

Humility

The Rev'd. Dr. John Roddam | www.Pleroma.ca

I have never heard a sermon on Humility. This is a Biblical topic that is little understood and even less practiced. In a culture of “rights and privileges” the idea of humility runs counter to the broader community and within much of the Church. The newly-elected Pope (Francis 1), known for his humility, is quietly causing a significant upheaval in the Vatican.

Why is humility, one of the main character traits of Jesus Christ, such a revolutionary concept? The self-emptying, intrinsic to humility is core to the Kingdom of God – living into the reign of Jesus as Lord of our lives! We are called to become like Jesus –

Humility of Christ

He who says he abides in Him (Jesus) ought himself also to walk just as He walked. (1 John 2:6 NKJV) Jesus encourages His followers to: ... learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart... (Matthew 11: 29)

Jesus reflected humility in his life and ministry – *And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. (Philippians 2:8)*

Jesus gave up certain rights, privileges, and divine characteristics in order to “*be found in appearance as a man.*” This self-emptying is an expression of humbling oneself. Jesus further humbled Himself and took the place of a servant, stating:

Instead whoever wants to be great among you, must be your servant... just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve... (Matthew 20: 27-28)

Jesus is our model of a yielded life, emptied in submission to The Father’s will, assuming the posture of a servant. We too are to re-present Jesus and take on this ministry of a servant.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: *Who... made Himself nothing taking the very nature of a servant... and humbled Himself (Philippians 2: 5, 7-8)*

St. Paul offers practical counsel on being a servant in godly relationships by offering what is known as the “one another” commands. Here are examples that center on humility -

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love (Ephesians 4:2)

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves (Philippians 2:3)

... clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. (Colossians 3:12-13)

This is a sampling of the three dozen “one another” sayings in the New Testament. Humility calls us to self-emptying as we, like our Master, serve others!

Andrew Murray notes, regarding our call to be a servant: (Pp. 46 “Humility”) The humble man seeks at all times to act on these principles –

- In honor, preferring one another



- Serve one another
- Each esteeming others better than himself
- Submitting yourselves one to another

John, the Beloved Apostle, claimed, “*We love because He first loved us!* (1 John 4:19 NIV)” Some translations state, “*We love Him (God) because He first loved us.*” OR “*We love others because He first loved us.*” In the original Greek sentence, there is no object. The sentence may be simply rendered, “*We love because He first loved us!*”

That’s great incentive on its own. However, the call to Christ-like humility, service and love is impossible in our own strength.

Love Them Through Me

My parish in Seattle (St. Luke’s Episcopal Church) served an inner-city community in various, creative ways. On Fridays, we hosted a lunch for 150 street people, homeless folk and those on fixed income. All were welcome to this “family meal!” The team hosting the Friday Lunch would pray before the doors were opened to serve our guests. One time the team was shocked when the ministry head, a godly woman, prayed:

“Lord, I don’t like some of the people You’ve called us to serve. Would you love them through me?”

Something changed in me that day! I realized that I did not have the capacity to love people selflessly. I needed the Lord’s strength and power to move through me. Thus, rather than operating in my own strength, I began to surrender to the Lord, asking Him to work in and through me – a major shift in the way I lived and served others!

Marriage & Humility

The bottom line is that humility brings us to a deeper understanding of our self-centeredness. When I got married, I soon realized how self-serving I was – being used to “getting my own way” while appearing to be a godly servant of others. The sense of being self-centered increased when we had four kids in five years. Learning to serve my wife AND four very dependent little children taught me about my self-occupied focus IN A HURRY! I was left with a choice to serve them or continue in my selfish, self-centered ways. While I have not walked this out perfectly, I have sought to serve my family.

Humility yields the right to be right.
#marriagetip

Sadly, there are those who continue to live self-oriented lives in marriage and family life, leading to divorce and family breakups. I’ve learned that marriage is not 50:50 but 100:100. Even when both are “all in” - invested fully in their marriages and family, they come up short. Here is where we need the Lord’s grace and power to live into our fundamental relationships!

Andrew Murray asserts, “Humility is nothing but the disappearance of self in the vision that God is all. “ (“Humility” Pp. 58)

This statement arrested me! Godly humility is a life surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus. Our lives are under new management where Jesus reigns. One 19th C. preacher declared, “If Jesus isn’t Lord of ALL, He isn’t Lord at all!” The call to set Jesus apart as Lord in our hearts (1 Peter 3:15) is a radical call to commitment.

This parallels St. Paul’s exhortation in Romans 12:1ff – “*I beseech you, brothers and sisters, in light of the mercy of God, that you present your entire selves as living sacrifices unto the Lord...*” A good friend has a T-

shirt stating, “The only problem with living sacrifices is they keep crawling off the altar!” Yes, it is true that we often lack resolve and follow-through but this is more about the Lord’s commitment and covenant towards us!

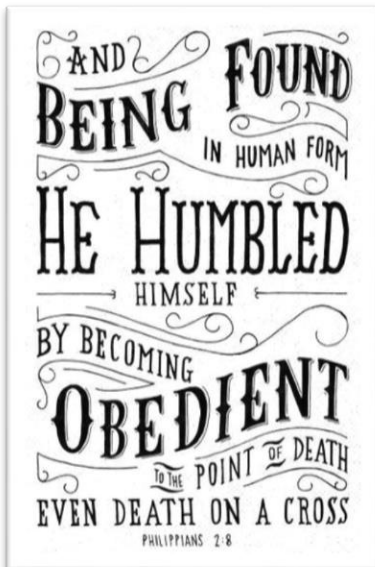
As we live into our walk with Jesus, we find that He is faithful. I love the doxology at the end of Jude: *Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen.* (Jude 24, 25 NKJV)

This speaks of the fact that it is Jesus Himself at work in us that will accomplish The Father’s heart and will in our lives. Yes, our surrender and choice to follow Jesus as Lord is important. However, He is committed to us and works in and through us to accomplish His covenant purposes. Thus, it is more about HIM than US!

Death To Self

Yet, one key remains to live fully into the humility we are called to embrace. A ministry colleague summed it up this way – “There are two people trying to kill us – the devil and the Lord!”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his classic book “The Cost of Discipleship” asserted, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”



It is in the death to self that humility is perfected. (“Humility” Pp. 66) ... *He (Jesus) humbled Himself and became obedient unto death...* (Philippians 2:8)

Humility matures when we, through the Lord’s grace and mercy, come to the point of deep consecration. This is the point where the Lord’s character (Fruit of the Spirit – cf. Galatians 5: 22-23) manifests through us in an ongoing way. Also the power of God is released through us regularly.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty (‘Kratos’) hand, that He might lift you up in due time. (1 Peter 5:6)

It is Jesus’ life, through a totally surrendered person, where dominion authority and power (Kratos) manifests.

Kathryn Kuhlman, the famous 20th C Healing Evangelist stated, “Everyone wants to operate in a profound healing anointing! However, few are prepared to pay the price... One must die!” Humility not only releases godly character but the power of God!

The lower man lies before God, the faster and fuller the inflow of the divine glory will be. (“Humility” Pp. 93)

Here is Andrew Murray’s prayer to the Lord, seeking a deeper walk with Him – one of deep humility -

Heavenly Father, may Your great goodness be known to me. Take from my heart every kind and form and degree of pride... Awaken in me the deepest depth and truth of that humility which can make me worthy of being but your servant, a vessel through which You can manifest the riches of your wisdom, power, and goodness. (“Humility” Pp. 95)

If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. (Matthew 16:24 NKJV)

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