

Community Group Guide



the Church at Martinsburg

Paradox: An Unnatural Response to Natural Circumstances

“Humility”

Philippians 2:1-11

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June 7, 2015

Introducing the Sermon Series

A *paradox* is a statement or proposition that seems self-contradictory or absurd but, in reality, expresses a possible truth. The book of Philippians communicates a series of paradoxes: joy in the midst of suffering, unity in the midst of diversity, freedom in the midst of imprisonment, contentment in the midst of turmoil. These are only a few.

The apostle Paul wrote this epistle to the church at Philippi while he was in prison. The Philippians had sent one of their own, Epaphroditus, to take support to Paul. In turn, Paul supports them through this joy-filled letter.

Sermon Overview and Outline

Humility is one of the core virtues of the Christian faith, but it is not a virtue that is easily pursued. We often find ourselves on slippery ground because humility cannot be attained directly. Humility is a byproduct of belief in the gospel of Christ. In the gospel, we have a confidence not based in our performance but in the love of God in Christ (Rom. 3:22-24). This frees us from having to always be looking at ourselves.

Scripture Passage

Have a volunteer read the following scripture passage(s).

Philippians 2:1-11

[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 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.

Discussion Questions

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means.

1. What insight, principle, or observation from this weekend's message did you find most helpful, eye-opening, troubling?
2. How would you define humility? Give an example from your life experience that displays humility in action.
3. What areas of your life do you place your interests above the interests of others? Why are these areas difficult to place others first?
4. Read James 4:6. Discuss the characteristics of proud and humble people. Which are you more naturally inclined to identify with?
5. This week, plan to intentionally make someone else more significant than you. This could be holding doors, giving a bigger tip, or a simple word of encouragement. Share your ideas with the group, and discuss again next week.

Prayer

As you pray with your group, consider praying for the following things:

- Any personal requests. Pray for the personal requests that may have been shared in your group.
- A desire to have the Word of Christ dwelling richly in the hearts of your fellow group members (Col. 3:16).
- Ask the Lord to help you keep your mind set on Christ so you may experience the paradoxes of life with Christ.

Weekly Scriptures

Encourage your group members to consistently read Scripture. The daily Scripture reading plan from the church is be a helpful place to start.

Monday - Philippians 1

Tuesday - Philippians 2

Wednesday - Philippians 3

Thursday - Philippians 4

Friday – Romans 15:1-3

Saturday – John 10:1-18

Weekly Update

Remind your group of some of the important things coming up for the church.

Upcoming events:

One-Day Preaching Workshop

On Saturday, June 27, Dr. Mark Johnson will be teaching a one-day preaching workshop at 50 Monroe Street. This even is open to all men interested in teaching the Bible.

Baptism Celebration

We will be celebrating with baptisms on July 19th! If you have members in your group who have yet to be baptized, encourage them to follow through in obedience. They can register to be baptized at baptism.martinsburgchurch.org.

Follow-up

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email, text, etc. to your group with some or all of the following:

- A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- Encourage individual members of your group with specific passages of scripture that deal with something they might be experiencing.
- Challenge your group members to read through the entire book of Philippians this week.
- A reminder to pray for the requests made during your group time.

Commentary

**This commentary has been taken from the Philippians: An Unnatural Response to Natural Circumstances Study Guide. You can pick up a physical copy at the Guest Services table.*

Humility is crucial for Christians. We can only receive Christ through meekness and humility (Matt. 5:3, 5; 18:3-4). Jesus humbled himself and was exalted by God (Phil. 2:8-9); therefore joy and power through humility is the very dynamic of the Christian life (Luke 14:11; 18:14; 1 Pet. 5:5).

The teaching seems simple and obvious. The problem is that it takes great humility to understand humility, and even more to resist the pride that comes so naturally with even a discussion of the subject.

We are on slippery ground because humility cannot be attained directly. Once we become aware of the poison of pride, we begin to notice it all around us. We hear it in the sarcastic, snarky voices in newspaper columns and weblogs. We see it in civic, cultural, and business leaders who never admit weakness or failure. We see it in our neighbors and some friends with their jealousy, self-pity, and boasting.

And so we vow not to talk or act like that. If we then notice "a humble turn of mind" in ourselves, we immediately become smug—but that is pride in our humility. If we catch ourselves doing *that* we will be particularly impressed with how nuanced and subtle we have become. Humility is so shy. If you begin talking about it, it leaves. To even ask the question, "Am I humble?" is to not be so. Examining your own heart, even for pride, often leads to being proud about your diligence and circumspection.

Christian humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less, as C. S. Lewis so memorably said. It is to be no longer always noticing yourself and how you are doing and how you are being treated. It is "blessed self-forgetfulness."

Humility is a byproduct of belief in the gospel of Christ. In the gospel, we have a confidence not based in our performance but in the love of God in Christ (Rom. 3:22-24).

This frees us from having to always be looking at ourselves. Our sin was so great, nothing less than the death of Jesus could save us. He *had* to die for us. But his love for us was so great, Jesus was *glad* to die for us.”

2:1-2 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.

Staying in context, recall that Paul has just shared with the Philippians saints his hope for them: that they “are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” As chapter 2 begins, Paul jumps into a precise discourse on the unity that they have been exhorted to have.

There are four “ifs” in verse 1. These “if” clauses in the Greek are in the first-class condition, which is better translated as “since” or “because.” They express the idea, “if this condition is true, and it is, then...” Therefore, this encouragement in Christ, this comfort from love, this participation in the Spirit and this affection and sympathy are undeniable truths in the lives of believers. In essence, they are a given.

Encouragement in Christ: Encouragement (*paraklesis*) has the meaning of coming alongside someone to help them by giving comfort and/or exhortation. It is related to the word used for the “Helper” (the Holy Spirit) in John 14:16. Indeed, our encouragement comes directly from the Spirit of Christ in us and is extended to others by the Spirit at work through us.

Comfort of love: Comfort (*paramuthion*) means to persuasively and closely speak to someone to give them comfort. Consoling love is “that which the Lord grants to unworthy sinners in the grace of salvation.”¹

Participation of the Spirit: Participation (*koinonia*) is the same word used in 1:5 and is translated “fellowship” as well as “communion”.

Affection and sympathy: Affection, used also in 1:8, is used to describe personal longing in close relationship with those we love. Sympathy can also be translated mercy.

Steven Cole gives a wonderfully precise paraphrase of verses 1 and 2: “Therefore, in light of our mission to proclaim Christ, if you have ever received encouragement at a time of need because of your union with Christ, and I know you have; if Christ’s love has ever given you comfort in trials, as I know it has; if you’ve known that common bond with God and others that comes from the Holy Spirit – in fact, we’ve known that bond together; if you’ve ever felt deep down inside the tender concern Christ has for you, as every Christ has; then, top off my joy by working through any conflicts until you come out at the place of true oneness of heart.”²

Paul reminds them of these truths with a goal in mind. Each “if” demands a “then...” Because they have received these things in Christ Jesus or because of their union with Christ, he desires that they make his own joy complete through Spirit-filled response: unity. They aren’t to passively hope that unity happens. They are to actively be like-minded, “striving to achieve common understanding and genuine agreement.”³ They are to have the same love (*agape*). This is a love based on a choice to seek the

¹ MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Philippians*. Chicago: Moody, 2001. 104

² Cole, Steven. *Phillipians Sermons*. On-line. www.fcfonline.org/content/1/sermons. 1995.

³ MacArthur.

welfare of another, not based upon preference. They are to united in spirit, which literally means to be “one-souled”. It is to live free of self, intent on unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ. And finally, Paul exhorts them to be intent on one purpose. Literally translated, it could be read: “Being minded on the one thing.” It is virtually synonymous with having “the same mind.” Ultimately, each of these responses points back to conducting themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel, proving the gospel through their union with Christ and others.

2:3-4 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

In verses 3-4, Paul gives the “how to” of verses 1-2. The answer is humility. We are commanded to do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit. Selfish ambition (eritheia) is also found in 1:17. The word describes a person “who persistently seeks personal advantage and gain, regardless of the effect on others...it usually carried the idea of building oneself up by tearing someone else down...describes someone who strives to advance himself by using flattery, deceit, false accusation, contentiousness, and any other tactic that seems advantageous.”⁴ Conceit demands personal glory. It’s the applause button in each of us. To have empty conceit is to believe one’s own press. The two negatives are contrasted with the positive, humility.

Humility of mind is “lowliness of mind.” This is not what the world would call poor self-esteem. Rather it is the high calling of believers not to think too highly of themselves, but to esteem (regard) others as more important. It demands that we “not merely look out for” our own interests, but to give special attention to the “interests of others.” The focus is not on whether a person is really more important or worthy; the focus is to choose to “regard” them as more important. It’s not what they are, but what one counts them to be. In a phrase, humility is dying to self. “The key to harmonious relationships is not to esteem self, assert self, or stand up for self. It is, rather, to put self to death and to regard others more highly than myself for Jesus’ sake.”⁵

C. S. Lewis had a great way of defining biblical humility. “Do not imagine that if you met a truly humble person you would ever come away from him thinking that he was humble. He will not be somebody who is always telling you he is a ‘nobody’. All you will remember from coming away from a truly humble person is how much he seemed to be totally interested in you. Because the essence of gospel humility is not thinking more of yourself or thinking less of yourself; it’s thinking of yourself less.”⁶

Once Paul defines genuine unity and further describes the means of that unity (humility), he then gives us the quintessential example: Jesus Christ. He commands us “Have this attitude (of humility) in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.” This is the attitude that will result in true spiritual unity and Jesus is the supreme example. His “incarnation calls believers to follow Jesus’ incomparable example of humble self-denial,

⁴ MacArthur.

⁵ Cole.

⁶ Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity*. New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1960

self-giving, self-sacrifice, and selfless love as He lived out the incarnation in obedient submission to His Father's will."⁷

2:6-8 ...who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

John MacArthur has masterfully noted 2:6-8 as a series of downward steps from glory to abasement. Paul begins with Christ's exalted position stating that Jesus "existed in the form of God." The phraseology which Paul here employs was the popular usage of his day...and...was accordingly the most natural language for strongly asserting the deity of Christ which could suggest itself to him... 'Form' is that body of qualities which constitute Him God, and without which He would not be God. What Paul asserts then when he says that Christ Jesus existed in the 'form of God' is that He had all those characterizing qualities which make God God, the presence of which constitutes God, and in the absence of which God does not exist. He who is in the 'form of God,' is God. (John 1:1, Heb. 1:3a)"⁸

From this exalted position as fully God, Jesus took a step downward by "not regarding equality with God a thing to be grasped." Though Jesus continued to be fully God when He became a man, He willingly let loose His divine rights and prerogatives. His deity was not diminished in any way, but He did not demand His own way or the honor and glory that were rightfully His. In short, He maintained all the rights and privileges of God because He is God, but chose not to exercise them apart from the command of the Father.

"Perhaps a good paraphrase would be: 'Be humble as Christ was humble. He, although existing before the world in the form of God, did not treat His equality with God as a prize or a treasure to be greedily clutched and selfishly displayed; on the contrary, he resigned the glories of heaven.' Or again, as Silva puts it: 'The divine and preexistent Christ did not regard the advantage of His deity as grounds to avoid the incarnation; on the contrary, He was willing to regard Himself as nothing by taking on human form'. That is to say, the preexistent Son did not regard equality with God as excusing Him from the task of redeeming mankind through suffering. Indeed, it uniquely qualified Him for that vocation."⁹

The next step downward... "Jesus emptied Himself. Emptied (kenosis) can also be translated "nullified" (Romans 4:14) and "made void" (1 Cor. 1:17). "Jesus Christ emptied Himself completely of every vestige of advantage and privilege, refusing to assert any divine right on His own behalf. He who created and owned everything forsook everything." The rights Jesus divested Himself of included His divine glory, divine authority, the independent exercise of His divine attributes, eternal riches, and His face-to-face relationship with the Father (even to the point of being forsaken by Him).

⁷ MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Philippians*. Chicago: Moody, 2001. 119

⁸ Warfield, B.B. *The Person and Work of Christ*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1950. 566-567

⁹ Storms, Sam. *Philippians 2*. www.samstorms.com. 2006.

In reference to the verb “emptied”, Sam Storms gives a clear exposition. “...Paul intends us to interpret this verb in precisely the way he uses it elsewhere in his epistles. In each of the other texts the meaning is ‘to make void,’ ‘to render of no effect,’ ‘to nullify,’ ‘to despoil,’ ‘to make of no reputation,’ or the like. The point of the word is not to specify some content of deity or divine glory of which Christ emptied or divested Himself. Rather, it is designed to emphasize the radical and far-reaching dimensions of His self-renunciation. Again, not surprisingly (if we keep in mind the crucial role of context), the meaning of this verb is in vv. 7-8. He ‘emptied Himself’ by taking the form of a bond servant and by being made in the likeness of men and by being found in appearance as a man. In other words, Christ did not divest Himself of any divine attributes or in any sense becomes less than God. Rather, Christ ‘emptied’ Himself. paradoxically, by taking something to Himself. Simply put: the incarnation is the kenosis (emptying)! That which constitutes the self-renunciation or self-emptying of Christ is the assumption of human nature. The second person of the Trinity ‘made Himself of no reputation,’ not by ceasing to be God, but by becoming man!”¹⁰

Thirdly, He descended to “take the form of a bond-servant.” As fully as He was God, Jesus was fully a bond-servant with His own will completely bound up in the will of the Father.

The fourth step downward was in Jesus “being made in the likeness of men.” Likeness (*homoion*) means to be like something else, not just in appearance, but in reality. “Jesus was not a clone, a disguised alien, or merely some reasonable facsimile of a man. he became exactly like all other human beings, having all the attributes of humanity, a genuine man among men...subject to physical death,”¹¹ but remaining fully God. “Jesus is said to have been ‘in the likeness of men’ and to have been found ‘in appearance as a man’ (vv. 7-8). This choice of terms is not meant to suggest that Jesus was not truly man but only ‘like’ men. Paul most likely used this terminology to prevent his readers from concluding that in taking the ‘form of a servant’ Christ assumed ‘sinful’ flesh (see Romans 8:3). In saying that Jesus was ‘in appearance as a man’ Paul emphasizes that there was no difference in external characteristics and circumstances between Jesus and other men of his day. Simply put, he *looked* human. When all three of these phrases are taken together, as Paul surely intended them to be, they provide a powerful declaration of the reality of Christ’s humanity. In every respect, be it the inward nature (soul, spirit, mind, emotion, will) or the outward form (appearance, circumstances of life, bodily weakness), Jesus was truly human.”¹²

Fifthly, He was “found in appearance as a man”. Jesus was “recognized” as a man by those who saw and heard him. Appearance (*schema*) refers to outward shape or form unlike “form” (*morphe*) which refers to the very essence of someone.

Continuing His descent, Jesus “humbled Himself.” This phrase has the idea of “lying low”. The most dramatic and poignant time of Jesus’ self-abasement was during His arrest, trial, and crucifixion. He was mocked, falsely accused, spat upon, beaten with fists, scourged, and had part of his beard painfully plucked out. Yet He was never

¹⁰ Storms.

¹¹ MacArthur.

¹² Storms.

defensive, never bitter, never demanding, never accusing. He refused to assert His rights as God or even as a human being.”¹³

Seventh, Jesus became “obedient to the point of death,” and finally, “even to death on a cross.” The Father did not force Jesus to die. By his own willful choice, He freely obeyed and freely surrendered His life for us. And if that were not enough, the final descent was the deepest abasement possible, an accursed death on a cross. “...Having become a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’ (Gal. 3:13).”

2:9-11 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The perfect humility of Jesus led to His perfect exaltation. Jesus was “super-exalted” in His resurrection, ascension, and His seating at the right hand of the Father. Because of the height of this victory, every knee will bow and tongue will confess that He is indeed Lord, the Sovereign over all.

In Addition:

It’s My Pleasure: Humility and Christian Hedonism John Piper

Humility is important because it is God’s pathway to infinite pleasure. Listen to what God has to say:

Proverbs 16:19 - “It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil of the proud.” Better humble and poor than proud and rich. Really? Why?

1 Peter 5:5 – “Clothe yourselves all of you with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Poor humility is better than rich pride because God is against the proud. Even his riches will be a snare to bring him to ruin in the end. If God is opposed to you, to whom can you turn for help? But He gives grace to the humble. He is watching like a jealous lioness over all His lowly cubs.

Isaiah 66:2 – “Thus says the Lord, ‘This is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at My word.’”

And not only is He watching; He is close to the lowly and refreshes them when they are about to fall. He loves to magnify the height of his grace by condescending to the lowly:

Isaiah 57:15 – “For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, ‘I dwell in the high and holy place and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite.’” What a promise! You cannot be too insignificant for God to reach you; He loves to dwell with the lowly and contrite. That is bad news for the proud and self-reliant, but good news for broken sinners.

But the Bible goes right on singing the benefits of humility. In the words of Jesus: Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven... blessed are the meek,

¹³ MacArthur.

for they shall inherit the earth... Unless you turn and become like children you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven... Whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted (Matthew 5:3,5; 18:3,4; 23:12).

...So I conclude on the first point: it is very, very important to be humble. God opposes the proud but the poor in spirit enter the joy of His kingdom.

The second question is: What is the nature of humility? What is a person like who is humble in a Biblical way? Let's look at a few texts that depict humble people and then try to sum up what it involves. We will begin with 1 Corinthians 4:7. Here Paul puts a huge roadblock in the path to pride when he says, "What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?" The recognition that everything we have is a free gift from God is a great roadblock to pride. It is unreasonable to brag about a free gift. So the humble person is not stingy or miserly or overly possessive. Nor is he ostentatious about what he has because he knows and feels that he is merely a trustee and that everything is really God's, loaned to him for his temporary use.

Another picture of Christian humility is given in Luke 18:9-14, a parable of Jesus. "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank Thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing afar off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

A humble person is keenly aware of his sin and feels very sorry for it. He is not presumptuous before God or man. He knows he has no right in himself to approach the holy place or even lift his eyes to heaven. Before we spell out the implications of this attitude for our daily life, let's look at one more text. Luke 17:7-10, another parable of Jesus. "Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he comes in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down at table'? Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me and gird yourself and serve me, till I eat and drink; and afterward you shall eat and drink'? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also when you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"

We can never obey our way out of humility. "Why you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants.'" No matter how much we grow in sanctification, we will always be people for whom lowliness is fitting and proper.

Now how shall we describe the humble person? What manner of life flows from these texts? First of all Christian humility sees life and breath and everything as a gift of God and so is shot through with gratitude instead of grumbling. But not only is all a gift. Because of our sin, all the benefits of life and the hope of eternity are utterly undeserved gifts. The Christian knows that his life hangs on a scarlet cord of mercy and mercy alone. Therefore, the humble person is not greatly inclined to demand personal rights, because he knows if he were treated like that his life would be over. He is not presumptuous or insolent but unassuming and meek. The humble person has the feeling that his natural place is to serve rather than be served; he takes the lowest seat. There arises in his heart a great uneasiness when he is unduly honored or praised. And even when he has done

well the compliments he gets are a bit awkward for him, not because he artificially denies his competence, but because he feels so keenly that whatever he has accomplished is owing to grace, so that God should get the credit above all. The humble Christian does not crave the praise of men. He longs for God to be praised and thanked and for truth to be honored. And finally a person who has been humbled and secured by the gospel will manifest a willingness to acknowledge his error and a readiness to be corrected when wrong. Humility does not try to save face. It is quick to admit its own finitude and imperfection and stubbornness.