 - b. **Philippians 2:5** – *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”*

- i. The incarnation was God humbling Himself to be the perfect sacrifice for us.
 - 1. *“Incarnation”* is a combination of the Latin words **in** and **caro**.
 - 2. **In** means “into” and **caro** means “flesh.”
 - 3. The incarnation describes when God left heaven’s glory to stoop to earth, wrap Himself in flesh, and be born of a virgin.
 - 4. **John 1:14** – *“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”*
 - 5. The mystery of the incarnation—that God would condescend to reach us—seems unbelievable to many, including Muslims.
 - 6. The example of Jesus should teach us to be humble.
 - 7. **DISCUSS**: What does it mean to have the mind of Christ? How do you develop this mind?
- c. **Philippians 2:6** – Jesus *“being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.”*
 - i. The word *“form”* is translated from the Greek **morphē**.
 - 1. **Morphē** means “the essential character and nature of God made visible.”
 - ii. The phrase *“did not consider it robbery”* implies Jesus did not take anything He did not already possess.
 - 1. Jesus was not created when Mary was pregnant with Him.
 - 2. Jesus always existed as God, and being born to Mary was only His entrance into our world.
 - 3. Hence, Jesus being *“equal with God”* was not a *“robbery”* because He was not taking anything that was not due Him.
- d. **Philippians 2:7–8** – *“[7] But [Jesus] made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”*
 - i. Jesus made Himself of no reputation.
 - 1. Jesus did not cling to the rights or recognition of His deity.
 - 2. Jesus exchanged His royal robes for human likeness.
 - ii. Jesus took on the form of a *“bondservant.”*
 - 1. The Greek word for *“bondservant”* is **doulos**, meaning “one who willingly submits himself to another’s will.”
 - 2. Jesus willingly submitted Himself to the will of the Father.
 - iii. Jesus took on the appearance of man.
 - 1. Jesus merged His deity with His humanity.
 - iv. Jesus humbled Himself even unto death.

1. C.S. Lewis said, "True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less."
 2. To be humble is to be others-minded (**Philippians 2:3-4**).
 3. Jesus exemplifies true humility, taking on the cross for us.
 4. Augustine said, "If you ask me concerning the precepts of the Christian religion, I will answer, first, second, and third, humility."
 5. **DISCUSS**: What "triggers" your compassion? How are you purposefully placing reminders in your day to look outside of yourself?
- v. God rejects the proud.
1. **James 4:6** – *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* (NLT)
 2. **James 4:10** – *"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up."* (NIV)
 3. **Proverbs 22:4** – *"Humility and the fear of the LORD bring wealth and honor and life."* (1984 NIV)
 4. **Luke 14:11** – *"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."* (ESV)
 5. **DISCUSS**: Do you allow God to show you areas where you're being proud? Do you humble yourself? When has God had to humble you?
- e. **Romans 15:5-7** – *"[5] May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, [6] so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. [7] Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."* (1984 NIV)
5. **Philippians 2:9-11** – *"[9] Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, [10] that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, [11] and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*
- a. *"Every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord"*
 - i. This phrase does not imply that all will be saved.
 - ii. This phrase declares that one day, no one will be able to deny the Lordship of Christ.
 1. We will all stand before Jesus one day.
 2. You will either accept Jesus as Lord and enter your eternal reward upon death, or you will reject Jesus and call Him Lord when it is too late and face judgment.

3. **DISCUSS:** How does knowing that everyone will face Jesus as Savior or Judge one day encourage you to witness to the lost?
- b. For now, we still have the opportunity to accept Jesus and be saved from wrath.
 - i. **Romans 8:1** – *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”*

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James (NKJV)