

BROKEN CHAINS
The Philippians Series #8
Philippians 2:1-13

(ADDITIONAL COMMENTARY)

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER!

The vision and ministry of Grace Community Church
Is to glorify God by building biblical relationships
With God, with each other, and with our neighbors
So that we might reflect Christ.
UPWARD ... INWARD ... OUTWARD

This is the mission statement of Grace Community Church. We created it because it is a very accurate summary of what the Bible teaches from Genesis to Revelation. Genesis 1 begins with God and Adam in relationship. In Genesis 3 that relationship was broken when Adam and Eve chose to rebel against God's Word. But in that same chapter we see God, by His grace, making both a promise and a provision that would allow sinners to be reconciled to God and enter into a relationship with Him best described as being "eternal life". Genesis 3 also set into motion a centuries-long process of prophecies that would ultimately be fulfilled by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The book of Revelation ends with the victory of redeemed and forgiven sinners enjoying fellowship with God forever.

Once you start looking for the centrality of relationships in the Bible you can see it on almost every page. Healthy Christianity and healthy churches require relationships that function in accordance with God's Word. When our relationships fail to reflect God's Word, we undermine the process which produces joy, peace and contentment. The promises of Philippians 4 depend upon putting Philippians 1-3 into practice. And in Philippians 1-3 we can see God's commands regarding relationships.

The church of Philippi was a fairly healthy and vibrant church. Paul did not write to them to correct heresy or false teaching. Paul did not need to defend his ministry against any critics in the Philippian church. They loved Paul and Paul loved them. But Paul did have some concerns about problems he could see on the horizon, and it all had to do with relationships within the church.

A careful reading of Philippians 2:1-4 reveals that Paul was sensing a weakening of unity and an increase in division. Other verses in Philippians indicate the same concern (see 1:27, 2:14-15 and especially see 4:2-3 where Paul identified, by name, two influential women in the church who were in open conflict with each other). We know that Paul wanted his friends in Philippi to experience God's promises of joy, peace and contentment (see 4:4). It is clear that Paul recognized that unbiblical relationships are

often the very things that keep our hearts captive (chained) to discouragement, resentment, anger, guilt and depression. He gave the Philippians instructions about their relationships in order to remove barriers and obstacles to having **BROKEN CHAINS**.

There are two core issues Paul addressed in Philippians 2:1-18. They are:

1. Selfishness (and its companion, Pride)
2. Humility

Let's consider the true nature of selfishness. Some acts of selfishness are easy to identify. The driver in the mall parking lot who aggressively cuts off another car so as to get the parking space closest to the door is clearly selfish. The husband or wife who forsakes a loving spouse and family in order to pursue a sinful relationship is clearly selfish. But the sin of selfishness is more widespread than we realize. I might tell myself that I'm not selfish because I don't cut off other drivers in a quest for a good parking spot, and I would never abandon my wife and children. The truth of the matter, however, is that I am deeply selfish and so are you.

Does such an assertion seem unfounded? We need to understand that every sin that can possibly be committed is, at the root, an act of selfishness:

gossip = selfishness
lust = selfishness
bitterness = selfishness
murder = selfishness
adultery = selfishness
greed = selfishness
lying = selfishness
stealing = selfishness
pride = selfishness
jealousy = selfishness

The only way we can claim that we are not selfish is to claim that we are without sin. That is an option not available to us (Romans 3:23; I John 1:8). Since we are all sinners, selfishness is part of what we are and selfishness will be a chronic problem in our relationships. Paul was aware of that and spoke very directly about it in Philippians 2:1-4.

If I am a sinner, and if sin will always be expressed in selfish ways, then how could I ever be anything but selfish? What reason is there to think that true **selflessness** is possible? As Christians, we have been given a new nature with new possibilities (see II Corinthians 5:16-18; II Peter 1:3-4). We know Christ, and He indwells us through the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9-11). What we cannot do by our own strength, we can do through Him who gives us life. Not only can we be selfless with His help, He commands us to be selfless.

What was going on in Philippi? Other than 4:2-3 we do not have any specifics, but we do not really need them. Each of us is aware of our own private struggles with our old selfish ways. Each of us (let's be honest!) knows how easily we can hold a critical spirit in our hearts against others, how easily we can be offended and hurt, how hard it is to be a team player when things do not go our way. And we can be that way with the people we love the most. The Christians at Philippi were no different, so Paul wrote to them before the selfishness was able to do its devastating work in a church that was basically healthy. No church is immune from the sin of selfishness and pride.

In 2:5-8 we see the exact opposite of selfish pride. We see humility and we see it in its ultimate expression. Paul gives us one of the greatest descriptions imaginable of the humility of Jesus Christ. It is impossible for finite creatures such as ourselves to fully comprehend what Jesus gave up for our sake. From all eternity past, Jesus was fully equal in nature (Deity) with the Father. Jesus set aside the prerogatives and privileges of His deity and became a man. Imagine: The Creator (Colossians 1:15-17) spends nine months in a creature's womb, is born in something like a cave or barn, and begins life needing someone to change his diapers and feed him. He grows up largely anonymously, begins a three year ministry that exposes Him to ridicule and blasphemy, is betrayed by one friend and abandoned by eleven others, is given an illegal trial, is stripped naked and viciously flogged and is killed in excruciating agony. Why did He act in such humility? To save sinners who did not deserve it, sinners like me.

Humility was not considered a virtue in the Roman world. One of the distinguishing characteristics of a genuine Christian should be his/her humility. Humility is seen in thinking that others are more important than I am and acting accordingly. Getting my way is not the most important thing, it is the least important thing. It is saying with Jesus to His Father, "Not my will, but yours be done".

The irony in all of this is profound. Paul wanted his friends in Philippi to have **BROKEN CHAINS** and to experience the glorious promises of Philippians 4 (peace, strength, joy, contentment). But to have true joy we have to be selfless in our relationships. The world tells us the opposite. It tells us that we can be kind to others, but first we must look out for number one (see I John 2:15-17). And if others hurt us, disappoint us or don't live up to our expectations then we distance ourselves from them or sever the relationship altogether. It is a good thing God doesn't treat His relationship with us the way we sometimes treat others.

In Philippians 2:12 Paul said we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. He did not say work **FOR** salvation, but work **OUT** the salvation we already have. This exhortation is directly connected to our relationships (2:1-5) and Jesus' humility (2:6-11). In other words, conducting our relationships in the church in a way that reflects the humility of Jesus is at the very center of what it means

to live as a Christian. When we do this we bring delight to our God and we bring glory to His name. And when we do that, the opportunity to experience joy, peace and contentment will be close behind.

DIGGING DEEPER

1. How did selfishness manifest itself in Adam and Eve's marriage after they sinned (Genesis 3:8-12)?

2. In what ways can selfishness manifest itself within any church? _____

3. How has your selfishness and pride affected your relationships with other believers in the church? This is not limited to outward actions, but includes inward attitudes. _____

4. What did Paul hope to accomplish when he instructed the Philippians to embrace humility in 2:3?

5. Name 5 ways Jesus' life was a demonstration of humility. _____

6. How is being unwilling to truly forgive someone a sign of our own selfish pride? _____
