

## Best Approach

(December 5, 2023)

I recently attended a meeting with a group of pastors from my area. I'm on the local Baptist Association Pulpit Supply list for pastors in the area who may need to find a sub for times they are gone. As part of that, I was invited to attend the association's monthly meetings where the pastors come together to discuss aspects of ministry, both good and bad. The discussion the other morning involved the reasons why pastors choose to leave the ministry itself, based on a Barma poll that provided numerous reasons why pastors did so. Topping the list was the tremendous stress of the job itself and the feelings of isolation that often visit pastors because of their position and job. It was a very insightful meeting and I'm glad I attended. I'm looking forward to future meetings.

At one point during the meeting, one of the pastors offered that in a previous church, he had some issues with congregants that often come with the pastorate. In his latest church, he decided beforehand that he was going to do everything he could to simply "love people."

As I listened to him, it hit me. What that pastor was saying was that every day, whether he actually did this knowingly or not, he approached his ministry literally asking and expecting God to *humble* him with every situation he faced. The most important aspect of ministry is a willingness by the pastor to allow the Lord to *humble* that minister every day, throughout the day. It comes down to this: *seeing others as better than yourself*.

I know I've touched on this subject recently in several blog articles I've written, but the Lord seems to continue to flesh it out for me. From what I am understanding, *everything* hinges on our level of humility. For instance, no one comes to Jesus for salvation without first realizing that they actually *need* salvation and that begins with some sense of humility. By ourselves, we are incapable of saving ourselves. We must go to Another, One who has provided salvation through His sinless life, death and ultimate resurrection. We go to Him because there is nothing we can do, and without Him, we have zero chance of receiving salvation at all.

So humility (whatever degree is in us or dawns on us at the time prior to receiving salvation), helps us realize our need for Jesus. That same humility then brings us to the foot of the cross whereby we acknowledge our woeful and helpless state. We come to understand that Jesus suffered and died, taking on the Father's wrath so that we do not have to experience that wrath. We prayerfully come to Him with praise and thanksgiving for His willingness to die for us, in our place and we gladly receive the only salvation that is offered. Our eyes are opened because God reached into our lives and opened them, allowing us to see our need and His answer to our need.

Without any humility, we would *never* come to realize that we need Jesus. It *starts* with humility and it *continues* with humility (or should) for the remainder of our Christian lives. In fact, whether we like it or not, humility should be a welcomed "shadow" if you will to our life from salvation onward, until we leave this life and see our Lord with new eyesight (that was only *faith* in this life).

As I look back over my life (from my current age of 66), I realize more than ever that humility is something I've *lacked* on a daily consistent basis. In other words, when trials, temptations and difficulties would come into my life, I often resisted those things and at times, became an immovable object in my approach against them. I didn't want to deal with them. I wanted God to remove them. Of course, God's point in allowing them in the first place was to fulfill His ideal for me, which is that I should *grow in Christ*, to become *like* Him. Isn't that the correct goal for all Christians? Paul lays it out like this in his first letter to the Corinthian believers.

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; 3 for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal? (1 Corinthians 3:1-4)

The Corinthian believers were well known for their *lack* of humility. In fact, as Paul notes, they often acted very carnal. So have I.

One of the things I realized I've had issues with concerning the pastorate is the *people* in that congregation. It doesn't matter what church it is because there's probably going to be at least one person (or more), who wants things done their way and if they don't get their way, they will put up some measure of stink. They will act just like the Corinthians or worse.

I've been a Youth Director and an Associate Pastor. I know exactly how people can and often unfortunately *do* act in churches. It can be a constant source of agitation for a pastor who then always feels like he's called to "put out fires" instead of *shepherding* the flock. Imagine watching sheep and seeing several of them fighting all the time, when you just want them to get along, eat and do sheep things. Worse, is when one or two sheep might turn on the shepherd and attack. It's rare, but it happens.

But one thing I've begun to realize is that if God calls a man to the pastorate, he wants that man to approach that pastoral position with *humility*. That means at every turn, God wants that man to ask, "*Lord, how are you going to use situations and people to humble me today?*" The goal is to be as much like Jesus as possible in this life and that means, responding to situations and people as He would respond, not the way our fallen natures wants us to respond.

Now that I've begun realizing that, I'm starting to understand something fascinating. It's not just pastors who have to approach things in life with humility. *All Christians* need to do that. However, the pastor is often the point man in reflecting the character of God in that church setting. People should see with that pastor a desire in him to be increasingly humble. This can *only* happen when situations come up that he becomes part of, whether it's between members in the body or between him and another member or two in that body.

Clearly, it's not just pastors that need to do this, but *all Christians*. Too many of us simply don't. I include myself in that group. I have not excelled in seeking humility the way God wants. In that sense, I have *grieved* the Lord because of my consistent failure to seek humility.

However, as I wrote about several weeks ago, the Lord finally was able to get through to me with a situation in which I escalated a situation that existed instead of allowing it to die out. [1][2][3][4] It is astounding to me how the Lord used that situation and the results of it as a continual *marker* for me, like a buoy in the ocean. I want to stress that it in no way *condemns* me, but is a serious *reminder* of just how insidiously bad a lack of humility is for our spiritual lives.

Let's consider Paul's words in **1 Corinthians 13** for a moment. Most of us understand that as the great chapter on *love*. Paul's segue into **chapter 13** from **chapter 12** hinges on these words: "*And yet I show you a more excellent way.*" Paul then spends an entire next chapter outlining for us that excellent way, which is the way of love.

In reality though, there is something that acts as the foundation upon which authentic love is built. That foundation is actually *humility*. We can fake a lot of things. We can pretend to be nice to people. We can pretend we care. We can say the right words that make people *think* we are concerned about them. In essence, people can be great actors without ever having taken one acting class. This is often done because we want people to think good of us. We want others to *believe* what we often project to them.

To authentically love people means we have to start with true *humility*. A humble heart means exactly what Paul says when He says we should see others as being better than ourselves (**Philippians 2:3-11**). Jesus offers the same approach in **Matthew 5-7** as well. But note what Paul says.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

Paul's point is very simple and clear. If our motivation for doing things is based not on humility but on putting on a show for others so they'll think well of us, it's totally worthless. He continues by making these statements.

4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

All of what Paul says in the above text is based on *humility* and that humility needs to flow from a changed heart or it will merely be an exercise in *acting*. Authentic love flows only from authentic humility, which is then seen as love for God and love for others. We cannot truly say we love God if we

don't actually love others and want what is best for them, can we? In fact, there are probably some people who could do a fair job of imitating what Paul describes in **verses 4-7** by simply *acting* that way or by putting it on from the *outside*. However, God sees their heart and even that person knows they're simply acting. While others might see their efforts to love as "admirable," in truth, it doesn't pass the muster because it doesn't flow from an authentically humble heart, a heart that desires to serve as He served us. It may *look* good on the outside but it's only skin deep and therefore, superficial. It lacks substance.

The picture of true love that Paul describes is based on a heart that literally *seeks* greater and greater humility, steadily becoming more and more like Jesus Himself! That person is wholly affected because they've come to understand that the more humble they become, the more they become *like* Jesus! Isn't that the very essence of being and living life as a Christian?

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

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

[3] <https://studygrowknowblog.com/2023/11/07/actual-victory-in-christ/>

[4] <https://studygrowknowblog.com/2023/11/17/emotional-virtue-equals-exalting-self/>