



# Attitude

## Philippians 2:1-5

**Attitude.** It's one of those words that you often hear these days. Usually it's in the negative and refers to kids with attitude. **GRUMPY GIRL** You know what I mean – this photo speaks for itself. To have attitude these days usually means to have a bad attitude and we come across it all the time don't we do. And it's not just teenagers – you get the same thing throughout all age groups – bad attitude. People who are – selfish, self-important, believe they can do what they want when they want, arrogant, don't listen to others. **Bad attitude.**

Like I said we see it in every area of life. My wife and I went somewhere for lunch a few weeks ago and an elderly couple sat in the table next to us. They complained about everything which included sending back their food twice. I must say, the staff were very courteous. The lady was particularly grumpy and I could see from the man's expression that he wasn't too impressed. What was biting them? I don't know but you could cut their attitude with a knife.

Lucky they weren't in a restaurant run by a celebrity chef with attitude. **MPW** Marco Pierre-White throws people out of his restaurant if they dare send anything back to the kitchen! I think I'd have understood if chef with attitude at the Oyster Reach had escorted the couple off the premises! **PIECE OF ME**

But of course attitude isn't just about behaviour, it is about our outlook on life and towards situations and people we meet. **CAN DO** We can have a positive attitude or a negative one. And having the right attitude extends to our faith. **ATTITUDE**

And this passage in Philippians is about attitude. If you've been coming on a Sunday evening you'll know we've been going through Paul's letter to the Philippians. It's a very positive letter. They thought highly of Paul and he thought highly of them. **PHILIPPI 1**

So far so good, but it's quite clear that all was not well at Philippi – there was an attitude problem with some or all of Christians there and he addresses it. **VERSE** The core of Paul's message is in verse 5 *The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had.* In verses 2 to 4 he says what their attitude should be towards one another, says your attitude to be the same as Jesus and then goes on in verses 6 to 11 which illustrate verses 2-4 by telling us effectively that Jesus had the same attitude Paul was asking them to have towards one another. If you want to know more of verses 6-11, plan to come next Sunday evening when the series on Philippians continues.

So what was the problem and the solution? Actually passage is a great model of how to deal with people whom you need to correct without being damning and negative. It's a very positive passage. Paul starts by recognising how good things were in Philippi. **PHILIPPI 2**

*Your life in Christ makes you strong, and his love comforts you. You have fellowship with the Spirit, and you have kindness and compassion for one another.*

You're a strong church with strong fellowship, you're people who are responsive to Christ's love, you're a spiritual church, you've got a good attitude towards one another. Wow! What an accolade! Could we say that of ourselves? He had a criticism of them, but he also recognised just how far they had come and how positive things were at Philippi.

I urge you, then, to make me completely happy ..... by doing these things. From looking at the following verse, by implication they were a bit short on having a unity of mind about things, there

were some who thought themselves better than others and they just didn't look out for one another pastorally. Actually, all those are big weaknesses, but he doesn't slap them around the head and say "you're bad, Get your act together because you'll be in serious trouble!". These people didn't need rebuking, just encouraging because they were heading in the right direction. It was constructive criticism, which was put in a way that they could take on board and understand and reflect on what Christ-like behaviour is.

Actually his tone with the Corinthians was more terse because things were a disaster there and their affairs were common knowledge in the community. He needed to do something dramatic and he gave them serious criticism which he kind of regrets little I think in his second letter because it brought repentance readily.

If you're a leader, have the discernment to act appropriately. People who are moving in the right direction are always open to constructive comment. Those who aren't require you to be more proactive. These people in Philippi didn't need it. Just some words which were constructive and encouraging. These are lessons for all of us, not just leaders.

## ATTITUDE

I remember years ago that in church meetings, people giving out criticism used the words "I say this in love..." You knew what was going to come was an insult or swingeing criticism. Love? I don't think so. I believe as God's people, our words to one another should always be given in love in a way that it will have a positive impact on one another's life and growth. Most often that is encouraging one another, praying for one another and helping one another in areas that we know in each others life that are weak. That's what being a Christian is about – *Heb 10:25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.* Christianity is an encouraging faith – we deepen our trust in Christ, to follow Him more faithfully and serve Him more completely.

But there are times when also criticism is warning. It's saying "no", that's not acceptable. The behaviour of the Corinthians was unacceptable by any standard. The problem was that some of us were brought up in background where discipline was meted out enthusiastically and where people were often ejected from the fellowship. Look at our early history and you'll find they were strict and it was common to find cases of "dismissal". I hope we've improved a bit since then. It's important that we say "no" but our no should be borne out of the love that leads to repentance and brings those we are saying "no" to closer to Christ.

That's an aside. There's no stern words here. Paul is very happy with them and for them but he wants his joy to be complete by them attending to these three linked issues:

### ◆ Unity

*2 I urge you, then, to make me completely happy by having the same thoughts, sharing the same love, and being one in soul and mind.*

Paul encourages them towards both of thought and of love. One of the biggest problems that just goes round and round with Christians is that we think unity is a great idea. We have unity with all those who see things the way we do, but what about those who don't?

## EMO PHILIPS

*Emo Philips: In conversation with a person I had recently met, I asked, "Are you Protestant or Catholic?" My new acquaintance replied, "Protestant." I said, "Me too! What franchise?" He answered, "Baptist." "Me to!" I said. "Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?" "Northern Baptist," he replied. "Me too!" I shouted.*

*We continued to go back and forth. Finally I asked, "Northern conservative fundamentalist Baptist, Great Lakes Region, Council of 1879 or Northern conservative fundamentalist Baptist, Great Lakes Region, Council of 1912?" He replied, "Northern conservative fundamentalist Baptist, Great Lakes Region, Council of 1912."*

*I said, "Die, heretic"*

All branches of Christianity have the unfortunate tradition of having unity with the people we agree

with and showing little love and care for those who have differing views. And that can happen as much within a church as outside. How quick we are to condemn those that don't see things our ways. And usually it hasn't got anything to do with theology or morality. What churches will fall out about! And from what comes in the next two points about humility and looking out for one another, the issues in Philippi were probably rather trivial and had more to do with strong-minded individuals who thought themselves better than others rather than too many deep issues.

But Paul saw it as something serious enough to call them to be a people *having the same thoughts, sharing the same love, and being one in soul and mind.*

We are fortunate as a church that this is not a problem that besets us much at the moment but how easily it can appear and consume Christians and split churches and often over the most trivial of things. Besides, if we are aware of how it can be a problem, it hopefully won't become one. Christians who show love to one another invariably have the right attitude to one another by seeking the Lord in a way in which they do become like minded.

### ◆ Humility

*3 Don't do anything from selfish ambition or from a cheap desire to boast, but be humble towards one another, always considering others better than yourselves.*

The reason why I think the issue in Philippi was one of selfish people trying to force their views and ways on others is this verse. Self-promotion has no part in the church of God. I've said this before, but one thing that gets my goat is when I hear Christians who think they've advanced so much that they don't seek or need the ministry of other Christians because they are not so advanced in the faith. Ugh! That attitude is so self-righteous and humble it certainly ain't.

### TOLSTOY

*There is a persistent myth in contemporary culture that Count Leo Tolstoy was a great Christian, and even a saint. This is palpably false. In fact, he was a self-righteous egoist who felt himself to be "God's older brother." Tolstoy once arrogantly penned these words in his diary:*

*"I have not yet met a single man who was morally as good as I. ... I do not remember an instance in my life when I was not attracted to what is good and was not ready to sacrifice anything to it." This statement was repeatedly given the lie by his inveterate womanising and neglect of his family.*

*Tolstoy's diary goes on to say that he felt in his soul "immeasurable grandeur." He was baffled by the failure of other men to recognize his qualities: "Why does nobody love me? I am not a fool, not deformed, not a bad man, not an ignoramus. It is incomprehensible."*

He obviously didn't know Philippians 2:3: *be humble towards one another, always considering others better than yourselves.* We are given to one another to be part of the body of Christ, the Church. We are a team, not a group of individuals and we are here to lean from one another and grow with one another. And it starts by us showing humility towards one another, considering others better than ourselves. Wow! How opposite is that to the way of the world which is where we promote ourselves at the expense of others and mock or look down on others we think inferior to us.

Yet it's only by the grace of God we are who we are and where we are in Him today. Let's remember that in our dealings with our brothers and sisters in Christ and people in our community.

And if we don't we may just miss Jesus. Before we condemn Tolstoy too quickly, God still used this flawed man to bring blessing to people through his stories. He told one story of a cobbler (I think) who had a dream that he would meet Jesus one particular day. And he waited all day whilst he served a number of customers who had all sorts of needs who he had to show kindness to. Patiently he served these people and helped them but was disappointed by the end of the day that Jesus never came. But he was then reminded that he did see Jesus that day – in the lives of the people he served. *"For as much as you did it for any of these little ones, you did it for me".*

Never be so arrogant as you think yourself superior to others – because in doing so, you'll not see Jesus, you won't hear His voice and you won't be touched by His Spirit – because you so frequently see these qualities through the most humble person in the most humble circumstances.

*Don't do anything from selfish ambition or from a cheap desire to boast, but be humble towards one*

*another, always considering others better than yourselves.*

#### Care

*4 And look out for one another's interests, not just for your own.*

Perhaps the clearest outworking of humility is in our attitude to other people. If we consider others better than ourselves, and we are in one mind and share one another's love, then we'll look out for one another.

Being part of a church fellowship is looking out for one another. Whilst I've been here in Felixstowe I've seen some great examples of Christians caring for one another. My wife and I feel humbled and grateful for your love as we have been on the receiving end of that. But let's not be complacent about that. As a church we have an open front door – but an open back door too and there have been people who have been hurt here in the past and not felt that people have looked out for them and encouraged them. That's sad, particularly for those who no longer worship and have fellowship with other Christians. There are those who will always want to leave for whatever reason, but let's be sensitive to one another so that no-one can ever say we didn't look out for one another's interests.

Therefore let's celebrate when things go right and listen to the encouragement to look out for one another's interests. Let me finish with a story. It's from America but I've come across many similar tales here:

#### OLD MAN

*An old man showed up at the back door of the house we were renting. Opening the door a few cautious inches, we saw his eyes were glassy and his furrowed face glistened with silver stubble. He clutched a wicker basket holding a few unappealing vegetables. He bid us good morning and offered his produce for sale. We were uneasy enough that we made a quick purchase to alleviate both our pity and our fear.*

*To our chagrin, he returned the next week, introducing himself as Mr. Roth, the man who lived in the shack down the road. As our fears subsided, we got close enough to realize it wasn't alcohol but cataracts that marbled his eyes. On subsequent visits, he would shuffle in, wearing two mismatched right shoes, and pull out a harmonica. With glazed eyes set on a future glory, he'd puff out old gospel tunes between conversation about vegetables and religion.*

*On one visit, he exclaimed, "The Lord is so good! I came out of my shack this morning and found a bag full of shoes and clothing on my porch". "That's wonderful, Mr. Roth!" we said. "We're happy for you." "You know what's even more wonderful?" he asked. "Just yesterday I met some people that could use them."*

In this picture of humility we see the Son who was this picture of love and humility. He loved us so much that He became one of us, He did not hold Himself superior to us (even though He was), but lived amongst and placed our needs before His, dying on the cross for us. That's why He's exalted. We're going to explore that more next Sunday evening. But we have a clear mandate for unity, humility and care for one another.

#### CHRIST JESUS

*The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had.*

#### Prayer

#### ATTITUDE

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