

HUMILITY

WHY IS IT NECESSARY IN THE LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN?

Philippians 2:5-8

Bro. Ezekiel Oghenekaro

*⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. **Philippians 2:5-8.***

The term humility is a noun which defines the state of being humble. The quality of having a modest or low view of one's importance. Dictionary definitions accentuate humility as a low self-regard and sense of unworthiness. Humility is an outward expression of an appropriate inner, or self, regard and is contrasted with humiliation which is an imposition, often external, of shame upon a person. Humility may be misappropriated as ability to suffer humiliation through self-denouncements which in itself remains focus on self rather than low self-focus.

"Some must follow, some must command, but both are made of clay." wrote Longfellow. That is a profound summary of who is who in the world. Everybody wants to feel important, worth something. Typically men find their worth in their accomplishments, in their work, in their status, by their possessions.

Once there was a lion. The lion was proud of his mastery of the animal kingdom. One day he decided to make sure all the other animals knew he was the king of the jungle. He was so confident that he by-passed the smaller animals and went straight to the bear. "Who is the king of the jungle?" the lion asked. The bear replied, "Why you are, of course" The lion gave a mighty roar of approval. Next he asked the tiger, "Who is the king of the jungle?" The tiger quickly responded, "Everyone knows that you are, mighty lion".

Next on the list was the elephant. The lion faced the elephant and addressed his question, "Who is the king of the jungle?" The elephant immediately grabbed the lion with his trunk, whirled him around in the air five or six times and slammed him into a tree. Then he pounded him onto the ground several times, dunked him under water in a nearby lake, and finally dumped him out on the shore. The lion-beaten, bruised, and battered-struggled to his feet.

He looked at the elephant through sad and bloody eyes and said, "Look, just because you don't know the answer is no reason for you to get mean about it!" Ah yes, how many of us often live with that kind of self-delusion.

Pride Is the Pitfall of Many Leaders

The greatest stumbling block to humility is pride. Moses had plenty of reasons to be puffed up with pride as anyone could have. He had claim to fame, to status: He had been raised and educated in Pharaoh's court like one of Pharaoh's own kin; he was a skilled soldier, a knowledgeable scholar, a statesman.

As a matter of fact, it appears at one time that Moses was a proud man, overly self-confident, presumptuous about his ability to lead and that his own people would recognize him as a leader: Exodus chapter 2 pictures Moses as an avenger, a self-made liberator, ready to kill the Egyptian taskmaster, and ready to lead his own people. There was a good measure of pride in being a Jew, but also in being skilled as a soldier and in the use of a sword. It appears that he felt ready to liberate his people, confident that they would accept his leadership because of his position of privilege and power in Pharaoh's court, while at the same time he had proven his undivided loyalty to the Jews. But that proved not to be the case when one of his own people questioned his self-promotion as their liberator and judge, and he was overcome with fear. This is the problem, we place ourselves where God has not called us to be.

False Humility Is Pride in Itself

But when God calls Moses to go back to Egypt, Moses presents excuses: He has a false sense of humility. False humility at the root is really pride in disguise. False humility looks at the self as the source of strength and value just as pride does. *I am not good at singing, I don't want to pretend about it. I am not a giver, I am not good at visitation... etc.* These are excuses we give in the bid to profess our humility... Moses does not humble himself before God and willingly submit to God's plan for him. Instead he counter argues. How does he dare argue with God, except that he thinks that he has something to say about the inadequacies of God's idea? That is pride. He argues that he is not the best choice, he doesn't have the gift of clear speech, he doesn't have the qualities of a leader that inspire others to follow. People will only question him with, "Who do you think you are?" just like the first time. But he forgot that the first time he was not sent by God to deliver Israel at that time. He had taken up the bid for himself the first time. So in his false humility, he declined God's order. Mutiny, refusing to submit to the captain's authority, is a daring thing to do and it comes from pride, from the idea, *"I know better than you do."* We will come back to this later.

Why Is Humility Necessary in the life of a Christian?

This is the crux of the matter. This is why the lesson is before us today. No one is a child of God until he/she experiences the new birth – **John 3:3-5, Romans 6:2-4.** *"If anyone be in Christ, he is a new creature, old things have passed away..."* – **2 Corinthians 5:17.** Paul writing to the Philippians emphasized the importance of our new nature. We must be like Christ. In other words, we are not Christians if we are not humble like Christ. Consider

our text again, *He humbled Himself, even to the point of death on the cross*. How do we come to terms with Christ's example?

TO GROW IN HUMILITY, WE MUST UNDERSTAND THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST:

Jesus Christ voluntarily left the highest position in the universe and went to the very lowest position on earth in order to rescue from God's judgment people who did not in any way deserve it. There can be no greater example of lowering oneself than what Jesus did on our behalf. If your heart is cold toward the things of God, think on who Jesus is and on what He did in leaving the splendour and purity of heaven and coming to this wicked world to be made sin on our behalf. It should fill our hearts with love and devotion and make us realize that no personal sacrifice we make, no humiliation we go through, can ever match what our glorious Saviour did for us!

When Paul states that Jesus existed in the form of God (***Philippians 2:6***), he is referring to His preexistence before He was born of the virgin Mary. Jesus is not a created being, but rather is the second person of the Godhead. As John opens his gospel, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being"* (***John 1:1-3***). A few verses later John explains further, *"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth"* (***John 1:14***). Or, as Jesus said to the Jews who challenged His claims, *"Before Abraham was born, I am"* (***John 8:58***).

When Paul states that Jesus existed in "the form of God," "form" refers to that which is intrinsic and essential to the being of God, that is, to God's attributes (J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* [Zondervan], pp. 132-133). Thus Paul is saying that Jesus in His preexistence shared the essential attributes of deity. He is God! Before He came to this earth, Jesus dwelled in the indescribable glory and perfection of heaven, one with the Father and the Spirit, in the blessedness of the divine being. But He willingly left that glory to come to earth!

The next phrase has been variously translated and interpreted. The King James Version reads that He "thought it not robbery to be equal with God." The NASB translates, He "did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped." John Calvin explains the sense: "There would have been no wrong done though he had shewn himself to be *equal with God*" (*Calvin's Commentaries* [Baker], on ***Philippians 2:6***, p. 55).

Lightfoot, following the early Greek fathers, gives the sense as, *"Be humble as Christ was humble: He, though existing before the worlds in the form of God, did not treat His equality with God as a prize, a treasure to be greedily clutched and ostentatiously displayed: on the contrary He resigned the glories of heaven."* He goes on to observe, *"For how could it be a sign of humility in our Lord not to assert His equality with God, if He were not divine? How could such a claim be considered otherwise than arrogant and blasphemous, if He were only a man?"* (pp. 134, 137).

Paul goes on to say that Jesus *"emptied Himself"* (NIV = *"made Himself nothing"*). Clearly, God cannot cease to be God, and so Jesus did not, as some have asserted, give up any of

His divine attributes. He limited the independent use of certain attributes and prerogatives while on this earth. Paul explains the main sense of how Christ emptied Himself in the rest of verse 7 and in verse 8: by taking the form of a servant and being obedient to death on the cross.

When Paul says that Jesus took on the form of a bond-servant (2:7), he means that He voluntarily adopted the very nature of a servant. He did not cease to be God in any sense, but added to His divine nature a true human nature. Jesus' human nature was exactly like ours, except that it was joined to a divine nature (not mixed or blended); and, it was without sin, although His body was subject to the results of the fall, such as weariness, aging, and death. When Paul says that Christ was "*found in appearance as a man*" (2:8), he means that if you had looked at Jesus, you would not have thought, "*There is a superman or a god,*" but rather, "*There is a normal-looking man.*" He was born into a family as a baby, grew to maturity as we all do, and in every other observable way was completely human. To deny either the full and perfect deity of our Lord or His complete humanity is to veer into serious heresy. So what Paul is showing is that the Lord Jesus went from the highest place in the universe, as eternal God, to take on human existence, and that, not as a king or powerful warrior, but as a lowly servant. But, He went even lower:

To Grow In Humility, We Must Understand Christ's Death, Which Was The Most Shameful Death Imaginable:

It would have been amazing enough for the eternal God to come to this earth as a mighty king. It was even more amazing that He came as a humble servant. But it's almost beyond comprehension that He would even go lower and die. And, even more staggering, His death was not a noble death, but a horrible, ignoble death of a common criminal. For the Jew, whoever was hanged on a tree was accursed of God (***Deuteronomy. 21:23***). For Gentiles, death by crucifixion was the lowest, most despicable form of death imaginable. Roman citizens were exempt from crucifixion.

So, Paul is saying that Jesus went from the height of heights to the depth of depths. We will never begin to know what glory He gave up or what humiliation He suffered on our behalf until we are with Him in glory. But, to grow in humility, we must think about the staggering implications of what it meant for the holy, glorious, eternal Son of God to take on human flesh; and, not the flesh of a king, but of a servant; and, stooping even lower, He willingly and obediently went to the cross for our sins.

To Grow In Humility, We Must Allow the life of Christ Affect The Way We Act Toward One Another:

In our day humility is hardly ever emphasized as a Christian virtue that we must pursue. In fact, we extol the opposite, self-love, as a healthy quality that we need to work on! Due to the fall of man, self-love is innate (in-built) in all humans. We are quick to listen with applause to anyone who extols human nature in favourable terms. Even those who take a more modest attitude and give God credit for some things. To divide the credit meant for God is the the chief basis for boasting and self-confidence.

Granted, then, that we must pursue humility, what does it look like? Christ's humility teaches us several aspects of true humility:

- (1) **True humility is a proper attitude toward self that results in proper actions toward others:** *"Have this attitude in yourselves"* Jesus Christ could rightly have thought, *"I'm the eternal God. I'm not about to become a human being, let alone be a servant, let alone die!"* I am glad He didn't think like that!

Who are we? According to Scripture, we are rebellious sinners at heart, who have gone our own way and despised the God who created us. But, by His undeserved favour, we have become His children through faith in Christ. By grace, He has forgiven all our sins and has made us members of Christ's body. He has entrusted spiritual gifts to us to use for *His* kingdom and glory (*not* our own kingdom and glory!). As a result, we have the great privilege of serving others for Jesus' sake.

- (2) **True humility means renouncing self for the sake of others:** Jesus had to renounce any self-will when He came to earth and went to the cross. In the garden, He prayed, *"Not My will, but Yours be done"* (**Luke 22:42**). Of course, He had no sinful will to renounce, whereas we fight it every day. But humility means dying to self-daily so that we can do God's will.
- (3) **True humility means lowering myself to lift others up:** That's what Jesus supremely did in giving up the splendour of His glory in heaven to hang naked on the shameful cross for our sins. It would be impossible for us to go to that extreme. But we do need to lower our view of ourselves so that we can serve others. If you ever find yourself saying, *"That task is beneath me,"* you'd better check your pride.
- (4) **True humility yields any rights for the sake of serving others:** Did Jesus have a right not to come to this earth in the humble way He did? Of course He did! Did He have a right not to go to the cross? Of course! But, He yielded all His rights and became a bond-servant for our salvation. A bond-servant was the extreme bottom of the ladder when it came to rights, because he had none. He didn't have a right to his own time. He didn't even have a right to his own life.

This doesn't mean that we become the slaves of everyone else's whims or desires. Jesus was obedient to the Father, not to what others thought He should do. Even so, we become enslaved to do what God wants us to do. Jesus told the disciples that when a slave comes in after a day of working in the field, his master doesn't serve the slave dinner. The slave has to fix dinner and serve the master, and only then is he free to eat. Jesus concluded by saying, *"So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done'"* (**Luke 17:10**). Any privileges I enjoy are by God's undeserved favour.

- (5) **True humility serves others in obedience to God, even at great personal cost:** The cross was painful beyond description for Jesus, not just because of the physical pain, but because He who was totally without sin, endured the wrath of God by becoming sin for us (**2 Corinthians 5:20**). Any personal cost we have to bear in serving Christ is nothing by way of comparison, even if it means laying down our lives. As Isaac Watts put it, *"Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all"* (*"When I Survey the Wondrous Cross"*).

True Humility is shaped by Recognizing God's Greatness

In the process of liberating Israel, Moses' character had changed considerably. He had come to the point in his relationship with God where he not only submitted to every order from his Lord and Master, he also loved him as a father. He was jealous for God's honour. He realized that honouring God is what true humility is all about.

So close was he to God the Bible says in **Exodus 34: 29** *When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD. 30 When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him.*

Moses could easily have taken on a "holier than thou" attitude. Moses could have allowed all of these things to boost his own ego. He could have pretended to be better than everyone else. He could have chosen to keep to himself the powerful position he had. He didn't even have to share it with Miriam and Aaron. They had privileged positions simply because of their kinship with Moses, but these were privileged positions. Aaron ought to have considered that God could have wiped him right out for having made the golden calf. Moses could have agreed with God's plan to wipe out the entire nation and start all over with just himself. (**Exodus 32:1-15**) But instead he pleaded for the lives of the people for the honor of God's name, lest the nations get the wrong picture of God.

True Humility Shares Responsibility:

Moses wasn't in this historical endeavor to free the Israelites in order to make a name for himself. He didn't try to cling to the position of power he had because it made him feel superior to everyone else. Instead he begged God to give him helpers to share the burden of responsibility for these people.

Let's look at **Numbers 11** for just a minute: *14 I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. 15 If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now—if I have found favor in your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin." 16 The LORD said to Moses: "Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you. 17 I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone.*

Then we jump to verse 24: *24 So Moses went out and told the people what the LORD had said. He brought together seventy of their elders and had them stand around the Tent. 25 Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took of the Spirit that was on him and put the Spirit on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they did not do so again. 26 However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the Tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp. 27 A young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." 28 Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' aide since youth, spoke up and said, "Moses, my lord, stop them!" 29 But Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD's people*

were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!" 30 Then Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

Moses exemplified the attitude which Paul talks about in **Philippians 2: 5-11**. To take a lowly position does not mean we are of less worth in God's sight. Instead we become of even greater value or importance in the sight of God. Peter in his first epistle, chapter 5:5-6 wrote, "All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

CONCLUSION

If you're experiencing friction in your relationships, whether at home or anywhere, chances are you need to grow in humility. C. S. Lewis saw this. He wrote,

... Pride ... has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began.... Pride always means enmity--it is enmity. And not only enmity between man and man, but enmity to God.

In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that--and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison--you do not know God at all. As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you (*Mere Christianity* [Macmillan], pp. 110-111).

Calvin sums up the practical application of our text: "Since, then, the Son of God descended from so great a height, how unreasonable that we, who are nothing, should be lifted up with pride!" (*Calvin's Commentaries*, p. 55). But, the fact is, we must fight pride all our lives. In 1985, a Spanish bullfighter made a tragic mistake. He thrust his sword a final time into the bull, which then collapsed. Thinking that the bull was dead, the bullfighter turned to the crowd to acknowledge the applause. But the bull was not dead. It rose and lunged at the back of the unsuspecting matador, piercing his heart with its horn.

Pride is like that. Just when we think we have conquered it and we turn to accept the congratulations of the crowd, pride stabs us in the back. It won't be dead before we are. Fight it by focusing on what the Saviour did for you by leaving the glory of heaven and coming to die for our sins. Have that same mind in you which was in Christ Jesus: "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (2:3, 4). That's the way toward harmony in our church and in our homes.

References

Our Humility - God's Honour: Ken Vanderploeg, VX, Texas, web-based publication
@ <https://www.crcna.org/resources/church-resources/reading-sermons/our-humility-gods-honor>

Supreme Humility: Steven J. Cole (1995), online publication @
<https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-11-supreme-humility-philippians-25-8>

Sermon on Humility from Matthew 21:23-32 and Philippians 2:1-13: Steve Thomason.
Online publication @
<https://www.stevethomason.net/2011/09/30/sermon-on-humility-from-matthew-2123-32-and-philippians-21-13/>

Wikipedia dictionary