

## Actual Victory in Christ

(November 7, 2023)

I've written two recent articles on choosing *humility* or *self-exaltation* [1][2], but I'm not done. In fact, in some ways, I'm just beginning because understanding the difference between choosing humility or self-exaltation is tantamount to understanding what it means to *be* a Christian, especially in this day and age where the world seems to have moved to a post-Christian era. It is *that* important and how I wish I would have not merely known this, but lived by it for years rather than simply beginning to understand it after 53 years of being a Christian!

The truth of the matter as far as the Bible is concerned and specifically, Jesus' own teachings on the subject of humility or self-exaltation is more than simply *profound*. The concept is literally the foundation upon which Christianity rests. Without the proper attitude and understanding of just how diametrically opposed humility vs Self are to one another, we cannot live a life of victory in Christ consistently (though not necessarily *perfectly*).

Jesus repeatedly taught that we should "lose" our life and "deny" ourselves. We should take no thought about our Selves. In other words, don't feed Self. Didn't Jesus also note we need to "lose" our lives to *find* it in **Matthew 16:25**?

25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

This "finding" ultimately means *salvation*. We receive salvation by denying and ignoring the dictates of Self because we then see the truth of the matter that we need Someone outside of Self to save us. Focusing on Self all the time keeps us from seeing the truth here. This is why God has to open a person's eyes from outside of us.

In the **Matthew 16:25** verse, Jesus is speaking of *salvation*. If we want eternal life, we must be willing to go against our natural proclivities and reach out to Jesus, denying Self's demands that we appease it. Self wants our attention and obedience. Self is diametrically and continually opposed to God. Self is "instead of" God and is probably the biggest type of antichrist that exists (aside from the coming Antichrist who will be the epitome of Self). Self will not go away quietly or easily. It must be put to death by constantly seeking the opposite: *humility*.

A longtime reader sent me a note about his father and a truth he learned years ago, and from a Catholic priest, though the reader's dad was not even Catholic. The priest essentially told him, "*And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted*" (**Matthew 23:12**).

It is when people see the truth that they need Jesus that they begin to consider denying the Self within them. When they deny Self to embrace Jesus, they become saved. What they are literally doing is saying that Self is a liar and Jesus is the Truth so they turn their backs on Self. They come to understand that what Self has been telling them for years is all based on lies. Jesus has and is the Truth and He says that

unless a person is born again (from above, spiritually), they cannot see (or enter) the Kingdom of Heaven (**John 3:3**). This was said to Nicodemus, a spiritual leader within the nation of Israel during Jesus' day.

So, once a person becomes a Christian, they may sense a real joy that they've never had before. It buoys them up and carries them along. However, this often fades and daily living remains. Because I was one who had that truly uplifting experience after receiving salvation that did carry me along, when it began to fade, I thought something was wrong. So I spent years chasing after it, which is what led me into the Charismatic Movement. Those folks seemed happy and content and always had a smile and a cheerful word. Unfortunately, their theology, in my opinion, is seriously off, because feelings tend to elevate Self. Why? Because you're always looking inward to gain some sort of satisfaction about your Christian life and experience. Jesus' way of humility doesn't do that.

In my first article on this subject (linked #1 below), I talked about the fact that trying to lose weight by avoiding sugar was not at all working. The more I thought about not having sugary treats, the more I wanted them. There had to be a different method. I eventually discovered it on the bathroom scale. Watching my weight reduce became the reward to avoiding sugary treats. It helped me avoid the things that packed the weight on. My focus went from *sugary treats* to the *bathroom scale* and I noted in that previous article that both are "rewards." The sugary treat is a reward because it tastes good and satisfies, but that reward comes with nasty side effects like weight gain, increased blood sugar levels, fatigue, foggy mind, etc. The bathroom scale offers a reward as well and that is to watch my weight go down. Along with that, the other rewards include lower blood sugar levels, lower cholesterol, clear mind, overall better health, etc.

In my most recent article fleshing out this subject (#2 below), I stated this:

So how to avoid sin and increase humility? By focusing on the positive reward (increased humility), which then becomes the impetus to ignore temptation and do what is right. So we are not focusing on *not* sinning. We focus instead on gaining humility.

Humility is not inherent within us. We are not born with humility, but must actively *seek* humility. Humility is outside Self. It is not part of Self at all. It must be sought by us and in all situations. We must also understand that Self is resident within to keep us from seeking and gaining more humility. It's one or the other; that simple.

Unlike my involvement in the Charismatic Movement where I *thought* I was seeking God and humility, I was actually focused on Self and my feelings. It was a deceptive way to make me think I was on the correct path but when all is said and done, I was simply exalting Self.

In truth, Self does not like it when we ignore it and will retaliate by creating tension within us, doing what it can to refocus our minds on Self. The enemy of Self is humility.

Let's take a quick look at one incident in the life of a person who came in contact with God the Son and was forever changed because of it due to the fact that the person deliberately chose *humility* refusing to make excuses for himself. The man's name was Zacchaeus (**Luke 19:1-10**).

Jesus had just come in from Jericho and we immediately read about *chief* tax collector named Zacchaeus. We know that tax collectors were despised by Jews and many were Jews themselves. Tax collectors were able to keep a percentage of what they took in legally for their services, giving proceeds to Rome but keeping anything above what they collected. Obviously, some tax collectors took far more than they should have so that doubled the hatred they received from average Jews.

Zacchaeus was rich (v 2). How did he become rich? Could he have been one who took far more than he was supposed to take? We don't know. However, he'd obviously heard about Jesus through the grapevine and wanted to see Him. Problem was that Zacchaeus was very short so he did what he could to get above the crowd and that involved climbing a sycamore tree.

When Jesus passed underneath where Zacchaeus was in the tree, Jesus stopped and called out to him.

Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house. (v 5)

Fascinating, isn't it? Jesus knew that Zacchaeus was the guy who he would spend time with at his home that day. It is interesting to me that tax collectors in general appreciated what Jesus offered (Matthew, etc.), and responded positively to Him. Now it is interesting also that people could have accused Jesus of wanting to go to Zacchaeus' house because He knew His every need would be met; good food, servants to wash His feet, etc. But clearly, this was *not* the reason at all. The reason had to do with Zacchaeus' *salvation*.

Immediately, people began to complain, "*He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner*" (v 7). We don't know who these people were, but I have to wonder if Pharisees, Scribes or other religious leaders were in the crowd. They seemed to show up wherever Jesus was just to give Him trouble. It didn't seem to bother Jesus though but before Jesus spoke, Zacchaeus responded to the grumblings of the people.

Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold. (v 8)

What Zacchaeus said here is remarkable and proof of his genuine repentance and seeking humility. He was actually promising to give *half* his wealth to the poor and if it turned out he had taken anything from anyone through cheating them, he would restore it *fourfold*. These are not mere words. I'm aware that translators and commentators disagree on what is actually meant here, but I take it to mean that he was more than willing to part with *half* of all he owned. The Mosaic Law only required 20% not 50%!

What prompted Zacchaeus to take this approach? Only one thing: *humility*. He was desperately seeking it, reached for it and embraced it! He ignored Self's desires to remain aloof, rich, and "right" about everything. He pushed Self aside roughly and in fact, did *more* than what was right according to the Mosaic Law. A person cannot do this unless gaining humility is the goal!

We Christians need to adjust our thinking. We need to see *humility* as the overarching goal for victorious Christian living. We need to understand it's not easy but if we keep humility as the constant reward, we will find it becoming easier as time goes on.

We need to end the debate with Self, push past it and reach for and embrace the humble way that Jesus tells us will end up in our exaltation. Isn't that strange? The way to be exalted in the end, is to embrace humility constantly. In every situation we face, we should seek humility. This is what the narrow, difficult path that Jesus speaks of is all about. It's not about giving into Self. It's not about gritting our teeth and doing things with Self-effort. It's about denying Self in order to reach for and gain more humility because this is the very essence of Christ's character. Embracing humility *is* the reward that leads us along the narrow difficult path.

**Isaiah 11** tells us of the Lord's inner character and strength.

1 There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,  
And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.  
2 The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him,  
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
The Spirit of counsel and might,  
The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.

How did our Lord gain those qualities outlined in **verse 2**? The very last line: *The spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord*. You cannot fear the Lord without being humble. The two go hand in hand. Jesus' fear of (offending) the Father pushed Him to always without fail, reach for and embrace the humble way in every situation. He knew this delighted His Father. He knew this was the only path to choose. He denied Self at every turn, choosing instead to please the Father and gain more humility. Jesus *learned* humility (**Philippians 2:5-11**). If we claim the title Christian, we must do the same.

[1] <https://studygrowknowblog.com/2023/10/27/i-did-it-again/>

[2] <https://studygrowknowblog.com/2023/11/03/two-gates-humility-or-self-exaltation/>