

Norman C. Schwab
Yacolt EV Free
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The Strength of Humility Philippians 2:5-11

During the Civil War, general George B McClellan was put in charge of the great Army of the Potomac...mostly due to his popularity. He enjoyed hearing people tell him what a great military leader he was. He enjoyed being called "a young Napoleon. However, his performance and success on the battlefield was not so sensational. President Lincoln had commissioned him with this task hoping that he would rise to the challenge and make some things happen...but McClellan kept procrastinating.

One evening Lincoln and two of his staff members were to meet with McClellan at his home, only to find he had gone off to a wedding. The three men waited an hour for him to return. Ignoring the president when McClellan got home, he promptly went upstairs and did not return. Half an hour later, Lincoln sent a servant up to tell McClellan that the president was still waiting. The servant came back to say McClellan had gone to bed!

Lincoln's staff members were furious. Lincoln merely got up and led the way home. "This is no time to be making points of etiquette and personal dignity, said Lincoln. I would hold McClellan's horse if he will only bring us success." It was that kind of humility that made Lincoln a great man. He did not think of himself. He did not think of his position and rights being stepped on and smashed in the mud. He thought only of serving others. He was looking for the interests of those he served.

For most of us...humble service toward others does not come naturally. We get very sensitive when it appears someone has ignored our rights. We get offended when someone has usurped our position, maneuvered away our advancement at work. We get upset when we see others stealing commissions that were rightfully ours. We get offended when things are not done my way. We feel that jobs we've been asked to do are not in keeping with our gifting and skills. We deserve better. God would get more out of us if we were in a more strategic leadership

position, a bigger church. From the time of our babyhood, we've been taught to stand up for our rights because no one else will. Grab on to what is yours because the world is a tough place and you will have to fight to survive and advance to the top.

Does this kind of attitude promote unity in our relationships with our friends? with those at work? at home? No. Self serving. Self seeking. Self preserving actions and attitudes have done nothing but wreak havoc in unity and conflict. This does not mean we are meant to be weak co-dependent yes men and women who get slammed and stepped on and say thanks I needed that. True humility is not weak. There is a great strength in true humility. A strength and confidence that only comes from God. A strength that knows well ones significance is in Christ. A strength that can accurately assess ones own abilities. True humility does not minimize triumphs or exaggerate failures, it sees life correctly with eternal eyes moving toward others with sacrificial service.

My purpose this morning is also the purpose of the author of the God's Word in Philippians. To challenge believers to exercise humble service to others.

Turn with me in your Bibles to Philippians 2. We will be looking at verses 5-11. In the first four verses of this chapter Paul writing to the people at Philippi unveils a key to true joy in renewing a fresh delight for our undeserved blessings and then conveying those blessings to others in humble selfless service. He begins to present his case for unity among the people, what will enhance unity and what will kill unity. Here in verses 5-11 of chapter 2, Paul uses Jesus life on earth as a model of great other centered service for us to follow. (READ)

One might wonder, how would God act if He were a human. What would he do if He were in my situation? If God somehow could come down to earth and He was living as my next door neighbor. What things would he be doing? Or not doing? Where would his priorities be in relation to other people. If God became a human and we happened to work at the same job side by side, what would I observe about the way He would do his job, the way He would talk with others, the way He would handle the customers and bosses and vendors.

God did choose to come to earth. His Son Jesus fully God became fully a man. He walked in the same shoes we walked in. We go through

tough times and He can say to us with great credibility I've been there, I've done that. I've experienced that pain, that heart aches that loneliness. I've felt the rejection of family. I've felt the rebellion of a close friend. I've been cheated, lied to and beat up. I've been tempted by the lure of success, the lust of a beautiful woman, the desire for power and fame. Hebrews 4:13 "He was tempted in all things like us, but without sin." Jesus was and is fully God. He did not have a in-born nature to sin that we have, He was God and did not sin living a life of perfect humanity.

Verse 5 Paul is very clear in his instruction. Christ was a great example. Follow his example by taking on the same attitudes that He had toward life and others. Follow Christ's example. Verse five "have this attitude in yourselves" The way Christ thought should be our same way of thinking. Even though we cannot become as Jesus was because he was God, we are called to be motivated and inspired by the same purposes, the same standards the same attitudes that moved and motivated Jesus. Jesus exercised an attitude of humility and their is great strength in humility.

Lets look this morning to see how Jesus did it and see some areas where we can begin to work on changing our attitudes to be more like Christ's. Point #1 Don't let your status get in the way of your service. Verse 6. Jesus existed in the form of God. We will see that same word form or Morphe in the next verse 7. This word is not shape, not appearance, Jesus was the form or essence. The form that was an outward expression of an inward quality. That's what form means. The very nature or essence, God. John 1:1 tells that Jesus was and has always been God. "In the beginning was the Word, Jesus and the word was with God and the word was God." Jesus was not just a good man that achieved the level of God by His right living. Jesus wads and is God and yet, He did not, end of verse 6 regard equality with God a thing to be grasped onto. He did not cling to His rightful position, privilege and status as God. Even though He was God and equal with God, He did not hesitate to set aside those rightful rights as God. He did not let His position and status get in the way of His service toward others.

In the early 70's hippie era, a wild looking hippie guy came walking in late to a crowded church. There were no seats available, so the man

walked right up to the front and sat down in the middle of the aisle. There was whispering and raised eyebrows as to what should be done about this situation. From the back of the church came one of the elder leaders of the church. He came walking slowly with His cane. Relieved that the situation would be handled, they were amazed to see the older gentleman set his cane down and sit next to the hippie. What a great lesson everyone in the church learned. Here was a respected senior leader willing to set aside his position, seat, status his privilege to be with and minister to this young man. He came down to be where he was.

That's what Jesus did for us. He did not claim His position, His rights, His privileges. He laid them aside. He did not let them get in the way of His service toward others. Do we sometimes think because of the wealth or skills or status or job or car that we are too good to serve someone of lesser status. Have we insulated ourselves with the pride of our position? God calls us to love the least. He modeled it by loving the very least. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son..." Have this attitude in yourselves. Don't let status get in your way of service toward others. You may think that person at work or school is strange. Maybe you think they dress funny. Maybe they smell. Maybe they don't have the same social skills and are rude. Maybe they make far less money aren't as brilliant as you. How can you serve that person that God has placed in your life? How can you this next week lay aside your position to meet one of their needs? Point #1 Don't let your status get in the way of service toward others.

How can we exercise humble service toward others? Point #2 Focus on the needs of others. Be other centered. Look at verse 7. Jesus emptied Himself. Literally, emptied Himself of self. This is one of the most hotly debated topics in theological circles. Asking the question of what did Jesus empty Himself of? I believe the emptying refers to Jesus voluntarily setting aside the use of His power and rights to focus on the needs of others. He did not set aside His Deity or Godness. Verse 7 says He took on the form. It does not say He exchanged the form of God for the form of a servant. He added or took on full humanity, setting aside His right to visibly display His splendor as God.

Notice the use of form. He did not take on the mere appearance of a servant, but the form the essence and nature of a servant, minus

man's nature to sin. He did not exchange one form for another but took on another. He came in the likeness of a man. That word likeness stands in contrast to form, in that it holds a meaning that may be temporary in appearance. King James says fashioned as a man. Fashions change they are temporary. Appearance the way we look changed. Jesus took on the appearance of a man yet took on the form, the essence of a servant.

They have Macintosh computers now, Power PC's that can run the PC Dos system in emulation mode. The nature of the machine is Macintosh. Yet, the power PC's can, if they choose to, run in the Dos system and run Dos or windows software. The Macintosh can take on another form and voluntarily humble itself to the PC environment.

Just like a king setting aside His robes and putting on the rags of a peasant, Jesus took on the form of servant to serve others. We need to take on the nature of one who serves others and is other focused. Humility could be defined as one who voluntarily sets aside ones rightful privilege in order to serve others more effectively, using your strengths for others good regardless of their response.

Jesus became a humble and sacrificial servant to meet the needs of others. We are so full of self we scream out. But what about your rights? You need to think of yourself. Take care of you. That relationship is not meeting your needs so get out. That person is an insensitive pig so get out. I give and give and give and get nothing in return. What if Jesus had that attitude while He was on earth always in His relationships looking for what He could get out of them? Don't get me wrong I am not calling people to stay in abusive dangerous situations, one must think of what would be the most loving thing to do for that individual and sometimes its to step outside for awhile. Yet, I do think we have defined what is abusive to the degree anything that tramples on my rights is blatant abuse. One may think they are other focused is equated with being co-dependent enabling another persons sinful actions and habits. A co-dependent person acts that way because they need to be needed and in control. They are acting to preserve and feed their own self needs, in the guise of helping others. That's not loving the other person well...that's loving yourself. We are called to be other focused not self focused. Have this attitude of humble service toward

others. Do you see the strength in true humility in service toward others. Speaking the truth in love is humble service toward others. Coming to meet people on their level is humble service toward others. I often think of our churches that require people to come to us and conform to our dress code and traditions before they can here the freeing message of Christ. If we want to be like Christ we are going to be searching for ways we can meet the needs of others where they are at. We will be searching for ways of building bridges and ways we can best serve others.

Point #3 Jesus was God obedient. We must be obedient to God. Look at verse 8. He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Death on a cross was the ultimate of humiliation. The Jewish people were very modest in their dress and careful to keep even their ankles covered. Yet, Jesus allowed Himself to be stripped naked and hung on a ugly, torture cross that was only reserved for the worst of criminals. He was obedient to His father. While on earth he wanted to model for us a total dependence on God the Father. In John 5:19 it says Jesus the Son did nothing of Himself but only what the Father choose to do through Him. Jesus choose to be dependent. When He spoke, He spoke the Words of the Father. When He did miracles He used the Divine power granted to Him by the Father.

Are you willing to die? How about risk embarrassment. Are you willing to risk being called intolerant, inflexible? Are you willing to risk being misunderstood and ignored. I've heard the youths say, "I'd rather die than be embarrassed like that" Are you willing to be obedient to God to the point that He may call you to embarrassment, even embarrassment in front of your friends at school. Are you willing to be obedient to God even to the point of ridicule even ridicule in the break room at work? The key verse in the book of Mark 10:45 The son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many." What are some things your holding on to that keep you from serving others?

Look what happens to the true servant of humility in verses 9-11. God honors unselfish service toward others. God will not honor us like Jesus. We are not God. But His word tells us that if we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God...He will life us up." God

opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. We read in verses 9-11 of the great eternal equalizer. Bow now or bow later. Verse 10 one day at the end of this age all people will bow before God. In heaven on earth even under the earth. This does not mean that everybody will one day be saved. Some will be bowing the knee without a smile on their face...but they will be bowing before they go to a Christless eternity in hell. In Matthew it says many will call out "Lord Lord but God will say I never knew you." The great servant must be made Lord of our lives not just with words but with our hearts and actions. We will bow to the one who went from Sovereignty to servanthood to become our Savior and then again to Sovereignty. We will bow now or bow later. There is no middle ground. You are either in the kingdom of God or in the kingdom of Satan. No halfway ground. If we refuse to confess Him now, one day we must confess that Jesus is God. If you have not yet made that decision to trust Christ and to place your life in His hands. Now would be a good time.

If you are a believer, I want us to think of your attitude of servanthood. Many will serve others if there is something in it for them, or if at least it doesn't cost them anything, or they can serve at a convenient time and be noticed by someone. I challenge you that service that costs us little, accomplishes little. Ministry that costs us nothing will accomplish nothing. No pain...no gain. No bleeding no blessing. At a Brazilian market there was a sign over one booth selling religious items. Cheap crosses for sale. That's what is wrong with so many Christians today. They all want cheap crosses. They risk nothing. It costs them nothing and they wonder why their Christian life is boring and lacks the power and freedom and fresh vitality. The Lord's cross was not a cheap one, why should I expect mine to be? Are you willing to actually do something that costs you something?