

Christlike Humility & Unity | Philippians 2:1–18

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[0:00] If you don't already, you'll need a Bible. And the great news is, in the busy Sunday morning rush, when you're putting all this stuff in your bag, and you realise you've left your Bible on the dining table like I have, we always have spares at the back.

So, as I have this morning, please do grab a spare. You'll need a Bible. We're going to be in Philippians chapter 2. We're picking up from where Joseph left off last week. It was a blessing. I was away on holiday last week, but it was wonderful to be able to catch up on the sermon. It was great to hear his study and his heart for us. I want to open this week by sharing a post that was posted online on Thursday, so a few days ago, by a guy called Wes Huff, who I'm hoping you've heard of.

I was going to call him a young guy, and then I learnt he's only two years younger than me, and I don't know if I can get away with that. Let's call him a young guy. He's a Canadian apologist. He recently, on Thursday, posted this.

If your theological convictions are not actively making you more gracious, humble, and repentant, then your beliefs are not being shaped by Jesus.

[1:11] They're motivated by a desire to be argumentatively right. I can see why that was something that was on his heart as an apologist, as someone who contends for the faith.

The motivation behind that is important. And let's be honest, none of us want to be that guy, not at church or at home, who enjoys being argumentatively right.

And I hope, as a really poor segue, I'll mention I've been married to my wife now for 12 years. Wait, because you've not heard the bit yet.

And we've actually been together for about 20 years, because we met when we were 17, 18, before we both went separately to uni. That to say, she has a lot of experience of living with someone who is argumentatively right.

On our wedding day, in his speech, my father-in-law gave us some wonderful advice.

[2:18] And for those of you who've been married, you'll know, I don't remember a lot from that day. There was a lot of people. It was wonderful. It was happy. It was exciting. But this advice has stuck and reverberated in my head.

And I'm sure he said a lot of other stuff. I don't remember that. The bit I remember is he looked at us both and told us to prioritize the other's happiness.

To prioritize the other's happiness. As I say, that's continued to reverberate in my head. And as we continue our series today in Philippians called Ordinary Church, we are going to look at how, as a church, we are called to prioritize one another.

How we are being formed into a radically counter-cultural community. Where we are called as individuals to pursue unity that flows only by living out Christ's transformational humility.

And so it is those link between those three words. They're not alliterative. I'm not that good. community requires unity, which requires humility.

[3:36] Or you could read it the other way around. That humility leads to unity. And unity is what shapes and defines community.

If it doesn't make sense yet, I hope that will make sense in about 45 minutes. So let's crack on with our passage. We're in verse one of chapter two of Philippians.

The first two verses read, so if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

This idea here of completing my joy, echoes our prayers before the service this morning. It's Paul saying, fill up my cup of joy until it overflows.

He requests that they allow God to unite them. And as we're going to see, this unity is something that goes far beyond intellectual agreement or argumentativeness.

[4:45] It goes beyond sharing some hobbies or some passions. It's not Paul saying that, if everything else in life is rosy, don't also forget to try and get on at church. Agree about the types of chairs, how much you love the coffee, talk about the weather.

This is Paul outlining what he's already shared in chapter one, as Joe outlined last week, in verse 27, where he said, only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

What we're looking at today unpacks how that plays out in the church. And it's essential because the gospel is definitely not on top of everything else.

Also try your best to get on with everyone. But Paul's call here isn't just for the Philippians. It is universal to every Christian.

The life he's going to outline is the life that every Christian should expect to lead. And that is that the things God has done, when you believe they are true, lead to the sort of action that Paul is calling us to.

[6:02] Our beliefs about God lead to right thinking about God and other people. That right thinking leads to right action. So before we explore what this unity looks like, we need to understand the work of God that causes it.

And that's where Paul's argument begins. He opens verse one with, so if there is any. I don't know if you're like me and read sarcasm where it's not intended.

But if you are, I'd be tempted to read it there. I'm sure Paul isn't being sarcastic. But is it not a bizarre thing to say to a church of Christians, have you ever found any encouragement in Christ? It seems like a fairly obvious question of a fairly obvious answer. Of course, we know the establishing call of Christ. We know the comforting, foundational love of Jesus.

We know that the Spirit resides in us. And we know of God's mercy and his compassion. Paul, why on earth are you opening your argument by asking us this? And this is the point of how we reach this unity that defines our community.

[7:16] Because both of those things stem from humility. And a genuine humility is only something you can foster and live in if you first know who God is and who we are in him.

And so, before we crack on, as a quick aside, again, if you're like me, as we move through the passage, you might be tempted to think this is Paul telling you to just try a little bit harder, to just work a bit more, just try and be nice, try and get on.

I'm reminded that Simon, our pastor, regularly calls us away from that error by reminding us that we work away from the cross and not towards it.

That is, it's the truth of who God is and what he has done for us that is the only lasting source of inspiration for our efforts.

That inspiration is going to go beyond the days when you feel tired and grumpy and hurt so that you continue to overflow in abiding unity. And if you have been in church for any length of time, the tired and the grumpy and hurt happens here as much as it happens outside.

[8:36] So, let's have a look at Paul's question a little more seriously. So, if there is any encouragement in Christ, I absolutely love here that our word for encouragement, which might also be translated consolation, depending on your translation that you're using, that might ring to you thinking of Israel's consolation, the consolation of Israel that the Israelites were looking for.

And it's a noun that can be translated elsewhere as both comfort and exhortation. So, how to understand this word encouragement? It's made up of two words in the Greek and I will try and butcher some pronunciation and you can correct me later, that's okay.

The first word is para and the second word is kaleo. And what they mean is beside to call or to call to one side.

And this is so significant and there's a reason Paul puts this first. See, the word has different implications depending on the context of the person doing the calling or the context of the person being called.

And if you're a parent, you know this because sometimes you call your child to you and both of you love the conversation that's about to happen. And sometimes you have to call your child to you and they don't love the conversation that's about to happen.

[10:00] It's the same context. Sometimes it's exhortation. Sometimes it's consolation. Sometimes it's comfort. But at the root of this idea of encouragement is that you have been called by Christ to his side.

And Paul reminds us in the letter to the Thessalonians that this encouragement, this call doesn't just mean the one time event when you were called to Christ, when you acknowledged who he was. This encouragement is endless. He says in the second Thessalonians chapter two, now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God the Father who loves us and gave us eternal comfort. That word comfort is again the same as this word encouragement. So when we seek encouragement, and I'm sure like me you often do, we do well to seek it from Christ who can offer us oceans of it for us to swim in.

But on the flip side, of course, if reliance on this encouragement in Christ is the bedrock of our unity, we need to be careful to ask ourselves another tricky question.

[11:21] Where else do I seek encouragement from? What else, when push comes to shove, will I invariably fight to keep because I really feel like I need it?

I live like I rely on it. And I'll give you some examples. Maybe these are just all from my own life. Maybe some of these resonate with you. Perhaps you live like you require validation from others. Their approval and praise is the encouragement you seek. Perhaps you expect unconditional love from family or spouses. And you are greatly discouraged when you don't get it.

Perhaps your life is built upon a fierce independence. You are working towards, striving towards, or expecting financial stability. And that will be your anchor. And without it, you will feel shipwrecked. Perhaps it's just pursuing the temporary pleasures of satisfying your own desires. And as long as you can do that, you feel like everything's okay.

[12:28] The question, of course, is, is the encouragement of Christ better than any of those things? Yes, of course. Will I risk the unity of the saints in order to hold on to my self-made encouragements?

Hopefully the answer is no. This is the argument that Paul is building. Can I therefore afford to let these things go in order to know the depth of the encouragement of Christ?

Yes. So let's move on. The next thing on his list. So if there is any comfort from love. So before we had parakaleo, that idea to call someone to your side.

Now we have paramytheon. I've definitely butchered that. Which means to speak to someone who is next to you to speak beside. This is important because you've already been called to the person's side.

Now that you are at their side, they're going to speak to you. And the word, the context, the picture is of an intimacy. of a greater degree of tenderness, which is why we have it translated as the word comfort.

[13:42] But also, and I absolutely love this, the word comfort also means an address, an inspiring speech that makes someone brave.

Imagine that. it's the love of Jesus that he speaks to you that he expects to make you brave and it can.

It's the love of Jesus that makes us brave and able to risk putting ourselves second to pursue unity and humility. So we've been called to walk by his side and there we find that Christ speaks to us by his love and about his love and he gently communicates his self-sacrificial love for us.

And we do well to remember what sort of love this is and I know you know this but this entire passage is about encouraging you and reminding you of the obvious. So let's take a look.

What sort of love is it that Christ speaks to us? As the Father has loved me so I have loved you. Abide in my love.

[14:56] Greater love has no one than this that someone laid down his life for his friends and God has shown his love for us that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

It's God's love that has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us and as Paul beautifully puts in chapter 8 of Romans is there therefore anything that can separate us from the love of Christ?

So is there any greater comfort than the love of God? Is there any other counterfeit love that we could really expect to give us the same degree the same depth the same certain comfort that only the love of God gives?

Perhaps you're able to recognize that you too seek comfort from other places? So perhaps some kind of questions to unpick that.

When you are hurt and although we're talking about unity we recognize as sinful people that happens from in and outside of the church when you are hurt where do you run to first?

[16 : 11] Who is it you seek to give you comfort? When overwhelmed by the crushing expectations of others or the unmet expectations of yourself what voice is it you listen to?

What voice comforts you? That's the comfort that God is offering in Christ. It's the comfort of God's love spoken to you as you walk by his side and it is the greatest sort of comfort you could ever know.

And so it poses the same question for us. Is that something we want to throw aside to risk the unity of the saints in order to hold on to our own self-made comforts and preferences?

And the point of course is no. So can we afford to run to Christ first when others hurt us? Can we let his voice be the only voice of comfort we need?

The only source of love that we expect because he will never let us down. Paul goes on. So if there is any participation in the spirit.

[17 : 25] So we've seen we've been called to come to Christ's side and there we find this unsearchable deep love of God that he speaks to us constantly to comfort us. And the Holy Spirit we find also resides in us.

And we find ourselves invited to live life in fellowship with God by his spirit. And the word here for participation is probably one of our favorite New Testament words.

I know we say it a lot as a church. This is that *koinonia* word. We often translate it as fellowship. Its roots come from that which is common or shared which is why you get comrades or companion. communion. It's also the root of the word community. When we think about the act we share together as a church to represent and celebrate our participation with the spirit, that's why that's called communion.

It's also from where we get the word commune which in theory is a place where all things are shared with all people, most of whom have a lot of hair and an abundance of Birkenstocks. And that was an idea, of course, that had a revival around the same time that revival hit Calvary Chapel in California in the late 60s and here we are today.

[18 : 41] Thankfully with fewer Birkenstocks. I've got nothing against them personally. So here Paul reminds us that our new life is inextricably lived in the spirit's presence.

Again in Romans 8 he said, for all who are led by the spirit of God are sons of God. There is no alternative. So we can also understand the communal aspects of our participation in the spirit as it is the spirit that moves and leads through our church services.

And I won't read these all out, there's some on the screen for you. The New Testament is littered with examples of how the Holy Spirit moves to empower and work through church services.

These are probably best summarized in Ephesians chapter 2 where he says that in Christ we are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the spirit.

That's the sort of community church is. That's why it requires unity and a unity that is built on humility. Our fellowship with the spirit is as certain and as essential as our hearing Christ's call to come to his side and then receiving the comfort of his love.

[20 : 01] As we'll come to in a bit, it's not possible for us to build together a unity through our own efforts. It is only possible when done in participation with the spirit because it's the Holy Spirit who works in us individually and corporately to build us up together for God's glory.

And so I wonder, is there anything greater you can think of that you could be a part of? Is there really anything more significant that you could participate in than God's work to build a people together?

We live busy lives. There are many activities and hobbies and tasks and at times relationships that can challenge and sometimes even combat our need to fellowship with the saints.

And I don't mean this as to place any burden on you and suggesting only that externally to you there are forces which work to prevent you from meeting.

I know you guys love to come, obviously you're here, that's a given. But the question that we do well to remember is whether we are going to be willing to risk the unity of the saints in order to hold on to some of these lesser pursuits.

[21:28] I forgot she'd be at the back, her daughter's at the back. It's an initially unpopular rule in our house that whilst we love attending friends' birthday parties, we wouldn't ever do that at the expense of going to church.

And that's not, I'm speaking as me, not as, this isn't a scriptural rule. And we thought it was important as a family to kind of set that expectation for our daughter because how else do you, how in future years can I tell her, yeah, church is great fun, we have a lovely time, there are friends there, it's really worth it, you should come, other than if there's cake and you can bounce on a trampoline somewhere else to celebrate Charlie's eighth birthday.

Like that, it doesn't flow. It didn't make sense. But that challenge exists for us as adults. We need the fellowship of the Spirit individually, collectively, communally, just as much as you need the grace of the Lord Jesus and the love of God, which is why Paul prays in 2 Corinthians, he links all these things together.

And he prays, may the grace of the Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. We rely on all these things to drive our humility that leads to our unity.

So, lastly, in this list we have, so if there is any affection and sympathy. We've been called to Christ's side, defined by the love that he speaks over us, redeemed into fellowship with God and invited to participate in God's great work of redemption in the church as we walk by his Spirit.

[23:09] And we also need to know and remember God's tender mercy towards us. If you like doing word studies, you'll find this word here that is translated affection.

It's just the word bowels. I love Hebrew, it's weird sometimes. Hebrews had this idea of the bowels being the place where affections reside.

God's God's God's God's This is why Paul says in chapter one of Philippians, for God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

That's the same word here, affection, it's the same word, the bowels of Jesus. I share his deep affections for you. And we who rely on God's mercy, and I'm sure you know that you do, that I do, we are called to let it dwell in us that from the overflow of knowing God's mercy, we are able to give it to people who need it.

We know that mercy means withholding what's justly deserved. I don't mean to teach a Sunday school class, I know that you know that. But we do well to remember then that mercy is something you can only show to someone in response to sin.

[24:34] The implication therefore is that if we have to be people whose knee-jerk reaction to being sinned against is mercy, we have to accept the possibility that at some point someone is going to sin against you.

We know of course that that reaction, reacting in a way of mercy, is only possible when we know who we are in Christ and we understand the depths and the breaths of his great love for us that affords us the opportunity to be able to show mercy to those who sin against us.

The affection of Christ is the model that we have been given to follow. And of course there's another word there. Alongside the God-fueled deep residing mercy, the bowels and affections of Christ, we are reminded of God's sympathy, which could also be translated compassion.

It's again the same word. Whereas mercy withholds punishment that's due, compassion feels pity or distress on someone else's behalf and then acts.

Whereas mercy retracts something, compassion extends and offers help. As Paul writes in Colossians, we are called to put on compassionate hearts.

[26:00] And he tells us to do it because that isn't the default mode of being a human. Our sin has warped how we interact with one another so that this is something we have to be reminded of.

And this pairing of affection and sympathy, I probably haven't got time to get into all of this, but it's deeply exciting and you can do it at your own time, is the same link words that you see God speaks in Exodus. And Paul quotes it in Romans when he says, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

The long short of it is, this is the very heart of God. These two words together show how he chooses to respond to us.

I think there might be a list of explanations a little bit. There we go. There are some more things you can read there. I'll move on. So this leads to the question then, do we rely on the mercy of God?

And I know that you know that you do. And do you know his compassion? And I hope that you know that you do. Am I going to risk the unity of the saints by holding others to a standard that I myself

know I do not meet?

[27:13] Hopefully the answer as we move through this passage is no. Will I expect forgiveness when I hurt someone and then withhold it when I am hurt? Will I expect kindness when my life falls apart but not let myself be moved to pity and compassion?

Not let myself be moved to action when a brother or sister is going through a dark and difficult time? See, if we are ever tempted to think that we're beyond reliance on God's mercy and dependence on his compassion, it's then that we will fail to show it to others.

So praise the Lord that his mercies are for me and for you new every day and that a life lived in his presence grows to overflow into a life that offers mercy and compassion to others.

So, having been reminded of all of this, I mean, apologies, it's like half an hour in and we've done about eight words. there's water at the back for when you need it. We can now understand how the unity that Paul commands flows out of a life lived in God's presence.

And that's why it's important for us to unpick that first. This isn't just going to be about you should try harder to be a nice person. It requires that we understand who God is and the life he has called us into.

[28:36] So, reading on from verse 2, Paul says, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. And again, you kind of think, Paul, you love your lists.

This seems to be four fairly similar things. Let's quickly flick through and try and unpick them in the time we've got. He calls the Philippians and others to a unity that is essentially four things.

Have the same mind, share one love, be in full accord and be of one mind. And if you're paying attention, it seems an awful lot like the top one and the bottom one were similar.

So, I've unpacked them a little bit for us and I won't get into all of the Greek-y words. We might summarize these as, have one understanding, practice together sacrificial love, do life together, that participation in the spirit, that community and communion.

communion and share one purpose. Without our foundational understanding from verse one, we know that we can't fulfill this in of ourselves.

[29:48] If we hadn't have unpicked verse one, we would get here and go, yep, sure, Paul, we can go to church and share one mind, just tell us whose mind it is. Should we copy that person? We'll just do whatever they say, we'll do whatever they need.

When we then have a fight and we can't decide whose mind it is, we'll get into trouble. We understand here that the one mind he refers to is the mind of Christ. It's not that unity, it's not that it's the icing on the cake of a nice church.

Unity is the foundational description of the purpose of the church. church. On the next slide, you'll see how these four things link to the aspects of God that he pointed out in verse one.

Have one understanding, that Christ has called you to his side, the encouragement of Christ, and cultivate sacrificial love, which is that love that Christ himself pours into you and speaks to you in comfort.

Be in community, led by your communion with the Holy Spirit who resides in you individually and corporately, and have one purpose, to make God's mercy and compassion known, to share the gospel.

[31:12] So this unity that we're exploring is not an optional extra, it is the essence of Christ's church. Moving on in verse three, Paul writes, do nothing, and before I get into the Greek, it definitely means do nothing.

There's no exceptions, there's no possibilities. But do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

We remember Joe's wonderful sermon about chapter one in Philippians last week, he pointed out how Paul experienced, even in the church, some people were managing to preach in a way still that was motivated by envy and rival towards Paul.

He's not talking about hypotheticals. This is a reality in the church then, it's a reality for us now because our hearts are the same. But in stark contrast to how the world operates, the church is not to be an arena where people exercise their selfish ambition or are motivated by rivalry.

And if I'm honest, I won't, so don't panic. We could spend a whole hour talking about this. Maybe we will, we've got water. It's important to recognize he's talking about selfish ambition which implies that ambition in of itself can be godly and right and true.

[32:34] The desire to do better is not a problem. The desire to serve yourself only is. And particularly the words that get translated selfish ambition would to the Greek readers because we know that Philippians is a Roman, what do you call it?

It's a Roman city that was built to celebrate a military victory. It's kind of Roman through and through. So they understand how the political system works. And it speaks to this word, selfish ambition, speaks to someone who is running for office, like political office.

And they're kind of going around and they're knocking on doors and they're gaining favour and they're making promises they've no intention of keeping. And everything they're doing is about giving themselves a platform and gaining for themselves a following.

And it's definitely something that can still happen now. You're a good man. The second phrase, which is translated there, conceit, is literally the words, vain glory, empty glory.

And again, we could camp out here for the next 45 minutes to unpack why it is that our hearts pursue vain glory. But I won't because it's warm and you'll all fall asleep.

[33:59] But if you think that the pursuit of vain glory, of empty glory is not a problem today, then bless you, you've probably missed the last 20 years of social media, amongst a few other things.

There's a great quote from C.S. Lewis, which will be on the screen. He says that if anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud.

And a biggest step too, at least, nothing can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed.

The point is, of course, this is something universal to our sinful hearts. please don't think of this justice something other people do. Paul shares this and he knows that harboring these sorts of feelings is disastrous to you as an individual and to the body.

may may may may may may may may an antidote to our enticing worldly attitude, where he says, first of all, cheers, count others more significant than yourselves.

[35:14] The first step is to think sober-mindedly about yourself, to have a right thinking about yourself. The second step is to think of others as being above yourself.

And this is because, of course, our hearts are best served by purposefully practicing raising up others. And I'm reminded of my father-in-law's quote on our wedding day.

It makes for a good marriage to concern yourself with prioritizing the other person's happiness. In marriage, of course, the interplay then between both spouses mean that when I meet your needs, you meet my needs, and when I prioritize your happiness, you will prioritize mine, and we find that everyone's needs are met.

And you should be able to expect that one day, as Christ finishes his work in us and through us, that the church will be the same. And then this counter-cultural community that he is building in his church helps to eat away at our desire to be self-sufficient and helps us to increasingly fulfill Jesus' command.

Where he says in John that by this, all people will know you are my disciples if you have super comfy chairs and great coffee and relatively short sermons and cool music.

[36:42] That by this, all people will know you are my disciples if you have love for one another. This is the defining mark of Jesus' church. Paul continues to unpack what this looks like in verse 4.

He says, Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. I won't unpick this too much.

Except to say that if verse 3 is to think sober-mindedly of yourself, to think less of yourself, verse 4 is try thinking about yourself less. And I appreciate that is inadvertently a Rick Warren quote, so we'll put it on the screen.

It is a requirement of living in community that you look out for others. This is why, and I hope this doesn't hurt anyone, this is why you cannot do church community exclusively from the comfort of your own sofa.

And I know, because we all tried it for two years in COVID, and it was rubbish. It's why any kind of online-only model of church is going to fall short of experiencing the depth of blessing that it is to be a part of the body.

[38:07] But we see in verse 4 as well, you can't just think about lifting others up. It's not an intellectual exercise. You have to actually look up and let love lead to action.

Humility then actually gets off its butt and loves people. Let's move on to verse 5.

Where Paul summarizes this, kind of reaches a climax and says, have this mind amongst yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. We see, we've seen from verse 1, that we have been called to Christ's side.

That while we are there, he speaks, he comforts us with his love, he invites us into communion with his church and with his spirit, and we know of and share our dependency on his mercy and his compassion that leads constantly to our transformation.

And when we are talking about becoming a humble people, we are reliant, as we are reminded in Romans, that instead of being conformed to the patterns of this world, we require to be transformed by the renewal of our minds.

[39 : 29] True humility then is birthed only from a life lived in God's presence. As we find we are given the very mind of Christ. So here, Paul's encouragement reaches a climax.

Verses 5 to 11 are regarded by many as a hymn of the early church. I won't ask you to stand up and sing it, but I like the idea that halfway through his argument, as he reaches the pinnacle, Paul literally breaks out into song.

And the song has a really clear theme. Have this mind. And I like that he says that before the song, so you don't get distracted by all of the awesome things contained within it.

He reminds you, as you read each of these just awesome things that Jesus gave up in embodying humility, we are reminded that that is the very mind we are called to have.

Christ embodies humility. God himself chose to be humbled for us.

[40 : 47] I won't spend too long unpacking this. I know time is going. But if you think of just the ways in the verses 6 through to 11, the ways in which Jesus chose humility and revealed his heart, his mind of humility.

That when you looked at him, he hid his glory so that you wouldn't have looked at Jesus and have known he was God. He chose to enter into a relatively obscure town in poverty, in the midst of oppression.

He chose to come as a child, requiring him to grow up and be obedient to human parents who he'd literally helped create. Like a man. He lived as an adult in apparent anonymity for like 20 years before his public ministry began.

He chose humble followers, fishermen, and people that no one thought he should choose. He experienced thirst and hunger and pain and weakness and tiredness.

He humbled himself in total obedience to his heavenly father. He even died. And even the means of his death, his nakedness, his shame, the mocking, the crucifixion.

[42 : 14] It's no small thing to say that Christ for us embodied humility. Moving on into verse 12, Paul says, therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. And I've got so many verses this morning. These two verses would like, they'd do us for a good six-week sermon series. Paul is writing, of course, from afar. We know that he's probably currently in house arrest as he writes to them.

So he isn't going to get to see the church read the letter. But Paul trusts, because of the work of God inside the Philippian church, that they will continue to obey his letter just as they obeyed when he was with them in person.

Before we move through this, because it's, I mean, I think verse 12 is particularly tricky. It's important that we highlight that this call here to the whole church, to us, is for each individual within the church to respond to.

[43 : 31] This is not one of those situations where you can be like, yo bro, can you cover me on the rotor? This is just a you, only you can do this for you sort of thing. But even before we get there, I feel like a quick caveat might be necessary.

It's so important to understand when Paul says, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, he is speaking exclusively to Christians. He's speaking exclusively to people who are already disciples of Jesus.

It's important because the gospel is not, at no point will you read that the gospel is, mate, you're kind of on your own, you better figure out your own salvation, it's all on you, best of luck.

So it's by, that's not the gospel, that's literally the definition of false religion, it's all on you, you need to do it, this is something you need to figure out on your own.

If you're listening to this and you're not already a disciple of Jesus, this is not a call for you to figure it out on your own. Your own intellect is not intended to be the means of your salvation.

[44 : 37] It's a trap many of us fall into. The gospel is not go and find some secret knowledge, go and work out this super difficult puzzle, come solve some ancient wisdom.

The gospel, and in case you're listening to this and you wouldn't consider yourself yet a disciple of Jesus, I'll as briefly as I can summarize it.

In the context of our passage, we were created by God so that together we would know him and love him and enjoy the fullness of joy that is being with him. And although we are his creation, we chose to reject him as creator, choosing instead to create things with our own hands that we then play pretend with that they are God.

We've rejected God's call to community, both with himself and with one another. We define life as mine. It is my life. I am entitled to go on an adventure of self-actualization and self-fulfillment.

It is my job to gratify any desire I find within me in the vain hope that I will discover the joy that deep down I know I was made for. The joy that can only really be filled in the presence of God.

[45 : 54] And of course, our rejection of God creates a significant problem. Being in God's presence is now a significant problem because his presence is permitted only to those who love and obey him as the all-consuming depth of his joy consumes anything and everything that would threaten or destroy joy.

But thankfully, God, from the foundation of the earth, had determined to make a way for his people to be able to return to the joy of his presence.

While we were still sinners, lost and outside God's presence, alien to true community, pretending that the things we had made could satisfy our desires, living our best life and you doing you and me doing me and all of that kind of stuff, making our own plans, fulfilling our own empty self-fulfillment, leading ourselves further and further away from the all-consuming joy of being in God's presence.

While we were doing all of that and before we even thought a thought about returning to God, before we even had an inkling of returning to a spiritual home, before we thought about maybe I'll read a Bible or I'll find out who this Jesus is, before any of that, we read in Ephesians chapter 2 that God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

By grace you have been saved. And he raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus so that in the coming ages he might show us the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

[47 : 43] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not of your own doing. It is a gift of God, not a result of work, so that no one can boast for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

And the good news is that if you listen to that and you realize that that isn't you, if you don't know the immeasurable kindness of Christ, if you don't consider yourself to be God's workmanship, if you're not experiencing a life where you are walking in the good works that God has prepared for you, if in reality you're just kind of walking through your own poor decisions, making up as you go along like the rest of us do without Jesus, the good news is the gospel is specifically for you.

Christ died specifically for you and his invitation to come to him stands today. And there is nothing else you need to do first. All of this to say, you do not need to work anything out.

The invitation is just to come. Everything else we see in this passage comes later. It's a work he does in you and with you. It's not a requirement of salvation.

So, as quick as I can, looking at an imaginary watch, it's a great sign to know you've gone on too long, isn't it? For those disciples of Christ then, Paul outlines that continued obedience is necessary not to obtain salvation and not to maintain salvation, but, as we saw in chapter one, to walk in a manner of life worthy of the gospel of Christ.

[49 : 26] So this idea then of working out your own salvation, we understand, does not mean to cause it or to fight to keep it. It means to act in response to it.

We're reminded again of the quote our pastor regularly says. I feel like it's going to be something we have to try and get in every week now. We don't work towards the cross. We work away from it. We work in response to it. There's another quote I love, which will come up on the screen. That our work does not inspire God's love of us, but God's love should inspire our work.

We see too that this is an individual responsibility. He says, work out your salvation. You can't do it for your neighbor. You can't spend your efforts and time complaining in your head about how they're doing.

It isn't something you can say, that's my pastor's job to do for me or my spouse's job or my boss or my circumstance or my kids or whatever else you can think of. This call is for you exclusively.

[50 : 30] And in the little time we've got, the sentence or the statement to do this with fear and trembling requires some significant unpacking that we probably don't have time for.

So let's be careful about how we understand this. We'll summarize it quickly as, remembering that the same God that created the entire cosmos died for you and now resides in you.

It would be then incredibly foolish to use that freedom as an opportunity to sin again. That is not the life that God leads us to.

It is the very life he is saving us from. Fear and trembling doesn't have to mean a horror, a terror.

It can if you reject the plan that God has made and the offer of salvation in Christ.

[51 : 37] Our God is an awesome God. But fear and trembling is to consider the weight of who God is. This is no vain glory.

So then, four, reading on in verse 13, how on earth will we ever do this? How are we ever going to walk in a manner consistent with the gospel when the gospel is necessary because we really suck at walking how we're meant to?

The good news is, and God promised this all the way back in Ezekiel, it's God himself who will give us a new heart and a new spirit he will put within us.

He will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and carefully obey my rules.

They will be my people and I will be their God. The great news is that was always God's plan. And that's why we read in verse 13 and it's important to see it as part of the same argument with verse 12.

[52 : 44] Paul says, for it is God who works in you. We read earlier that God worked to resurrect Jesus from the dead and include us within that.

At the end of that passage in Ephesians it even says we are his workmanship. Paul tells us that God works out our heart of stone and fills us with his spirit.

He works on our will and on our work, our desire and our action or like your intentions and the outworking of those.

Your heart and your walk and whatever buzzwords you want. And it's really important that we see this doesn't reduce the significance of the call to work out your own salvation.

It actually underpins it with a really weighty significance. You're called to work out your own salvation because that's the work God's already doing in you.

[53 : 44] You're called to walk in a manner of life worthy of the gospel because that is the work God is delighting to do within you. That you too would delight to will and work in him.

And the most wonderful news then, Paul had already shared it in chapter 1 of Philippians, is that God always finishes the work that he starts. He is working to change your will, your desires, our intentions, our hearts and our thoughts so that we are able to walk and to act and to take action and to have compassion and to be people of mercy.

He's doing all of this so that we would lead a life in a manner that reflects the gospel and we would know a life of delighting in God. He said, I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

And then verse 14 happens. That's a lot, isn't it? Do you remember in Titus when Paul agreed with a Greek philosopher?

I love philosophy so apologies if this just tickles me. He agreed with him to say that Cretans are always liars and evil beasts and lazy gluttons and every time I read that I think, man, that's harsh.

[55 : 08] I think we should read verse 14 as British people and go, whoops. Is there anything more British than grumbling?

It's like our national pastime. you don't need me to tell you that the thing where it says do all things without means do all things without.

There aren't exceptions. We are called, as we've already read, not to be conformed, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds and let's be honest, as Christians living in Britain, this transformational work is essential when it comes to our grumbling.

Ever so quickly then, we've been looking this morning at how humility is what allows unity and these things that define the church community. We need to look ever so quickly at the opposition that exists to these things, both within and without.

Paul told us earlier not to let selfish ambition or conceit motivate us. He says elsewhere in James, and oh man, this is heavy.

[56:29] Yeah, let's do it anyway. James 3. If you have bitter jealousy or selfish ambition in your hearts, we already know, Paul's like, don't do that. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic.

That's fairly definitive. It's important for us to realize that God's work in us individually and corporately does have opposition. And the opposition can't nullify or overcome God's work. But in us and through our sin, this opposition does attempt to wield some influence over us. And if you've been in church any length of time, you know that's why unity is such a tricky subject because most of our experiences is of the times it fell apart.

In James, James tells us really clearly, jealousy and selfish ambition are quite literally stirred in courage even prompted by demons. As I said, this isn't something to be overly concerned about. This is something Christ has already overcome. Their eventual destruction has been decreed and guaranteed. There is no opposition to Christ's church that will stand. Nonetheless, I'm sure you know in your life I know I do in mine that jealousy and selfish ambition when harbored oppose God's work in you and his work in the church.

[58:10] This episode quickly summarizes jealousy, selfish ambition, grumbling and disputing as tactics of the enemy quickly unpin why they are so dangerous and then we are done.

Jealousy says that should be me or that should be mine. The root of it is that I doubt God has my best intentions in his plans.

God accidentally left me out. Selfish ambition could be I need to make that mine. That's something I need to do. I doubt God is able to bring about the best plans for me.

I doubt I could even afford to wait for his timing. Whatever plan I've got, that's better than the plan God's got. In verse 14 Paul is telling us not to let grumbling or disputing be our story and our song. In contrast to the call to work out our salvation and fear and trembling as God is working in us to change and transform us, it's like the antithesis of that would be to live a life of grumbling and disputing.

[59:18] ever so quickly. And it's important because it's what it means in the context of our passage. Grumbling is a secret complaint.

It's something you harbour in you, like a murmur or a mutter. The point being not everyone else hears it. You're kind of keeping it covert. And if you've ever tried it, you know that doesn't work very well.

It tends to grow within you. It's kind of grumbling is that sense of, well, I didn't like that. I'm a little worried others might not agree with me.

And if I share it with them, they might correct me or help me. I don't want them to do that. I'd rather stew on it a little bit longer. Disputing is more like having an argument with yourself, going round and round in your thinking inside your head.

It's that kind of attitude that says, look, I know what's best. I'll figure this out on my own. Both of those deny the cool New Testament to bring things to the light and part of that is sharing things within the community of the church.

[60:25] Both grumbling and disputing either about God's work in your life or about things other people have done to you oppose the work of humility and unity.

To summarize quickly, Paul's argument here is pretty clear. We've been called to walk in a manner that's worthy of the gospel. So don't let your mind harbor secret thoughts that doubt who God is or the work he's doing in you to will and work for his good pleasure.

You can trust God. He will complete the work he has started. Paul mentions in verse 15, and we're out of time, so this will be super quick.

The other reason it's so important not to grumble and dispute and let that be your song is because it will harm your witness. God is calling us and part of this wonderful transformation of us that he is doing individually and corporately turns us into shining lights in stark contrast to the patterns of the world.

It's that idea again of we have been called to one purpose, to reveal his mercy and compassion. You really can't do that if you're just grumbling all the time about everything.

[61:45] In verse 16, Paul says, holding fast to the word of life so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labour in vain. And Paul looks forward with certainty as we can to the day of Christ's return.

We saw in verse one who we are in God and we can see in verses 10 and 11 in the middle of that hymn the culmination of all things. We know where we are ending up and where all things will end up.

And we sit at the moment kind of in between those two points. Whilst you're sitting in between those two moments, we are called to hold fast to the word of life.

Or your translation might say hold forth the word of life and both are true. The word means both. To cling to it and to hold it forth, to hold it up like a bad banner for other people to see.

Paul concludes then, even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all and likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

[62:56] After everything we've just studied here, we see in the life of Paul the picture and the power of a life lived not from selfish ambition or conceit or with grumbling or disputing but a life lived in humility.

Paul is embodying that mind of Christ where the interests of others are paramount over the interests of himself even to the point of accepting death.

God's abiding love and the certainty of the coming day of Christ and our eternity with him and Paul's leads Paul to a place in both mind and deed where he is able to lay down his life and say rejoice with me about it.

It's a picture of the life of humility to which we are called where our community will be defined by unity and a unity that comes only from the humility that God is birthing in each of us.

we're going to wrap up and in your own time please carry on reading through verses 19 to 30 where you'll see examples of humility in the life of Timothy and the other guy that begins with E that I can't pronounce very well Apathroditus we'll try that.

[64:10] Both of them show fantastic examples of humility the second one literally nearly died on a church rotor. He was doing a job at church that no one else wanted to do and doing so nearly killed him and Paul says don't worry he wants to come back and see you like to let you know he doesn't hold it against you he's not grumbling about it he's rejoicing in it.

As I close I just want to remind us again of Jesus' words in John by this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

We've looked at the encouragement we have in Christ as we have been called to his side the comfort from his love which he quietly speaks to us. Our participation and communion with his spirit and with one another our reliance on his mercy and compassion and our invitation to share that with others.

The humility that this births the mind of Christ that we're called to have as God works in us and through us overflows into unity.

unity. It isn't something you have to drum up. That unity then defines the community of the church, a place where we hold fast and hold forth the word of life, walking together in a manner of life worthy of the gospel of Christ.

[65:35] And the great news is that this is a work that God is already doing in us. And he's delighting to do it. this is why he calls us his workmanship.

So as we close, I encourage you to lift one another up in prayer. We can afford to turn our backs on our other lesser comforts and on our self-reliance. There's a saying, I hope it's a saying, because if I say it and you've never heard of it, that's kind of weird.

There's a saying that if you have more than you need, build a bigger table, not a higher fence.

Please tell me you've heard that saying. Cool. No one's ever heard the saying, Joe.

So there's this great saying, if you have more than you need, build a bigger table, not a taller fence.

It's a great saying, man. I totally agree. I really hope I didn't just coin it.

The truth is that in Christ, as a community, we are called to be people that can afford to do that.

When life is abundant, build a bigger table, invite others round and pull up a chair.

[66 : 49] And when life is tricky, do not neglect meeting together, but allow the brothers and sisters that God has put you in community with to show you his mercy and compassion to act and to bless you.

God's God's church community is not built by people, not really. It's built by God's Holy Spirit who is teaching us to lift up and serve one another for his glory.

Let's pray. Lord, we want to thank you for the work you are doing in us individually.

Lord, thank you for the work you are doing in us corporately. We don't want to neglect or treat it as an insignificant thing.

that Lord, the God of all creation, you humbled yourself. You knew the glory that you had hidden, the reputation that you set to one side for us.

[68 : 08] Knowing where you'd come from and where you were going to, you are able to do these things and the great news, Lord, is that we know where we come from and where we are going to. Lord, would you help make us a community that is defined by unity?

Would you help us continue to rely on you to be a humble people, to be a people whose knee-jerk reaction is to show mercy and compassion and to have, whenever there is any opportunity, a chance to share you with one another and with others.

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