

LifeWay Bible Studies for Life Series for January 9: A lifestyle of humility

December 30, 2010

The Apostle Paul is such the master of logic and reason. You really get a feeling he isn't trying to be manipulative or sneaky, but rather he is walking a church and individual through some very simple logic.

Philippians 2:1-2 is a great example of that. He uses "if" four times in verse 1. You could even frame this as a series of questions: Do you have any encouragement from being united with Christ? Do you have any comfort from his love? Do you have any fellowship for his Spirit? Do you have any tenderness and compassion?

It's perfect. Now how are they going to answer that? How are you and I, as Christians, going to answer it? The answer of course is "yes" to all of the questions. How can we not?

At times in our lives when we are at our lowest and are depressed—yes, even Christians get depressed—these are great questions to ask ourselves. And when we say "yes" to them it should cause us to re-examine our attitude and current state of mind.

Think of the pressure you take off yourself when you don't have to "look out for No. 1" and how freeing it is to expend yourself by looking out for someone else. Imagine how your life, and the lives of those around you, would change if you had the attitude of "you're better than I am."

Make it a point in the coming days to not have to be the next in line or have to receive all the credit, or any of it at all, and give it away to someone else.

Paul gives us a great working definition of true humility. There were many during this time who would consider themselves humble but would go out of their way to make a big deal about it and make sure that others saw how much they were serving others. Doesn't sound very humble does it? It's like the old story where the guy wins the humility award and hangs it on his wall. Of course as soon as he does that he loses the award.

But wait! Even before Paul wrote his words to the church at Philippi, Jesus already had done the same thing but in a very radical and embarrassing way. Luke records an occasion where Jesus totally calls attention to those people who were thinking much of themselves.

At a dinner party, he notices people taking the places of honor around the table and then being embarrassed in front of the group when the host asks them to move to a seat of lesser honor and respect. Ouch! Talk about a shot to the ego! Don't you know the other guests were talking about it with their neighbors the next day. Before too long everyone in the neighborhood would know about it. Jesus says these wise words in verse 11, "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and everyone who humbles himself will be exalted."

Doesn't it just get under your skin to see someone who has to be the center of attention all the time? Jesus says, lighten up, it's only a matter of time before they will be humbled.

Within his words is also an encouragement to remain humble. If you want to be exalted or lifted up, then humility is the way to do it. And strangely enough when, because of your humility, you are lifted up among others you will probably be embarrassed you are getting such attention.

Sometimes we wonder if the kind and charitable things we do go noticed at all, even by God. Jesus tells us in verse 14 that not only do they get noticed, but they will be rewarded. That's a promise from God himself. Now, the

reward may not be immediate or look like what you want it to at the time, but it will happen. You have to trust God that he knows the best—even perfect—reward for you.

What do you do on a regular basis that goes unnoticed? Anything? If there isn't anything you do that is behind the scenes in serving, make it a point this week to start. Dishes need washing at your church. Plants need watering and flowerbeds need weeding. Is there someone in your church or neighborhood whose yard needs mowing or their leaves raked? Do it, take nothing in return and try to get it done while the owners are away. See how fulfilling it really is and what you've been missing out on.

Jesus was the perfect example of servanthood and humility. In John's Gospel, he tells the account of Jesus washing the disciples' feet in chapter 13. Keep in mind that John writes his Gospel at the end of the first century, and he is the last remaining disciple alive. John writes with such feeling and emotion because he is thinking through the deep meaning behind the events and not simply the actions or events themselves.

Jesus didn't just give lip service to loving and serving others, he did it. For years, the people of the time had heard the Pharisees and religious leaders talk-the-talk with empty words, then Jesus comes along and puts actions to his words giving them weight and authority. Perhaps that's what the world is waiting for us to do today.