

Paraklēsis: Humility

This is one of those words that, when I hear it, I tend to nod my head in understanding. I know what it is and how important it is for us to have it as a trait. At least I thought I did... but as with most things, there is always a **depth to understanding that I have not yet reached**. We all know that we need to be humble.

For some strange reason, I want the directive to be humble to come like other “commands” that are simply implicit; “Do this because I said so,” and the reason for the command is left for us to figure out. Here’s an easy one... “Thou shalt not steal.” It is a simple command to understand and follow. What if I don’t steal? And why should I not steal? These questions are reasonably **answered with a bit of logic and empathy**. But, the directive, as I’ve called it, to be humble, is not a direct command from God. You won’t find in Exodus 20, “Thou shalt exhibitith humility;” I guess that is why I am calling it a directive. Humility is not really a command. It is just a good idea. Or is it?

For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. (Romans 12:3)

You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, (1Peter 5:5-6)

These two scriptures are structured as commands, just not directly from God. They are also only a small selection of example passages that tell us to be humble, either implicitly or explicitly. The second one answers the question “**What if I do humble myself?**” – that is “God will exalt me at the proper time.” Now, that is something to look forward to! Scriptures confirm this again in Philippians 2 using Christ as the example who exhibited humility and was exalted by God.

*Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming **obedient to the point of death**, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, (Philippians 2:8-9)*

What about the other question: “Why should I be humble?” What good does it do, for me, or for others? I hope that I start to answer that for you and me both in the remainder of this letter. Here is a scripture for us to think on with respect to that question – a seed that hopefully will grow into some understanding.

“Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. (Luke 6:31)

An attitude of humility will make this **Command from God** much easier to obey. Humility will make our whole submission to God much easier. I am thinking that a soft heart is indicative of humility.

So, what exactly is humility? I think there are various types of humility, **all of which benefit us when employed**. Here are some types that I think stand out and categorizing them will maybe help us recognize them (or the lack of them) in ourselves.

Personal or social humility: This is how **we tend to construct an image of ourselves** that others perceive. Surely, we all know someone who works at projecting an outward image of himself in order to impress others. I don’t need to look very far to find that person. Indeed, the mirror is undoubtedly the best place for me to search! There are at least 4 selfs, or identities, that we all have:

- The true self. This self is so private and personal that sometimes we forget: this is our heart, into which **God sees and will judge**.

- The private self. This self is the one that we show only to those who are closest to us, like our spouse, closest friends, and maybe siblings.
- The semi-private self is who we are around our friends and the people we trust
- The public self is the image we project to everyone else.

Certainly, this delineation is only for illustrative purposes; actually, the different levels of true identity that we expose are a gradient – just as our levels of trust in others vary. I think the ultimate goal, our striving for **perfect humility, is when we only ever have one self**, or identity. Where can we find an example of perfection to model? Once again:

Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:8)

Intellectual humility: Years of experience working, learning, or even merely living, give us an opportunity to feel like an expert of sorts and **rid ourselves of humility**. It makes sense. With experience, I can anticipate an outcome of a situation and act accordingly. This earned confidence can easily lead me to **focus on what I can bring to the situation**. But, intellectual humility is me entering every situation with the mindset that there is something here for me to learn and grow from. The advice here is to keep your experience and wisdom close to you, but put it behind you. In front of you, and even closer, keep a curiosity. Always know that **you have more to learn and always be on the lookout for those things that can fill in the gaps**.

'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' 'Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.' (Job 42:3)

Theological or Spiritual humility: This is really an extension of intellectual humility but applies to **understanding our walk with God** and His ways. It is yet another thing we gain experience with over time. We use the experiences of studying scripture, meditating, considering thoughts of others, praying, etcetera, to make better decisions. We serve ourselves well by entering into any conversation, study session, sermon, paper, article as if **it were a journey into "what can I learn from this?"** And we resist the urge to have pre-formed responses. Author and philosopher G.K. Chesterton, explained his theological journey this way: "It is not bigotry to be certain we are right; but it is bigotry to be unable to imagine how we might possibly have gone wrong." I remember attending a Bar-Mitzva maybe 6 or 8 years before I believed there even was a God. The rabbi said in his message, "A wise man understands that he can learn something from anyone."

I mentioned above that our great example for humility is Messiah Himself. And I have cited Philippians 2 twice in this paper already, but here comes number three! Read that chapter; the first half is directly relating examples of and encouragement for humility, but the rest has little gems of wisdom and examples.

" But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. (Philippians 2:17)

Christ was obedient even to death. Paul was poured out. What about you? I read this somewhere and think it is worth keeping in mind: "**Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less.**"

Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (Colossians 3:2)

Peace to you and glory to God!

-Nate

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