Unified for the Gospel

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. Well, open your Bibles with me, if you would, to Philippians chapter 2.

Philippians chapter 2. We finished chapter 1 last Sunday and now begin chapter 2, which is such an important portion of Scripture for us to consider and to think very carefully of these next several weeks.
Humility for all of us, I think, is a struggle. We want to be humble. We want to think of others above ourselves.
But if we're honest, it's just so difficult to do at times. Even when we try to be humble and try to not put ourselves first, we still find ourselves so tempted to elevate our own opinion or our own desires. Even sometimes when we would try to speak humbly, we end up putting others down, much like the very famous Winston Churchill quote who said of one of his political opponents, he is a humble man who has much to be humble about.
[1:25] Maybe you find yourselves thinking that wouldn't it be great if our nation as a whole would repent of our pride.

The Lord has been good to our nation. We have received so many mercies from His hand. And yet, if we are honest, we have become a very proud nation.
Would it be amazing if our country would be called to repent and called to reject pride and called to humility?
Our entire nation as a whole and the individual people that make up our nation can at times be so filled with pride that such a call to repentance would just feel impossible.
It may surprise you to hear, though, that in our nation's past, such calls for repentance has been a part of our story. In fact, April the 30th, 1863, was declared a day of national humiliation, fasting, and prayer.
[2:38] The proclamation had been made by then-president Abraham Lincoln. He declared it on March 30th, 1863, as a response to the Senate resolution requesting such a day to address the national crisis of the Civil War.

And so, April 30th, 1863, the United States of America observed a national day of humiliation, fasting, and prayer.
Let me read a part of the words that were spoken by our president at that time. Whereas the Senate of the United States, devoutly recognizing the supreme authority and just government of Almighty God in all the affairs of men and of nations, has by a resolution requested the president to designate and set apart a day for national prayer and humiliation.
We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven. We have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown.
But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us.
[4:08] And we have vainly imagined in the deceitfulness of our heart that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own.

Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace.
Too proud to pray to the God that made us. It behooves us then to humble ourselves before the offended power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.

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And I do hereby request all the people to abstain on that day from their ordinary secular pursuits and to unite at their places of public worship and their respective homes in keeping the day holy to the Lord and devoted to the humble discharge of the religious duties proper to that solemn occasion.
That's staggering to hear, isn't it? And while we may hear that and our hearts grieve to think of the seeming impossibility of such words being spoken again on a national level, and while it may be true that our nation may not hear such words as those spoken of to the entire country asking for the entire nation to repent of their sins, certainly it should be true among those who know the Lord Jesus and claim the name of Christ, that we should respond to our sin and our self-sufficiency in repentance and confession of sin.
[6:10] Our great example of humility given to us in Philippians 2 is that of the Lord Jesus. In fact, some of the most lofty Christological thoughts in our entire New Testament appear in chapter 2, verses 5 to 8, on down to verse 11, in fact, where it declares every tongue will one day confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

And while for most of us we are well acquainted with the words of verses 5 to 8, and speaking of how the Lord Jesus, verse 6, was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, what may oftentimes be missed is the immediate context within which these high and lofty Christological words appear.
The beauty of verses 5 and following, though they are rich in doctrine, in context are given to us as a follow-up, as an example, as a demonstration of what verses 1 to 4 calls us to do.
Namely, verse 3, to 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 interest, but also to the interest of others.
And now here comes the example of Christ. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. Chapter 2, verses 1 to 11, is a plea for God's people to live in humility, to walk in unity, and in so doing, to magnify our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is not only our ultimate example of how to live, but is Himself the propitiation for our sins and the redemption that has been purchased on our behalf.
[8:42] Philippians 2, 1 to 11 could not be overstated in its importance that we would understand it. And to rightly understand the glory of Christ in this passage would demand that we would understand the context behind it and the importance of how God's people are to live both in humility and in unity.

All for the sake of the gospel. Humility is that which should describe those who are in Christ, and the result of true humility will be unity among God's people.
This is not only true in Philippians 2, this is also the very thing that Jesus Himself in the flesh on the earth prayed for us.
Those words were recorded in John 17 where He prays, 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 as You loved Me.
[10:28] Unity, love, and the Gospel inextricably linked together of how God's people should live. So we're going to spend a few weeks here in chapter 2, verses 1 to 4, and then, depending on how far we get with some of the holidays and the new year upon us, we will return in January at some point to pick back up here in this passage down through verse 11 as we continue to walk through this entire letter.

But I want us today and next Lord's Day to consider the opening verses here of chapter 2, verses 1 to 4. This call to humility and call to unity.
It says, So, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 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 interest, but also to the interest of others. And so, these opening verses deal with our unity.

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Unity, which, of course, demands the humility with which we would conduct ourselves. But, let's just begin. We'll look today probably just at this first observation from this text and that is the source of our unity.
[12:28] Let's begin by looking at the source of our unity. Where does it come from? What is it that unifies us? How does it unify us? What is the source?

And there are several things that are mentioned here in verse 1 that I want to draw your attention to that becomes the foundation of our unity as the body of Christ.
He begins, so, if there is any encouragement in Christ. At first reading in our English text, this could wrongly be assumed to be some kind of a question.
Is this the case? If we have this or do we have that? This is, though, what we would call in the original text a first class conditional, which means it's best understood in terms of definition if we would say because we have or since we have.
it would be rightly understood to read verse 1 this way, so, because there is encouragement in Christ, because there is comfort from love, because there is participation in the Spirit, because there is affection and sympathy, unity.
[13:54] The source of our unity begins with this, that we have encouragement in Christ. Christ is the source of every good and perfect gift that we have.

Encouragement, the word there translated in verse 1, is a compound word that means to call and alongside. The word literally would mean to call alongside.
We are in Christ, we have been called to walk with Him, and as we walk with Him, we are to walk with each other. We are in Christ, and therefore we are related to all who share a union in Christ.
We have encouragement in Christ because of His work and because we are in Him. The source of our unity is not something that begins with us.
The source of our unity begins with Christ. He has called us, He has saved us, He has changed us, the Spirit of God indwells us, we are part of His family, and we share that encouragement with all who are in Christ.
[15:09] We are unified because of what we hold in common, namely, that all who are believers are in Christ. And that encouragement stays with us through any circumstance.

We have encouragement in Him. And as we have encouragement from the Lord, so we have encouragement to each other.
As we call on each other to walk with the Lord, to honor the Lord, we call on each other to be persevering in our faith. When you think of encouragement from person to person, think of it in this picture.
It's an arm around the shoulder and it's a hand in the back. This is the way to think of what biblical encouragement is. It's an arm around the shoulder that says, I'm with you, I'm here for you, I care for you.
It's an arm around the shoulder that says, we are brothers and we are sisters. And it's a hand in the back that's pushing forward. That's not letting the other person quit.
[16:21] It's both a sense of support and of pushing forward. To have encouragement in Christ is to say that our greatest encouragement is what He has given to us, and then in return, we want to give to each other the encouragement that says, I am here beside you, arm around the shoulder, and I'm helping to push you to follow Christ, hand in the back.

I think this is the way to view biblical parenting. As a parent, if you're all and only arm around the shoulder, if it's just, I love you, and I feel for you, and I care for you, if it's only that, then we're missing the part that is to push our children to pursue the Lord, and to honor the Lord, and to obey the Lord, but if our parenting is all push in the back, and no arm around the shoulder, then we just come off as people that are always wanting and demanding and expecting more without connecting with the heart of our child.
Biblical encouragement is both that arm around the shoulder and the hand in the back. That's true in the family, that's true in the church. church. We need to let each other know that we love each other, that we support each other, and there's a time in Christian ministry to just be present.
Don't have to fix everything, don't have to solve every problem, just be with them. Just put your arm around your brother or sister in Christ and just be with them, just feel with them, just care for them.
But there's a time to, with a hand in the back, push them forward and call them to obedience and challenge them to grow.

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[18:14] This is what encouragement is all about. And so in the end, we are unified with each other because Christ has encouraged us.

And so in turn, we encourage each other. The source of our unity is we have encouragement in Christ. There's a second source that is mentioned here.
We also have comfort from love there in verse 1. This specific word, translated comfort, is found only here in the New Testament.
The love that we've received comes from the Father and it leaves us feeling comforted and safe and blessed. We are comforted by the love of God because it is active in us.
us. And because the love of God is active in us, we walk in obedience. This is the greatest problem with those who would try to live the Christian life apart from truly being converted.
[19:23] They're trying to will themselves, to force themselves to do what they don't have springing up from inside their own heart. But for those who have the comfort of God's love, who have been changed from the inside out, we've been given new affections.

We've been given new desires. And so it's not that it's always easy to do so, but as the people of God, when we obey the Lord, we are now walking in step with our redeemed will that has been changed from death to life.
This is why you cannot successfully fake the Christian life. I mean, for a season, you may fool some, but you'll never fool the Lord, because it is His love that is the source of our Christian life.
There's a third thing that he mentions here, not only that we have encouragement in Christ and comfort from love. Also, we have participation in the Spirit. Participation in the Spirit.
The word participation is that word you're likely familiar with, koinia, often translated as fellowship.
This idea that we have participation in the Spirit can be rendered that we have and enjoy a fellowship produced by the Spirit.
[20:55] That's the idea here. That this participation, this fellowship that we have is produced by the Spirit. This is one of the good ways to test your heart to see if you're truly in Christ.

Those who are truly in Christ enjoy a participation, a fellowship produced by the Spirit of God in your heart for God's people.
Now, I'm not pretending that every single Sunday morning is easy to get up and come to church, and I'm not pretending that every single week you're at the top of the mountaintop, spiritually speaking, and I understand there's times where you may come to worship with a heavy heart and with a burdened mind, and sometimes because of the events of the week, that your heart may actually be somewhere else, but you kind of have to force your body to physically be here.
I understand all those things are a part of real life. However, it should be the pattern of your life. It should be the regular practice of your life that you long to be with the people of God.
Coming to gather for worship with God's people should not, week after week after week, be a grind for you. This isn't something that you have to force yourself to do.
[22:21] You shouldn't be looking for reasons and excuses to not be here and to be absent from what the church is doing. Because one of the evidences of being truly converted is that the Holy Spirit is producing within you a desire to participate in the life of the body of Christ.

Christ. This is one of the reasons, there's many, but this is one of the reasons why in so many churches you see this phenomenon where you have moms and dads who are at church all the time while their kids are little and even while their kids are in high school and then when their youngest child graduates and leaves, mom and dad are gone and often never to be seen again.
And you say, well, how did that happen? They were here in a part of the church for 20 years. What happened? Well, one of the reasons that happens is you have people who loved the benefits and the blessings of their children being around the church, but they themselves never truly knew Christ.
And so, when you take the benefit for the kids away, there's no desire or passion in their heart to participate in the body of Christ. Why does that get exposed?
Because one of the sources of our biblical unity is a desire and a passion to fellowship, to participate in the body of Christ.
[23:59] So this becomes a good test for you. Do you love gathering with God's people? people? I'm not saying is every single Sunday the easiest thing.

Life happens and there's time to time where it's discipline and over delight, so to speak. But it ought to be the ongoing practice and pattern of your life that this is where you love to be with God's

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people.
That you love to sing songs about Christ and hear preaching about Christ and be a part of conversation about Christ and to encourage each other and to use your spiritual gifts to bless and to strengthen others.
And while the world says, wouldn't you prefer to sleep in? And while the world says, wouldn't you prefer to stay home on Sunday and just watch more television?
And the world says, wouldn't you enjoy just more time to just scroll mindlessly through your phone?
The body of Christ, the believers, we who participate in the life of the Spirit, say, no, this is where we want to be.
[25:16] Because this is our family. We are united in Christ. And one of the great evidence is that you truly belong to Him.

is that your heart delights to participate in the things of the Spirit of God.
The whole Trinity here is mentioned as a part of the source of our joy. The Father loved us, the Son has given us encouragement, and the Spirit gives us our fellowship and our togetherness.
before you get to the beautiful verses of the Christology in verses 5 and following, it begins with this reminder that we as the body of Christ are supposed to love each other and walk in humility and walk in unity.
And the example of what that looks like that is to come in verse 5 directs our attention away from ourself and onto Christ, which in context becomes a beautiful picture of the Christian life.
[26:36] That our eyes are focused on Jesus, but our hands and our feet are walking in obedience. It's not a question of do we worship Christ or do we live obediently.

It's that we live obediently as we keep our eyes focused on Christ. This is one of the real fallacies with this disease that has infiltrated and permeated churches for the last 25 years.
This idea of I just want preaching that's relevant. I just want something that's relevant. And the danger behind that the last 25-30 years has been this false thinking that our doctrine is not relevant. That to study theology has no relevancy. That that's just relegated for those who want to be smart and educated. Just give me something I need.
Well, the truth of the matter is, the more you know of who Christ is, the more you understand who our God is, it has everything to do with how you live your life every single day.
[27:45] So you just don't need four ways to be happy or eight ways to be financially free.

Those things aren't going to change your life. What you do need is to see who Christ is and look at His life and know His message and understand the Trinity's involvement and role in your salvation.
And as we do that together, and collectively, it produces a humility within us that gets expressed in unity as we keep our eyes focused on Christ and then walk in obedience to His will and to His word.
Folks, the most relevant thing you can know is who God is. That's the whole point in context of chapter 2.
be humble, walk in unity, and understand such blessings come to you from God.
[28:58] We have encouragement in Christ, we have the comfort of love from our Father, and we have participation in the Spirit.

There's one other thing he mentions here in verse 1, and that is affection and sympathy. So, we have encouragement, we have comfort, we have participation, and we also have affection and sympathy.
The word here in verse 1, affection, might sound familiar to you. We looked at it earlier, chapter 1, verse 8, for God is my witness how I yearn for you with all the affection of Christ Jesus.
Affection, it's the place of deep emotion, of deep feelings. We have, as a part of our unity, affection and sympathy.
This is helpful for us, church, because this reminds us that while the study of God and the knowledge of theology is relevant for us, it's also a good reminder that the knowledge that we pursue as we learn of who God is from His Word should not be something that leaves us cold or robotic.
[30:19] There's affection. There's feelings here. There should be this part of us that as we learn who God is, we remember what we received from Him.

That the Lord was kind to us and took pity upon us. He was merciful to us and just as He was merciful to us, so we should be merciful to each other.

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We've received affection and sympathy and so with each other we strive to give both affection and sympathy.
I think of it this way, affection is what you feel, sympathy is what you do. We feel for each other and we act on those feelings.
Just as God has loved us, John 3, 16, for God so loved us. He loved us this way.
[31:27] He loved us in this way that He gave. It speaks of His love and it speaks of His actions. He gave.

That's what God has done for us and in turn with each other so we should love each other. There are things we should feel but that love is an act of love that should lead us to do.
Beware of just feeling things that don't lead to action. Be careful with this. This is one of the mistakes so many people make. They feel certain things towards someone but if those feelings don't lead to action, you've not been obedient.
The danger is you will convince yourself you have been obedient because of what you felt but feeling by itself is not the Christian life.
We have feelings for sure but it leads us to obedience. I'll give you two examples. One example would be in your relationship with your fellow man, the other with the Lord.
[32:43] If there is someone in the church that you are aware of that is struggling, they're hurting, they lost a job, they've got something in their life that's come up that's been very difficult for them and you truly feel something for them, you feel compassion for them, you feel affection for them, you hurt with them, you grieve with them over this problem and you think to yourself, I ought to help them, I ought to do something to remember them, to lighten their burden, I ought to give them a gift, I ought to do something for them to help with their tangible needs.

And you feel it and then you don't do anything about it. They've not been helped. The danger is you would substitute your feeling with helping them.
And while you've done nothing to help them, you may satisfy your own conscience by saying, well, I didn't help them, but I sure did feel something for them. beware of feelings that don't lead to response.
Now, this exact same thing gets brought into churches all the time. When congregational services whip people into a frenzy, and by the use of instruments and music and lights and all the gadgets and toys and gimmicks, your people feel a lot.
They feel excited. They feel emotional. They feel fired up. And if they've not been given the truth of God's Word to anchor those feelings in truth, then they will leave that sanctuary feeling a certain way without any inner compulsion to be obedient because there is no doctrine for those feelings to be rooted in.
[34:44] But they will all the while feel like they've worshipped. This is a subtle danger that is so prevalent, not in the world, quote unquote, but inside churches.

And so, just as I would say to you individually, I would say to churches corporately, beware of feelings that do not lead to action and obedience.
But he mentions here that we have from God affection and sympathy. God not only loved us, He so loved us.
He loved us this way. He loved us in this demonstration, John 3.16, that He gave His only Son for us. Or, you can look at Romans 5, same idea, but God demonstrated His love in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us.
If you think of God purely with your mind and have no heart affection, you've missed something.
[36:03] If you think of your spouse, if you think of your parents, if you think of your child only intellectually, and there's no feelings there, something has gone wrong, but if all those relationships are built exclusively on emotion, with no follow-through of action, we have fallen short of what biblical love is.

The source of our unity is that God has not only had affection, but also sympathy. He demonstrated His love for us, and so we should do the same.
This is the source of our unity. Encouragement in Christ, comfort from His love, fellowship with the Spirit, and affection and sympathy.
all of this is what leads us to be unified, and we do that as we focus our eyes on Christ, who is described as the author and perfecter of our faith.

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This Christmas season, I want to biblically implore you to look to Christ, Christ, and then to act in obedience. Be clear on who He is, and then follow through by loving and encouraging those in your life with an arm around their shoulder and a hand in their back as you say, I am here with you, and I'm going to call you to obedience and together with our eyes on Jesus.
[37:53] We will participate in the life of the Spirit. That is what this day and every day is about for us. Lord, we thank You for Your Word today and pray that You would use it to bring encouragement and hope, conviction and clarity.

We thank You that You sent Your only Son, that whoever would believe in Him would not perish but have everlasting life. We pray even this morning for any who may not know Christ as their Savior, for any who have been trying to live the Christian life apart from truly belonging to You, that this very day they would repent of their sin and turn from their self-sufficiency and in humility call out to You for forgiveness and in unity walk with their Christian family as together we pursue to love You and to live as You have told us to live.
In Christ's name we pray. Amen. If we can help you, if we can serve you, if we can answer questions for you, guests, remember, if you would please use that connection card.
Let us know your question. Let us know your need. Let us know your prayer requests. We would love to serve you in that way. Join us tonight 5.30 outside, Christmas around the tree.
Refreshments start at 5. Dress warm. Come sing with us. Love you, church. God bless you. You're dismissed. God bless you.
[39:42] God bless you.

God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you.

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