

**Sermon preached by Mr. Justin Sembler at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
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CHRIST-LIKE HUMILITY

Philippians 2:1-11

About fifteen years ago, I was watching *60 Minutes* on a Sunday evening when they ran a piece on two men by the names of Bennett Cohen and Jerry Greenfield, better known as Ben and Jerry of the Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream fame.

Now, I love ice cream as much as any man, perhaps more than most men. Maybe that is why I was initially drawn to the program. However, as the interviews with Ben and Jerry, front office management, and ice cream manufacturing workers went on, I found that I was most intrigued by a unique company policy that Ben and Jerry instituted from the inception of their now multi-million dollar business.

The policy is simple: The highest paid executive at Ben and Jerry's could not make more than seven times that of the lowest paid worker on the manufacturing floor. That means that if the lowest paid worker made around \$20,000 then the highest paid exec could only make around \$140,000, a small salary for a professional running a successful ice cream operation.

The reason this policy intrigued me had a lot to do with seeing my father, grandfathers, and other family members working for GM and DuPont where I knew no such policy existed. In fact, some of my father's immediate supervisors were making double what he was making. This said nothing of what the top executives of his company were making, most in the high six-figure range. For Ben and Jerry to go this far for their employees seemed very admirable to me.

Due to increases in business and the demand for more Ben and Jerry's, the two men have been forced to hire an actual CEO that commands much more than seven times that of the lowest paid worker. However, Ben and Jerry did institute a new policy that guarantees each of its workers a livable wage based on national cost of living reports. In addition to this, each worker may take home, each night, up to three pints of ice cream. Not too shabby. These benefits are very admirable and say a lot about the selflessness and dedication these two men have for their workers. At first glance, you might even say that Ben and Jerry embody Paul's words to the Philippians in the passage we just read.

They seem one in spirit and purpose as they look out for the welfare of their workers. Though their fame is great, they seem to be doing nothing out of selfish ambition, rather they seem quite humble and are considering their workers to be equal, if not better, than themselves. And finally, by paying a livable wage, they seem to be looking out for the interest of others and not just their bottom line.

If all of that is true, if any secular organization or philanthropist can embody the characteristics of humility that Paul has laid out here in Philippians, then what is it that makes us as followers of Christ different? What do we have that will enable us to live genuinely humble lives before others and before Christ for the long haul?

PAUL’S THREEFOLD DIRECTIVE

Let’s look at the text together to see what Paul is communicating through God’s Holy Word.

Philippians 2:1-4:

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Most commentators agree that for the most part, the people of Philippi were doing these things without reservation. However, there was obviously some concern on Paul’s part that there were some who weren’t buying in.

He wanted to be sure that each Christian in Philippi understood that these things were non-negotiable in the Christian life.

If you look at verse 2 through 4, you will see that Paul is giving the Philippians a directive for living life together. William Hendricksen, in his commentary on Philippians calls this “the Threefold Directive.”

Paul’s Threefold Directive is this:

- ❑ **Verse 2: Oneness** – This is what Paul means by like-mindedness, having the same love, being one in spirit and in purpose.
- ❑ **Verse 3: Lowliness** – “Do nothing out of selfish ambition – in humility consider others better than yourself.”
- ❑ **Verse 4: Helpfulness** – Looking to the interest of others above yourselves.

Hendricksen states that Paul is not giving “three directives,” but “one directive with three graces, very closely related.” Essentially, this means that you can’t live out any one single part of this directive without living out the other two.

So why is this directive so important in the life of the Christian, and how do we live it out in our daily lives over the period of a lifetime?

In his commentary on the Philippians, James Montgomery Boice states, “There are constant pressures from sin within Christians. These will eventually destroy Christian

unity and render our witness useless unless they are offset by the supernatural realities of Christian comfort, fellowship, love, mercy, and compassion.”

I would also add to this list, the genuine humility that is only possible when we cling to the cross.

Why was Paul able to so genuinely urge the people of Philippi on in all humility?

Because he recognized his own need for true Christ-like humility.

After all, wasn't it Paul who stated in 1 Corinthians 15:9 that he was “the least of all apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

Again in 1 Timothy 1:15 Paul calls himself the “worst of all sinners.”

Again William Hendricksen states, “It took a humble minded cross-bearer to urge humble-mindedness. Isn't Paul's humility also one of the reasons why even in the midst of his imprisonment, facing a verdict, he was filled with joy? The man who has learned to view himself as a great sinner before God appreciates God's saving grace, and thanks God in the midst of tears.”

Isn't that the truth? Isn't it our sin that keeps us humble?

The fact that we are sinful beings should cause us not to look upon others with disdain, but to fall on our knees and cause us to follow the example of Christ's humility all the more.

Thankfully, it is God's amazing grace that makes it clear that we are not on our own in our quest to live out the Christian life in this way

Effectively, Paul is saying “if you have been transformed by the life-changing grace of God as I have, **Then Do These Things!**”

However, Paul, never one to let an argument rest on its own merits, takes it up a notch in verses 5-11 by pointing to Christ, the ultimate example of humility.

Let's take a closer look at verses 5-8 once again.

Philippians 2:5-8:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!

We have before us the ultimate example of perfect humility in Jesus Christ, fully God, fully Man, and yet He did not for a moment consider his equality with God something to be grasped, He made Himself nothing.

After all, wasn't it Jesus, when called by the rich young man "Good Teacher," who was quickest to say, "no one is good but God alone"?

And what of His making Himself nothing? Does that indicate that for even a few moments on the cross that He ever stopped being the Sovereign God of the universe?

Of course not! We have a Savior that emptied Himself of all but love and His being fully God. He made Himself nothing by becoming God incarnate and carrying our burdens as we carry them.

As Boice points out: "Think of what the self-denial of Jesus meant to the spotless Lamb of God. In the first place, it meant living in a world of impurity and of the most revolting sin. Imagine yourself stepping for an hour into the lowest moral environment you can imagine, in the company of rapists, murderers, or hardened criminals awaiting execution. That would only be a suggestion of what the incarnation meant to Christ."

While visiting Joshua Hall in Federal prison, he gave me a snapshot of "the lowest moral environment."

To quote Joshua, "this place is so filthy, the dirt of this place permeates you."

- ❑ Fellow inmates always scheming
- ❑ Hundreds of criminal minds working together simultaneously everyday
- ❑ There is nothing positive
- ❑ This is why Jesus spoke of visiting our brothers when they are imprisoned
- ❑ Christian love and hope is all Joshua is clinging to right now

And yet, that prison environment is only a shadow of what it was like for Jesus the spotless lamb to enter into our world. And yet He did!

Having this perfect example of humility in Christ, let's take a look at what Jesus said about this call for all believers to Oneness, Lowliness, and Helpfulness.

ONENESS

Take a look at **John 17:20-23:**

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

Jesus in His final hour is praying to His Father for His disciples and all the believers that they would be one, as Jesus was one with the Father.

What a glorious and selfless prayer! What an amazing truth that our oneness could be used by God to draw unbelievers to Himself.

What a wonderful, yet incredible responsibility we carry as believers. Thankfully, we don't have to go it alone; we have Christ as our example and His Spirit as our guide.

LOWLINESS

Take a look at **Luke 9:23-24**:

Then He said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it."

Jesus lays out, in no uncertain terms, the cost of following Him. Now, why would He have to do that?

It is because Jesus' teachings are so contrary to selfish human thinking.

We want what we believe is rightfully ours, and no one is going to take it from us!

This is Christ's call to the believer to forsake all of what we are clinging to for our security that does not relate to Christ.

We will look closer at this in a moment.

HELPFULNESS

Now, this is close in nature to oneness.

In **John 13:34-35**, Jesus gives a new commandment, one that even now seems difficult to follow:

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Jesus knew that this commandment was contrary to the way in which the Pharisees of His day treated the people.

He was teaching something that was so revolutionary to His disciples because He knew that they would be the leaders of His Church.

Just think, by loving one another, others would see that love and know that the disciples belonged to Christ.

Not only would this build one another up, it would serve as a wonderful witness to a world full of unbelievers.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Matthew 25:34-40 is a wonderful example of what we are really doing when we come alongside even the lowliest of our brothers in great humility.

Read Matt. 25:34-40.

The reason Christ calls us to do these things for the least of our brothers and sisters is because there is no one else willing to over the long haul.

However, we are doing much more than just feeding the hungry or visiting prisoners, we are serving Christ!

In fact, as it says in Hebrews 13, we may be entertaining angels without even knowing it!

HOW NOW SHALL WE LIVE?

How is it possible to have this kind of humility for a lifetime?

1. We need to recognize that we are selfish, sinful beings that want to have things our way
 - ❑ We don't want to be humble – **I want to be the man!**
 - ❑ We don't want to serve others – **I don't want to give of myself**
 - ❑ We want what is best for us, not others – **I don't have time for missions, visiting, feeding the hungry, I need to feed myself!**

My sons show me the selfishness of my heart daily!

2. We need to keep Christ as our focus and recognize that apart from the life-transforming grace of Jesus Christ in the lives of us as sinners, we will do nothing that is truly humble. **We need Christ's example!**
 - ❑ Without Him making Himself nothing
 - ❑ Without His taking on the very nature of a servant
 - ❑ Without Him being made in human likeness
 - ❑ Without His willingness to become obedient to death on a cross
 - ❑ Without Him working in us by His grace through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit – **WE CAN DO NOTHING OF LASTING VALUE!**

About eight years ago as I was finishing up my undergrad in criminal justice, I felt compelled to work with kids who had rough backgrounds – juvenile delinquents. I pursued this. I wasn't a Christian at the time but I guess it was a calling. So I pursued an internship in a juvenile detention center a few miles from our home and thought: "This is what I need to be doing."

As the internship wore on and as I became a part-time staff member there, I realized that I couldn't do it on my own. I realized that I didn't really want to care for these kids and love them the way they needed to be loved. I found myself talking to them in ways that surprised me. I found myself going home and thinking about them and realizing that I couldn't do anything for them. So I got out. I stuck around for about a year and a half because the pay was halfway decent and I needed a pay check. But to me over the long haul, it wasn't enough to keep me there.

After I left, Wendy and I began attending a church in Michigan and God just grabbed hold of our hearts. It was shortly after that that we realized we were being called to the ministry. He did a lot of humbling of us through that experience at the detention center. I was greatly humbled by what I couldn't do on my own.

After that we moved down to Detroit and there was an internship open in the church we were a part of. It was working in youth ministry. God took me to where I thought I could work with kids, then pulled me out of that, then took me right back into working with kids on a bit of a different level. But I realized I couldn't do it without Him. He did so much through those experiences, even the difficult and painful experience of working in a job I wasn't suited for. He took it and turned it into something that brought Him the most glory. It's only what He's done in me that allows me to minister to anyone.

It's only what He's done in us that allows us to minister in the ministries we're involved in here at Faith.

My prayer is that the Lord will continually keep me humble by showing me my sin and drawing me back to the Cross on my knees.

May we never look down on anyone, always recognizing that we are wretched, miserable sinners apart from the grace of God.

May the humility of Christ be our focus as we live our lives out in the world.

May the love of Christ overcome and overwhelm us to the point that we have no choice but to pick up our crosses daily and follow Him.

To His glory alone, Amen.