

# The Greatest Leaders Are The Greatest Servants

Luke 9:43-48

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Although the grace and fruit of humility is not listed among the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, it is undoubtedly a grace/fruit which we as Christians are bound to bear in our hearts/lives (“be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble” 1 Peter 5:5). In other words, one of the reasons why we may not see the growth of grace in our lives is because pride is growing at a quicker pace than humility. One who is growing in humility does not exalt himself/herself before God or man, but counts it the greatest privilege to simply serve the Lord Jesus Christ and others (the Greek word for humility refers to one is lowly-minded before God and before others).

How do you describe a humble person? Calvin wrote this description of a humble person:

That man is truly humble who neither claims any personal merit in the sight of God, nor proudly despises brethren, or aims at being thought superior to them, but reckons it enough that he is one of the members of Christ, and desires nothing more than that the Head alone should be exalted (From Calvin’s Commentary on Matthew 18:4).

Humility, dear ones, is a grace purchased by Christ as a part of our inheritance and implanted within the Christ at the moment of regeneration. Humility is directed first toward God and second toward man. **In respect to God**, the grace/fruit of humility causes the Christian to believe on the one hand that he is nothing apart from Christ, and on the other hand that God is everything. **In respect to man**, the grace/fruit of humility causes the Christian to believe that he is no better than the next man, for he sees himself as simply a beggar who was led (by God’s free grace) to the Bread of Life (Jesus Christ) who alone satisfies the hungering soul of man.

Today we shall take a serious look at the grace/fruit of humility as presented by Christ to His own ministers, the apostles. For those who serve as officers in Christ's church are especially to be those who are characterized by exalting Christ rather than themselves ("He must increase, but I must decrease" John 3:30).

The main points for the sermon this Lord's Day are the following: (1) The Supreme Example Of Humility (Luke 9:43-45); (2) The Instructional Lesson Concerning Humility (Luke 9:46-48).

## **I. The Supreme Example Of Humility (Luke 9:43-45).**

A. Our text begins in Luke 9:43 with the utter amazement of the people who witnessed Christ deliver the son who had been possessed by the demon in Luke 9:37-42. The Lord Jesus then left the area of Caesarea Philippi in the northern most part of Palestine, and began to make His way toward Jerusalem where in about six months He would offer His life a ransom for all those chosen in Christ before the world began and given by the Father to the Son to redeem.

B. As He passed through Galilee with His disciples and headed for Jerusalem, Christ was teaching His disciples and preparing them for those events that would soon lead to His betrayal, death, and resurrection (Luke 9:44; Matthew 17:22-23).

1. This is not the first time that the Lord had taught His disciples explicitly about His death (Luke 9:22). Here, dear child of God, is the supreme example for your own humility before God and before others: the sinless and glorious Son of God humbled himself to be betrayed and to be crucified as a cursed criminal upon a shameful cross in order that He might be highly exalted by His glorious resurrection (Philippians 2:3-11—first humiliation and then exaltation).

2. Who has ever stooped so low, or given up so much in order to serve and rescue such undeserving, unworthy beings as us? Was He forced to do so? Absolutely not. He freely humbled Himself in order to minister to us in our wretched, helpless estate. There was nothing in us that compelled Him to do so; if anything, our sin should have immediately called down upon us His righteous condemnation in eternal torment. No, it was not our worthiness, but His worthiness, His love, His mercy, His grace that brought Him to earth in order to be betrayed to death by His own disciple and by His own people to whom He had showed such kindness (John 1:11-12).

C. Dear ones, if you do not understand and love the humiliation of Christ, you will never know what it is to be truly humble. If Christ's betrayal by His own does not become that which you are willing also to bear for Christ's sake, you will not see the grace/fruit of humility growing in your life. If Christ's cross is not something you are willing to take upon your own shoulders daily and to learn to do so joyfully, you will not grow in the grace/fruit of humility. For if Christ's betrayal and death is an example to us of humility and through His betrayal and death we have life, how can we grow in humility as Christians, if we are not willing to learn of Him?

D. Is it easy to grow in humility? Is it comfortable to grow in humility? Of course not! It goes very much against the pride in all of our lives. In fact, it's impossible with man. But by the grace of God it is not only possible, but a certainty (John 15:5; Philippians 4:13). For the grace of humility was purchased by Christ on the cross for every believer in Jesus Christ. The grace of humility is implanted in the hearts of Christians at their regeneration. You need not cut yourself or abuse yourself in order to receive the grace of humility. You simply need to take hold of Christ who is humility personified. You simply need to learn of Christ and

to grow in Christ. It is through His humiliation (in becoming flesh and dwelling amongst us and suffering and dying for His people), that Christ entered into His exaltation (at His resurrection, ascension, session, and second coming). The so-called gospel heard on tv and radio to such a large extent is one that promises prosperity and exaltation, but conveniently leaves out suffering and humiliation for the Cause of Christ (Acts 14:22; 2 Timothy 2:12). You are not likely to hear more self-exaltation from the lips of men than from the lips of these men—and what is so sad, is that their followers love to hear it, because they want to exalt themselves in the same way.

E. Our text says in Luke 9:45 that the apostles did not understand what Christ taught about His betrayal and death. Why? (1) Because of their own dullness of mind to understand what was the great purpose of Christ as a Suffering Servant. (2) Because of the Jewish opinion they had embraced about an earthly kingdom over which Christ would reign from Jerusalem. They did not want to hear about the suffering Servant (Isaiah 53). They wanted to hear about the reigning Messiah (Psalm 2). However, it was by means of Christ's suffering in the place of guilty sinners and paying their debt in full as a Priest that would lead to His being exalted to the highest heaven to reign as King over the church and the nations to the benefit of the church.

F. The text also says in Luke 9:45 that the apostles were afraid to ask the Lord about His betrayal and death as well. Why? (1) Perhaps they feared being reproved by Christ as Peter was (Matthew 16:23; Psalm 141:5). Dear ones, the reproofs of Christ are our salvation and for our welfare ("reproofs of instruction are the way of life" Proverbs 6:23). (2) Perhaps they feared knowing the truth because of what it would cost them. They may have preferred to remain in ignorance, rather than to be further instructed in the truth in order to avoid more suffering. How we

at times also fall into the trap of thinking, “Lord, keep me ignorant, for it is a more comfortable path. It requires less of me.” However, the one who is truly humble cries out, “Teach me Thy ways O Lord. Lead me in the ways of truth and righteousness whatever it may cost me. For I desire at whatever the cost to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.”

## **II. The Instructional Lesson Concerning Humility (Luke 9:46-48).**

A. Christ and His disciples had now come to Capernaum and while in a house (Mark 9:33) Christ supernaturally knew the hearts of His disciples in regard to a recent discussion the disciples had been having as to who among them was the greatest in the kingdom of God. So He asks them: “What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way (Mark 9:33). But the disciples were silent, perhaps out of some sense of shame at having been caught (Mark 9:34). The parallel account in Matthew 18:1 actually says that the disciples came to Christ and put to Him the question. Well, who approached whom first? I would suggest that the Lord first asked the disciples, “What were you disputing about on the road?” Initially, they were silent, but then they did soon after come and put the question to Christ Himself as Matthew says in 18:1. There is no contradiction—it is impossible that there would be, for the Spirit of God breathed out the very words to be written by the apostles and prophets in Scripture.

B. If this whole matter does not demonstrate the sinful weakness and frailty of the apostles, I don’t know what does. If it were not so sad, it would almost be comical. Here were grown men, yea even the chosen apostles of Christ debating over which one of them would hold the #1 position in Christ’s kingdom. They had not only given in to the temptation to think about their own greatness in the kingdom of heaven, but even gave expression to such thoughts in actually debating the issue. Even

when we as Christians fall into the snare of the devil to think of ourselves as better than another Christian, we are usually more subtle and do not usually engage in some debate as to why we believe we are better or first in the kingdom of God.

C. The disciples (along with many Jews of that time) believed that Christ would establish Himself on the throne of David in Jerusalem, crushing the Roman invaders and idolaters (John 6:15). And the big question for them was, Who would be Christ's chief minister, His right hand man? Perhaps Peter who was one of the three within the inner circle and had as the spokesman for the group declared Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God? Or perhaps James or John, who were the other two of the inner three and who Jesus called "the sons of thunder"? Or perhaps Andrew, who was the first follower of Christ among the apostles? Or perhaps Matthew, who had been a tax collector and would have some knowledge of political policy? Or perhaps Judas Iscariot, who was the treasurer among the disciples? Or perhaps Simon the Zealot, who had been associated with a political party dedicated to the overthrow of the Romans? No doubt the various disciples gave reasons why he should be the chief minister in the kingdom. But they did not even stop at debating amongst themselves, but gathered their shamelessness together to ask Christ directly the question according to Matthew 18:1. How much of ourselves is seen and exalted in our discussions with one another, or in our debates with others? Unless we ask others, or take account of what we say and how we say it, whether we are clothed with humility or with pride, we will likely continue down the same path. Discussions about the truth should not be about you or me, but about Christ and His gracious revelation to us.

D. Consider again the patience of the Lord as He tenderly sits down to instruct His ministers in training them about the grace of

humility. How would you react if you heard your own children arguing about who was the greatest? Or they came to you and put that question to you? Compare what your reaction might be to the reaction of Christ in Mark 9:35: Read it. He sits down and calls the twelve unto Himself. He doesn't publicly embarrass them and expose their sin to all. The Lord did not react in a fit of rage, "Are you guys just plain stupid!" If the Lord was patient with these weak but foolish disciples, will He not also be with us as we stumble along the way? He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). How patient are you, husbands, in teaching your wives? Or parents in teaching your children? Or supervisors in teaching your associates? Or we as ministers and elders in teaching the flock entrusted to us? The patience of the Lord with us is a further incentive to our growth in humility with others (not to beat them with whips or lashes with angry tongues, but to patiently instruct as an act of love to Christ and to one another). Yes, patience will not be appropriate where there is clear resistance to and rebellion against Christ's truth, but let us first exhaust patience (especially in private conversations) before we firmly stand against the errors of others (speaking the truth in love).

E. Here the Lord first instructs His disciples by precept and then by an outward sign (or object lesson).

1. The Lord instructs by precept (Mark 9:35).

a. The disciples had asked about greatness from a perspective of selfish ambition and vain-glory, but the Lord it would appear answers their question from a true perspective of greatness in God's kingdom. Jesus teaches us that there is a sense in which any man may seek after true spiritual greatness in Christ's kingdom. For, dear ones, every Christian ought to desire to be found faithful by the Lord and honored by the Lord. Every Christian ought to desire to be used of the Lord to build His kingdom. And the greatest in Christ's kingdom are not necessarily those ministers and elders who administer the keys of the

kingdom, but rather those who lower themselves the most in order to serve Christ and others.

b. Christ herein abolishes the supremacy of any one of the apostles. Thus, He destroys the false teaching of the primacy of Peter and the papacy as flowing from Peter. This would have been a most opportune time to explain to the disciples that Peter was the greatest and was the chief apostle, yea the visible head of the church if such were the case. But the Lord not only does not teach it here, but does not teach it in Mark 10:35 (James and John) or in Luke 22:24 (at the Last Supper). The papacy and prelacy (i.e. a hierarchy in the ministry) is herein condemned by the Lord. Equality of ministers is the norm to be followed. How ministers and elders must especially beware of the sin of desiring preeminence over the brethren (like Diotrephes in 3 John 9; note how Peter speaks of himself in 1 Peter 5:2-3). The greatest ministers and elders are the greatest servants in putting aside all selfish ambition in serving Christ and ministering to the flock. And those who aspire to serve in an office of the church need not the title or office to be the greatest servant of all in all humility laying down one's life for the sheep. Such loving service that is blind to selfish ambition will be recognized by the church.

c. How different it is in the world. If one wants to be first, one must climb up that ladder stepping on others in order to get to the top. How wonderful are the ways of the Lord in that He works by contraries: in order to be great, you must be the servant of all; in order to live, you must die; in order to be exalted, you must be humbled; in order to be glorified, you must suffer.

2. The Lord instructs by an outward sign (Luke 9:47-48).

a. This was a little child small enough for Christ to embrace in His arms (Mark 9:36), and yet the child was able to stand beside Him (Luke 9:47). Perhaps this is a child we would call a toddler. There are two points about the child that Jesus uses to instruct the disciples in regard to humility.



1. First, “Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:4). Now although a toddler is not sinless, nevertheless, a toddler typically is not puffed up about his gifts or rank. No doubt, that will develop in the child as he/she grows. So are we to be if we would be humble and therefore great in God’s kingdom.

2. Second, “Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great” (Luke 9:48). The toddler of a king will not choose all on its own to avoid the toddler of a peasant, nor despise the toddler of the peasant as inferior to himself. If we would be truly great in God’s kingdom (in the eyes of the Lord), we must serve and minister to children, or to those who are young in the faith, or to those who have little by way of gifts or resources. We must serve and minister to fellow brothers and sisters simply because they are the children of God, and not for what we might receive from them.

In conclusion, how do we stir up the grace of humility in our souls?

1. We must not seek humility as an end in itself. It is a means to being Christ-like. Earnestly pray that it would grow in our lives—Yes! However, we must seek to be filled with Christ and to be like Christ, who humbled Himself more than any one has ever done. If our eye is constantly upon ourselves, rather than upon Christ, we may end up making humility an idol that we pursue. We will not be filled with Christ without communing with Christ.

2. We must be honest and transparent before God and with ourselves about our pride. We must sincerely ask the Lord to show us the ugliness of our pride in all the many ways in which we exalt ourselves, draw attention to ourselves, put down others, seek the approval of others, or pursue promotion out of ambition rather than out of love to serve Christ

and others. A wife, a husband, or a close friend may be helpful in this regard.

3. We must learn that being like Christ means becoming a servant more than becoming a leader. For the greatest leaders are the greatest servants. The greatest leaders in the home, in the church, at work, and in a nation are not those who demand the respect of others, but who through loving service earn the trust and respect of others.

May this be our goal in life: Christ must increase, and I must decrease.

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