

Philippians in Ten

Week Four: Paul Remaps Our Values

Readings:

Phil 1:27 – 2:5; Phil 1:12-16, Phil 4: 2-3

Recap

The values of Jesus's kingdom are utterly different than the values of the Roman colony in which they live. Paul's universe is ruled by King Jesus, to whom every knee, including the Emperor's, will bow; where humility, service, joy and unity are the dominant values and not the violence and grasping that characterises Rome.

From chapter 1:27 onwards, Paul is encouraging the Christians to stand firm under pressure. They were a tiny group who were the objects of considerable opposition from their neighbours. And key to that was the need to be united. In each of these 4 chapters, Paul urges the Philippians to be united together, not to grumble or argue, to embrace Paul's Jesus-centred way of life, and he appeals for two Philippian church leaders to forget their differences.

Paul wants the Philippians to be united in a deep love for each other. Such love consists of humility, valuing others above ourselves. It consists in not acting in selfish ambition. Paul says that in this new universe he is remapping for them, where Christ is king, the important value is not self-seeking but humility. Paul says that the Philippians ought to treat people as if they were of higher status – so if everyone did that, in status-conscious Philippi, the whole system becomes subverted.

Howard Marshall's take on Philippians 2:4: in looking out for the interests of others, we should aim at enabling them to achieve and enjoy "things that they scarcely thought possible for themselves."

Were we to do that, then, as Paul says in 2:15, we would shine like stars in the world. Paul characterises his world as unscrupulous and perverse. We could hardly say our modern world is any better. But to live with humility, helping others to enjoy "things that they scarcely thought possible for themselves," would be to shine a light in a dark place. It would be to demonstrate something of the alternative universe that Paul is remapping for us, where Jesus is the king.

Paul goes on to appeal to a couple of the leaders, two women, Euodia and Syntyche to be of the same mind. They had struggled with Paul in the gospel and, like many other women Paul mentions in his letters, they were helping to lead the church.

Paul points the Philippians to the core values in the new kingdom they are a part of: humility, service, joy and unity. All this runs counter to the Roman culture around them. And it runs counter to our culture too. So here's the challenge: to see our citizenship and loyalty primarily with other Jesus followers and to seek peace and unity. And to follow the example of Jesus into the path of humble, loving service, day after day.

Tall order? Yes, but as Paul says in 2:13, God himself is at work within us. We not left to hopelessly try to follow Jesus's example.

Questions to Consider

Why does Paul want the Philippians to be united?

What is the reason for Paul writing the Christ hymn in chapter 2?

How important is unity within our church? Between churches? What does unity look like?

What are the key characteristics of unity that is based on love, according to Paul in chapter 2?

In our world, what might "treating people as if they were of higher status" look like?

How different are the values of humility and service that Paul points to from the values we see around us – in business, in the media, in politics...etc.

"We should aim at enabling people to achieve and enjoy things that they scarcely thought possible for themselves. Can you think of practical ways in which you might do that?"

What difference does it make if we see Euodia and Syntyche as church leaders?

Is it possible for us "to follow the example of Jesus into the path of humble, loving service, day after day"? What resources are there to help us do that?