

Philippians 2:1-18  
Gospel Centered Purpose

Introduction
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1. We have been studying Paul's short letter to the Philippians
2. So far, we have noticed a theme that permeates the letter and this is the centrality of the Gospel
3. In week 1 we saw how the Gospel was at the center of Paul's relationship with the Philippians, demonstrated by how he constantly thanked God for their partnership in the Gospel, as well as how he prayed for their growth in the Gospel
4. Last week we learned about Gospel Centered Living which is evidenced by three things:
  - a. By choosing to see the circumstances of our lives—good or bad—in light of God's plan for the spread of the Gospel
  - b. By our ambitions to exalt Christ and minister to others
  - c. By living our lives in a manner worthy of the Gospel

Meeting Sandy on our Whit's date last week
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5. Today we begin chapter 2 where we are going to look at **Gospel Centered Purpose**
  - a. In 2002 Rick Warren released his book, Purpose Driven Life and it apparently struck a chord with many people—sold over 30 million copies to date and is the second most translated book in history
  - b. Apparently, there's a lot of us who struggle with purpose (at least 30 million plus)—What is my purpose in life? What does God expect of me? What am I called to do?
  - c. When it comes to everyday things like jobs, careers, marriage, ministry roles, school, etc. the answer will vary
  - d. However, when it comes to the Church, there is one overriding, all-encompassing, primary purpose to which we have all been called: The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20)
  - e. This is our Gospel Centered Purpose as individuals and as a local church
  - f. Paul has already expressed his thankfulness to God for the Philippians "participation in the Gospel" (1:5)
  - g. He has called upon the Philippians to continue in that by 'striving together for the faith of the Gospel" (1:27)
  - h. Here he expands upon that theme and calling and lays out what is required to accomplish this Gospel Centered Purpose

A. Fulfilling our Gospel centered purpose requires unity (2:1-2)
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1. Paul begins our passage today 2 with two important words: **"Therefore if"**:
  - a. **"Therefore"** indicates that what we are about to study today is a continuation of what comes immediately before it:
    - 1) In 1:27-30 Paul challenges the Philippians to live their lives in a manner that is worthy of the Gospel, which Paul actually defines as **"standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel"** (1:27)

- 2) Two verses later he reminds them that they have not just been called not just to believe in Jesus, **“but also to suffer for His name sake”** facing the same kind of struggles that Paul faced.
  - 3) So what we look at today is a continuation of these two things
  - 4) In fact, this passage today will tell us what it takes for us to **“strive together”** for the Gospel and **“suffer”** for Christ—this is our Gospel centered purpose
- b. The second word, **“if”**, begins a rather complicated “if-then” construction which drives home a single point: fulfilling our Gospel centered purpose requires unity:
- 1) The conditions (each of which is assumed to be true by Paul and should therefore be understood as **“since...”**):
    - a) **“If there is any encouragement in Christ...”** (1)
      - Greek paraklesis is related to the word for helper, paraklete
      - Can be understood as encouragement, exhortation, consolation or comfort
      - Based on the preceding verses, it is likely best understood here as encouragement during suffering (READ 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 for a similar but more exhaustive parallel passage)
    - b) **“if there is any consolation of love...”**:
      - the NET captures the sense of this phrase well: **“any comfort provided by love”**
      - Paul likely has the love of God for the believer in mind here
    - c) **“if there is any fellowship of the Spirit...”**
      - Paul uses the same word here for fellowship as he did in v. 1:5, which communicates the idea of participation or partnership
      - The grammar here can suggest 1) fellowship with or in the Spirit, 2) fellowship with one another which is produced by the Spirit
      - Both are true
    - d) **“if there is any affection and compassion...”**: likely affection and compassion toward one another
  - 2) The statement: **“Then make my joy complete by being of the same mind** (2)—Paul uses two prepositional phrases to describe this like-mindedness:
    - a) **“by maintaining the same love, united in spirit...”**
    - b) **“by thinking the same thing”** (lit. translation; NASB “intent on one purpose”)
2. Paul is calling the Philippians to unity because it is required in order to fulfill our Gospel centered purpose:
- a. The world looks for unity through compromise or appeasement
  - b. But Paul is calling for genuine unity which is based on having the same mind, thinking the same things
  - c. However, Paul has in mind something specific that he wanted his readers to agree upon and that’s found in the verses that follow and this leads to our second point

B. Fulfilling our Gospel centered purpose requires humility (2:3-11)

1. Paul now describes the sort of unity he calls for above which leads to our second requirement for fulfilling our Gospel centered purpose (2-3):
  - a. In other words, what does this look like?
  - b. Verses 2 and 3 are basically two long participial phrases, but most translations render them as a series of imperatives (which does adequately convey Paul's intent)
    - 1) They were to regard others as better or more important than themselves (3): **"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;"**
      - a) **Selfish ambition:** not so much what someone does to benefit themselves, but something done out of jealousy or rivalry
      - b) **Empty conceit:** a state of pride which is without basis or justification (Louw-Nida)
      - c) **Humility of mind:** having a humble attitude without arrogance, not thinking too highly of one's own value or worth
      - d) Notice here that Paul is not saying that others are better than we are, or more important
      - e) Rather, he says to **"regard"** (i.e. think of, treat) others as more important
    - 2) They were to look out for the interests of others (4): **"do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."**
      - a) Here Paul describes how they were to regard others as better than themselves
      - b) They were not to be overly concerned about their own interests (i.e. what is best for themselves), but also that of others (what is best for them)
  - c. So the type of unity that Paul called them to above is one that was rooted in humility, which is our second requirement for fulfilling our Gospel centered purpose
2. And there's no better example of this than Jesus Christ (5-11):
  - a. Now before we get into these next seven verses I need to clarify some things:
    - 1) We could spend an entire morning on just the theology of these next seven verses, and study what is referred to as the doctrine of kenosis
    - 2) Kenosis is the Greek word for "emptied" that Paul uses in v. 7 and when it is used in a theological sense (i.e. kenosis theology) it attempts to explain the incarnation of Christ—in other words, what does it mean and how could it be that Jesus Christ is both 100 percent divine and 100 percent human, without compromising the true nature of either
    - 3) We will touch on some of this, but our focus this morning isn't on trying to resolve that paradox but rather to understand the passage in terms of Christ's humility because that is its primary purpose
    - 4) Paul wrote these verses as an explanation of the kind of humility he wished the Philippians to have toward one another
  - b. Notice how he begins (5): **"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,"**
    - 1) So, in vs. 3-4 Paul encourages the Philippians to develop the kind of humility that puts the interest of others above that of their own interests
    - 2) Here he provides them with the perfect example: Jesus Christ Himself and the attitude and humility he embodied
    - 3) In other words, Paul is telling them to think just like Jesus Christ does—have His attitude, His way of thinking, this humility in you

- c. There are 3 things about Christ's attitude that Paul highlights in this passage:
    - 1) The first thing Paul highlights is that even though Jesus was God, he was willing to temporarily suspend the exercise (i.e. use) of some of His divine attributes in order to become fully human (6-7)
    - 2) The next thing Paul highlights is that fact that Jesus was willing to submit himself to death, even the most horrific of deaths, the cross (8)
    - 3) The third thing Paul highlights is that the Father exalted Christ for this act of humility and gave Him the name above all other names (9-11)
  - d. This is the kind of humility that Paul is encouraging the Philippians to have toward one another: the kind of humility where God was willing to step down (if you will) and become man, take the sins of the world upon His shoulders, and pay for them on the cross.
3. So, to fulfill our Gospel centered purpose we need to have unity; we need to have humility, and we need to have one final thing: obedience (below)

C. Fulfilling our Gospel centered purpose requires obedience (2:12-18)

- 1. Paul finishes this portion of his letter with an interesting challenge (12): **"So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;"**
  - a. What does it mean to work out our own salvation—isn't salvation by faith and not by works?
  - b. We know that Paul cannot be referring to earning our salvation by our works because he wrote in Ephesians 2:8-9 that we can't earn salvation by our own merits or works, but instead that it is a free gift through faith in Jesus Christ
  - c. Rather, Paul's challenge to work out one's salvation is a synonym for obedience (notice the juxtaposition of **"just as you have always obeyed"** and **"continue working out your salvation"**—present tense)
  - d. In other words, Paul is simply calling them to live out their salvation through obedience to the Lord
- 2. Their obedience was important in three areas (13-18):
  - a. It was important for God's work (13): **"for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."**
  - b. It was important for their witness (14-15)
  - c. It was important to Paul's ministry and for his joy (16-18)
  - d. Did you notice that each one of these have to do with their (and our) Gospel centered purpose?
- 3. So, the final requirement for fulfilling our Gospel centered purpose is obedience

Conclusion