

Joy In Spite of People

Philippians 2

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In Philippians 1, we saw that we can have joy in spite of circumstances. And certainly we are all in circumstances right now that we didn't choose, that we have no control over, that we're not excited about, but we can have joy. Joy is an artesian well in the soul; it's not dependent upon outward things. The Holy Spirit is like an artesian well that springs up in our souls.

It's kind of like a motorhome that is self contained. You don't have to have any hookups. You don't have to have any plugins. You can be out in the middle of a desert and be self contained; you can have everything you need to sustain yourself.

In Philippians 1:21, Paul said, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." That's an indication of what we call the "single mind." The way to have joy in spite of our circumstances is to have our mind set on one thing, and one thing only. Paul said that his circumstances strengthen the fellowship with other believers in the Gospel, that his circumstances help to further the Gospel and his circumstances help him to be strong and stand strong on the faith of the Gospel.

Not only do we have joy in spite of our circumstances, chapter 1, but we have joy in spite of people, chapter 2. In Philippians 2, Paul deals with the important doctrine of humility, sacrifice and service. The teaching for believers is that as Christ gave Himself in sacrificial service to others, so we, too, should give ourselves in sacrificial service to others.

Not only can circumstances steal our joy, but people can often rob us of our joy. The key to having joy in spite of people is the submissive mind. In verse 5, Paul says, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." This one verse is the key to this whole chapter. In this whole chapter, Paul is going to tell us how to have the mind of Christ, which is having an attitude of humility, sacrifice and service, or putting others first.

Why did Paul write chapter 2, right in the middle of this book on joy, where he deals so much with the need for unity and humility? For a couple of reasons: number one, Epaphroditus had come from Philippi to Paul to bring the offering that the believers in Philippi had sent. Not only did he bring the offering, the grace gift, but he also brought good news and bad news.

The good news was that the believers were doing well, growing in the Lord, that they loved Paul and wanted him to have this offering. But the bad news was that there was some dissension in the fellowship, some strife going on in the church, some division.

That doesn't surprise anyone who is part of a church to realize that Christians don't always get along with one another. But we should.

This division in Philippi wasn't like the division in Corinth, which was a doctrinal division. It was

more of a personal issue; they weren't getting along. So there was division in the church. As a result, in chapter 2, Paul is actually dealing with this subject of division.

The second reason Paul wrote chapter 2 was because there were false teachers. In chapter 3, we'll see that in verses 1-6. But in chapter 4, he deals not with the false teachers but with the disunity and disharmony that was going on in the church.

We need to understand that there is a difference between unity and uniformity. Paul calls for unity but not for uniformity. Uniformity comes from pressure on the outside; you dress the same, think the same, do everything exactly the same, follow rules and regulations. It is uniformity pressed on from the outside.

But unity is the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, whereby the love of Christ constrains us, and we're knit together because we love God, love each other and we have a common goal and purpose of making the Gospel known.

So Paul wanted them—and us—to have unity. He knew that the way to unity was to live in humility. And all that we will cover today is not just about getting along together in the church; it's perfectly fitted for getting along in your marriage and in your home. Maybe you've been shut up in your home for a length of time with several people, and you start to get on each other's nerves. Well, here is the message for you today: how to get along together in unity through humility.

Paul does three things, which we'll cover. First, he pleads with us for unity and humility. Second, he then gives us the picture or pattern of Jesus, our example of humility. Then, third, he explains the power that is available for us to live lives of humility, resulting in unity.

He first gives us the plea for unity, verses 1-4. He says, "If there is..."—or literally, "since there is"—"...any consolation..."—or "encouragement"—"...in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy..."—then Paul asks this of them—"...fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind..."—this is our phrase—"...let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."

There are two main sections to these first four verses. The first section is the grounds for having unity in the body of Christ. Verse 1 is describing what believers share together "in Christ." The first thing we share in Christ is encouragement. Christ can encourage your heart today. Let Him encourage your heart. So if you are "in Christ," you have encouragement. That's the idea of coming alongside someone to encourage them, to help them and to strengthen them. At a time like this that we are facing in our nation, when the pandemic is going on in our world, we need encouragement.

So we as believers should reach out to one another, text one another, email one another, send letters to one another, call one another. Appreciate one another. We are one in Christ, and we

should reach out to one another.

Let us know if you are listening to our sermons online. Let us know if you are being blessed by the church services and the messages every day. Let us know if you are being encouraged and helped by these broadcasts.

Paul also says there is comfort that comes to us from His love, verse 1.

He mentions the fellowship of the Spirit. The Greek word is "koinonia," which means that we share these things in common. The same Holy Spirit who dwells in you dwells in me. Every Christian has the Holy Spirit. So we are one in the Spirit of the Lord.

Next he mentions compassions and tender mercies or "affection and mercy." God, give us compassions and tender mercies for one another.

Paul was asking them to make his joy complete by putting these things into practice. He asked them to have the same love, to be in one accord and of one mind.

Then the key is in verses 3-4: "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit." It seemed that the division that was going on in chapter 4 was two women who weren't getting along in the church. There seemed to be strife and vainglory. The vainglory seemed to be a reference to boastful pride. But this is the key in verse 3: "...but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself." The idea is that you are more important than me; I esteem you and your needs more important than me and mine in ministering to you. Then verse 4 says, "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."

In verse 1, we have the ground for unity. Then in verses 2-4, we have the graces for unity. They are love, verse 2; humility, verse 3; and sacrificial service to others or others first, verses 3-4. The way that we can have unity is to have love, humility and put others first.

What does it mean to be humble? It doesn't mean that you put yourself down or you think less of yourself; it literally means that you just don't think about yourself. F. B. Meyers said, "Humility is that virtue that when you know you have it, you've lost it." When you have a badge on that says, "I'm humble," you're not humble; someone should take that badge away from you. Or when you stand up in a testimonial service and say, "Thank God I've finally arrived at humility." You just lost humility.

It is a virtue that comes as a result of seeing myself as a sinner, unworthy of God's mercies and grace, turning my eyes upon Jesus and understanding that I am unworthy and undeserving of all the blessings He gives me. As a result, it is then simply living my life not thinking of myself but thinking of others. In the time we are going through right now in our nation, we need to be humble and not think about ourselves. We need to think of how we can serve others in the home, serving others by helping them and praying for them.

So we have to practice love, verse 2; humility, verse 3; and we have to consider others more

important than ourselves. Only Jesus can save us from our empty, self-centered lives. This has great application for us in our families, in our homes and in our marriages.

Then Paul moves, secondly, in verses 5-11, to the picture or pattern. Paul wants us to see a picture of what it means to be humble, what it means to live sacrificially or self-denying and giving of ourselves. In verses 5-11, Paul says, “Let this mind...”—or “this attitude,” “this outlook on life”—“...be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who...”—that is, “Christ”—“... being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 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. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 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, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

In verse 5, we have the illustration of Christ. “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” Now you might ask, “Well, how do I have the mind of Christ? He was the God-man, but I’m just a man.” The word “mind” here means “attitude.” We’re to have the same attitude. Attitude determines outcome. The attitude we have in whatever we pass through is important. What is going to be my attitude? We can’t change our circumstances; we can only change our response to our circumstances. We need to have the same attitude that Jesus had; He is our primary example.

Next, Paul describes for us who Jesus was, what He did and that He died on the Cross. Let me break down verses 6-8. First, we see His humiliation. Verse 6, “...who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.” Next to verse 6 in your Bible, write in “Jesus is God” or “Jesus is sovereign.” When it says that He was “in the form of God,” it literally means that He was in the very essence, God. The word “form” or “morphe” doesn’t mean outward shape; God is a spirit, so He doesn’t have hands or feet or a shape. It doesn’t mean outward order. It means “inward essence”—“who being in the very essence of God.” Verse 6 is one of the very clear and powerful affirmations of the deity of Christ. He is the sovereign Jesus Christ who is God.

And notice at the end of verse 6: “...did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.” Some translations say, “...thought equality with God not something to hold on to.” It was not something Jesus had to steal, because He already possessed it, so He didn’t need to hang onto it.

The next phase is in verse 7, where He moves from being the sovereign God to being the humble servant. Verse 7 says, “...but made Himself of no reputation.” In verse 6, it was “being in the form of God,” and now it is “made Himself of no reputation.” So Jesus is God, from all eternity to all eternity, but now He is taking on Himself or “made Himself of no reputation.” This is where we get the word “kenosis” or “emptying.” Jesus emptied Himself or “made Himself of no reputation.”

What did He empty Himself of? It's so important to understand in this passage that Jesus emptied Himself not of His deity but of His outward display and manifestation of that deity. He laid aside His majesty, and He took on humanity. He was like a king among peasants incognito. He took off His robe, His crown and His kingly ring and came dressed as a peasant. He came as a man. That's why they didn't recognize Him as being God; He was veiled in flesh.

In verse 6, He was the sovereign, and in verse 7, He was the servant. He emptied Himself voluntarily and temporarily set aside the use of His divine attributes and the majesty that He had possessed in heaven. Then He took on Himself "the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men." That is a reference to the Incarnation. So we have His humiliation described as the sovereign who humbled Himself and became a man.

Why is Paul telling us this? He's not actually telling us this so we would understand the doctrine, which is in this passage, but he's telling us this so we could follow Jesus' pattern in the way He lived. He's telling us so we will know how to practice humility, resulting in unity.

So He came as a servant, and was made "in the likeness of men." He was fully man. In verse 6, He was fully God. Without giving that up, He laid aside His majesty. In verse 7, He took on full humanity.

Then in verse 8, we have His sacrifice. Why did He become a man? "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." So Jesus is the sovereign—His deity; Jesus is the servant—His humanity; and Jesus is the sacrifice—His Cross. Jesus gave Himself on the Cross for our sins. He "became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the Cross."

We could do a whole sermon on the Cross, the center of God's revelation in sending His Son to die for us. But let me just mention three things about the Cross. In the Cross, Jesus first rescued us from sin; second, He defeated Satan and conquered the devil; and third, He revealed the Father's love. It's a rescue mission, a victory and a revelation, as He came to reveal the Father's love to us.

Then in verses 9-11, we have His exaltation. "Therefore God..."—who exalted Christ? God the Father—"...also has highly exalted Him..." That means the Father exalted Him super abundantly above all others. Paul says in Colossians that Christ is to be "preeminent," and indeed He is. "...and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven..."—in heaven they bow and worship Him—"...and of those on earth..."—we need to bow and worship Him—"...and of those under the earth..."—the demons and Satan himself will bow to His authority—"...and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." So we have His eternal deity, His temporal humanity, carried off into His exaltation, which is something He has now by the right hand of God the Father.

So Jesus is our prime example. We are to practice love, humility, putting others first and

sacrificing and serving others. When we become believers, we become followers of Christ. Jesus is our pattern, our picture, our prototype; we are to follow Him and be like Him.

You might say, “Well, I’m not Jesus; how can I live a life of sacrifice and service? How can I be humble and really live out this Christian humility that Paul is exhorting us to?”

That moves us to the third section, the power, verses 12-16. We have a power available to us to walk in humility and unity, verse 12. “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Here is the point: “...for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the Word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.”

Notice in verse 12, Paul starts with a “therefore.” Whenever you have a “therefore,” find out what it is there for. Look for these key words. Paul is now taking all that he said from verses 1-11 and puts it all in shoe leather; he wants to apply it to our lives.

Paul calls us “beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence...”—the first thing we need to do is to—“...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” So Paul says this is how you put it into shoe leather. This is what you need to do: you need to get out there and live out your salvation.

Now notice that he doesn’t say that you work for your salvation. We know that the Bible teaches that “By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” So we are saved by grace. We’re not working to be saved; we’re working because we are saved. Every true believer should have the manifestation of their faith in good works. Read the book of James. True saving faith manifests itself in works.

That’s what Paul is saying in verse 12. We need to work out our salvation. You can’t work out what God hasn’t already worked in. We have to live it out. It means to live out your Christianity on a daily basis; put it into practice.

The second thing we need to do is let God work in us, verse 13. So we work out, but God is the one working in. “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” Verse 12 is a work-out, and verse 13 is the work-in. How do we live out our salvation? God works in us. This is called “sanctification.”

So we are saved and live it out, but in order to live it out, to be sanctified, there are several things that God does. He works in us by His Word. Spend time in His Word—reading His Word and studying His Word and meditating on His Word. He also works in our lives by His Spirit—shaping us, molding us, making us. We are sanctified by the Spirit. And God also works in our lives by circumstances. This is the one we don’t like. He works by adversity, difficulty and trials.

And certainly God has brought trials into our lives at this time. Some of you have already lost your jobs, some may be sick and facing some of your fears. But God allows them in our lives for a purpose: so that we might grow and mature. The goal of the whole process is to be like Jesus. When we get saved, He gives us the righteousness of Christ, but when we are sanctified, He makes us look like Christ; He produces holiness. One, He declares us righteous; two, He's making us righteous. So He uses trials, troubles, difficulties and hardships to mold us, make us and shape us into the person He wants us to be, like Jesus Christ.

The third thing we need to do to put it into practice is we need to shine out. So we work out, verse 12; we let God work in, verse 13; and we need to shine out, verses 14-16. Paul says, "Do all things without complaining and disputing." That's the first way we need to shine "in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation": don't grumble, gripe, murmur or complain. It could be he is talking about toward God. It's easy at a time like this to say, "Why, God, did you let this happen? What are You doing? Why is this going on?" You may even get bitter toward God or complain to God. "God help us not to murmur, help us not to complain," because we need to shine out in our walk with God.

Then we need to be blameless and harmless, as well, verse 15, which is our second way to shine out. Paul says, "...that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world." So we live in a dark world, in a "crooked and perverse" world, and we need to let our light shine. Don't murmur; be blameless and harmless and shine out.

My favorite instruction is in verse 16. We need to hold out. "...holding fast the Word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain." So the whole time that we're not murmuring and we're not complaining, we are shining out and telling others about Jesus—"holding fast the Word of life." The "Word of life" is the Scriptures. Contained in the Scriptures is the good news, and the good news is about Jesus Christ. We need to let our light shine, tell others about Jesus, preach the Gospel and do all we can to tell everyone about Jesus Christ.

Why should we do that? Paul says, "...that I may rejoice in the day of Christ." "The day of Christ," for the church, is that day when He catches us up to meet Him in the air, and we will stand before Him in the bema seat, the judgment seat or the reward seat of Christ. We will give an account of our lives—how we lived our lives, what we did with our lives.

Paul says that when that day comes, when the Lord returns, he wants to "rejoice" in that day. Why? He wanted to know two things: that he did "not run in vain" and that he had not "labored in vain." He uses two images here: number one, he was running a race. He wanted to make sure he would win the prize; he didn't want to "run in vain." He wanted to know that in the race he was running, he was not running needlessly. Number two, he wanted to know that he had not "labored in vain." He uses a picture of a builder. He wanted to know he was building for a purpose, building something that would last.

Paul was living with an eternal perspective. How is it that he could be humble and sacrificial in service? Because he knew one day he would hear those words: “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord.”

Now I want to give you a bonus point. There is a fourth point to this chapter, and that is the proof. First we have the plea, then we have the pattern, then we have the power. But closing out this chapter, we have the proof that you and I can be humble and sacrificial in the way we live.

You might say, “Well, I’m not the Jesus, the God-man. I know I have the Holy Spirit, but I don’t think I can live this way.” Paul gives us three other examples of living this way: the first is himself, in verse 17. “Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.” So Paul says that when he gives his life in sacrificial service for them, it brings him joy and rejoicing.

You say, “Well, John, I’m not an apostle. I’m not the Son of God. I’m not Paul, the apostle. I’m not in league with them. How am I going to live like that?” Well, we have another example, of Timothy, in verses 19-24. But notice verses 20-22: “For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the Gospel.” Paul said that Timothy was humble and sacrificial in his service toward others. He was like-minded; he gave himself for the things of Christ in serving others.

You say, “Well, I’m not a pastor. I’m not the Son of God. I’m not an apostle of God. And I’m not a pastor over the church of God.” Okay; here’s another example. His name is Epaphroditus, verses 25-30. He is an interesting man. He came from the church at Philippi. He was carrying the offering from Philippi to Paul in Rome, where he was under house arrest.

I believe he volunteered for the mission. Somehow on that journey—he didn’t get Corona virus perhaps—but he got sick. He got deathly sick. But he gave himself willingly and risked his own life to serve Paul and to help the church by carrying the offering to Paul.

I can picture a church service in which the Philippians took up the collection, set it there and asked, “Now, how are we going to get it to Paul? Someone’s going to have to carry it.” I think that Epaphroditus raised his hand and said, “I will go. ‘Here am I! Send me.’” He might have left a wife, he might have left his children and family and he might have left his job. We don’t know. But what we do know is that he volunteered to do something that was very dangerous, very difficult and would take up a lot of time to hand carry this offering to Paul.

When Epaphroditus got to Paul, Epaphroditus was sick. So Paul said, “Well, now that you’re sick, the believers in Philippi have found out that you’re sick and are worried about you, because you’re sick. But you’re worried about them, because they’re worried about you.” This is actually what happened. They’re worried about each other and Paul is in jail, so Paul said, “Why don’t you just go home. I’d love to have you hang out here with me. I’d love to have you

company, your fellowship and your companionship.” Yet here’s what Paul said: “But I want what’s best for the believers in Philippi, and I want what’s best for you, so I’m going to send you back.” That’s why he told the believers in Philippi, “Hold him in reputation for the work of Christ. He almost died, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service for me.” They were probably saying, “Why did you come back? We sent you to help Paul. But Paul said, “I want to be helpful and thoughtful toward others.” So Epaphroditus returned to Philippi.

Epaphroditus wasn’t an apostle. He wasn’t a pastor; he was what we call “a layman.” He was just one of the believers in Philippi in the body of Christ. You don’t have to have a title or a position. You don’t have to be an elder or a deacon or a bishop. You just have to be a believer in Jesus Christ and say, “Lord, here am I. Send me. I’m not worried about me; I’m not worried about what happens to me. I just want to shine out. I just want to hold out the Word of life. I want to love and walk in humility. I want to walk in sacrificial service toward others.”

In summary, we are to walk in love, walk in humility, walk with others thinking of them more important than ourselves and we are to walk in sacrificial service toward others. We, as believers, are to walk as Jesus walked. That’s why the early believers were called “Christians.” They were Christ-like, living like Jesus.

“So in our modern age today, Lord, help us to live like Jesus Christ.”