

An Unnatural Way to Live

Humility, Part 2

Philippians 2:2-4

Today we take another look at the subject of humility.

In our last study, I began with several statistics on how people viewed themselves as above average – even as superior to others.

One of the men in our church came up afterward and asked me if I'd seen a recent publication by Tim Keller. I hadn't seen it – but got a copy and read it this past week.

In his book, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, this pastor and author, wrote on the subject of how we view ourselves – and how that has changed in our generation.

He wrote, “Up until the 20th century, traditional cultures always believed that too high a view of yourself was the root cause of all the evil in the world. In other words, why are there crimes and violence? Why are people abused? Why are people cruel? The answer traditionally was that people had too high a view of themselves – that was the reason given for why people misbehaved. However, in our modern culture, we have developed an utterly opposite cultural consensus. It now forms the basis for education, the foundation of most modern legislation and the starting point for most modern counseling. It is the exact opposite [perspective]. Our belief today – and it is deeply rooted in everything – is that people misbehave because they have too low a view of themselves. They lack self-esteem. So the reason husbands abuse their wives and people turn to crime is because they have too low a view of themselves – they don't have enough self-esteem.

Keller goes on to write, “Only recently have secular psychologists begun challenging this

viewpoint. One such professional wrote an article for the New York Times in which she quoted three current studies into the subject of self-esteem that has discovered – no surprise to the Bible student – and I quote – “people with a high [view of themselves] pose a greater threat to those around them than people with a low view of themselves.”ⁱ

I cannot even begin to connect the dots with how this perspective distorts the foundation of education – how it creates rampant self-centeredness, even tyranny – how it damages relationships beyond repair.

This is why every child now has to get an A and parents are likely to sue the school district if their child doesn't make the ball team; this is why every dream has to come true if you believe in whom? – in yourself – this is why sinful behavior is now just a bad choice – and it's bad because it harms your sense of well-being; this is why the gospel is marginalized for people who obviously don't think much of themselves and need extra help.

Perfectly illustrated in a recent interview with the former mayor of New York City – now in his 70's – he admitted to his growing sense of mortality as a number of his former college classmates have passed away. The reporter commented, “But if you think the Mayor has any doubt what will await him at Judgment Day, think again: he pointed to his work on gun safety, obesity and reducing the number of people who smoked in his city; he said to the reporter with a grin: “I am telling you if there is God, when I get to heaven I am not stopping to be interviewed. I am heading straight in. I have earned my place in heaven. It's not even close.”ⁱⁱ

Beloved, nobody gets into the family of God without stooping – in humility; acknowledging that there is nothing of ourselves worthy of saving – there is nothing in ourselves capable of earning salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9).

How humbling is that?

Listen, this dangerous attitude of self-importance – which is a gateway to hell; this high view of self which is so destructive in every relationship in so many ways – isn't really a new problem.

If you traveled back to the days of the Apostle Paul, the Roman perspective would have been very similar to ours; they encouraged and applauded anyone's attempt to attain public status and any means to promote one's own honor.

It was all about developing a high view of yourself.

In fact, one of Rome's best-selling authors during the days of Paul had written that the entire population in the Roman Empire was enslaved to their desire for fame.ⁱⁱⁱ

Paul knew that there would be nothing more profoundly devastating to the church than people with a high view of themselves – people with self-centered agendas – pride running for position and preeminence; and he also knew that there would be nothing more profoundly encouraging than humility – humble people with a servant-hearted agenda.

In Philippians chapter 2, Paul has effectively begun a discussion on this subject.

In *verse 1* – which we covered last Lord's day – Paul said, "Listen, if this is true and this is true and this is true – then something ought to happen as a result."

Remember?

Verse 1 – paraphrased –

- ***If there really is encouragement in Christ*** – and there is:
- ***if there is any consolation of love in Christ*** – and there is
- ***if there is any fellowship of the Spirit*** – and there is
- ***if there is any affection and compassion in Him*** – and there is
- ***then, make my joy complete by being of the same mind***

Now why would Paul effectively tell the church in Philippi to remain unified? They were an amazing church.

Most New Testament scholars believe this church had already begun to fracture, and this letter from Paul will address it later on specifically.

Which means:

- even though the church in Philippi was wonderfully supportive of Paul –
- even though they brought him great joy every time he prayed for them –
- just because they understood the value of the gospel;
- they were still in danger of dividing

John MacArthur writes in his commentary on this text the warning Paul has in mind: he writes, the church at Philippi was for the most part theologically sound, devoted, moral, loving, zealous, courageous, prayerful, and generous. Yet it faced the danger of discord that often is generated by only a few people. Such troublemakers can stir up the contention and strife that fractures an entire congregation. Now . . . follow this thought – although sound doctrine, moral purity and passionate commitment to the Lord and to His work are essential to a church's effective ministry, they alone cannot guarantee protection from discord. Thus, Paul gently but firmly pleads with them to be diligently on guard against it.^{iv}

So Paul writes to this church and every church since, ***make my joy complete*** – make my joy top the charts – by ***being of the same mind***.

By the way, being of the same mind is the main verb in these verses – all these other actions that follow are secondary – in other words, they describe what it looks like to be of one mind.

Before we take a look at them, let me tell you ahead of time, they are all unnatural – that is, they don't come naturally.

Paul is going to call them – and us – to humility; and that happens to be an unnatural way of living; which is another way of saying – we are to live supernaturally; living by means of the supernatural power and perspective of the Holy Spirit as we humbly submit to Him.

What does that look like?

Well, first of all, Paul writes in *verse 2* – it looks like this – ***maintaining the same love***.

1. **We'll call this characteristic, loving intentionally.**

Maintaining the same love; by the way, would you notice that Paul didn't write, loving the same things.^v

And Paul uses the word *agape* for love – it's the New Testament word of loving by volition; it's making up your mind to love; which is why Paul can command it.

It isn't sourced in feelings or emotions, but in the will.

In fact, we're told to love – agape – **not with word or tongue, but in deed and truth (1 John 3:18)**. John also writes that ***we know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren (1 John 3:14)***.

We don't all love the same things, but we share the same love.

We have all received the love of God through Christ. And we're to demonstrate that by taking that same kind of selfless love and live it out with each other.

And would you also notice that Paul is taking us beyond loving only those who love us? He isn't telling us here to maintain a love for those who love you; he isn't telling us here to love those who are loveable, either.

None of us are loveable all the time. I'm sure some of you are. Some of us are probably loveable 2 or 3 days a week . . . in a good week.

We're all a little like porcupines – we have some good points, but it's difficult to get too close.^{vi}

But now we're in the same family – and we're actually going to live together forever.

The kind of living Paul wants the church to begin rehearsing is going to require a mind governed by selfless humility – because humility overflows with genuine, practical love for others.^{vii}

Paul goes on in **verse 2 to add, united in spirit**.

We are not only to be loving intentionally, we are to be:

2. Secondly, living harmoniously.

United in spirit

This is one Greek word – *sumpsuchos* (σὺμψυχος) – it means “one souled” – used only here in the New Testament.^{viii}

Sumpsuchos means living harmoniously.^{ix}

Harmony cannot happen without humility.

In fact, the prefix *sum* in this word – *sumpsuchos* – begins our word for symphony.

And a symphony is a great illustration of a unified church.

Different talents . . . different instruments . . . beautiful harmony.

But can you imagine a symphony that has a tuba player determined to play whenever he wants and whatever he wants?

Can you imagine the guy in the London Symphony who plays the tympani – better known as the kettle drums – demanding that he be given a solo at each performance or he just won't play at all.

There would be one word to describe him – unemployed.

The church happens to be a symphony composed of different instruments . . . different people . . . different ages . . . different backgrounds . . . different skill levels . . . absolutely wonderful at playing one instrument but more than likely unable to play any other instrument with the same skill; but we all combine to make different contributions to the music; all the while endeavoring to keep the same time and play evenly with everyone else – and always keeping an eye on the Chief Conductor of the church, who is Jesus Christ.

We are to be loving intentionally.

We are to be living harmoniously.

3. Third, we are to be longing cooperatively.

Notice the next description of this unnatural life. The last part of **verse 2 – intent on one purpose**.

We have the same longing – the same passion.

If we take from chapter one Paul's primary focus of challenging us to live lives worthy of the gospel (1:27), this cooperative longing here in chapter 2 would tie together with the idea of living in such a way that we glorify God by obeying Jesus Christ.

And what did Christ primarily command the church? The Lord gave us what we call the great commission – sometimes referred to as the great omission, because the church at large has chosen to opt out of the command.

Before ascending the Lord commanded us to be His witnesses – as we go into all the world and make disciples we are to baptize them and teach them all that Christ commanded us (**Matthew 28 and Acts 1**).

This is our primary purpose as a church and as believers.

We are witnesses, cooperating together as a local assembly in glorifying God through obedience to Christ.

Which means we're taking the gospel to our world.

Listen, if there is one thing the devil delights in, it is distracting the believer and the church from cooperating together in a global strategy – to just think about ourselves.

Whatever you do, don't get passionate about glorifying God by joining the Father who *seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth* (John 4:23).

Whatever you do, only think about your immediate living condition – that's natural; don't think about some global commission – that's unnatural.

So is our church naturally minded, or supernaturally minded?

And what is my personal contribution by way of cooperation?

Here's humility – and it doesn't come naturally:
Loving intentionally
Living harmoniously
Longing cooperatively

This is what humility *looks like*.

Now Paul goes further to tell us what humility does *not* look like.

Notice verse 3. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit.

Do nothing from selfishness – that is, do nothing that is motivated by self.

How unnatural is that?!

The word Paul uses here was translated in chapter 1 and verse 17 as selfish ambition.

It's the word *eritheia* (ἐριθεια) and it originally referred to a day laborer – primarily for those who cut and bound wheat sheaves together – they were paid daily. Later on, in time, the word became a reference for people seeking personal wealth or even a political office by self-centered methods. And then finally, by the time of Paul's letter, the word referred most often to someone who jockeyed for position and power – someone motivated by selfish ambition.^x

Jockeying for position – now that's natural.

This was Diotrephes, John the Apostle wrote of, who loved the preeminence. He was always jockeying and conniving and manipulating to be first in line.

Selfishness is a consuming and destructive sin – it destroys and deceives and manipulates and self-destructs – because the primary casualty is the person who manifests it.^{xi}

And you can understand why Paul would warn the church of this characteristic. Discord and division are inevitable when people jockey for position in the church – when people focus on their own agenda – when the body is divided into their own self-serving agendas.

I read several years ago a biography of Jonathan Edwards, one of the leaders of the Great Awakening in the 1700's.

This particular biography included a look into the marriage of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards.

The title of the book is *Marriage to a Difficult Man*.

What a title . . . how many women love that title - *Marriage to a Difficult Man* – don't raise your hands.

My wife gave me the book for Christmas . . . I don't know why.

One particular chapter recorded the conflict in the church he pastored following the collapse of their balcony. The leadership had to put their heads together to come up with a seating arrangement. Unlike our churches today, everyone back then sat in the same seat.

You don't do that, do you?

Well, back in the 1700's, you were actually assigned your seat. And the seats were typically arranged by how important a person was perceived to be. They seated 6 people per row on the ground floor – which was preferred – and they squeezed 9 people into a pew in the balcony.

Listen to this – the coveted seats were in the very front – just like Colonial.

Amazing.

But now, since there was no balcony . . . everyone had to be reassigned to make room. The biographer records from Jonathan Edwards own journal how the deacons and church officials toiled for hours upon hours over the seating chart and finally worked out a plan that seemed to ruffle the least feathers.^{xii}

How's that for distraction? It's all about where I sit.

Humility is the opposite of selfishness.

Now notice, Paul also refers to *empty conceit* here in this verse.

Empty conceit is compound word, literally translated "empty glory".

The old English called it vainglory. Personal vanity . . . self-promotion.^{xiii}

Self-conceit, Paul points out, is essentially empty. It is an attempt to get glory but in reality it's really nothing more than empty, exaggerated importance.

One of the favorite things my grandson Nicholas enjoys is having us blow up a balloon and then hand it to him – he laughs as the balloon fizzes out in his hands, or if he lets it go, it zigzags around the room as the air rushes out.

That's the idea here.

Self-conceit is like that balloon – it's full . . . but at the same time, it's empty. And the larger it stretches on the outside, the bigger the emptiness on the inside.^{xiv}

It's really just full of hot air.

- You want an empty life? Live for yourself.
- You want a full life? Empty yourself . . . of self.

But that's not natural . . . you're right. That will take the supernatural presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

In fact, Paul goes on to describe two more unnatural aspects of humility that further establish unity in the church.

a. First, there is an unnatural realization

Notice – verse 3, with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves

That's an unnatural realization - other people are more important than you are!

He can't mean it . . . really?

The word here translated “regard – *regard one another as more important*” is a word that refers to a settled conclusion. It isn't play acting or patronizing; you actually come to the conclusion that other people are more important than you are.^{xv}

And notice what allows you to arrive at such a conclusion – notice the first part of the phrase again – *with humility of mind regard one another as more important*.

With humility of mind – that's one word in the original language that means – with a lowly mindset.^{xvi}

Now that's not a reference to some sort of “poor me syndrome . . . I'm no good, I think I'll go eat some worms . . . I'm so inferior.”

The mindset Paul is referring to here – *with humility of mind* – is a mindset that actually forgets about oneself entirely.

They don't think well of themselves; they don't think badly of themselves – when it comes to this immediate context of the church, they are the peoples who don't think of themselves at all.

And when they do, they consider everyone else in the body as more important than themselves.

Listen, none of us should be running around the church saying “I am good at everything”; nor should we say, “I am no good at anything.” Either mindset hurts the church and that person and ultimately fails to give glory to God as our Creator.

The word translated *more important* here in this text means “to be superior.”^{xvii}

In other words, a humble person doesn't view himself as superior to anybody.

This is the attitude of Paul when he said he was *the least of the Apostles (1 Corinthians 15:9)* and even *the least of all the saints (Ephesians 3:8)*.

He wasn't grousing or groveling or having a pity party. He had come to the conclusion that he was superior to no one.

This is an unnatural realization, isn't it!

Wouldn't this remove all competition in the Body of Christ? Wouldn't this eliminate all ungodly comparison . . . no more jockeying for position . . . no more gossip . . . everyone views the other person ahead of them.

The favorite expression in the church would be, “You first . . . no, after you.” Try that out in the parking lot as you leave today . . . it'll be the most unnatural thing you've ever seen.

There are no big shots in the body of Christ.

No one is out to win points . . . or popularity . . . or some prized platform of attention. We all play our part, according to the Divine Director of the Symphony.

I love the illustration that perfectly sets this in context: an older woman wrote an article about the wedding her grandson was going to be in – he was the ring bearer. He was 5 years old and was quite active, as you can imagine – he was obviously the wildcard in the upcoming ceremony. He is why many of us go to weddings – we want to see what the ring bearer does . . . or the flower girl.

Anyway, Grandma devised a clever plan and at the rehearsal said, “Listen, I think I'll give a prize tomorrow to the person who does the best job in the wedding – they'll be the most important person there and they'll win a prize.

The next day she wrote, “We were all holding our breath; but when it was time, the little ring

bearer performed his role perfectly. During the reception, when his grandmother told him that he had won the prize, he was excited and relieved. He said, “I was pretty sure I had it . . . until she came in wearing that white dress and everybody stood up . . . then I started thinking . . . she might win.”

Imagine . . . the least consequential person in the wedding thought it was all about him.

Are we any less silly in our comparisons and competitions?

Unity in humility is *based* on an unnatural recognition.

b. Secondly, unity as a body of believers is built on an unnatural resolution

Notice verse 4. Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

An unnatural realization says: other people are more important than me.

An unnatural resolution says: other needs are more important than mine.

Don't merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

The natural thing to do is to look out for number one.

The words translated “to look out for” come from the Greek verb, *skopeo* (σκοπεω), which means to *make this your aim in life*.^{xviii}

You get out of bed in the morning and it's all about your own personal interests.

I found it interesting that *skopeo* – to look out for – is used in our word for telescope – and microscope.

We pull out our metaphorical telescope and look way down the path of our lives as far as we can see and we try and scope out what's going to happen and then we prepare for it. We plan for it. We save for it.

Or we pull out our microscope and evaluate all the details of our daily lives – all the events, relationships, problems, issues, needs – and we focus on them – we talk about them – we pray only about them – we worry about them – we fret over them.

That kind of telescope and microscope activity is natural – that comes easy.

Paul is effectively saying here that humility of mind takes a telescope and trains it on the needs and concerns we see in someone else's life.

It takes the microscope and evaluates ways that we can help them, or encourage them, or pray for them, or support them.

One author and pastor said, “Paul makes us face the question, “Why do I do what I am doing in the church, in the home at my workplace? Am I driven by self-centered motives, even when I am supposedly helping others? Am I self-serving even while serving others, wanting and hoping to be noticed, so that I receive the appreciation and recognition that I think I deserve? Whether I express it outwardly or not, do I nurse resentment when my hard work is ignored or my ideas are not followed?”^{xix}

Whose interests am I really pursuing?!

Tim Keller is right . . . our culture today applauds self-promotion; a high view of ourselves; but it then reduces our capacity for humility; accountability; even self-sacrificing hard work for the benefit of someone else.

I came across a fascinating list of nurse duties, from 1887. They were catalogued in a book entitled *Quest for Character*, by Chuck Swindoll, printed 30 years ago.

Nine duties for nurses in 1887:

1. Daily sweep and mop the floors of your ward, dust the patient's furniture and window sills
2. Maintain an even temperature in your ward by bringing in coal for the day's business
3. Light is important to observe the patient's condition; therefore, each day fill kerosene lamps and trim wicks; wash the windows once a week
4. The nurse's notes are important in aiding the physician's work; make your pens carefully
5. Each nurse on day duty will report every day at 7 A.M. and leave at 8 P.M. except on Sunday, on which you may have 2 hours off duty
6. Graduate nurses in good standing with the director of nurses ill e given an evening off each week for courting purposes and two evenings a week if you attend church regularly
7. Any nurse who smokes, uses liquor in any form, gets her hair done at a salon or frequents dance halls shall give the

- director of nurses good reason to suspect her integrity and intentions
8. Each nurse should lay aside from each payday a goodly sum of her earnings for her benefits during her declining years so that she will not become a burden; for example, if you earn \$30 a month, you should set aside \$15.
 9. The nurse who performs her labors and serves her patients and doctors faithfully for a period of 5 years shall be given an increase by the hospital administration of five cents a day.^{xx}

Your natural reaction is, how in the world . . . and why in the world would anyone want that job?

The gospel effectively trains us for this kind of self-forgetful humility and self-sacrifice.

In fact, in the mind of the Spirit of God, through the Apostle Paul, this is how to serve one another; this is how to combat divisions and distractions and personal agendas and pride in the local church – and in every one our hearts –

Paul writes – this is how we live and serve together, ***being of the same mind***; here’s what that looks like:

- ***maintaining the same love*** – that’s **loving intentionally**;
- ***united in one spirit*** – that’s **living harmoniously**;
- ***intent on one purpose*** – that’s **longing cooperatively** and that will take humility of mind;
- which leads to an **unnatural realization** – other people are more important than we are;
- **it leads to an unnatural resolution** – other people’s needs are more important than ours are.

This is going to be an unnatural way to live . . . a supernatural way to live; with humility of mind:

- bringing glory to Christ
- a unifying influence to the church
- service to others
- and the gospel to the world.

You want an empty life – fill it with yourself
You want a full life – empty it of yourself

It is an unnatural way – but it is the *only* way – to live a life worth living.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 2/22/2015 by Stephen Davey.

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