

Message #11

Philippians 2:3-8

Years ago, Donald Grey Barnhouse told the story of a remarkable crime that occurred in a New Jersey school on Valentine's Day. Apparently, a seemingly shy, quiet 8-year-old boy put a Valentine on his teacher's desk, then went down into the basement and set fire to the school by lighting a wastepaper basket in the boiler room. When the Fire Department suspected that this fire was started by a student, this 8-year-old admitted that he had done it. When asked why, his answer was "In class yesterday, they took away my bubble gum." He destroyed the school over a piece of bubble gum.

Unfortunately, this willingness to ruin something, if you don't get your own way, is not just a mentality found in 8-year-olds. Over the years, I have seen wives walk away from husbands and children and husbands walk away from wives and children because they did not get their own way. In one book I have on counseling, a counselor told the story of a Pastor who walked away from his ministry and wife because she did not want to go to the Bahamas and go skinny-dipping with him. Imagine that one would be willing to destroy your reputation, ministry and marriage for something so foolish. People like to get their own way.

Unfortunately, it is also true in the church. There are some who would destroy the church and a good ministry and think nothing of it. There are some people in the church who want their way and if they don't get it, they will do a verbal devil work and will do and say whatever it takes to make it happen. They will verbally attack and destroy and they truly don't care if they split the body of Jesus Christ or ruin His name. All people like this want is their own way. These kinds of people project themselves to be kind, gracious, concerned, spiritual people. But underneath that facade is a spirit that says if I don't get my own way, I'll destroy everything.

Marshall Shelley, in his book "Well Intentioned Dragons" tells the story of a mother who went to watch her son perform in the marching band. Her son got out of line and the mother said to someone sitting next to her, "Look, everyone else in the band is out of step except my Freddy."

Jesus Christ does not want any division in His church. Jesus Christ does not want a church to split. He wants unity. Never did He want people in His church to focus on themselves. **He wanted people in the church to be God-oriented and other-oriented.** When a church is moving that direction, it fills up the joy of God. God sees that church and is pleased and joyful. That is exactly what Paul wanted the believers in the Philippian church to realize. What Paul says here is this:

BELIEVERS IN A CHURCH ARE COMMANDED TO CONTINUALLY STRIVE TO HAVE A LOVING, UNITED HARMONY AND OTHER-ORIENTED MENTALITY IN VIEW OF ALL THAT JESUS CHRIST HAS DONE FOR US.

In verses 1-2, Paul established "what" the church was to do, namely fulfill his joy by striving for a loving, united harmony (2:2) and he also established "why" the church was to do this, namely because of all the wonderful things God has done for the believer and the church (2:1).

In these next verses, Paul establishes “how” we can develop this loving, united harmony. Here is the blueprint God gives to be so united that it fills up His joy. There are three specific directions to follow in this inspired manual for producing a loving unity that makes God happy:

SPECIFIC DIRECTION #1 – Don’t do anything out of a self-centered motivation. **2:3a-b**

When Paul says in **verse 3**, “do nothing” with these attitudes, it is the same as saying, “don’t ever do anything” with these attitudes. Now there are two self-centered motivations that should never be the reason we do anything.

Self-Centered Motivation #1 - Don’t ever do anything out of selfishness. **2:3a**

The word “selfishness” (επιθια) is a word that refers to doing something motivated by self-seeking ambition or rivalry (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 179). This is given in the context of the church.

There are people who are working and doing things in the church but their motive is not pure. God knows it and they know it. They are doing something because they have this secret ambition and rivalry to be on top. **These kinds of people never cause unity; they cause disunity. They bring dissension to the church.**

Some people do things for the purpose of exalting themselves. They want to be in charge. They want to be in front. Their motive is not to minister for God to help build the church. Their motive is to exalt self.

I literally saw two men nearly destroy a church because both wanted to be an awana leader. They ran self-centered, behind scenes campaigns that cut each other down to try and get the leader role. They both wanted to wear the uniform and strut around like a dominant king pin and they nearly split the church.

Self-Centered Motivation #2 - Don’t ever do anything out of empty conceit. **2:3b**

This word “empty conceit” is a word that refers to doing something out of foolish, empty arrogance and conceit.

There are people in the church who are motivated by a cheap desire to honor themselves. Their motivation is empty and foolish and it is dishonorable to God and it will destroy the unity in a church.

There is always a threat in the church of a Diotrephes type who always wants the preeminence (III John 9). They are always at the services and in all the action but they are not there to glorify God; they are there to glorify themselves. It is empty, cheap and foolish and God will not honor it.

It is one thing to make a good name for oneself through faithful, humble service. It is quite another to make a name for oneself by proud arrogant dominance.

Moises Silva, who wrote a commentary on Philippians said, “The true obstacle to unity is not the presence of legitimate differences of opinion, but self-centeredness.” The point here is not to do anything out of a self-centered motivation.

SPECIFIC DIRECTION #2 – Do everything out of an other-oriented motivation. **2:3c-4**

In this text Paul says there are two other-oriented actions that do promote a loving unity in the church:

Other-Oriented Action #1 - Regard others as more important than ourselves. **2:3c**

The prepositional phrase “with humility of mind” means to maintain a humble mentality that puts self at the lowest degree and level. This particular concept was used in secular literature to describe the Nile River when it was at its lowest, literally when “it runs low.”

Now the adverb “more important” means to consider another as superior in rank (*Ibid.*, p. 458). The word “regard” means to actually think this way; to actually believe this (*Ibid.*, p. 198). The pronoun “another” refers to others of the same kind. These are people in the church who are believers in Christ.

What Paul is saying is that the believer who will be joyful and will fill up the joy of God will be one who considers others to be superior to himself and will continually put himself at the lowest level while continually thinking others are more important.

Most people think the way to happiness is to push and shove your way to the top. God says the way to happiness is to put yourself last and push others to the top.

When a believer does his or her best to elevate others, he/she walks away clean. But when one tries to elevate self, one walks away dirty.

Other-Oriented Action #2 - Watch out for the welfare of others. **2:4**

There are two ways to live life: 1) Look out for the interests of self; 2) Look out for the interests of others.

Now in some respects we must look out for the interests of self because we each have responsibilities. The verb “look out” is one that means to look at, behold, contemplate. It carries with it the idea of fixing our eyes on something as a watchman (*Ibid.*, p. 410). It is possible to spend one’s entire life totally focused on self. That is all one looks at and thinks about. It is also possible to look out and think about the needs of others.

Now what is really interesting about this is the pronoun “others.” This pronoun refers to others of a different kind. What this means is that we need to be looking out for the welfare of others who aren’t like us. Not just those who have our same interests, but all kinds of people. Godly people don’t always and only think about themselves and their welfare; but they also think about others. People who operate like this are the most joyful people of all.

SPECIFIC DIRECTION #3 – Do everything out of a Christ-like mindset motivation. **2:5-8**

Here is the high bar and goal to shoot for. **Verse 5** says we are to develop the attitude and mindset that Jesus Christ had. J. B. Lightfoot said we are to “reflect in our own minds, the mind of Jesus Christ.”

One commentator said, “volumes have been written on these verses.” But the point of them is easy to see: **Jesus Christ, the highest ranked Person in existence who held the highest position in the Universe, willingly left it in order to stoop to the lowest degraded position in existence to save sinners who don’t deserve it.** That was His mindset.

In **verses 6-8** Paul describes the mindset and thinking of Jesus Christ when He decided to leave heaven and come to this earth to die on a cross.

Now there appears to be two main themes that Paul develops concerning Jesus Christ:

Theme #1 - Who Jesus Christ actually was. **2:6**

Now there are two specific realities brought out about Jesus Christ:

(Reality #1) - Jesus Christ continually existed in the form of God. **2:6a**

The participle “existed” is one that means continually existing. The noun “form” (μορφή) not only speaks of form or shape, but also appearance (*Ibid.*, p. 296). **The point of this word is that prior to Jesus Christ actually coming to this earth, He was continually existing in the form and actual appearance as God.** That appearance was partially seen by Peter, James and John at His transfiguration (Luke 9:28-32).

(Reality #2) - Jesus Christ continually existed in equality with God. **2:6b**

That word “equality” means to be equal and identical and the same in size, number and quality (*Ibid.*, pp. 218-219). The word “grasped” means an act of robbery in which someone seizes something (*Ibid.*, p. 60).

When Paul says Jesus “did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,” **what He means is it was not robbery for Jesus Christ to claim equality with God because He was God.** That was His identity. That is who He was. When Jesus Christ is identified as fully God, it does not rob God of His glory because it is absolutely true.

Now I like to learn things and try things. My latest was to follow directions to put together a leaf blower. I enjoyed it and the leaf blower works perfectly. Now it would be robbery for me to claim to be an expert in small engines. It would not be reality. In fact, for me to do that would make a mockery of those who actually are the experts.

Christ's claim to be equal with God was not mockery or robbery. That is who He was. It is reality.

Theme #2 - What Jesus Christ was willing to do. **2:7-8**

Now we get to the heart of all of the discussion. Here is what Jesus Christ as God was willing to do. This is what should motivate us to be other-oriented. Frankly this is mind boggling that Jesus Christ would be willing to do this for us. There are two unselfish actions:

(Unselfish Action #1) - Jesus Christ emptied Himself. **2:7**

Jesus Christ was willing to empty Himself of His majestic splendor and glory. Now the verb "empty" is aorist, meaning this was a one point of time moment. Jesus Christ was willing to set aside His visible glory as God and also set aside the independent use of His Divine Attributes. Now that in itself would be amazing; but then Paul says He took two condescending steps:

Condescending Step #1 - He took the form of a servant. **2:7a**

The word "form" is the same word used in **verse 6**. Here Jesus was existing in the form, shape and appearance as God and He was willing to set that aside and become a slave in form, shape and appearance.

Do we grasp this? Jesus Christ fully existed as the glorious God. He was willing to empty Himself of that visible glory to become a servant of God.

Condescending Step #2 - He was made in the likeness of men. **2:7b**

Now Paul says He also was willing to be made in the likeness as a man. **The incarnation was a major demotion and sacrifice for Jesus Christ.**

This concept is so foreign to this world. Most people, when they have reached the pinnacle of something never want to go backwards and lower themselves to what they were. Could you imagine, for example, a multibillionaire saying, let me give this all up and become a paper boy in Kalamazoo? Well I can tell you this. If any person did that, it would be far less than what Jesus did.

He was willing to set aside His visible glory as God and the independent use of His attributes that God has to come into this sin-cursed world.

(Unselfish Action #2) - Jesus Christ humbled Himself. 2:8

That word “humble” is the same word of **verse 3** which speaks of a humble and lowly mindset. Jesus Christ willingly chose a mindset that put Himself in complete obedience to God as a servant. Jesus Christ was willing to subject Himself to the will of God and He willingly subjected Himself to two experiences:

Experience #1 - He subjected Himself to death. 2:8a

Death was a penalty for sin. Since Jesus never sinned, He did not have to die. But He chose to voluntarily subject Himself to death so that He could save sinners.

Experience #2 - He subjected Himself to death on the cross. 2:8b

Philippi was a Roman colony which meant the people were considered to be citizens of Rome. No Roman citizen could die by crucifixion. If a Roman citizen were to die, it had to be by decapitation. Crucifixion was the punishment that Rome used on their worst non-Roman prisoners. No Philippian would ever have to worry about dying on a cross.

But Jesus Christ was willing to die on a cross.

Why? Why was He willing to do this? Why was He willing to become a man, a servant? Why was He willing to die on a cursed cross?

He did that all for us.

Now do you think we can stop coming to church with a self-centered attitude? Don't you think it is about time to leave our big fat ego at home when we come to church?