

WATCH YOUR ATTITUDE

The Book of Philippians #13

The last time we looked at Philippians we talked about personal motives – the singular thing that drives people to do what they do. Today we’re going to talk about attitudes.

Have you ever said to your children, *“I do not appreciate that attitude. You better change it right now or else”*? Or have you walked away from a restaurant talking about the waiter or waitress saying, *“I didn’t care much for their attitude.”* Or perhaps you’ve thought to yourself, *“That person must be an only child because they’re acting like they should be the center of attention”*?

All of us behave in certain ways and project certain feelings toward others. That’s natural. We are all different and we all behave differently. And we’re not always in a good mood. We can’t all be as sunny and happy as Julie Andrews was in the Sound of Music. Sometimes we come across snippy or uncaring, aggressive or passive, moody or lifeless. Sometimes we think far too highly of ourselves and sometimes far too little. When these behaviors are consistent we call them characteristics, saying things like, *“That is so characteristic of her”*, or, *“He needs to work on his character”*. It’s when these feelings and actions get directed toward us in a negative manner that we call them “attitudes”.

Sometimes a person’s attitude is very noticeable to us and irritating because we possess the same attitude ourselves. But Scripture says that we must deal with our own attitude first before we address someone else’s.

MATTHEW 7:3-5

“Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.”

How often have you been really irritated at someone only to discover that what you don’t like about the other person is the very same thing that you don’t like about yourself? And the reason it irritates you so much is that it is out in the open. You try and keep your faults well hidden and away from prying eyes. But when someone else manifests your weakness it is intolerable to you. Sound familiar? I know it does to me. At times I’ve tried to keep a weakness or fault hidden from others and never addressed it. But the Lord wanted me to change so He revealed this hidden fault through my irritation with others. It’s humbling when you come to the point of having to thank the Lord for making you irritated with someone else. Perhaps the Lord understands reverse psychology better than we do.

We do tend to think of an attitude as a negative thing and usually notice it when we want it to change, either in ourselves or in others. But attitudes can be positive as well. In fact in the second chapter of Philippians we are actually instructed to have an attitude that has no negative connotation. But before we get there let’s have a quick review for the sake of context.

Last month we looked at verses one through four. Paul started by asking the Philippians to *“make his joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”* He then gave some specific direction in verses three and four on how to attain this by taking direct aim at

the heart of personal motives. He instructed them to, *“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also look out for the interests of others.”*

Whether or not they followed his advice is unknown. But James 3:13 to 4:12 tell us what can be expected when we do not follow Paul’s advice to the Philippians. What happens when selfish ambition, conceit, and self-importance are allowed to grow?

JAMES 3:14 to 4:12

“If you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: ‘He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us’? But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, ‘GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.’ Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom.

Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you. Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy but who are you who judge your neighbor?”

These verses tell us what can be expected when we do not follow Paul’s advice to the Philippians. And what happens when we allow selfishness, greed, quarrels, wrong motives, pride and judgment occur?

We become arrogant and lie against the truth. There is disorder and every evil thing. The things we desire (our pleasures) wage war in our members. We lust and do not have so we commit murder to get it. We are envious and cannot attain what we want so we fight and quarrel. We don’t have what we want because we don’t ask for it; and when we do ask we don’t receive it because we ask with wrong motives so that we can spend our wants on our own pleasures. We become proud and God ends up opposing us. We speak against our brother and judge him thereby judging the Law itself. We then become subject to judgment from the Righteous Judge Himself.

Some of us here may have seen the destruction that occurs when humility and unity are lacking in a church. Certainly Paul and others did as well. That’s why in verse five through ten in Philippians, Paul is quick to provide the example upon which his teaching is based.

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-10

“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men, 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, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

What these verses tell us is that the glory that Christ realized, that which was bestowed upon Him by God, started with His attitude. He existed in the form of God but made the decision to take the form of a human in order to fulfill the purpose of God. While it is true that He had an attitude of humility while in the form of man His attitude of humility started way before He took on flesh. It started when He said,

HEBREWS 10:5-7

“Sacrifice and offering You have not desired but a body You have prepared for Me; In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come (in the scroll of the book it is written of Me) to do Your will, O God.’”

His attitude was first manifested in His willingness to do God’s will. It then carried over into the actions that were required to accomplish God’s purpose. We see by this that **attitude is the foundation upon which all action is based**. The attitude of Christ regarding the Father and even regarding Himself was the foundation upon which the actions He took to please the Father were realized.

Well, you may say, that was Jesus. We can hardly be expected to have the same attitude as He. After all only Jesus could fulfil the eternal purpose of God for redemption. We were never God and never anything more than human. But hopefully we do have this in common – the desire to do God’s will. And for that we need humility and purpose.

So what attitude does Paul say we are supposed to have in ourselves? It is the same attitude which was in Christ Jesus. And how did Jesus manifest this attitude? What actions did He take which revealed His attitude? Paul says He did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, being made in the likeness of men.

And what was God’s response to Christ’s attitude? God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name. And what will be the outcome of God’s action towards Christ? At the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Christ manifested His inward attitude concerning Himself by humbling Himself and becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. But it wasn’t just the transition from God to Man. It was a transition from power to weakness, from Master to slave, from the Limitless to the limited. This is something I think we can all relate to. It ‘hurts’ to feel powerless after being in control. It’s unsettling to have circumstances dictate your decisions. It’s demeaning not to have a choice about what will happen to you.

But all this happened to Jesus and it happened with His full knowledge and consent. Here are some examples of Jesus’ attitude of obedience unto death.

MATTHEW 26:36-46

“Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, ‘Sit here while I go over there and pray.’ And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. He said to them, ‘My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.’ And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.’

“And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, ‘So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.’ He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done.’ Again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.

“And He left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more. Then He came to the disciples and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!’ ”

Jesus had many opportunities to avoid the cross. Even at the last moment He limited His abilities in order to conform to God’s will and accomplish God’s purpose. After His three prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane a large crowd, led by Judas, came up to Him and seized Him. During this altercation one of His disciples drew out his sword and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. And this was Jesus’ response.

MATTHEW 26:52-54

“Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?”

Jesus could have put a stop to the arresting circumstances and put people “in their proper place” but He did not. He restrained His power and authority in order to fulfill what God required of Him.

He demonstrated this again when He stood before Pilate after being handed over to Him by the chief priests and elders.

JOHN 19:10-11

“Pilate said to (Jesus), ... ‘Do you not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?’ (And) Jesus answered, ‘You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given to you from above.’”

The only authority Jesus feared was that of His heavenly Father. He understood that it was His Father who was behind this judgment and He was willing to submit to His Father’s authority. He was of one mind and one heart with the Father. He had come to do God’s will, even to the point of death.

Other examples of obedience and submission to God’s will are found in the gospel of John.

JOHN 5:30

“I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will but the will of Him who sent Me.”

JOHN 12:49-50

"I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. I know that His command is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told me."

What these verses tell us is that Christ humbled Himself in order to be obedient. He prayed for His Father's will to be done. Even when it was not His own will, He submitted to God's will, leaving the place of prayer with a resolve to accomplish all that God had instructed Him to do.

While He lived on earth He did only what He saw the Father do. He did not seek His own will but rather the will of the Father. He did not speak on His own initiative. He only spoke what the Father told Him to say. He allowed the Father who was abiding in Him to do the Father's works.

Now I don't want to give a false impression of Jesus' humility. He was not all soft and cuddly. He got angry when He did His Father's will. Just think of Him cleansing the temple and confronting the Pharisees by calling them whitewashed tombs full of dead men's bones. There is a place for confrontation even in the midst of humility. Moses was called the most humble man on earth. Yet Moses was instructed to confront the most powerful ruler on earth in order to do God's will.

And there was anger in their confrontations. But the difference between being angry with humility (as was Moses) and being angry with pride (as was Pharaoh) is that the humble person does not sin when he gets angry. And when a humble person gets angry enough to confront it is because God's law or character is being violated, not their personal pride or their will. So don't get the impression that in order to be humble you can never be confrontational or angry. Jesus has shown us that humility and confrontation can go together and there is room for some anger in that confrontation. But the overarching attitude which is ruling and driving the situation is that of humility.

Since Paul says we are to have this same attitude in ourselves which Jesus had within Himself, is this possible? I mean this seems like a rather tall order for us. But if it were possible, and we must assume it is or else God would not have inspired Paul to write these words, if it were possible, how would it be manifested in us? Can we really demonstrate our humility as Jesus demonstrated His? According to Romans 8:11 and 26 the answer is yes.

ROMANS 8:11

"But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."

ROMANS 8:26

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know who to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."

Since the same Spirit which lived in Jesus abides in us this same Spirit provides the means and the ability to do what Jesus did. So, as uncomfortable as this may seem to us, we now know that it is possible to have the same attitude of humility that Christ had. But Christ had a different purpose to fulfill than we do right? Wrong. The task He was given to do was certainly something that none of us could ever be asked to do. Only God becoming man could offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin. But He did what He did for a reason. He said, *"I have come to do Your will, O God."* And that is what we have in common. That is where our attitude of humility can match that of Christ. We have seen how Christ manifested His

humility. But how will we manifest ours? What actions will we take as we build upon our foundational attitude of humility?

In 1 Peter 5:5-11 Peter speaks of humility and the reason we should humble ourselves but he also gives us practical steps to help us remain humble. Let's see how these instructions are tied to humility and pride (see also Matthew 6:25-34)?

1 PETER 5:5b-11

“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, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

In this passage Peter gives some practical steps to help us remain humble. We are to:

Cast our anxieties on God, because He cares for us.

Be sober of spirit and on the alert for our adversary, the devil is seeking to devour us

Resist the devil, firm in our faith, knowing that we are not alone in our suffering

Be assured that after we have suffered for a little while that God will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish us

In Matthew 6 Jesus gives us a list of things which we are normally anxious for – what we shall eat, what we shall drink, and what we shall wear. And He tells us that our heavenly Father knows we need all these things, that we should not be anxious but rather seeking after His kingdom and trusting that God will supply all our needs.

But right about now you may be saying, “What does all this have to do with humility?” Well I’ll answer that question by referring back to our initial Scripture.

PHILIPPIANS 2:8

“(Jesus) humbled Himself by becoming obedient”

God gives specific instructions that cause us to trust Him and not rely on ourselves for our daily sustenance. We are to cast our anxieties on Him and trust Him for tomorrow because He is trustworthy, and can be relied upon to fulfill His every promise. When we don't trust in Him but rather trust in ourselves, worrying about tomorrow and where the provision for our needs will come from, we are prideful, setting ourselves up as more worthy of handling tomorrow's needs than God Himself. Obedience requires humility and humility stems from obedience. If we want to be humble we need to be obedient. And if we want to be obedient we need to be humble.

In Proverbs and Isaiah we read that, borrowing the title from an old TV show, “Father Knows Best”.

PROVERBS 16:25

“There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”

ISAIAH 55:8-9

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

Humility is recognizing that God is greater than we are, that God knows more than we do, and that His way is the way of life. If we are to find this life in abundance, as Jesus said we could, then we must humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, listening for His word and obeying it, not stealing ourselves to resist or oppose it.

ONE FINAL THOUGHT

In chapter two, verse 7, Paul says that Christ “emptied Himself”. What did Christ empty Himself of? And what difference does it make whether Christ “emptied Himself” or not? And if Christ had done everything else except empty Himself would the outcome for us have been any different? Would His example for us have been any less? Let me address these questions in the order in which they were asked.

What did Christ empty Himself of? Christ emptied Himself of the power of God and the rights of God. He took off the robe (authority) of God and put on the flesh of man. He did not cling to the authority and privileges that were His as a Divine Being, but gave them up to embrace the humble authority and meager privileges of a man. As a result He relied on His relationship to the Father for strength and not on His Divine essence which was immune to human weakness.

What difference does it make whether Christ “emptied Himself” or not? If Christ did not empty Himself of His supernatural abilities then He could not be an example for us. We could never hope to do the things Jesus said we could do, if he did them by a power and authority which we could never possess. We could never hope to be like Him in overcoming sin if Jesus did so by His divine nature because His divine nature could never be tempted by sin. But Jesus did empty Himself of His divine nature, becoming a man, easily tempted, yet victorious over sin by the Spirit of God residing in Him. And we have this same hope of overcoming sin because we have this same Spirit in us. And when we empty ourselves and become a bond-servant to Christ as He did to His Father, then we possess the same ability to overcome sin that Jesus did.

If Christ had done everything else except empty Himself would the outcome for us have been any different? Would His example for us have been any less? Yes. Absolutely - He would not have experienced the basics of the human experience – hunger, weakness, ignorance, sorrow, temptation, pain, trust, a need to rely upon God, etc. Because of this He would not be qualified to help us as we face trials, suffering and temptation. (He would be more like a Greek god who displays human emotions but is never without his godly powers)

HEBREWS 2:17-18 says,

“He had to made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.”

The attitude of Christ was first manifested in His willingness to do God's will. It then carried over into the actions that were required to accomplish God's purpose. We see by this that **attitude is the foundation upon which all action is based**. The attitude of Christ regarding the Father and even regarding Himself was the foundation upon which the actions He took to please the Father were realized.

And so it is with us. Our actions are also based on our attitude toward God. If we believe then we trust. If we do not believe then we worry. If we think God is not trustworthy then we do not seek His help. If we do not believe God cares then we do not bring our petitions to Him. If we believe God is powerless over situations then we assert our own power over them. If we believe equality with God is something we can grasp, that we can control our destiny, that we can provide everything we need, that we manage our own affairs with no help from Him, then we will seek to grasp what we can never hold, ultimately finding everything we have attained empty of value and purpose. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. So,

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-7a

"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking on the form of a bond-servant."

Paul, Epaphras, Tychicus, James, Peter, Jude, and John all called themselves bond-servants of Christ. Even Moses was called the bond-servant of God. When we became believers we became bond-servants because we were immediately indebted to the One who purchased our redemption. The question for us is, having been made into a bond-servant of Christ, will we empty ourselves and fully inhabit this form or will we cling to the old man, refusing to divest ourselves of its corrupt nature?

Paul tells us that, like Christ, there is a choice to be made. We are to have an attitude of humility which is empty of self. "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." A tall order? Yes. But not an impossible one. Because it will determine our action, we need to watch our attitude. We need to have it checked it at the door of heaven.

I don't know your heart, only God truly knows that part of you. You may be an expert at keeping sin at bay or an expert at keeping sin hidden behind a mask of self-righteousness. You may be struggling internally or you may be experiencing the freedom that only Christ can give. But what I do know is this. We can all use an attitude check, maybe even an attitude adjustment.

So let's take a few moments to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, going to Him to have our attitudes checked. Let's ask Him to search our hearts and see if there is any hurtful or wicked way in us. And if He reveals it to us, let us humbly repent and empty ourselves of it. Our attitude should be that of Christ Jesus who sought only to be obedient to the will of the Father, even if it cost Him His life. We must check our attitude to see if it is in line with Christ. This is not a one-time thing, it is a daily thing. But it can start today. Let's humble ourselves and go to God to get an attitude check.

SONG: "Search Me, O God"