

The Humility Paradox

A Study of Philippians: Philippians 2:5-11

A paradox can be so much fun to think about.

A paradox is something that that is seemingly contradictory to common sense, but still true.

We drive in a parkway and park in a driveway.

If truth does not exist, the statement "truth does not exist" is a truth, thereby proving itself incorrect.

If absolutes do not exist, the statement "absolutes do not exist" is an absolute, thereby proving itself incorrect.

Increasing your knowledge causes you to see how little you know.

Water is more useful than diamonds, yet it is a lot cheaper.

Paradoxes can be fun, or they can really cause your head to spin, and they are all around us, these things that are true but seem to contradict.

What paradox have you seen recently? Why was it a paradox?

Sometimes we have our own paradoxes, like one of mine is no matter how much water you give your son, he will always need one more drink after he is already in bed. It's a paradox to me.

The Bible is full of paradoxes. In fact it starts off with a paradox of creating something out of nothing. There is also the story of Noah. Except for one family and some animals, the entire world was destroyed in order to save the world.

I could go on, but we are working our way through Philippians. Read 2:5-11.

Now this is a passage that is full of paradoxes. It is also the center of countless books and many hours of contemplation and wonder. This passage is even labeled the Kenosis because of the content and importance to Christianity.

Paul has just explained how to develop unity through exhortation, comfort, fellowship, and compassion. He explains how these ingredients of unity need to be covered in humility, but for Paul, it is not enough to simply call for humility. Paul sees that need to capture the full scope of what humility is.

He says, "Have the same attitude or mindset that Christ did when He saved the world."

Why do you think Paul is stressing humility so much?

Why is humility so hard to have?

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"
Philippians 2:5-8

“...who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.”
Philippians 2:6

Then comes one of the most amazing verses. After Paul encourages us to have the same attitude that Christ did, he explains that attitude. Read 2:6 slowly.

What do you think Paul means that Jesus did not regard equality as something to be grasped? It is a hard thought, but let me paint a picture. If you were king or ruler of a nation, what would you do?

We may make decrees and rule with a just hand, but many of us would accept the creature comforts that would come along with the title. We may go out and buy that car that we always dreamed of or maybe redecorate the old home-stead. We would be tempted to do things for ourselves, maybe not all the time, but there would be some of the time that we would indulge.

Paul explains that Jesus is God and with that came the title of ruler and sustainer of life among other titles. Jesus deserves it all, but He did not consider His position and authority as something to be hoarded for himself. He did not see His existence as God to be a reason to be selfish.

So what did he do? He empties or pours himself out by becoming a servant. He became a man that had no advantages or rights in life. He identified with the lowest by becoming low.

And then he died, not just a normal death, but a death on the accursed cross.

It is the example of perfect humility. A being that deserved the praises of heaven received the curse of earth, willingly.

So with this in mind, how would you define humility?

I can see it being explained as a matter of my status; I am called to serve man in obedience to God.

Can you think of a person who, being of a high status, served in sincerity?

I can remember a time when I was in the company of several CEOs of large companies. We were walking down a sidewalk and one of the more respected men stopped, stooped down, and picked up a piece of nasty trash. He carried it several yards before finding a trash can. He casually wiped his hand on a handkerchief, the whole while continuing the conversation with his peers.

Hopefully you thought of a person; what impression did it leave?

God continues to remind me that we are all on the same level. We are all called to serve each other. This is what builds unity and brings a church body together. This is what will stimulate the Philippian church to band together.

Why does this bring people in the church together?

Serving secures, but the passage tells the end of the story. Inherent in it is the

“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 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.”
Philippians 2:9-11

fact that Christ did not stay dead. He rose three days later and resumed his position. He was then afforded the glory and praise due Him.

Paul explains that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. No other could have or would have set the same example.

Paul has been challenging the church to continue to be unified and tighten the bonds that hold them together. He is pressing on them the need to be of one mind and one spirit, but he does not leave the church without an example. He shows how Jesus showed ultimate humility.

How would it look if the church reached for this level of humility?

This world would be radically changed through service. People may wonder in the beginning why the church is being so nice. They may even think we have ulterior motives, but as we continue to show humility, people will see Jesus. There may be some that try to take advantage, but they would not last long because the majority would seek to serve. The pressure would be too great.

Although I know it will not happen here on earth, it makes me long for heaven all the more. I can understand a little better Paul's words in the first chapter about being torn. He wanted to be in heaven.

I can't wait to bend my knee and confess with my tongue that Jesus is my Savior and Lord.

Hope to see you there.

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?

