
Others First – Its Responsibility

Philippians 2:1-4

Introduction Selfishness and self-centeredness is the rule of the day. People but 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.

