

From the pulpit of



Humble Orthodoxy

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Philippians 2:1-11

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At EBF we have a series of 5 Ethos statements that guide our structures, commitments and priorities. These Ethos Statements describe who we are and who we want to be as we follow Jesus Christ. This summer we are going to cover these Ethos Statements to root ourselves a bit further in God's calling. Today we will be covering "Humble Orthodoxy" which means that we hold to the truth of God's Word, but without the attitude. In humility we stay anchored in the truth no matter the cultural storms that blow against us. Often we think about humility in the way we come across to others by standing on the truth such as the Biblical claims of salvation through Christ alone or claims of sex only within marriage between a man and a woman. We want to speak the truth, but in humility. But this morning I want us to focus on the humility piece in how we treat others in and outside the church. We can have all the orthodoxy and sound doctrine and still be arrogant punks to those in the world, to those in the church and to those closest to us. Humility is so important to God that it is the second most taught-about character trait in the New Testament, the first being love.¹

The passage we are going to look at this morning comes from Philippians 2:1-10. Let's stand together as I read the text. The Apostle Paul is in prison and he is writing the Philippians to stand firm in their faith as a unified body. Specifically he wants them to serve one another in a similar way to which they were served by Jesus Christ who died for their sins. He's bringing this up because there is some tension in the church and a bit of disunity. Lack of unity is a common theme in many of the New Testament churches and even today, because Christians tend to forget the real enemy. Steve Brown describes how Christians sometimes act. He explains that when a group of thoroughbred horses face attack, they stand in a circle facing each other and with their back legs kick out at the enemy. Donkeys do just the opposite, they face the enemy and kick each other. The church often does just that, we ignore the real enemy of Satan and his demons and we attack fellow believers. Not good!

Philippians 2:1-2: "So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind." Paul is saying that if you are saved and you know Christ and you receive comfort from His love and the Holy Spirit indwells you and you have fellowship with others, then make his joy complete by being likeminded, having the same love and being one in the Spirit and purpose. Since this is true about you, then be unified. Since you are on the same team, then act like it.

¹ *The Blessing of Humility*, Jerry Bridges, page xi.

But at times unity is lacking and tensions flare up. What are the root causes and how can they be alleviated? Look at verse 3: “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” Notice the word ‘nothing.’ You are to do absolutely nothing out of ‘selfish ambition or conceit.’ ‘Selfish ambition’ tends to pull another person down and ‘conceit’ puts oneself up. When I was young and living in Dallas, a yearly ritual would occur in the yard of our house. A big dump truck would come and dump a huge pile of dirt. I hated what I had to do with that dirt: spread it all over the front and back yard to somehow make the grass grow. But there was one fun thing to do on the huge mound of dirt. We would play ‘King of the Hill.’ This is where the goal is to stay on top of the mountain of dirt. You would pull others down and stand on top as the King of the Hill. That is exactly what ‘selfish ambition’ and vain ‘conceit’ are all about: pulling others down and establishing yourself up top.

If ‘selfish ambition’ and ‘conceit’ are the root of the problem, then what is the solution to counteract these sinful tendencies? It’s at the end of the verse 3 into verse 4: “...but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” Unity comes through humility. Let’s get specific. One interpretative translation of the Bible called *The Message* says, “Put yourself aside and help others get ahead.” Now, this does not mean that you are ignoring your gifts or calling and walking around telling everyone, “I am so horrible and you are so wonderful.” It simply means giving preferential treatment to others. It means letting others have the credit, letting others get ahead, pulling others up and trying to keep them up. Humility looks out for the interest of others. This does not deny that we have needs, but we must also have an equal concern for the needs of others.

When I was in grad school I would go to the grocery store and shop for my needs, which were legitimate. Right before I would leave, one of my roommates would ask me to pick up this or that for him. I would say sure. Then I would go to the grocery store and come back and say, “OOPS,” because I got my stuff, but not his. That scenario plays out in so many areas of our lives. Paul is calling us to lean toward others and put their needs first.

The tension comes in that, if we start to put others first and work for their benefit, they might take advantage of us. Jerry Bridges says that it sounds like we are advocating “doormat Christianity where we allow people to run roughshod over us.” Ultimately you can’t control the responses of others and there are Biblical insights on how to proceed, but keep in mind that Jesus was the “Ultimate Doormat” as he allowed himself to be crucified by wicked men.² In fact, we are to imitate the One who served humanity and was clearly taken advantage of: Jesus Christ. Look at verse 5: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...” I like how it says, ‘have this mind’ like Christ. It’s as if he is saying, “Think like Christ.” Our thinking must change from trying to get ahead and pushing others down, to going down while pulling others up. That was the mind of Christ. He stepped down in order to pull us up.

Look at His stepping down in verses 6-7: “...who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” Jesus ‘was in the form of God,’ meaning that Jesus has all the attributes of God, because He is indeed God. Jesus was in Heaven, where He had dominion and control over all of the created order because He took part in creation. He had angels around Him all the time because He’s God. But Jesus ‘did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,’ meaning that Jesus didn’t utilize the fact that He was in the image of God to His own advantage. “...but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” Jesus did not stop becoming God when He became a man, but gave up the right to take

² Ibid., page 32

advantage of or to exploit His position for His own benefit. Instead He became a human, a servant. He did not exploit His privilege of deity, but became a servant. He did not stop being God, but now became the unique God-Man. He took on flesh as He went from glory to humiliation, from the throne to the fetus. God humbled himself and became a man in order to save you.

Let's see what happened to Christ as He stepped down in order to pull you up. Verse 8: "And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." As the unique God-Man, Jesus not only was 'obedient to the point of death' but He died the humiliating death of the cross. This is a disgraceful death and it is not pretty. We are talking about public humiliation. Nails were driven into the skin and most people ended up suffocating or drowning in their own blood. The Jews during this time saw it as a curse and the Romans saw it only fit for the hardest of criminals. But how did God view it? God viewed it as necessary to bring you up to Him. You were born dead in your sin and destined for Hell under God's wrath. You could not get any lower. Jesus stepped down and took on flesh and bore the wrath of God in your place on the cross. Through repentance and faith in Christ you are reconciled to the Father. Jesus came down to pull you up into a relationship with the Father through faith.

Now you are called to imitate the service and the humility of Christ. John Ortberg says that the life of Jesus is a series of demotions. His life is not a life of someone striving to climb up the ladder, but one who is coming down. If you are into organizational charts, He would have been at the top of the chart of the universe. He gave it up to become a servant, but 'even angels are servants' so He went even lower and took on flesh as a human. But humans can sometimes live as presidents and pop stars, so he took a demotion again by being born in a stable and living a life of poverty. Then He went even further down by submitting Himself to death; not just any kind of death, but a shameful death on the cross. How would the world evaluate this descent? As failure. But the evaluation of the Father is different.

Look at verses 9-11: "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Jesus rose from the dead and God exalted Jesus to the highest place and He has the name that is above all names as the reigning Lord. One day everybody will bow down to Jesus and every tongue will confess that "Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

John Ortberg says, "The problem with spending your life climbing up the ladder is that you will go right past Jesus, for he's coming down."³ And the Father's evaluation of Jesus' ascent was well pleasing as Jesus was exalted. And what you should be looking for in life is the Father's evaluation. Yes, In Christ, His evaluation sees the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to you by faith. But God still sees conduct and fruit that comes from a saved life. His eyes are on you and He is looking for your descent and the way you serve others in imitation of Christ. And your exaltation on this earth may come in a variety of blessings and promotions but the main exaltation will be in Heaven in the Father's evaluation of 'well done my good and faithful servant.' So, if you find yourself wanting to reach the top while pushing others down, look to imitate Christ and desire the Father's evaluation as He calls you to descend while you help others ascend.

Conclusion:

I ran across an order of worship from November 2, 1997 at my last church. That was a time when God was calling me to descend further and further while I wanted to ascend higher and higher. I had just finished seminary that past May and I was taking on my first church. In my mind I was a rising star going places with solid orthodoxy, but lacking in humility. Yet God took me to a

³ John Ortberg, *When the Game is Over It All Goes Back in the Box*, page 45.

church full of problems and called me to serve them over the next 6 ½ years until the church closed down. At times I wanted to yank people down as I ascended. I tried to ascend by leaving and bailing out to greater places, but God kept taking me lower and lower. He called me to the way of the cross of Christ and eventually to a place of surrender to only the evaluation of the Father.

Maybe you need to go right now to that place of surrender to only the evaluation of the Father. You find it difficult to serve others while ascending. Maybe you need to lock your eyes on Jesus and His descent for you. The Lord's Table is a good place to remember His descent to live and die in your place. Jesus descended to serve you so that you can ascend by faith into a relationship with the Father. May you turn your eyes to Him now and find yourself imitating Him and serving others under the evaluation of God alone. Let's pray.

This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Evanston Bible Fellowship, Evanston, Illinois, by Pastor Jason Lancaster on Sunday, July 3, 2016. It is not meant to be a polished essay or substitute for personal Bible study. Evanston Bible Fellowship is a community of sojourners empowering one another to cultivate Gospel transformation.