

“Attitude Adjustment”
Philippians 2:1-8
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From our crib to our deathbed we crave relationships.
We may enjoy being alone from time to time, but we hate loneliness.

I told the following story recently to some of the leaders of our church:

“Judy Bucknell was murdered on a steamy June 9th evening.
She kept a diary.
If she had not, no one would have known of her loneliness.

In those diaries she created a character and a voice.
The character was herself and the voice was yearning.
Judy had failed to connect – many lovers, much love offered, but not returned.

Her diary was filled with words like:

- ‘Where are the men who would like to share more than my bed?’
- I would like to have, once in my life, the kind of sex that included love.
She never did.

- She was not a prostitute
- Never on drugs
- Never went to jail
- Not a social outcast.

- She was respectable
- She jogged
- She hosted parties
- She wore designer clothes
- And she had an apartment that overlooked the bay.
AND SHE WAS VERY, VERY LONELY.

She wrote, “I see people together and I am so jealous that I want to throw up. What about me? What about me?”

In her diary she wrote, “Who is going to love Judy Bucknell? I feel so old, unloved, unwanted, abandoned, and used up. I want to cry and sleep forever.” (From Miami Herald in Max Lucato, No Wonder They Call Him Jesus)

Sustained isolation is probably one of the worst fates to befall a human being.

To be alive and yet emotionally alone is a hell on earth; in fact it is part of God’s description of hell itself (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9).

God has created us to live in relationship with him and with one another.

Here is my thesis this morning drawn from Philippians 2:

Pride is the poison of relationships and humility is the antidote.

Philippians 2:1-13 (NIV) “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 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!”

Author Richard Berry reminds us that “two hundred years ago Benjamin Franklin wrote of an experiment in which he expected to become morally perfect.

In order to carry out this project, he listed thirteen virtues that he considered valuable, and then attempted to incorporate them all into his life daily while eliminating the opposite vices.

However, as time passed, Franklin became aware of the fact that true humility was simply beyond his reach.

Try as he might to subdue his pride, he finally despaired of ever obtaining his goal, stating, "Even if I could conceive that I had completely overcome it, I should probably be proud of my humility." (From "Pride" by Richard Berry, website)

I recently came across this rather silly test of humility:

1. If you made it big, would you go to your high school reunion just to show off?
2. When you daydream about your tombstone, does it read:
Rest in Peace.
Loved by all.
How will the world ever go on?
3. Do you think your obituary should be a full article with a picture of you 10 years younger?
4. Do you have framed pictures of yourself - alone, with no one else in the photo - displayed in your house? Don't lie!
5. Would you hire someone smarter than you?

Most of us dislike the overbearing know-it-all who uses every opportunity to tell you how successful, smart or clever they are.

And because we don't see ourselves that way, we assume we aren't inappropriately proud.

But while we easily see pride in others, we are often blinded to our own.

Listen to Berry again as he gives some of the signs of pride:

1. Do I hate for people to give me advice?
2. Is it difficult for me to apologize, or admit when I might be wrong?
3. Do I sometimes make statements like "I told you so," and argue my opinion about even trivial matters?
4. Do I ever have attitudes that are outwardly similar to the attitudes of people whom I consider conceited or arrogant?
5. Has anyone ever considered me too vain, smug, or overbearing?
6. Do I enjoy telling others about myself and what I have accomplished more than I ought to enjoy it?
7. If a friend were to suggest that I change some aspect of my personality, is it likely that I would take offense?

8. When offering my opinion on a subject, do I leave the impression of stating it as an undeniable fact?

(From "Pride" by Richard Berry, website)

Besides just being obnoxious, what's the problem with pride?

C.S. Lewis wrote, "According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil is pride... Pride leads to every other vice: It is the complete anti-God state of mind.

God says it characterizes and even summarizes the wicked:

Proverbs 21:4 "Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin!"

And God says he detests and opposes the proud; there's nothing worse than having God against you.

Proverbs 16:5 "The LORD detests all the proud of heart.

James 4:6 "'God opposes the proud..."

But in the context of our continuing series of messages on our relationship to each other as Christians (what we are calling "spiritual community"), pride is a "killer".

It seems that pride is at the root of all broken relationships.

It is willful self-centeredness that keeps us from having and enjoying the relationships with God and others that we were created to have.

In our house through the years there have been times when various members of the family have needed an attitude adjustment.

Sometimes that adjustment can be administered through the ears and sometimes on the rears.

But the point is that a new perspective is needed and attitudes must be adjusted to fit.

The Apostle Paul knew there were budding problems in the church at Philippi, people "out of sorts" with one another.

And he also knew that such a lack of unity would ruin the church and make it ineffective in its mission.

And so Paul writes in part to give them an attitude adjustment.

Now I quickly confess that while an attitude adjustment might be a clever way to speak of what Paul is talking about, it doesn't do justice to the seriousness of the spiritual issue that Paul here addresses.

To mix metaphors, we are not talking about "fine-tuning" our attitudes, we are talking about major surgery on our hearts.

We'll come back to that in a few minutes.

At the end of chapter one of Philippians Paul began the theme that he continues into chapter two.

Philippians 1:27-28 "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved--and that by God.

Paul says to them and to us, "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" – live what you believe – walk the talk – or maybe said better, be who you really are – You are the people of God

In a sermon I haven't yet preached from this passage, Paul says that "conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel" will look like three things:

1. You know who you are (you are united as one people in the Spirit of God)
2. You know what you are doing (you work together to accomplish the mission God has given you)
3. And you know where you are going (opposition to you only proves that you will be saved by God in the end).

Now remember that Paul is not describing them as individuals but as a church, as a group.

In order to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the gospel, they must be united; they must be one; they must live in true spiritual community.

Continuing on that same important point, Paul continues to describe that unity this way in Philippians 2:2: It is “being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”

To be “like-minded” does not mean agreeing on everything or having the same opinions about everything.

This like-mindedness speaks of valuing the same things, having the same purpose in regard to the kingdom.

Together they are gospel oriented; they are “partners” in the gospel.

Of course there are differences between people but the tensions those differences create are held together by an “overmastering loyalty” to each other. (Haw thorne, 68)

When Paul speaks of them “having the same love” he is talking about a shared love – loving the same God and loving each other.

Someone wrote, “Love begins when someone else’s needs are more important than my own.” (author unknown in Fee 185)

“Being one in spirit and purpose” seems to repeat the ideas already expressed.

Their hearts are toward each other (they love each other) and they have a common purpose, a shared goal – a commitment to reflect the character of God in their relationships.

But Paul quickly moves to and spends more time describing **what it will take for them to live that way.**

So in verses 3-8 Paul describes humility.

And he uses Jesus as the supreme example of that humility.

Philippians 2:5,8 “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus...who humbled himself...”

Paul says Jesus is our example.

Even though he is God, even though he is equal with the Father, he didn’t have to cling to the advantages that gave him.

He didn’t consider his equality with God as something to be used to his own advantage but gave that up to serve us.

Furthermore he chose to become as a slave.

Think for a minute about the position of a slave.

A slave has no rights; a slave exists to serve.

And he humbled himself so completely that even his very life was not his own but was voluntarily turned over to benefit us.

He was so obedient to this service of us that he willingly gave his life for us.

Death to self is the ultimate expression of humility.

Jesus went even to the point of such an ignoble death as on a cross.

Jesus is the example of what we are called to with these words:

Philippians 2:3-4 “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Here Paul contrasts pride and humility.

Pride is “selfish ambition”; It is a view of life that is always promoting self.

It is all those attitudes I mentioned earlier as signs of pride.

And it is “vain conceit” (literally, “empty glory”); those who think highly of themselves without cause.

Barth wrote, “We think everyone sees the situation from our point of view. We drag everything into the sphere of our wishes, desires, and concern. We sit on our own throne on our own island and make our judgments from that point of view.” (Barth 58)

But then in contrast to pride, humility is to **“consider others better than yourselves.”**

Instead of selfish ambition and vain conceit we are to have the same love for each other that Christ has for us.

This kind of love is expressed in “considering others better than ourselves.”

“To consider others better” does not mean to regard someone else as more important in an absolute sense but to focus on them - to think about them and to give them preference.

It is not that they are inherently better but that I choose (“considering”) to put their interests ahead of my own.

Oh, how easily my own interests dominate:

- If only I could get some peace and quiet.
- If only I had some time to do the things I like.
- If only I didn’t have to jump every time the phone rings.
- I had this evening all planned and now I need to go help someone move.
- I’ve served my time in the nursery or teaching children, I deserve a break.”

Why do we so easily think that way?

- Because of pride.
- Because of how we think about ourselves
- Because of the high estimation we make of ourselves and our rights.

But that is “vain conceit” – it is empty glory.

Charles Spurgeon said the best definition he ever heard of humility was "to think rightly of ourselves."

Humility is to see ourselves correctly or to see ourselves as God sees us.

We take pride in our physical appearance or strength, our intellect, our successes, and our comparisons to others.

Can you imagine what that looks and sounds like to God?

As Paul said it to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 4:7

“What do you have that you did not receive?”

Gordon Fee has written, “Humility is not to be confused with false modesty, or with that kind of abject servility that only repulses, wherein the “humble’ (feigns humility to gain an advantage). Rather it has to do with a proper estimation of oneself, the stance of the creature before the Creator, utterly dependent and trusting. Here one is well aware both of one’s weaknesses and of one’s glory (we are in

made in his image, after all) but makes neither too much nor too little of either. True humility is therefore not self-focused at all, but rather, as further defined by Paul in verse 4, “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Fee, 188)

This isn't the only time the Bible teaches this:

1 Corinthians 10:24 Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

1 Corinthians 13:5 Love “is not self-seeking.”

Romans 15:2-3 “Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself...”

So when Paul writes, “look” to the interests of others, the word “look” used here means to seek, to look at carefully, watching for the right time, the best time, the time that will bring the most good.

Paul says don't be preoccupied with yourself and your own interests instead be preoccupied with the needs and interests of others.

He is not saying we don't address our own interests but they don't come first.

Let me illustrate that.

Barbara loves to plant things to see them grow and to see their beauty.

But she is both unable to some of the heavier work that is sometimes required to both plant those growing things and to maintain them.

So her hobby requires my investment.

I would rather have a maintenance free yard so that I could sit and read.

She wants to plant a garden and put out flowers before it is safe weather-wise in Colorado to do so.

Then she wants me to go out in the dark and cold and cover the plants or haul them all into the house so they won't freeze.

Worse yet, she wants me to love gardening the way she does.

Two weeks ago, she wanted a rose bush transplanted.

She can't dig the bush out and she can't haul it so I had to do it. So in a "loving" manner I said impatiently, "Just tell me where you want it and I'll do it."

But no, she wanted me to come with her and think about where it would best be replanted.

So she said, "Do you think it would be best here, or there or how about over there." (it's like rearranging furniture in the house – moving an 800 pound couch first to one place and then wanting just to see it placed over there).

Again in my loving way I said, "Just tell me where you want it!"

She wanted me to enter into her world; but I just wanted to get the task completed so I could get back to my things.

Can you imagine with me what a difference it would make in our homes and in our church if we had a right estimation of ourselves so that we humbly wanted to put the interests of others ahead of our own?

Andrew Murray wrote, "The "insignificances" of daily life are the "importances" and the tests of eternity, because they prove what really is the spirit that possesses us. It is in our most unguarded moments that we really show and see what we are. To know the humble man, to know how the humble man behaves, you must follow him in the common course of daily life."

A very simple question to be asked in each encounter (planned or unplanned): What is God's loving interest in this person right now?

What can I do to show that love to him or her right now.

Oswald Chambers wrote that God tells us to "Identify ourselves with God's interest in other people, don't try to identify God with our interest (or disinterest) in other people."

But how can we love each other this way?

How can I ever be truly humble and not just have a feigned humility?

This is not just a homily on ethics; on how we ought to be good. Rather this is a call to a transformation made possible by the supernatural realities of our relationship together with Christ.

Real change requires a conviction that change is necessary.

If I'm okay the way I am, then nothing needs to change.

But if I believe that the honor of God hangs on this, If I believe that my life, and if I believe that the lives of my brothers and sisters in the Lord and the lives of the world around us hangs in the balance – then I may do something.

But what do I do?

I begin with an understanding of how deep-seated this self-centeredness is and how **dependent I am on God** to root it out.

Paul began this teaching in chapter two with these words:

Philippians 2:1 “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion...”

You quickly note that Paul is not saying “if” as if there is a question but “if” as “since it is true.”

- Since you have encouragement from the experience of being united with Christ,
- Since you have comfort from the experience of God's love for you,
- Since you have fellowship together with the Spirit,
- Since you have experienced the tender mercy and compassion of God then make my joy complete by being living in unity – “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus...who humbled himself...”

In other words, you have been supernaturally brought into the family of God, you are united to Christ, you experience God's love, you live in relationship with the Holy Spirit, you **are able** by God's grace to live out a life of humble service to each other.

For as Paul will write just a few verses later in the same context:
 Philippians 2:13 "...it is God who works in you **to will and to act** according to his good purpose.

The kind of love Jesus calls us to when he says, "Love one another as I have loved you" and the kind of humility we are to have when Paul writes, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" is **only possible by a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit.**

The question of us is will we take the issue seriously enough to come to God in true sorrow for our sin of pride, confession of it, and a willingness for him to help us turn from it?

Again from Spurgeon: "So if we would get rid of pride, we should not proceed to arrange our dress by adopting some special costume (trying to look humble), or to qualify our language by using an outlandish tongue (trying to sound humble), but let us seek of God that he would purify our hearts from pride, and then assuredly if pride is purged from the heart, our life also shall be humble. Make the tree good, and then the fruit shall be good; make the fountain pure, and the stream shall be sweet."

If we take this command to unity seriously, we will also take prayer and the dependence that prayer assumes very seriously.

- Yes, we will consciously make every effort to think and act differently
- but we will realize how dependent we are on the Spirit to do it
- and we will be serious about praying for the kind of humility that Jesus has.

270 years ago the English evangelist John Wesley knew the seriousness of the issue of pride and prayed nearly daily for God to help him be rid of pride and live in humility.

Listen to his prayer:

“Above all, deliver me, O my God, from all idolatrous self-love. I know, O God, that this is the root of all evil. I know you made me to serve not my will but yours. I know that the very essence of the devil is having a will contrary to yours. Help me against this most dangerous of all idols. Enable me to feel the full evil of my sin and sinfulness and then let me be fully content when all others think of me as I do of myself.

“O Lamb of God, who both by your example and teaching instructed us to be humble, give me grace this day and throughout my whole life, in every thought, word and action, to imitate your humble ways. Help me understand that I am nothing and have nothing and that I deserve nothing but misery and punishment. Grant it Lord that I may look for nothing and claim nothing and that I may go through life not seeking my own glory but only yours.

“Let me never speak any word that may tend to my own praise unless the good of my neighbor requires it; and even then let me beware, lest to heal another I wound my own soul. Let my ears and my heart be shut to the praise that comes from others. Give me a dread of applause in whatever form and from whatever tongue it comes.

“O Jesus, who was despised and rejected by men, when I am slighted by my friends, disdained by my superiors, ridiculed by my peers or contemptuously treated by my inferiors, let me know that it is only then that I begin to be your disciple, following in your steps. Let me thankfully accept, and faithfully use such occasions for the improving of a humble attitude.” John Wesley (A Collection of Forms of Prayer 1733)

- Will I acknowledge that pride is a serious, life-threatening, church-destroying problem?
- Am I willing to do something about it?
- Do I recognize that I need God’s supernatural help to overcome my pride and live increasing live in humility?
- Will I repent of my pride and ask for God’s aid?
- Will I here and now do so, in faith believing that this honors God and that he will enable me?
- Will I determine to examine my own heart often to see and root out the tendencies to pride?

Prayer

With the notes of this sermon available on the website, I will place both the prayer of Wesley that I quoted earlier and a helpful reminder of 12 ways to cooperate with God in learning humility.

Twelve Ways To Humble Yourself

1. Routinely confess your sin to God. (Luke 18:9-14) All of us sin and fall short of the glory of God. However, too few of us have a routine practice of rigorous self-honesty examination. Weekly, even daily, review of our heart and behavior, coupled with confession to God, is an essential practice of humility.
2. Acknowledge your sin to others. (James 3:2, James 5:16) Humility before God is not complete unless there is also humility before man. A true test of our willingness to humble ourselves is being willing to share with others the weaknesses we confess to God. Wisdom, however, dictates that we do so with others that we trust.
3. Take wrong patiently. (1 Peter 3:8-17) This has been a difficult one for me. When something is unjust I want to react and rectify it. However, patiently responding to the unjust accusations and actions of others demonstrates our strength of godly character and provides an opportunity to put on humility.
4. Actively submit to authority...the good and the bad! (1 Peter 2:18) Our culture does not value submission; rather it promotes individualism. How purposely and actively do you work on submission to those whom God has placed as authorities in your life? Doing so is a good way to humble yourself.
5. Receive correction and feedback from others graciously. (Proverbs 10:17, 12:1) In the Phoenix area, a local East valley pastor was noted for graciously receiving any negative feedback or correction offered. He would simply say "thank you for caring enough to share that with me, I will pray about it and get back to you." Look for the kernel of truth in what people offer you, even if it comes from a dubious source. Always pray, "Lord, what are you trying to show me through this?"
6. Accept a lowly place. (Proverbs 25:6,7) If you find yourself wanting to sit at the head table, wanting others to recognize your contribution or become offended when others are honored or chosen, then pride is present. Purpose to support others being recognized, rather than you. Accept and look for the lowly place; it is the place of humility.
7. Purposely associate with people of lower state than you. (Luke 7:36-39) Jesus was derided by the Pharisees for socializing with the poor and those of lowly state. Our culture is very status conscious and people naturally want to socialize upward. Resist the temptation of being partial to those with status or wealth.
8. Choose to serve others. (Philippians 1:1, 2 Corinthians 4:5, Matthew 23:11) When we serve others, we are serving God's purposes in their lives. Doing so reduces our focus on ourselves and builds the Kingdom of God instead of the Kingdom of self. When serving another costs us nothing, we should question whether or not it is really servanthood.
9. Be quick to forgive. (Matthew 18: 21-35) Forgiveness is possibly one of the greatest acts of humility we can do. To forgive is to acknowledge a wrong that has been done us and also to further release our right of repayment for the wrong. Forgiveness is denial of self. Forgiveness is not insisting on our way and our justice.
10. Cultivate a grateful heart. (1 Thessalonians 5:18) The more we develop an attitude of gratitude for the gift of salvation and life He has given us, the more true our perspective of self. A grateful heart is a humble heart.

11. Purpose to speak well of others. (Ephesians 4:31-32) Saying negative things about others puts them "one down" and us "one up"...a form of pride. Speaking well of others edifies them and builds them up instead of us. Make sure, however, that what you say is not intended as flattery.

12. Treat pride as a condition that always necessitates embracing the cross. (Luke 9:23) It is our nature to be proud and it is God's nature in us that brings humility. Committing to a lifestyle of daily dying to self and living through Him is the foundation for true humility.

Alfred Ells, M.C. in "What does the Bible Say about Humility"

A Prayer for Humility

Charles Wesley

"Above all, deliver me, O my God, from all idolatrous self-love. I know, O God, that this is the root of all evil. I know you made me to serve not my will but yours. I know that the very essence of the devil is having a will contrary to yours. Help me against this most dangerous of all idols. Enable me to feel the full evil of my sin and sinfulness and then let me be fully content when all others think of me as I do of myself.

"O Lamb of God, who both by your example and teaching instructed us to be humble, give me grace this day and throughout my whole life, in every thought, word and action, to imitate your humble ways. Help me understand that I am nothing and have nothing and that I deserve nothing but misery and punishment. Grant it Lord that I may look for nothing and claim nothing and that I may go through life not seeking my own glory but only yours.

"Let me never speak any word that may tend to my own praise unless the good of my neighbor requires it; and even then let me beware, lest to heal another I wound my own soul. Let my ears and my heart be shut to the praise that comes from others. Give me a dread of applause in whatever form and from whatever tongue it comes.

"O Jesus, who was despised and rejected by men, when I am slighted by my friends, disdained by my superiors, ridiculed by my peers or contemptuously treated by my inferiors, let me know that it is only then that I begin to be your disciple, following in your steps. Let me thankfully accept, and faithfully use such occasions for the improving of a humble attitude. Let me acknowledge that your goodness is letting me experience this training and let me beg for mercy for those physicians of my soul that administered your instruction to me."