

Ambassador III - Character

The Fruit of the Spirit--True Greatness

Review

In our first several weeks we discussed how an Ambassador knows the fear of the LORD (Cor. 5).

Knowing the Fear of the LORD, an ambassador:

- would not dare to tamper with His message—the Gospel
- would not dare to misrepresent His Character or otherwise bring reproach upon Christ or His Bride by living immorally or foolishly. (ref. Piper Handout)
- is growing in boldness and courage, putting to death the fear of man.
 - *Tapping into the Spirit's power* ← **Key point/transition of the course**

Next we began our discussion of the fruit of the Spirit. “These qualities” in 2 Peter 1:3-8:

- God is the source of power (v 3)
- Requires effort (v 5)
- Closely tied to the fruit of the Spirit
- When present and increasing--promises effectiveness/fruitfulness and assurance of salvation

Then we focused on love. We contrasted culture's and God's definitions of love.

1. Pop Culture Believes God's Love Is Sentimental (*Trivializes Love*)
2. Pop Culture Believes God's Love Is Universal and Unconditional (*Trivializes Sin*)
3. Pop Culture Believes God's Love Is Me-Centered (*Trivializes Sacrifice*)

Finally--last week we turned our attention to the perils of pride and the promise of humility.

^{ESV} **James 4:6 & 1 Peter 5:5** "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

Pride

- God hates it--the *base/source/foundation of all sin...* and fallen man loves it.
- Defies logic - *madness!*
- Pervasiveness - *everywhere we look, especially inward*
- Imminence -*like darkness, like water filling the hole when you pull your hand out*
- Popularity -*not recognized for what it is and often rewarded rather than rebuked*

Humility

^{ESV} **Isaiah 66:2** All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But *this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.*

White Board Exercise:

What is the relationship between humility, contrition, and fear of the Lord?

Humility is honestly assessing ourselves in light of God's holiness and our sinfulness.¹

[Humility is the result of these two great clarifying truths:

Fear of the Lord is the result if the understanding of God's holiness;

Contrition is the result of our understanding of our sinfulness;...]

Introduction

Hopefully we are beginning to appreciate how serious the problem of pride is, and what a great ally humility can be. So what's with the topic of this week's lesson--true greatness? Are we now going to turn our attention to the pursuit of greatness? *Is that prideful?*

Greatness Redined

Recall last time's discussion about the pervasiveness of pride. Jesus dealt with it among his disciples:

^{ESV} **Mark 9:33-35** And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?"³⁴ But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.³⁵ And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "**If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.**"

Let's look for a moment at the flow of Mark 10 with our "pride detectors" fully engaged.

v 1-12 -- The Pharisees are asking what is a legitimate question, but for evil motives--to test Jesus. [While honest testing is noble, they've demonstrated they are not interested in truth (Luke 20:5-6), only in trapping Jesus in his words so they can destroy him.]

v 13-16-- Children being brought to Jesus, disciples rebuke them, (indignant) Jesus rebukes them.

v 17-31-- Rich Young Ruler (Man)

v 32-34 - Jesus clearly tells them about his impending torture, death, and resurrection.

v 35-45 - James and John's question ... we'll cover this next...

v 46-52 - Jesus heals blind Bartimaeus. (Is Bart proud? ... bold?)

¹ C. J. *Humility: True Greatness*, Multnomah Books, Colorado Springs, CO. 2005. p 22.

So... Jesus is walking ahead of everyone towards is death, states what is going to happen (v32-34) and the next recorded conversation (*hopefully not immediate!*) is the bold question:

^{ESV} **Mark 10:35-45** And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." ³⁶ And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" ³⁷ And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." ³⁸ Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" ³⁹ And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." ⁴¹ And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. ⁴² And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But **whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.** ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Where is pride demonstrated here? -- James and John (mother), the other disciples are *indignant*--just as prideful as J&J.

If Jesus' closest disciples, at a time such as this!, can fall prey to blatant pride, how susceptible are you to it?

What I find especially fascinating and instructive in His next words is that Jesus does not categorically criticize or forbid the desire and ambition to be great. Instead, He clearly redirects that ambition, redefines it, and purifies it: **"But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all."**

We always want to pay careful attention when that word *must* appears in Scripture... something that's required... indispensable... What's required is that you become a servant to others; it means nothing less than becoming the slave of everyone.²

It is a solemn thought that our love for God is measured by our everyday relationships with others. Except as its validity is proven in standing the test of daily life with our fellowmen, our love for God may be found to be a delusion. It is easy to *think* that we humble ourselves before God, but ***our humility toward others is the only sufficient proof that our humility before God is real.***³

The Disciples' Example

On rare occasions expressed true humility--*at moments when Jesus had performed a miracle...*

² Mahaney, p 43.

³ Murray, Andrew, *Humility--The Journey Toward Holiness*, Bethany House, Minneapolis, MN. 2001. p. 16. *emphasis added.*

^{ESV} **Luke 5:8** But *when Simon Peter saw it*, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

Their behavior can teach us some powerful lessons.⁴

First, is the fact that there may be the enthusiastic and active practice of Christianity while humility is still lacking.

We must be vigilant and remember the pervasiveness and imminence of pride. Self and mutual examination is essential.

Second, is the reality that external teaching and personal effort are powerless to conquer pride or create the meek and lowly heart in a person.

They had doubtless tried to learn His lessons, and firmly resolved not to grieve Him again. But all was in vain. To teach them and us the lesson that no outward instruction, not even of Christ himself; no argument, however convincing; no sense of the beauty of humility, however deep; no personal resolve or effort, however sincere and earnest, can cast out pride.

With man it is impossible.

Third, is the revelation that it is only by the indwelling of Christ in His divined humility that we can become truly humble. We have our pride from Adam; we must have our humility from Christ.

With God all things are possible. Again we are back to the recurring theme--we are utterly dependent upon God and His power for change.

The Path to True Greatness--Cultivating Humility⁵

Practicing Christian Disciplines

Daily "quiet times" are a healthy thing as long as they aren't an end to themselves. Mahaney offers some excellent guidance for morning and evening focus (see appendix)

As Each Day Begins

As Each Day Ends

Fasting can also have a humbling effect as we recognize our own weakness (mentally and physically) and dependence upon God.

Studying the Key Truths

Recall the twin truths:

⁴ This section is a summary of chapter 5 of Murray. pp.45-49.

⁵ This section is a summary of chapters 5-11 of Mahaney.

There are two things that are suited to humble the souls of men ... A due consideration of God, and then of ourselves. Of God, in his greatness, glory, holiness, power, majesty, and authority; of ourselves in our mean, abject and sinful condition.⁶

The Holiness of God

We must study the character of Christ until our souls are filled with the love and admiration of His lowliness. We must believe that when we are broken under a sense of pride and our inability to cast it out, Jesus Christ himself will come to impart his grace as a part of His wonderful life within us.⁷

Study the attributes of God. Two outstanding resources: *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer and *The Holiness of God* by R.C. Sproul.

Study the doctrines of grace. God's sovereignty and our depravity and inability are humbling truths revealed in God's Word.

I believe in the doctrine of election, because I am quite certain that, if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen Him; and I am sure He chose me before I was born, or else He never would have chosen me afterwards; and He must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I never could find any reason in myself why He should have looked upon me with special love.⁸

The Sinfulness of Man

Study the doctrine of sin. It's destructive and hardening effects ...

Stop isolating yourselves from people and you will quickly become aware of their sinfulness (all too easy to see) and your own. We are saved and called "unto good works" (Eph 2:10) --loving and serving others to God's glory.

Identifying and Encouraging Evidences of Grace

Are you one who actively searches for evidences of grace (EOG) in others? (Or are you better characterized as a fault-finder?) Are your EOG detectors in need of adjustment? (Are you only attuned to the "spectacular"? Do you not recognize the truly spectacular when you see it?--e.g. the salvation of a sinner--spiritual life imparted to one dead in sin). As you recognize those evidences do you encourage those in whom you see them? Are you discerning humble servants from high visibility (potentially proud) servants? ...

⁶ John Owen--as quoted in Mahaney (as quoted in Packer's *Quest for Godliness*, Crossway, p. 193), p 92.

⁷ Murray, pp. 18-19.

⁸ Charles Spurgeon--as quoted in Mahaney (from Calvin's *A Defense of Calvinism*: www.spurgeon.org/calvinis.htm), p 103.

Inviting and Pursuing Correction

Does your pride cause you to be revolted by this whole idea? Is it time to grow up?

My self-perception is as accurate as a carnival mirror... If I am going to see myself clearly, I need you to hold the mirror of God's Word in front of me... [Heb 3:12-13] clearly teaches that personal insight is the product of community.⁹

^{ESV} **Hebrews 3:12-13** Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

^{ESV} **Proverbs 24:5** A wise man is full of strength, and a man of knowledge enhances his might, ⁶ for by wise guidance you can wage your war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory.

Do you understand the need to ask for correction?

Responding Humbly to Trials

Which are you more aware of, your present suffering or your salvation? Are you not suffering? Just wait, you will. Do you see the wisdom of developing a theology of suffering before hand?

In the darkest night of our soul, we have something to hold on to that Job never knew. We know Christ crucified. Christians have learned that when there seems to be no other evidence of God's love, they cannot escape the cross.¹⁰

Breakout--Teach One Another ...

1. **As you scan through this week's material (and Mahaney's "How to Weaken Pride and Cultivate Humility" appendix:**
 - a. **What appears most difficult (hopeless?) in your own life?**
 - b. **Where among the pride offenders of Mark 10 do you see yourself?**
 - c. **What's the importance of community in all of this?**
 - d. **Focus on God's ability rather than your inability and encourage one another.**

2. **Discuss the importance/relevance of this overall "Amb III-Character" study to being and effective, fruitful, and God honoring ambassador for Christ. [2 Peter 1:3-8]**

⁹ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, p. 54, as quoted by Mahaney, p 127.

¹⁰ D.A. Carson, *How Long* p. 191 as quoted in Mahaney, p 153.

*A List of Suggestions*¹¹

ALWAYS:

1. Reflect on the wonder of the cross of Christ.

AS EACH DAY BEGINS:

2. Begin your day by acknowledging your dependence upon God and your need for God.
3. Begin your day expressing gratefulness to God.
4. Practice the spiritual disciplines—prayer, study of God's Word, worship. Do this consistently each day and at the day's outset, if possible.
5. Seize your commute time to memorize and meditate on Scripture.
6. Cast your cares upon Him, for He cares for you.

AS EACH DAY ENDS:

7. At the end of the day, transfer the glory to God.
8. Before going to sleep, receive this gift of sleep from God and acknowledge His purpose for sleep.

FOR SPECIAL FOCUS:

9. Study the attributes of God.
10. Study the doctrines of grace.
11. Study the doctrine of sin.
12. Play golf as much as possible.
13. Laugh often, and laugh often at yourself.

THROUGHOUT YOUR DAYS AND WEEKS:

14. Identify evidences of grace in others.
15. Encourage and serve others each and every day.
16. Invite and pursue correction.
17. Respond humbly to trials.

¹¹ Mahaney, pp. 171-172.