

CHIEF

MINISTRIES

August 2016

Beloved, no one gets into the family of God without stooping - in humility; acknowledging that there is nothing in ourselves worthy of saving - there is nothing in ourselves capable of earning salvation (Ephesians 2:8,9).

How humbling is that? Listen, this dangerous attitude of self-importance - which is a gateway to hell; this high view of self which is so destructive in every relationship in so many ways - isn't really a new problem.

If you traveled back to the days of the apostle Paul, the Roman perspective would have been very similar to ours; they encouraged and applauded anyone's attempt to attain public status and any means to promote one's own honor.

It was all about developing a high view of yourself.

In fact, one of Rome's best-selling authors during the days of Paul had written that the entire population in the Roman Empire was enslaved to their desire for fame. (Expos. Bible Comment v12 p.214)

Paul knew that there would be nothing more profoundly devastating to the church than people with a high view of themselves - people with self-centered agendas - pride running for position and preeminence; and he also knew that there would be nothing more profoundly encouraging than humility - humble people with a servant-hearted agenda.

We've looked at Philippians 2 last month. We're going to continue this where we left off. Paul had stated, if this is true and this is true and this is true - then something ought to happen as a result (v1). Now why would Paul effectively tell the church in Philippi to remain unified? They were an amazing church!

Most New Testament scholars believe this church had already begun to fracture and this letter from Paul will begin to address it later on specifically.

Which means:

- even though the church in Philippi was wonderfully supportive of Paul
- even though they brought him great joy every time he prayed for them
- just because they understood the value of the gospel
- they were still in danger of dividing.

This church faced the danger of discord that is often generated by only a few people. Such troublemakers can stir up the contention and strife that fractures an entire congregation. So..... Paul writes to this church and every church since - *make my joy complete by being of the same mind.*

By the way, being of the same mind is the main verb in these verses all these other actions are secondary - in other words, they describe what it looks like to be of one mind.

Before we look at them, let me tell you ahead of time, they are all unnatural. That is, they don't come naturally.

Paul is going to call them, - and us, - to humility: and that happens to be an unnatural way of living, which is another way of saying we are to live supernaturally; living by means of the supernatural power and perspective of the Holy Spirit as we humbly submit to Him.

What does that look like? Well first of all, Paul writes in verse 2 - it looks like this - maintaining the same love. We'll call this characteristic, loving intentionally. Notice, Paul didn't write loving the same things and Paul uses the word agape for love which means making up your mind to love. It isn't sourced in your feelings or emotions but in the will. In fact, we're told to love - agape - not with word or tongue, but in deed and truth (1 John 3:18). John also

writes that we have passed from - death into life because we love the brethren (1 John 3:14). We don't all love the same things but share the same love.

We have all received the love of Christ and we are to demonstrate that by taking that same kind of selfless love and live it out with each other.

And would you also notice that Paul is taking us beyond only loving those who love us? He isn't telling us here to maintain a love for those who love you or only the lovable ones either.

None of us are lovable all the time. We're all a little like porcupines - we have some good points, but it's difficult to get close sometimes.

The kind of love Paul wants the church to begin rehearsing is going to require a mind governed by selfless humility - because humility overflows with genuine practical love for others.

Paul goes on in verse 2 to add, *united in spirit*. We are not only to be loving intentionally we are to be - living harmoniously.

This one Greek word - *sumpsuches* means "one-souled". It means living harmoniously. Harmony cannot happen without humility. In fact the prefix is where we get the word symphony. And a symphony is a great example of a unified church.

Different talents....different instruments....beautiful harmony.

But can you imagine a tuba player determined to play whatever he wants whenever he wants in the middle of the symphony? Or the kettle drum (tympani) player demanding a solo at each performance or he just won't play it all. There would be one word to describe him - unemployed.

The church happens to be a symphony composed of different instruments....different people....different ages....different backgrounds.....different skill levels.....absolutely wonderful at playing one instrument but more than likely unable to play any other instrument with the same skill; but we all combine to make different contributions to the music, all the while endeavoring to keep the same time and play evenly with everyone else - and always keeping an eye on the chief conductor of the church who is Jesus Christ. We are to be loving intentionally. We are to be living harmoniously.

Third, we are to be *longing cooperatively*. Notice the next description of this unnatural life. The last part of verse 2 - intent on one purpose.

We are to have that same longing - the same passion. If we take from chapter one Paul's primary focus of challenging us to live lives worthy of the gospel (1:27), this cooperative longing here in chapter 2 would tie together with the idea of living in such a way that we glorify God by obeying Jesus Christ.

And what did Christ primarily command the church? The Lord gave us what he calls *the great commission* - sometimes referred to as *the great omission*, because the church at large has chosen to opt out of the command.

Before ascending the Lord commanded us to be His witnesses - as we go into all the world and make disciples we are to baptize them and teach them all that Jesus commanded us (Matthew 8 & Acts 1)

This is our primary purpose as a church and as believers.

We are witnesses, cooperating together as a local assembly in glorifying God through obedience to Christ.

Which means we are taking the gospel to the world.

Listen, there is one thing the devil delights in, it is distracting the believer and the church from cooperating together in a global strategy - to just thinking about ourselves. Whatever you do, don't get passionate about glorifying God by joining the Father who seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23).

Whatever you do, only think about your immediate living conditions - that's natural, don't think about living in such a way that you begin to change the very environment you're living in - that's unnatural.

So is the church naturally minded or supernaturally minded? And what is my personal contribution by way of cooperation?

Here's humility, and it doesn't come naturally: loving intentionally, living harmoniously, longing cooperatively. This is what humility looks like.

Notice verse 3. *Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit.* Do nothing from selfishness - that is do nothing that is motivated by self. How unnatural is that?!

The word Paul uses here is translated as selfish ambition (*eritheia*) and it originally referred to a day laborer - primarily a field worker who cut and bound wheat sheaves together - they were paid daily. Later on, in time, the word became a reference for people seeking personal wealth or even a political office by self-centered methods, and then finally by the time of Paul's letter, it referred to someone who jockeyed for position and power - someone motivated by selfish ambition.

Jockeying for position - I bet you've seen that in your prison church. This was Diatrophes, John the apostle wrote of, who loved the preeminence. He was always jockeying and conniving and manipulating to be first in line.

Selfishness is a consuming and destructive sin - it destroys and deceives and manipulates and self-destructs - because the primary casualty is the person who manifests it. And you can understand why Paul would warn the church of this characteristic. Discord and division are inevitable when people jockey for position in the church - when people focus on their own agenda - when the body is divided into their own self-serving agendas.

I remember reading a biography on Jonathan Edwards, one of the leaders of the great awakening in the 1700's. One particular story was about the conflict in the church he pastored following the collapse of their balcony. The leadership had to come up with a seating arrangement. Unlike our churches today, everyone back then sat in the same seat. You don't do that do you? Well back then, you were actually assigned a seat. And the seats were typically arranged by how important a person was perceived to be. Amazing! The deacons and church officials toiled for hours over the new seating arrangement so as not to ruffle anyone's feathers. How's that for a distraction? It's all about where I sit!

Humility is the opposite of selfishness. Now notice Paul also refers to empty conceit - personal vanity....self-promotion. Self-conceit, Paul points out, is essentially empty. It is an attempt to get glory, but in reality is really nothing more than empty, exaggerated importance.

Self-conceit is like a balloon filled with air. It's full,.....but at the same time it's empty. And the larger it stretches on the outside, the bigger the emptiness on the inside. It's really just full of hot air. You want an empty life? Live for yourself. You want a full life? Empty yourself.....of self. But that's not natural....you're right. That will take the supernatural presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

In fact Paul goes on to describe two more unnatural aspects of humility that further establish unity in the church.

First, there is an unnatural realization. Notice verse 3 - *with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves.* Other people are more important than you are. He can't mean itreally?

The word translated from regard here refers to a settled conclusion. It isn't play acting or patronizing. You actually need to come to that conclusion that others are more important. And notice what allows you to arrive at such a conclusion, - with humility of mind regard one another as more important. With humility of mind - that's one word in the original language that means - with a lowly mindset. Now that's not a reference to a "poor me syndrome...I'm no good, I think I'll go eat some worms. I'm so inferior" the mindset is actually forgetting about oneself entirely. They don't think well of themselves, they don't think badly of themselves, they are people who don't think of themselves at all.

And when they do, they consider everyone else in the body as more important than themselves. Listen none of us should go around the church saying "I am good at everything", nor should we say, "I am no good for anything"... Either mindset hurts the church and that person and ultimately fails to give glory to God as our Creator.

"More important" here is translated as "to be superior." In other words a humble person doesn't view himself as superior to anybody.

That is Paul's attitude when he called himself the "least of the apostles" (1 Corinthians 15:9) and the "least of all the saints" (Ephesians 3:8). He wasn't groveling or having a pity party. He had come to this conclusion. This is an unnatural realization, isn't it?

Wouldn't that eliminate all ungodly comparison.....no more jockeying for position...no more gossip...everyone views the other person ahead of them. There are no big shots in the body of Christ. No one is out to win points...or popularity...or some prized platform of attention. We all play our part, according to the Divine Director of the Symphony.

Secondly, unity as a body of believers is built on an unnatural resolution.

Notice verse 4. *Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.*

An unnatural realization says: other people are more important than me

An unnatural resolution says: others needs are more important than mine

The natural thing to do is to look out for number one. The words translated "to look out for" come from the Greek verb *skopeo* which means to make this your aim in life.

You get out of the bed and it's all about your own personal interests. The word *skopeo* is used in our word for telescope and microscope.

We pull out our metaphorical telescope and look way down the path of our lives as far as we can see and we try and scope out what's going to happen and then we prepare for it. We plan for it, we save for it.

Or we pull out our microscope and evaluate all the details of our daily lives - all the events, relationships, problems, issues, needs, and we focus on them - we talk about them - we pray only about them - we worry about them - we fret over them.

That kind of telescope and microscope activity is natural and it comes easy.

Paul is effectively saying here, that humility of mind takes a telescope and trains it on the needs and concerns we see in someone else's life.

It takes the microscope and evaluates ways that we can help them, or encourage them, or pray for them, or support them.

Paul makes us face the question: "Why do I do what I am doing in the church, where I live, where I work? Am I driven by self-centered motives, even when I am supposedly helping others? Am I self-serving even when serving others, wanting and hoping to be noticed, so that I receive the appreciation and recognition that I think I deserve? Whether I express it outwardly or not, do I nurse resentment when my hard work goes unnoticed or my ideas are not followed? Whose interests am I really pursuing?"

Our culture today applaud self-promotion; a high view of ourselves, but it then reduces our capacity for humility; accountability, even self-sacrificing hard work for the benefit of someone else.

My best friend has a servant's heart. She also is a nurse. I came across a fascinating list of nurses duties from 1887. Here they are:

1. Daily sweep and mop the floors of your ward, dust the patient's furniture and windowsills.
2. Maintain and even temperature in your ward by bringing in coal for the day's business.
3. Light is important to observe the patient's condition; therefore, each day fill kerosene lamps and trim wicks; wash the windows once a week.
4. The nurse's notes are important in aiding the physicians work; make your pens carefully.
5. Each nurse on day duty will report every day at 7 AM and leave at 8 PM except on Sunday on which you have 2 hours off duty.
6. Graduate nurses in good standing with the director of nurses will be given an evening off each week for courting purposes and 2 evenings a week if you attend church regularly.
7. Any nurse who smokes, uses liquor in any form, gets her hair done at a salon or frequents dance halls shall give the director of nurse's good reason to suspect her integrity and intentions.

8. Each nurse should lay aside from each payday a goodly sum of her earnings for her benefits during her declining years so that she will not become a burden; for example if you earn \$30 a month, you should set aside 15.
9. The nurse who performs her labors and serves her patients and doctors faithfully for a period of 5 years shall be given an increase by the hospital administration of \$.05 a day.

Your natural reaction is, how in the world....and why in the world would anyone want that job?

The gospel effectively trains us for this kind of self-forgetting humility and self-sacrifice.

In fact, in the mind of the Spirit of God, through the apostle Paul, this is how to service one another; this is how to combat division and distractions and personal agendas and pride in the local church - and in every one of our hearts - Paul writes -this is how we love and serve together - being of the same mind; here's what that looks like:

- maintaining the same love - that's loving intentionally
- united in one spirit - that's living harmoniously
- intent on one purpose - that's longing cooperatively and that will take humility of mind
- which leads to an unnatural realization - other people are more important than we are;
- it leads to an unnatural resolution - other people's needs are more important than ours are

This is going to be an unnatural way to live...a supernatural way to live with humility of mind:

- bringing glory to Christ
- a unifying influence to the church
- service to others
- and the gospel to the world

You want an empty life - fill it with yourself

You want a full life - empty it of your self

It may seem unnatural - but it is the only way - to live a life worth living.

Chief

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Christ's

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