

Union with Christ

Sermon Text: Ephesians 1:1-14

Study Text: Philippians 2:1-11

Sermon Recap: Ephesians is a wonderful letter, full of God's grace for His Church. In this opening section, Paul deals with the glorious work of God in Christ. Through Christ, we have been reconciled to God, saved out of the death of sin. Paul calls our attention to Christ's work in our salvation, that it was from God, that God chose us to be saved long before the world had ever been made. God had us, the Church, in His mind when He sent Jesus all those years ago. Although we were alone and destitute in our sin, aliens to grace, and orphans from God's goodness, through Christ we are adopted into the family of God with all that rights and privileges that come with it. We have unity, privilege and eternal goodness because we are in Christ.

Sermon Connection: In Philippians 2:1-11, Paul introduces us to a foundational Christian idea: that we are together *in Christ Jesus*. The context of the letter to the Philippians is "community." Paul is writing to the gospel community in Philippi, that is, the church in Philippi. Therefore, because Paul's intended audience is the community of saints, everything in the letter must be read in the context of community. To be *in Christ*, then, takes on a new dimension for us. It means that not only are we *in Christ* individually, but we are *in Christ together* as a gospel community. It is by looking to the example of Jesus that we learn that we are inseparably connected to one another in Him. We also learn how to relate to, love, and serve one another.

Lesson Plan

Lesson Goal: To see that the foundation for membership in gospel community is our being *in Christ together*

Lesson Points:

Point 1: Our Shared Humility (vv. 1-8)

Point 2: Our Shared Savior (vv. 9-11)

Point 3: Group Reflection and Prayer

The Context: Philippians, like Paul's other writings, is a personal letter. It is, perhaps, one of Paul's most loving and heartfelt letters. He truly loves the Philippian church. His task in writing is to encourage this church not to love the world as their culture did. He called them to live radically different lives by looking to Christ. Jesus is the One Who began the work of salvation in them (1:6), and He is the One in Whom the Christian life is lived. But Paul presses it further here. He wants the

Philippians to see that being in Christ also includes *being in Christ together*. Salvation reconciles us to God but also to the other members of Christ's Church.

Opening Question: Considering our study from last week, where are some areas we may be misunderstanding gospel community? How has the modern religious culture misunderstood gospel community?

Transition Statement: Let's consider now what Paul has to say about being *in Christ together*...

Point 1 - Our Shared Humility (vv. 1-8)

What does Paul want us to see about encouragement, comfort from love, and participation in the Spirit as it regards to being *in Christ* from vv. 1-2?

Paul's question is rhetorical. He is not really asking, "Are these things really in Christ?" On the contrary, the phrase communicates that all of these things—encouragement, loving comfort and participation in the Spirit—are indeed found in Christ. Therefore, Paul is instructing us that we should hope upon these things because they are assured in Christ. We should be people of encouragement, people of loving comfort, and people who are filled with the Holy Spirit. Why? Because all of these things are assumed of those who are *in Christ*. These benefits flow from Jesus to His people by the power of the Holy Spirit.

What kind of picture of community emerges from vv. 1-5?

The picture here is of a grace-filled, life-giving community. Do you desire to be a part of a community where encouragement, comfort and the Holy Spirit are present? Of course, you do! What about a community where everyone shares the same core convictions, puts everyone else first, looks out for the interests of others? Of course, we want to be part of such a community. Even the secular world recognizes these benefits. And while we all long to be part of such a community, we must recognize two important points:

- 1) The foundation for gospel community rests on being in Christ, and...
- 2) Gospel community takes real work and sacrifice on the part of each individual member.

One of Paul's objectives with the letter to the Philippians was to undo a social/cultural idea that prestige was a good thing, something worthy of our pursuit. How do vv. 5-8 help to undo pride and prestige?

Paul understood that we naturally love ourselves; we want others to think much of us. The same was true for the Philippians. They were proud to be proud. Knowing that such pride had no place in gospel community, Paul sought to hold Christ as our example and corrective. One theologian calls this section, "Christology in service of Ecclesiology." Those are big words that simply mean Paul is talking about Jesus in order to help the Church. How do we deal with sinful pride? We look to the example of Christ. How do we deal with thinking too much of ourselves and our desires? We look to Christ. If anyone deserved pride and preference, it was certainly Jesus, the King of the kings. But as we read, Paul calls to imitate Jesus, Who humbled Himself for our sake. Therefore, as we are in Christ, we learn to humble ourselves for others.

How should these elements of Christ's humility shape and form our (collectively) understanding of true gospel community?

Paul is holding up Jesus as the example of how we are to live and act inside the Church, inside gospel community. The community of saints does not exist to make us happy and meet all of our needs. These things are certainly a part of it, but the primary goal of gospel community is the mission of God, which we find exemplified in Christ Himself. Jesus' primary goal in and through His life was to make much of God by fulfilling all that God had called Him to do. He was certainly happy, joyful, and deeply satisfied, but these things came through submission to God. Therefore, we must see that the foundation and shape of gospel community is primarily the mission of God. The mission defines the community.

Transition Statement: Gospel community is entirely dependent upon the foundation of Jesus, Who through His death, burial and resurrection, set the example for us of how we are to live together as His people...

Point 2 - Our Shared Savior (vv. 9-11)

What does the "*Therefore*" in v. 9 signify?

Paul makes a transition in his argument at this point and begins to show how God now exalts Jesus. The "*Therefore*" in v. 9 calls us back to vv. 5-8. In these verses, Paul depicts the humiliation of Christ for the sake of the Church. Jesus humbled Himself for our sake, took on our likeness, bore our sins, and died in our place. On this basis, Paul says, God has highly exalted Jesus! And rightly so. King Jesus is our everything.

What do vv. 9-11 teach us about Jesus, His work on the cross, His resurrection, and His present standing?

Paul is doing for us what is called "Christology." He is explaining the doctrine and work of Christ. From these verses, we note several things about Jesus: that He is God, the second Person of the Trinity; He is submissive to the will of God the Father and humbled Himself to the cross; He was buried and He was raised to life; we note that His Name is higher than any other in all creation; His Name signifies His royalty; He is all-powerful and commands proper confession from all; and His goal is to make much of God the Father.

How does this understanding of Jesus help us better understand what it means to be "*in Christ*" and to be in gospel community?

The first step to properly being in gospel community is to be in Christ. As we noted earlier, being "*in Christ*" means having salvation through the gospel; it means being full of encouragement, loving comfort, and filled with the Holy Spirit. These things are all possible because of what Christ has already done on our behalf. Therefore, as we look to Christ, we find not only our hope for salvation, we also find our pattern of living within His gospel community. We submit ourselves to the Father's will and mission, we humble ourselves for the sake of others, and we make much of God in all of our lives. So, as we noted earlier, Paul is holding up Christ here for the sake of the Church.

Group Reflection Activity -

Have someone read 1 Peter 2:9-12. Ask the following questions, and encourage honest response and dialogue...

- In what ways have we been too easily pleased with mediocre community?
- Take turns describing your picture of “*life-giving*” community.
- How might we incorporate some of these ideas in our growth group?
- What elements of gospel community is our group good at, and which ones do we struggle with?
- Why do you think we struggle with certain elements of gospel community?
- Work together to build a mission statement for your growth group that especially applies Parkwood’s mission of “*Glorifying* God by laboring together for the *growth* of all believers, while *going* with the gospel to all people(s)” to your growth group.

Intentional Prayer for Community

- Pray that Holy Spirit would open your eyes to see Christ in a fresh way; pray that He would cause you to love Jesus above anyone or anything else.
- Pray that God would reveal to you areas where you have been too easily pleased with mediocre gospel community...perhaps areas where you need to reevaluate your understanding or practice.
- Pray that God would reveal areas of struggle concerning gospel community that you need to work through.
- Pray that God would send someone from your growth group to help you with these struggles.