

Fundamental Christian Attitudes: Humility

Selected Scriptures

90-116

Before we have our time at the Lord's Table tonight, I want to continue in our series on the anatomy of the church. We have been saying recently that there are so many new folks in our church as our church continues to grow – and for that we are so grateful to the Lord – so many new folks that perhaps don't quite understand why we do what we do, and why we do the things the way we do them. And so we're going back and looking at the anatomy of the church, looking at what are the ingredients, the essential elements, and components, and features of church life; what should a church be. And it's a timely period in the history of the American church, and probably in the western church in general, because as we've been saying, the church is in an identity crisis. It is kind of struggling to figure out what its identity should be.

Some churches are struggling with the substance of that identity, and others are struggling with the style of that identity. We have to go back to the Word of God to understand what are the absolute essentials, and that's what we're endeavoring to do. And we're borrowing the wonderful imagery of the metaphor of the body of Christ, which our Lord gave through the apostle Paul in the New Testament. We're extending it a little bit to talk about the anatomy of the church. And this is to put us in touch with what we should expect in the church, this church, for that reason, and the reason that it's the revelation of God, any church. For the reason that this is Christ's church and not ours, and He has set out to build His own church and has determined it should be built. These then become non-negotiables for the church.

We're concerned about what those are, and how we respond to them as the Scripture lays them out. As I said to you this morning, it shouldn't be too difficult to figure out what the church should be, since we hold in our hands in the Word of God the manual of instruction. Jesus said, "I will build My church," He has established the plan as to how, and He has revealed it to those who are employed in that building. Now, we have mentioned that there are four areas of the anatomy of the church we want to look at: first the skeleton, then the internal systems, and then the muscles, and finally the flesh. We have already gone through the skeleton, and we laid out what we felt were the very essential things that give the church its rigidity, that give it its backbone, that are the firm foundational things that provide the framework of life in the church.

And we noted those to be the worship of God, the exaltation of Jesus Christ, the pursuit of holiness, and the proclamation of truth, and submission to spiritual authority. We went through those carefully, and God really blessed us as we did. And then we started also to look into that second category of internal systems. A skeleton is not life. It gives framework, it gives rigidity, it gives some form, but it lacks life. You have to hang a whole lot of internal organs on that skeleton before you have a living body. And we're talking about, then, the internal systems. We have given you two of the very important internal systems that must operate in the church, the body of Christ, the first being faith, and then this morning we talked about obedience. Those are the spiritual attitudes.

When I talk about internal systems in the church, I'm talking about spiritual attitudes, motives, convictions – those things that are true of the heart. This is heart business. We are not legalists. We do not believe that people are to be manipulated externally, intimidated, forced by fear or external reward into certain patterns of behavior. But we believe that men and women ought to live as direct response to transformation on the inside. And so what we do is the work of the heart – working on spiritual attitudes. That is primarily the work of the Word, as we said this morning. If you're going to do heart surgery, you have to have a very efficient tool, and according to Hebrews 4, what is most efficient in laying bare the heart and doing necessary surgery is the Word of God, which is sharper than any other instrument.

And so if you're going to build into people right motives, and right attitudes, and right convictions, if you're going to do the work of the heart, if you're going to cut out the disease, and do the necessary spiritual bypass surgery, you do it with the Word – to teach people from the heart, as Ephesians 6:6 says, to do the will of God. Now, that work of producing the right heart attitudes involves building in people strong faith and a commitment to obedience, and we've already discussed those. Let's go to a third one tonight. Here is another heart attitude. Here is another conviction. Here is another motivation that is essential if the church is to be the living body of Christ. It should come somewhere near the front of the list. In fact, in my mind, it kind of belongs in the third position, and that's why it's there. It is the attitude of humility – humility.

Apart from faith and obedience as a general category, probably there is no more important spiritual virtue than this matter of humility. At the very central, the very central point, at the very heart of life in the church, comes this matter of the virtue of humility. And I want to review it for you tonight before we come to the Lord's Table because of its absolute importance, and we'll see how important it is in linking up with breaking bread and drinking the cup together. Turn in your Bible to Matthew, chapter 5 – Matthew, chapter 5. If there was anything true about the Judaism of Jesus' time, it was that it bred spiritual pride. If there was anything true about the Judaism of Jesus' time, it was that men paraded their external religion, and expected the accolades of the crowd.

We remember reading in Matthew 23 how the leaders of Israel always sought the chief seats, and the high places. When they did their alms, they blew a trumpet, or when they did their fasting, they went into public and through public places and threw ashes on their heads, that everyone might see how devout they really were. Legalism always is the companion of spiritual pride; true spirituality has the virtue of humility coming alongside. And so when Jesus started the Sermon on the Mount, He attacked the religious of His day with a direct hit.

Opening His mouth, in Matthew 5, He began to teach them, and the first thing out of His mouth: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

The promises that come at the end of each of those verses have to do with the realm of salvation. He's talking about people who are saved; their being in the Kingdom, their being comforted, their ultimately inheriting the earth, and their being soul-satisfied. Those are all descriptions of features of salvation. Those all describe what it means to belong to Christ, to belong to God, to know that you're in the Kingdom, to have comfort in all the issues of life, to have the promise someday of inheriting the earth, in its ultimate and final form – the glories of the new heaven and the new earth in the eternal

heaven, and soul-satisfaction. Those things belong to the redeemed.

And the redeemed here are described in these ways: they are poor in spirit, they mourn, they are meek, and they hunger and thirst. All of those are descriptive of various facets of humility. First of all, that phrase “blessed are the poor in spirit” captures a Greek word in the verb form, those who are poor in spirit, which means to be so poor that you have to beg. The best way to describe it as that they are bankrupt and they have no means of support. They have nothing, and they have no means of getting anything. It’s a term used for beggars who had no skill, or were disabled so that they could not function, could not work. They are the utterly destitute. The Kingdom belongs to the destitute, Jesus is saying.

The Kingdom belongs to people who know they have nothing, who have come to the realization of their utter bankruptcy. And, of course, He’s not talking about material things here, but spiritual ones. It doesn’t belong to the people who believe they have achieved great spiritual ends. It doesn’t belong to people who think they have accumulated merit with God. It doesn’t belong to people who are counting on their circumcision, their having been born into the race of Israel, having been born, as the apostle Paul, for example, into the very noble tribe of Benjamin. It doesn’t belong to those people who manage to maintain all the externals, the traditions, and who outwardly conform to the law, and consequently have filled their gain column with personal religious achievement.

It belongs to people who are beating their breasts, saying, “God, be merciful to me a sinner.” If you’ve ever wondered how people in the Old Testament were saved, they were saved the same way people now are. They were just on the other side of the cross. And the manner of salvation was, first of all, the conviction of sin, which was brought about when someone knew they couldn’t keep the law of God. God gave His law, laid it out very clearly to Moses, it was written down for all to see and read. And people endeavored to keep it and failed, could not keep the law; went through the repetitious response of the sacrifices, never ever having soul-satisfaction, because the blood of bulls and goats couldn’t take away sin.

And so there was a sort of endless repetition, until they came to the point where they recognized their bankruptcy, they recognized their utter inability to keep the law of God, and the utter inability of animal sacrifices to take away their sin. And in the bankruptcy of all of that, threw themselves on the mercy of God, and pleaded for forgiveness. In fact, that publican in Luke 18 beating on his breast is an illustration of how an Old Testament person, a person living pre-cross, was saved; pounding on his chest, “God, be merciful to me a sinner.” Can’t even look up toward heaven, because he’s so embarrassed and mortified by his unending iniquity; he cries out for the mercy of God.

And at that point, God steps in, in the words of Jesus, and that man went home justified. The righteousness of Christ was imputed to him, just as it is imputed to us on this side of the cross. Brokenness, humility is the issue; the one who understands his spiritual bankruptcy. And notice, in verse 4, the one who, when contemplating his spiritual bankruptcy, has an attitude of mourning; there’s an attitude of desperation, there’s a depth of sorrow, and an agonizing over this condition. It is followed, in verse 5, by meekness, almost a timidity, a fear to even approach the throne of God, because of one’s utter unworthiness. And that is reflected in the man in Luke 18 not being able to even lift his eyes up toward heaven, but being down on the ground.

And then finally, in verse 6, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness they know they do not have. The apostle Paul, we’re reminded in Philippians 3, spent the first nearly forty years of his life

accumulating self-righteousness, and it was utterly unfulfilling. In a moment of time, on the Damascus road, he met Christ and he says, “Christ gave to me a righteousness not of my own, but the righteousness of Christ imputed to me by faith.” This is all about humility, spiritual bankruptcy, mourning over sin, meekly coming before God, almost afraid to look up, and recognizing you’re utterly devoid of what you desperately need, and that is righteousness. That’s how you come into the Kingdom.

This is further emphasized in Matthew, chapter 18. Just so we understand how it all starts, in Matthew, chapter 18, Jesus – really speaking in the same general area about how one enters the Kingdom, and emphasizing the matter of humility – says in verse 3, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted.” And the disciples desperately needed to be converted – literally, that means to be turned around and go the other direction – because you remember, if you know the background of Matthew 18, the disciples were having an argument at this point, and their argument was about who was going to be greatest in the Kingdom.

When they joined up with Jesus, they knew they were in the presence of a very remarkable man. They came to understand that He was the Messiah. That was articulated a couple of chapters earlier in no uncertain terms, when right out of Peter’s mouth it came: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” You’re the Messiah, God incarnate. They knew that this was the Messiah, and the Messiah was bringing the kingdom. And the more they knew about the kingdom, the more they began to argue about which of them was going to sit in the chief seats. It isn’t long after this incident – showing how hard it was for them to hear with hearing ears and believe, even when Jesus told them what He told them – it wasn’t long after this very incident that James and John sent their mother to ask personally if Jesus would allow them to sit on His right and left hand in the kingdom.

So the argument was going on; it was even going on in John 13, the very night Jesus was being betrayed. Instead of them being sensitive about what was going to happen to Jesus – He had told them that He was going to die – they were all arguing about which of them would be the greatest in the Kingdom. In the middle of this argument, Jesus, sitting in a house in Capernaum, maybe even Peter’s house, some think that was his home, pulls a little child to Himself, a little baby. Sets the little baby in His lap, and uses that little baby as an illustration, and says, “Unless you turn around and go the other way and become like children, you’ll not even enter the kingdom of Heaven. Whoever, then, humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven.”

The Kingdom belongs to the humble. You come in humble. Now, what does He mean, humbling himself as this child? Very simple; a child is absolutely dependent. That’s part of it, but maybe that’s the minor part. The major part is that a child has achieved nothing. A child has achieved nothing – a child has accomplished nothing. There’s no great record of achievements. You come bankrupt, with nothing; as the hymn writer so magnificently says, “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling.” That’s how a child comes – no record of achievement, that’s how you come. You come in as a little child.

Further emphasizing this, I want to take you to one of the great evangelistic texts of all the New Testament, James 4 – James 4. And I want to start in verse 4, because I think it sets the context for us. “You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be the friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” That’s very much what John said in 1 John: “If anyone loves the world the love of the Father is not in him.” Verse 5: “Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: He jealously desires the Spirit which He

has made to dwell in us?" And then verse 6: "But He gives a greater grace."

This transitions from the very strong language of verse 4, about being a friend to the world, and thus being an adulteress and an enemy of God, into to verse 5, a very difficult verse to sort out, which means rejecting the work of the Holy Spirit, to the fact that, in verse 6, God still gives grace. You may be a friend of the world, you may be at enmity with God, you may be resisting the Spirit, but there is grace available. And I really believe he's talking here to the unregenerate, and I'll show you why. In verse 8, right in the middle of this context, you see, "You sinners" – "Cleanse your hands, you sinners." There is no place in the entire New Testament where believers are ever so designated.

That is not to say we don't sin; we do. But never are we called sinners. In fact, we are called even though we sin, just the opposite, what? Saints. We are not double-minded, in the sense that there is some interest in spiritual things, but a captive interest in the world. That's exactly what he was talking about in verse 4. You may think you're the friend of God, but if you're double-minded and attached to the world, you're not. You're like that soil in Matthew 13, where the weeds, the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choked out the truth. So he's talking, I believe, to the unregenerate, who can be classified as adulteresses, who are friends of the world, who are hostile toward God, who are enemies of God, who are, in verse 8, called sinners.

And in verse 6, he says there is an available grace, but please notice to whom it is given. Verse 6: "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." That statement is recorded both in the Psalms and the Proverbs. Saving grace is for the humble; those with the Beatitude-attitude, those who are spiritually bankrupt and know it, mourn over their bankruptcy, come to the Lord meekly, almost hesitant to come into His presence, they're so ashamed, but they're so hungry they'll come, because they know what they most need, they lack. Now, how is this humility demonstrated? Follow this. God gives grace to the humble, so here's how to manifest that humility.

"Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded." And here, verse 9: "Be miserable and mourn and weep," and there's that Beatitude language again. "Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you."

I really believe that is one of the great evangelistic texts of the New Testament. We don't have time to sort it all out, but the whole intent of that is to call to the sinner, and the one who loves the world, to humble himself. And that humility means you submit yourself to God, and that is to say you submit yourself to God as revealed in Scripture.

You turn, as it were, from the devil. You draw near to God. You confess your sin. You cry for the purging of your heart, with a miserable, mourning, weeping attitude. And in such humility the Lord will lift you up. Now, this is the way it all begins, folks – the way it all begins. You come in humble and broken, with a contrite heart. I think that's essentially the same thing as you have in the Old Testament, there really isn't any difference. I don't like it when people make some kind of great difference between how people in the Old Testament came to the Lord, and the difference, say, between those in the New – it's really the same.

Listen to Isaiah 55: "Seek the Lord while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. Let the

wicked forsake his way And let the unrighteous man forsake his thoughts; And let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” There it is again; you come realizing your wickedness, you come realizing the absence of righteousness, you come broken, casting yourself on God’s mercy. That’s how you came into the kingdom. You came in humble. And may I suggest to you, all of that, to say this: nothing changes – nothing changes. You are no more worthy now of salvation than you were when you came, right? You are no more worthy now of God’s goodness in Christ than you were when you came.

You’re still a sinner, and it is still God’s grace that sustains you. There’s no place for pride in your life, ever. Whatever good, whatever noble, whatever godly features may exist in your life are the work of the Lord, and not you. That’s why Peter, in 1 Peter 5:5, says, “Clothe yourselves with humility,” and quotes those same Old Testament passages: “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Verse 6: “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you at the proper time.” And here he’s talking to believers. The principle is the same. I think, in James, he’s talking to unbelievers, sinners, and adulteresses, and friends of the world.

But here he’s talking to young men – some of them may even be in the ministry serving as elders, because that’s the immediate context. But certainly he’s talking to believers here. And the command is to humble yourselves – to humble yourselves. The Lord wants to do this, and the Lord will do whatever He needs to do to humble us. Let’s look at 2 Corinthians, chapter 12, for a moment. We’re going to get to this passage one of these days in our study of 2 Corinthians, but I want to share with you just some of its insights; 2 Corinthians, chapter 12. As the chapter begins, the apostle Paul is rehearsing an amazing, amazing experience that he had. He’s speaking, as it says in verse 1, about visions and revelations, supernatural things.

And then in a somewhat oblique way – but all of us know to whom he refers, namely himself – he says, “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago” – speaking of himself – “whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know.” In other words, he says “Fourteen years ago I had an experience, the reality of which I don’t understand. I don’t know whether I was actually in the body, or whether I was translated somehow out of the body, I don’t know, God knows.” But such a man “was caught up to the third heaven.” The first heaven is the heaven of oxygen, the air around us. The second is the celestial, and that’s where the stars and all the planets, that’s the great space that is above us. And the third heaven, in simple terms, is the heaven where God lives, the throne of God, the abode of God.

And this man, fourteen years ago, he says, in some way was taken to that place. I do not know how, I do not understand, I don’t know the form I was in, but I was there. And again, in verse 3, he says, “I know how such a man” – again he repeats – “whether in the body or apart from the body, I do not know, God knows—was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.” People always ask me what they are. Sure. They’re inexpressible, and they’re not able to be spoken. Now, Paul alone had this experience. I know there are a lot of folks today who claim to have it, but Paul alone had it. And he says, “On behalf of such a man will I boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses.”

What he is trying to do here is to say there certainly is something to say about such a trip, and there’s a part of me that wants to celebrate that incredible experience. But when I really look at myself, all I can really talk about is my weakness. As if to say, “I didn’t go there because I deserved to go there, I didn’t go there because I had earned the trip. It wasn’t a reward for my spirituality. I

mean, it was a wonderful thing and something marvelous to exult in and rejoice in; but when I look back at myself all I can rejoice in is my weakness.” And then, coming down to verse 7: “Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations” – and Paul had a number of them.

He had one, first of all, on the Damascus road, where he literally was struck blind by the shining light of Jesus Christ. Christ appeared to him there – Christ appeared to him at least two other times – personally, individually and independently of anybody else. When he was going back to Rome in the book of Acts, the Lord, you’ll remember, sent an angel to give him instruction about what was going to happen in the midst of the storm. And then he was caught up into the third heaven, the very paradise of God. He had had some astonishing revelation, the likes of which no one else had had. And because of all of that, verse 7 says, “For this reason, to keep me from exalting myself” – you see, that’s the tendency when you’ve had those great revelations.

I mean nobody had had them, nobody. Nobody had been to heaven and back. That’s not a routine thing. In fact, in the gospels it says no one went up and came down except Christ. This is not some kind of thing that just happens willy-nilly, these surpassing revelations. Even Peter looked back at the glorious transfiguration of Jesus Christ, and in all of its wonder celebrated such a glorious experience because of its rarity – there was just Peter, and James, and John. But after the ascension of Christ, no such revelation was given again to Peter, just to Paul. And this could easily cause one to be exalted, and one to be lifted up in one’s own mind, because, after all, I mean when you’re in a conversation, and you want to kind of get the best of everybody, all you have to say is, “Say, guys, how many times have you been to heaven? How many times has the exalted, ascended Christ come back and had a private meeting with you?”

So to keep him from exalting himself, verse 7 says there was given him a thorn in the flesh. Really a stake, not just a little thorn like in a rose bush; the word means a stake, like a sharpened pencil, only the size of a shaft. And it was designed to ram right through his otherwise proud, human flesh, to keep him from exalting himself. It was a thorn in the flesh from God. We know that, because in verse 8 he entreated the Lord three times that it might depart, and the Lord said “no.” So the Lord must have allowed it, because the Lord refused to remove it. And furthermore, if it was sent to humble him, Satan is in the business of humbling people. But you say, “Wait a minute, it was a messenger of Satan to buffet him.”

That’s right. And God will use demons if need be to humble His own. That’s why it’s so silly for people to run around chasing demons away. Even if they could chase them away, they might be chasing away the ones the Lord had sent to do His work. And the Lord had allowed this demon-possessed person. I think this is a particular reference to the ringleader of the Corinthian conspiracy that was just tearing up that church, and in the tearing, just breaking the heart of Paul. That’s what this whole epistle is about. And Paul didn’t like it, and he probably prayed the imprecatory Psalms, and wished the guy was dead, and said, “God, kill him.” But the truth of the matter was the Lord wanted him there to drive that stake through Paul’s flesh, because so many successes, and so many revelations would make a normal man, and even a good man like Paul, proud, and God wanted him humble.

And God will go to whatever extremity He needs to humble His own, even if it means sending a messenger from Satan to plague them. Even if it means trouble in the church, as there was in Corinth, even if it means an attack on his character. The character assassination that was going on in the Corinthian church was directed right at Paul, and you know what they said about him. He’s in it

for the money, he's seeking sexual favors from women, he is self-centered, he lies, he's a deceiver, and on and on, and all of that comes out of 2 Corinthians. And there are times when God will even allow the tearing up of a church, and the assassination of a man's character, if it humbles him. That's how important humility is.

Why is it so important? Verse 9: "He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in' – what – "weakness." And God crushed him, because when he was at the end of himself and he had nothing, then he was most useable. Paul learned that. So "most gladly, therefore" – he says in verse 9 – "I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me." You see, he knew that power was in direct relationship to humility, to brokenness. "Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, insults, distresses, persecutions, difficulties for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I'm" – what – "strong." He learned to embrace adversity. You're being falsely accused, you're being maligned, you're being misrepresented, embrace it.

Embrace it. Search your heart; let the humbling work go on. Be content because it's in your weakness that His strength is perfected. He wants you humble, and He will go to whatever extremities necessary. The humility of the apostle Paul, I think, is manifest as clearly as anywhere in Philippians, chapter 3, if you'll turn over to that chapter. Now, I usually have an outline in my messages. I do tonight. It's just one point, and I can't get past it, unfortunately. The point is humility, and it's point three. But I just want to point this to you. If anybody – if anybody in the spiritual realm had achieved, it was Paul. If anybody had achieved what could certainly please God and bring Him accolades, it was Paul.

And I suppose from the world's standpoint, that's why they named a city in Minnesota after him, and that's why they name cathedrals all over the place after him, and churches all over the place after him, and little boys after him. But I want you to know how he viewed himself, in verse 12: "Not that I have already attained" – I have not already arrived. "I have not become perfect: I press on – I press on – I press on." When he wrote to Timothy at the end of his life, he said it as simply as he could say it. He said, "I am the chief of" – what – "sinners." 1 Timothy 1:15: "I am the chief of sinners." And he says, "You know why God saved me? He saved me because I was so bad that He could put on a demonstration of mercy of a unique kind with me, in order that me," he says, "as the foremost, the worst, might allow Jesus Christ to demonstrate His perfect patience, using me as an example."

As if to say, "If He could save me, He could save anyone." And nothing's changed in the heart of Paul. He says, "I haven't arrived. I am as unworthy now as I've ever been." Read him in Romans 7. He says, "There's still a law in my members warring against the law of my mind that leads me to this conclusion: O wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death?" I'm like a murderer with a corpse strapped to my back, eating its way through me. That's humility – that's humility. "Not that I have already attained, or become perfect, but I press on" – *diōkō*, I pursue, I chase. "And I'm just trying to lay hold of what I was laid hold for." And why did God lay hold of him?

Romans 8: "Predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ." God saved him to make him like Christ, and He'll do it ultimately. That's going to be the prize of the upward call, Christlikeness; that's the goal in eternity, and that's the goal in time, so he says, "I'm just pursuing the very thing for which God laid hold of me, and that was to make me like His Son. Someday He'll do it in eternity, but until that time I pursue it here and now; I haven't arrived." And that's the way you measure yourself, beloved. If you want to know how far along you are spiritually, compare yourself not with someone else – you remember 2 Corinthians? Paul says we don't compare ourselves with ourselves, or

measure ourselves by ourselves, at a human level. If you want to know where you are spiritually, compare yourself with Jesus Christ. That will keep you humble.

And before honor, Proverbs 15:33, comes humility. Before honor comes humility. God wants you humble. You came in humble. You have no reason to be proud now, none at all. You're no more worthy of salvation now than you were before God saved you. You're still wretched and unworthy, in and of yourself; it's just that you've been covered by the righteousness of Christ, because He paid the penalty for your sins. But you, in yourself, are no more worthy now. And when God brings those things into your life that humble you, and push you down, and break you, and shatter your self-confidence, those things you can't fix, you can't make right, you can't undo; when the criticism comes, and it's like blowing a dandelion into the wind.

You'll never get the pieces back, and you wonder what it will do to you – just remember that what it's most likely to do to you, if you deal with it rightly, is to humble you, and make you more useful. The place to close our little discussion of humility, as we come to the Lord's Table, is Philippians, chapter 2. Philippians, chapter 2, and we'll start at verse 3. "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than oneself." You know, there's something true about a humble person, and that is this: they see their own sin as worse than everybody else's, and that's a mark. If you are more critical of other Christians than you are of yourself, you lack humility.

It is pride that allows you to crawl up out of your own hole and condemn others. And I'm not talking evaluating truth, I'm not talking about being discerning, I'm talking about being preoccupied with criticizing the sins of others. That's hard to do when you're overwhelmed with your own. When the sins that most offend you are yours, when the sins that most grieve you are yours, when the sins that you would want to prevent are yours, and when the effects of those sins that impact the church are your sins and not somebody else's, you have a measure of humility, and you're able to do what it says here, regard one another as superior to you. It also involves, in verse 4, not looking out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

When you are more concerned for the enterprises of others, the successes of others, the blessings of others, the benefits of others, than you are yourself, you have a measure of humility. When your personal interests are not what matters, when you could care less about your own personal successes, and you could care less about your own personal achievements, and you could care less about your own personal privileges, popularity, reputation, but you are consumed with those things in regard to others, you have a measure of humility. It has to do with how you view your own self – negatively with regard to your sin, and positively with regard to your successes. Are you more concerned about your sins than anybody else's? And more concerned about others blessings than yours?

That was the attitude of Christ. He was more concerned about us than Himself. The attitude that is expressed in verse 5: "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." He was perfectly willing to give up His privileges to bear our sins. He was willing to be separated from God and endure agony, which is inexplicable and incomprehensible to us, in order that we, who are unworthy, might be saved. And it's this marvelous passage, familiar to us, that points this out. "Although He existed in the form of God, He did not regard equality with God something to hold on to." He was willing to give it up. He "emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, being made in the likeness of men."

This is the condescension right here, the *kenosis*, as it's called, the self-emptying – “and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross.” In other words, He came all the way down for us – all the way down for us. What is this humility that God seeks for us? It is a sense of one's spiritual bankruptcy and utter unworthiness, as manifested in the Beatitudes, and in the sermon Jesus preached in Matthew 18, and in the book of James. It is an attitude that continues after our salvation, when we recognize that we are no more worthy now than we ever were in the past. It is an attitude that realizes the suffering and pain that comes into our lives, that cuts so deeply and buffets us – and that's a word from 2 Corinthians 12 that means fist.

It's a blow to the face, the very same word used of the soldiers who punched Jesus in the face. And when we get punched around in life, and falsely accused, we embrace that, because we understand that through it, God humbles us, and the humbler we are, the more powerful He is through us. It's the kind of humility that is more concerned about our sins than the sins of everybody else, or anybody else. It's the kind of humility that particularly looks on the interest of others, demonstrated in the condescension of Jesus Christ – that's humility. And that, beloved, is an attitude of the heart that is at the very center of spiritual virtue. So when the ministry of the church is doing what God wants it to do, it is doing heart work.

And in the heart, it is endeavoring by the Word of God to build faith, and to build obedience, and to bring humility. That's heart work, that's the work of the church. It's not superficial, just the opposite of that. The goal of the church is not to just get you here and give you a nice experience. The goal of the ministry of the church is to produce humility. That's the kind of spiritual attitude that makes the internal part of the church what God wants it to be, and then the church can live inside out. Let's bow together in prayer. Father, as we think about this, we all are feeling guilty in our hearts. I know I am. You have given me many blessings, and from the standpoint of ministry in the church, You have opened up many avenues, and many experiences, and many privileges.

And, Lord, such a privilege necessitates a humbling, and I understand that, and I thank You for those things that come into my life that bring me quickly to the end of myself and cast me on You. I thank you for the insults, the distresses, the misrepresentations, the false accusations; I thank You for the trials and tribulations, the distress that comes to the church, the difficulties – yes, even satanic enterprises, demonic enterprises. I thank You for all of those, that are not a result of iniquity, but are the unfolding of the purposes that You have for the humbling of your servant. And I thank You for the same in the lives of these beloved people. I thank You for doing what You need to do to humble them, so they can know how to depend on You.

So they can be driven to intimacy with You, because they have nowhere else to go, so that they can be powerful. If Jesus humbled Himself to the cross, O God, give us this same attitude, may we be like Him, and humble ourselves. As we come now, Lord, to this table, and we look at the very humility of Christ in its most graphic demonstration, we see Him humiliated. The Creator, the One who spun the whirling worlds into space, and splattered the stars across the heavens, the One who created the universe in six days, and rested, the One who is infinitely holy and perfect, untouched by sin, who interacts in this wicked world like a sunbeam in a dump, untouched by the pollution, pure and bright.

But, Lord, we know that we so often forget Your grace and mercy, and the extent of Your humiliation.

That's why we need this table; that's why we need to come here and be reminded again that You humbled Yourself for us. You came and were made sin for us when You knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God through You. You became sin only in the sense that You were treated as if You had committed our sins, when in fact You never committed any, so that we could be treated as if we committed none and had done only Your righteous acts. This is wondrous grace and condescension. And as we look at the cross tonight, there are so many perspectives. But for tonight, we want to see there Your humility, Your condescension, as a model for our own.

May we humble ourselves, realizing the sinners that we are, so utterly unworthy; and may we therefore humble ourselves before you, and before one another, expressing that greater love can no man have than that he would lay down his life for his friends. Humble us, Lord, by whatever means necessary, that we might manifest the very character of Christ, whose we are and whose image we long to reflect.

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