

December 15, 2013 by Steve Brandon



Unity Through Humility

Philippians 2:1-4

1. The Reality (verse 1)
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3. Through Humility (verses 3-4)

There is a quarterback controversy in Chicago. Jay Cutler, the Bears franchise quarterback has been injured for much of this season. In his absence, Josh McCown has performed very well, leading the Chicago Bears to a 3-2 record, which could have easily been 4-1. In fact, Josh McCown has performed incredibly well. He has the highest "Total Quarterback Rating" in the entire football league (85.7, two points ahead of Payton Manning and 13 points ahead of anybody else).

Of late, Josh has been playing particularly well. In last Monday night's 45-28 victory over the Dallas Cowboys, McCown had a record night. He completed 27-of-36 passes for 348 yards and four touchdowns, good for a passer rating of 141.9. McCown also had a 7-yard touchdown run.

For his performance, he was named the NFC's Offensive Player of the Week. In other words, of all the players in the National Football Conference, Josh McCown had the best week. To put it in perspective, he is the only Bears player since the 1970 merger to account for five touchdowns while throwing zero interceptions in a single game. Furthermore, the McCown-run offence never punted, something that hadn't happened in 41 years.

It has led many in the media to say that Josh McCown should be the starting quarterback, whether or not Jay Cutler is healthy enough to play. However, Josh McCown has a different perspective. Listen to what he said to one member of the media, ...

"Like I said before, I'm the backup and Jay's our starter. If Jay's healthy, he should be the starting quarterback, that's really it. I don't go out here going, 'you know what, if I do this, now I'll be the starter.' That's not my mindset.

My mindset is to serve our team as the backup quarterback as best I can and to play efficient football and to play winning football and in this situation keep us in contention, so that whenever he gets back in, takes back over, we're in position to continue to make a playoff run." [\[1\]](#)

Now, what makes that comment so remarkable is that we're talking about professional football players here. We're talking about players with egos. We're talking about players with millions of dollars at stake. And yet, in every interview that he has given over the last few weeks, Josh McCown has held the line: "I'm the backup, and Jay's our starter."

Certainly, this isn't easy for any athlete to say. Athletes are trained from their youth to play. They want to play. They do everything in their power to play. I remember as a child working very hard and doing whatever I could to play. So, saying such things is certainly not easy to say. And yet, Josh McCown has put the team first, and himself second.

His story reminds me of the famous conductor who was asked, "What is the hardest instrument to play?" Without hesitation, he replied, "Second violin." He explained, "I can always get plenty of first violinists, but to find one who plays second violin with as much enthusiasm or second French horn or second flute, now that's a problem. And yet if no one plays second, we have no harmony."

This is what Josh McCown is doing. He is playing second fiddle. And he's doing a pretty good job of it as well.

Well, this morning as we come to our time in the Scriptures, we will see that God's call upon all of our lives is to play second fiddle. Let's read our text.

Philippians 2:1-4

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

The core of these words comes in verse 2, which speaks of unity. Four times Paul uses a phrase to denote unity: "same mind", "same love", "united in spirit", "intent on one purpose." The path to such unity is humility. Verse 3 says it like this, "with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves." Unity comes through humility.

This is what we see in Chicago with the Bears. Just imagine with me if Josh McCown's response was different. Just suppose that he was saying to the press what many in the press are saying to the world, "Just look at my performance. It speaks for itself. Last week I had a higher passer rating than Jay Cutler has ever had in a single game in his entire career. My passer rating all season long is better than Cutler's. In fact, I lead the league in Total Quarterback Rating. Sure, Jay Cutler has a stronger arm than I have. Sure, Jay Cutler is a bit quicker in the pocket. I'll acknowledge that. But, our team is on a roll with me at quarterback. Why tamper with success? The team trusts me. The team has full confidence in me. I think that I should start. I think that I earned the job. I think that I should play. I think that the team has the best chance to win with me."

What would that do to the locker room of the Chicago Bears? It would divide it right down the middle. You would have those who would side with Josh McCown. You would have those who would side with Jay Cutler. It would distract from the focus of the team, which is to win football games, and eventually a championship.

But, none of that has taken place. Instead, Josh McCown has taken the humble path. And thus, has created a unity in the locker room and in the entire organization of the Chicago Bears. And Jay Cutler has been named the starter for today's game against the Cleveland Browns.

The title of my message this morning is, "Unity through Humility." That's the message of Philippians 2:1-4. Of course, this theme picks up from our text last week in which Paul exhorted those in Philippi to "Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Philippians 1:27). The key manifestation of such conduct is unity, "so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel."

And in verses 1-4, Paul shows how to do this: through humility. Well, let's look at my first point. I'm calling it, ...

1. The Reality (verse 1)

In verse 1, Paul says, ...

Philippians 2:1

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion,

In this verse, Paul puts forth four statements. Paul couches all of these statements with an "if." "*If* there is any encouragement in Christ"; "*If* there is any consolation of love"; "*If* there is any fellowship of the Spirit"; "*If* any affection and compassion". But, in Paul's mind, these aren't doubts. In Paul's mind, these are certainties.

Here's the fact: there is encouragement in Christ; there is consolation of love; there is fellowship of the Spirit; there is affection and compassion.

It is entirely faithful to translate this verse, "Therefore *since* there is any encouragement in Christ, *since* there is any consolation of love, *since* there is any fellowship of the Spirit, *since* [there is] ... affection and compassion," (Phil 2:1), then, "make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose." (Phil 2:2).

In fact, you can even translate it, "Therefore *because* there is any encouragement in Christ, *because* there is any consolation of love, *because* there is any fellowship of the Spirit, *because* [there is] ... affection and compassion," (Phil 2:1), then, "make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose." (Phil 2:2).

The reason Paul says, "if," is for the sake of those in Philippi. He's trying to persuade them into following his counsel of chapter 1, verse 27, "Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel."

Rather than demanding that they be unified by coming down with an iron fist, Paul is seeking to give them reasons why they are to be unified. And it all has to do with the reality of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in their lives. That's what each of these four phrases is getting at. Jesus and the Spirit are very much a reality in the life of a believer. And so, we should strive for unity in the body.

Well, let's spend a few moments meditating upon each of these phrases.

a. Encouragement in Christ.

Encouragement. This is a very common word in the New Testament with several meanings. The word is used more than 100 times in the Bible. Literally, the word gives the picture of "calling along side of." It can mean, "encouragement," as translated here. It can mean, "exhortation." It can mean, "comfort." It's meaning is all determined by the context.

The best way to picture it is like a track coach counseling his athlete as he races in the mile, four times around the track. Picture his runner in the hunt after the first lap. The coach may "come along side" and shout out words of encouragement, "Keep going. Keep your pace. You can do it. You have a chance."

Picture his runner, falling behind after two laps. The coach may "come along side" and shout out words of exhortation, "Gotta pick up the pace! You have to run faster! Catch the leaders! C'mon, let's go!"

Picture his runner after three laps, clearly out of the race, suffering from cramps in his legs. The coach may "come along side" and shout out

words of comfort, "Keep going. Finish strong. You can do it. Don't worry about winning. Worry about finishing. Just do your best."

Here in verse 1, it's difficult to know exactly how to translate this word. We don't have a lot of context here. But, the picture is clear. It's of Jesus beside us, calling us to "conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel."

For some, this may come by way of encouragement, "You are doing well in the gospel. Keep going. Press on. It's worth it." For some, this may come by way of exhortation, "You can do better! There are some things in your life where you are slacking." For some, this may come by way of comfort, "I know that things in your life have been difficult. I know that you are seeking Me above all. Keep going. Focus your heart upon finishing well."

Perhaps all of these meanings have their place with the church in Philippi. The church was full of those doing well, who simply needed encouragement to press on. This is the entire tone of the letter. "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now." (Phil 1:3-5).

The Philippians had participated in the gospel. They were continuing to participate in the spread of the gospel. All they needed was encouragement. And Jesus gives such encouragement.

But, the church had some who were going through some difficult trials as well. Surely, they needed comfort in the midst of their distress.

Philippians 1:29-30

For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

Paul speaks here of how suffering is divinely given. Paul speaks here of how some were suffering with the same things he experienced. Paul was beaten for his faith in Philippi. Paul was imprisoned for his faith in Philippi. For those experiencing these things, surely they needed a little comfort. And Jesus gives such comfort.

But, the church had some who were not doing well and were in need of exhortation. Look over at chapter 4, verse 2. Here we see Paul exhorting two women, named Euodia and Syntyche. For some reason or another, they had a feud between themselves. Paul wrote in chapter 4, verse 2, "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord." The word Paul used here, "I urge" (NASB) or your translation may say, "I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord." (ESV). "I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord." (NIV). "I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord." (KJV). "I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord." (NKJV). It comes from the same root as what we have in our text today. Paul was urging them and entreating them and pleading with them and beseeching them and imploring them that they would live in harmony in the Lord. Literally, that they would be "of the same mind."

It is no accident that this is the same thing to which Paul calls us in chapter 2, verse 2, "be of the same mind." This is the issue at hand in our text this morning. This is the issue of what it means to "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (1:29).

And as they lacked, Paul exhorted them. And Jesus gives a similar exhortation.

That's our first phrase, "If there is any encouragement in Christ." Perhaps Paul was purposely vague in this phrase in order to say this, "If, indeed, Jesus comes and meets you wherever you are with a timely word, ..." And He does. And He is this morning. If you need encouragement, Jesus will give it. If you need comfort, Jesus will give it. If you need exhortation, Jesus will give it.

And this first phrase is getting at the active involvement of Jesus in our lives. He is involved! He is engaged!

This same issue is involved in our second phrase. "If there is any consolation of love."

b. Consolation of Love.

This phrase is talking about the comforting love that Jesus brings to His people. There's some overlap between this phrase and the first phrase, which might mean that the first phrase has more to do with exhortation than with comfort, unlike is the case with this phrase.

When Jesus came to this earth, His was a mission of love. Romans 5:8 tells us, "God demonstrates His own love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Ephesians 5:25 says, "Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her."

When walking with the disciples, we read in John 13:1 that Jesus loved them. "He loved them to the end." "He loved them to the uttermost." But, the love of Jesus wasn't a one-time event. He didn't love only during the 33 years that he was on the earth. No, His love is an eternal love. To Jeremiah, God said, "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3). When speaking of the church, we read in Ephesians 1:5, "In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself."

The love of Jesus for His people continues to this day. In Revelation 1:5 we read, "To Him who loves (present tense) us and released us from our sins by His blood." And with His love comes comfort. With His love comes consolation. With His love comes care and compassion. And Paul is saying, "If there is any comfort in His love for us."

Now to our third phrase, ...

c. Fellowship of the Spirit

This phrase refers to the active role of the Holy Spirit on our lives. Paul calls it here, the "Fellowship" of the Spirit. Literally, it means the "sharing" of the Spirit. That is, the active presence of the Holy Spirit.

Again, Paul's argument is the same. Philippians, "Is the Spirit real in your life? Is He genuinely with you? Has He shared His gifts with you?" Yes? Then, let's see them work! They work themselves out in unity.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he spoke about the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. He said, ...

1 Corinthians 12:4-7

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

In other words, the Holy Spirit shares His gifts with the church in all different sorts of ways. Not all get the same gift. Not all get the same ministry. Not all get the same effect. Rather, the Spirit distributes "to each one individually just as He wills" (1 Cor. 12:11).

But, it is only the One Spirit who shares. And He does so for the common good. He does so for the unity of the church (which is where Paul is headed in verse 2).

That is, "If there is any fellowship of the Spirit."

Finally, the fourth phrase, ...

d. Affection and Compassion.

Paul writes, "If any affection and compassion." This may be like the first three phrases, focusing primarily upon God's love and compassion for us which comes to us in abundance. But, notice, there is no qualifier here. He doesn't say, "If there is any affection from Christ Jesus." He doesn't say, "If there is any compassion from God, the Father."

So, it may be that this phrase is general in nature. God's affection and compassion for us. Our affection and compassion for others. It may even include affection and compassion on the horizontal level. We know from the first chapter of Philippians that Paul had a great affection for those in Philippi. Philippians 1:8 says, "For God is my witness how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus." We know from the first chapter of Philippians that Paul had a great compassion for those in Philippi. Chapter 1, verse 3, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you."

So, it may just be that this phrase is general, speaking of affection and compassion all around. Christ has done much for our souls. He has died for us. He has redeemed us. He has reconciled us to the Father. He has given us every good and perfect gift.

The call here is to respond rightly to Him. Love to God means love for others. Affection to God means affection to others. Experiencing His compassion means compassion to others.

Do we really have feelings for the Lord Jesus? Do we really have affection for Him in our heart? Is there genuine compassion in our hearts? Do we really care for other people? Such should be the case for every believer in Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:1

if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion,

Then, ...

Philippians 2:2

make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

This leads us to our second point. Because of The Reality (verse 1), we should ...

2. Seek Unity (verse 2)

Verse 2 is a call to unity. He uses four phrases that are almost identical: "be of the same mind", "maintain the same love", "be united in spirit", "be intent on one purpose." Paul's heart for the Philippians is for a united church. We saw this last week in chapter 1, verse 27, "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;"

This is the one thing that Paul wanted from the Philippians: their unity. If I come to you, I want to see it firsthand. If I can't come to you, I want to hear that you all are united.

Notice how the argument is the same at the end of chapter 1 and at the beginning of chapter 2. In verse 27, Paul says, The life worthy of the

gospel will work itself out in unity. In chapter 2, Paul says, If you genuinely have shared in the gospel, you will seek unity.

Now, for Paul, this was more than something that was good for the Philippians. For Paul, this was something that was good for Paul. He desired it. He says, "make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose." (Phil 2:2).

It is here that we see Paul, with the pastor's heart, open up to his genuine desires. He desires to see the Philippians church united in all ways. He knew Psalm 133 and the blessings of unity, ...

Psalm 133
Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brothers to dwell together in unity!
It is like the precious oil upon the head,
Coming down upon the beard,
Even Aaron's beard,
Coming down upon the edge of his robes.
It is like the dew of Hermon
Coming down upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the Lord commanded the blessing—life forever.

Paul knew how sweet unity was. Unity is like oil coming down upon the edge of Aaron's beard during the day of his installation as priest. A joyous time. A high time in the history of Israel. Unity is like the refreshing dew of Mount Hermon, which comes down into Israel to give them water and life. Unity is like the Dew of the Mountain.

I like the dew that comes down from the mountain. You all may not know this about me, but I'm a Dew connoisseur. In fact, in my office, I keep all kinds of Mountain Dew. I have the Original flavor (Green) begun in 1948. I have Code Red (Red, introduced in 2001). I have Live Wire (Orange, introduced in 2003). I have Mountain Dew Voltage (Blue, introduced in 2008). I have Mountain Dew White Out (White, introduced in 2010). In our family, we affectionately call them, "Green," "Red," "Orange," "Blue," and "White." There's nothing better than a Mountain Dew. I find these beverages refreshing and enjoyable.

This is what Psalm 133 says that unity is like. And Paul knew this.

But, beyond Psalm 133 (and the Scriptures), Paul knew from experience the joys of unity and the sorrows of disunity. The tone of this letter to the Philippians is much more pleasant than his tone in 2 Corinthians. Why? Because there was a general unity in Philippi that didn't exist in Corinth.

And if you have lived long enough, you know the joys of unity and the sorrows of disunity. Maybe you have seen it in your family. Brothers and sisters who haven't spoken with each other in years. It's painful. Holidays are very difficult times. All said and done, you really don't like to be with your family on Thanksgiving or Christmas because of the tension that exists.

Maybe you have seen it in your marriage (or in your parents' marriage). When husband and wife aren't getting along, it's painful for all who are around. It's no accident that divorce is so painful. It's the opposite of unity. Unity is sweet. Disunity is sour.

Maybe you have seen it in your workplace. People at work who simply can't get along. It leads to tension everywhere.

Maybe you have seen it in church. Resentments and feuds that have stirred for years. It leads to ugliness.

But, Paul says this -- when it comes to the church in Philippi -- Seek Unity (verse 2). This is what a worthy walk looks like. This is what will make Paul happy. He said, "make my joy complete [by being unified]."

Paul's happiness is similar to John's words in 3 John 4, "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth" (3 John 4). This is the same thing the Paul is saying.

Paul is saying that he would have no greater joy than to hear of those in Philippi walking in the truth of the gospel. Paul didn't use the phrase, "no greater joy." Instead, he used the phrase, "make my joy complete." These are essentially synonyms. They mean the same thing. They are talking about a superlative love! "My joy will be complete when I hear of those in Philippi walking in the truth of the gospel."

Again, we come to our theme: "Rejoice in the gospel." Paul would rejoice when he hears of the Philippians walking in the truth of the gospel, just like a parent who hears of his children walking in the truth (3 John 4). This is really what Paul is after. His heart is to rejoice in the work of the Lord.

Being a pastor is an incredible blessing in my life. I love being a pastor. I love sharing my life with all of you. I love sharing my love with all of you. I love being with your families. I love interacting with the kids of this church. I love seeing the gospel take root in your lives. I love seeing your commitment to Jesus grow. I love being a part of that.

But, there are times when being a pastor isn't so wonderful. It's when there is disunity in the church. It's when I hear of people in conflict with one another. It's painful. It's difficult. It's distracting.

At times, it can be all consuming. Because, part of my role as a pastor is to help facilitate reconciliation when there is disunity. And

reconciliation is very difficult.

If there is one thing that I have learned in pastoring it's this: Proverbs 18:19 is true. "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, And contentions are like the bars of a citadel." And there are times that I'm placed right in the middle of the mess. Two sides are warring with each other. and I'm thrust into the role of peacekeeper. And it is difficult. And when hearts are hard, it's impossible.

I remember one time at church when two families were at each other's throats. I remember talking with one of the husbands, and he told me of the wrongs that this other family did to his family, and how we should carry through with Matthew 18 and tell the whole church about the sin of this family. And within the hour, I called the husband of the other family, and he told me of the wrongs that the first family did to them, and how we should carry through with Matthew 18 and tell the whole church about the sin of this family. How are you ever going to reconcile this?

As it turned out, I was thrust into the role of a judge, and when I sided with one of the families, the other family left the church angry, leaving me a nasty letter in my mailbox during church. Eventually, the other family left as well. It was a painful time. It was painful for me. It was painful for both of these families. It was painful for other families who knew about these things and gathered around these two families, seeking to help them. How opposite from the blessings of unity.

It was not a joyful time to be a pastor. It's one of those things that I dread most of pastoring. Listen to John MacArthur's comments on these words, "From my own personal viewpoint, the thing I most hate in our church, the thing I most hate is spiritual apathy, indifference to the things of the Lord, indifference to holy truth, indifference to spiritual issues. That's the thing I most hate. But the thing I most fear is discord, disunity, conflict and division."

MacArthur continues, "My constant prayer for this blessed church of which we're all a part is that men will never tear asunder what God has joined together. But that is a constant battle. And I would say to you that endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the church is easily the most pressing difficult and constant activity of spiritual oversight. Unquestionably it is the major issue of spiritual leadership." [\[2\]](#)

And here in Philippians 2, Paul is seeking to put forth his spiritual leadership, encouraging unity in the church. Notice the four things that Paul calls the church in Philippi to do. Four things that would complete his joy -- by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

Really quickly, let's take each of these phrases individually.

a. Being of the same mind.

This is talking about thinking the same way. Certainly, this is talking about the gospel. For genuine unity here at Rock Valley Bible Church, we need to think the same thing about Jesus -- how He lived perfectly; how He died unjustly; how He raised triumphantly; how He died as our substitute; how faith in Him justifies us before the Lord.

But, Paul is getting at something deeper than this. He wants us to think about each other in the same way. Remember Euodia and Syntyche? Paul exhorted them to "live in harmony in the Lord." Literally, he said, "be of the same mind in the Lord." It's the same phrase as used here in chapter 2, verse 2.

I don't think that their problem was one of differing views of the gospel. I think that their problem was of differing views about circumstances in church life. And Paul was telling them to see things the same way. "Think the same way, so as to build unity."

But, there is more than merely thinking the same way. Paul also says, ...

b. Maintaining the same love

The first phrase addressed our heads. This second phrase addresses our hearts.

Paul's talking about having a love for each other. He's talking about having the heart of sacrifice. He's talking about having the heart of devotion. He's talking about having the heart of care for each other. He's talking about having love that matches. "My love for you is on the same level as your love for me."

c. United in spirit

Literally, Paul says, "united in soul." Paul is getting to our inner being. He is getting as deep as he can. He is going beyond our thoughts, beyond our feelings, and into our souls. He desires that we be united in our souls. The English Standard Version says that we should be "in full accord."

Such is the call to Christian love. It's not merely external, as in, "what can you do for me?" No, it's much deeper than that. It's a soul bonding that should take place in our hearts. Such is the unity created among believers in Jesus Christ.

Finally, ...

d. Intent on one purpose

This gets back to the first phrase. Literally, this phrase can be translated (as in the ESV), "of one mind." Such is the call of unity in our lives. We are called to have the same mind. The same mind toward the gospel. The same mind toward one another.

When we have the same head, same heart, same soul, one mind, then unity will exist. At this point, there are two big questions on the table. The first comes by way of application. Is this your heart for this church? Do you know of this? Have you experienced this? Are you striving to reach this?

You can't do this by simply looking in on the outside. There needs to be a level of involvement and engagement with the people of the church. There needs to be time in which your thinking intersects with the thinking of others, which eventually molds into thinking similarly. Are you experiencing this right now at Rock Valley Bible Church?

The second question comes by way of enablement. How in the world is this going to happen? We are different people. We come from different walks of life. We have different experiences. How are we going to know any of this unity?

This leads us to our final point. In light of The Reality (verse 1), God's call on our life is to Seek Unity (verse 2). This can only be done, ...

3. Through Humility (verses 3-4)

That's what verses 3 and 4 are talking about.

Philippians 2:3-4

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

On the one hand, these words are simple. But, on the other hand, these words are incredibly difficult. They are simple to understand. They are extremely difficult to apply.

Verse 3, ...

Philippians 2:3

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, ...

We are selfish creatures. We are inherently looking out for our own well being. We are inherently looking out for our own good. We like it when people speak well of us. We like it when people look up to us.

But, Paul says, "Wipe that all away." "Do nothing from a self-centered motive." "Do nothing that would give you praise from others." "Don't live inwards, looking for your own self. Rather, live outwards, seeking only the good of others."

Philippians 2:3

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;

Practically, this can happen in many ways. Let others go through the line first, because they are more important than you. Help others with their projects, because their projects are more important than your projects. Speak well of others in such a way that demonstrates that they are more important and significant than you are. Listen to what others have to say, because their words are more important than your words.

And this will only happen when you genuinely think this way about others. In other words, letting others go first or helping others or speaking well of others isn't a show. It's not like you are putting on a show of humility. Rather, it's because this is genuinely what you believe. This is genuinely what you think

Look again at verse 3, ...

Philippians 2:3

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;

Think of them as more important than yourselves. And I tell you, this goes against every ounce of our being. This goes against everything that we think. This goes against everything that we feel. But, such is the only path to true, genuine unity. When you have a group of people, all setting others as more important than themselves -- deferring decisions, deferring preferences, overlooking sin, seeing past weaknesses -- only then will you see genuine unity.

Now, you say, that's impossible. How can anyone live like that?

Well, beginning in verse 19 of chapter 2, we will see an illustration of such a life. Timothy lived such a life. Listen to the apostle Paul.

Philippians 2:19-22

But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after

their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father.

Now, this isn't saying that Timothy was a perfect man. It's not saying that Timothy lived this out fully. Rather, this is to say that Timothy was ready and willing to leave his own comforts and serve those in Philippi, considering them as more important than his own comforts, and thereby promoting unity in their church by way of example.

Paul repeats the same thing in verse 4, ...

Philippians 2:4
do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

The New American Standard has the word, "merely" in italics, which means that this word was not in the original text, but that the translators put it here to help make things clear. The "merely" comes about because of the "also" toward the end of the verse. It helps smooth the way for Paul's insistence upon looking out for the interests of others. However, literally, Paul says, ...

Philippians 2:4
do not look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

These words place strong emphasis upon looking out for the interests of others and not our own. Let's not soften these words. Let's allow them to stand in their full force. It's the only way that genuine unity will ever come about. True unity comes through humility. Unity through humility.

And the only way that humility will come about is through Jesus Christ. That's the point of verse 5, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ..." (Phil 2:5). But, we will look at this next week.

Well, I opened my message by talking about Josh McCown, the backup quarterback for the Chicago Bears. I want to finish by reading a newspaper article written by Tom Musick, written a few days ago. The article was entitled, "Digging Mission on McCown comes up empty."

LAKE FOREST -

Let's get real.

Deep down inside, Bears quarterback Josh McCown must have been fuming mad. He must have been punching walls. He must have been swearing up a storm.

Because all of this Mr. Humble Teammate stuff made for great sound bites on TV, but there was no way a millionaire quarterback possibly could be this gracious and selfless. You win NFC player of the week and you get benched for Jay Cutler the very next day, and you smile and shrug it off as the best decision for the team?

Please. Not buying it.

The time had come to discover the dirt on McCown from inside of the Bears' locker room.

"Any dirt?" receiver Earl Bennett said. "Nothing, man."

"None," right tackle Jordan Mills said. "I like to say Josh is like the white version of me."

"That's the real deal, man," offensive lineman Eben Britton said. "There's no dirt."

Whatever.

We all know the saying: If it seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Both on and off of the field, McCown seems too good to be true. He stepped in for an injured Cutler and set a team record with three consecutive games with 300-plus passing yards. And once the Bears cleared Cutler to play, McCown stepped aside without complaint.

"I understand my role on this team," McCown said. "It's the backup quarterback. So, that being said, if Jay is healthy, he's ready to go. I'll support him and help him as much as I can."
Barf.

So maybe my dirt-digging mission wasn't going to unearth some sort of secret criminal past. At least tell me that McCown dropped a bunch of swear words when he was in the huddle.

"No," Britton said. "He chews gum the entire game. He comes into the huddle chewing gum. 'All right, guys, here we go! We've got flex right, twin, 784...!' Something like that.

"That's what you love about Josh. You love him as a teammate."

OK, so he didn't swear.

At least tell me that he clenched his fist and screamed something like, "Fiddlesticks!"

"I've never seen him get frustrated," Bennett said with a smile. "I've never seen him get mad, turn red, nothing. He's just a great guy."

Wait a minute.

This was starting to feel like one of those situations in which players on offense looked out for one another. What happens on offense stays on offense. Gotcha.

Maybe somebody on the defense would dish some dirt. They hate quarterbacks, right?

Defensive end David Bass offered a behind-the-scenes glimpse into McCown.

"Say they'd get a three-and-out and they'd have to punt," Bass said.

Yes, failure!

This should be good.

"He'd say, 'Yo, D, we need you one more time. Keep it coming. We're going to help you on our end,' " Bass said. "He's always like that. Always positive reinforcement coming from him.

"So, I don't think he's acting. That's from the heart."

Almost all hope was lost.

McCown was as genuine as advertised. There was no dirt. He was unblemished.

At least, it seemed that way until Britton heaved a "Hail Mary" pass toward a determined dirt-digger.

"He has a tattoo," Britton said.

Finally. Something.

You know who else has tattoos? Prisoners.

"It's pretty [great]," Britton said.

Only, Britton didn't say great. He said a word that McCown never would say. It started with "bad" and ended with another description for "donkey."

Armed with this information, it was time to grill the veteran quarterback.

McCown's group interview already had ended, and if he were like most other players on the team, he would have turned down any additional requests. But he stopped what he was doing and politely agreed to answer a few more questions. What a mistake.

The tattoo, Josh.

We know about it.

Are you going to fess up, or what?

McCown lifted up his right sleeve to reveal a tattoo of a large cross on his right shoulder. Inside the cross was the face of a lion.

"It's just my faith," McCown said. "It's a cross with a lion in it, and the lion represents Christ. And, obviously, the cross.

"As a follower of Christ, that's what is central to my faith. So, that's all it is."

It was time to stop digging.

McCown really was a nice guy.

Fiddlesticks. [\[3\]](#)

I don't know Josh McCown personally. I have heard nothing about his faith in Jesus other than this article. I have never heard him speak about his faith. But, such is a good illustration of humility -- how it will only come about through the power of Jesus Christ. You will never be humble apart from Him, and that's my message next week. So come back and listen.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on December 15, 2013 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] <http://www.hubarkush.com/2013/12/10/mccown-shines-but-cutler-still-the-starter/bbowbgy/>

[2] <http://www.gty.org/resources/Sermons/50-12>

[3] <http://www.daily-chronicle.com/2013/12/13/musick-dirt-digging-mission-on-mccown-comes-up-empty/akceqaa/>