

Contrast 6) of Exaltation & Humility

Philippians 2:5-11 • 2020-04-05 • Lenten Epistle Series: Contrast



"You'll be like God." That's the lie which the devil sold to Adam and Eve. He told them that if they just reached out and took hold of it, they could attain the highest position and be just like God. In the very beginning of time the man and the woman had it all. They lived in paradise. Adam had been raised up from the dust to become a living being. He and Eve were created to bear the image of God as righteous and holy. They were given charge of all the world to rule over it. But the man and his wife wanted more. And so, Adam and Eve bought the devil's lie and grasped for more. They wanted to be like God. They wanted to exalt themselves to a higher position. Then the same hands which were made from the dust reached out to try to "be like God." Ever since then the entire human race has struggled with the desire to have more and to be more. We want to regain paradise. And even when it seems we have it all we still want more. We are in a perpetual mindset of self-exaltation. But this Palm Sunday we look at one more of the contrasts in Paul's letters. In his letter to the Philippians we see a mindset that is altogether contrary to self-exaltation. It is a mindset of humility. If we are to ever know what it means to be like God, we must understand humility first.

Paul gives an instruction in his letter to the Philippians which is very difficult to follow. He calls for humility. *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility consider one another better than yourselves. Let each of you look carefully not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."* Paul sets a challenging goal for the humble mindset. *"Consider others better than yourselves."* Who likes to do that? Who likes to say that others are smarter, wiser, and more important? Don't people hate it when someone comes across as egotistic and acts like they are better than everyone else? Why would anyone want to afford someone else a higher status? Paul also adds, *"Look not only to your own interest but also to the interests of others."* Who has time to take care of their own interests nonetheless start helping and looking after the interests of other people?

Just look at this world's mindset. In the face of a pandemic we have many people pleading for us to temporarily give up some of the things. There are videos of doctors and nurses urging people to please avoid spreading illness. They are asking people to stop going out to eat, stop mixing with crowds, and try to stay at home. Those working in hospitals don't want to be overwhelmed with illness that spreads too fast. Many of them are making their pleas with a noble cause. They want to serve the interest of others and prevent deaths. People are indeed dying from the pandemic. But how many of those same doctors and nurses are pleading for the lives of their children dying each day in our nation from abortions? We don't yet know if we'll see 3000 people dying a day in our nation from the pandemic or not. But we do know that 3000 lives have been ended every day just in our nation because they are killed by doctors and parents. Those deaths from abortion all happen because mankind has desired to play God. Doctors and counselors tell the lie, "You can put yourself above the needs of your child. You will be like God to yourself." And many people grasp after the chance to be more in charge of their lives and in charge of death. They take life, which only God has a right to do. God has said life is a gift, but humanity wants to be like God. It wants to call the shots. Do we consider the unborn better than ourselves or do we consider ourselves more important than the many who daily die? And once again we have doctors pleading for people to be careful and stop spreading illness. But what happens? People look to their own interests and don't forgo the things they enjoy. People look to their own interests and grab all the things they want and need. Only when they are fully supplied do they ask "Oh, by the way. Do you need anything too?" The world is full of those who want to be like God.

There's a book that my children like me to read. It's called "Bear Wants More." The story talks about a bear that wakes up from its long hibernation and goes foraging for food. The bear finds some food and then eats it all up. Then the next page says, "But Bear wants more." He finds more food and then he gobbles it all up. Every other page in the story ends with "But Bear wants more." That's the human condition. From the moment we leave our mother's wombs we seek out and crave more of all the things that bring us pleasures. And not even respect for life can stop that selfish craving for pleasure. But don't be mistaken. This is the condition of the whole world. It's not just those who put their lives and their livelihood over the lives of babies. It's not just the people with their garages filled with cans of beans and toilet paper who are looking out for themselves first. All human beings spend most of their time looking out for self and trying to attain more. That includes you and me. We want more. We grasp for more.

Perhaps you might say "But I do put others first. At least sometimes I do. I spend a lot of thought and time on other people." And that's good if you do. But God isn't interested in having us adopt humility as a part-time job or a secondary priority. He wants us to humble ourselves in a way which we would never dare to dream of doing. In fact, he wants us to lower ourselves to a depth of humility which we would all like to avoid sinking into at all cost. The humility that God calls for is perfect humility. How perfect? Paul says our attitude of humility should match the attitude and mindset of Christ Jesus.

Jesus' humility far exceeds any notion of it which we might devise. He went from being the highest to the lowest. *"Being in very nature God (Jesus) did not consider equality with God as a prize to be displayed, or something to be used to his own*

advantage.” Jesus, though true God from eternity, did not grasp after his status. The man Jesus was by nature God, but did not chase after equality with God. That’s certainly not the mindset of all other men and women. Jesus is God and found himself setting aside his divine glory. In strong contrast we are not God and yet we find ourselves grasping after self-glory.

God has given you countless opportunities to consider others better than yourself. How did you do with those opportunities? Have you viewed everyone around you as more important than yourself, or have your own interests come first most of the time? Have you invested your time and money and energy into the needs of others more often than the needs of yourself? Humility calls for sacrifice. Have you taken what was rightfully yours and decided that you would give it all up so that others who don’t deserve it could have it all? Would you lay down your life for the sake of others?



God sees every mindset and every thought we have. He knows when you and I have tried to be like God and made ourselves more important than others around us. And he knows when you and I have tried to be like God and made our own desires and our own interests more important than God himself. We deserve to have him humble us by turning us back to dust. We deserve to have our God treat us like the devil -as his everlasting enemies and deserving only of his just wrath.

One idol which has been exposed in today’s circumstances with a world-wide pandemic is the *idol of self-preservation*. We by nature will do whatever it takes to preserve our own comforts and our own life. We essentially put ourselves as the object of all our adoration. We make appeasing the god of self the end goal in life. If that means making sure that you stay healthy while many other suffer, then our sinful self says, “So be it.” But the strong contrast found in the mindset of Christ Jesus is the *opposite of self-preservation*. His goal wasn’t to preserve his own self. His goal was to save the world of selfish sinners doomed to death and hell.

Jesus Christ, though being in very nature God, came into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday riding on a donkey. He came humble and lowly. When the people saw him, he came in appearance as an ordinary man. But it was no ordinary man riding into Jerusalem. He was the only man who ever could put the interest of others perfectly above his own. He was the only man who could lay aside all his divine glory and honor and ride into the city in obedience to his Father’s will. . He was the only man who could be obedient even to the point of death, death on a cross.

True humility isn’t found in us. It is found in our God. He put the interest of every human being above his own. That includes the interest of those guilty of being so selfish they committed abortion. It includes those so guilty of self-preservation they charged money and accepted money for taking the life of an unborn child. It includes us despite every time that you and I failed to put others first and every time that you and I failed to humble ourselves to serve others. Our God had the true humility which we could never fathom or follow by taking on the nature of a servant and dying for a world of sinners. That’s how great his humility is and how great his love for us is.

But with Jesus there is more than humility. Exaltation follows. Jesus humbled himself confident that the Father would exalt him. The same Jesus who died for sinners in greatest lowliness is the living and exalted Lord. And though he humbled himself to the greatest depth, he is exalted and lifted to the highest place. The same Jesus who was lowered and took on the nature of a servant to die, is now lifted in glory as Lord and lives forever. And it is the name of Jesus which every knee will bow before. Everyone in all creation, all angles, and all who ever lived will bow before him. And every tongue will confess that the man who died on the cross is Lord.

Paul says, let the attitude and the mindset of Jesus be your attitude. In view of all that Jesus Christ did to humble himself for us, we now can understand true humility. We could never truly consider others better than ourselves until we see God doing that for sinners. Now we too consider others more important than ourselves. We are more like God, not because we grasped after it, but because he has given us the mindset of humility. We could never really set aside the things that make us feel important until we see God himself setting aside all his divine power and glory. We could never lift ourselves up to glory, but we are more like our Lord Jesus as we trust that God himself will lift us just as he has promised. And our mindset is more like God as we set aside all our rights for the sake of love.

The devil’s lie is that you can be like God by grasping for more and putting yourself first. God’s promise is that he freely gives us what we could never attain. Where will you look to for goodness in your life? If it is in chasing after your own self interest you have bought into the lie of God’s enemies. You will return to dust and face everlasting shame and contempt. But if you trust in the promise of God, he will lift you up. In grace he will give you a new body risen from the dust of death so that you can bow your knee in praise and humility before the man who made himself nothing but is now exalted. You will open your mouth to confess that the man Jesus who died is equal to the Father and is God and Lord.

It’s a strong contrast, isn’t it? Humility stands in strong contrast to self-exaltation. And it’s a bit unexpected, isn’t it? If you want to be like God, you want to be humble. We can follow the mindset of Christ Jesus trusting that God himself will lift us up. We will see our exalted Lord Jesus.