

Philippians: Jesus Regard
Sermon 9-30-18
Pastor Curtis Dehmey

Philippians 2:1–11

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ²make my joy complete: be 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 regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Message:

This past week I attended two different conferences on two different days. One was with Andy Stanley and the other was the Orange Tour where their goal is to be more intentional about connecting families with churches. I have to admit that I was surprised by some of the things Andy said. I thought I had him pegged in terms of theology and his philosophy around ministry. In his newest book, “Reclaiming Irresistible”, he seeks to answer this question, “How do we reach the next generation for Christ?” And for 3-quarters of the day he spends in-depth time debunking this one idea: that we tell our youth “the Bible tells us so...” In other words, every challenging question that comes our way from youth and young adults we have for the past 20 or 30 years given them the pat answer “the Bible tells us so...” Andy’s argument is that by telling them this over and over again we have set the Bible as the foundation of our faith. And by setting this as their foundation for faith, we have set them up to be easily undermined. He showed us a video that within a matter of minutes a college professor makes some pretty compelling arguments undermining this belief. In a matter of minutes this college professor and many other college professors have dismantled the faith of many youth that simply believed because “the Bible told them so...” They do this

in a matter of minutes that would take us a matter of hours to refute. It's not that we can't counter their arguments, it's that it takes much longer to repair than what a young adult or teenager would give the time and attention to do. The Bible is not the foundation of our faith. Before I go further into this, understand that Andy is not challenging the authority of scripture. He believes in the authority of scripture and so do I. So what is the foundation of our faith? How do we equip the next generation to be able to withstand an age of skepticism? I'm gonna let those questions hang with you for a little bit.

As we look at our passage, just a quick refresher. Remember that Paul is in prison as he writes this letter. He's in prison in Rome. Again, in Rome there are people defending Paul and the gospel and there are people speaking against Paul and the gospel. So he is in an environment that is in the middle of conflict. Any instruction or advice he gives to the Philippian people is not because he's correcting this group of people, it's because he doesn't want them to become like these believers in Rome. "If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ²make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind." If you remember, this passage we're studying today is the centerpiece of the letter to the Philippians. Everything else in Philippians revolves around this passage. Paul is saying in these first two verses, "please don't be like these people I'm with now." Love each other. Have compassion and sympathy for each other. Be of one mind where you can be of one mind.

Here's where I want to focus most of our time and energy today. "³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others." A month or so ago, Ken had me listen to a podcast. The guy speaking was probably not someone I would identify with theologically, but I listened anyways. He surprised me. Again, I thought I had him pegged and what he was going to say. He referred to this Philippians 2:3 passage and was encouraging the Bible thumpers and the theologically arrogant in this audience to really listen to this passage from Paul. So often when we have these heated theological debates, just like the one that's probably coming at our District Conference around ministers performing same-sex marriages, we have these heated debates with arrogance and condescension. Whomever we're arguing with we treat them as less than. We treat them as less smart or less loyal or people of less integrity. We assume the worse in them. We even question their faith. What this speaker in this podcast is advocating for, what Paul is advocating for and what I'm advocating for, is to treat those whom we disagree with higher regard than those whom we agree with. Treat them better than you would treat yourself. Treat them better than you

would treat people that are like you. It doesn't mean you can't disagree. Can you imagine how much more productive our politics would be if we started to regard the other as better than ourselves? Reggie Joiner in the second conference I attended this past week used this example from the 2008 Presidential Campaign between John McCain and then, Senator Barak Obama. (Play Video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrnRU3ocIH4>) McCain could have affirmed the woman's "Arab" comment about Obama. He could have trashed Obama. You can see in this video that McCain's integrity and character comes forth. Now, I'm not advocating for any political party here. So don't get distracted by the affiliations here. The point is, McCain embodied what Paul is talking about. Even though McCain disagrees with Obama, he is still going to regard him as better than himself. Likewise, Paul is instructing the Philippians not to get caught up in the heated arguments with the retired Roman soldiers in Philippi, but regard better than themselves. To treat them as Christ would. And the fundamental thing that causes us to treat others with such disdain in the midst of disagreement is this: "Where there is strife, there is pride...", Proverbs 13:10. How often do we go into a debate armed and ready to battle, forgetting to consider the other? That we treat them with disdain even before we hear them. This kind of pride is the kind of pride that continues strife and entrenches enemies. What if we went into an argument assuming that the person is better than we are? What if we held them in higher esteem than we hold ourselves? What if we assumed that Jesus is in them just as much or more than Jesus is in us? Imagine how that would change the conversation.

⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness." Regarding the other better than yourself includes viewing the other differently, but it also includes viewing yourself differently. When Adam and Eve took a bite of that apple, they wanted to have the knowledge to be like God. They wanted to be gods themselves. Jesus, by contrast, is God. He is equal to the Father. Yet, he "...emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness." So if anyone had the right to view himself higher than others, it was Jesus. Yet, Jesus took the form of a slave. God took the form of a slave. So if Jesus didn't view himself higher than the rest of humanity, who are we to think we are better than any other?

"And being found in human form, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and

every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” What Jesus did on the cross wasn’t about him. It wasn’t to his benefit to be nailed to the cross. It wasn’t to his benefit to be mocked and ridiculed. It wasn’t to his benefit to bend down and wash his disciples feet. He could have easily used the divine power that was within him to set people straight. He could have hoisted himself off that cross. He could have broken the chains that captured him. All those things were within His power. But Jesus and Paul understand something, there is no power, no strength in displaying dominion and authority over others in some vain attempt to control others. There’s an irony here. By displaying our power, our intellect or our authority on a matter, we actually display our weakness. By trying to dominate or to shut people up, trying to control others, or showing our power, we end up exalting ourselves. We show our vanity. We show our insecurity. By name calling, belittling the other and considering the other less than, we show how little strength and power we have. What Paul and Jesus are advocating for here is a spirit of humility. A spirit of understanding. That even when others attack us, hurt us, speak ill of us, that this is a call not to retaliate, but to treat them better than we are being treated. It’s not about what they deserve or what they don’t deserve. It’s about seeing others as children of God no matter how they treat you. It’s about loving them even when you aren’t being loved. None of us deserved the forgiveness of our sins. None of us deserved the incredible love that Jesus bestowed upon each and every one of us.

When Paul talks about “same mind,” “one mind,” or being in “full accord,” he’s talking about harmony among the body of believers. And harmony in the body of Christ comes from humility. And we see that Jesus modeled both. Harmony doesn’t come by agreeing on everything. Harmony doesn’t come by seeing everything the same way. Harmony, in the body of Christ, comes by all of us staying focused on Christ. Harmony comes by all of us having the same posture towards Christ. That as we are one with Christ, we can be one with one another. We agree to find harmony because we know we serve the one who provides peace and harmony in our lives.

And this is where Andy Stanley lands. How do we reach the next generation for Jesus? If the Bible is not the foundation of our faith than what is it? Remember that the Bible wasn’t compiled for about 300 years after Jesus’ death and resurrection. And remember, that Bibles weren’t mass produced to be in the hands of every believer until after the reformation in the 1500s. So for many many years Christians functioned without this amazing book. A book that we adhere to as our authority for understanding Jesus and God today. I believe in the authority of scripture. Andy believes in the authority of scripture. But that’s not our foundation. Our foundation is a loving relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. Think about it, if Jesus just died on the cross and didn’t rise from the dead would

we talk about him the same way we talk about him today? Would there even be something called the “Bible” in front of us today? No. It’s because he rose from the dead that Christianity was born. If someone lives the way Jesus lived and died the way Jesus died and then rose from the dead, don’t you think we should listen to him? We don’t follow the gospels or Paul’s letters simply because “the Bible tells us so...” We follow the Bible because of what Jesus did. And why did Jesus do all of this? For you and for me. It’s because God loves his children. It’s because God didn’t want to see us suffer under the weight of sin any more. It’s because Jesus wants a loving relationship with you and with me. Without a relationship with Jesus, the Bible carries no weight. Does the next generation have a relationship with the Bible, what it says ABOUT Jesus? Or does the next generation have a relationship with Jesus? The real thing? Not the written words, but the person. If you have a relationship with Jesus, no atheist can argue against your experience with Jesus.

What was the second greatest commandment? “Love your neighbor as yourself.” So follow this logic backwards with me: if Jesus, God incarnate, humbled himself to die on a cross and to come back to life to open up a loving relationship that we can have with He and the Father. If Jesus did all of that for us, what gives us the right to treat others like crap? And by not regarding the other as better than ourselves we actually display that we do not have a loving relationship with our God. How do we reach the next generation? How do we combat those who would argue against our Biblical beliefs? How do we raise a new generation in faith in Jesus Christ? It’s not to say “the Bible says...” It’s to have a relationship with the real thing, Jesus. It’s to live the way Jesus lived. It’s to love the way Jesus loved. It’s to regard others whom we may fiercely disagree with in higher regard than ourselves. It’s to live in humility so that we all may have harmony with one another in Christ Jesus. The standard is the love of Jesus. The love of Christ is the highest standard in which we can view all things. If you can’t regard your neighbor the same way Jesus would, then you don’t know the love of Christ. What does it look like to plant seeds for eternity? What does it look like to leave a legacy beyond our death that will bless the Kingdom of God? It’s to share the good news of Jesus Christ. It’s to share the joy of our relationship with Christ with others. It’s to live the way Jesus lived. It’s to not just accepting death, but it’s to live in the resurrection. It’s to love those around us the way Jesus would love. It’s to be one with Christ and one with each other. Amen.