

CHIEF MINISTRIES

July 2016

We often talk about what we see happening in the “free world” as well as with those around us as being less honest than before, less polite, less cultured, less focused, less spiritual, less sacrificial, less godly, less pure. I wonder if we’ve taken stock in the growing lack of humility. That we are a “less humble” culture today. We are an overconfident species given to the magnification of self.

One million people were asked how well they get along with others and 85% of them rated themselves above average and none of them - that’s right - not one of them said they were below average in their relational skills. No wonder everyone gets along – HA!

College professors and teachers led the way in their distorted view of themselves, they were asked similar questions and 88% rated themselves either above average or truly exceptional in their relational skills. In fact 94% of college professors rated themselves as having above average - to exceptional teaching skills. 94% considered themselves outstandingly gifted; 94%! Those other 6% must be following me around.

A few decades ago it would have been unthinkable for a sports athlete to celebrate himself in the batter’s box after hitting a home run or knocking down a three-pointer (a long two back then) or dancing in the end zone after scoring a touchdown. Today it is the routine.

One of the clearest conclusions of social science is that we are “proud”. We have shifted from a people who down-played ourselves - to a culture that glorifies self-promotion. This is another way of saying, in times past honest humility was a virtue.....and that virtue is vanishing.

When a person is self-absorbed, self-promoting, and self-congratulating they are prone to being deceived, distorted in every area of life and on terribly-dangerous ground.

Why? Here’s the danger. Pride is the mother hen under which all other sins are hatched.

Pride was the very first sin - hatched in the heart of Lucifer, the highest created angelic being - but now fallen and known as Satan; for he said in his heart, *“I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will sit on the mount of the assembly.... I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High.” (Isaiah 14:13-14)*

Five times - I will.... I will.... I will.... I will.... I will! Is it any wonder the middle letter in the word “pride” is “I”?

In fact every sin can be traced to pride - no matter what it is. Sin is mankind saying, “I will do whatever I want to do, no matter what God says. I will be the master and the ruler of my own life.” Isn’t that why many of us wound up in prison?

The problem is after we recognize it, we don't do anything about it. In fact, as a Christian, the blindness of pride knocks on our door even more and it can lead many others astray.

The apostle Paul wants to drive us toward greater humility. It isn't enough to recognize a problem we all battle with - pride and self. With that we arrive at Philippians 2

Now understand here that biblical humility isn't thinking low of yourself, or poorly of yourself - running yourself down - that may even be a form of pride to gain attention. True humility is not thinking meanly of yourself; humility is when you do not think of yourself at all.

In this chapter, the Spirit of God through the apostle Paul will; unapologetically command humility; he will beautifully illustrate humility in Jesus Christ; and he will clearly apply it, not only to the church, but to every Christian.

And he begins with a series of statements, beginning in verse 1. *"If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation in love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete."*

Four times, Paul writes if there is.... If there is. In the original language, these "if" statements are what linguists call, "first class conditional clauses" I know that sounds exciting doesn't it? Not really, but actually it is. Paul is wondering if these four prepositions are true! "Is there encouragement in Christ?; Is there fellowship of the Spirit? Is there?"

The particle "if" with an indicative verb can be understood as "since". In other words you could read it like this; "since there is encouragement in Christ, since there is consolation of love; since there is any fellowship of the spirit.... This may lead you to wonder - why doesn't Paul just right "since"? Why "if"?

What Paul is actually doing is using an approach that logically herds us toward the right conclusion. He's like a trial lawyer, bringing the witness to agree to certain things that then demand only one response. If...then...if these things are true...then this ought to happen! These four phrases are not possibilities - they are certainties. You could reword what Paul is effectively saying with yes/no questions: Is there encouragement in Christ? Well, yes. Is there consolation in his love? Sure, I know that's true. Is there fellowship in the Holy Spirit? Yes, I'm sure there is. Is there any affection or compassion from God! Yes absolutely.

Well then, if all of these things are true - and they are - and since they are true - complete my joy by demonstrating humility in unity.

In other words, if this is true and if this is true and if this is true and if this is true then - do something about it. You see these four phrases are not only four supernatural realities - they should be four experiences of every Christian.

Let's take a closer look at them. First, Paul refers to encouragement in Christ. The word encouragement is from *paraklesis* and can be translated comfort or exhortation, - Paul effectively asks the Philippian congregation - have any of you experienced the comfort and encouragement of Jesus Christ? And they all would respond in unison - absolutely! It began at salvation and it changed everything. Think of someone you know (besides yourself - remember were trying to get away from that here) who has accepted Christ and it's amazing what is going on in their life. Their transformation is shocking. They obviously have discovered no greater encouragement than in Christ.

Later on in this text, Paul will effectively tell the Christian not to keep this news to ourselves. That's the idea here - not only are these statements spiritual realities found in the Lord - they are to be delivered and declared and demonstrated to one another.

Paul speaks of this issue when he uses the same word for encouragement or comfort as he writes to the Corinthian believers, referring to God as "*the God of all comfort, comforts us in all our affliction, so that we can comfort those in any affliction with the comfort we ourselves receive from God (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)*"

And what is that going to require? Humility and self-sacrifice. Pride and self-serving will be more than happy to receive comfort from God from all our afflictions - But to see the troubles - to see the sorrows - to see the suffering in someone else's life and go and minister comfort to them; my goodness, that would mean you'd have to actually take your eyes off yourself and see those around you!

Pride blinds us to others.....pride covers our ears and binds our hands. Humility allows you to observe the pain and suffering of someone else; but it also compels you to do something about it.

Secondly, Paul speaks in verse one of the consolation of love. This is a reference to the love of Jesus Christ for us. It can be translated literally - speaking in a friendly manner to another person. The word for consolation refers to speaking closely with someone to offer solace.

Some of my fondest memories were of ministering to the elderly at homes for them with my mom after my dad passed away. We'd go in and pray with them or just talk to them. Sometimes realizing that their own sons or daughters live just a few minutes away, but hadn't been to see them in years because they were "so" busy. I remember going by a room where my mom, a Christian whose legacy of faith and joy has become a part of her son's life - even here in prison. I stepped into the room and watched and listened as mom read scriptures to this old, blind lady. She was reading the words to an old, old hymn. She sensed my presence and even though she couldn't see me she said, "Would you sing it?"

So I did: here are the lyrics:

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater;
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase
To added affliction He addeth His mercy;
To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace

When we have exhausted our store of endurance
When our strength has failed and the day is half done,
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources
Our Father's full giving is only begun.

His love has no limit; His grace has no measure
His power has no boundary known unto men;
For out of his infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth, and giveth and giveth again.

That moment, in that old folks home was nothing less than delivering the consolation of the love of Christ. And oh! What love! "*But God demonstrated his love in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*". (Romans 5:8) What kind of humility was that....how humble of God!

Paul will later describe it in this chapter as the ultimate, mind-boggling humility of the King of Kings, who became the servant of mankind. How consoling is it that God would hunt us down to save us...that God would choose us to be the bride of His Son...that God would take pleasure in offering us eternal life and a regal throne and never ending joy.

How humble must God be to offer that kind of consolation to us? Paul will connect the dots later - love like that is impossible without humility.

Thirdly, Paul points next in verse 1 to the fellowship of the Spirit. The *Koinonia* of the Spirit. In chapter 1 Paul referred to the Philippians *koinonia* with him in the gospel. Remember *Koinonia* is much more than everybody eating together or small groups. *Koinonia* referred to inheriting and common possession.

In Paul's day if heirs inherited a piece of property; common possession and that each heir wasn't inheriting a piece of the property; they all were becoming part owner of the entire piece of property. This has a powerful application to this spiritual reality.

The apostle Paul is telling us that believers in Christ are heirs to the Holy Spirit. We have a common possession of the Holy Spirit. Every believer has a common possession - by faith in Christ we "*have all been made to drink of one spirit*" (1 Corinthians 12:13); we are all "*the temple of the Holy Spirit*" (1 Corinthians 6:19). In other words, we have all inherited from God - the entire property in this case - the entire person of the Holy Spirit. Our fellowship with the Spirit is complete. Now again this is a spiritual reality that must be demonstrated in living reality.

If the Spirit condescends in great humility to fellowship with us, how willing are we to fellowship with each other? Does it bother you that you are worshiping with people that you did not handpick? In other words, if the spirit of God recognizes us as joint heirs with Christ, how do we recognize each other? How do we view one another?

Fourthly, Paul points out the reality of affection and compassion - in the last part of verse 1. Affection is a word that refers to the inner person. Your King James translation will call it "*bowels of mercy*". That's a good translation, just kind of brutal.

You see, Paul's generation considered the bowels to be the source or origin of emotion. It's the word *splanchna* - deep emotional feelings. Paul's Hallmark cards would read, "I love you with all my entrails," or "I have you forever in my kidneys." "I have a longing for you deep down in my colon."

Over time, and to this day, we have viewed the heart as the central seat of emotion; which is great, because, "I love you with all my heart" sounds so much better than "I love you with all my liver."

The next word Paul introduces here as a further demonstration of humility is a word that refers to tender mercies or compassion. The word specifically refers to displaying concern over someone's misfortune. In other contexts, Paul uses the word to talk about the compassion of God. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 1:3 - "*that God is the Father of mercies.*" What's important to recognize here is that these words are intertwined - you can't have one without the other!

Affection is the internal source of the emotion and compassion is the actual expression of that emotion. Affection is the root and compassion the fruit. Since all four of these prepositions are realities - Paul now drives home the point where he says as verse 2 opens: make my joy complete.

This is an imperative - fulfill my joy by being of the same mind. Now it might seem contradictory for Paul to tell the church to do something to make him happy as an introduction to humility and to not think of yourself but of others. Your right - it does sound like that when first read.

But in this context, Paul is actually revealing the truth that there is a joy that is far richer, deeper, sweeter than any self-centered desire; it is the grace of Christ that turns a person's heart inside out so that his personal joy is now bound up in seeing his Christian friends grow more like Jesus Christ.

Paul is saying, "This is what would just send my joy off the charts - for you to demonstrate the humility of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in demonstrating their version of love, encouragement, fellowship and caring with all humility."

Now don't miss this, Paul's under house arrest; he's in chains, under constant guard, without any freedom of movement, isolated from his friends and misunderstood by the church in Rome - and here he says, "What would really make me so incredibly joyful would be for you to demonstrate the unity of humility."

I couldn't help but wonder - how would we fill in this blank?

"What would really make my joy complete would be _____."

What would you fill in that blank?

"What would really make me incredibly happy in life is _____."

Paul effectively says here, "What would top off my tank of joy isn't getting out of prison - it isn't getting all my friends back - it isn't being vindicated before people or church leaders who are condemning me, or being given an award for serving Christ or being elevated by the warden or the chaplain to facilitate this or that - No!

Paul says it would bring him incredible fulfilling joy to see the church demonstrating humility toward one another.

This is the heart of a true shepherd. This is the passion of a true Christian. This is the heartbeat of Christ. This is the heartbeat of Christianity.

This is the unmistakable distinctive virtue that is vanishing all around us..... It's time to bring it back it's time to demonstrate it to one another. And the church is just the place to see it happen.....first.

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