

The Humility of God's People

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[0:00] Philippians 2, and I'll read the first 24 verses. If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete.

By being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And, being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, 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.

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.

[2:03] Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life, in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.

But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you, so you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him who takes a genuine interest in your welfare, for everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father, he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things will go with me.

And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon. Good to see you again this morning. I've been told that it's your habit when you have guest speakers to ask them to give a brief testimony of how these speakers came to know the Lord and came to serve him.

[3:54] I can begin with the general comments that come from God's word, one that comes from Psalm 23. Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life.

And I'm now in my mid-70s, not maybe the oldest person here, but in the top rank of age. And then there's a phrase that I've come to love that the prophet Ezekiel uses throughout his book.

And maybe the next time you read the book, you can look for this little phrase. And how often he says, the hand of God was upon me. And as I look back over my life, it was not like Ezekiel.

When Ezekiel said that, he meant the Spirit of God came upon him so that he could prophesy. I have never prophesied. I am not a prophet. But his hand was upon me to guide me all through my life.

I would mention awareness from the earliest days of my life. I grew up, I was born and grew up in the suburbs of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania.

[5:09] And I was born into a family who always prayed prayers of thanksgiving at mealtimes. And I was born into a family where parents would read to me from the earliest ages.

Accounts of Bible history and the great heroes of the faith. And probably I knew I would recognize from my earliest years the great names in the Bible that have become familiar to you as well. They sent me to Sunday school and to Bible school where I memorized scripture good to hear Bible memory this morning. And I have never forgotten some of the things memorized as a child when I was probably in elementary school.

Psalm 23, Psalm 100 and many more passages of the Bible that were committed to memory and never forgotten. Occasionally my parents took me to church.

They were not regular church goers at the time. But these events made a deep impression on me and the habits that they taught me.

[6:29] For instance, the habit of tithing. As a young boy in elementary school during the Second World War, if we wanted to earn money we'd get our wagons and go from house to house and ask them if they had any rags or they had any used newspapers, we'd load them on our wagon and take them to a factory nearby that was short on material to use as rags to wipe the oily machinery and they didn't have other packing material than used newspapers and so they would buy them from us for a few cents a pound.

But I was always taught whether earning money or receiving a dollar and a birthday card that anything that came to me the first 10%, a dime out of a dollar would go to the Lord and set it aside for times of offering at the church.

These things make a deep impression and parents, it has never wasted time to start with very young children to do these things and to form habits and to tell them the reason why they're being done.

Those impressions have lasted with me for a lifetime. As to my conversion and coming to know Christ, my mother's brother was a strong Christian man and he was always helping with evangelistic services in the community and he was concerned about me and took me to evangelistic meetings.

And because of his doing that, I came to a clear understanding that I had sinned against God. I knew what my sins were.

[8:27] I wasn't going to talk to any adult about it. But I knew in my heart how I had broken God's commandments. And I had learned in these meetings that someday I had to face God personally and answer for my having broken his commandments.

What I didn't know, what didn't come through, I don't mean it wasn't being preached, but I had no idea how my sins could be forgiven and how I could receive eternal life.

And I would, as a very young man, lie awake at night wondering about that, secretly reading the Bible, hoping to find an answer to that.

And it didn't come and I was deeply troubled. But then, when I was 13 years old, my parents moved to a different community church, and they began regularly attending church and I always with them. And it wasn't long after being there that there was a communion service. The Lord's Supper was celebrated by God's people. And on that occasion, the minister explained exactly what Christ had done for sinners on the cross.

[9:49] and there wasn't a more joyful heart in the assembly that day than mine in getting an answer to a question I had been long time asking.

Because of this, I was always interested in being part of church groups. I became, as a young teenager, part of a youth group in a church, a church that was becoming liberal, going further and further in the liberal direction.

Getting less and less from the pulpit, but there was a strong youth group and a youth leader that taught us about witnessing. And we were often very busy at school and on the streets of Philadelphia communities trying to witness to other young people our age.

And then the church decided to cancel Sunday evening worship. If you come once on Sunday, they thought that was good enough. And a number of times attending and even observing the Sabbath day was not very important by this time in the church.

But we had a number of young men, teenagers at this time, who offered to preach if the youth group would hold an evening worship service.

[11:13] Why don't we make that a project? The youth group will lead evening worship and young teenagers will do the preaching and will invite the people of the church to come if they want to.

Well, we did this for a couple of summers especially. And older people would come from the congregation and they would encourage us because of the teaching. Now, this practicality of opening the word of God and studying it and trying to find a way to communicate it to other people led to a deep impression that I would like to become a minister. So I went to Dickinson College when I graduated from high school thinking it was a Christian school. It wasn't. It was anti-Christian in many ways. But there were Christians in the town and the Lord led me to a church that eventually became known as Grace Baptist Church in Carlisle. At that time, Grace Baptist Church was changing its theology. It had a fundamentalist approach to many things until they started being given books written by Arthur Pink. [12 : 35] There was a man in central Pennsylvania who had a book service called Adepo and he knew Arthur Pink personally and Arthur Pink had led him to understand the doctrines of grace, the sovereignty of God, the doctrine of election, things like this.

And so the man stopped selling the kind of books he had sold and tried to sell the books of Arthur Pink as he printed them but nobody would buy them. So he started selling shoes from door to door to make a living and he started, he kept printing Arthur Pink's books and giving them away. His method was to go to churches and talk to the officers and give them all copies of Arthur Pink's book like the sovereignty of God, like the attributes of God, these great books that have influenced many of our churches. and at first the officers in this church did not like those books, one of them even threw them in a trash can, but eventually they led them into a deeper understanding of the scripture and I was there in this transition and being fed and being led step by step by the Lord in the direction of going to a school that was thoroughly founded on the doctrines of grace, the great confessions of the reformation and the day I graduated my wife and I, the Lord led me to my wife at Dickinson College as well as to a church that taught these things and we spent many hours together in prayer for the youth group on campus and for other ministries that we were involved in. When I graduated from seminary had no idea where I could present a resume that anyone would be interested in with the views that I held and even after graduation there was no idea of what door would open.

[14 : 57] Well, the church back in Carlisle was looking for an experienced minister but they hired me as an interim and I stayed for a 39-year interim and so that's how the Lord led me one step at a time not always seeing what was coming next but he has blessed my life and I am extremely grateful to him.

Now we're going to turn in God's word to Philippians chapter 2 and look at some of what is said here. Last night if you were not with us we spent time looking at how humility is produced by seeing with our hearts and the help of the Holy Spirit the Lord Jesus Christ. He is so high and so pure and so magnificent and so powerful and so loving that it humbles us to realize how far below him we are.

Humility however is to be seen in true church members and this morning in this Sunday school hour I want to think about the fact that what makes a church a great blessing to the people who come and worship there is the humility that is found in its members and its church officers.

And Paul is talking about that here in Philippians 2. He talks about our Lord Jesus Christ and his exalted! exalted dignity but he's not really teaching about Christology here.

[17 : 01] He's not teaching the nature of Christ here in particular. He's asking us to consider the Lord Jesus Christ and to let this mind be in you to imitate Christ.

The Lord Jesus said to his disciples follow me imitate me be like me. And so the apostle here is saying let this mind be in you let this attitude be in you which was in Christ Jesus.

And it's that attitude which makes a church member and a church officer that is useful to his kingdom and a church where people feel very blessed to be.

Of course the model of humility is Jesus Christ. It's not the first way in which you would describe him.

You would describe him as exalted at the right hand of God as being powerful and glorious and such like.

[18 : 08] But here Paul is talking about the humility of Jesus Christ. Think of that. The Son of God was humble and we are to be like him.

Of course usually when we think of being like him we want to be pure as he was pure we want to serve God as he served God. Well that comes with humility. Let this mind be in you verse 5 or this attitude be in you.

Learn the mindset of Jesus Christ. The frame of mind that he had was everything. we read in this place that our Lord Jesus Christ was very God.

He was equally God with the Father. And he would often speak about his own divinity. I and my father are one he taught the disciples.

we are one. We are the same. And he did not think that that was robbing God to claim that because it was true.

[19:21] He was eternal as the father and infinite as the father and spiritual as the father the creator of the world as was the father and so he did not think that he was robbing God to make himself equal with God but as our text tells us he made himself of no reputation as the King James says or he made himself nothing as our version here says imagine that he made himself of no reputation he lived in Galilee the Pharisees said nothing good comes out of Galilee you can't expect a prophet to come out of Galilee and he went around preaching and teaching and healing but as far as the religious world was concerned he had no reputation and having made himself in the very nature of a servant you see that in verse 7 he made himself nothing and taking the nature of a servant being made in human likeness now we often think that man is pretty dignified man was made to be a servant of

God and Jesus was made in human likeness and he appeared to be a servant and being found in the appearance of a man he humbled himself yet further as a man he humbled himself and became obedient doing the will of the father not doing what he wanted to do in a selfish fashion but obedient to death even the death of a criminal even a death in which he was tortured on purpose to make him suffer as he died and to make people despise him as he died and people walked by and mocked him and signs were placed over him on the cross that would mock him!

This is the king of the Jews look at him under Roman power dying the death of a criminal like Rome would destroy a criminal you remember the Jews very clearly expected a Messiah who would come and overthrow the Roman Empire which was holding them under its heel and the Pharisees thought well if the Messiah ever shows up he's going to chase the Romans the whole way back to Rome and we'll be rid of them and Jesus humbled himself to die under the execution of the hated Roman Empire and he appeared to the Jews at that time to have no reputation whatever well we're told to lift up our eyes to the Lord Jesus Christ and to be like him in terms of humility he humbled himself and if we are going to be humble we need to work at humbling ourselves he did not cease to be God but he did not appear as much in the eyes of men we certainly do understand that death is a humbling thing for everyone who goes through it it is the great tragedy of humankind that we live in a world in which we are all destined to die unless Jesus comes very quickly and death is not a pretty sight and it is not something that makes man look more noble and Jesus suffered death on the cross to take away the sins of his people the first step in being humble is to admit you are not always humble we have proud thoughts we have ambitions we have desires we have goals we want to get ahead but

Paul is talking about how humility works in the church and in verses two to four he's pointing out some very clear things he says in the church be like minded get along with one another don't always dispute what's being done like minded having a love for one another what love did Christ have to humble himself and to die the death on the cross do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit but in humility consider others as better than yourselves that's not talking about some silly notion that you know if the church roof has to be fixed that 80 year old women can do it better than a young man who has skills in carpentry that's everybody can't do everything better than you that's not what it's saying but you ought to look upon one another in the church and focus on some way in which

[25:55] God has sanctified them and given them a talent and an ability in service to Christ that you do not have and put them on a higher rung in your mind than you are and selfish ambition and conceit wanting to look good should not be the thing that holds sway esteem others better than yourself it says in verse three and then in verse four it says you should not look only at your own interests but on the interests of others what do other people in the church need not always what do I need and what am

I seeking but what do they need put their interests before your interests the apostle Paul is saying you can only do that if God is working humility in you now we do have a way of saying well I'm going to church this weekend and I hope that this happens for me and I hope I am encouraged by this or that I grow in this area are you looking at what other people need in verses 12 and 13 Paul gets back to that whole idea in verse 12 he said therefore my dear friends as you have always obeyed not in my presence but now much more in my absence continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who is working in you to act according to his good purpose do everything and don't you like those words everything that's where we have to say we failed we sometimes we do but do everything without complaining well that hits the spot doesn't you remember when the Jews were delivered out of Pharaoh's oppression that they mumbled the whole way to the promised land and they grumbled and they complained do everything without complaining and arguing so that you may be blameless become blameless as pure children of God without fault that's how you become without fault in a crooked and depraved generation that we lived in we live in now in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life let your light so Jesus said this in the sermon on the mount let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father which is in heaven is there a place for good works in Christianity there sure is as a witness to the

Lord and here Paul is emphasizing that the good works arise from humility we are to shine like stars in doing good works to others!

And then we want to take just a special look at church officers and if you look down at verse 19 Paul begins to talk about one of his great helpers in the ministry Timothy remember there are two books written to Timothy in the New Testament two letters written to him I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon why are you going to send Timothy to Corinth that I may be cheered when I receive news about you I want to know all about you people at Corinth so I'm going to send Timothy because I have no one else like him now Paul's talking about people that are missionaries with him and people that minister with him to the other churches he's got quite a sizable staff of sending one man here and one man another but

[30:40] I don't have anyone else like Timothy who takes a genuine interest in your welfare and a word is used here like the word that is used in the sermon on the mount when Jesus said don't worry about what you're going to eat or what you're going to drink or what you're going to put on that's what the Gentiles are seeking in other words don't let that become the heavy thing on your mind and you can't get your mind off of it don't these things will be added to you and he says here I don't have any other person who works with me who like Timothy will just zero in on how you are doing and he will be distracted with how you are in your

Christian walk for everyone now he's talking about the other he's not talking about people who are great sinners but everyone else on my staff looks out for his own interests and not those of Jesus Christ and you belong to Christ and you are the interest of Christ and Timothy knows that and he will be interested in you because you belong to Christ you know that Timothy has proved!

himself because as a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel this is an aside but fathers your sons need to work with you when you have tasks at home have them work with you on projects and they will learn something about work your attitude of being careful in getting it done right in redoing it if it isn't right in persevering until the task is done and they don't learn this somewhere else and the school can't teach it to them they need their fathers to show them how they work and how they do things Timothy and I serve together and he cares about Christ's things the things that belong to Christ and that's Christ's people and if he comes to your church he is going to be riveted on you and when he gets back

I know I'm going to have a full account I can say how is so and so he's going to know it I'm going to ask is this person still walking with the Lord he's going to know he's going to give me the answer where are they spiritually he is going it's going wrong because men are interested in their own things and I'm not I'm not criticizing it in the way of the worst sins but it isn't right there is something and young men feel it I am ambitious to be well pleasing to God I hope that I do great things for the kingdom of God and that I serve my Lord in a way that will change things from the way they are in sin and ugliness however we've gone off in the direction of churches being built for the star whose reputation is rising whose name is being spread all over the place so that we build these mega churches to which people come and they may go for months and never shake the hand of the pastor nor ever have a visit from a pastor or an elder and it's how many books are being sold and

how far and wide were having influence and the church was meant to have pastors who look after people as

Christ's things Christ's treasures and knowing how they're doing and caring and visiting and not this new model of the mega church and the great star through all of the new media that's out there and computers and records of sermons and all of that sort of thing are they focusing on you Timothy will and we need those who care for our state in the church of God so we have the apostle saying that we should seek these things as he is teaching us about them you remember how when

[36:19] I say I'm not too critical of men who have gone the other route let me remind you that when Jesus was walking in Galilee from town to town ministering to people his disciples were a few steps behind him arguing about who's going to be greatest in the kingdom of God and Jesus had to say to them him who is greatest will be him who serves everyone and it's in the service and it's not in the stardom and the attraction to large numbers where he's the focus of attention but it's in service to the real people of God and that should be our attitude too do you ever make a mental list to yourself before you go to church and say to yourself now who is hurting in our congregation I need to speak to them today need to give them a bible verse or give them a book or invite them out to lunch this week who are the people in need and struggling who are the young people that need an arm around them and a word of encouragement

I need to do that when I get to church I need to serve I'm not just going saying I need this and I need that and I hope I get this but we need to think in these terms of serving within the church in the membership as church officers it is that that will build a church that is greatly blessed and a church in which people like to be so we can help build the church by being part of that congregation of serving one another let's bow together in prayer our Lord Jesus Christ we thank you that you made yourself of no reputation we thank you that when you became a mere human being you humbled yourself to the lowest position amongst us and we thank you for serving our interests without which we could not be saved make us like you in that way

Lord Jesus serving one another not complaining not disputing not always saying I've got a better idea than the other people in the church but humbling ourselves to do the tasks of assisting those who are in need and may we with loving one another and imitating Christ become a beacon to this community that leads them to you we pray it in your holy name amen