

If you have your Bible let's flip it over to Paul's letter to the Philippians. We're going to be in the second chapter of Philippians. While you're flipping there, let me introduce myself formally. My name is Beau Hughes and I serve as the campus pastor for our Denton campus. So I spend my weeks and weekends up in Denton serving and leading and shepherding the church up there. And if you're new here, we're one church here that meets on two campuses. Obviously we have a campus here in Highland Village and then we have one in Denton. And so right now simultaneously there's a group of men and women from the Village Church meeting up there and worshiping. So that's where I spend my days. And I promised that group that I would bring them a shout out on their behalf. So this is the shout out from the Denton campus. The Denton campus loves the Highland Village campus. We think of you and pray for you very often. And so I'm very excited. I'm always honored when Matt asks me to come down here and speak to you. Even though I don't know many of you, I'm just honored to be able to come down here and open God's word and share a little bit about what He's put on my heart. So thank you for having me.

Before we look at Philippians 2, let me read this quote to give you some idea of where I want to go this morning, because I think some of the things we're going to read that Paul wrote to the Philippian church 2000 years ago has some extremely relevant impact for our church, specifically for where we are in the life of our church. If you were here two weeks ago, you heard Matt talk about how we have 39 weeks, 37 now, until we move in to the Flower Mound campus. And what we're hoping and praying for is that during these 37 weeks is that as a church body we would pursue depth with vigor and fierceness so that when we move in to the Flower Mound campus, it won't be just about width, but that we would be a deep people who now have an opportunity to grow wider as well. And I think some of the things that Paul writes, some of the attitudes that he's going to exhort the church in Philippi are going to be very, very helpful in our journey. So if we don't understand some of the things that Paul has written to the Philippian church, if we don't take those and make them our own and pursue some of the things and attitudes that he's going to write about, these next 37 weeks are going to be much more difficult to reach the goal that we're setting for ourselves of growing deeply as a church. Let me read you this quote. William Barclay wrote this about the passage that we're going to read this morning.

He said, "The one danger that threatened the Philippian church was disunity. It is, in a sense, the danger of every healthy church. When people believe in earnest, and their beliefs truly matter to them, they are apt to get up against each other. The greater their enthusiasm, the greater the danger that they might collide with each other. It is against that danger that Paul wants to safeguard his friends." Very simply, in the time that we have this morning, I want to do the same. I want to pick up and stand on the shoulders of Paul and apply some of the things that he wrote to this church in Philippi.

And if you don't know any of the historical background on the church in Philippi, it's really a neat deal. Paul planted this church, it was actually the first church in Europe that he planted on his second missionary journey. And he's writing this letter to them in 58-63A.D. from a jail cell. He's writing them as their father in faith, and he's encouraging them. He's sitting in a jail thinking about this church, praying about this church, very encouraged by this church. And he's writing them to exhort them to significant things and to live lives worthy of the gospel. And what I really love about Paul's letter to the Philippians is this. If you've read any of Paul's other letters, a lot of his other letters have a tendency to take on a tone of correction. If you take the letter of 1 Corinthians, it seems like Paul has this list of things in his mind that he wants to correct the Corinthians about. So he just starts off writing a letter and he goes to this issue, he goes to this issue, he goes, "You're doing this...you shouldn't be doing this...church discipline is not going as well here as it should be...you're

not utilizing and operating in your spiritual gifts as you should..." And so if you read the letter, it just reads like thing after thing after thing after thing Paul's writing to the church, and he's just correcting them. When he writes to the Philippians, if you read all the way through the letter to the Philippians, it doesn't come across that way. There are a couple of things that Paul points to and says, "Yeah, you need to think about this, and if I were you I'd do this. And there's these women in your church that are disagreeing, and you need to address that." But really this letter is filled with pastoral encouragement and exhortation. It's one of my favorite letters because he's writing to a church that's not necessarily unhealthy. So he's not writing to correct a bunch of things, but rather he's writing to a church that is somewhat healthy but could be healthier. And he's writing to them to tell them how they can deepen their faith and walk in more health. And I think it's just really where our church is at.

So let's read this together, and I want you to hear Paul's angst. He has a pastoral angst for the church in Philippi to be unified. Let's actually start in Philippians 1:27. His thought process starts there and he continues on. In chapter 1, he just got through telling them that he's in jail and hopes to come see them although he's not sure he's going to be released and be able to. But he really, really wants to, and he's hoping and praying that God will provide him that opportunity. And now in verse 27, this is really the first time in the letter that he shifts his focus on what's going on in the church at Philippi. He says, "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ,..." I know that we're Westerners and Americans, so when we hear a sentence like that, we take that as individualistic, as if he's speaking to an individual. He's speaking to a group of people. So very easily we could say this morning, "Village Church, let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel." This is his exhortation. This is his hope for this church. He wants this church to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ as a group of believers. And then he's going to unpack what that entails. He says this, "...so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,..." Here's why I wanted to start with this verse, because this is where his thought process starts. Apparently in Paul's mind, a church that is living in a manner worthy of the gospel is a church that is unified, standing and striving together with one heart and one mind for the faith of the gospel. So that's really what I want to exhort us to this morning as we follow Paul's train of thought.

So now let's move on to chapter 2, starting in verse 1. "So if there is any encouragement in Christ,..." Now this word "if" here may make it sound like he's asking a question, but he's not really asking a question. He already knows that there is encouragement in Christ. He's exhorting them saying, "Since there is encouragement in Christ..." Let's continue. "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 you hear his angst for this church to be unified? "I want you to live in a manner worthy of the gospel, and I want you to be unified. If there's anything beneficial, if there's anything right, if there's anything good about being in Christ and being loved by Christ, if there's anything valuable about the Christian life, if these benefits are yours in Christ Jesus, then I want you to complete my joy. Complete my joy by being of the same mind, by having one soul, by being in full accord. I want you to be unified." And if you're like me, you're going, "Well that's great. Unity is kind of ambiguous idea." I think about those inspirational posters that were popular in the 90's. When I think about unity, I always think about that inspirational poster with the men and women on the rowing team, how they're working together in unity. But it's just an ambiguous idea. So you're going, "Yeah okay, we need to be unified as a church. I don't think that's anything new, pastor. I don't think that's anything I've heard before." To walk in a manner worthy of the gospel means that we as a people, as a group of men and women committed in covenant to one another, walk in unity with one mind, one purpose and one soul. But what does that really look like? Let's flush that out. If we're saying in the next 37 weeks, in order to grow in depth, what's going to accompany that is us as a church being unified, what does that really mean? And Paul's going to unpack it in a way to say, "If you want to cultivate unity, unity is going to be accompanied and cultivated by certain attitudes of heart. And in verse 3 he's going to unpack these attitudes of heart to the church. So he's not just leaving them and saying, "Hey, I want you to be unified. I want you to live in a manner worthy of the gospel," and that's where he stops. He gets into some detail

and says, "Here's what that looks like. Here's how you can do that as a body of believers. If you practice some of these attitudes, if you develop some of these inclinations of heart together, you will be unified. And if you are unified, you will walk together in a manner worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And if we as a group walk in a manner worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ, some significant things happen."

So this is what he says. Here's how you can cultivate unity. Here's the attitudes of heart. And I just want you to see that he's not just going after action. He's going to go after the heart and the mindset and world-view, and these attitudes are for sure going to lead to action, but he doesn't just say, "Hey, be unified, and in order to do that, you need to do this, do this, do this and do this." He goes a little deeper than that. He really digs in to their attitudes, he really digs in to their heart and he really dig in to what's going on beneath their actions. He says this in verse 3, "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit,..." Look over in chapter 1, verse 15. He's already used this word "rivalry" in this letter. As he's sitting in prison, he talks about how his imprisonment has caused more men and women to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. So he's actually rejoicing in the fact that he's in prison, which is crazy. That's what happens when you're really submitted to the Lord. He says, "Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice." So he's in this situation where he's seeing men preach the gospel from rivalry. He's looking around and as he's seeing these people preach the gospel out of a spirit of rivalry. These men are preaching the gospel, but they're doing it in such a way that's divisive. So you can actually be preaching the gospel and be doing it with a heart that is wicked and divisive and contrary to what Jesus Christ hopes for and prays for His church. And Paul's seeing these men doing these things out of rivalry, and he's writing to the Philippians and says, "Don't do anything from rivalry. Because rivalry is going to unravel unity so quickly."

And let me tell you how I see this play out at least at the Denton campus. I don't see it inasmuch as there are men and women standing up and preaching the gospel out of rivalry, but rather what I think happens is that men and women develop a party spirit around certain opinions that are not central to the gospel. And those opinions about topics begin to control them, and if we're not careful these opinions begin to control you and a rivalry is created because men and women that have this opinion stand here in the church, other people that have this opinion stand here and they go at it. And this became extremely relevant and very evident to me a couple of weeks ago during the election. I live in 76201 in Denton. It's not homogeneous. Not everybody at our campus voted the same way. And it's okay to have an opinion, it's okay to have a conviction. But listen to what I began to hear and why I got burdened for our campus. I began to have covenant members come up to me and say, "I'm afraid to talk to another covenant member about this election because of what they're going to say. Because I voted for this person and I know they voted for this person, and I just feel like it's going to be a really, really bad conversation. And I'm afraid to go and talk to this person." That's no okay. That's rivalry. That's taking an opinion about politics and a conviction about politics, which is important but not central to the gospel, and being controlled by it in such a way that you're creating rivalry in your home group over the election. And listen, it's not just politics here. We could do anything. You could do Apple and PC. We create rivalry over those things. One of the ones I know is pretty standard is this idea of public school vs. private school vs. home school. And everybody has an opinion, and everybody thinks their opinion is right, which is why follow through with what they think is right. That's okay, but when you take something like that and bring it into the church and develop a party of people that think the same way you do and you combat with other people in the church that disagree, that's creating rivalry. And that's not okay. That rips at the fabric of unity, and it's real subtle. And what it really exposes is you insecurity. Because you're so violently aggressive with your own opinion that you can't just have a conversation and disagree about things that aren't central to the gospel. And listen, there are times where you need to draw the line in the sand, and there are things that are explicit in the Bible that you need to contend for and war for. That's not creating rivalry, that's standing on truth. But Paul's saying, "Listen, there's a spirit behind even that, but you've got to be careful. Because if you create rivalry in the church,

then what do you think is going to happen when somebody who is not a believer walks in to your home group and hears you talk about these things and violently disagreeing? That's not living in a manner worthy of the gospel. And so he's saying, "If you want to cultivate unity in the church, do nothing from rivalry."

And he doesn't stop there. He says, "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit..." And the word "conceit" there is two Greek words slammed together and together they literally mean "empty glory." I think the King James Version translates it "vainglory." Do nothing from rivalry and do nothing from vainglory, from empty glory. So if you're pursuing things within the church or even outside of the church for empty glory, if you're not doing it for the glory of God but for your glory, please don't do that within our church. That really hinders unity being cultivated. And so Paul says, "Don't do these things." And then he contrasts it, so he doesn't just give negatives. And I want to remind you throughout as we're reading this that the Philippians aren't necessarily doing these things. He's just writing them to forewarn them not to. So he's not mad at them, he's encouraging them. "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." I think it is noteworthy that at the time Paul wrote this, the word "humility" wasn't really a positive word. If someone comes up to you and says, "You just have a lot of humility," you'll be encouraged by that. In the 1st century if somebody called you humble, you would be offended. Because the word "humble" in that context and in that culture literally was probably reserved more so for a slave. And for something or someone to be humble meant that they were unfit or shabby. So when Paul uses this word, some commentators have said it's the first time ever known that this word has been used in a positive way. He's saying, "Be humble. Don't do anything from rivalry or conceit, but in humility, in lowliness." Do you want to cultivate unity at the Village Church? Be lowly. Have an attitude of lowliness.

And he doesn't stop with humility. He says, "in humility count others more significant than yourselves." So in lowliness have an attitude where you think of others as more significant than yourselves. And again, he's not saying, "Act like others are more significant than yourselves." He's saying, "Really believe that other people in your church are more significant than you are." So in a group context I'll just ask you: Who in this church do you consider more significant than yourself?

Let me be bluntly honest with you today. Do you know what I like to do? I like to count other people more significant than myself, but only the people I like. I like to choose within our church who I count more significant than myself. So if there's a guy that I really connect with, I have no problem thinking about him more significantly than I think about myself. And I'll choose to do that. So I'll read this and go, "Absolutely. This guy over here, I like him. I think of him more significant than myself." What about the awkward guy in your home group? Do we really think about that person as more significant than ourselves? I'll just be honest, a lot of times I don't. The guy in your group, the woman in your group, the person sitting next to you, do you really consider that person that's so difficult to love more significant than yourself in your mind? If you really want to start thinking about this, those of you who are regular attenders here but you don't belong, those of you who come here but you don't really know anybody, you haven't plugged in, you've been here for months and you're still just soaking in, this exhortation to consider others better than yourself becomes really difficult. It's hard to consider others better than yourself when you don't know anybody. I mean, you could do some actions, but it's really hard in your heart to think of individuals within our church as more significant than yourself when you're really not here, you just come. And Paul's saying, "To cultivate unity means that you have a heart and an attitude where you see men and women in your home group, at Recovery, in services, wherever you go, you see them as more important than yourself, you see them as having more value than yourself." This "more significant," it's the same phrase Paul's going to use in the next chapter of Philippians when he says that it is of "surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus." And he's saying you need to think of other people within your congregation, that they're more significant than yourself.

And he doesn't just stop there. He says this in verse 4, "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." And I'll just tell you, this is a very personal sentence for me because when I was eight years old,

I was diagnosed with clinical depression. I don't know how much you know about clinical depression or the disease of depression, but it is absolutely demoralizing and it's tragic. Because when you're in the middle of that self-pity, when you're in the middle of that despair, it feels impossible to not just have all of your thoughts terminate on you but to actually think of other people. In the same way that depression for the individual is paralyzing, a church whose members are thinking about themselves is going to waste away and it's going to be paralyzing and stunt their growth of becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. This is what Paul's saying. These are the attitudes that cultivate unity: doing nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility considering others better than yourself, to not only look to your own interest, but to look to the interest of others. John Calvin, the great pastor, said about this passage, "If there's anything difficult in the Bible, these two are of utmost difficulty." And he says, "You shouldn't be surprised humility is such a rare virtue, because all of us in our hearts like to think of ourselves as kings."

And so I guess the question is: if to live in a manner worthy of the gospel as a group of people means to be unified and unity is cultivated by attitudes of humility and thinking of others more significant than yourself daily and to look after other people's interests over your own, how in the world do you do that? And I think we need to be careful here, because what I have a tendency to do and what you may have a tendency to do is read through this Scripture and go, "Wow, unity and humility and selflessness is important. So what I'm going to just do better and try harder. I'm going to go and get some turkeys and bring them back and donate them to the church, because I need to be more humble, I need to be thinking of others. Or I'm going to go and finally join a home group." And if you're not careful, we'll try to pull ourselves up by our moral bootstraps here and white-knuckle humility and selflessness. And if you try to white-knuckle humility and selflessness, you'll be a failure every single day and you'll walk in more guilt and shame that you could imagine. Because you can't do it. You can do the action, but you can't change your heart. Your heart is inclined toward selfishness, it's inclined towards wickedness. And you can't change that by white knuckling it or by changing your actions. And so what do you do? If unity's so important for our church as we move forward in this season and if to be unified means that we all walk in attitudes of humility, how do we get there?

Well, let's just finish reading this little part that Paul wrote, and I have an idea that I want to encourage you in. In verse 5 he says this, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,..." So He didn't hold on to His Godhood. Though He was God, He didn't say, "I'm God and I see that the world really needs rescuing and I see that the Father's really needs to be rectified because it's been trampled on by wicked creatures, but because I'm God, I'm just stay up here. Because I don't have to come down. I don't have to help. I don't have to descend. I am God. I'm more significant than anyone else." For Jesus to think those thoughts, He would be thinking rightly of Himself. He is more significant than everyone else. He is ultimately and infinitely worthy. And the Scriptures are saying, "Though He was God, He didn't just sit up there and say, 'I'm God, I'm just going to hold on to this.'" But instead, He made Himself nothing. Jesus Christ, God Almighty "made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant,..." If you're not a Christian in here, this is the Christian God and I invite you to know Him. How scandalous is this, that God would become a slave? "...being born in the likeness of men." So He was fully God, He was born in the likeness of men. He didn't quit being God when He was born in the likeness of men through the virgin Mary. He was fully God and fully man at the same time. "And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." And as Paul would later say, He died in accordance with the Scriptures for our sins. Until you understand that Jesus Christ did this for you, you will never do it for somebody else. Until you really believe the gospel, you will be unable to really be humble, to really think of other people as more significant than yourself. Because this gospel, what we just read, this reality of Jesus Christ that He became nothing and was humbled to the point of death, even death on a cross, this is what compels us towards the attitudes that Paul says will cultivate unity in our church. And unless this is compelling you, you're just religious and you haven't been transformed by the gospel in a way that does these things. And unless the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is compelling you, you're no different from my friend Peggy who attends the Universalist Unitarian Church,

who came up and asked me last week, "How can I serve you this week?" What transforms everything is Jesus Christ and His gospel. And when that clicks with your heart in a transformational way, when that really collides with your heart, it's going to be hard.

But let me tell you this so that you'd be encouraged as you go. Let me tell you what does happen when this does collide with a group of men and women and when the attitudes that Paul talked about are compelled by the gospel in such a way that it cultivates unity and brotherly affection for one another. Three weeks ago at the Denton campus, during prayer after the service, a Japanese woman came up to my wife Kimberly. She's going home after this semester, and she's been in America for three and a half years. She came up to my wife and said, "How do you know that God exists?" And that's a start to a very long conversation. Kimberly said, "Oh, well do you want to go and get some tea and talk about that?" And so they went out and met at a coffee shop and just started talking. Kimberly started asking her questions, because someone coming up and asking a question like that is kind of weird, it doesn't happen every week. So Kimberly was just delving into that question a little bit. She said, "So why did you come to church? What's going on? Why do you want to talk about this?" She said, "I've just been so utterly compelled by Christianity since I've come to the Village Church. And here's what's compelled me and here's what's intrigued me and what I can't get out of my mind. When I walk into your services, the brotherly and sisterly affection that you have for one another, I've never seen something like that in my entire life. I've never seen a people that seem to prefer one another and love one another and care about one another. I've just never seen that. If this is Christianity, I want to know about this. If this is a result of following the God that you follow, I want to know about this God." That's the fruit that we're after.

Let's pray, "Father, I thank You for these men and women that are here this morning by no accident, that You have brought them into this room. And I pray that all of us, whether we've been a Christian as many as 62 years or whether this morning is the first time we've ever heard about Jesus Christ, I pray that by Your Holy Spirit You would convict us and help us to see and believe Jesus Christ and His gospel this morning. And I pray that You would help us see and believe it in such a way that it transforms our heart to where we think of each other more highly than we think of ourselves. And I pray that in doing so, we begin to live our lives in a manner worthy of the gospel. I do pray for our church that we would be known for more than just the faces on the stage, but that if men and women were to walk in these doors we would be known for the way that we love each other, selflessly, ruthlessly, fiercely, humbly. These things are miracles, and so I lay them at your feet and trust by Your Holy Spirit as we go now that the conversations will lend us to think about these things and lend us to exemplify the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in these things. It's in Jesus' name I pray. Amen."