

### Philippians 2:1–4 (NKJV)

**1** Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, **2** fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. **3** Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. **4** Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Last week we focused on verses 1 and 2.

Paul was calling us to a **whole hearted devotion** to the **Kingdom of God**. He appealed to that **which we were given** in our **relationship to Christ**. We have Christ and the Holy Spirit. We have everything that comes in that package. And Paul appeals that we **let that drive us**, let that **motivate us** to a **unity of purpose** of **mission** and **fellowship**. He appeals to us to all think with the same **mindset**. Ok Paul has given us a picture of what that looks like. He tells us how we should view life and each other.

Now he enters the world of contrast.

I picked some mushrooms a while ago to eat. I am fairly careful to make sure none of the ones I eat can kill me. But I do not know everything there is to know about mushrooms. For instance, one of the things that I did not know is that Belote mushrooms are covered with a substance that is not dark on your skin but it is dark when it touches other things, like paint. The stain is black. We happen to have white kitchen cupboards. And every woman here probably knows where I am going with this.

Carla was deeply struck with the contrast between how things **should have been** and how they **actually were**. Had the cupboards been painted black, all would have been good. But the fact that they were only black where my fingers had touched them had less than a desirous effect on our relational harmony.

Well Paul, this morning, is giving us contrast.

In verses 1-2 he is telling us what this single minded love and zeal looks like. In verses 3 and 4 he tells us what it does not look like. Verses 1 and 2 are the white paint. Verses 3 and 4 are the black fingerprints.

**3** Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. **4** Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

This Greek word for selfish ambition we have seen before in Philippians. It was used of those who **electioneer** for office, **courting popular applause by trickery and low arts**. It means courting a distinction, a desire to put one's self forward, a partisan and factious spirit which does not disdain **dishonorable or dishonest** methods of gaining that favor.

Basically it is viewing and treating one's self as the highest priority. It is looking for a selfish advantage by manipulating others. It is presenting one's self in the best light in order to gain something for one's self.

How bad is that?

Well we are in the **mess we are in on planet** earth because of this trait. The devil viewed himself and what he wanted as being more important than what God wanted. Eve, and then Adam viewed what they wanted as being more important than what God wanted.

What evil decision did you ever make that was not fueled by selfishness, wanting what you wanted and not caring enough about what God says?

And this selfish quality is not the kind of thing that needs an **outlet** to do its damage.

Think about some of your **inner turmoil**. Have you ever had a time where you **envied** someone, **resented someone** for their lack of regard for you, **harbored grudges** against someone, spent long periods in self pity? This is just a sampling. We could probably all get creative here. But we get it. Even if we **never act in a selfish manner** toward another fellow human being, selfishness creates its own wicked effect in our hearts.

I know I keep coming back to this over and over again. But I cannot help it. We see again that **motives matter**. Our relationships with God and each other will only grow as we do **truthful business** with our motives. Why we do what we do and why we think and feel like we do **matter intensely**. They are being either inspired and fueled by God's word and the Holy Spirit or by selfishness. They are inspired by **Jesus** is Lord or **Jon** is Lord, **self** is Lord. And which is which matters intensely.

Everything we think and everything we do is fueled by something. It all falls under doing what we do **by faith** or **by flesh**.

Even the mundane tasks of life are to be done **through faith**. Everything not of faith is sin. We live in the presence of God and should continually make decisions accordingly. That is faith.

True spirituality is doing business with the **inner us** that no one sees. True spirituality starts with being given a **new heart** and then identifying the old residue that keeps trying to creep back in.

So be encouraged. The fight is expected. It is ok that your life is a struggle. It is expected. The struggle itself is not a proof of failure. It is a sign of life.

So Paul has laid the **big framework**. Live for that which matters most, submitted to the Lordship of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ for the Gospel of Christ. Or live for your own selfish self serving, self seeking interests.

If we knew nothing else from this morning, we would **already** know much of what **we need** to know.

But Paul is so helpful to us. He fills us in on another concept. **Conceit**.

Are any of you conceited? Isn't that one of those sins that other people commit but we don't? Think about it. Would you ever think of yourself as being conceited? Most people don't.

Let's look at the definition.

John MacArthur says that Empty conceit is arrogant pride, being "wise in your own estimation"

He said that even the Greeks, who did not admire humility could recognize "that a person's view of himself could become so exaggerated as to be presumptuous and contemptible. Their term for such exalted pride, a word still used in English and many other modern languages, was hubris. In his long list of sins that characterize unbelieving, rebellious mankind, Paul uses a word derived from hubris, which is rendered "insolent"

Perhaps we should apply the "**eye roll**" test. When we start speaking of our virtues, do those people who know us best roll their eyes? If so, we are probably guilty of the conceit that Paul speaks of. And people who live in this kind of conceit are often the last to know. Because even if you were to tell them how they are perceived, they would have trouble believing it. We always believe best that which we tell ourselves. And that is the problem with conceit.

Conceit can **only grow** in a vacuum of knowledge. Were we to do serious business with the things that go through our minds, the vast amount of evidence would prove to us we have **lots of reasons for humility**, but very little reason for **pride**. But if we refuse to do the serious business of self analysis, we can float all kinds of theories about ourselves. And conceit will usually be one of the fruits of our pride.

But our friend Paul is so very helpful. He does not allow us to wallow in our self deception. He says this:

**but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.**

The **but** is the contrast word. We are back to the white paint again. This is what it **should be**, what it should **look like** without the fingerprints.

Instead of **selfishness**- the preoccupation of what we want for ourselves, for our flesh. Instead of **conceit**, which is a fictional view of our own virtues and importance in the scheme of things, we should choose a different world view. One based on truth and facts.

It is normal to regret many items in our histories. Have you ever thought about that. Oh yeah. I want to go back there too and clean them up. Mixed among some of my **better motives** for this regret and change is a very **selfish motive**. I want to remove the things I am **simply embarrassed about**, things I would not want to read in the paper or in a short story. Films I would not like replayed. And what a terrible thing it would be for us if we actually could accomplish such a thing. It would remove a tremendous tool in the Holy Spirit's tool belt. All of our histories reveal **shame** and all shame is fuel for **humility**. From what I can see in scripture, without shame and regret, humility is impossible. Shame is the emotion fuel for humility. If you refuse to think about your shame, you fail to have the proper incentive to reach humility. Shame when recognized and admitted is the fertile soil that humility grows in. So the things that we did to cause the shame were bad. But when we **tell the truth about it** it puts us right where we need to be to appreciate the grace of God. It is not a smart thing to excuse our guilt by any method. Grace is extended to sinners. We have no reason not to admit our full culpability, our full guilt.

Humility is a remarkable trait. It was not valued as a virtue in the Greco Roman world. It was seen as a weakness.

But in the church of Christ humility is one of the **greatest virtues**. It is a core virtue. It is only those who humble themselves that God exalts. What makes humility so difficult is that to be truly humble takes **tremendous** objectivity. When we talk about humility we are not talking about the game that some play that. These people make statements about negative things about themselves. But they are really just shopping for people who will tell them how wrong they are about themselves and what a wonderful person they are. You can usually tell the difference between someone who is **truly humble** and someone who is just **acting humble**. When the person makes negative statements about themselves, **enthusiastically agree with them**. While the humble person might wish you weren't so enthusiastic about it, the falsely humble will begin changing their story to get a better response. They will begin to defend themselves.

True humility is formed and grown when we look at our lives as if it were a life of someone **outside of ourselves** that we have inside information about. Yes this person did this thing on this day according to faith. On this same day he did something that was completely driven by flesh. This person is growing in the Christian faith. And at the same time this person has zero excuse for many of his faithless acts. This person showed no interest in God. But God showed great interest in this person.

Do you see what I mean? Lowliness of mind, or humility, is best gained by an objective evaluation of what one **should have done** or **should not have done**, as opposed to what one actually **did** or **did not do**.

And humility comes, not by applying **our** standards but by applying **God's** standards. It asks "How do we compare **to Christ**." It is seeing our lives from the light of God's Word and God's perspective. We can see why it is so hard to **attain** humility and why it is so hard to **maintain** humility. It lives on a diet of absolute truth.

Now this lowliness of mind also has an element to it also to where we do not strive to have the top seat, the position of status, the place of importance. In that sense there is another element of humility other than that simply gained by telling the negative truth about ourselves. Jesus humbled himself, but His humility did not come from a negative reality about His history. We will talk about this more next week. For Jesus to tell the truth about himself would not be humbling in the sense that it would show Christ's weaknesses and failures. He had none.

But Jesus's life and attitudes stood in direct contrast to selfish ambition or conceit. He **deserved** the highest seat. He was far and above the **best human being** who ever lived. He **deserved** all honor and glory. But He **laid it all down** for His mission. He lowered himself. That is different than admitting the low position he deserved. He deserved the best position. He deserved the greatest throne ever conceived on this earth. But he chose a lowly position when He deserved the highest position. He chose to be born in a stable and to die on a cross. That is the perfect example of lowliness of mind. His **mission** was more important than his **comfort**. His mission was more important than gaining what He deserved, than His deserved status.

**in lowliness of mind (like Christ) let each esteem others better than himself.**

When I read this my first impulse is to read it that I should esteem others as being **better people** than myself. Is that how you read it?

And there is a real sense that this could be how it is to be applied. Do I know your secret sins? Do I know your secret failures? No. But **I know mine**. And the same with you. So when I look at you I can assume that you have your own struggles. But to me those are only **theories**. Where mine are a **stark reality**. I can give you dates and places of my failures. So for me to assume that whatever your failures are, they are probably not **as great** or **as often** as mine, especially with all that God has given me. That would not be a long stretch then for me to think that you are a better Christian than I am.

But in the context I am not sure that would be the strongest application. Especially with what Paul is going to say next. I think this is more likely the best application.

When you look at others, think it through and evaluate it in this way. The person's **needs** that you are looking at, that you can see, are more important than your own. **Esteem**, count of highest value, what **they need** as more important, higher, of **greater value to meet**, than your own. That is probably what this is saying.

It is easy to read this and say, yes I want to do this. Or yes, I already do this. Or yes, I would do this if I saw what it was. But I think we need to look at what does not come into consideration. Things like, how has this person treated me in the past? Or, this person and I don't click very well. Or this person hurts my feelings. Or this person will not appreciate what I do for them at all.

Do you know what I mean? We have **other stuff** we want to bring into our calculations. But Paul says put yourself in a mindset where **what they need** is more important than **your reasons** for not meeting the need. What they need is more important than **what you might feel** like you deserve. Or maybe what they need is more important than what you might feel **you** actually need.

This is really just another application of doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. You initiate the good treatment that meets the needs of others without regard for how it affects you.

**4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.**

Look how this passage started. First don't wrangle to take advantage or use others for your own selfish benefit. Don't get the idea you are more important than others.

No. See it completely differently. Those people you want to use for selfish motives you can not only cannot use that way, but you must see their needs as

more important than your own. Not only are you forbidden to **take advantage** of them. You are also not allowed to **neglect** them. And not only can you not **neglect them** but you must put **their needs ahead of your needs**.

Paul completely reversed that self centered scenario. And like always he tells us what to take off and what to put on.

And now he puts it all in perspective. Let's sum it up again.

Do not use others for your advancement.

Do not see yourself as being more important than others.

No, see yourself accurately and choose for yourself in a subservient position.

There is nothing in self in this. You cannot say I want to use you to make me important. You cannot say what I want or need is most important.

No the ethic here is that when you see a need in a brother it is top priority and mine is secondary.

So while it is normally just fine for us to provide for our own needs. All bets are off when another brother is in need. When a brother is in need we need to prioritize that. And while it is fine to meet our own needs. In fact it **is assumed** that we will meet our own needs. In some ways we are **commanded** to provide for ourselves in a moral manor. But that is not enough in the kingdom of God.

We can no longer look out for **only** our own interests. We cannot be like the religious folks that walked past the man who was robbed and beaten on the road to Samaria. We are not **forbidden** to look after our own interests. But we are commanded to **do more than that**. We are to take the expertise we have in taking care of ourselves and put all that zeal and energy and knowledge and pour it into meeting the needs of **others** as well.

It is clear that Paul is calling us to an other-ness that is not natural for us on this selfish planet. We are to have this ultimate concern for the Gospel, for the kingdom of God, for things above. And that naturally flows into an other-ness in our outlook that is supernatural as well. We go beyond that which is **self serving**. We take on a mindset that has us doing things that Christ would do.

**3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.**

Let's look at this passage one more time before we go forward next week.

What we should **not do-**

Do stuff to draw attention to ourselves to gain what will stroke our egos or appeal to our flesh.

Think about ourselves in a way that is not accurate, not according to truth, not reflecting the reality of our limitations and failures.

What we **should do**-

See ourselves with an objective perspective, as if we are an outside person seeing the facts about our lives. We must allow that to drive our opinion of ourselves to absolute accuracy.

And then we accept like Paul that even though we might have **some statuses** we could claim for ourselves, like in Paul's case **being paid**, that we choose to only do that which is best for **those we are serving**. We lower ourselves, even when we could rationally and rightfully claim rights. We do what **Christ did** when He humbled himself.

In that mindset we see the needs of others as taking priority over our own, just as Christ did. And instead of internal focus- what do **I** want? What would **I** like?

What do **I** deserve? What do **I** feel? How should others honor **me**? What could others do to give **me** what I want? How can you help **me** grow? What would you do if you loved **me**?

We maintain an **external** focus. What do **you** need? How can I meet **your need**? What can I do that will help **you**? How can I help **you** grow?

Let me ask you. How much of the turmoil or despair in your life, how much of the dissatisfaction or conflict in your life, is based on your mindset of seeing **other people's needs** as **more important** than your own? How much does your **heart ache** because no matter how you try you cannot lay down your life in such a way that it meets another person's needs? How much of your **turmoil** is because you are willing to do anything to meet another person's needs but they reject your efforts? That happens. But I think it is safe to say that is not where the lion's share of our miseries come from.

And where do we really receive the longest lasting pleasures?

Do we not find that what Jesus says is true. It truly is more blessed to give than to receive. Can we see this morning what a body of believers looks like when everyone applies these words of Paul. What a wonderful situation to be in the middle of. What an addictive environment.

\*\*\*Maybe a good application for us this week would be to ask ourselves and the Lord, **what, if anything, keeps me from reaching out to discover and meet the needs of those around me?** And then commit to overcoming whatever excuses we find.