

Humility

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In Romans chapter twelve, Paul appeals for us to become living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1). He warns against conforming with the world. Instead, we must seek to be transformed by renewing our minds with the Gospel (Rom. 12:1-2). As memorable as the opening verses of this chapter are, what follows is all but forgotten. Paul describes actions of a transformed life.

Humility is the first trait of a transformed life that Paul mentions. Paul wrote, “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned” (Rom. 12:3).

Humility is not the natural disposition of the human heart. We are inclined towards pride. We are often selfishly motivated. We give to get. Humility does not serve the purpose of pride. The related qualities of meekness, gentleness, and kindness are strange and unusual to worldly-minded people. Yet, humility has a critical role in the development of a servant of the Lord.

Two Men Prayed

Jesus often taught about humility. One famous parable of Jesus was about two men who prayed. One man was a pious Pharisee. The other was a traitor to the nation, a tax collector. Notice how Jesus described the prayers of the two men:

“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:10-14).

The differences between the Pharisee and the tax collector are stark. The Pharisee thought he was better than everyone. This foolish assessment was based on the things he did. He took pride in his status and deeds. The tax collector, however, tried to pray unnoticed. He bowed his head and closed his eyes. In his prayer, he pleaded for the mercy of God. He acknowledged himself as a sinner.

Surprisingly, Jesus said that the tax collector was justified, whereas the Pharisee was not. The Pharisee relied on his deeds for justification. The tax collector relied on the mercy of God for justification. The heart of the Pharisee was inflated with pride. The heart of the tax collector was contrite. Rather than relying on our status and or accomplishments for justification, we must learn from the tax collector and humbly seek the mercy of God.

The Results of Humility

There are important reasons for Jesus wanting His children to become humble. Humble hearts help produce the fruits of a transformed life. Consider the following results of humility.

1). Humility leads to learning. Solomon wrote, “Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him” (Prov. 26:12). Those who are wise in their own eyes think they know everything. Pride blinds them from education. This can have disastrous consequences.

As Christians, we are to continue to learn. Learning leads to growth. We need to learn to deepen our love for the goodness and greatness of God. We need to widen our love for the diversity of people in the world. Learning will help us find common ground with people that we might win some to Christ (1 Cor. 9:19-23). Learning will help us become better imagers of God and stewards of the world. Learning will help us make better discernment between good and evil (Heb. 5:11-14). A humble mind is a curious mind ready to learn.

2). Humility produces unity. Jesus wanted future disciples to be united (John 17:20-25). They are to be known for their love for Jesus and one another. Unity requires each disciple to put the needs of others above their own. Paul taught the Philippians, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:3-5). United believers cannot be defeated.

3). Humility generates service. The great purposes of God are unleashed in the world through service. Jesus taught, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45).

Jesus redefines power and greatness in His kingdom. He expects disciples to be humble servants of the world. We are to follow His example of service. Service by humility is how we gain influence. We are to use our credibility to lead people to Jesus.

Conclusion

The Gospel can powerfully produce a humble mind. The Gospel proves that no one is better than another. All are sinners in desperate need of the mercy of God. This self-awareness will cause us to rely on God. We will become motivated to learn more about Him and serve His purposes in the world.

“The reward for humility and fear of the LORD is riches and honor and life.”

Proverbs 22:4