

Hallmarks of the Transformed Life

Humility toward others

Intro: Leonard Bernstein, the late conductor of the New York Philharmonic orchestra, was once asked to name the most difficult instrument to play. Without hesitation, he replied, “The second fiddle. I can get plenty of first violinists, but to find someone who can play the second fiddle with enthusiasm—that’s a problem. And if we have no second fiddle, we have no harmony.”

It’s not only in music that it is difficult to find people to play second fiddle. It is true also in life. Something in us draws us to the first seat, but not to the second. Paul in Romans 12 shows us that the transformed disciple is willing to play “second fiddle in the Lord’s orchestra”.

do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. (Romans 12:16)

The transformed disciple manifests a humble attitude.

Paul’s brevity of words makes the translation and interpretation difficult.

But note two things:

There is a contrast. Paul mentions “high things” or “high people”.

Then he contrasts “lowly things” or “lowly people”.

There are two words that describe what the Christian does with these two things or groups. He is not “minding” or “focusing his thoughts on” the high; but he is “being carried or led away with” the lowly.

We often used the expression “got carried away”. It refers to what influences or moves us.

Let consider some other translations that seek to capture the idea of the Greek text in modern English:

Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble (NKJV)

do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; (RSV)

Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position (NIV).

What is clear is that the transformed disciple is going to manifest a humble heart!

Humility affects what we value and pursue.

Set not your mind on high things, but condescend to things that are lowly (ASV)

Even in our language we still use the word “high” to describe people and things. Someone who is haughty is sometimes also called “uppity”, on his “high horse”. Nice houses are in an “upscale” neighborhood.

Paul urges us not to become focused on the things the world exalts; thus becoming by their attainment “haughty”. There are lots of things that make people feel superior.

Money

Social Position

Intellect

Paul would urge us not to value and pursue these “high things”.

A humble person minds lowly things.

He seeks service rather than control.

He seeks to give rather to receive.

He listens to and respects the thinking of others rather than claim a monopoly on wisdom.

Humility changes how we view people.

When we have our values in the wrong place, it affects how we treat people.

do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; (RSV)

When our values are wrong, then we are looking for people who can help us get to where we want to be. We become climbers and other people become the rungs of the ladder we are climbing. We focus on the people who can get us where we want to be, that is, until we're through using them and moved on to someone higher up the ladder.

Paul urges disciples to be influenced by or to associate with lowly people.

It is interesting to see who Jesus chose to be his friends. One could have imagined that he would hang out at the temple and get on good terms with the important religious leaders; make regular visits to the Roman palaces to get on good terms with the Roman officials. Instead he associated with the lowly, with the nobodies. Jesus was not a climber. He sought to teach those who could do nothing for him. Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them.

He took time to bless the children, even over the protests of his disciples.

Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” And He laid His hands on them and departed from there.

When we have a humble heart, the heart of Christ, we will be as interested in the conversion of the poorest man in the neighborhood as the wealthy.

We will be as glad for that new family of common workers as much as the socially prominent. We will not prefer the sophistication of the well-educated over the common sense of the farmer who loves God's word and seeks to express his understanding of it.

Humility changes how we view our own abilities and contributions.

Do not be wise in your own estimation.

The Greek text read literally something like “do not become wise besides oneself.”

Again let's consider some other translations:

Be not wise in your own conceits (ASV).

Do not be conceited (NIV)

Never be conceited (RSV)

Do not be wise in your own opinion (NKJV)

*Most of you know about the heavyweight boxing champion of the world, Muhammad Ali and that he was known for his egotism. On one occasion he was, flying to one of his engagements. During the flight the aircraft ran into foul weather, and mild to moderate turbulence began to toss it about. The passengers were accordingly instructed to fasten their seatbelts immediately. Everyone complied but Ali. Noticing this, the flight attendant approached him and requested that he observe the captain's order, only to hear Ali audaciously respond, “Superman don't need no seatbelt.” The flight attendant did not miss a beat and replied, “Superman don't need no airplane either.” (Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God*, (Word Publ., Dallas: 1994), p. 7)*

Humility does not cause us to cower in corners, but it does cause us to regular reality checks, to remember our limitations.

It is easy to think that every idea we have is brilliant and that everyone else is just too dull to see it. It is easy to think that our lives and actions are beyond scrutiny but every else's life is filled with mistakes. Paul urges us to a more honest assessment of our intellectual or moral superiority. Whatever knowledge we have or moral leadership we claim can in part be measured by who we can convince and who is willing to follow us! And in the end, it is not self-approval that matters, but divine approval.

For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you.

Paul himself was an example of this humility. The man who warns about thinking too highly of himself three times characterized himself in this way:

I am the least of the apostles. - 1 Corinthians 15:9

I am the very least of all the saints. - Ephesians 3:8

I am the foremost of sinners. - 1 Timothy 1:15

Conclusion: It is the humble character of God and of His Son that draws us to him. If as I submitted to you last week, we should admire God for his selflessness, then this is His companion virtue. God is humble; and He wants His children to be humble. In fact, he gives us every incentive to imbibe His nature: *Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. (Jas. 4:10)*

