



"True Humility"

REVIEW

Paul wrote this letter from a Roman prison along with letters to the Jesus Followers at Ephesus and Colossae known as the "Prison Epistles (letters). By the frequency of reference, the overall theme of his letter seems to be joy. But not just joy, it is joy in the face of the obstacles and struggles of life. I like the theme, "Joy No Matter What".

Of course there are numerous other themes flowing through this impassioned epistle. Reference to love also appear throughout the letter. Many divide the letter into four main sections in which four clues to maintaining the joy of the Lord emerge. These sections roughly fall along the four chapter divisions found in the English Bible. Chapter divisions were not part of the original writings.

In order to maintain this joy, we must actively consider the following four areas.

I. ADOPT THE RIGHT AXIS -- SUPERIOR LIFE PERSPECTIVE

The Exaltation of Jesus in Everything

II. MAINTAIN THE RIGHT ATTITUDE -- SUPERIOR PATTERN OF LIVING

The humble example of Jesus

III. PURSUE THE RIGHT AIM -- SUPERIOR LIFE PURSUIT

The Passionate Pursuit of Jesus

IV. ACQUIRE THE RIGHT ABILITY -- SUPERIOR POWER SOURCE

The strength of Jesus

After a traditional greeting and personalized praise to God for their trust in Christ and petition to God that they would exalt Christ and glorify God through an increase in their love for one another, Paul drew attention to the first key to joy through personal testimony. Paul revealed the axis around which he arranged his life that enabled him to find joy and rejoice no matter what. A study of his life definitely unearths a ton of "joy no matter what" examples.

I. Adopt the right Axis – the superior perspective

The exaltation of Christ in everything.

according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. Philippians 1:20

A. Paul Encouraged a right axis by personal example 1:12-26

B. Paul encouraged unity by pastoral exhortation 1:27-30

After sharing his personal testimony, Paul encouraged his readers to adopt the same axis of exalting Christ in everything.

1. The Mandate #1 – unity against the opposition 27-28

He encouraged them to live a life worthy of the Kingdom to which they had been made citizens.

He encouraged them to unify against the opposition.

The more we focus on the enemies of the kingdom, the less time we have to worry about the insignificant issues that too often divide the citizens of the kingdom.

Remember what happened when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor.

The "Sleeping Tiger" indeed did awaken.

Rebuilding began immediately with a vengeance previously unheard of.

A new group called Seabees increased from 1,100 to 290,000 charged with building or repairing whatever was needed to support our fighting troops.

When the Japanese attacked Pearl they infuriated the United States, and infuriated people can move mountains in moments. We swung into high gear and began producing ships and planes in amazing numbers in astoundingly short lead times, which came as a complete surprise to the Axis, which thought we couldn't recover that quickly, couldn't possibly produce that many, and wouldn't be able to match their level of technology. They also learned to their dismay that we could hit their homelands, while they couldn't hit ours.

Paul called the Philippians to focus on the external enemy not their personal enmity.

I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel... Philippians 1:27

2. Motivation #1 God's gifts

Paul communicated the **motivation** for unifying against the enemy.

God granted the faith necessary to become Christ exalting citizens.

God granted the privilege of suffering for the sake of Christ.

Exalting Christ in everything eliminates the need to fuss about anything.

3. Motivation #2 – God's encouragement & consolation 2:1

Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion... Philippians 2:1

Here Paul began another set of mandates with the motivation first. Paul emphasized four realities concerning our relationship with Christ motivating Christ exalting behavior toward each other. I see these as privileges of citizenship in the kingdom of Christ.

If there is any **encouragement** in Christ (and there most certainly is)

If there is any consolation of **love** (and there most certainly is)

If there is any **fellowship** of the Spirit (and there most certainly is)

If there is and **affection** and **compassion** (and there most certainly is)

THEN

The actual mandate appears after this motivation.

4. Mandate #2 Make my joy complete by your humble unity

Paul encouraged them to “make his day” by emulating God's love for us.

...complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Phil 2:1-4

Make my joy complete by living in unity and mutual service. The argument basically flows along this line. If Christ has made ANY difference in your life (and He most certainly has), then ignite joy in my heart by how you relate to one another in love and unity. The motivation for the mandated behavior is the ministry of Christ to them. The actions listed all modify the “Make my joy complete”. At first I thought Paul attached a list of things that would bring him joy. On closer inspection, he actually cites **one thing** followed by six related phrases.

Literally translated “Make my joy complete that the same thing you think”

...having the same love

...one souled

...pursuing the same purpose

...nothing from rivalry or empty conceit

...humbly esteeming others more important than self

...looking to the interests of others

His joy came from the unified purpose of the body that would determine their daily interaction with each other. The term translated “thinking” conveys the idea of a personal mind-set that regulates outward action. All of us function according to a “mind-set” that regulates our external actions. We develop that “mind-set” from our culture, environment, peers, education, and hopefully through our interaction with God through the Scripture. If you grew up with the thinking that other races were inferior, your prejudice would show up in your behavior. If your culture taught that humility or meekness was weakness, you would not naturally demonstrate that behavior. A change in thinking always precedes a change in behaving. The use of the singular “think the same thing” here refers to an overall mind-set that regulates behavior.

Paul does not expect nor encourage uniformity but unity.

A. W. Tozer, "One hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other. They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshippers meeting together, each one looking to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other."

The reference to “same thing thinking” has to do with the life-axis of exalting Christ in everything by loving God and each other and embracing God’s way of living. This call to unity among Kingdom citizens occurs multiple times in this letter as well as in the rest of the New Testament.

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. Romans 15:5-7

Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. 2 Corinthians 13:11

I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. 1 Corinthians 1:10

This unity shone brightly in the early development of the church.

All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. Acts 1:14

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. Acts 4:32

Jesus highlighted this love and unity as the hallmark of a true disciple. A good portion of Paul’s letters addressed both the need and failure to demonstrate this unity. Paul specified what such a unity looks like in the six phrases that follow. We could easily devote an entire message to each one.

1. Having the same love

Paul used the term generally indicating an unconditional kind of love. The specific command to “love one another” appears 12 times. Other general references to love for one another appear multiple times.

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Galatians 5:14

Imagine if we all tuned our thinking to the exercise the same unconditional (1 Cor 13) love toward one another.

2. Being “one souled”

This specific term appears only here in the New Testament. It merges a term meaning “closely identified with” and the term translated “soul”. Paul describes the relationship between believers as being “one souled”. This describes a unity that flows out of soul oneness. This “soul-ones” flows out of our mutual connection to the body of Christ.

3. Pursing a common purpose

Paul repeated the initial premise concerning a unified “thinking”. He used the same word as before and will use again in reference to adopting the same “thinking” as Jesus demonstrated. This time he emphasized the “one thing thinking” perhaps referencing his own primary axis of exalting Christ in everything. Can you imagine the result of every Christian focused primarily on exalting Christ?

4. Doing nothing from selfish motives

This kind of selfless thinking produces a selfless living. Paul illustrated the type of behavior that flows out of a thinking transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit in one’s life. This is the kind of living that characterized those transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of Jesus.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Philippians 2:3

He presented the negative and the positive behavior.

This kind of thinking does not...

This kind of thinking does...

First, it **does not** act out of selfish ambition or conceit. Paul used a term indicating “work for hire”. This identified someone whose sole motive for their actions was personal gain. This motive asks, “What’s in it for me?” It is the opposite of unity and love described earlier. A companion undesirable motive for action would be “conceit”. This term describes one who has an inflated or groundless sense of importance. It comes from the marriage of the terms “empty” and “glory”. We might call it one who has delusions of grandeur. One motivated by a desire for material gain and personal recognition derails unity. James clearly exposed these undesirable motives.

Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. James 3:16

5. Humbly considering other people more important

The opposite of selfish thinking is a humble thinking which willingly considers other people more important. Rather than a focus on what will benefit me or bolster my esteem, such humility seeks to benefit and promote others over self. The Greek and Roman culture despised such thinking. They were much more interested in self-benefit and promotion. The Gospel transforms the heart to relate to others differently. Such a heart to consider others more important than ourselves also takes interest in the lives of others.

6. Humbly investing one’s self in other people’s interests

True unity goes beyond thinking. True unity, directed by humility, actually involves themselves in the lives of others. Paul used a term indicating “to look, regard, observe”. The humble servant heart actually stands as the hallmark of Christianity. Unfortunately, these are not things that describe many interactions in the church today. There can be no unity without humility. Humility considers others first. Humility serves others first.

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Romans 12:10

The only cause for strife in this environment would have to do with who got to serve and honor the other first or more. Who in this “Me first” world lives with this kind of thinking? This seems impossible! This is foreign to unredeemed human nature. Paul next asserts that not only is this thinking possible, but was the key component of the ministry of Jesus all through His earthly ministry.

And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you

must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:42-45

Many claim to want to be like Christ until they find out what that really looks like. In the context of encouraging them to complete his joy by living in humble unity, Paul called them to adopt and maintain the same thinking Jesus demonstrated.

II. MAINTAIN THE RIGHT ATTITUDE -- SUPERIOR PATTERN OF LIVING

The humble example of Like Jesus

Some consider the next seven verses the most powerful in the New Testament. Some feel they were actually lyrics to a commonly sung hymn in the early church. Since I agree with that sentiment, they deserve more than a cursory treatment. Today I will focus on how the example of Jesus illustrates the exhortation of Paul. Next week I will lead us through a more in depth exploration of the grand themes represented in this sensational section of Scripture. Jesus clearly brought joy to the heart of His Father by His actions.

Have this thinking in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Paul used the same word for thinking used earlier in his exhortation to the church. He mandated a mind-set similar to the one demonstrated by Jesus. This is a present tense command calling us to adopt and continually maintain this Christ-like mindset. What was Jesus mind-set? The reality? In spite of the fact He was eternally existing in the nature/form of God...

Paul presented one thing He did not do and two things He did.

He did NOT “regard, esteem, count” similarity with God something to be clung to.

He did not esteem Himself more privileged but esteemed God more important. This “esteeming” did not flow from a consideration of actual worth because the Father and Son were equal in essence. This is just like the esteeming of others as more important having nothing to do with whether they really are as important. It was a decision to take on a menial form (humanity) in spite of His majestic form (deity). He DID NOT cling to the outward manifestation and recognition due His deity. He did not insist on coming to earth to be immediately recognized and identified as deity. He did not regard that as something to be clung to no matter what. How often we demand to be recognized as important. Too often we demand recognition no matter what. We demand people recognize our true nature.

BUT what did He do. Two things...

He “emptied” Himself.

The two emphasis points in this verse focus on “not clung to” and “emptied”. The term translated emptied refers to something that has been nullified of value, emptied of recognition. The passage identified the core of this “emptying”. Taking the form of a slave even though He was existing in the form of deity. This act did not empty Jesus of the reality of His deity only the manifestation. We will explore this more next week.

Rather than appearing on earth as a glorious God as He will at His return, He entered human history as a helpless baby. The immortal God took on the likeness of mortal man. Paul used several terms to emphasize this incarnation; this identification with humanity. “form” (morphe) , “slave”, “likeness” (homoioima), “appearance” (schema), “man” (anthopos)

The second thing He did was “humbled” Himself.

This humbling was evidenced by becoming obedient to death on a cross. Humility meant to see oneself as low or make oneself low or weak. The current culture viewed this trait negatively. The Bible views this trait as necessary. It is not hard to compare how Paul instructed the Philippians to live and the example Jesus left.

He exhibited perfect unity with the Father.

He demonstrated perfect love.

He embraced one purpose with the Father.

He showed no trace of selfish ambition or conceit.

He humbly considered The Father’s agenda and our need more important.

He actually looked to our need.

In response to the thinking and behavior of Jesus...

For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Phil 2:9-11

As we celebrate His example of humble sacrifice, may we consider our response to others. Better to think and act humbly now and be exalted later than act exalted now and be humbled later.