

TARGETING OTHERS WELL

...result of theological adjustment

Philippians 2:1-18 ESV

WEFC August 31, 2008

Getting along with people is an art ... and art that we desperately need help in.

Literally the whole world struggles in relationships.

The 20th century was the bloodiest in human history. In *Humanity: A Moral History of the 20th Century*, Jonathan Glover estimates that 86,000,000 people died in wars fought from 1900 to 1989.

That means 2,500 people every day, or 100 people every hour, for 90 years.

In addition to those killed in war, government-sponsored genocide and mass murder killed approximately 120,000,000 people in the 20th century—perhaps more than 80,000,000 in the two Communist countries of China and the Soviet Union alone, according to R. J. Rummel's *Statistics of Democide*.

We enjoy each other ... at times, but God wants to make that all the time.

Last Sunday we noted from **Philippians 1** that **“As we mingle with people God must rise to the top.”**

He must heavily flavor all of our relationships.

Loving others is one of the things that we need to do. It is a nice trademark of God's people, but a hard sell in practice.

Philippians 2 takes a further step in that process of working with people, loving them purely, and functionally.

It targets people – gets them in the crosshairs of its scope – for good.

It tells us how to get along, by making the necessary adjustments clear ... as they are drawn from God's Word.

Key Thought:

God's people need to heavily invest personal effort into translating divine resources into good relationships.

Did you hear the Texas tall tale about the teacher who was helping one of her kindergarten students put on his cowboy boots? He asked for help, and she could see why. Even with her pulling and him pushing, the little boots still didn't want to go on. By the time they got the second boot on, she had worked up a sweat. She almost cried when the little boy said, "Teacher, they're on the wrong feet." She looked, and sure enough, they were.

It wasn't any easier pulling the boots off than it was putting them on. She managed to keep her cool as together they worked to get the boots back on, this time on the right feet. He then announced, "These aren't my boots." She bit her tongue rather than get right in his face and scream, "Why didn't you say so?"

Once again, she struggled to help him pull the ill-fitting boots off his little feet. No sooner had they gotten the boots off when he said, "They're my brother's boots. My mom made me wear 'em." Now she didn't know if she should laugh or cry, but she mustered up what grace and courage she had left to wrestle the boots on his feet again.

Helping him into his coat, she asked, "Now, where are your mittens?" He said, "I stuffed 'em in the toes of my boots."

Relationships do not “just” happen. They require work, much work.

God has heavily invested in people ... and has worked things through in detail for us so that we might connect well with one another and enjoy the privilege of getting along with one another ... a reality that still comes at a price today, as it did back then.

Key Thought:

God's people need to heavily invest personal effort into translating divine resources into good relationships.

Since God has heavily invested in people, He wants us to do the same. Here is what He expects us to understand and what to do.

1. Our divine resources are tailor-made to launch us into relationships that are far from perfect 2:1

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,

The "if" is not addressing an uncertainty, but means ... "since".

This is what we as followers of Christ DO have. This is what is available to us

We have a divine advantage.

Given to each of us in generous amounts are ...

- **encouragement in Christ**
Support from Christ that nudges us to personally follow His directives.
- **comfort issuing from love**

Thought-through comments from Christ (who cares for us deeply) that stabilize our hearts in circumstances of conflict.

- **participation in the Spirit**

We do not go it alone.

The Spirit of God includes us and mentors us.

The Holy Spirit sticks with us and lets us in on God's truths and power.

- **affection and sympathy**

Surrounded by an atmosphere of care we are secure.

What we have received when we become a part of God's family are resources that are anything but meager.

In the family of God, we are supported because of what Jesus has achieved for us.

If you are in difficult straits, and you let this group of believers here at WEFC in on what you are facing, we will stick with you as these statements of Scripture say.

We may not do it perfectly, but we will do more than make an attempt.

God has changed us, He has made us less selfish, He has caused us to see beyond ourselves ... and He is working in us.

But we often slip up ... we miss opportunities to show it God's love through our bodies.

Therefore, we get a bit of a refresher on what needs to be revived in a local church's dynamics.

Because of our being IN UNION WITH JESUS CHRIST, our close tie with Him, the result of us receiving Him, we have been given a more than adequate supply of resources.

These resources are directly connected to Christ and come only through Him ... delivered often through His people.

We know that God cares, we know that there often is support from His people ..., but the concrete acts get lost under the pile of pressure of intruding events and matters of urgency.

Into this hodge-podge of life we are given divine resources.

Whether we are using them, is another matter.

... and that is why we have the next lines.

Philippians 1:2-4

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

Do nothing from rivalry 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.

2. Translating spiritual resources into relational realities is worked out through intentional attitude 2-4

Three things stood out as this writer, directed by the Spirit of God, considered how to let Christ become a practical reality in the very middle of what they faced daily.

He takes the reality of Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection ... which took place some 2000 years ago, and tells us, this is how that great event should affect your relationships today with your spouse, children, family, friends and community.

Because of what Jesus did for us ... that should express itself in the following ways:

- Operate as one

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

Jesus lived, died and rose again ... to give us a different life and approach to it.

As followers of His this means that we begin to see that all that He did was to get us to see that we are to commit ourselves to operate as He did.

He did not do what He wanted to do, but He bought in to the plan of His Father and was enabled to complete it by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

He did not follow His own personal agenda.

This was not His work alone ... He fit into a plan that was anything by personally convenient, so that in the big picture, people worldwide might understand what being bought back by God was all about.

So when we look at THE TRINITY – The Divine Family - God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit – one thing becomes clear as we read God's Word.

These Three had **the same mind, the same love**, were **in full accord and of one mind**.

They had planned together, worked together, stayed together and followed through on the plan to a “T”, even though it resulted in one of their members dying on a cross, a humiliating event for the God who seems to be defeated by the creatures He created.

These Three were tight.

This was no intellectual theory, this was what reality was like when a group of you become committed to a plan and follow through on the strategy of implementation.

That is what we need to continue to work at as followers of Christ at WEFC.

We operate as one ... no one doing his or her own thing ... we work to see Christ’s Church bring attention to Jesus Christ ... that is what makes us tight.

Transition:

But there are always a few of us bad apples in the mix. We want to do things our way because we see something that no one else sees or no one else can do as we do.

We rate and rank ourselves ... and trouble becomes inevitable.

What that generally means is that ...

- Downgrade our significance

Most of us think too much of ourselves, our insights, our abilities, our analysis in comparison to others.

Children, the younger ones, do not think. They just demand to have their way.

Teenagers think their parents are out of touch and do not understand.

College and Young Adults are in that somewhat confused state, realizing that the older people are not that out of touch, and the teenagers are just plain crazy.

Older people have the answers, but find out that few, if any people, are asking the questions to which they have come to conclusions.

We all think that we see things a bit better than the next person.

We have the “key”.

Ours is the “best” way or answer.

Others are good, but we just are that one or two steps ahead of the pack.

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

If we are “tight”; if we all are led by the Spirit of Jesus; if we have God’s goal as ours, then why do we compete among ourselves.

It happens, but it needs to be stopped where we see it happening.

Here is what we do:

- We stifle competition among family members ... because we are all fully accepted and are all valued equally by our Savior and Lord.

- We recognize our thoughts of doing better than the next person by identifying our arrogance, pride, conceit ... and we ruthlessly chop it out.
- On the positive side we attach a new value to our family members.

Honestly, and actually, we start to think of them as more significant than ourselves.

We give them a bit more slack, a bit more influence, a bit more preference than we give to ourselves.

If this upsets us and messes with our minds, that is an indication that we think far too highly of ourselves. If inside we protest and say, "Unreasonable, ridiculous, ... you do not know who they are and what it is like to live with them ..." ... then that is one of the clearest indicators that we are not "tight" with God or His people.

To do this sincerely takes a work of God ... because none of us appreciates do this.

Humility does not come naturally to us talented and good people.

This requires us to consider others as more significant than ourselves.

We do not say, "Those who are obviously smarter and more influential, ... we get the picture and slide in under them." But this means that even to those who do not deserve to be considered better us, who really are not better than us ... we give them the benefit of the doubt ... because they are members of Christ's family.

IF, and the IF is extremely big, IF we did this than it becomes rather obvious that there would be few problems.

Just a further consideration on this.

To do this sincerely, requires a number of things:

- **The conviction by the Spirit that TIGHTNESS or TOGETHERNESS in God's family is far more important than we make it out to be.**
- **Listening to the Spirit's voice rather than the voice of our own person** ... the little voice that tells us we are better than everyone else.
- **Doing what does not feel nor appears to be intellectually natural.**
- **This only begins to make sense when I put Jesus Christ consciously in the picture** ... If He, the Son of God, could live by treating people the way He did, people who were far worse than He, ... then I need to do it

This will always be a sore point with us, until the lid on our coffin closes over us.

Don't say, "That person bothers me. "Think: *That person sanctifies me.*"

—Josemaria Escriva, founder of Opus Dei

Transition:

The next lines take what we have just addressed and helps put it into practice.

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

What we begin to “think”; now we begin to “do”.

- Refocus attention beyond ourselves

To let the truths of God’s Word become practical, take those truths and carry them out in real life with your spouse, family, friends and strangers.

In this case, actively do things for others within God’s family that show to them that you consider them as important.

Make time for them.

Spend your hard earned money on them.

Recognize them.

... and the result will be that we will discover a new tightness, a tightness that expands our worlds without diminishing them.

Last weekend was spent doing one of those stressful things: buying a car. We are a one-car family and tend to drive our cars until they die. Our trusty Sebring could no longer be trusted, so it was time to replace it. For us, a major purchase like this is almost traumatic. We are very careful and have a purchasing style that might drive others insane. ...

We’ve been married 20 years and have never bought a new car. It was sort of a policy of ours with the whole depreciation thing in the first year. But as we shopped we found that the models that we chose were not depreciating in value to make it worth our while. So, following a certain train of logic (reliability + features +

cost) this family ended up with a bright, shiny, spanking-new, kiwi-green Honda Element. Our first new car.

Now, one of the reasons we always bought used is a concept called “the kiss factor.” ... When my husband was younger, he had an uncle who told him that if he ever got a new car, the first thing he needed to do was take a hammer and give it a whack, hence giving it its first dent. In other words, “kiss” it.

His logic was that if it was already “kissed” then all that fuss and stress over having something new and trying to keep it new would evaporate into practical everyday life. Practical. Sensible. Would I do it to our bright shiny spanking new, kiwi-green, Honda Element? Not on your life.

However, the downside that remained without “kissing” our bright, shiny, spanking-new, kiwi-green, Honda Element is that I, in fact, did feel a certain weird, low-grade anxiety about keeping it new—and that is not our family’s style. When we get something—blender, luggage, whatever—we use the snot out of it. But this was a new car. ...

But there was one factor I had not considered: my sweet husband.

I had driven it home from the dealership Saturday night, and then my husband carefully parked it across the lawn... . Sunday morning we needed to take the Sebring to that great car lot in the sky (Carmax). The plan was he would move the Element for me and then I would drive it following him (for his last drive in the Sebring). I realized that I forgot my keys. I ran back in the house, grabbed my keys, and ran back outside—just in time to see our bright, shiny, spanking-new, kiwi-green Honda Element with its bumper squared off against a tree. ...

Knowing full well that he had just backed into the tree, I heard myself saying, “You didn’t; you didn’t,” while feeling something rise up in me.

Now, this is one of those pivotal moments that tell you a lot about yourself. Looming on my emotional horizon was a dark cloud of disappointment, blame, and something even uglier. The temptation to place something of material value over a relationship.

Recognizing the moment, I snapped out of my "you didn't" chant, and looking at my husband's expression of utter disbelief, I started to laugh.

Examining the damage, we looked at each other and both began to laugh. "I guess it's been kissed," we said. Now I can relax.

Transition:

When we come to such unusual, out-of-the-box thinking and behavior that is far from the norm, we wonder whether it works, has anyone done this before, how well was it accepted. And so we are given not just any example, but the example of the Son of God – Jesus Christ.

3. The Clarifying Picture: Christ has shown us what this means 5-11

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, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Though what we have just talked about is so “un”-us, it is not impossible.

Jesus’ real life verifies that.

Jesus was not just a human being. He alone in all of time and all of people was unique, being the only God-Man.

Here is how He thought, and how He lived. This morning we pick out just a few considerations.

- **Jesus was God, but He did not allow His divineness to stop Him from reaching out to those who were not divine (us).**

Jesus could have said, “Hey, I live way above the people.

I am pure; they are unclean.

I am holy; they are tainted.

I have done nothing wrong; they have done much that is wrong.

Jesus understood all of that, but that did not stop Him from crossing over to help us.

He never used His status as a reason to refuse hard work. He used it instead as the basis on which to provide the most excellent service or work possible to those who were in need of help.

- **To be God does not mean that we get everyone to do what we want done, but it means to do serve.**

We would normally assume that if we were God, everyone would do what we said should be done, pronto.

Jesus, did the opposite.

He, instead, rather than being served, Himself served.

He, being God, worked on the people's behalf.

- **Jesus, the sinless Son of God, obeyed His Father, even when obedience meant dying.**

To Jesus, listening to His Father, was not optional.

As He followed His Father's directives, the end result was that He died.

Being right and good lead to death.

- **Jesus' work did not end at the cross, but He is yet to be fully recognized and rewarded.**

There were difficulties for Jesus, major and painful ones.

But they were not the end result.

Jesus did not end up in a grave.

He does not end up the loser.

He does not get cheated out on life and its rewards.

Jesus Christ, in the end, wins ... and He wins big.

That is what happened to Jesus ... and the reason we have it written here is that we need to apply the truths that fit Jesus to ourselves.

If Jesus was God and He did not allow His divineness to hold Him back from help those of us who were human ... THEN, MOST CERTAINLY, we who are human should not think it such a big thing when we help other humans ... those who are of the same family we are.

If Jesus saw being God not as getting, but giving, then we need to channel more of our energy into giving, rather than getting.

If Jesus, who was perfect, obeyed His Father's plans, and that resulted in death ... I have no excuse for not following God's plans of helping others, never mind dying for them.

If Jesus is to be rewarded for His work, so will we. God will not overlook or miss our hearts that served Him in purity and holiness.

It is possible to live like Jesus lived.

While it is definitely not easy, it is right and the one way, the only way that God has chosen to impress the world.

We have no excuses.

Transition:

We may swallow rather hard at what God's Word is saying. We will have many reasons as to why we should not, and cannot follow through on it.

... and so the writer ties these thoughts together with what we need to keep in mind as we attempt to be God's people in this community and with one another.

The conclusion to these thoughts comes in the next couple of verses.

Once again, we are nudged to take what Jesus Himself did and make it applicable to our own situations.

4. Sustaining implementation requires alertness 12- 16

The people at Philippi had been hit on the head, gently. Nevertheless they felt the spiritual goose egg with which they now needed to contend. When Paul was with them, when the "head hauncho" was present ... sure they watched themselves.

But now with him out of the picture, and maybe never returning, they needed to grow up and get on.

They needed to make the evidence of their salvation more obvious.

This was not an extra cirricular activity. This is at the core of what following Jesus Christ was all about.

They needed to realize that this process is ...

- we are God-aided

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

God works in them in two ways.

He work in our wills to give us the desire to follow through on His plan.

Then He works to help us carry it out.

To this God is committed.

He is pulling for us.

- we are on display

Do all things without grumbling or questioning, ¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

Be especially alert to the tendency to get cranky.

Slipping back into the old mode comes without us even trying.

We seem to be walking so much uphill that at times we want just relief and a break.

We grumble, complain and question why we need to live this way.

This isn't just about us.

Some of it is, some of it isn't.
There are more players than just ourselves.

We live this way, for the same reason that Jesus lived the way He did ... and ended up with Him dying on the Cross ...
We live this way because our world is messed up.

If it is ever going to change, it will need help ... ours.

We are going to need to be lights ... we are going to need to get their attention ... we are going to need to be actual demonstrations of what life can be like, when we step under the authority of Jesus Christ.

That is why we live this way.

Key Thought:

God's people need to heavily invest personal effort into translating divine resources into good relationships.