

# Philippians 2:1-11

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn in our Bibles to that passage that was read earlier, Philippians chapter 2. You remember that Paul is writing from prison.

He's facing an uncertain future. He doesn't know whether he's going to be executed or whether he's going to be released. But his only concern is for the Gospel.

He's not concerned about himself. He's only concerned about the Gospel. Don't worry about me, he said. I'm alright. If I die, if I'm executed, for me that will be gain.

It will be to be with Christ, which is better by far. That would be my personal desire, he said. I desire to be with Christ, which is better by far. Although it would be more profitable for you if I was to live and continue my ministry amongst you.

But the important thing, he says, is not what happens to me at all. The important thing is what's going to happen to the Gospel. So I want to hear, he says at the end of chapter 1, I want to hear, that you are conducting yourself in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ.

[ 1 : 24 ] And he goes on to say that that means being united. It means being of one spirit and preaching the Gospel as one man. Disunity amongst those who believe the Gospel is conduct unworthy of that Gospel they believe.

It is a denial of the Gospel. If a man teaches doctrine that denies the Gospel, we're on to him like a ton of bricks.

If he continues to do it, we put him out of the church, presumably. If he's teaching what is a denial of the Gospel. But we seem to be able to live with conduct, which is a denial of the Gospel, fairly easily.

And we need to remind ourselves that according to Paul, disunity amongst those who love the Gospel. Disunity is conduct unworthy of the Gospel of Christ.

That's how he ended chapter 1. In chapter 2, verses 1 to 4, he describes this unity in much more detail. He says, look, if you really care about me, if you really want to make me happy, if you want to complete my joy, I'm already a happy man.

[ 2 : 45 ] Philippians is the most joyful of all the letters that Paul wrote. But he says, if you want to complete my joy, if you want to make me really, really happy, then this is how to make me happy.

Verse 2, make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. If you want to demonstrate your care for me, if you want to demonstrate your concern and your compassion for me, then let me hear that you're one in spirit, one in purpose.

Thanks very much for the gift, says Paul in chapter 4. They'd sent him a gift via one of their members, Epaphroditus. And Epaphroditus risked his life to bring that gift to the apostle Paul.

Paul says, thanks very much. Much appreciated. But if you really want to make me really happy, here's what to do. Here's what to give me. Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and in purpose.

That's why in chapter 4 he pleads with two ladies in the church, you, Odeer and Syntyche. I plead with you, Odeer, and I plead with you as well, Syntyche. I plead with both of you.

[ 4 : 08 ] Sort his out. Agree together in the law. This is what I want more than anything else, he said. I want to hear that you're getting on, that you're not divided, that you're united.

I deduce from that that disunity should make us unhappy. A disunited church is an unhappy church and it should make people unhappy to be disunited.

But there are some people who seem to be unable to be happy unless they're divided.

They thrive on it. They thrive on division. They thrive on trouble. On disunity. That's very, very serious when you find people like that in a church.

Okay, so what does this unity look like? Paul says, verse 2, I want you to be like-minded. That means I want you to think in the same way.

[ 5 : 12 ] It doesn't mean think the same thing. It means think the same way. And he tells us later on in the chapter, the way we are to think.

Have this mind in you which you see in Christ Jesus. Everybody's got to think like Jesus thought. It doesn't mean to say we all think the same thing.

We don't all think the same thing. But we think the same way. And yes, there are differences of opinion in any local church. I'm assuming, of course, that we all believe the gospel.

But on other matters, there will be differences of opinion. And these differences of opinion will be the opportunity for friendly discussion and debate.

But we'll all do that with the same mindset. The mindset. The mindset of Jesus Christ. So, one, like-minded, sorry.

[ 6 : 16 ] Having the same love. That means that we love everybody in the local church the same. It's not easy, is it? Because we all tend to warm to some people rather than others.

We tend to warm to the people who warm to us rather than others. And I suppose that's inevitable. But Paul says, in the local church, we should have the same love for every member. We shouldn't deliberately seek out to have favorites in the local church.

We should treat everybody the same. Even people we find it hard to get on with. Even people who perhaps differ from us on a few matter. Even people who we don't immediately warm to.

We treat them in the same way as we treat the people we do warm to. We have the same love. Being one in spirit.

[ 7 : 17 ] That's literally one soul. One soul. Christians in a local church are soul mates. Paul's talking about an inner union.

We don't just paper over the cracks with sort of Christian niceness. Or amiability. We're not sort of like a political party that puts on a facade of unity before the election.

But everybody knows they're actually at each other's throat. We're soul mates. We're one soul. We've got an inner genuine genuine unity and love for each other.

one in purpose. That's Paul. That means we've all got one agenda. One aim. And that's to glorify Christ.

and to make the Lord Jesus known. That's our aim. That's our purpose. Don't do anything out of selfish ambition.

[ 8 : 22 ] Because behind selfish ambition, Paul says, there's vain conceit. Vain conceit leads to selfish ambition. Selfish ambition is one of the works of the flesh.

In Galatians chapter 5, before you read about the fruit of the Spirit, you have a list of what Paul calls the acts of the sinful nature.

The acts of the sinful nature. One of them, selfish ambition. It's there along with witchcraft and sexual immorality. Selfish ambition.

That's the person who wants a group of admirers around him. A group of followers. And he resents other people because he sees them as rival.

We're usually talking about a tiny little group here. It's usually a tiny little group. But it doesn't matter as long as the divisive individual is at the center of the group.

[ 9 : 26 ] And there are people like that, I'm afraid, who are just divisive. They're troublemakers rather than peacemakers. Jesus said, blessed are the peacemakers.

These folk aren't peacemakers. They're deliberate troublemakers. They're an absolute danger to any local church. They can paralyze the church. They can paralyze an eldership. We went through a period of two or three years.

Thankfully, six or seven years ago now. When as an eldership, we were paralyzed by just one or two individuals in quite a large-ish church. We had about 140, 150 members, but there were one or two individuals, and they decided that we ought to be a church that believed that the rapture was seven years before the coming of Christ in glory, followed by a thousand-year millennia.

And if we didn't all believe exactly that, we were liberals, according to this person. I didn't believe that. So I was a liberal. So they started writing letters to the eldership.

And every sermon I preached, they'd start circulating the true exposition of that passage from their point of view.

[10:42] And every elders' meeting was taken up by these two or three individuals. And during that time, we did nothing as a church.

We did all the things we've started doing now, things like helping the poor, helping people in debt, curry nights for men, things like that. We've done since these people, thank God, left and went to another church where they're still causing trouble.

Because they were professional troublemakers. And there are people like that. You need to be aware of them. And don't be foolish like us and allow them to do it for two or three years.

You should never allow somebody to paralyze a church for two or three years. Do nothing out of selfish ambition. In humility, says Paul, consider others better than yourself.

That means rather than wanting everyone to follow you and admire you and agree with you. You seek to encourage others and promote others. You're pleased when others are recognized.

[11:48] Others are preferred. We esteem others. We consider others better than ourselves. We mustn't be foolish about that. It doesn't mean to say that we pretend we haven't got gifts that God has given us and we pretend that other people's gifts are better than ours when really we know they're not.

I mean, if you're a brilliant pianist or a brilliant organist, you don't say, oh, I'm no good. Such and such a person is much better than me. You know, somebody who's maybe had three or four lessons or something.

No, you don't do that. God has given you the gift of playing the piano or playing the organ. So you recognize it as what it is. It is a gift. It's a gift.

And you don't get proud about gifts. You're thankful for gifts, not proud about gifts. And the point is that you recognize that other people have other gifts. And those gifts are just as important as your gifts.

And you actually want to benefit from the gifts of other people. As well as blessing others with your gifts, you actually really seriously want to benefit from the gifts of other people as well. So you consider others better than yourself.

[13:08] This is what it means to be united. Paul says, look, if you want to make me happy, I want you to be at church like this. Let me hear that you're at church like this. What if you disagree with someone's opinion or preferences?

Well, you remember that other people's opinions and preferences and other people's consciences are as important as yours. If it's something the Bible doesn't speak about, such as what musical instruments to have in a church service, I can't find anything in the Bible about that at all.

I suspect that they probably didn't have any actually. Probably they were in homes and I don't know whether they brought musical instruments or not. It doesn't matter. We're not told.

And therefore, God says, please yourself. Please yourself. I can put anything in my word about that, so please yourself. Sort it out amongst yourselves. That's what you've got to do. So, what do you do?

Well, you do what the elders tell you to do. You do what the church leaders decide is right for this church. That's what being humble is. That's what esteeming others is better than yourself is.

[14:24] You've actually appointed church leaders to lead you. So, if they say, this is what we're going to do, that's what you do. And if quietly, you'd prefer the elders to have made a different decision, tough.

You go along with the elders. And, if they decide that you're going to sing songs that you don't like, you don't sort of sit there looking at the floor, refusing to sing, like some people do.

You sing as heartily as you can. Because the elders, the church generally, has decided this is what they want to sing. So, you try and make it work. You'd rather be singing something else, but it doesn't matter, you're not.

So, you sing that as well as you can, and as heartily as you can. And, if it's a doctrinal matter, on which Bible believing Christians disagree, assuming we all believe the gospel, if it's a doctrinal matter about which Christians have disagreed for centuries, such as the sort of thing I've just talked about, end times, and all that sort of stuff, well, what do you do if you disagree with what's being taught?

well, if you differ from the church leaders on the subject, you keep quiet.

[15:49] You might want to make your opinions known to the church leaders, that's fine, but if you're overruled, and you want to stay in the church, you keep quiet, and you support the leaders,

and you keep your own opinions to yourself.

And if it's so important to you that you think it's worth dividing the church about, if, for instance, you think that it's so important to believe that the rapture is seven years before the return of Christ in glory, if that is so important to you that you're willing to divide a church about it, you don't divide a church about it, and you go and find another church where that is taught, and you get stuck in there, and then everybody's happy.

Okay? So that's how to promote unity in a local church. All that, is the background to this wonderful hymn, which we find in verses 5 to 11.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. The word attitude there is the word mind, or I like to translate it mindset.

Your mindset should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. So what was the mindset of Jesus Christ?

[17:09] Well, says Paul, he was in the form of God. NIV, being in very nature, God. There's actually some disagreement as to the exact meaning of the Greek word translated form here.

If he's thinking in a Greek way, the word form means the inner nature or the essence of something. It means, as the NIV translates it, his inner essence, his very nature, was divine.

It was God. If he's thinking in a Hebrew way, the word form means more like the outward appearance. So he's saying something similar to what he says in Colossians chapter 1 verse 15, where he says that Jesus is the image of the invisible God.

He was in the form of God. He was the outshining. He was the visible expression of the being of God. He shared and he showed the divine nature.

That's what Paul is saying here. The Lord Jesus shared and he showed the divine nature. He goes on to say that he took the form of a servant. So the word form is the same in both those statements.

[18:28] Jesus certainly became a servant in reality. That's what he was. He was a servant. And Paul says that before he had the form of a servant he was in the form of God.

That's what he was. That was his nature. He was in the form of God. He was God's equal. But he didn't count equality with God something to be grasped.

Now scholars for quite a long time have had two different views of that. And you'll see this both in the NIV and in the footnote of the NIV if you've got an NIV with footnote.

Some scholars used to think that it meant that the Lord Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be grasped in the sense of clung on to at all costs.

In other words he was willing to give it up. He didn't feel he had to cling on to equality with God at all costs. Other scholars said that he didn't think that it means so.

[19:39] Other scholars think that Paul means that the Lord Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be seized, something to be snatched, like Adam in the Garden of Eden you remember.

If you eat that fruit you will be like God. So Adam wanted to seize equality with God. Those were the two possible views of this statement up until quite recently but quite recently because of discoveries that have been made from Greek texts found in the Egyptian desert and places like that where scraps of papyrus last for centuries in the hot sun.

Scholars now think they know what Paul means by this unusual statement. The problem is it's the only time a word is used it's a Greek word which I can't remember what it is but it doesn't matter anywhere it's a Greek word which is only used here once and nowhere else in the New Testament. He did not consider equality with God and I think it's an RP or something like that. He did not consider equality with God an RP what does this word RP mean?

Now scholars think that they now know and it means something like this. He did not consider equality with God something to be exploited for his own advantage.

[21:00] And RP was something to be exploited for his own advantage. In other words he could have insisted on his rights he could have insisted on his privileges as God's equal and he chose not to do that.

Let me give you an illustration. Let's imagine Richard Branson wants to travel to London on a virgin train. Now he owns virgin train.

He is virgin trains. He owns the lot. Let's imagine he wants to travel to London on a virgin train. Well he could consider his position as the owner of virgin trains an RP got.

Something to be used. Something to be exploited for his own advantage. So he doesn't have to buy a ticket. He doesn't have to queue. He doesn't have to find the cheapest ticket on the internet. He doesn't have to sit there waiting and listening to the guard explaining why the train is late. He doesn't have to queue in the food bit of the train and pay an exorbitant sum for a British rail sandwich.

[ 22 : 12 ] A virgin train sandwich sorry. He doesn't have to do any of those things. He could just insist on his rice. He could have the train to himself if he wanted. He wouldn't need to pay for his ticket.

He could have a free sandwich if he wanted one, which he probably wouldn't. If he did what I've just said, he would be not considering his position as the owner of virgin trains, to be an arpegos, i.e. something to be exploited for his own advantage. Now that's the idea here. The Lord Jesus Christ was in the form of God, he was God's equal, and he could have insisted on all his rights as God's equal.

He could have used his position, his status as God's equal for his own advantage, God's good. But he didn't. He didn't. What did he do instead?

Well, says Paul, he made himself nothing. And again, we've got a translation problem here.

Literally, the translation is he emptied himself. He emptied himself.

[ 23 : 24 ] And scholars have debated for centuries what he emptied himself of. And there used to be some who said, well, he emptied himself of his deity, but that can't be right, because contrary to popular opinion, God cannot do anything.

One of the things that God cannot do is stop being God. God cannot stop being God. So, Jesus was not God who stopped being God.

So, what did he empty himself of? Well, he emptied himself of, he gave up all the rights, all the privileges, the status, the outward status of equality with God.

He had the right to be known as who he was. He had the right to be known as God's equal. He had the right to be worshipped as God's equal. But he relinquished those rights.

He humbled himself, and the old King James Version has a beautiful rendering of this. He made himself of no reputation he made himself of no reputation.

[ 24 : 30 ] That's exactly it. He should have had the reputation of one who was equal with God. But he made himself of no reputation. The glory and the status of his deity he relinquished.

Now, the sun can't stop being the sun. The sun is always the sun. S-U-N. The sun, S-U-N, is always the sun. S-U-N. But sometimes the sun goes into eclipse, and the glory of the sun is not seen.

It is veiled for a while. And John Owen, in his great volume one of his works, the great Puritan theologian John Owen, on the glorious mystery of the person of Christ, describes the incarnation as being like an eclipse of the sun.

It's still the sun, but you can't see its glory. Its glory is veiled. its glory is hidden. So how did he empty himself?

Well, not so much by discarding something, as by taking something. He did not cease to be what he was.

[ 25 : 43 ] That's not how he emptied himself, by ceasing to be what he was. He became what he was not. Without ceasing, this is John Owen, without ceasing to be what he was, he became what he was not.

He took the form of a servant. Utterly devoted to his father's interests, utterly devoted to our interests.

Being made in human likeness. He assumed servanthood by assuming manhood. Now when it says he was made in human likeness and he was found in appearance as a man, Paul is not saying that he just appeared to be a man, but he wasn't really a man.

He really was a man. The point is that he appeared to be nothing more than a man. He appeared to be nothing more than a man. The one who was in the form of God, the one who was equal with God, appeared to be man and nothing more.

so you could pass Jesus Christ in the street and not realise you were passing one who was in the form of God.

[ 26 : 58 ] You could disagree with Jesus in a discussion and not realise that you were disagreeing with God. You could spit in the face of Jesus Christ and not realise that you were spitting in the face of God.

you could nail him to a cross and not realise that you were nailing God to a cross. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself. Well, hadn't he already humbled himself enough? Wasn't the incarnation an act of humility, a humiliation for one who was in the form of God?

Of course he was. But even then, being found in appearance as a man, he continued to humble himself. He could have become a self-assertive, arrogant, bossy man.

He could have become rich, he could have become a celebrity. But as you know, he was born in Bethlehem of Judea, of an ordinary peasant family. He was unknown.

[ 28 : 10 ] and he became an obedient man. He became obedient. He became obedient unto death, as far as death.

He became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. cross. And as Paul says in Corinthians, the cross, well, it's foolishness to the Greek, and it's weakness to the Jew.

the Jewish scripture said, cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree. So the one who was in the form of God became an obedient human being to the point where he appeared to be under the curse of God on the cross, bearing our sin.

That's the gospel, says Paul. That's the gospel. And I want you to conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Therefore, says Paul, God gave the Lord Jesus, God gave the Lord Jesus the recognition that he had relinquished. God gave him the name which is above every name, God gave him the highest place in heaven and on earth.

[ 29 : 55 ] And every tongue will confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father. God gave him the recognition that he refused. He gave him the recognition that he relinquished.

God and as is it Paul or James or is it both of them elsewhere who say that God oppresses, God opposes the proud but gives grace, exalts, he exalts the humble.

God so what is it to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ? It's to conduct ourselves in a local church, not just when it's going well and everybody's happy, but when there are problems, when there are disagreements, it is to conduct ourselves with the mind of Christ, with the mentality of Christ.

It is to think and behave as Jesus would have thought and behave. That's what it is, to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

And as Paul writes this letter from prison, not knowing what his future holds, he says, don't worry about me, all I'm bothered about is the gospel. And if you don't live like that, people aren't going to believe the gospel, they're not going to take it seriously, why should they?

[ 31 : 19 ] So if you want to make me happy, if you want to complete my joy, live like this, conduct yourselves like this, let the, your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

Amen. So shall we pray? Oh Lord, we do pray that your people, your inheritance will conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We do pray, Lord, that we might not take this gospel upon our lips and deny it with our lives. Lord, it grieves us to know that many churches, many churches, many good, at least churches that have good doctrine, good sound doctrine, many churches that believe the doctrines of grace, somehow seem to be the very churches which find it hardest to agree and to live with each other.

please help them to see, and we're not thinking about this particular church here, but help these churches to see that unnecessary disunity, a divisive spirit, is a denial of the gospel they claim to preach.

Help them, help us, help us all to take this seriously, we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen. Let's turn to the Bible.