

The Perfect Pattern of Humility



Pride vs Humility (Part 7)
by Derek Prince

In this series we have been studying the eternal, universal law stated by Jesus in Matthew 23:12:

> "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." (NIV)

So far we have looked mainly at the negative aspect of this law stated in the first half, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled." The first and most outstanding demonstration of this negative aspect is provided by the rebellion and fall of Lucifer. You remember Lucifer was perhaps the most beautiful and the wisest of all created beings, a cherub with a special position of honor in heaven, in God's presence. But his heart was lifted up by his beauty and his wisdom and he conceived rebellion against God, promoted it amongst the angels that were under his charge and ultimately was banished from God's presence and fell.

Today we are going to focus on the other side, the positive aspect of this law which is stated in the words, "Whoever humbles himself will be exalted." The greatest and most perfect demonstration of this positive aspect is provided by Jesus Himself. In fact, the contrast between Jesus and Satan or Lucifer is exact and complete. Look at it this way, Lucifer, now Satan, sought to exalt himself and was cast down. Jesus, the Son of God, humbled Himself and was exalted.

Today I want to look with you at the picture of the self humbling of Jesus, which is so beautifully described for us by Paul in Philippians 2:5–11. I think it's significant that this epistle was written in a prison cell. I think Paul was applying lessons that he'd had to learn in his own life and he saw the perfect pattern of these lessons already worked out in the life of Jesus. In this passage in Philippians 2:5–11, Paul describes two things: the self-humbling of Jesus and then His exaltation as a result by God the Father.

We'll look first of all at the description of the self-humbling of Jesus in Philippians 2:5–8, and I want you to see seven successive downward steps that Jesus took from His place of equality with God to the place of dying a criminal's death on a cross. The number seven in Scripture often represents that which is perfect or complete. And so in these seven

downward steps we see the perfect self-humbling of our Lord Jesus. Let me read the words to you now:

> "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus..."

Notice that everything begins with the attitude, not the act. First of all, it was Lucifer's attitude of pride that prompted the act of rebellion. It was Jesus' attitude of humility that led Him to His subsequent downward course.

> Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, [He was God Himself, equal with God the Father] 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. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (NASB)

Let's look briefly at those seven downward steps. Step one, Jesus emptied himself. Charles Wesley, in one of his hymns, says, "He emptied Himself of all but love." He laid aside all His attributes as a divine person.

Step two, He took the form of a bond servant. The Greek says a slave. But He could have been a servant of God and still remained on the level of the angels for they are all God's servants.

But step three was further down. He took upon Him the likeness of man. He made Himself on the same level with the Adamic race, the descendants of Adam. But He could have come to the earth in the form of the perfection, physical and in every aspect that Adam had before the fall.

But the fourth step down was He was found in appearance as a man. He was just like the men of His time. He mingled with them on the streets of Nazareth and no one noticed anything different.

Finally, sometime on through His ministry, when Peter identified Him and said, "You are the Messiah, the Son of God," Jesus reminded him, "Flesh and blood did not reveal that to you, but My Father which in heaven." In other words, His true identity could not be seen with the normal eyes of the flesh. He was just like all the other men of His time. Only the Holy Spirit could reveal beneath that veil of flesh the true divinity.

Step number five, He was a humble man. He humbled Himself. Have you ever thought about that? Jesus was not a ruler, He was not a military commander, He didn't come from the priestly cast. True, He came from the house of David, but it was a house that was in decay and humiliation at that time. It had lost its pristine kingly glory.

Step number six, as a man He endured the ultimate fate of all men; that is, death. He saw it through to the end.

Step number seven, the ultimate—it was death on a cross. Not death on the sickbed with His relatives around Him, not death in the comfort of His own home, but the criminal's death in agony and shame on the Roman gibbet. That was the total self-humbling of Jesus.

Now listen to the result and I want you to notice the very next word that follows, it's a "therefore." Jesus did not pretend to renounce His position as God, He really renounced it. And in order to return to it He had to earn the right and earn it He did, by His self-humbling. So Paul goes on in Philippians 2:9–11:

> "Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (NASB)

Notice the seven upward steps. Number one, God highly exalted Him. Number two, God gave Him the name above every name. Number three, God ordained that at that name of Jesus every knee should bow. And then three areas are specified. Step four, those in heaven. Step five, those on earth. Step six, those under the earth, every area of creation. And step seven, the final one, that every tongue should confess Jesus as Lord. Bear in mind that, therefore, Jesus earned this exaltation by His self-humbling. He was the perfect example of the principle whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Now I want to continue with the next verses from Philippians 2:12–15, and I want you to notice the first word again. It's "therefore." There's another outworking of this principle that's applied to our lives. See what Paul says:

> "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you

> to will and act according to His good purpose. Do everything without complaining or arguing so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe." (NIV)

You see that "therefore" immediately after the record of Jesus' self-humbling and His subsequent exaltation? What is that therefore there for? It's an application of that principle to our lives, just as Jesus humbled Himself, so if we are to live the Christian life successfully and follow His pattern, we too have to humble ourselves. Self-humbling is the essential condition to leading the Christian life successfully as the New Testament pictures it. The same principle that worked in Jesus has to be worked out in us.

There are three results of humbling ourselves that are stated there by Paul in that passage. The first is obedience. Paul said, "Don't obey only in my presence, but much more in my absence." A proud person cannot be obedient. Pride and rebellion can never go together with obedience. We cannot obey God, we cannot obey those set over us by God as long as there is pride and rebellion in our hearts. We have to humble ourselves in order to obey.

The second result of self-humbling is that it enables God to work in us. After challenging us with that "therefore," Paul says, "It is God who works in you, both to will and to act according to His purpose." Pride is a barrier to God working in us. God can only work His will in those who humble themselves. As long as we remain proud, arrogant, self-sufficient, and seek to maintain our independence of God, there is not way that God can work in us. Pride is a barrier to God working.

Thirdly, the third result of humbling ourselves is very beautiful. It causes us to shine as the stars in the universe. It makes God's people totally different from the people of this world. A people that stand out, not by their high attainments or their intellectual ability, but by their humility. That's a quality the world sees very little of today. It certainly makes God's people different when they practice it.

See, the world is getting darker all around us. Many, many lights that we regarded secure are being taken from us. But it's a beautiful fact about the stars that the darker the night gets, the brighter the stars shine. And that's how God wants it to be with us, but the key is self-humbling.

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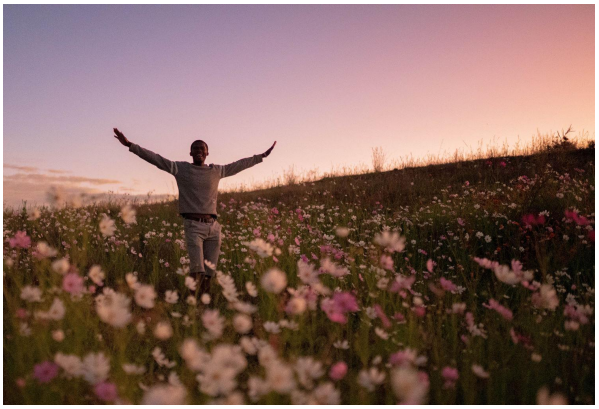

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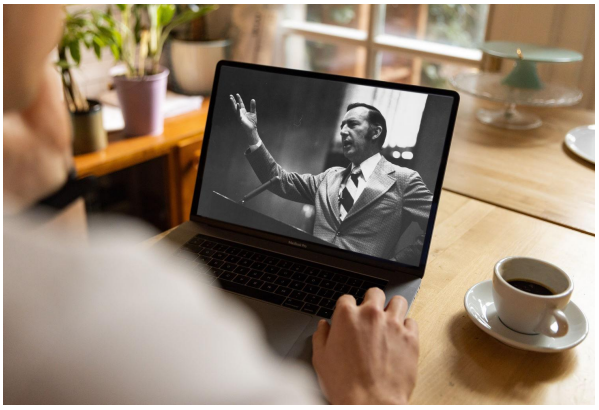

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