

### III. Philippians: Rejoicing in the Advancement of the Gospel “Unity for the Sake of the Gospel”

Philippians 2:1–11

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In this study we will be starting in Philippians 2. In our series thus far, we have seen how the Philippians were partnering in the Gospel with Paul, and Paul was celebrating that and was commending them for that. There was a lot of good things going on in the church at Philippi, but there seems to be one underlying issue that Paul is trying to get at in Philippians 2. There's a problem that is potentially threatening the church's ability to advance and partner in the Gospel with Paul. John Calvin said the most dangerous thing for the church is false teaching within but then he gives the second most dangerous thing and I'll tell you what that is after I tell you a couple of stories.

My family and I were able to go on a family vacation to Disney World and my children were obviously really excited about that, except for the car ride. We had to drive 9 hours to Disney World and we're probably a little over halfway there. We get into Florida and we're kind of somewhere in the middle of nowhere. We don't really know where we are. We're just not anywhere that we're familiar with and all of a sudden, I had a little piece of wood and I hear this thump, thump, thump, thump, thump, thump, thump, thump, thump. I knew exactly what happened. Something was on that wood that caught my tire and it was just running with my tire. It was a nail. Immediately my car starts beeping at me and tells me my left front tire is running low and I turn on the gauge. I can see the back left pressure in my tire actually is going down 35, 34, 33, 32 and I look at my wife, Alison's thinking we have to find an exit because we're in the middle of nowhere. I don't want to pull off a highway with two small kids and I can see the exit about a half mile up. The pressure continues to count down 29, 28, 27, 26. I'm thinking we're not going to make it.

Do I speed up or slow down? If you slow down, you get a flat tire and that's even more dangerous so I just kind of maintained the speed as the tire pressure continues to go down, 19, 18, 15, 14, 13, 10, 9, 8... We get to the exit ramp and as the pressure goes down, 3, 2, 1, we arrive at the gas station. Perfect timing. I get out and I look at the tire and it's all the way to the rim and then a police car follows in behind us. I thought, “Am I getting a ticket for a flat tire? I didn't know that was illegal.” He gets out and says, ‘Hey, is everything okay with you guys?’ I said “I hit something on the highway and it flattened my tire.” He said, ‘Let me look at it, Yes you have a flat tire.’ Then he said ‘It's 4:45pm on a Friday afternoon and all the places around here pretty much close at 5:00.’ I said, “I know, we're going to Disney World and I know I can't get there on my spare tire because it was a small spare tire that would only get you to the next gas station.” He said ‘Let me see if I can help you. I'll call my buddy who owns a car shop. Let me see if they'll stay open for a few minutes.’ I'm like, “O Lord, thank you for You have sent this angel to rescue my family.”

Then this police officer jacks up our car for us, takes our tire off, and then he puts that tire in his car and said “I don't want to get your luggage dirty and get all the tire stuff on it so I'll put it in my car.” Then he puts on the spare tire. I'm just amazed at the service of this police officer. Then he said “I talked to my buddy. He's going to stay open for a few more minutes. I'm going to give you a police escort to this car shop.” I'm thinking, ‘man, this is too good to be true.’ We're now in the car and driving on some back roads and at some point, my wife and I

look at each other and we think, “Is this a trap?” This is the stuff that happens in movies where the police officer pulls over just in time, takes you somewhere to a warehouse, you think it's going to be helpful but he has a registered car, dressed in uniform. I think this is legit, but we don't have any choice.

We pull up to this maintenance shop and get out and his friend was there. He plugs our back tire and puts it on for us, comes up to me and says “that will be \$7.” I said “That's it. Can I give you \$20 for just your great service?” He says ‘No, \$7.’ I go over to the cop and say “Can I give you \$40? I need to pay somebody more than \$7 for this service. Take your wife out to a date. Do something. You've earned it. Thank you so much.” He said ‘No, no, this was my pleasure to do that.’ We were amazed. That was about a 2 hour delay to our kids during vacation. We get on the highway, but everybody's having a good attitude.

We get on the highway and I mean, a minute after we get on the highway, I'm in the left hand lane trying to trying to speed up a little bit to get us there quicker and I see this car just rearing down on me. I get over just in time and this car is probably going 120 miles per hour and just flies past us. Then all of a sudden I hear police sirens one, two, three police officers, four police officers, five, six, seven or eight police officers pass us going 120 miles per hour. Then about three minutes later, the traffic in front of us just comes to a dead stop. Now we're delayed again. We sit in that traffic for about an hour. We pull up and realize this guy had hit the median, flipped several times. We didn't see that the criminal but the police were around his car on alert and so we had this incredible experience. We get to Orlando late and the hotel which we paid for, gave away our hotel room and so we had to find another hotel room but, the Lord worked that out. In all that, we were united as a family. We were bonded over that. We were on mission. We were ready to get to Disney World and we were united. We were one.

On the way home, there's a different story. There were two huge incidents that caused division and frustration in the Shaw family, something that divided and fractured our whole car ride. It wasn't a flat tire that almost killed us. It wasn't this high speed chase if we literally were 3 minutes ahead of time, we could have been killed there. It was much bigger than that. It was the corner of one of my daughter's blankets, got on my other daughter side of the car and the wheels just came off. It was over. That's what ruined our car ride. That's what divided the Shaw family. Our kids are arguing. Alison and I are jumping in saying, “Hey, calm down. Quit yelling at each other.” We're yelling at each other and yelling at them and we just finally said, ‘we just need to go in silence, just another hour of silence.’ So everybody's silent and we're all miserable. We're just so mad after a great vacation at Disney World.

Then the second thing that happened on that return trip was when I said, “Do y'all want to go to Subway or Wendy's for lunch?” And the wheels came off again because somebody says Wendy's and somebody else says Subway. Alison says, “Why did you even ask? Just go somewhere.” What a small thing to ruin such a great experience we had as a family. The big obstacle didn't divide us at all, but the small incidents of the corner of one of my daughter's blankets being on someone else's side and where we're going to eat – that's what divided us. Divisions can happen just because of the smallest issues. John Calvin said the second most dangerous thing that can happen in a church is division, dissension. It's when we turn our eyes off of Christ, and we turn in and on each other and Paul is saying something here that he's trying to get in front of at the church at Philippi.

Let me tell you another story before we read the passage. I've had the privilege of taking over 20 mission trips. On these trips I've been to New York, Fairfield, Cherokee, Yakima, Washington Bay, St Louis, Jonestown, Mississippi, Jamaica, London, all over the world to serve

the Lord. We've experienced a lot of spiritual attacks and a lot of obstacles – delayed flights, lost luggage, stolen rental car, which I'll tell you about later, flat tires, change of plans, bad weather, sicknesses, allergic reactions to peanuts or butter where we had to take people to a hospital, knocked out front teeth, all kinds of obstacles. If you have kids that are in the youth group or that are coming up to the youth group, don't let that deter you. They are great trips and those things didn't all happen on one trip. Those things happened over 20 trips. Usually there's one big obstacle that Satan throws out there and says, "Let's see how you handle this."

The amazing thing is, is our team bonded and united around those struggles but the worst mission trips we had happened years ago but it was when two of our mission trip members got very, very sour about the smallest little issue. They began to tell somebody else about that issue who didn't even know about the issue and weren't even mad about it to begin with, but because these students were mad at it, now they're mad at it, and then they tell somebody and they get mad. Dissention happened on our team and it fractured us from one little small issue that two students didn't handle very well.

Here in Philippians, Paul is concerned about this small issue that he's seeing in Philippi and he's already said that they're doing great things, like advancing the Gospel and partnering with Jesus, but he's concerned here. We know that there's some division, small division. Paul says in Philippians 4:2, *[2] I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.* Paul is wanting them not to necessarily agree with each other, but just to agree with the Lord. We don't know what the issue is between them but it's a small issue. We're not sure of all the details and the divisions that are welling up in Philippi, but it would appear that these aren't primary doctrines. They agree on the Gospel. More than likely they are having a problem with secondary issues that are small issues and disagreements.

Paul is concerned because he knows the danger and he knows that Satan wants to take this great church and cause it to fail. He knows that division can ruin and dampen all the good things that this church has going for it. He knows that if Satan can have success and cause the church to turn on each other, then he wins a big victory because they turn away from their mission. That's Satan's attack on the church and it's a very dangerous but very successful attack because disunity in the church doesn't just affect the individuals, it affects the watching and waiting lost world around them who desperately need to hear the Gospel – the Good News, the great story of how man was reconciled to God through Christ, the forgiveness of sins. And if we the Church aren't showing this to each other, then how then should we show the world? So Paul is making an appeal here in Philippians 2 to be unified because he knows that ultimately it's about the advancement of the Gospel and that's what he has a heart for.

As we look at this passage in Philippians 2, I would just challenge myself and all of us to search our own heart. Are we guilty of creating dissension, of causing fractures, of letting our preferences disrupt unity, of making a big deal about something that really shouldn't be a big deal, not submitting to a decision that our leaders have made or not forgiving a brother or sister in Christ? So let's get into our passage for this study. The Christ hymn is in Philippians 2:5-11 but we'll be looking at Philippians 2:1-11.

Philippians 2:1-11 says *[1] So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, [2] complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. [3] Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he*

*was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. [9] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

I want to point out, Paul gives us the motivation for unity in Philippians 2:1. Then he gives an appeal to be unified. Then how do we attain and maintain unity? What are the steps that we take to attain it and maintain it? What's our model for unity? Let's start with Philippians 2:1 which says *[1] So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy.* Paul uses a pretty interesting word here which is 'if' and it makes it sound like he's saying, 'if you are in Christ, if you have the Spirit...' but that's not what Paul is trying to get across. They would know what he's trying to do. He's using a literary tool to make a point.

We do this all the time. My wife and I try to go on a date night every Thursday night. We love to go out to eat while our kids have a babysitter. My wife, Alison grew up in Vestavia, Alabama, went to Vestavia High School and I think this is a Vestavia thing. It seems as though everyone I know from Vestavia, love Mexican food, and it's usually between El Poblano and Sol Azteca. Allison likes them all and when we're on our date, she has said this before, "If you really love me, you'll take me to Mexican." Now, what she's really saying is, *since* you love me, for she is just using a literary tool to make her point and that's all Paul's doing. Instead of *if* you could say, *since* there is any comfort from love, *since* there's participation in the Spirit, *since* there's affection and sympathy, *since* there's encouragement for those in Christ. Paul gives us four 'if' statements to say, 'If you have these things, *then* you should do this.' So these are the motivators for unity. So let's take a look at each one of these.

The first is 'if there is any encouragement in Christ,' if you are in Christ, you should be encouraged, believers in the church. Why? It is because of all the benefits you have in Christ. I love just all the whole book of Ephesians and Ephesians 1:3 says to those who are in Christ, *[3] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.* Think about that. I don't even know what that fully means but he begins to tell us in Ephesians what that means and we can kind of grasp it. We're chosen, we've been adopted, we're children of God, we've been redeemed, we've been forgiven, we've received God's grace which has been lavished upon us, we have the peace of God and we have peace with God. We have been given the Holy Spirit. We've been sealed with the Holy Spirit. We've been given an inheritance. We have the hope of Heaven. These things, if we're in Christ, should encourage us. So Paul is telling the church at Philippi, 'since you are in Christ, you should be encouraged.' Guess what? All of you are in Christ. You have this mutual encouragement that you share and that should motivate you to get over yourself and be united around the blessings of Christ.

The second phrase Paul says is, 'if (since) there's any comfort in love,' knowing that we are loved by God Himself, we can't even fathom that, that He loved us so much that even while we were sinners, He demonstrated His love by Christ dying for us and nothing can break His love. Romans 8 tells us that nothing that can separate us from His love. In Ephesians 3 Paul prays that they would know the love of Christ that surpasses all understanding and knowledge. This love gives us great comfort. To know your loved is just comforting but to know your loved

by God gives us the greatest comfort there is. Paul tells them at Philippi that they have all experienced the love of God, and that should motivate you to love each other with that love and be united and quit thinking about yourself.

The third phrase from Paul is 'if there's any participation in the Spirit' and it's the Holy Spirit he's talking about. They are united together through the Holy Spirit – sister and brothers in Christ – and they've experienced these blessings of Christ because they have the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and it's the Spirit who lives in them, who's opened up their eyes. The Spirit opens up our eyes and ears so that we can understand the Gospel. What a blessing to have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us. Paul is saying that if we share that Spirit that should motivate you to be united.

The fourth phrase Paul uses is 'if (since) there's affection and sympathy' and some translation say compassion and mercy. He's appealing to their heart. Paul is saying God has had great compassion on you and if you have and you share of any of that type of compassion, then you should be compassionate to one another. I love that word compassion. It means a sick feeling in your stomach. When Jesus was looking over on the mountain at the lost, He said, 'They are like sheep without a shepherd' and then it says He was filled with compassion (Matthew 9:36). It was a sick, sad feeling in His stomach because they were lost. It's interesting to note that Jesus didn't run from them, He ran to them. In our sin, Jesus doesn't run from us. His love motivates Him to run to us. In the same way if we share in that love, affection and compassion, then we shouldn't run from each other, we should run to each other in unity.

Matthew Henry says this; 'How cognate are these arguments? One would think them enough to tame the most fierce and hardest heart.' There's a lot of hard hearts in the church, and when we think about these four motivators, it begins to soften our hearts and unhardens them. Bitterness can also sneak in. We've all struggled with that – just being so upset about something that's really not something we should be that upset about. Paul is addressing the heart here so if you're bitter, frustrated, divided about small issues, we remember the grandness of the blessings we have in Christ.

Now, what's Paul's appeal? Paul is appealing to the church for something. It's unity, right? Philippians 2:2 says *[2] complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind*. Paul is leaning on to a really personal thing here. He's saying, "I'm joyful over you, church at Philippi, but if you want to complete my joy, be of one mind, be of the same spirit, be of full accord." We use that language as well, don't we? When your kids do something you're really proud of say, they clean their room and you might say, 'you know, it would really make me proud if you clean your bathroom to' and mine usually don't but they know that will make me more proud. Or if you would be nice to your siblings, that would really complete my joy. Paul wants them to do away with these divisions that are creeping up within. Do it for the Lord, first of all, but do it for me. "All the work and toil I put into this church complete my joy by not allowing Satan to divide it is." Paul is appealing to unity here.

Paul wants them to be one as a church, sameness, together, having the same mindset, the same mind as being like-minded, setting your mind on the same thing. MacArthur says this in his commentary; 'Paul is not talking here about a doctrine or moral standard in this context. He is talking about being of the same mind, which means to actively strive to achieve common understanding and a genuine agreement.' Then Paul wants them to have the same love. That's the agape love, this selfless sacrificial love that Christ has for us. He wants them to share that love. Have that same love that Christ has for you, for each other and then for the lost.

Paul then tells them to be of full accord. At the end of Philippians 1 there are challenges with them standing firm in one spirit with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. Rob Looper said that literally means one soul soldiering together for the Gospel and that as a church were to be one soul, arm to arm soldiering together, locked arms side by side as one for the Gospel. It's similar to an orchestra for there are lots of parts but if they have the same song and they're on the same page, they play in harmony. That's what Paul wants for the Church at Philippi. Paul was noticing that they were a little bit out of tune because they got their eyes off the mission.

Thirdly, how do we attain and maintain that unity? We see this in Philippians 2:3-4 and the bottom line is that Paul is dealing with selfishness and self-centeredness. Back to my family car ride. We were thinking of ourselves. "My blanket being on your side" is my daughter thinking of only herself. "I want to go to Subway, not Wendy's" is I just want to go where I want to go. Paul here tells us the cause of this disunity. Philippians 2:3-4 says [3] *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.* [4] *Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Selfish ambition or conceit causes disunity and fractures. Paul is saying, don't live as if the world revolves around you. Quit putting your desires, your opinions, and your needs over everyone else. Dale Moody says 'selfishness is tearing others down, and vain conceit is when we build ourselves up.' Paul is saying, this can't happen. Then he gives us the cure – *in humility, count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others.* We don't need to complicate this. This is a very simple point. Don't be selfish. Be humble. Don't be prideful. Be humble. Don't think of yourself first. Think of others first. Put others and their interest above your own. Matthew Henry sums up this section by saying, "Paul presses them to be like minded and lowly minded." That's a great summary of that.

There's a family in our church who had a "Philippians 2 Club" in their family. When their kids would get in arguments, they would say, "remember, we're in the Philippians 2 Club where we count others more significant than ourselves. You're in that club. Did you count your brother, sister more significant than you with that action?" Briarwood Church, we're in the Philippines 2 Club just like the church at Philippi and this is what Paul is saying is the cure for division and disunity in the church. We are to put on humility. John MacArthur says this; 'To insist on one's own way in such small things is sinful because it senselessly divides believers to humbly defer to one another on secondary issues as a mark of spiritual strength, not of spiritual weakness.' That is so true, but it is so hard to do – to take my eyes off of myself and something that I'm really zealous about that is a small issue is hard to also be humble about, and that's what Paul is calling us to do.

What does that look like in the church? It can be smaller fractures, it can be bigger fractures, not dealing with a situation or disagreement in the right way, in the godly way. It's having a critical spirit. After COVID, there was so much of this critical spirit where people were critical about everything. We're called to have critical thinking, to look at things and want to make them better. But the Bible says, we can't have as a critical spirit. We're just critical and negative about everything. There is complaining which is when we make preferences, primary issues like our music, our style, non doctrinal decisions, when we gossip and slander, when we hear that something's happened and instead of going to the right person, we go to somebody else and then we get them involved in the situation when it's really none of their business. Even worse, is when we put it out on social media and tell the whole world instead of dealing with the

people that are really part of the problem. We see it when we don't submit to one another or to the leadership of the church, or maybe we submit but do it begrudgingly and then we complain about it to others.

My own children do that a lot where they don't like to submit to a rule and complain about it. I told one of my daughters years ago to go put up her shoes and she angrily said, "I'll put up my shoes" and she stomped up the stairs. She threw her shoes in the closet, and said, 'I put up my shoes.' Did she obey me? Technically, yes, you could argue that but did she honor me? She did not and the Bible tells us we should honor our leaders, not just submit and obey them, but we honor them. That means we submit with a gracious heart and a thankful heart.

The opposite of humility is pride. Humility seeks the interest of others where pride, seeks our own interest. Humility forgives where pride holds on. Humility serves, whereas pride seeks to be served. Humility is when we focus our eyes on everyone else and pride is when we just focus our eyes on ourself. Humility is knowing how much we need grace because of our shortcomings and we all have a lot of them, but pride sheds no grace on other people's shortcomings. Humility is when we think our way is maybe not the best way and we look at others and we listen to others, whereas pride only wants its own way.

Here at Briarwood Church we take membership vows. Vow number five says, 'Do you submit yourself to the government and discipline of the church and promise to promote its purity and peace?' This is an important issue, and we vow before the Lord and before each other that we will pursue peace and purity. Why? Because if we don't, the Gospel moving forward is at stake.

In closing, what is the model? That's easy. It's Jesus – He's the perfect model of humility. Philippians 2:5-8 says [5] *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,* [6] *who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,* [7] *but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.* [8] *And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

We are to have the mind of Christ, the thinking of Christ. He demonstrated the ultimate act of humility by leaving His fellowship with the Father, by taking on human form and taking on betrayal, grief, sorrow, persecution, and ultimately death. Isaiah 53 is about the servant Jesus, and it says 'He had no form or majesty that we should look at him and no beauty, that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men. A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief as one from whom men hide their face. He was despised and we esteemed him not.' That's the humility of Christ. That's what Paul is pointing us to, to follow. This is how Jesus showed humility by putting us first. Jesus lived out Philippians 2:3 and 4 – do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility, count others more significant than yourself. What was the outcome of Jesus' humility? The Gospel was advanced and God was glorified.

Philippians 2:9-11 says [9] *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,* [10] *so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,* [11] *and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* What's at stake for the church at Philippi if they don't fight for unity? The advancing of the Gospel that Paul was commending them for would be paralyzed and that's what was beginning to happen. Paul sees that and he's appealing to them to be unified. This is a big deal. Sinclair Ferguson says this; 'This unity always has the effect of turning a Christian fellowship in on itself, wasting energy on itself. When we devour ourselves in that way, we have little energy left to be a shining light and preserving salt in a needy world.'

How many of us get so bent out of shape about the corner of a blanket and we let that paralyze us and our relationships from sharing the Gospel? It fractures us yet when we stop and think about that corner of a blanket or Subway versus Wendy's – does it really matter in the Kingdom? Let's learn to listen better to others and putting others before ourselves. This can happen to us. This church has great theology and a great heritage, but we have a great enemy, too, that is always attacking and he wants us to turn in on ourselves, to take our eyes off the mission.

We also have a great Savior who gave us every spiritual blessing, who gives us the Holy Spirit, who convicts us, who when we turn our eyes on each other, hopefully there's conviction to say, "No, I need to turn my eyes on the Lord Jesus." We also have these motivators to live for Him. Satan would have us turn on each other in the face of battle, but the Lord calls us to be united so we can advance the Gospel – one soul united soldiering forward for the sake of the Gospel, for God's glory. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, we just thank You for Your Word that is so rich. Lord, it is living and it's active and like a double-edged sword. It convicts us, but at the same time, it encourages us. It reminds us that we are adored, loved, redeemed, and forgiven. Then, Lord, it motivates us to live a life for Your glory, to love one another and to love You for the sake of the Gospel. So, I pray that we here at Briarwood Presbyterian Church would keep our eyes on our mission, that we would love one another and You told Your disciples they will know they are My disciples by the way you love one another and that our witness here would not be tarnished, that Satan would not have his way and would turn us on each other. But Lord, we would serve each other and treat each other more significant than ourselves. Help us to follow You and that we would advance the Gospel here at Briarwood for Your glory. We pray these things in Christ's Name, Amen.