

Humbling Ourselves for Spiritual Progress



Pride vs Humility (Part 9)
by Derek Prince

We've been looking at the opposite results that follow from self-exaltation and self-humbling. In Lucifer, who became Satan, we saw the perfect example of self-exaltation and its consequences. In Jesus we saw the perfect example of self-humbling and its consequences. We've seen also that these laws work out just as accurately and just as universally in the life of each one of us.

Yesterday I pointed out that self-humbling is an essential requirement for each one of us to come to God initially. Today I'm going to take this principle one step further. I'm going to show you that after we have come to God initially, self-humbling remains an essential requirement for all subsequent progress in the spiritual life. Our progress will be in direct proportion to the degree in which we continue to humble ourselves.

First of all, I want to speak about the path to leadership in the Body of Christ, among God's people, the disciples of Jesus. I want to take an example from an incident that happened quite near to the close of Jesus' earthly ministry. It's recorded in Matthew 20:20–28. In this situation the mother of two of His disciples—James and John, the sons of Zebedee—came to Jesus with a special request on behalf of her two sons. I want you to listen to the request and to the response that Jesus gave. Beginning in Matthew 20:20:

> "Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. 'What is it you want?' he asked. She said, 'Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.' 'You don't know what you are asking,' Jesus said to them. [Notice, he placed the responsibility not on the mother, but on the sons. He said, 'to them.' They were, as it were, hiding behind their mother's apron but He brought them right out into the open and exposed their own wrong motives.] 'You don't know what you are asking,' Jesus said to them. 'Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?' 'We can,' they answered. Jesus said to them, 'You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit my right

> or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.' When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers."

Why were they indignant? There was only one reason why they should have been indignant. They were aspiring to those two places of top honor at the right and left of Jesus. A lot of motives are laid bare in this simple incident.

> "Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave...'"

That's an ugly word, "slave," isn't it? And yet it's an absolute requirement. If you want to be great, you've got to become a servant. If you want to be first, greater still, you have to go lower. You've got to become a slave.

> "...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (NIV)

So there's a principle of the law for promotion in God's kingdom. It's the same law that we've been looking at all the way through these talks. The way up is the way down. If you want to go higher, stoop lower. If you want to be the ruler, if you want to be the leader, become the servant. If you want to be the chief, become the slave.

You see, I want to emphasize that this principle operates in every life, in every year of the universe. There are no exceptions to this law. Just as we would normally say in the physical world there are no exceptions to the law of gravity, so in the spiritual world there are no exceptions to this law—he that exalts himself will be humbled, but he that humbles himself will be exalted. And there is no other legitimate route to promotion in the Kingdom of God to become a leader, but through self-humbling.

Let me suggest to you that many times we ignore this law in our principles of promotion in the church. We choose people because they've been to seminary, because of their education, because of their preaching gift. And many times such choices turn out to be disastrous to the Church of God because we have ignored the great basic principle—anyone who has not learned to humble himself is not fit to be the leader of God's people.

Now I want to show you this same principle worked out in the personal experience of the apostle Paul. I'm going to read Paul's own testimony about himself and his experience given in 2 Corinthians 12:7–10. Paul has been speaking about the tremendous, unique revelations concerning the Gospel and the Church that he had received from the Lord. And then he explains how God had to deal with him because of these revelations.

> "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me."

That's not the way we would think. We would think that if we had tremendous revelations, everything would go smoothly. Life would be that much easier. And yet, often the contrary is the true. The man with the great revelation is the man who suffers the most. Then Paul says:

Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.

You know, when we pray we need to remember something. "No" is an answer just as much as "yes." And this time Paul prayed three times and each time he got the same answer—"no." And then the Lord explained:

> "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' [And then Paul continues:] Therefore, [in other words, this is the outworking of this principle.] I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (NIV)

I wonder if you could say that. In fact, I am asking myself, "Can I say that?" How many people could say, "I delight in weakness, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties." But you see, the reason why Paul delighted in those things, was he'd learned the principles. Everything that pushes me lower, everything that strips me of the last vestige of pride or arrogance or self-confidence, that's the steps to my exaltation. The lower down I go, the higher up God lifts me. The less I have in myself, the more I can receive from God. When I am weak, then I'm strong. Why? Because God's power is made perfect in our weakness. As long as we've got so much of our own, we don't need much from God. But when

we've been stripped of our own, then we need all that God has for us and it's freely available.

Now I want you to see the same principle illustrated by the man who came as the forerunner of Jesus. The man who had a unique ministry to prepare the way of the Messiah—John the Baptist. At a certain point in John's ministry, people told him that the man whose way he had come to prepare, Jesus, the one whom he had declared to be the Messiah, was making more converts and baptizing more people than John himself. And I suppose the people who told John the Baptist that expected him to react in a negative way, to be disappointed. They felt that his pride would be wounded and his feelings would be hurt and he wouldn't want to see his cousin—who was younger than he, for whom he had actually opened the door to ministry—he wouldn't want to see him promoted above himself. That, thank God, was not John the Baptist's reaction. His comment on the situation was this in John 3:30:

> "He [that's Jesus] must become greater; I must become less." (NIV)

What a secret there is in that. You want more of Jesus? There must be less of yourself. You want more of God's power? You must see your own weaknesses. You want God's anointing? You must strip yourself of all confidence in your own fleshly ability. As you become less, Jesus in you becomes greater. His power is made perfect in your weakness, in my weakness.

I think of an example given by the late evangelist, Dwight L. Moody. He said once, "As a young man I used to think that God had His gifts arranged on shelves, and that the best gifts were on the highest shelves, and I would have to reach up to get them. But," he said, "later on I learned it was the other way around. The best gifts are on the lowest shelves, and I don't have to reach up. I have to stoop down to get them."

In all this, the real secret is to keep our eyes on Jesus, Himself. Remember He's the pattern, the one in whom the principle was perfectly worked out. Hebrews 12:2 says this:

> "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, [Remember not only did Jesus get us started in the faith, He's the one who's going to see us through. And why do we fix our eyes on Him? Because of His example.] who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (NIV)

In other words, what's the principle? The way up is down. Just as it was for Jesus, so it is for us. The way to the throne is via the cross. As we willingly receive the death of all arrogance, all self-confidence, all our carnal pretensions and claims to be something, as we let all that die on the cross that God provides, the way is open for us to the throne. So let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

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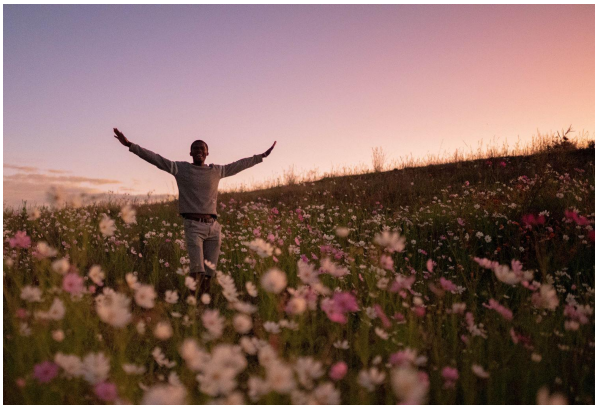
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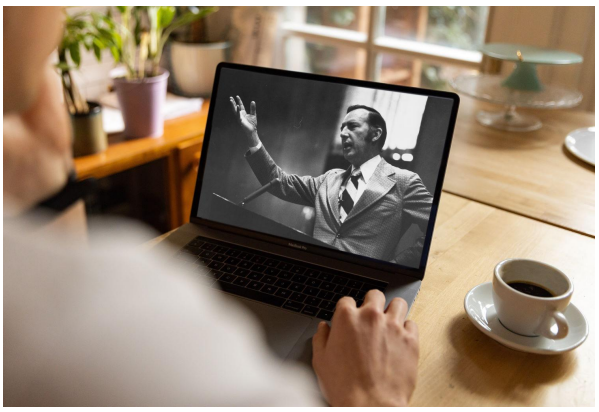
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