

The Power of Obedience

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[0 : 00] Hello, my name's Ben. If I haven't met you, I would love to meet you as well. Jordan's very friendly, but I'm also friendly. I just need to get all my things in order here.

Okay, so tonight I am going to speak about the subject of humility. Humility is something of a paradox.

It's something that you don't notice in a person when you meet them. But very often when I think of someone that I like a lot and I think about it, I think, you know, one of the reasons I like that person is because they're humble.

Let's never see it, it's not on the surface. Humility is a thing that you can't work at. You can't really make yourself more humble, right?

Like, if I start thinking about myself, that's almost the definition of not what humility is. So how do I do that? How do I make myself more humble?

[1 : 03] Humility is about what's inside my heart, but it's actually about how I relate to people as well. And it's where those two fuse together somehow.

Now, I have a quote. C.S. Lewis was the great author who wrote many, many great books. And about humility, he captures this paradox quite well, I think.

He says, There's one vice of which no man in the world is free, or woman, which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else, and of which hardly any people except Christians ever imagine that they are guilty themselves.

I have heard people admit that they are bad-tempered, or that they cannot keep their heads about girls, or drink, or even that they are cowards.

I do not think I have ever heard anyone who is not a Christian accuse himself of this vice. And at the same time, I have very seldom met anyone who is not a Christian, who showed the slightest mercy of it in others.

[2 : 07] There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular, and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have of it in ourselves, the more we dislike it in others.

The vice I am talking of is pride, or self-conceit. And the virtue opposite to it in the Christian morals is called humility. How wonderfully he puts it.

Father, help us. I have three points for us tonight. Firstly, it's the conflict of humility, the power of humility, and the source of humility.

The conflict of humility, the power of humility, and the source of humility. All right, let's go. So, we just had 2 Corinthians 10.

Thank you, Sophie, for reading that to us. And in 2 Corinthians 10, Paul is fighting. He's in an argument. In the book so far, he's done a few different things.

[3 : 08] We just went through chapters 8 and 9, and he was talking about a completely separate issue, an issue of money. And in chapter 10, he drops that and starts something new.

And for the rest of 2 Corinthians 10, 11, 12, 13, he's going to enter this argument. And what's happened is there's a group of people called the super apostles who are leading the church of Corinth away from Paul.

And by doing so, they're leading the church away from the gospel in Jesus Christ. Here's a tip. If someone calls themselves a super apostle, you should be worried.

about what they say. Yeah, you're welcome. That one's for free, Jordan. They have come, and they have accused Paul of all sorts of things.

I count six or seven accusations in this chapter alone. Let me give you a flavor. Look down at verse 2. He says, I beg of you that when I'm present, I may not have to show boldness with such

confidence, as I count on showing against some who suspect us of, walking according to the flesh. [4 : 26] So, while Paul's away, these super apostles come and they say, Paul is not spiritual. He walks according to the flesh. It's a pretty big deal to say about the apostle Paul.

Verse 10. Again, they say, his meaning Paul, Paul's letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech is of no account.

So, they accuse him of being a hypocrite, of being two-faced, and being a coward in one go. That's pretty good for an accusation. And the reason they're accusing Paul is because Paul acts with humility.

That's why they accuse him. It's because he has humility. And you know what? Their accusation is correct. Right?

He writes very strong words in his letters. And when he's with them, I'll say it this way, he's loving. He didn't berate them or act like a bully towards them.

[5 : 34] He acted like a kind father to them. The Christians became, sorry, the Corinthians had become Christians. Paul had been there, and he had spoken the gospel, and a lot of them had got converted.

The Holy Spirit was in their lives and transforming them. But the hooks of their culture was in their hearts, pulling. Something remained untransformed.

And this can happen to us. And it's why we need the gospel today. We need the gospel to renovate our hearts. We need Christ to do it for us. It's important that we understand a little bit about the background, the Greek cultural background.

In the Greek culture in this time, they had a value, which was honor and a value of strength. That's what they liked. And humility doesn't fit into the Greek grid of thinking.

Think of something like self-control and a soldier and someone who stands up and takes something. If a Greek father had a son, what he would want his son to do is get honor.

[6 : 44] He wouldn't want his son to be happy. I mean, he would, but this is like a secondary, right? He wouldn't want his son to be moral, necessarily. He wouldn't want his son to be rich.

Those are good things, but what he wanted for his son was to have honor. That's the value of what they have. I'm going to read you a story.

This is from Homer. He wrote something called the Iliad. If you study literature, you will know all about it. I have not studied literature. But you can watch movies about it.

In the Iliad, there's a scene where the soldiers have come, so these are Greek soldiers, they've come to Troy and they're fighting a battle and they're basically losing.

So think, you know, wooden horse, that hasn't happened in the story yet. So the soldiers are outside and they've been there for like a year and they're tired. And Odysseus and Agamemnon, those guys, are kind of the leaders and they're telling the soldiers you've got to stay.

[7 : 45] And there's this character called Thersites and Thersites stands up. He mocks the kings and he says, time to go home, guys.

Let's go home. And Thersites is eloquent with his speech, but he's ugly. Homer says, he was the ugliest man who came beneath Iliad.

And Odysseus confronts him and he mocks Thersites for his appearance. And then he, quote, dashed his scepter across the back and shoulders and a bloody welt stood up between the shoulders upon the golden scepter stroke.

And then here's the important bit. The people who are around and see Odysseus mock and beat this guy say this, quote, Odysseus has done excellent things by thousands, but this is by far the best thing, oh, I've gotten very loud, but this is by far the best thing he has ever accomplished.

So Odysseus stands, mocks, and beats a weak, ugly person, and that is the best thing he's ever done in his life.

[9 : 02] What? It's because of the Greek values, right? They value strength, honor, standing up for what's right, and compassion and humility do not fit.

They are honor culture, not a humility culture. And thus, they value boasting. The Corinthians had their own style of this.

They had kind of public arguments, and it was apparently known the Corinthian way of doing it. It's a little bit like Jerry Springer, right? They would have two groups, and there would be a leader and another leader, and they're kind of little disciples, and they would have to stand up and argue, and they would begin with sort of philosophical arguments, and they would develop that into basically

insults, and they'd develop that into punching.

They would literally come and punch each other. In chapter 11, Paul says, you let these super apostles slap you in the face. He probably means actually, they're actually just slapping them in the face.

Like, that's actually what's happening, right? And that's attractive, this whole thing. See, here's the thing. The Corinthians are Greeks. This is the cultural narrative that's in them.

[10:16] And the gospel comes and turns it upside down, and there's something completely different that comes, and it's Christ. You see, Christ was like a bomb that changed things.

Christ went into the temple and turned the tables upside down, but he didn't finish there, did he? He turned more than that upside down. He turned the world upside down. In the West, we have two sources for our ideas and ethics.

One of them are the Greek and Roman worldview, and the other one's the Christian worldview. And the Greek worldview gave us quite a lot of awful stuff. Some very good things, but in the end, it was the Christian value of humility that won us over.

I'm making a historical argument right now, and that's this. We need to appreciate what Christianity has given us. I'm not saying that only Christians are humble people. That's not what I'm saying by no means.

But I am saying humility is not a universal cultural value, and in the West, it only came from Christianity. If you think humility is a good thing, then you need to go thank Jesus for that, because he was the one who gave it to us.

[11:32] So the source of the conflict is that Paul is humble and talks about humility, and these super apostles hate it, and the Corinthians are not sure.

So my second point is the power, the power of humility. And I'm going to talk about what humility is, sort of the paradox of humility. Maybe you think humility is something about being a pushover or being a weak person.

Maybe you think humility is about kind of being nice, but not being offensive. And that's not really what's happening here either. Paul's not talking about that. Look at verse 4. Paul says, the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds.

We destroy arguments. But in verse 8, he says, for even if I boast a little too much about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed. So Paul's talking about the way he is and he says, I destroy, in verse 4, and in verse 8, he says, I do not destroy, I build up.

[12:40] What's he saying? These two bits. Humility is the ability to put aside our own dignity and honor and use our resources for the good of another.

I'll say that again. This is what humility is. It's the ability to put aside our own self and our own desire and our own dignity and to use our resources for the benefit of another.

And that's exactly what Paul's doing. He looks at Jesus for the example. Verse 1, Paul says, I entreat you myself by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

Paul looks at Jesus Christ, the one who had power and dignity and the one who used it for others. This is forbearance.

This is being open. This is kindness. This is tolerance. This is yielding. This is loving another. This is what humility is.

[13:43] But humility can also be fierce. The Bible says that Moses was the meekest man in all the earth. But when he saw what the people were doing when they worshipped the golden calf, he held two tablets in his hand, threw them down with enough force to break stone.

Jesus Christ, who was yet more meek, came into the temple, threw tables over. He stood in the face of people with demons. He looked at them with no fear and he spoke words of authority.

See, humility is like a surgeon can cut out cancer and leave the good. Paul destroyed the arguments, but he did not destroy the people.

He was trying to build the people up. Do you know how hard this is to do that? To put aside yourself, you know, when you're in an argument with someone, I have two temptations.

One is to run away and the other is to destroy the person. Right? Humility says, I'm going to put aside myself and I can do the surgery in you and I can destroy the arguments and I can build the person.

[14:57] When you meet a humble person, it will really change you and I mean that. I was going through a very weird time in my life about three years ago.

I was at a seminary in Australia and I dropped out. I never thought I'd be a dropout. I am. I, yeah, it was a weird time.

I got depression. I had no idea what God wanted me to do. I had no sense of what I was doing with my life and I met a man whose name was Keith Condy.

He has very white hair and blazing eyes and he's quite skinny and we sat down once and he looked at me and he listened to me talk and it was amazing.

We met twice and those two meetings were in a way life-saving really and the only way that I can describe Keith Condy is humble.

[16:03] He had no thing of his own heart in that conversation but he had Jesus you see a humility isn't having no goal humility is having the kingdom goal.

Paul says what I want is to build your faith up and I put aside my own goals and when I was in that moment and I met that humble man man that was that was what I needed. You see Christ walked into people's lives and he gave his whole attention to them he gave them his whole heart and he brought God's agenda into their lives and he transformed and he's calling us to do the same thing actually to put aside our own selves to love and to help others.

The power of humility is actually amazing and so my last point is this what's the secret? What's the secret to humility right? Where do we get this? Where do the resources for this come from?

And the answer is in verse 18. For it is not the one who commends himself but the one whom the Lord commends. The secret to humility is commendation.

The word is talking about a coin and the idea is is the coin a real coin or is it a fake coin? Or is it an approved and a genuine coin?

[17:26] That's the idea and it's talking about where do we get our commendation from? So commendation is what do I need to feel or be right within myself?

Commendation is how do I judge if I'm a good person a valuable person a worthwhile person a good person and this works in two different ways in traditional and modern cultures we actually operate differently in a traditional culture commendation works in a group way in a in a in a collectivist way so in a traditional culture what you do is you say what do all the people around me say my family my society though verse 12 that's what's happening here verse 12 says not that we there classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves so here are the super apostles right and they're going around this thing what are other people saying about me and this is the traditional way to do it it's a collectivist way if other people say that I'm good then I'm good if other people say that I'm smart then I'm smart in the modern world we do it differently we do it in the individualistic way traditional cultures look out for their commendation individual cultures look in we look inside we look inside for our own sense of self we say

I have to have my own self esteem so low self esteem is bad and you have to go to a counselor to go get good self esteem we say believe in yourself in a Star Trek episode the captain says to one of the characters this character wants to go to the Starfleet Academy to become a new captain and the captain says to this character this I don't want you to go for me I don't want you to go for your mother I want you to go only if it's the right thing for you only if you want to don't do it for me don't do it for you don't do it for your mother do it for yourself this is completely opposite of how the traditional collectivist culture does they would say only do it if other people are telling you to do it we've turned it upside down and it's the other way around now the problem is this when we in traditional cultures pride worked by pushing others away and getting people to look at me but in the individual cultures our pride is internalized we don't say it out loud it feels wrong to us but we just have it on the inside and we don't share it with anyone because we value independence we value standing on your own two feet the gospel of

Jesus Christ does not value independence it values dependence on God and others if we say I don't need God and I don't need you that's actually an insult to God and an insult to others I was in my backyard a while ago and our back neighbor was moving only a couple of blocks but he doesn't own a car or anything and he didn't have a lot of stuff but he had some stuff and a couple of boxes and a cart and he was moving his older retired not bodily weak but a bit older and he was moving his whole life cart by cart with his own hands he built it himself and he was moving it like seven blocks that way days of this box moving stuff and I went to him

I said hey that's kind of interesting I'd love to help you could I have a car we're literally next door neighbors can I roll by he didn't let me finish the sentence he said no I've got it what this craziness but we have this huge huge need to be seen as independent depending on ourselves and independence causes what loneliness we talk about the city and its loneliness this city has been built on the bricks of individualism and pride and we are lonely and reaping the fruit of that now and I don't think it's other people's fault you are coming to the city I think it's our fault right the way that we live the choices that we make about individualism this is what our inward looking pride is like if we try to get commendation from outside from others we will be pride we'll be prideful but if we try and get our commendation from ourselves on the inside we're going to crack because our souls are like black holes that will suck us more and more and more we need commendation from somewhere else and that somewhere else is

[23 : 14] God verse 18 for it is not the one who commends himself who is approved but it is the one whom the Lord commends how do we get it we need to do two things we need to look at God and then we need to look back at ourselves you see the only way that we would think that we're any good that we would commend ourselves is if we compare ourselves only to people if I can usually find someone who's worse than me than any particular thing I can also usually find somebody better than me who's a particular thing but I don't do that I look at someone else first right you know I can say I'm a hard worker or a smart person or a good moral person or even cool you know if I pick the right person but we're playing games and it's only when we look at God that we understand who we are Isaiah 24 verse 23 says God is the one who made everything he is so big and so kind he is so wild and so constant he is so amazing when the sun comes into his presence the sun bows down because that's all the sun can do

I was reading the paper this week I like science and something quite cool this week happened in science we found a gravity wave I have one nod someone else is with me thank you yeah it's a big deal I studied some physics and a gravity wave is a big deal like we've been looking for it since Einstein and this week was the first time it's been announced that we found one and the gravity wave if you want to know more about it I can tell you afterwards or our friend here can tell you as well but it came from probably a black hole and another black hole flying so you know one black hole has lots of gravity another one has lots of gravity but that that's not enough the two flying together and then spinning and then spinning faster and then you just have to imagine my hands going like a lot faster like a lot faster and when I say a lot you're not thinking fast enough physicists use very big numbers and a lot lot faster right this huge thing pulsing crazy amounts of energy we finally found this thing gravity wave right

God is the one whose hands who threw those two black holes together right like that thing is so wildly off the charts huge God is so much bigger than us that we can just stand and marvel at him if you think you're strong he's stronger if you think you're smart he's smarter if you think you're kind he's kinder if you think you're thoughtful he's more thoughtful and this God who is so wonderful and big humbled himself twice he became a man he became Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ walked on this earth and he was powerful and he was big and he was humble and he came and he met people and he spoke to them no matter who they were he lived among the poor and he spoke to them and he loved them and he saved them and when you thought he couldn't become more humble he did he humbled himself even unto death on a cross and he surrendered his own life for the sake of you and for me he chose to be considered a criminal to take shame upon himself so that we could be commended by God this is what the super apostles missed this is what

Paul stands for and this is the gospel and when we take it and the second thing is we need to take ourselves to that we look at ourselves and the gospel says to us two things it says you are worse than you could dare imagine we are so weak we are so insecure we need Jesus Christ the gospel will humble you if you really see it if you really see how big God is and what he's done for you it will humble you but the gospel also says you are more loved than you can ever dare hope you are worse than you could ever dare imagine and you are more loved than you can ever dare hope Jesus Christ died for you oh the glory this is peace this is commendation you see if we get this commendation if we understand this this is what will change our lives this will transform us into humble people it will free us from doubt from worry it will free us from the need to crush others it will free us from all the things that plague us this is the gospel of Jesus

Christ the humble one who we need to praise amen God bless him he is he esta he he the water girl could know maybe he thanks him he