

Happy 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent! For the next four weeks of Advent, we are going to be teaching through “The Christ Hymn.” Philippians ch. 2, verses 5-11 is a hymn about Jesus that Paul includes in this letter. Some translations indent or put it in italics to show that this is a poem or hymn that existed previous to the writing of this letter. This is significant because it shows us what the early church thought of Jesus, even before the completed writing of the NT. And listen, one couldn’t fathom a higher view of Jesus. The deity of the Lord Jesus Christ was not something the church made up hundreds of years later. It was the reality sung even before we had a NT. And this is what Advent and Christmas are all about: the Son of God incarnate. God taking on flesh for us and our salvation. But that is mostly next week’s part of the passage.

The plan is to hit v. 1-4 this morning, 5-8 next week focusing on the Christology of the passage, week 3 will be another pass at verses 5-8 focused on application, then we’ll round out advent on Xmas Eve morning with verses 9-11 and the exaltation of Jesus. So over the next month we’ll see the exhortation, the example, and the exaltation of Jesus. / **Phil 2:1-4** (921). (This is the Word) - Main point: As Mrs White teaches our kiddos: have J.O.Y: Jesus, Others, Yourself. Unpacked in three points this morning:

**I. Four Motivations to Live 1** – Paul uses “if” here because he wants to invite us in. Is this true of you? He expects a positive answer. If there is any encouragement from being united to Christ. We are united to Christ by faith. We are in Him and he is in us. He is our representative and we are to abide in him. What is true of him is true of us. There is much encouragement from being united to Christ.

If there is any comfort from love. What love? I think primarily comfort from God’s love for us. This should be the greatest comfort. The Holy Creator could justly judge us but instead he gives mercy. He loves us! He is a loving father. Do you receive comfort from this love?

If there is any participation in the Spirit. Or fellowship with the Spirit? Do you walk by the Spirit, do you listen to his leading and respond to his conviction and turn from sin? Or do you quench the Spirit? This goes with the comfort of love because one of the main tasks of the Spirit is to bring the love of the Father home to our hearts. Rom 5: the Spirit of God pours God’s love into our hearts. 1 Cor 2:12 says the Spirit helps us understand the things freely given to us by God. In Eph 3, Paul prays that the Spirit would strengthen us so that Christ would dwell in our hearts. He is talking to Christians so he is talking about in greater degrees. Do you have this fellowship with the Spirit?

Notice the Trinitarian structure: we have encouragement from being united to the Son, comfort from the love of the Father, participation with the Spirit. Similar to how Paul ends 2 Corinthians: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” (13:14). The Three in One, the Father, Son, and Spirit at work to accomplish the plan of salvation.

If there is any affection and sympathy. Do you care for other believers in the local church? Do you have deep impulses of love and concern for one another? If you don’t one of the best ways to cultivate it is to pray through the member prayer directory daily. But if you do experience these things, the following passage is for you! If/Since you are so blessed by our Triune God, you ought to respond by living together in unity:

**II. A Plea for Unity – 2** – The Apostle says complete my joy by being of the same mind. I mentioned before the importance of this word. I am going to translate it as the same mindset. This word occurs 26x in NT, 23 in Paul, 10 of those are in Phil.<sup>1</sup> He used it in verse 7. It refers to a mindset: thinking, attitudes, dispositions, and

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<sup>1</sup> Harmon, 89n54.

emotions. One author says, “A mindset is a frame of reference, a lens for seeing the world and assessing it. The believer’s mindset is to be shaped by the gospel and by Christ’s own ‘mindset’ (2:5).”<sup>2</sup> It is a considered disposition that embraces feeling, thought, and will. This mindset is a mental map, a world view. Matt Harmon writes, “The verb speaks of one’s frame of reference for life, what we today might refer to as a world view. It is a way of evaluating the world around us and acting in a manner consistent with that mindset. . . .”<sup>3</sup> It is “an intentional way of thinking about specific circumstances and about life in general.”<sup>4</sup> How we view the world and live in it (1:7, 3:15, 4:2, 10). Believers are to share the same mindset.

What is the mindset of the Christian? In other words, the Christian worldview? Creation Fall Redemption Restoration. We can view all things through this filter. The world was made good, sin has spoiled all things, Christ is now reversing the curse, bringing the Kingdom on earth as in heaven, and one day will come to fully consummate the Kingdom. Creation/Fall/Redemption/New Creation.

This vision of a unified new covenant community with one mind is exactly what the prophets envisioned. **Jer 32:38-40**. Acts 4:32: “Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.” In fact, these words “same mindset” in 2:2 (*autos* and *phrōnēō*) are used together in a couple of other places in the NT, but the ESV translates it in different ways in different contexts. So I want to read these verses from the NAS:

Rom 12:16 - "Be of the same mind." (*auto* and *phrōnēō*)

Rom 15:5 - "Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus;" (*autos* and *phrōnēō*)

2 Cor 13:11 - "Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you." (*autos* and *phrōnēō*). / And then flip over a couple of pages to **4:2**. Or better, “to have the same mind in the Lord.” (*auto* and *phrōnēō*). Clearly this issue of having the “same mindset” is important for the churches. Paul repeats himself on purpose in these passages. We must share the same outlook on life, which is informed by Scripture. Going about all of life with the spectacles of Scripture firmly set in place. Come tonight at 5 to hear more about how Sunday School is an important pathway to that end.

He says having the same love. The love that comes from God and that we express to one another. Being in full accord and of one mind. He says it again. We need to work at this. Not being conformed to the world’s way of thinking about things but taking every thought captive to obey Christ.

These verses on unity look back at **1:27**. / They will complete Paul’s joy by being on mission together. Paul’s joy is their unity. A hallmark of spiritual maturity is finding joy in seeing others grow in spiritual maturity (1 Jn 1:4, 2 Jn 12).

**III. A Plea for Selflessness, not Selfishness 3-4** - There is a negative then a positive aspect to having the same mindset. First the negative. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit. Nothing from selfish ambition. Now, this does not mean all ambition is sin. In fact, we need more God-centered ambition in the church. But this is talking about *selfish* ambition. We are to do nothing from it.

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<sup>2</sup> Brown, 66.

<sup>3</sup> Harmon, 88.

<sup>4</sup> Harmon, 56.

This call is contrary to fallen human nature. Selfish ambition is that attitude that only evaluates situations and circumstances in terms of how it benefits me.<sup>5</sup> It is having an inflated self-evaluation. A drive to exalt the self. Self-preservation, self-promotion, self self self. As Augustine put it, sin is being curved in on the self. Here is how the prophet Isaiah put it: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned - every one - to his own way." Self-centeredness is the sin beneath every sin. Spurgeon said that Mr. Self is the worst enemy a Christian has.

This call is counter-cultural and counter to our own flesh. In our sin, we don't want to serve, we want to be served. As the devil puts it in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven." We want to rule ourselves, not be ruled by God or give up our rights for the sake of others.

During Thanksgiving, we watched *Elemental*. The fire girl Ember was tired of the restrictions of family life and her father's house and job so she follows her heart to marry water Wade. Cute story: in the real world, that doesn't go well: water extinguishes fire. Fish aren't free outside the tank. Think about all the princess stories. I am not saying don't watch these, but do so with eyes wide open, Scripture spectacles on. Our children are being disciplined. Belle want to abandon her provincial life; Rapunzel longs to escape her tower prison; Cinderella longs to get away from the influence of her wicked stepmother; In *Cinderella 2*, she says this when talking about the authority of her MIL: "I think its time to stop following someone else's orders and start following your heart." Ariel longs to leave confines of the sea. Elsa, that Scandinavian intellectual goes to the mountains where she can be her true self: "It's time to see what I can do, to test the limits and break through! No right, no wrong, no rules for me, I'm free!"

That's the theme song for expressive individualism and it came straight from the lips of the serpent in the Garden of Eden: you shouldn't listen to him. You can be like God. Authority is bad. Be your own authority. You do you. You determine what is right and wrong. You are the judge. You are the standard. You define what is good for you and evil for you. No right no wrong no rules. If there had been smartphones, Eve would've taken a selfie. #blessed when in fact the world was cursed due to their grasp for autonomy.

We want to be our own god. To enthrone the self. Calvin said, "Everyone flatters himself and carries a Kingdom in his breast." Anton LaVey, the founder of the church of Satanism, explains that the heart of Satanism is the worship of the self. He says, "We don't worship Satan, we worship ourselves using the metaphorical representation of the qualities of Satan. Satan is the name used by Judeo-Christians for that force of individuality and pride within us."<sup>6</sup> Worshipping Self is Satanic and to be Satanic is to worship self.

The author George MacDonald said that hell runs according to one principle: I am my own. Sinatra: I did it my way. Lewis: There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done."

Our natural tendency is selfish ambition: to make much of self and make little of others. It starts in infancy. Babies only care about themselves. You'll never have an infant start to cry in the middle of the night and think, "You know, I am hungry, (hangry) and my diaper is full of something awful – but Mommy's tired and needs some rest. I'm just gonna lay here in it and exercise self-control." Whenever you see a group photo for the first time and you're in it, who is the first person you look at? Our fallen tendency is to be self-consumed.

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<sup>5</sup> Harmon, 192.

<sup>6</sup> *The Secret Life of a Satanist* in Tyson and Silk, 21-22.

And Paul says *do nothing* from selfish ambition! Crucify the self. *I* have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer *I* who live but Christ who lives in me. But he also says do nothing from conceit, or out of vain conceit. King Jimmy translated this word as vain glory. Vain glory is a worldly attitude that loves outward appearance. It is an exaggerated self-evaluation. Conceit really makes zero sense in God's universe. I mean, think about it. As 1 Cor 4:7 puts it, what do you have that you did not receive? Your smarts are God-given. Your looks, you didn't design them. Your athletic ability. The fact that you were born in the family you were born into. God placing you in this nation. All is a gift so conceit makes no sense. John Chrysostom said "There is nothing so foreign to a Christian as arrogance."

So the negative is do nothing from selfish ambition or vain glory. What's the positive? **3-4**. In humility. When Augustine was asked to list the central principles of the Christian life, he said, "First, humility; second, humility; third, humility."<sup>7</sup> Humility was frowned upon in Greco-Roman culture. This made no sense to them. No one then considered it a virtue. The word for "humility" is a combination of the words "lowly," and "to think." To think lowly of oneself. CJM: "humility is honestly assessing ourselves in light of God's holiness and our sinfulness.

Lewis said that humility is different than say, the property of having brown hair. It is not something you style yourself in or even especially notice in others. You don't meet a humble person and think, "Wow, what dazzling humility!" It is rather a low-key virtue, often taking a while to spot in others because truly humble people are not worried about appearing humble. He wrote, "Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call 'humble' nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all." Humility puts others first. They think about others way more than they think about themselves.

In humility, count others more significant than yourselves. Put others before yourself. JOY: Jesus others you. That's spot on. 2 Cor 5:15: Jesus died so that we might no longer live for the self but live for him. Jesus others you. Put others first. Don't be selfish; be selfless.

Don't merely look out for your own interests, but for the interests of others. The words "only" and "interests" are not there in Greek but added for our understanding, which is helpful but actually softens it a bit, doesn't? Literally, it is "Everyone should look out not for his own." You can fill in the blank. "Let each of you look not to his own house, job, money, hobby, family, his own time, and friends, but also to the house, job, money, family, time, and friends of others."<sup>8</sup>

The word here for "looking:" looking not to your interests but also to others is the word from which we get "scope." It is "to exert effort in continually acquiring information regarding some matter, with the implication of concern as to how to respond appropriately"<sup>9</sup> (LN). We are on the look out. We are talking about intentional attentiveness to others. Consider others. Reframe your vision for others-centeredness. This is a call to renunciation of status and self-promotion in pursuit of the good of the local church.

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<sup>7</sup> SF, 42.

<sup>8</sup> Chandler, *To Live is Christ*, 75.

<sup>9</sup> Harmon, 196.

In Philippians, we have several examples. In a couple weeks, we'll see the example of Christ himself. But we also have Timothy: **2:20-21**. Be like Timothy . . . and notice that the welfare of the church is equated with the interests of Jesus Christ.

Church, how can we seek to eradicate selfish ambition and vain conceit from our communities? In his classic work on Christian community, *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer lays out seven helpful tips. Christians should:

1. Hold their tongues, refusing to speak uncharitably about a Christian brother or sister;
2. Cultivate the humility that comes from understanding that they, like Paul, are the greatest of sinners and can only live in God's sight by his grace;
3. Listen "long and patiently" so that they will understand their fellow Christian's need;
4. Refuse to consider their time and calling so valuable that they cannot be interrupted to help with unexpected needs, no matter how small or menial;
5. Bear the burden of their brothers and sisters in the Lord, both by preserving their freedom and by forgiving their sinful abuse of that freedom;
6. Declare God's word to their fellow believers when they need to hear it;
7. Understand that Christian authority is characterized by service and does not call attention to the person who performs the service.<sup>10</sup>

Lofty goals. A high calling. Nothing from selfish ambition but considering others as greater than ourselves. How do we get there? The next two weeks will show us the way. Actually, they'll show us the person. The God-man. The Son of God incarnate. As F.B Meyer put it, "The only hope of a decreasing self is an increasing Christ."

**Benediction:** Now may the encouragement that comes from being united to Christ, the comfort of the love of God, and the fellowship with the Spirit move us to humbly put others before ourselves in the way of Christ as we go. Amen.

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<sup>10</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: HarperOne, 1954), 90-109 quoted in Frank Thielman, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 107.