

Humility and Openness in the life of Paul

We know Paul's history and the magnitude of his sin prior to his conversion:

Acts 7:58 - 8:3

When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, he fell asleep.

Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death.

And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.

Years after Christ revealed himself to Paul on the road to his Damascus, Paul was taken up to the third heaven (2 Corinthians 2) and received a revelation from God directly and the unveiling of many mysteries:

- Christ and the church (Ephesians 5)
- Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 3)
- The resurrection (1 Corinthians 15)
- Israel being hardened until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in (Romans 11)

Despite the unique position that Paul had as a result of his stewardship of the mysteries and revelations, this man did everything he could to humble himself so that it wouldn't be himself who was exalted in the eyes of men, but rather The Lord Jesus:

1. He reminds the church of his past sin and position among the apostles and all of the saints:

1 Corinthians 15:7-9

then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

1 Timothy 1:12-16

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of

all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

Galatians 1:13

For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it;

Ephesians 3:8

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,

-note: Was Paul's sin , like ours, under the blood of Christ, forgiven, and as far as the east from the west? Absolutely, however Paul wants to ensure that he is not exalted.

- While we do not need to *always* walk around informing others of the depth of our sin, it is extremely important for those in leadership to be humble and honest about who they have been and who they are apart from Christ. As we know from human history, men are always wanting to appoint a king to intercede between them and The Lord.

When Paul hears of those in the church who are creating factions and aligning themselves under him vs. the other apostles, he humbles himself and redirects them back to Christ:

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.

Not only was Paul open and honest about his past sin, he was open and honest about his *current* struggles with sin in the flesh:

- Romans 7:14-25

For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good

dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

-Paul's humility and openness here not only keeps him from being exalted, but also is an example from his own life and testimony of how Christ has set him free from the law of sin and death.

- Testimonies that are real and honest, especially current ones, are used by The Lord to show His power and faithfulness and strength in the midst of our weakness. Look at Paul's testimony on his struggles and the need to depend on Christ for strength:

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

Here we see that Paul opened his life up to be examined by those in the churches:

1 Corinthians 4:1-4:

4 Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. 3 But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by *any* human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. 4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. 5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, *but wait* until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God.

- He declares that he is not aware or conscious of any current sin against himself that would be found in an examination, but defers that to the examination of the Lord who can convict him of sin through the working of the Holy Spirit.

- Note that Paul says that the Lord will eventually bring to light things “hidden in the darkness” and to “disclose the motives of men’s hearts”.
- Part of walking in the light is to disclose and make evident the motives of our hearts, as this is usually where we are harboring sin. Once disclosed and made evident, we can confess the sin, repent, and receive the cleansing from the Lord.

James 4:10

Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

1 Peter 5:6

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

Philippians 2:3-13

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Do not Challenge/Provoke one another

Let us not become boastful, challenging (provoking) one another, envying one another. (Galatians 5:26)

Clothe yourselves with Humility towards one another

You younger men, likewise be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. (1 Peter 5:5)

Colossians 3:12-15

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.