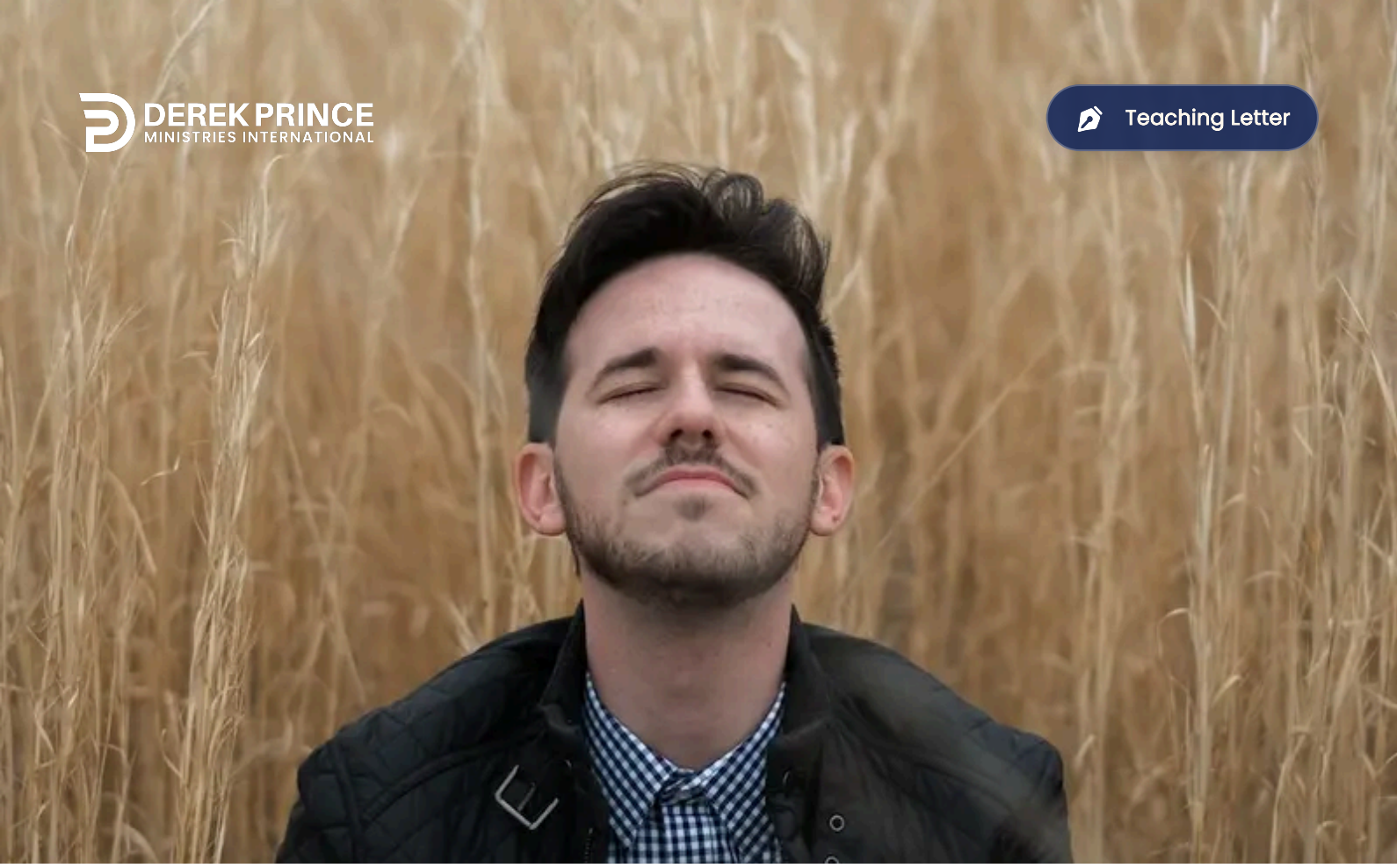


Pride vs Humility - Part 3



Part 3/4

Pride vs Humility
By Derek Prince

In this four-part series on the theme of *Pride Versus Humility*, we have been studying the eternal, universal law stated by Jesus in Matthew 23:12:

> Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted. (nasb1995)

Making Spiritual Progress

In this current teaching letter, we are covering the third installment of a four-part series dealing with the very important issue of overcoming pride and walking in humility. We began the series with a recognition that the nature of our struggle with pride is a desire for self-exaltation and independence from God—a very common attitude in the world today, yet one which leads to rebellion and destruction. The antidote to this prevailing attitude is the universal principle stated by Jesus in Matthew 23:12: "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted" (nasb1995). We also examined 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. Derek impresses upon us that these laws work out just as accurately and just as universally in the life of each one of us.

In the first of our two previous messages, we studied the life of Jesus as the perfect pattern for overcoming pride through self-humbling. Our next message was an application of that pattern—a step that must take place for each of us in order to step initially into a living relationship with the Lord. This brings us to our current teaching, in which we will understand how humility is required for us to move forward into maturity in the Christian life. For each of us, our progress will be in direct proportion to the degree in which we continue to humble ourselves.

A Bold Request

First of all, I want to focus on the path to leadership in the Body of Christ, among God's people, the disciples of Jesus. We will take an example from an incident that happened near the close of Jesus' earthly ministry, one which is

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recorded in Matthew 20:20–28. In the situation described in this passage, 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. Let's give our attention to both the request and the response Jesus gave. The story begins 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 spoke 'to them.' They were, to a degree, hiding behind their mother's apron. But He brought them right out into the open and exposed their own wrong motives.] "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 at 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. (niv)

An Absolute Requirement

Why were they indignant? There was only one reason why they should have been indignant. They themselves were also 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 ... (vv. 25–27, niv)

That word, "slave"—it's an ugly word, isn't it? And yet it is an absolute requirement. If you want to be great, you have 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. (Matthew 20:28, niv)

So we see here a principle of the law for promotion in God's kingdom. It is the same law that we have been looking at all the way through these messages on *Pride Versus Humility*. 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.

Once again, I want to emphasize that this principle operates in every life, in every part of the universe. There are no exceptions to this law. Just as we would normally say that 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. This is the eternal, universal law stated by Jesus in Matthew 23:12, "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted" (nasb1995). 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 have been to seminary, because of their education, because of their preaching gift. Many times, such choices turn out to be disastrous to the Body of Christ 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.

Paul's Thorn in the Flesh

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

> To keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me (v. 7, esv)

Let me just point out that this is 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. Yet, often the contrary is 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. (v. 8, niv)

Let's realize here that when we pray, we need to remember one fact. "No" is an answer just as much as "yes." In this case, Paul prayed three times—and each time he got the same answer: "no." We see the Lord's explanation in verse 9:

> 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"? Do you understand that the reason why Paul delighted in those things was because he had learned the principles—the same principles that we are learning here? Everything that pushes me lower, everything that strips me of the last vestige of pride or arrogance or self-confidence—that is the pathway 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 am 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.

Humility in John the Baptist

In our next section, I want you to see the same principle illustrated by the man who came as the forerunner of Jesus: John the Baptist. He was the man who had a unique ministry to prepare the way of the Messiah. At a certain point in John's ministry, the people following him gave him some startling news about Jesus, the man whose way he had come to prepare. The one whom he had declared to be the Messiah was making more converts and baptizing more people than John himself. I suppose the people who told John the Baptist this news 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. They supposed he wouldn't want to see his cousin—who was younger than he and for whom he had actually opened the door to ministry—succeeding in this way. They assumed that John wouldn't want to see Jesus promoted above himself. We can thank God that this was not the reaction of John the Baptist. We see his comment on the situation in John 3:30:

> He [that is Jesus] must become greater; I must become less. (niv)

What a secret there is in that statement! Do you want more of Jesus? Then there must be less of yourself. Do you want more of God's power? Then you must see your own weaknesses. Do you want God's anointing? Then 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, and in my weakness.

Fixing Our Eyes

This brings to mind a quote once given by the late evangelist, Dwight L. Moody: "I used to think that God's gifts were on shelves one above the other; and that the taller we grew in Christian character the easier we could reach them. I now find that God's gifts are on shelves one beneath the other. It is not a question of growing taller but of stooping lower; that we have to go down, always down, to get His best gifts." *Editor's note: This quote is actually traditionally attributed to F.B. Meyer, whose life and evangelical ministry was profoundly impacted by D. L. Moody.*

In all of the process we are discussing in this message, the real secret is to keep our eyes on Jesus, Himself. We must remember that He is the pattern—the one in whom the principle was perfectly worked out. Hebrews 12:2 says:

> 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 will see us through. 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. (bsb)

Once again, what is the principle that we see illustrated here? 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.

Our job is to willingly receive the death of all arrogance, all self-confidence, all our carnal pretensions and claims to be something. As we let all of that self-centeredness 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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