

Philippians 2 (Part 1): 1-11 •

Supernatural Love

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We've been making our way now for a few weeks through the Book of Philippians. We're starting chapter 2 today, so please turn in your Bible there. And we're going to be reading the first 11 verses, and then we'll pray. Paul writes,

“¹So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ²complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (ESV)

Stop there. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we come before you this day completely dependent on your Holy Spirit to enliven and awaken our hearts to hear your voice.

We pray, Father God, that you would allow us to hear what the Spirit is saying, to know your heart, and to receive all that you have for us from this Word so that we can apply it to our lives, for therein is wisdom.

Help us, Father God, guide us and direct us through this Word, we pray in Jesus' precious name, amen.

These are pretty amazing verses, aren't they? I would guess that some of you have even taken some of these verses from this section of scripture and made them memory verses, perhaps even life verses. But as we get into chapter 2, or at least what for us is chapter 2 of Paul's letter to the Philippians, he begins to exhort believers about walking in unity.

He's talking about the unity of the Spirit, and this is the theme that is found throughout Paul's letters. He talks about it quite a lot, which tells us that it's something that is important. And he begins by saying if you have been encouraged in Christ and if you've been comforted by His love and if and so on, he says, then make my joy complete by being of the same mind, having the same love, being one and so forth.

I want you to understand that his usage of the word, if as he begins that section. It's not to suggest doubt, like you and I might say to someone, hey, if you make it on Friday night, be sure and bring a friend. Our expression of if in that case is, I'm not sure if you're coming or not, but if you do, then da, da, da.

Paul's not saying that. In fact, his usage of the word if is more of a declaration of what is. You could also translate it as since. He's saying since you have been encouraged in Christ, since you've been comforted by His love, since you have participated in the Spirit and received His affection and His sympathy and so forth.

Then he says now, go on and walk out the reality of what it means to be one in Christ Jesus. Now, I have to stop for just a moment and tell you this is kind of an interesting topic for me to do for you here today because just this last week I was at a pastor's retreat up at the Bar M Ranch where our women went for their women's retreat. And I was gathered there with some Calvary Chapel pastors from around our region, from Montana, Idaho, Eastern Washington, and so forth.

And I was asked to speak at the retreat and I spoke on this very topic. I spoke on the unity of believers and how important it is that we maintain it and so on and so on and so on and so on. But I also made mention of the fact that it's something that in practical terms we don't experience that much. I mean, we know what unity is, I think we could probably define it, but we have a hard time, many times, walking in it. And, I mean, walking it out is what I mean.

By the way, let me explain what unity is not, at least as Paul is describing it. He's not talking about organizational unity. You might be familiar with that every once in a while, Christians get all kind of hot and lathered up about how we need to be one, but they're talking about organizational unity where there

shouldn't be denominational differences, there shouldn't, we should all be attending one church in every town and because we should be united.

I don't think that's what Paul was really caring about in this passage. I don't think he... I don't think he really cared if we all, if we're in different buildings or not, or this church over here does worship a little differently, sings different songs than this church over here, or whatever. I don't think that was his main focus.

He's more dealing with the spiritual and practical unity of who we are in Christ. Let me explain. When Jesus died on the cross for you and I, our response to His death brings us into the family of God. When we respond by faith, the Bible tells us, we are made children of God. Right? Isn't that what it says in the Word?

To all who believed Him, to those who received Him, and so forth. He gave the right to become children of God. When we come to Christ, by faith, we are children of God. Well, if we're all children of God, by faith, then that means we're of one family. Right? Literally, it means even if I don't know who you are, and I've never met you before, you are my family. You are my brother or my sister in Jesus Christ. One of the two.

All right, that's a fact. And it's a fact predicated upon what Jesus did, right? On the cross and how we have accepted that work. Now that we are family, how do we live it out? How do we walk it out? Do I treat you like family? And so forth. Do we treat one another as like we're really truly family? That's where we struggle. That's what I'm talking about when I say that, we struggle with the idea of unity.

And one thing we know about unity is that Jesus thought it was really important too. He added it as a huge element to what we call His High Priestly Prayer. When He prayed for the disciples, when He prayed for the church at large, He spoke passionately about this desire for us to be one. Let me show you some of these on the screen. First from John chapter 17.

John 17:9-11 (ESV)

I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

Jesus says, “*I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world* (I'm not praying that the church and the world would be one. That's not my point.) *but*

(I'm praying) for those (these guys) whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I'm coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one."

And then if you skip down a few verses to verse 20,

John 17:20-23 (ESV)

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even so you loved me."

He says this, *"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, (and that's us) that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me."*

Wow, that is powerful and sobering when we think about the reality of what extent Jesus went to that we might be spiritually one. And how so often we fall so short of living out the reality of that oneness, that true connectedness, that true family—sort of a relationship. And I'm not suggesting that we never have experienced unity or whatever, we have short bursts of it sometimes, but by and large, we struggle to walk in it continuously.

As we keep reading it here in Philippians chapter 2, we get a really good picture of why we struggle so much, particularly as Paul begins in verse 3 to describe what is necessary for us to walk out the practicality of our oneness in Christ.

Look what he says in verse 3. Look with me in your Bible. He says, *"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, (the NIV says, "vain conceit") but in humility, count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."*

What is Paul doing here? He's laying out the key. He's laying out the necessary ingredients for you and I to walk in real unity. And this is what holds us back, because he says, don't walk in selfish ambition.

By the way, if you need a little refresher on selfish ambition, let me put the definition up on the screen for you.

Definition: Selfish ambition

elevating oneself or putting one's own interest ahead of others

It means elevating oneself or putting one's own interests ahead of others. Good grief! That's what I was taught to do in the world! What the Bible calls selfish ambition, the world calls the key to success, right? It's basically a how-to of getting ahead in this world. Look out for number one. That's what I was taught, and I learned.

Being a child of the world before I was a child of God, I absorbed the teachings of the world, and I got them into my DNA, and I lived for myself, to promote myself, to advance myself. And then, I become a believer, and when we try to introduce some of those same concepts into our walk with Jesus, it doesn't work, like at all.

And so, I begin to look at this whole thing and I think to myself, well yeah, okay, the world doesn't know anything about what you and I or the Bible would call selfish ambition because they don't understand a love that would be so incredible that it would lay down its life for others. But we do, we know that love.

We've experienced that love, and as followers of Jesus who know that kind of love, we understand that is why we struggle so much with walking out our unity in Christ. It's because we lack love. Let's just, let's just call it what it is, guys. I mean, Paul's talking about unity here.

We can sit there all day long and say to each other, we need to be more united. Let's be united. Okay, ready, set, here we go. Well, what if we don't understand what is necessary to be united? We've got to love one another. We have to really, truly love like Jesus loved, right? And that's what takes selfish ambition out of the equation. That's what keeps us from being selfishly ambitious, because we love other people.

We're more concerned about them. We're actually treating people like they're more important than we are. Or are we? Like I said, this whole thing of learning selfishness and putting myself first is so natural to me that I see it coming out in the strangest of places. Well, not strange, but in the simplest of places.

Let me explain one, and you tell me if it's just me or if we share this a little bit. Sometimes I'll be driving along, and I'm coming up to an intersection, and I can see it up in the distance, and the light is green, and I'm kind of, I don't want to stop, I want to keep moving, right? So, I'm driving on, and I'm looking that way and that way to see if anybody's coming that direction, who might possibly trip the light and make it turn yellow. And I'm like, nobody's coming, nobody's coming. And all of a sudden, this car comes out of nowhere, and they trip that little magnetic thingy, and the light turns yellow, and I'm like, ugh! And I got to stop, probably for a whole 20 seconds or so. And I'm sitting there kind of...

Do you know why I feel that way? Because I see my life as more important than that person's life. Surprise! I am a very selfish person. And I suddenly realized that's what was going on. And so, I started kind of putting myself through this exercise.

Every time I start driving up to a light at an intersection, and I see other people waiting there, and I know that the light's probably going to flip and go yellow on me or whatever, and I just say to myself now, It's okay, that person is important, and they probably have somewhere they need to get to be. I don't necessarily feel it, but I'm saying it anyway, right? So, if you pass me in the car and you see me, just want you to know that. Or I may just be talking to myself, which is a sign of being weird.

But anyway, the point is, it reminds me every time I'm driving in my car, it reminds me how natural it is to think of myself first, and to think of other people as unimportant. I don't know where they're going, I don't know where they need to get to be, perhaps it's far more important than where I'm going, but see, I'm not giving that much consideration. I just don't want to stop. Why did you make me stop?

The Bible says, consider others as more important than you. Now, it doesn't say those people are more important, it says you and I are to consider them that way. We're to think of their life, their needs, and their concerns as more important so that we will begin to walk in a humble service toward those individuals. Anyway, that's kind of some exercises that I've been going through anyway.

But when we think about why we struggle so much for unity, we begin to understand that love is at the base of it all, and that is why we see so much about this in the Word of God. Let me show you how the apostle John wrote about it. And in 1 John 4:11, he says,

1 John 4:11 (ESV)

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

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Right? And then, the command that comes right from our Lord is written for us in John chapter 13, beginning at verse 34.

John 13:34-35 (ESV)

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Jesus says, *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, (and that's key) you also are to love one another. (And by the way, He says) By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

By the way, Jesus' statement doesn't mean that if you don't have that love all the time, every day, for one another, you're not a believer. He's not necessarily saying that because it's possible to be a believer and to withhold that love, to choose not to show that love.

What Jesus is saying is, when you operate in that love, the same love that I have for you, then people will look at your life, and they will understand that you belong to me because you are portraying the same kind of love that I modeled for you.

As we look back at our study here in Philippians chapter 2, we see that Paul begins to speak of the same thing, which is the model of Jesus. Jesus says, you are to love as I love. Now, what is that model? Paul gives it to us. Look in verse 5 in your Bible with me. He says, *“Have this mind among yourselves...”* Which is another way of saying, have the same mindset or have the same attitude, if you will, as that of Jesus, right?

Verse 6: *“...who, though he was in the form of God, did not consider or count equality with God a thing to be grasped...”* This is one of the most amazing verses in the Bible. And by the way, this is also one of the clearest declarations of the deity of Jesus Christ. Paul says very clearly, your attitude should be the same as Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not consider that equality, right, something to be held on to as if it were a right to be grasped or held fast to, but instead released it willingly.

Look what it goes on to say in verse 7, “...*but (He) emptied himself...*” And by the way, that's a very good translation of the Greek. I looked it up, and it is the verb that literally means to empty. Jesus emptied Himself by taking the very form of a servant in the likeness of men. Well, we're already born in the likeness of men, so we got that one dialed in. But there are these two other elements that you and I need to begin to understand that we're called to these, and the first one is emptying ourselves.

Jesus emptied Himself in order to become a man, and rather than considering his equality with the Father a thing or a right to be grasped, He emptied himself, became a human being, right? And then took the form of a servant. How does that apply to you and me? I've got to do the same thing. I've got to learn to empty myself.

What am I emptying myself of? Self. That's my big issue. Oh, man. The longer I walk with the Lord, the clearer I see how self-centered I am as a person, and how I am just absorbed with my own needs and my own concerns. But in order to love others—if we, as the body of Christ, are going to start to love one another—it starts with emptying ourselves of ourselves and looking at the needs of others.

And that's the second thing. Jesus took the form of a servant. He emptied Himself and then took the form of a servant. In other words, being willing to serve wherever and however the Lord may want you to serve.

Now, I can tell you right now, those are going to be challenging things for us to do because He's really calling us to love here, and love is usually pretty inconvenient.

I'll tell you right now, you're going to be called upon to love during the football game or right about when it's time to eat or when you're really tired and you really need to just fall into bed or when you're having your own issues. Just like you, I can have my own little pity parties, put on the little hat, just have my party? And it's usually during a time like that that God calls upon me to empty myself and to serve others.

And those are the times that we're not always necessarily willing because it is convenient or inconvenient for us to do it. And the other reason we don't necessarily want to do it is that we make ourselves vulnerable.

When I reach out to love somebody, there's always the chance they're going to stomp on my heart. And probably every one of us in this room has experienced that at least once. And you don't have to experience it more than once to know

that you don't want that to happen again. And so our natural reaction is to hold back. We're just going to hold back. I don't want to be kicked in the side. I don't want to be hurt.

Isn't it interesting that Jesus modeled for us a kind of love where He got hurt? I mean, He loved to the point where it hurt. And I think that's an important reminder for you and me. We are called to give our lives away in love one for another, to do it to a place where it hurts. That's not a fun thing to talk about. It's definitely not a fun thing to think about or to experience.

But if we don't understand, if we don't—if we don't get it that this is what's holding me back, this is what's holding us back from being what Jesus wants us to be, which is one in Him—then we're never going to reach this place that He has called us to reach of really, truly acting like a family.

It says in verse 8, “*And being found in human form, He humbled himself (further) by becoming obedient to the point of death (and not just death, you guys, but) even death on a cross.*” I mean, death is horrific enough all by itself. Death on a cross is so far above that on so many levels. And that's what Jesus modeled for you and I, and that's what Paul is bringing out for you and I to help us to understand what we have been called to.

And the reason that the Word of God gives us so many reminders about loving one another, even to a place of vulnerability, even to a place where we're willing to inconvenience ourselves. Yes, even to a place of being hurt, is because none of that happens naturally. What I mean is, if you're living a natural life, you're never going to put your life out there for anybody to hurt or for anybody to use. You never will. That kind of a life only comes supernaturally. And when I talk about supernatural life, I'm talking about the life of the Spirit living in us, operating through us. Right?

But if I'm determined to live a Christian life on a natural plane, I'm going to constantly be holding back. I'm going to be living for me. I'm basically going to be living according to the rules of the world. And I'm going to just think about what's good for me, what gets me ahead and so forth. And if you guys want to bang your heads against a wall, that's your business. I've had enough of it. But that's not the model of Christ, is it? And that's not where real joy exists, as we serve Him.

So, it comes down to this determination that I am willing to live a supernatural life. I'm willing to go beyond my natural inclination, which is to protect myself, to take care of myself, to hold on to the things that are mine, and to live a different kind of a life. But that, again, that life is only made possible by those who have been broken and surrendered to the will of the Lord.

Now, when I say broken, I'm not talking about broken to the point of emotional disaster. When we talk about brokenness, we're really referring to kind of the same thing that you do with a horse.

When you want to train that animal to be able to carry a human being on its back, because horses don't particularly like that. And we even call it breaking a horse, and we talk about whether a horse has been broken, as to whether or not they are willing to submit. Because if you've ever watched a horse being broken, sometimes they get really owly, and they buck and they nip and they kick. And you ever seen a horse when they're mad, they put their ears back? Get out of the way.

Hey, we Christians can be just like that. We can be just like that when there is a need in the church or in our family or wherever for supernatural love. We can do the same thing. We can nip and bite and kick and buck because we haven't been broken.

What it kind of comes down to for you and I is that self, we're so full of self that the life of Jesus is just struggling to get out and be expressed in our lives. And that's why we need to do what Jesus did, and that is empty ourselves. But that's only going to happen through the work of the Spirit as we come to Him and say, Lord, I am so full of myself and my own desires and my own thoughts and my own dreams. I haven't made any room for you to work through my life and to touch the lives of others, and I confess that to you in the name of Jesus. I bring it to the cross. I ask you to forgive me, and I ask you to begin to love others through me. Show me the kind of love that you have for these people. And show me the kind of sacrifice that I need to walk in order to really love like you.

Because each one of us is a recipient of that very kind of love. If we're in Christ today, I accepted His love. Have you? What an incredible love it is, that unconditional, total, sacrificial love of giving Himself completely so that I might have life. He went to death so that I might live. And He proved His ability to give me that life by rising from the dead. What an amazing Lord we serve.

But He didn't just do it so you and I could waltz off on our merry selfish way; He did it so that you and I might understand that is a model for how we are to live our lives so that we might be one. Really, truly one. As He has already spiritually birthed us to be, now He says, walk this out. Walk this out in practical terms.

But again, it will only come supernaturally through the work of the Spirit. Naturally speaking, I will never try to do that on my own. It only comes as I

yield my life to the life of the Spirit living within me. And that's the kind of life that you and I have been called to.

A life of self-denial, a life of service, a life of giving our lives to others. I want you to listen to the words of Jesus. You can read them with me on the screen. This is what He said on the night that he was betrayed.

Luke 22: 25-27 (ESV)

Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves."

He said this, *"Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, (By the way, children in that culture had no rights. Doesn't mean they weren't loved. They were greatly loved, but they had no rights. He's basically saying that the greatest among you should be like one who has no rights) and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table (meaning the one who's being served) or the one who serves? (is serving the one at the table) Is it not the one who is at the table? (And then I want you to just please hear these last words of Jesus) But I am among you as one who serves."*

This is incredible. Jesus is the only person to ever walk upon this earth who truly deserved to be served. They should have been waiting on Him hand and foot during His earthly ministry. And yet this is the same Jesus, who on the night that He was betrayed, took off His outer garment, wrapped it around His waist, got down on His knees with a bowl of water, and washed the feet of the disciples. Blows me away.

And Jesus says to you and I, I am among you as one who serves. He still says that, by the way. He still is among us as one who serves, Jesus is here today. Why is He here? To encourage you, to comfort those who need comfort, to fill you with spiritual nourishment, to bless your life, to strengthen you.

He has come here today with His outer garment wrapped around His waist, willing to get down on His knees and to serve you. And He wants to impress upon you and I that we are called to the same, to serve one another in love, in

love. And so, what is the response of the Father to the humble service that Jesus offers? This is where we look at the last three verses of our text.

Look at verse 9 in your Bible. It says, *“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

Wow, see this is the response of the Father, and this is something you and I need to understand because this is going to be the response of the Father to you and I as we follow the model that Jesus laid down for us.

Because Jesus humbled Himself, what does it say? God exalted Him. Because Jesus refused to make a name for Himself, what did the Father do? He gave Him the name that is above every name. And because Jesus was willing to bend the knee in service, what did the Father do? He decreed that every knee would bow before Jesus Christ and confess Him as Lord. That's the response of the Father.

But here's what we need to understand: these verses aren't just telling us what happened to Jesus. These are verses showing us the path to glory. And by the way, there's nothing wrong with talking about glory; the Bible talks about it a lot.

The problem is, the disciples, if you will remember in the gospels, they were constantly getting it wrong because they thought of glory or the path to glory as the one the world had taught them about. The path to glory was to be the biggest, the strongest, the best, and so forth, right? And they would constantly be arguing among themselves about which one of them was the greatest.

And Jesus would overhear them, and He would say, okay, greatest. He'd pick a child and bring that child and have the child stand right in the midst of them. And He'd say, you want to be the greatest? Be like this little child. Remember, children had no rights. They wouldn't be listened to, they wouldn't be considered great. If you want to be great in the kingdom of God, be like this child; have a heart like a child. (Matthew 18:4)

You see, that's where it just blows our minds because, again, the world tells us one particular way to do it. But the Word of God says that the way up is the way down. I know the kingdom of God seems to be upside down, and it pretty much is, but the way up in the kingdom of God is the way down. Here's how Peter puts it. Let me put this on the screen for you:

1 Peter 5:5b-6 (ESV)

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,

Clothe yourselves (he says), all of you, with humility toward one another, (why?) for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (and he's quoting Proverbs chapter 3 there) Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,

Did you notice that last phrase? He says, “*humble yourselves, therefore.*” Do you know, he could have easily just said, empty yourselves, therefore, because it's the same thing. Empty yourself of self under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time, God may exalt you. Once again, when I'm full of myself, there's no room for the work of the Holy Spirit to be manifest through my life.

But as I empty myself, I make room through that supernatural work of God to yield to His Holy Spirit so that He might be Lord and work through me and show that kind of love. Be empty of you so you can be full of Jesus, amen.