

The Chapel Ministry



CLEARCREEK
CHAPEL

Others First A Study in Philippians 2

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Savoring the Supremacy of God
Studying the Word of God
Shaping the People of God
Spreading the Gospel of God

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Introduction

Project

The will be a series titled *Others First* from Philippians 2

Purpose

The aim of this series is to teach, apply and challenge our people to live out the putting others first from Philippians 2 in the context of family, both personal and church.

Objectives

To develop the argument of the chapter as a foundation for practical application

To articulate a series of principles to shape and stimulate a concern for others first

To challenge our natural and sinful tendency to focus on self and our own agendas

To map the text over lives by very pointed application and illustration

To foster Christ's way of thinking in order to promote harmony and unity

Resources

Primary Resource

Basics for Believers, D.A. Carson

Secondary Resources

The Peacemaker materials

Format

	AM		PM	
January 8	Its Responsibility	Philippians 2:1-4	Others First – Church	Devon Berry
January 15	Its Attitude	Philippians 2:5-17	Others First – Children	Dale Evans
January 22	Its Aim	Philippians 2:18-30	Others First – Spouses	Greg Cook
January 29	Stuart Scott		Open Forum	

The evening service will work through the concept as developed in Phil 2:1-4 and apply it practically to the different spheres. The principles should be reviewed, illustrated, applied and the Biblical limitations specific to the sphere explained.

Others First Principles

The following are the key principles that arise from the text.

1. Aim to make other people's joy full and complete.
2. Guard against all forms of a self-serving heart and actions.
3. Focus on others interests and needs above your own.
4. Be willing to give up your rights and your reputation for others.
5. Putting others first will be a bright gospel light in our world.

Others First – Its Responsibility

Philippians 2:1-4

Pastor Russ Kennedy

Introduction Selfishness and self-centeredness is the rule of the day. People butt in front, block aisles, grab what you are reaching for, zoom ahead into parking places and a myriad of other small actions that express a “nur Ich” mentality, an “only me” attitude.

This becomes grossly exaggerated in public places of work and school. Self-promotion and self-preservation so dominated the business work place that companies were imploding from the inside. Some of you have experienced the dire effects of all this in your own work environment. Some companies and schools began huge “team-work” campaigns to try to get cut-throat employees to serve the company’s goals and other employees. The imposition of a team culture without a heart change has been disastrous for many.

Each year in January, we dedicate the month to Family Enrichment. We set aside all the services to minister the Word to you and address topics and issues confronting our families. Sometimes we scratch where you are itching (which, by the way, is sometimes not a good idea). Sometimes we are observing through our shepherding and counseling real needs and issues. So we are launching our Family Enrichment Conference today on the topic, *Others First*.

So, why we come to this topic for us this year? Self is at the heart of sin. Selfishness and self-focus are heart issues often clearly visible on the outside. So when we come to the Bible, we find a dramatic call for otherness – for a primary focus on other people rather than ourselves. The most powerful of all these is in Philippians 2. There, the call is in the context of ministry and church relationships. However, this chapter will quite appropriately apply to our homes and families as well.

As usual, our method will be as follows:

We will have an exposition of a portion of Philippians 2 in the morning service. Yes, there will be general application largely as illustration. But the principles and Biblical truths for an other’s first attitude will be the primary focus.

We will have wide expansions and deep personal applications in the evening service. We will take the truths from the whole chapter and start applying them right to our attitudes and actions in very practical (and probably, painful) ways.

Why is this important to us and in this text? There is close connection between our self focused ways and our troubles in family and marriage. When “me first” reigns, sin is served in all kinds of practical ways. The way we interact with one another at home will hugely influence the way we relate to one another at church. Why is this so?

- Because we build up habitual responses to people, either sinful or holy;
- Because we are often controlled by the old people we used to be and not by the new person we are and ought be becoming;
- Because the church is our spiritual family;
- Because the principles for guiding and guarding relationships are much the same for believers at home and at church

What will it mean then for us to put others first?

The appeal to Christians comes to us out of three important contexts:

- Paul's situation in which there was conflict over the preaching of the gospel (1:12-17) and his imprisonment for the faith (1:17-26).
- The church's circumstances in which there was conflict over ministering to Paul, even to the calling forth of public correction by name (4:2-3).
- All believers' shared exposure to the suffering, even in a kind of commonly experienced conflict (1:29-30).

So the clarion appeal to look to other's interests first rings out in the real world noise of conflict over personality, perspectives, styles, power and the pressure of misunderstanding and outright opposition. The Spirit summons us here to an authentic focus on others arising from Biblical principles amidst the fallenness and sinfulness of our homes, churches and world.

Its Biblical Grounds

(v.1)

Linked by a Condition

The "if" here has the "since" sense. Since these things are so, then do that. The appeal here is based on truth and reality. The principles or truths are specifically related to the affections and actions Paul is appealing for.

Yet Paul's tone is a "There are ... aren't there?" It causes me to want to frame these as questions for our homes and our families. Do we believe that these things are so for the practical, daily interaction and relationships and communication in our homes? If so, do we flesh them out with the *unities* in verse 2 and the *actions* of verse 3-4 and the *attitudes* of verses 5-8 with the *ability* and *aims* of verses 11-18?

Leveraged by Truths

Do I have to show and prove that there is encouragement by being a Christian (this is generally what Paul means by being 'in Christ')? Do I have to argue with you that love comforts, that we are to have *koinonia* (fellowship) by the Spirit (or possibly a spirit of cooperation)? Does not the whole intersection of God's love and our lost condition mean that we choose and are spontaneously and deeply affected by the needs of others? Beloved, is it significant for our homes and families that there is affection and compassion and tenderness in Christ?

So if being a Christian means there is encouragement, Spiritual fellowship and cooperation through shared oneness, a comforting love with deep affections and tender compassion, does this show in your home? Would a guest in your home describe your general interaction as expressing these things?

In other words, here is another example where we must think of our spouses first and primarily as our Christian sisters and brothers. I know some of you are single, some are widowed and others are not married to believers. But all of you live in the context of relationships that challenge you in some way. In those relationships, are you encouraged in Christ, fellowship spiritually and experience the kind of love that gives comfort? If not, listen on.

Its High Purpose

(v.2)

Look at how this sentence is put together; "Since... then *make my joy full* (complete) by..." The appeal is to believe certain things that cause us to do certain things because of the joy it brings to others. Now don't miss this. Joy is at the heart of holiness. Joy is at the heart of selflessness. Joy for others, ourselves and joy in God is the Bible motivation for delight in our duty. It is too bad that often in our preaching and teaching the emphasis from this text falls on a different place than that of the Spirit inspired author. We tend to spend a lot of time on what being in Christ means, how these unities are fleshed out and mention in passing that believing verse 1 and doing verse 2 will bring the joy Paul mentions.

I want to say that is wrong. It is precisely Paul's pursuit of his own joy that motivates him to appeal for harmony and unity among others. How is this so? How

can this pursuit of my joy not simply be a self-serving pursuit? Because this pursuit of our joy in God and in others is faith working by love.

This is wonderfully easy to illustrate. When you and your spouse have an argument or a fight; when your children are at each other's throat; when you have a young person who is rebellious and disobedient; when there is a lack of harmony and unity in the home do you have joy in that? Is unity and harmony without joyous love honoring to God? No! True unity and harmony has as its fulfillment and completion, joy. The harmony comes because we desire and pursue our joy in God in the joy of others and we value and treasure that so much that we will take up our cross and deny-self.

Beloved, listen. There is a way to do our duty that is just doing the duty of it. It's like clearing the table or cleaning our room *just because we have been told to*. Then there is a doing of our duty when we have no delight in it ourselves but for the joy it will bring God or others (parents); "I don't like cleaning my room, but it will bring joy to Mom and Dad." Then there is a doing of our duty that takes joy in the joy of God and others (parents); "I don't like to clear the table, but I will because I can't wait to see Mom and Dad's joy." Finally, there is a joyful doing of our duty because we are habitually and seriously pursuing the joy of God and others; "I love to take out the trash because God is delighted with this kind of obedience and it brings so much joy to Mom and Dad." So parents, wouldn't it bring you joy to see your children doing their duty joyfully for the sake of joy in God and others? This is the large aim of Paul's appeal and, I believe, the large aim of life: to magnify and glorify God by pursuing my joy in Him and others through faith working by love.

There is a God-honoring unity and selflessness that brings real joy to leadership and to mentors. Let's think about that unity. This is first a unity in the church that arises from this kind of unity at home. This is not the kind that can be dictated or legislated, but emerges from a heart shaped by this text.

- Mind – Thinking Biblically together. We must begin in our homes thinking together and thinking alike in harmony with the Word. Now this is not uniformity, but rather having a same-mindedness about the Word.
- Love – Maintaining AFFECTIONS for others that yield ACTS of giving ourselves.
- Spirit – Being one in our perspective on life, our attitude.
- Purpose – Being highly focused and intently pursuing a shared direction in life.

So, is this what your home (and our church as well) looks like? Because there is Christian encouragement, loving comfort, Spiritual fellowship, deep affections and compassion, you pursue your joy in a harmony of mind, love, attitude and purpose.

Its Sacrificial Motivations

(v.3-4)

What stands in the way of all this? SELF. The massive imperative here is to "Do nothing selfishly."

In The Way We Think about Ourselves

Much of the sin I think and do comes because of the self I seek and serve. I esteem self in a high regard of myself and a looking out for me and my interests. The joy I ought to be pursuing in God and others is replaced and destroyed by seeking pleasure (instead of joy) for myself. This is where the modern self-esteem movement has destroyed so much in the home and at church. I cannot conceive of how Christians have brought this into the church. Both self-love and self-loathing are still focused on SELF. How much of the difficulty and division in our homes comes simply because each person is self-centered to some degree and is pursuing or protecting their own interests?

But what about when a selfish motive is involved in a good thing? Does this mean that if I am getting ready to do something good and I detect selfish motives that I stop doing what I am doing? If I detect that I do not have a joyful heart at the offering I stop giving? Is the wrong motivation a reason to halt a right action? Never. I must choose to have a right heart and a right motivation. I must repent of my wrongful attitude, speak truth to myself and look outward to please God and others in this action.

In The Way We Think about Others

Look at this. Do you think of other people in your family at home and at church as being more important than yourself? It is utterly critical to Christian harmony and unity that we pursue joy in the esteeming and valuing and treasuring of others. Now, this is not an absolute. It is moderated and shaped by the sphere of our Christianity. But certainly, we must humble ourselves by holding others up. This is affirmed by 1 Corinthians 10:24, "Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor" and Romans 12:10, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor."

Notice that both of these are *the way we think*. This is why Paul says, "With humility of mind." Here is what I find to be true in my own sinful heart and I suspect is generally true. We have a way of thinking that constantly sees ourselves at the center of things. Our minds are self-focused so we jostle for every little advantage, look for the most comfortable seats, wish the heat were higher or lower (after all, when was the last time you thought to yourself, "boy, it is just right!") the music a little louder or quieter, our neighbor a little quieter, the pastor a little simpler or deeper, and so on. Don't you see that when we go through life weighing all our experience moment by moment as it relates to us that we are just simply self-centered?

I know that if I do not deny self and value others and be serious about my joy in God that the self-focus of my thinking grows ever larger until it dominates my life and destroys harmony. In the ever growing environment of communication problems and conflict, it becomes ever more difficult to deal with issues.

In What is Forbidden

Listen to what Paul says here. “Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit.” This is powerful stuff. Rivalry is how I look at others. Conceit is how I look at myself. Rivalry sees others in competition with me. Conceit sees myself in inflated and exaggerated ways. Both are the result of looking in the fat mirror at the circus and really liking what we see.

So, don’t do anything out of jostling and competing for recognition and gratification. Don’t push yourself forward, even in your home and family. Don’t compete with your spouse or children. Don’t be content to walk ahead while others trail behind you.

So, don’t do anything out of an inflated view of your own importance. You are probably not as smart, beautiful, handsome, talented or even essential as you think you are. These kinds of conceits are just terrible deceptions. They are not speaking truth to ourselves. They are self-talk falsehoods.

In What is Required

Two important reversals are required. These reversals are repentance.

THINK OF OTHERS AS BEING MORE IMPORTANT, SIGNIFICANT THAN YOU ARE. You replace your exaggerated view of yourself with a humble view of others that elevates them in your mind. The effect is that you will treat them differently. This is not a call to self-pity, by the way. This is a call to honor others and esteem others highly.

LOOK OUT FOR THE INTERESTS, CONCERNS, PREFERENCES OF OTHERS FIRST. We all naturally look out for ourselves. We must reverse that in looking out for the interests of others, particularly our spouses. The word interest here is not talking about catering to their sinful cravings or idols. It is talking about caring about their good, their personal spiritual welfare. It might occasion your having to confront them about sin. So we must care enough to overcome our comfort and move toward others for their great good.

One last question to consider. I imagine some of you are caught in what appears to be a real contradiction. It can simply be stated like this: "Isn't pursuing my joy selfish? Haven't you just contradicted yourself?" On the face of it, appears that way doesn't it? How can Paul say to others to fulfill his joy and in the next breath require them to do nothing selfishly? Why isn't Paul merely being selfish when he is requiring others to be unselfish for the sake of his joy? Let me suggest two answers.

- Since Paul (and other New Testament writers do the same – see 1 John 1) place these two next to one another, they must not actually be a contradiction. It is our own presuppositions or doctrine that causes us to see these as a disconnect. At the root of it is that we do not believe that we exist to glorify and enjoy God. We believe that we exist to be made holy. And holiness and happiness are simply not compatible. If that is so, then heaven is not a happy place because it is certainly a holy place. And God is not a happy God, because God is certainly a holy God. When we think like this, then any pursuit of my joy will be selfish. Until we have

theological criteria that allow us to think of God as supremely holy and happy *in Himself*, then we will have trouble with this.

- The joy Paul is pursuing may be his own, but he is pursuing it outside of himself. His joy is, in this text at least, a joy in others. Further, it is a joy arising from their holy, selfless harmony. And finally, the sacrifice of this self-denying ministry becomes a joyously shared pursuit (v.16-18).

Well, however it happened; however our home and church families became divided and filled with disharmony, what is now needed is a solution. And the solution to sin is always to bring us to the cross. The solution to self is to bring us to Christ. But that is next week

Lessons

So here is our simple call this morning:

BELIEVE THESE TRUTHS. Believe that there is truly encouragement, comfort, fellowship, affection and sympathy as a result of being in Christ.

DEFLATE YOURSELF. Stop looking in the mirror of your self-exaggerated esteem. Humble yourself in the Lord's sight and in your own sight. Don't be a pedestal person, up above others.

ESTEEM OTHERS. Lift up others in your own mind. Put others up above you in your honor and your estimation. Change the point of comparison, the perspective from which you see others and the place in which you position others.

PUT OTHERS INTEREST FIRST. Move towards others with their best interests in heart and mind. What does your friend, your spouse, your children really need? Do you seek to meet those needs or are you simply taking the easy way out?

This evening, Pastor Devon will be helping us think through this in relation to our being together for the sake of others in church.

Others First - Church

Philippians 2:1-4

Pastor Devon Berry

Introduction We will be studying from Philippians 2:1-4 this evening. Let's begin by reading that passage together [Read]. Let's pray before we get started.

Here is the Church, here is the steeple

Open the doors, and see all the people!

I remember learning this children's rhyme as a child and being somewhat amused and pleased by the last set of motions, "and see all the people!" The witty mind that came up with this children's rhyme knew something of church.

Yes, indeed there are usually meeting spaces enclosed by walls, and tall upward structures pointing to heaven exhibiting to all the nature of the events taking place inside, but then, there are, *the people*. Not cogs and gears comprising well-oiled smoothly running machines...Not leafy green things doing photosynthesis – organic and alive enough but spending a virtual lifetime in apparent peace and harmony...Not even docile herds of benevolent and amiable sheep with wool as white and pure as the driven snow, wandering harmoniously with their shepherd over the hillsides – no, our churches are not full of any of these. Our churches are full of people.

Tonight's message is the first in the evening component of the family enrichment series that we traditionally hold in the month of January. Sunday evenings this month will be used to expand on Sunday morning teaching, particularly in the area of practical application. As you already know, our text for this family enrichment series is Philippians 2. Tonight I will discuss the application of the 'Others First' principle to the Church. In the following two weeks Pastor Greg Cook will address the 'Others First' as it pertains to our spouses and then our children.

Why Others First?

Before we delve further into understanding and applying this passage this evening, it is important that we revisit and remind ourselves of the immediate context of verses 1-4. Although we are focusing on the "others first" aspects of Philippians 2 during the Sunday evenings of our family enrichment series, this emphasis comes to us enveloped by a greater purpose. That purpose is the unity of the church. Note Philippians 1:27 [Read]. What does a "manner of life worthy of the gospel" look like? In part, it looks like "standing firm in *one* Spirit, with *one* mind, striving *side by side* for the faith of the gospel..." And see again Philippians 2:1-2, what is the outgrowth of gospel union with Christ (v.1)? It is "being of the *same* mind, having the *same* love, being in *full accord* and of *one* mind." Our emphasis upon "Others First" in these various relationships in life during the Sunday evening service, is *made* important by one of the greater purpose it serves – that is, the unity of the church, and *that*

is the glory of God as the body grows up into it's head, Christ (Ephesians 3:20 – 4:16). For those of you who dabble at growing house plants, you will understand that there are many things that go into it: watering, offering the right amount of sun, trimming, preventing the root balls from becoming root bound, adding fertilizer at the right time, etc. You do none of these activities, however, just for the sake of the activity. You do them because you want a beautiful plant. In the same way, we do not consider “Others First” as a bible topic simply because we are enamored with the idea of putting others good before our own (kind of like Oprah) – no, we are teaching on “Others First” because is it necessary to the unity of the body which is necessary to God's glory in Christ.

So it may be easy to see why the idea of putting others first *in the church* is important to unity *in the church*, but why are we talking about relationships with spouses and relationships with children in the context of a passage discussing unity in the church? In addition to what Russ spoke of this morning, I think the simplest answer to that is that your home is the smallest representative unit of the church. This goes back to the confusion that we are often pushing back against – the church is not a place, it is not a building, it is not a series of sermons or a palette of programs, the church is God's people together. Therefore, at home, in a very real sense, you are “in church.” Many of us fail to realize this and it explains, in part, why we will treat our spouses one way on Sunday morning between 9-12, and another way the rest of the week.

So this is how the idea of “Others First” in Philippians 2:1-4 concerns the unity of our homes and our churches. Christian unity in the church begins at home. It is true that this statement needs refined to address the various home situations that we find ourselves in, but I will leave that work to Greg in the coming weeks as he speaks to “Others First” in our relationship with spouses and children.

But let's do a reality check – is this a topic that really needs addressing? Does our failure to live out the commands of Philippians 2:1-4 somehow inhibit or destroy our unity? Is disunity a problem that characterizes the church *today*? I imagine most of us would readily say “yes.” However, we may say that simply as recognition of a theoretical possibility. That is, “Of course disunity exists in the church because it is possible it exists in the church, so it must be happening somewhere...after all, don't we hear about church splits all the time...” Are any of us actively thinking about our *own* church, the believers *we* meet with regularly and consider to be part of *our* local expression of the body? Does this really apply to us here at Clearcreek? Is Christian unity really, only, just not, having a church split or open arguing and dissent in the aisles? Or, is Paul's idea of unity calling us to something much higher?

I believe that once we adjust our idea of church unity to reflect the biblical concept, two things will happen: First, the importance of “Others First” will become more central in our thinking about unity. And second, we will not so quickly view ourselves here at Clearcreek as uniquely free of the potential for disunity or disunity itself. Before we discuss that further, however, let's start by simply answering the question, is disunity a problem for the church?

New Testament Churches

We can go all the way back to the beginning of church, so to say, to consider the church's longstanding relationship with disunity. So what do we find in the New Testament?

1. In the Jerusalem church, shortly after the church's inception, there is a dispute between Hellenists and Hebrews because a certain group was being preferred above another (Acts 6:1ff).
2. In the Roman church there was quarreling over opinions and passing of judgment and despising of one another over issues related to "allowed" foods and days and "unallowed" foods and days (Romans 14)
3. In the Corinthian church there were those who followed "Paul" and those who followed "Apollos" and those who followed "Cephas" leading to "quarreling among" them (1 Corinthians 1:10-17).
4. In the Philippian church, there is Euodia and Syntyche who will not "agree in the Lord" and Paul asks others to aid them (Philippians 4:2-3).
5. There are many other references – Paul's difficulties with Barnabus, Peter, and Demas; the strife and division that was caused by the teaching of false doctrine in the church, and these among many other direct and indirect references to disunity.

There is little question that the early NT church, even with the blessings of having been contemporaries to Christ and the apostles, struggled with unity among themselves. Is it so great a leap to put our own names into these instances? Certain groups preferred or given precedent over others, passing judgment on one another in areas of freedom, being more willing to follow one leader over another, or women who cannot agree...

Today's Churches

But that was then, this is now. Has the contemporary church grown out of these problems? If a split or failure of a church is the end game of a disunified church, then getting a sense of church splits in the US might shed some light on our current day condition. To gain insight into answering that question, one must go no further than that great digital representation of the American consciousness, Google. Type "church split" into Google and you will immediately discover thousands of records and reports of church splits. For example, "100 years of joy and love go down the toilet, as a **church** bickers about an old piano bench;" "Church Split Evident as Clergy Admit Doubts over Existence of God." There are major denominations on the brink of splitting over issues such as female clergy, homosexuality, and apparently, piano benches. And then there is this quote from a Presbyterian columnist, "I know we had our New Side/Old Side split, and our New School/Old School split. I know we had our Fundamentalist/Modernist controversy that caused some people to split off and form Westminster Seminary, the Orthodox Presbyterians and then the Bible Presbyterians. I know the Presbyterian Church of America split off from the Presbyterian Church in the United States (the old southern church), and the Evangelical Presbyterian

Church split off from our reunited church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Our Presbyterian history in these United States is one of splits and mergers and divisions and reunions.”¹ A search on “church disunity” or “church closure” produces similar results. So even a cursory look demonstrates that both yesterday’s and today’s church is plagued by disunity.

Let’s briefly reconsider then how Paul describes unity in Philippians 2, by asking several questions over this text: What is a Philippians picture of unity? How is it destroyed? How is it maintained and what is the role of “*othering first*” in maintaining unity?

Questions & Answers

Before answering these questions, note these several observations about the context of this passage as Paul arrives at the admonishments and encouragements of 2:1-4.

Observations on Context

First, we should note the economy of joy in Paul’s life. If we make a quick survey of Philippians 1 and ask the question – what is bringing Paul joy, especially as Paul is asking the Philippian church to complete his joy, we will gain insight into biblical unity as well as Paul’s heart.

1. (1:4-5) Paul prays with joy because of his *partnership in the gospel* with the Philippians
2. (1:7) Paul prays with joy as he holds the Philippians in his heart because they are all *partakers with him of grace*
3. (1:18) Paul, in the midst of hardship, rejoices in his future deliverance, “because [he] knows that *through [the Philippians’] prayers* and the Spirit [he] will be delivered and Christ will be honored.”
4. (1:21-26) Paul recognizes that his being *among the Philippians* will result in their progress and joy in the faith (although he’d rather join Christ!)
5. (2:1-2) And then finally, Paul makes clear that his joy is completed by *unity and love* among the believers

It would be a simple enough exercise to sit down and ask ourselves if what brings Paul joy brings us joy?

A second observation, already mentioned by Russ this morning, is the current state the Philippians find themselves in at the time of this letter. They themselves, like Paul, are experiencing opposition without (1:27-30) and conflict within (4:1-3). Paul does not come to the Philippians with all this silly “joy” and “unity” talk in a Disney-like atmosphere...but that is what Sunday mornings sometimes seem like...*my wife and I are madly in love, we’re happy to be here today, we highly value the preaching and teaching of the word, the music is perfect, we love the people of the church because we understand it to be Christ’s body here on earth, in fact, we love them so much we’ll even smile at them!* That is a foreign world to

¹ <http://www.pcusa.org/oga/perspectives/oct05/schism.htm>

Paul, and if we are honest, it is a foreign world to us. God's Word meets us in the mess, just like it met the Philippians in the mess.

Third, the centrality of Christ and the gospel is prominent. The words Christ or Jesus are used no less than 20 times between 1:1 and 2:5. While a mere count does not tell us much, it does at least say that Paul's mind returns to his Redeemer frequently – and with good reason – for Christ is our all in all.

So here you have the opening of Philippians. There is an intensely horizontal and vertical nature to this letter, Philippians is about both *people* and *truth*. Paul can find much reason for joy because he rightly sees and interprets his role in the madness of a world loved by a great and sovereign redeemer. If we look carefully, we will see that what makes Paul's heart beat is the people of God partaking in the purposes of God resulting in the praise of God.

What is a Philippians Picture of Unity? (v.1)

Here is where we need to think carefully about our understanding of biblical unity. Perhaps we view 10+ years of successfully avoiding a split as unity. Perhaps we think of unity as relative peace among ourselves when we gather. Or maybe it is that only a few families have left over the past couple of years...If this is how we think of unity, we have missed the mark. Paul sets the bar much higher. Let's look again at 1:27 and 2:2. [Read]. It is not simply living together peaceably, like we do in the American democracy, it is:

a oneness of mind: In agreement on issues of doctrine and ecclesiology

having the same love: a unity in our expressions of love and care to the rich and the poor, to the strong and the weak, to the mature and the immature, to those with more visible spiritual gifts and to those with less visible spiritual gifts (James 2).

being in full accord and of one mind: united in spirit, affections, sentiments, bonded by something deeper than volunteerism or a sense of civil duty; and united in thinking and judgment – wedded in heart and head.

When Beth and I were living in Seattle...(crew rowing example)

Continued growth as a church in this manner is a clear demonstration to ourselves and the world, that we *experientially know* our God and His work of redemption for us in Christ (1:27, 2:1, John 13:35). And as Russ explained to us this morning, at the heart of this type of unity is joy – true joy that can only be experienced in obedience to God.

How is Unity Destroyed? (v.2-4)

Keep in mind that as Paul discusses these things with the Philippians he is not having a hypothetical discussion. There is evidence throughout this letter that there is grumbling and questioning (2:14), divisive and false teaching (3:2), and dissension and unreasonableness (4:2ff) in the Philippian church.

In verses 3 and 4, we see those character qualities and actions that destroy unity, and this is where a fine point is placed on the importance of "othering first." In verse 3 there is a continuum of thought regarding the way a person views them-

selves. On one end of the continuum is pride, evidenced by rivalry and conceit. On the other end is humility, evidenced by counting others more significant/important than yourself. Pride elevates one's own importance and needs. Humility de-elevates one's own importance and needs but it does not annihilate them. Rather, it puts them in their God-pleasing place. A proud person cannot in their heart put others first. The façade may be in place, but that is no substitute for true humility. Pride will always, eventually, give itself away.

Pride-driven interaction in the church represents a real danger. Hence the writer points us to humility. Rivalry and conceit are only two symptoms of pride, there are many more. In each one, however, the same core sickness is responsible: It is an elevation of self not just above others, but above God. It caused Satan to fall to a treacherous end, it was the sin that caused the fall of man in Genesis 3, and it has certainly caused the fall of many a church.

I think it is appropriate to briefly issue a special warning to elders and those that teach or lead in the church. We know that position, power, and knowledge puffs up, but love builds up (Matthew 20:25ff; 1 Corinthians 8:1; 2 Corinthians 1:24) – any greater knowledge or authority that we possess should only bind us further to the humble service of our brothers and sisters. When we sense distance in our hearts between ourselves and those we shepherd, we should be very careful to stop and consider if pride has wormed its way into our hearts and has begun saying, “I am different from them.”

How is Unity Maintained?

As we have already noted, unity begins with true understanding and experience of God and his grace. It is motivated by joy-producing obedience to God. It is destroyed by those who in their hearts put themselves first. The method or way in which biblical unity is increased and preserved, is the humility-shaped activity of “othering first.” Now I have used that term once or twice already and it is a bit of doing harm to the English language, as “othering” is not a word, however, I believe it captures well the spirit of what Paul puts forth. Othering, meaning a self-conscious, active, and purposeful consideration of others in the body, their needs, their desires. And First, lovingly and intentionally placing those needs and desires before our own in a way that moves all of us godward and brings God glory. This requires, “looking,” as Paul puts it in v.4. Watching out over, considering, having conversation, asking questions...we must *look* to the interests of others.

The Scriptures make it abundantly clear that our *looking* is NOT to be the work of a busy body or a gossip. No, we come to know and care for with the purpose of *doing* actual good unto our brothers and sisters, not simply becoming a conduit for inside information. Outside of the context of relationship, it is very difficult to know how to serve, how to encourage, how to admonish, how to confront, how to challenge, how to weep with, and how to rejoice with. [Consider example of single parent with limited access...].

To put it bluntly, our *othering first* should be characterized by a little less talk and a lot more action. Intelligent, wise, hard-working, and persevering love should be one of the most visible qualities our body.

1 Corinthians 10:24 reads "Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor" and Romans 12:10, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor." Does this mean we recklessly abandon care for our self and our families? No. Verse 4 assumes that you care for your self as well, look "*not only*" to your own interests. It is a rare believer who becomes so committed to caring for the body (with godly motivations) that they neglect to care for themselves. The struggle is usually quite the reverse. We are so committed to our own progress and well-being that we neglect to care for the body. My heart is a classic example of this. As an elder I have been exercised in this area...[example of meeting others needs].

The key here is this: You care for your self and your family in a manner that leaves resources to care for others in the body. If your life is consumed by self-care, you are no longer humble. Humility displays itself in the arranging of life in such a way that allows for the care of others. Often this type of thinking takes careful and wise planning, decision making, and discernment. One way that has worked itself out for Beth and I is in the case of my school debts...[example of school debt]

A high school bible teacher taught me well when he impressed this biblical principle upon me: *the way up, is down*. We must not pride ourselves in our abilities, skills, wealth, or gifts but rather we must become expert of making much of others abilities, skills, and gifts as we use our God-given resources to serve them. What do we have, after all, that has not been given?

Lastly, are you in need of an example? Would it help to have some inspiration by being able to witness someone actually doing this? Do you need help to carry out this high calling? Then hear Luke 23:46: Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. In verse 5 and following of Philippians 2, Paul is not primarily setting forth propositional truth about the incarnation – No! he is setting forth the *person* of Christ who in his humility counted others more significant than himself, even though he is certainly much more significant than us (cf. John 13:34-35). Christ is our perfect example of the humble consideration of others' interests before our own.

Observations & Applications

So what about the church on 2738 Pennyroyal Road in Springboro, Ohio? Are we known for this kind of unity? Are we humble to the degree that we are *characterized* by consistently, intelligently and wisely considering the interests of others before our own? Or, are we a conceited people? So self-interested that our field of view is no broader than our belly buttons? Are we compelled by our union with Christ to complete the joy of God, and others, by living in sacrificial service to each other as we glorify our Redeemer?

What observations and applications can we make as we draw to a close tonight?

1. *What does biblical unity mean to us?* Is it simply not fighting or splitting? Or is it more on the order of, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another?" (John 13:35)

2. *Othering First Inventory:* How do we care for Widows? Orphans or fatherless? Elderly? Poor or needy? among us? When is the last time you or I privately and personally met the financial or material need of a brother or sister in the church? When did you or I last discover such a need because we had intentionally engaged others in the church with the intent of loving them? When did you last make big changes in plans or commitments to serve the church? When did you last meet an immaterial but interpersonal need?
3. *Othering first happens most effectively in the context of relationship.* This presupposes that you and I are both asking questions of others AND answering others' questions.
4. *The under girding for body life is Sunday services and flock.* So where are we? As a Sunday night crowd, *you're* most likely the ones at flocks as well. But in your othering first, when was the last time you challenged someone to attend Sunday nights or flock? And I want to wade in a bit further here. There may be those tempted to, from a platform of "family values" argue for "family time" and its precedent over body life. Beware of the false dichotomy (strain, conflict) set up between valuing family time and church attendance. For to attend to church and the members of the body is to attend to your family members (Galatians 6:10). The tension lies not between the life of the body and family life, but between body life and other priorities – between which the family is pulled – we believe something more valuable can be found elsewhere (family night, childrens' sports, professional sporting events? weekends at the lake, work commitments, tiredness). Not that anyone of these is wrong in and of themselves, but when they become regular inhibitors to your ability to put the interests of others first, we must reevaluate. Further, and darker, is when "family" related activities or priorities are simply a cover up for an heart neither values or cares for the church body. Remember, the idea in Philippians here is not that you ignore your own interests, but rather that you arrange life in a manner that leaves resources to put the interests of others ahead of your own.
5. *Is your joy completed by what Paul's joy was completed by?* (Are your concerns more for yourself and opinions? Or the body and its good?)
6. *True union leads to true unity.* Do not disconnect the motivation statements and the commands of vv. 1-4 from the person of verse 5. It is because of union with Christ that unity in the body is possible. It is through Christ that unity will be produced. And what is the mind we are to have? It is the spirit that humbles itself to serve. This mind *is ours* in Christ.

In balance, YES, you are required by and before God to care for your spouse and your children and you must not do poorly. [Ephesians 5, 1 Timothy 5:1-8, wisdom is required].

God has blessed us much as we are a people who know something of othering first. May we continue to grow in this Christian duty and delight. [Pray]

Others First – Its Attitude

Philippians 2:5-11

Pastor Russ Kennedy

Introduction Sometimes we come to the cross for the work that was done there for us. Sometimes we come to the cross for the work that is being done in us. Sometimes we come to the cross for the work that is being shown to us there. And so here: Have Jesus' attitude; think like Him.

Now I have to say something to you. I believe in exposition. I believe that the grace of God flows through the exposition of the Scriptures. And I believe in expository exultation. So, it is my aim to exult in God by the Word. It is also my aim to expose the text to you. And it is my aim to expose you to the text. And sometimes, it is not possible to sufficiently do all three at the same time. And that is my problem this morning.

I want to exult in God here with this text. I want gaze in detailed and delighted wonder by these words at such a Savior and Sovereign, at such a God as this. I want to tremble by truth with holy affections. I want my mind challenged, my heart humbled and my life changed. I want to breathe the fragrant aroma of His sacrifice for me and His supremacy for Himself. I want to be speechless with joy – but it is my task to preach.

I want also to expose this text to you. I want to look down deep into its multifaceted truths and hold up each one for careful inspection. I want to connect them all together with Paul's appeal and God's enabling.

But I sense a great need to expose you to the text. I want to file away the hardness of your heart, the coldness of your affections and the dullness of your minds so that you are raw and open and sensitive to this text. I want to you to so hunger for the joy of putting others first that you will embrace the cross and die to self, just as Christ did, for the joy set before Him.

So, because of our responsibilities in verses 1-4 which were:

TO BELIEVE THESE TRUTHS. Believe that there is truly encouragement, comfort, fellowship, affection and sympathy as a result of being in Christ.

TO DEFLATE YOURSELF. Stop looking in the mirror of your self-exaggerated esteem. Humble yourself in the Lord's sight and in your own sight. Don't be a pedestal person, up above others.

TO ESTEEM OTHERS. Lift up others in your own mind. Put others up above you in your honor and your estimation. Change the point of comparison, the perspective from which you see others and the place in which you position others.

TO PUT OTHERS INTEREST FIRST. Move towards others with their best interests in heart and mind. What does your friend, your spouse, your children really need? Do you seek to meet those needs or are you simply taking the easy way out?

Then, you must begin to think and act like Christ...

The Cross and its Humiliation

(v.5-8)

Then what kind of mentality or attitude or way of thinking is shown us by Christ's cross kind of death? What is the prevailing attitude of Jesus? Humility. How can we have this kind of humility? By constantly reminding ourselves of these two God-delighting truths. For the joy of God and others:

I am a Servant

(v.6-7a)

If I could summarize this amazing text it is simply this, Jesus gave up His rights and His recognition. His attitude was that even the public affirmation and acceptance and perception of equality with God was not something to be tightly held onto. He gave up His rights, His Divine prerogatives and privileges. This is what the condescension and incarnation of Christ means. It means that in a sovereignly Supreme God there reigns a servant heart. It is just like Him to take on the nature of man and the servanthood that required, the author of Hebrews wrote (Hebrews 2:9-18).

Think how this would change your home. Stop grasping at your rights and prerogatives. Have a mentality that says, "I may have a right here in this thing, but I choose to give it up for the joy of others." How we need this attitude in a day where the world is fighting for human rights, women's rights, children's rights, even animal rights. Jesus clearly shows us how to think. Not that I do not have rights, but I value them for myself so little that I eagerly give them up. Often the pain in the family of our homes and church comes from the tight grip we have on our rights and our recognition.

Do you serve in your home? Now this is not all the Bible has to say about harmony in home and church families. But it is a prevailing attitude to be valued and cultivated. Men are to be servant leaders, women are to be submissive servants, children obedient and parent honoring servants.

Having a servant attitude is the foundation of putting others first. When we see ourselves as here for the sake of others, then we will begin to serve them. This text realizes that having a servant attitude means challenging us in two critical areas. It issues a call for us to serve practically:

In how we stop demanding our rights.

Jesus left us an example of giving up a right He most certainly had. It was His right to be recognized and worshipped and served as Deity, as God. Yet He was not here to be served, but as one who serves. The Bible is not saying that Christians have no rights – it is calling for us to give up the rights we have for the sake of others.

So will you give up your rights for others? In this day where we put boundaries around our lives by asserting our rights, we must give up our rights so that we can cross the walls to minister and serve others. We hear so much about our rights. Sadly, often these rights are masked by “needs” language. So, rather than saying “I have the right to be heard, or loved,” people will say, “I have a need to be heard or loved.” What is ultimately driving this is that we crave to be loved and heard.

Will you give up your right, or need or craving for love, recognition, comfort, space - whatever, so that you will serve your friend, your spouse, your parent, your brother or sister in church?

In how we stop demanding to be recognized...

Jesus' attitude is also exhibited in His not demanding that He be recognized. He accepts proper recognition when it is offered. But He rarely faces people and demands the recognition He is due. He is here to serve others. His desire to reflect the character of God for the sake of the needy is lived out in selflessness.

But oh how we long and crave to be recognized. We think of it in terms of being affirmed or acknowledged. We loathe moving anonymously among people. We want our contributions, our efforts, even our presence to be recognized and acknowledged by others. If we are not affirmed and acknowledged, we often will become frustrated and upset.

When you are moving through life seeking for others to affirm you (in however that looks or feels to you) you are not putting others first. You are seeing others as circling around your orbit. You are seeing your own significance, not the needs of others. Will you give up your demand to be seen, acknowledged, affirmed, recognized?

Have this attitude of Jesus: I AM A SERVANT.

I am a Sacrifice

(v.7b-9)

Look carefully at this sentence. Jesus' humiliation was wrought by an obedience all the way to death, a criminal's kind of death, the cross. Now I want you to see this clearly. There is a kind of sacrifice that is *martyrdom*. It is a death imposed from the outside because of opposition on the part of others and faithfulness on our part. Yes, this kind of death is gloriously great when enabled by grace. And few of us are called on for this largely because we have not the sacrificial attitude necessary to extract from us from our comfort and expel us into the danger of a people group dying and going to hell.

Then there is a kind of sacrifice that is *mortification*. It is a death to self and a death of self for the sake of others. When we come to the cross for the sake of ourselves, we will keep a hidden root of self alive to spring up later. But when we die to self *for the joy of God and the sake of others*, this is true death to self. Where do I get this? From the very nature of Jesus' death. Jesus did not die for Himself. Christ died for God and for His people. Why then do we find it so hard to die to self for the sake of our family at home and at church?

Further, this sacrifice involved *submission*. It involved obedience to the point of death. Do you get this? Putting others first comes when we have the kind of humility that will fight with faith for obedience even if it means death. Now we know precious little about this. I know about myself that my own obedience to Christ and His Word is so little like this.

So sacrificially putting others first requires that we meditate:

On how we must mortify our old ways of thinking...

You will need to recognize the beliefs and doubts that stand in the way of giving yourself away. You must see them as a part of the old person you used to be. You must know that those ways of thinking were put to death when you became a new creature in Christ. You are not to think like that any more. You are now to think like Christ as a new person.

You must also mortify these thoughts and beliefs (the old Puritan way of speaking) by putting an end to them and replacing them with Biblical, godly beliefs. Just as Jesus died and was raised, so your thoughts must die (be put off) and raised again (be put on). This is your part, what you are responsible to do. God has made you new; now be new in your thinking.

Listen to the beliefs in your heart that cause you put yourself first and not see the need of others. Do you believe that you will be taken advantage of? Do you believe that you do not have the resources – resources of time, money or ability? Do you believe that you are more needy than others? Do you believe that it is others responsibility, not yours? Do you believe you are more important?

Put to death all these beliefs and begin to think in ways the Bible directs you to and the Spirit enables you to.

On how we must mortify our old ways of wanting...

You will also need to recognize and mortify all the old ways of wanting that keep you from putting others first. You will need to recognize all the little ways in which you want to be served and noticed. You must repent of longings and cravings, of heart idolatries and adulteries, masters and enslavements that exhibit you at the center of your universe.

Listen to me. It is much easier to identify our beliefs that are wrong and to replace them with truth –that is, we have faith. But to begin to mortify our desires and wants, to repent of them, submit to the pleasure and providences of God – this is real dying. It is tough work. But at the end, we will be alive to serve others and put them first.

Have this attitude of Jesus: I AM A SACRIFICE.

The Crown and its Exaltation (v.9-11)

What makes this kind of humble serving and sacrificing for the joy of holy harmony worth it? What treasure can I put before children and teens and parents and singles to get your heart to say, "Yes. Yes, I will serve and sacrifice like that."

The Supreme Worth in His Exaltation (v.9)

The supreme value of Jesus' glory and exalted name is a treasure worth selling for joy all we own and value. For this reason, Paul says. Because Jesus has humbled Himself as a servant and a sacrifice, God has exalted Him as supreme and sovereign.

Now it is not that we humble ourselves now with the hope that we will be exalted later. The kind of approach here that says, "See if you will humble yourself just like Jesus humbled Himself then God will exalt you just as He exalted Christ" misses the whole point of Philippians and this text in particular. I will be a servant and a sacrifice for the glad joy of exalting Christ.

Your worth is not tied to your importance...

We need to learn this lesson. When worth and importance are connected, then you will find humble serving and sacrificial putting of others first difficult. The aim is not a theology of worthlessness. Rather, a theology that does not define who I am by the position, preeminence or place I achieve. When your focus is on the worth of God, then your place and position will not be nearly so important to you. This will free you to put others first.

Your worth is measured by putting others first...

Jesus is exalted because He has humbled Himself and put us first. His worth is expressed in His willingness to humble Himself. What a great paradox this is. Your worth may well be measured mostly by your willingness to humble yourself and to put others ahead of you.

The Submissive Worship by His Creation (v.10-11)

He was a servant and a sacrifice so that in the end all creation will serve and submit. This text just vibrates and pulses with what we need when serving and sacrificing is painful. Do you not think that just the simple humility that joyfully obeys and promotes others and pursues harmony will reach an amazing climax of gladness when Jesus is crowned and all around Him are perfected reflections of that multifaceted glory?

So I have to ask: will you have Jesus' attitude of serving and sacrificial humility for the sake of putting others first? Will this be becoming so true in our homes that it shapes the unity and harmony of our church life together? Will you believe that this is true in an obeying way?

Or will you go from here this afternoon and tomorrow and this week will be little different? Do we so little treasure the glory of Jesus that we will seek and serve self rather than pursue our joy in Him in others?

Will you magnify Christ by putting others first?

Will you submit to Christ by putting others first?

How you will do all this is the point of our evening services. If you are committed to magnifying and submitting to Christ by putting others first, come back this evening to think this through in relation to our homes as parents, teens and children. **Conclusion**

Thank carefully about these questions, as we move toward a conclusion.

Is my attitude and conduct in my home characterized by self-focused, self-serving promotion of my concerns and interests and complaining when I am not served?

Is my attitude and conduct in my home filled with joyful, sacrificial self-denial?

Is the harmony of my home shaped by the cross, filled with joy, aimed at God's glory and enabled by God's power?

What will I do now, this afternoon, to repent myself and to promote this in my home?

So, brothers and sisters, think and act like Christ:

I am a servant.

I am a sacrifice.

I aim to magnify the worth supremacy of God by putting others first.

Others First – Children

Philippians 2

Pastor Greg Cook

Introduction You may find this hard to believe, but when I was a kid, I was very skinny, tall, and had white hair. I was easily bullied. In fact, so much so, that at the end of second grade, the class bully caught up with me on the way home from school. (In those days, kids walked to school – from kindergarten through high school.) I was afraid of this kid. He was mean and always wanted to pick fights with anyone he came in contact with. He caught up with me at the corner and, rather than fight this bully, I ran across the street with my head down running just as fast as my legs could carry me. What I hadn't done was look for cars that were turning the corner. I hit my head on the door of the car that was turning left from the cross street and my left leg slide under the car. The rear tire ran over my leg just above the ankle. I spent the rest of the school year and the entire summer in a cast from my hip to my toes.

My father's reaction was the typical reaction of most fathers. My father had a very rough childhood. He had drunken parents who cared less about him, or his other siblings. He grew up in a very rough part of San Francisco. So this latest incidence of running from a bully was the last straw, as far as he was concerned. He was going to teach me how to fight. And he did. I'm ashamed to tell you what I did once I learned how to fight. That's for another time.

There was one refrain that he kept telling me, "You look out for #1 because nobody else is going to". If I heard that once during my days at home, I heard it a million times – "look out for #1 and screw the other guy." In fact, I still hear it from him.

What he had learned and was passing on to me was the way that he had figured out this sinful world worked. The only way to survive is to play the world's game better than they do. And that's what he taught me.

We find this philosophy spelled out clearly in Philippians chapter 2. Paul describes us as naturally prideful, self-centered, conceited, looking out only for our own interests, and believing we are in a rivalry with others. That sounds so familiar to me.

A Description of the Old Self

(v. 3-4)

Look at the description that Paul gives in verses 3 and 4. He commands us to do things that are not the way that they currently are. He says that we are involved in rivalry between us, conceited, proud, and self-centered. What does that look like in real life?

We blindly rush in the direction of self-love and think that we have good reason for exalting ourselves and despising all others when we compare them to ourselves. We believe that what we have is somehow something we deserve or have earned and we swell with pride. We must have the best, be the first in line, have the biggest portion, have the largest selection, be able to drive as fast as we want and yet, not have to let anyone crowd in front of us.

The many sins that we have, we are very careful to conceal from others and convince ourselves that our sins are minute and trivial. We often love them as virtues. For example, someone might pride herself in her ability to defeat others by her ability to use words effectively. She loves that ability and doesn't see it as sinful. In fact she believes that it is a virtue that should be developed more fully.

Yet, when others have these same sins, we exaggerate those sins and look down on them as awful sinners and inferior to us.

When we observe qualities in others that we admire in ourselves, we trivialize them and make sure others know how far superior we are to them. We have such an exaggerated opinion of ourselves. It doesn't matter how bad we are, we still have an exaggerated opinion of ourselves.

When I was a deputy sheriff with the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office back in the early 1970's, one of the assignments was working in the county jail. One of the rules in the jail was the protection of child abusers from the other prisoners. Someone who abused children was considered the lowest of human beings. A cold-blooded killer believed that he was superior to a child abuser and that he was not as bad or evil as that child abuser. We are no different. We have an exaggerated opinion of ourselves which allows us to think we are superior to others.

To top it off, life goes smoothly and peacefully until someone believes they are superior to us, are better than we, or not as sinful as we. That is when our pride rears its ugly head even higher and we defend our sins, our gifts, our accomplishments, and our opinion of ourselves. That smooth and peaceful existence disappears into ugly anger, contention, and fighting.

What is expected from the Christian

(v. 1,3,4,5)

But there is a problem with what we are by sinful nature. Our sinful nature is the opposite of what Paul is teaching in this passage. How do we go from being people who are filled with pride, self-centered, conceited, and believe that we are in a rivalry with others to what we are supposed to be?

We must change our minds.

This can only be done when we are Christians. We have this ability because we are in Christ. Look at verse 5. <READ> We have this new mindset because we are Christ's. This cannot be manufactured in our own strength. We do not have the ability to change our thinking without the enabling grace of the Holy Spirit Who gives us the mind of Christ. Look at what He gives us the ability to do in verse 1: We can be encouraging, we can show comforting love, we can fellowship in the Spirit with a spirit of cooperation, we can have an affection for others, and we can have compassion and sympathy for others. In verse 3 he tells us we can do things without believing that we are in a rivalry for superiority and that we can be honest about ourselves, not having conceit. He also tells us that we can be humble and think that others have more significance than we do. In verse 4 he tells us we can think about others and their interests and well-being. All of this because this mind is ours in Christ Jesus.

The key is humility

(v. 3,8)

We are told in verse 3 that we are to have an attitude of humility. This humility is foreign to our way of thinking, but it is the key to counting others more significant than ourselves. We are told in verse 5 that we are to have this mind among ourselves which we find in Christ. What is that mind? We see what that mind is in verse 8. Between verse 5 and verse 8 we are given an account of what Christ did. He left the throne and took the form of a human being. The infinite Son of God gave us the ultimate example of counting others more significant than Himself. He was the second person of the Godhead and counted His Father's plan as being more significant than His own deity. And verse 8 says that He humbled Himself by being obedient to the point of dying on a cross. Christ is our ultimate example of humility. He took the form of the ones who hated Him. And He was humbled by His obedience to His Father's will.

How do we change pride and conceit into humility? We become obedient to what the Scriptures say. What do they say? **First, we must evaluate ourselves truthfully.** Romans 12:3 says,

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Part of that sober judgment involves believing the truth about who we are and what we have. 1 Cor 4:7 says,

For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

We take what has been given to us as a gift from God. We take credit in the way we look, in the place we live, in the possessions we have, in the giftedness that we have, in the skills that were given for development. There is nothing that we are or have that is not a gift from the Father for our stewardship to the body of Christ. So when we believe we are superior to others, we are believing a lie. When we are more interested in our own lives than in the lives of others, that is showing our lack of humility and our desire to believe a lie. We must believe the truth about ourselves. We must realize that we are not the best, are not the only one who has it right, that we can learn from others, no matter their station in life.

I just finished reading a book written by Steve Saint entitled *The Great Omission*. I will not give you a book report, but one of the things that slapped me across the face was my opinion of those natives who live in the Amazon jungle. I looked down on them in the sense that I considered myself more intelligent and highly educated and I didn't run around in only a G-string. What Steve pointed out was that just because these Indians could not read scratchings on a paper, did not mean that they did not possess great intelligence. It was very evident to him that there were those who possessed great intelligence. As Dave Powlison said we cannot minister to anyone about whom we believe we are superior.

The **second** point in changing pride and conceit into humility is that **we must put ourselves in the other person's place.** In Romans 15:2-3 Paul says:

Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me."

We are being obedient when we look for ways that we can help someone else in their walk with the Lord.

The **third** point in changing pride and conceit into humility is that **we must work hard to be obedient**. But we are given a promise in verses 12 and 13. As we work at humility, God promises that He will give us the desire and the ability to do what He requires.

The **fourth** point in changing pride and conceit into humility is found in verses 2 and 13. **We must be motivated by the joy of serving God and by completing the joy of others**.

The **fifth** point in changing pride and conceit into humility is that **we must remember how much Jesus did for us and the example He left**. Where would we be today if Jesus had our attitude toward others? When we consider the great price that Christ, in His humility, paid, we must bow in complete repentance to our cold, conceited, prideful, and self-centered life.

You may be asking yourselves why I have spent so much time working through these issues. The reason is that I want to build a foundation for this week's and next week's applications. We need to know, as Ephesians 4 states, what we are to put off (stop doing) and what we are to put on (begin doing to replace what we stop). That is the way that we will bring about change.

What is involved for children putting others first

I would like to begin this section by letting you know that I am limiting it to younger children – toddlers, primary, and junior ages. As I outlined at the beginning, putting others first is not something that humans do naturally. As anyone who has had any dealings with children knows, the concept of others is completely foreign to them. So that means that parents must be involved.

I would like to start by looking at the wrong attitude of parents toward putting others first as far as their children are concerned. We have been teaching about putting others first, and some parents may believe that putting others first in relation to their children means that they need to be more concerned about what their children want. Perhaps you have been too strict or have not given your children all that they say they need to be at the top.

When we talk about parents counting their children as more significant than themselves and to be looking to the interests of their children, we are not saying that parents should have a child-centered home. Parents who are looking to the interests of their children in this way are actually looking more to their interests than to their children's.

(The following information about child-centered and God-centered homes is taken from Chapter One of *The Heart of Anger*, by Lou Priolo.)

What is a child-centered home? That is a home in which a child believes and is allowed to behave as though the entire household, parents, siblings, and even pets exist for one purpose – to please him.

It is characterized by:

- Children being allowed to interrupt adults when they are talking

- They use manipulation and rebellion to get their way

- They dictate the family schedule (including meal times, bedtimes, etc.)

- They are allowed to take precedence over the needs of the spouse

- They have an equal or overriding vote in all decision making matters

- They demand excessive time and attention from parents to the exclusion of other biblical responsibilities of the parents

- They escape the consequences of their sinful and irresponsible behavior

- They are allowed to speak to parents as though they were peers

- They are allowed to be the dominant influence in the home

- They must be entertained or coddled out of a bad mood rather than disciplined out of it

When a home is run this way, the parents are looking out for their interests and not the interests of their children. They are more concerned about having time to themselves, being comfortable, not being interrupted, and doing what they want to do when they want to do it. This is not looking to the interests of their children.

When parents look to the interest of their children, they will be training their children in such a way that they have a God-centered home. That is a home in which everyone is committed to pleasing and serving God. God's desires are exalted over everyone else's. This teaches children to serve rather than be served, to honor rather than be honored, to give rather than take, and to be loving rather than selfish.

It is characterized by:

- Children who know the joy of serving others

- They cheerfully obey parents the first time

- They do not interrupt parents who are speaking to each other

- They do not manipulate others

- They know that they are not always going to get their own way

- They work their schedule around their parents' schedules

- They may have input in family decisions but not necessarily an equal vote

- They understand that God has given their parents other responsibilities in addition to meeting their needs

- They suffer the natural consequences of their sinful and irresponsible behavior

They do not speak to parents as though they were peers, but honor them as spiritual authorities

They esteem others as more important than themselves

They fulfill household responsibilities

They protect themselves from certain bad influences

They do not divide parents on disciplinary issues

They are not more intimate with either parent than the parents are with each other

This is what it means for parents to be looking at the interests of their children.

An everyday illustration

One of our members asked me a question during the 9:15 Adult Bible time this summer when we were going through the video series, “A Case for Kids”. She brought up the subject of games in the lives of children. If we are trying to teach children to “look to the interests of others” and “count others more significant than themselves”, then should we be allowing our children to play games, since they foster competition and an attitude of me first.

I gave her the very definite answer that I didn’t know and that I hadn’t thought that one through, but that I would. Well, I have been thinking about games and I would like to use them as an example.

Suppose we decide we’re going to have some quality family time. What better way than by playing a game, right! Let me ask you, “What is the progression of events from then on?”

It would go something like this:

First, there would be a chorus of voices, each one with the game that they want to play.

Following the realization that there isn’t a consensus on which game to play, there would be the all-too-familiar responses, both in words and actions, in order for each to get their own way.

The regular umpire (whichever parent normally steps into these situations) gets involved with the familiar solution of trying to be fair, especially the older children being fair with the younger.

There is disappointment, pouting, whining, negotiating, crying, and manipulation when a game is finally chosen, by whatever means that decision normally happens – either by parental decree, or by shaming the children into agreeing.

It is apparent that people who invent games know the human condition very well. What is the next item to deal with after the game is setup? That’s right, who is going to go first. I have yet played a game in which there is no way of choosing who goes first that is not done in an objective manner, either by rolling dice, or picking a card. Can you imagine what it would be like if children had to come to a decision about who goes first without an objective method?

And there is the game Nazi. This is the person or persons who make sure the pieces are in just the right place and that only the proper number of spaces are moved, or the proper number of pieces are on the board at any given time.

Games have their place. They can help teach younger children how to count, and how to do things in an orderly fashion. The beginning games like Candy Land don't require any strategy. That's why younger children can play. The winner is chosen strictly by the way the cards are drawn. There is nothing that a child can do to boast of his superiority.

Can we teach our children about looking to others interests even at this young age? Absolutely! How about helping them to look to the interests of others in the choosing of the game. How about allowing someone else to go first who hasn't gone first for a while. When there is the victory squeal and the boasting of superiority, wouldn't this be a great time to point out in the Scriptures that even the roll of the dice, or the shuffling of the cards is determined by God (Prov 16:33).

But as children get older, the games begin to teach how to think logically and how to strategize and plan different scenarios based on unknowns. They teach how to identify weakness and to capitalize on it. Now things are getting more involved.

Can we teach our children about looking to others interests in strategy games? I believe so. Again, allowing others to go first. Helping younger or less experiences players understand the consequences of their moves.

Let's review the 5 points of change:

1. We must evaluate ourselves truthfully
2. We must put ourselves in the other person's place
3. We must work hard to be obedient, knowing that God is at work in us, as well.
4. We must be motivated by the joy of serving God and by completing the joy of others
5. We must remember how much Jesus did for us.

Can you see how you can use games, as well as so many others opportunities to teach the others first way of life? Such as at the dinner table when there are only two chicken wings and everyone wants one. Such as being aware of things that need to be done around the house and they are done without being asked to. How about the kids at school. Can we teach about the kid who dresses differently, or is struggling with school work, or that is the bully, or is new to the school, or during lunch, or during classroom time. The opportunities are endless.

One of the problems that we face in putting the needs of our children first is our own sin. Later in Philippians 4:9, Paul tells them to practice the things that they have learned and received and heard and seen in him. We must model what we teach. And we don't see the opportunities like we should because we are struggling with our own pride and conceit.

What about those who are home schooled. Can we teach them these principles in that atmosphere? And what about the home school get togethers? Can these be a time to teach these principles?

Teens and Others First

Let me say something to you teens. This is a time when peer pressure is great. I'm out of the loop to know how kids refer to those who are "different", but you know what those terms are. Will you humble yourself, count others more significant than yourselves, and look to the interests of those with whom you are involved. Are you willing to suffer the consequences of others when you befriend the geek, when you come along side the "ugly" one, when you are concerned that someone is failing a subject that is your strength? Are you willing to put yourself out to help someone else who is less proficient than you, whether it is in sports, or art, or music, or social skills? Will you have the mind of Christ that is willing to say the hard, unpopular things to kids who are throwing their lives away? Are you more concerned about where they are going to spend eternity than about what your friends will say about you and how they will treat you? Will you give your employer 100%, even when he doesn't deserve it? Will you honor your parents even when they don't deserve it? Will you help with younger siblings in whatever needs to be done?

Children and Church

As we develop this others first way of living, what happens at home will naturally flow over into what happens here. What about interrupting the service by going in and out during special music or the preaching? What about not cleaning your shoes off before you drag mud, dirt, snow into the building? What about honoring those who teach? What about helping those who are not paying attention? What about those that are hurting? Those that are different? Those who are in authority? Those who disagree?

Let's take a quick summary of the principles that I have tried to illustrate tonight. **Conclusion** These principles are going to be used next week, as well, as we talk about spouses and how they can practice putting others first.

We have the mind of Christ as Christians.

We have the command to obey.

We have God at work in us to give us the desire and the ability to do this.

We have the motivation – joy in Christ and joy in others.

We have Christ as our example.

We must teach them to be servants.

We must teach them to sacrifice for others.

May God give all of the enabling grace, as He has promised, to work hard at putting others first.

Others First – Its Aim

Philippians 2:12-30

Introduction

So, because of our responsibilities in verses 1-4 which were:

TO BELIEVE THESE TRUTHS. Believe that there is truly encouragement, comfort, fellowship, affection and sympathy as a result of being in Christ.

TO DEFLATE YOURSELF. Stop looking in the mirror of your self-exaggerated esteem. Humble yourself in the Lord's sight and in your own sight. Don't be a pedestal person, up above others.

TO ESTEEM OTHERS. Lift up others in your own mind. Put others up above you in your honor and your estimation. Change the point of comparison, the perspective from which you see others and the place in which you position others.

TO PUT OTHERS INTEREST FIRST. Move towards others with their best interests in heart and mind. What does your friend, your spouse, your children really need? Do you seek to meet those needs or are you simply taking the easy way out?

To do this with confidence and joy, you must begin to think and act like Christ. We must have His attitude, His words and wants in our heart.

I AM A SERVANT. I will give up my rights and recognition in order to serve others and put them first. I will humble myself for the sake of others.

I AM A SACRIFICE. I will mortify my self-life, put to death the old person I used to be so that putting others first will be a pleasure, not a pain. I will be willing, if necessary, to not only lay down my life, but give up my time, interests, wants, pursuits, money, whatever for the sake of looking after others interests first.

I aim to magnify the worth supremacy of God by putting others first.

But this is very difficult. We struggle mightily to overcome hearts that shudder at not being put first. How will we do this? Where is the motivation and power to shift the constant gaze of my heart's attention from me to others?

It is here in this text where Paul teaches us the greatness of God's power for us and the pattern in two people's lives. Here is the powerful enablement and practical example of the aim of putting others first.

Ability: Diligently Working by God's Power (v.12-13)

So how are we going to make this happen in our homes? How are we going to respond to Paul's appeal to a putting others first that rejects esteeming self and embraces treasuring Christ?

Our Determined Effort (v.12)

Now let's think for a moment about a *contrast*, about what Paul is not saying. ❶ He is not saying that you have to finish working for your salvation. The Bible is abundantly clear that Jesus' finished the work of salvation Himself. ❷ He is not saying that you have to work in order to keep your salvation. There is no cause to effect of my work yielding a retained salvation.

So what is being *commanded*? Notice first that it is *obedience*. What is being commanded here is the work of obeying God. It is what they have commendably done in the past and what they are being commanded to do in the future. Further, it is a working out of their salvation. Now we can understand this. We know what it means to "work something out". To do that means that we need a genuine and growing knowledge of what our salvation is and what its implications are for my life. So what is being commanded here is a path of obedience that is marked out along the lines implied by salvation and followed by grace.

There is a wonderful *commendation* for they have obeyed without immediate supervision. They have not needed the presence of Paul to walk with God and serve God and live in godly harmony together. What was begun when he was there was carried on in his absence. We need to consider this word in our own lives as well. How often do we begin well when an elder or a counselor or a friend or a mentor teaches and trains us and then we falter and fail as we are more and more on our own? It is a part of the maturing process that our children do what is right with less and less supervision. This is true as a Christian as well. One of our aims

D.A. Carson has helpfully written on this text saying, "God's continuous, gracious, sovereign work in our lives becomes an incentive to press on with fear and trembling." (*Basics for Believers*, Baker Books: 1996, p.62.) So this text is not designed to foster passivity, nor is it calling for self-assured confidence. Rather, the humble Christian dying to self and esteeming others because of the attitudes of the cross, chooses to obey God by faith. It is with fear of God and trembling over my sin and sinfulness that I move forward step by step in faith. I read His Word, I believe His commands and I choose to obey because I know that present at that moment is the enabling grace to obey.

God's Divine Enablement (v.13)

Why do I work out my salvation? What is the *cause* of my working out my salvation? Notice the "for" here: there is a causal relationship between verse 13 and verse 12. What I do in verse 12 is motivated by knowing what God is doing in verse 13. So what is God doing?

God's work in you is to change your will and enable your strength. This is how faith enters the picture. I choose to esteem others better than me, to value their in-

terests above mine because I am a servant and a sacrifice. Yet it is not I alone making this choice, this choice I make because I know by faith that God is working this choosing and doing in me. I do not passively sit by and wait on God – I actively engage my obedience knowing that God has made the choosing and doing of that obedience possible.

This is such an important concept for us. I work because God is at work in me. "We strive and labor because we have fixed our hope on God" (1 Timothy 4:10). "And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*" (1 Corinthians 12:4). "AND working together *with Him*, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain" (2 Corinthians 6:1). "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20). "And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me" (Colossians 1:29).

Finally, Paul has encouraged them to put each other first for the pursuit of his own joy. Now, God is working in us our outworking of obedience *for His own pleasure*. Therefore, God is so committed to His pleasure (that's almost shocking, isn't it) that He works in you so that you will obey Him in putting others first. This hard obedience requires His grace and reflects His glory. I cannot take the time this morning to tease out this concept. Only let me encourage you to do this. Take a concordance on a good translation (ESV, NASB, KJV, NKJV) and run down the word pleasure. See if it bears this out. Most of the time, it is the pleasure of God that is in view. If not, then it is man replacing what brings pleasure to God with what brings pleasure to man.

Aim: Joyfully Sharing in God's Purposes (v.14-18)

It is important that we see the living shape, the practical outworking of this kind of harmony. It will have a huge impact on some of the simplest things and some of the hardest things.

Lives that are a Witness to Others (v.14-16a)

Listen to how it starts. "Do all things without grumbling or disputing." Beloved this is the test. This is how you are going to know if you are pursuing your joy in humbly esteeming others and looking after their interests putting others first. Do you do everything without murmuring, complaining or grumbling? The word here could be *muttering*. Murmuring words from our mouth come from unrest in our hearts. Further, do we do all things without disputing, arguing or dissension? That is what the second word indicates.

So, when our serving and sacrificing (or even our grudging obedience) is accompanied by complaining and arguing (even if it is only in the heart or mind) then we do not have the attitude of Jesus nor are we truly responding to Paul's appeal. Now this is a hard thing. We are enormously prone by sin, by disposition and by long practice to a sort of spiritual muttering under our breath. We allow it in the daily interaction with our children. We gripe and complain about our spouses and our situations. This ought not to be.

The solution here is not merely the curbing of our tongues so that we stop murmuring and disputing verbally. What is required is a change of heart that joyfully accepts and embraces actions of self-denial and self-sacrifice gladly. Murmuring and complaining are monster enemies of our joy. It is not possible in a situation, to have joy and complaining arising from the same heart. And this is why many struggle with joy (among other problems as well.) When situations arise that ought to call forth from us a humble dying to self for the sake of others, we may do what is required, but we do it complaining and disputing (even under our breath) rather than with joy.

I am convinced that for many "holy" but unhappy people, this is root of the problem. They are doing what God wants them to do, but, doggone it, why does it have to be this way?

What is the effect when I sacrifice and serve and live for others even when it is painful to do so? What will flow from it that make is worthwhile? Well, because it is so different from the world's way, it is a magnificent testimony to others. We want others to know that we are Christians – that we think and love and live differently. In the darkness and crookedness of our world the uncomplaining, joyful humility that serves and sacrifices will be a beacon of bright light pointing to the cross.

Now frankly, this is not my aim or my purpose. I am not trying to live this way so others can see it. Rather, I live this way and it is inevitable that others will see it! The first way leads to hypocrisy. The second way flows out of authenticity.

Once again I have to ask you to pay careful attention. Look at the core sentence again. Do all things [in this way] [expecting this aim] holding fast [forth] the Word of life..."

Now we have to ask, is it *forth* or *fast*? Are we as we do this *offering the Word of Life* (forth) or *clinging to the Word of Life* (fast). Most commentators, due to the context take the *forth* sense. Do all things this way expecting this aim which is itself a holding forth or offering the Word like one offers a glass of wine or a cup of wine. The evangelistic sense best suits the context.

Do you want to hold out the Word of life to others? Do you want to shine in the darkness of our day? Do you want to show the purity and authenticity of Christianity? Then put others first. Serve and sacrifice for one another. Consciously choose to value others and promote their interests. Do so joyfully because of Christ and the cross. Do so because you know that step-by-step, deed-by-deed God is working in you to make it so.

Responses that are an Encouragement to Leaders(v.16b-18)

The second affect is on those to whom we are responsible spiritually. It is put before the church that their living in humble harmony will encourage Paul and give him hope that his ministry to and among them was not futile. So their sacrificial obedience will give him cause to glory, not in himself nor in his ministry – there is no self-promotion in view here – will cause him to glory in the grace of God.

And what an encouragement it is when God's men see the fruit of their labors in the holiness and joyfulness of their students or flock.

Paul's own sharing of this joy becomes the model for their knowing how this joy works. What an awesome responsibility. For me (and all of you who serve as elders) are we modeling this kind of uncomplaining, humble sacrifice and serving to our flock so that they know how to do this for one another? Is it a joy to you to do the hard things of ministry? Has there crept into the work of being a shepherd a sort of complaining, griping self-focus that is not embracing Christ's attitude and does not promote the interests of others?

And just so that they don't miss it, his service to them and their sacrifice for him are mutually shared overflows of joy. How I long that our ministry together here as a church will taste and feel and look like this.

Affirmation: Sacrificially Modeling Godly Unity (v.19-30)

Well, we need some flesh on this, Paul says. We need to see this in the lives of real people lest we think that living this way is simply not possible. And this is what he does. In the context of the church's need for harmony in ministry, he affirms the sacrificial serving of two men, Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Timothy – Serving as a Son (v.19-24)

Timothy is an example of *oneness of mind with Paul* illustrating the *I am a servant* attitude.

The Unity of a Kindred Spirit (v.19-21)

Their special oneness was an example of the general oneness for all. When he sent them Timothy they would soon be able to see what he was talking about. Only Timothy had a genuine concern for their welfare. His was a kindred spirit with Paul. They could learn from Timothy the practical lessons of what it meant to really care from someone else. And we find all too often what Paul and Timothy did as well, that too many people around Paul were looking out for number one.

The Submission in a Family Relation (v.22-24)

Timothy had proven himself over and over again. He was an example of humble obedience. Paul could hold him up as one who would stand shoulder to shoulder as a son would to his father. Since he had shown his proven worth, Timothy could represent Paul to them.

What a lesson this is for putting others first. This wonderful side-by-side serving of father and son in the faith exemplifies that which we ought to have in our homes. Timothy could be trusted implicitly to represent Paul because of his humble submission

Finally, as he often does, Paul writes, "I intend to come and see you." The message is clear. He will be coming and checking them out. There is an accountability in their following the model of those who serve as sons with godly mentors and fathers.

Epaphroditus – Sharing as a Servant**(v.25-30)**

Epaphroditus is an example of *oneness of mind with the church* illustrating the *I am a sacrifice* attitude.

The Unity of a Shared Service**(v.25-26)**

Paul sees a sharing in ministry as fellowship and brotherhood as soldiers and workers. Epaphroditus had come as the church's messenger and to minister to Paul. He wanted to do for Paul what the church had not yet been able to do. He wanted to communicate encouragement and care for Paul personally and practically. So Paul says, "I value him as a fellow servant; You trusted with your care for me."

Here though is the kind of man he was. Even when there is the opportunity to minister to Paul, he is still deeply concerned about the church at Philippi. So concerned that it distressed him that the church had heard about his sickness. What an example of selfless service. Here he is, ministering for the church in serving Paul and now he has fallen sick. His reaction is not to dwell on the circumstances, but to be concerned about the church back home.

Brothers and sisters, are we like this in our homes? Is our serving in ministry for Christ like this? Or does difficulty and distress in ministry cause us to turn inward and begin to complain? Do we find an ever growing self-pity choking out the joy of our sacrifice?

The Sacrifice in a Life-Risking Mission**(v.27-30)**

Epaphroditus has proven himself. He is an example of willingness to die. In fact, he was so sick he almost died. Paul sees his life being saved as aimed at sorrow being spared. The grace to Epaphroditus kept grief from Paul.

We must learn to honor those who serve and sacrifice like this in the family at home and at church.

Why should we honor spouses and parents and children and sheep like this? Because he risked his life to communicate their concern for Paul. His Christ-like attitude held firm even in the face of possible death.

What about your putting others first?

- Are you putting forth every bit of energy to put others first while totally relying on the grace and power of God?
- Is your putting others first filled with joyful, sacrificial self-denial?
- Do you seek to sacrifice and serve for the sake of those over you, whether you husband, you parents, your employer, your leaders at church?
- What will you do now, this afternoon, to repent myself and to promote this in my home?

Conclusion

Others First – Spouses

Philippians 2

Pastor Greg cook

Introduction John and Mary have been married for 10 years. John has had to give up his leisure time activities, bowling, softball, and golf, because he has been too busy climbing the corporate ladder. He is working 60-70 hours a week. Along with the promotions comes more stress and pressure to perform. John's outlet for the stress is the toys he has – a new sports car, a home theatre in the recreation room of their new, larger home, and gorgeous leather furniture on which to lay as he camps in front of the TV. John works hard and gives everything he has to the job. He resents having to give so much of himself at work, but his boss is a very demanding man, and Mary has a life-style to which she has become very accustomed. She is also very demanding. They have two young children, and between home schooling the older and running after the younger, all the housework, volunteering one day a week at the local crisis pregnancy center, and teaching the morning 2 and 3 year olds class at church, Mary is exhausted at the end of everyday.

John has developed a routine upon arriving at home. Because he works so late, everyone else has already eaten. He says hi to everyone as he quickly dodges the whining kids, trying not to allow them to touch him in case they have dirty hands. He makes his way to the bedroom and changes clothes into something comfortable. Then he retires to the theatre room for an evening of vegging in front of the TV. Mary will bring his dinner in and try to start a conversation, but gets discouraged at the grunts she gets. She leaves and tries to keep the kids quiet for the rest of the evening. After she has the kids in bed, she will try once more to engage John in meaningful conversation, but it is normally of no use. On this particular evening as he passes the kitchen on his way to the home theatre room, he yells, "Hey hon, when are you going to get me some dinner? I have had the worst day ever. And I am starving! And where is the newspaper? The kids must have run off with it. And you know that I don't like it when you have the laundry sitting in my room. When you bring me my dinner, you can take the laundry out with you and put it where I've told you to. I've told you at least a hundred times. How many more times do I have to tell you about it?"

Also on this particular day, Mary has had one of the worst days of her life as a mother. The two kids were horrible. The older one refused to do his school work and the younger one cried about everything. She had to go to the store for food and the kids whined and cried the whole time. She was in a hurry and the kids were tired, so they complained about not getting this kind of cereal and they didn't like that kind of soup, and when was she going to make the cookies she promised to make? She was so embarrassed. And since she was running late for an appointment with another home schooling mom and the kids were demanding lunch, she left a bag of groceries on the floor. One of the kids tore open the cereal and spilled it all over the floor. Plus, the washing machine quit working in the middle of the load she was running.

To say that John's request was the last straw is an understatement! Hence, the war of words and wits began.

Mary made her way to the doorway of the home theatre room and yelled, "You lazy, selfish, self-centered bum. You have no idea what I go through everyday. I'm the only one who is raising these kids. I'm the only one who does the housework. And who do you think washes and folds your clothes? Your mother? All you have to do is get up out of the bed every morning, get showered, put on the clothes that I wash, and go to work. You get to go out to lunch with all of your friends. Do you have any idea when was the last time I got to go out to lunch with my friends without these kids? And then, you come home at any ole time you please and expect to be treated and served like a king. You never help me with these kids, or any of the housework. Would it be too much to ask for you to at least take your dirty dishes to the sink? Oh, what's the use. You don't care about anyone but yourself, you pig-headed slob."

This did not sit well with John. He countered, "And who do you think makes all of this possible? Being a stay-at-home mom doesn't come anywhere close to the high-powered executives that I have to bow down to all day. If I don't do my job, and do it well, then, not only will we loose *this* happy home and everything that *you* enjoy, but the company will go down the tubes. And I suppose you would cheer. Everyone else knows how hard I work. Why don't *you* give me a little respect? Why can't *you* see how tired I am and the amount of stress I'm under. *I'm* selfish and self-centered? Look who's calling the kettle black? You have always been the one who is waited on around here. It's been that way ever since we got married." The rest of the conversation is not worth repeating. It is one in a long list that is getting longer, happening more frequently, and becoming more nasty.

This is the last of our messages for this year's Family Enrichment Conference. We are looking at **Others First** as it has to do with our spouses. I would like to use John and Mary as our case study this evening and see how we can help them to apply the **Others First** command as we find it in Philippians 2. Let's ask God to help us as we apply his Word to life as we know it. <PRAY>

Review of last week's main points

The first thing that we must see is that God is at work helping both John and Mary to obey Philippians 2. They are to count others more significant than themselves, and to look to the interest of others. Wayne Mack, in his new book, *Humility – The Forgotten Virtue*, says that God uses many things to humble us. He suggests that God allows other people to rebuke and criticize us, as well as misunderstand and misrepresent us.² We have taught that a husband and wife are brother and sister in Christ first, who are also able to participate in the most intimate of relationships on earth. I am not saying that marriage has as its purpose to sanctify you, but I am saying that no one knows us better than our spouses. It is no wonder that God would use our spouses to help us in this matter of putting others first.

² Wayne Mack, *Humility – The Forgotten Virtue*, pages 132-135.

Last week I made the point that the key to putting others first is humility. I get that from verses 3 and 8. In verse 3 we are told to humble ourselves and in verse 8 we find the supreme example of humility which is found in Christ. His example is one of being a servant and being a sacrifice.

The opposite of humility is pride. Stuart Scott defines pride as “the mindset of self (a master’s mindset rather than that of a servant): a focus on self and the service of self, a pursuit of self-recognition and self-exaltation, and a desire to control and use all things for self. Proud people believe that all things should be *from* them, *through* them, and *to* them or *for* them. Pride is competitive toward others, and especially toward God. A proud person believes that life is all about *them* – their happiness, their accomplishments, and their worth.”³

On the other hand, Stuart Scott defines humility as “the mindset of Christ (a servant’s mindset): a focus on God and others, a pursuit of the recognition and the exaltation of God, and a desire to glorify and please God in all things and by all things He has given. Humble people have their focus on others out of a desire to love and glorify God. They have no need to be recognized or approved. They have no need to elevate self, knowing that they have been forgiven and that God’s love has been undeservedly and irrevocably set on them.”⁴

I don’t think that there is anyone here who would say that John and Mary were exhibiting humility. So how can we help them to change from “Me First” to “Others First”?

Practical help for change

Last week I also mentioned 5 points that we need to consider as we work to put others first:

1. We must evaluate ourselves truthfully.
2. We must put ourselves in the other person’s place.
3. We must work hard to be obedient.
4. We must be motivated by the joy of serving God and by completing the joy of others.
5. We must remember how much Jesus did for us and the example He left.

Those of you who have been around the Chapel for any length of time are familiar with the teaching of the heart. But let me briefly review the concepts. Please turn your Bibles to Hebrews 4 verses 11-13: <READ>

Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

³ Stuart Scott, *The Exemplary Husband*; page 179.

⁴ Stuart Scott, *The Exemplary Husband*; page 187.

Hebrews tells us that our hearts do two things: they believe and they want. Our actions, choices, and emotions come from what we believe to be true and what we want. So in order to evaluate ourselves truthfully and put ourselves in the other person's place, we must change what we believe to be true and what we want. We must believe what really is true and want what pleases God, not ourselves.

So let's see how we can help John in his situation. What does it appear that John believes to be true? It seems he believes that he is more important than his wife. He believes that he can talk any way he wants to his wife. It's OK for him to give the best of his life to his job, and not his family. It's OK if he doesn't develop an intimate relationship with his wife. It's OK for him to believe that he doesn't have to sacrifice and serve his wife and her needs. He believes that she should be serving him. He believes that he deserves peace and quiet at home. He believes that he doesn't have to be involved in the rearing of the children. It's OK to be irritable and impatient. John believes that he is a self-made man. It is his hard work and dedication that have taken him to the place where he is. There are probably other things he believes to be true. But these are a good start.

The next question is, are these things really true, or is John believing lies? I'm not going to take you to the specific Scripture references, but I am going to list the things that are true in John's situation. John is not more important than his wife, and in fact, he is the one who must be serving and sacrificially loving her. John must be careful to speak to his wife only in ways that are good for building her up, and as are fitting for the occasion, so that it will minister grace to her. It is a godly testimony for John to be the best employee that he can be, but not at the expense of his wife and children. He must be on his game when it comes to his family. John should be Mary's best friend. She should be able to say without hesitation that John is her best friend. She can tell him anything and he is free and open to tell her anything. John doesn't deserve anything but eternal hell. He is Christ's ambassador and must be mindful of his responsibilities to serve Christ well, especially at home. Scripture is clear that both parents are charged with the responsibility to rear their children. This is not woman's work. Neither is the housework. John should be looking out for his wife to see if she legitimately needs his help in keeping the home running in a God-honoring way. And John should be the picture of patience, always learning about his wife, teachable, serving, and building others up. John should also realize that he has nothing that he has done. Everything that he has, and is, and will be is from the Hand of God alone. This is what John should be believing, since this is the truth.

So that is potentially what John is thinking. What does John want? It appears that John wants to be free to live his life in comfort, without interruption, and being treated in the manner in which he deserves. He wants recognition from his boss, he wants love and admiration from his wife, and he wants kids that will parent themselves. Are these God-honoring wants? The answer is no.

John must want to minister to his wife in a self-sacrificial way, love her as Christ loved the church, parent children for the glory of God, and want to bring joy to the heart of God and his wife. In short, John must want to be a servant and be sacrificing both his rights and his reputation, just as Christ did.

How about Mary. What does it appear that Mary believes to be true? It appears that Mary believes that she is destined for a life of servitude to her husband and children. She believes that the person she married doesn't live with her anymore. She feels cheated. John gets all the fun and she gets all the dirty work. John has an exciting social life and she doesn't and probably won't as long as the children are home. She doesn't have any close friends. She is all alone. She has a burden that is too heavy to bear. There is no end in sight. What's it going to be like when the kids are gone and John is worse than he is now. Things will never change. If she would have known that marriage to John was going to be like this, she would have probably had second thoughts.

Are these things really true? Is Mary believing lies like John is? Again, I'm not going to reference the exact Scriptures, but I'm just going to list what the Scriptures say are true. Mary can have joy in her position as wife and mother. God has not given her more than she can bear. He knows and will not allow more than she can handle. She is focusing on her situation more than on God. She is allowing herself to become downcast. She does not see God as big and her problems as small. She has forgotten that God loves both she and John and that He is at work in both of their lives. God can grant repentance to both parties. She believes that confronting her husband as her brother in Christ is not her responsibility. She plays "what if" games with her life. She lives in the past. She does not believe God when He says that He gives life and gives it more abundantly.

What does Mary want? She wants a prince charming to take her away. She wants to be loved and adored and cherished. She wants to be made the queen of the home. She wants to have the opportunity to develop as a person and have fun like everyone else. She wants kids who are delights to parent. She wants a trouble-free life. She wants her husband to be a God-honoring man so they will have a happy life together.

Are these godly wants and desires? Not according to Scripture. Mary must want to please God with her life. She must want to serve her children by being a godly mother, as well as submit to her husband as a godly wife. She must want to be used of God in the life of her husband by bringing a Godly rebuke to him. In short, Mary must want to be a servant and be sacrificing both her rights and her reputation, just as Christ did.

Now, I think that I can hear what you are saying to yourselves. "Greg, this all sounds very nice and spiritual. But this is not real life. How does it work in real life?" That's a good question. Let me see if I can help in a practical way.

First of all, how can we get a handle on what we are believing and wanting? I think that one of the best ways that you can know this is to write down what you say to yourself. You know, the self-talk that you do in your heart. Sit down and write it word for word as best that you can remember it. Then look at it and evaluate whether each of those statements is true. Also look at what you want and see if it is for self, or for God and others. Next to each false statement and ungodly desire, write what is God-honoring and what is true. Keep this list close at hand and refer to it often, especially when a situation presents itself.

Then pray, asking God to give you both the desire and the ability to change your thinking and your wanting. That's what He promised in Philippians 2:12-13.

Next, confess your sinful thoughts and desires to your spouse and ask them to help keep you accountable. If you have difficulty talking about this with your spouse, then you know that you are extremely proud! During your times together, you can share your list with your spouse. Then you can ask for them to make any additions that they believe you have missed. Then have them help you prioritize the list so that you can begin working on the top 1 or 2 items. You can also make plans on how you can help each other to change. Let's suppose that John and Mary have agreed that his "talking down" to her is one of the first things that needs to be changed. They could develop a sign that would help John to recognize that he is talking down again. Perhaps it's a pulling on the ear, or giving the time out signal. Whatever it is, it must be agreed that this is the time for John to stop and look at his heart. What is he believing and what is he wanting, and to change it.

Finally, work hard to change, knowing God is working, too. Let me give you a couple of examples of how you can change your thinking and wanting.

Let's take John first. He could make some 4X6 cards with the things that he should be believing and put them in the car so that he can refer to them on his way home. He could also be using his drive home to remind himself that he is going to the place where he has a very important ministry to perform. And he prepares himself to be a servant and a sacrifice as soon as he pulls up to the house. He changes his routine and makes sure that he kisses Mary and lets her know how much he missed her. He takes each of the kids into his arms and kisses them and tells them that he couldn't wait to get home to them. He makes sure that he sets aside some time with Mary and each of the kids before bedtime. And he makes sure the TV stays off for the evening. And he should be giving thanks to God continually for all that He has given to him.

How about Mary. How can we help her? She could also make cards for what she should be thinking and wanting and put them on the refrigerator or at the sink. When the days are trying, she can pray asking God to give her the desire and the grace to please Him during these times. She can be preparing herself and the kids for when John gets home, because he has agreed to call her before he is leaving the office. He has also talked with her during the day to give her an idea of what his day has been like. She could have a chance to change her routine and make sure she is receptive to John's arrival. She can ask about his day and be genuinely interested. She can make sure that dinner is a time that all enjoy by changing the kids schedule around dad's, if possible. And she can have a continually thankful spirit as she goes through the day. She should also seek John's help in keeping her accountable for her thinking and wanting. As she and John begin to share each other's lives in a more intimate way, she can make sure that she does not criticize him or make him feel inadequate as he starts to change. She should be encouraging and showing a helpful attitude.

Conclusion Don't allow your own pride and the busyness of life to steal away what God has been doing in your life these past 3 weeks. Begin tonight by starting your list and talking to your spouse. Make wise use of your pastors and other mature believers who can come along side.

And remember this, that one of the most devastating characteristics of pride, is that it blinds us to its existence. One of the Greek word form categories for pride has the idea of being enveloped in smoke, conveying the idea of blindness. Don't allow this to happen. But also included in that is the sensitivity to pride in others. Use the resources available to help you get a handle on pride and humility for the glory and joy of God as well as the joy of yourself and others.

