
Others First -- Spouses

Philippians 2

Introduction John and Mary have been married for 10 years. John has had to give up his leisure time activities, bowling, softball, and golf, because he has been too busy climbing the corporate ladder. He is working 60-70 hours a week. Along with the promotions comes more stress and pressure to perform. John's outlet for the stress is the toys he has – a new sports car, a home theatre in the recreation room of their new, larger home, and gorgeous leather furniture on which to lay as he camps in front of the TV. John works hard and gives everything he has to the job. He resents having to give so much of himself at work, but his boss is a very demanding man, and Mary has a lifestyle to which she has become very accustomed. She is also very demanding. They have two young children, and between home schooling the older and running after the younger, all the housework, volunteering one day a week at the local crisis pregnancy center, and teaching the morning 2 and 3 year olds class at church, Mary is exhausted at the end of everyday.

John has developed a routine upon arriving at home. Because he works so late, everyone else has already eaten. He says hi to everyone as he quickly dodges the whining kids, trying not to allow them to touch him in case they have dirty hands. He makes his way to the bedroom and changes clothes into something comfortable. Then he retires to the theatre room for an evening of vegging in front of the TV. Mary will bring his dinner in and try to start a conversation, but gets discouraged at the grunts she gets. She leaves and tries to keep the kids quiet for the rest of the evening. After she has the kids in bed, she will try once more to engage John in meaningful conversation, but it is normally of no use. On this particular evening as he passes the kitchen on his way to the home theatre room, he yells, “Hey hon, when are you going to get me some dinner? I have had the worst day ever. And I am starving! And where is the newspaper? The kids must have run off with it. And you know that I don't like it when you have the laundry sitting in my room. When you bring me my dinner, you can take the laundry out with you and put it where I've told you to. I've told you at least a hundred times. How many more times do I have to tell you about it?”

Also on this particular day, Mary has had one of the worst days of her life as a mother. The two kids were horrible. The older one refused to do his school work and the younger one cried about everything. She had to go to the store for food and the kids whined and cried the whole time. She was in a hurry and the kids were tired, so they complained about not getting this kind of cereal and they didn't like that kind of soup, and when was she going to make the cookies she promised to make? She was so embarrassed. And since she was running late for an appointment with another home schooling mom and the kids were demanding lunch, she left a bag of groceries on the floor. One of the kids tore open the cereal and spilled it all over the floor. Plus, the washing machine quit working in the middle of the load she was running. To say that John's request was the last straw is an understatement! Hence, the war of words and wits began.

Mary made her way to the doorway of the home theatre room and yelled, “You lazy, selfish, self-centered bum. You have no idea what I go through everyday. I'm the only one who is

raising these kids. I'm the only one who does the housework. And who do you think washes and folds your clothes? Your mother? All you have to do is get up out of the bed every morning, get showered, put on the clothes that I wash, and go to work. You get to go out to lunch with all of your friends. Do you have any idea when was the last time I got to go out to lunch with my friends without these kids? And then, you come home at any ole time you please and expect to be treated and served like a king. You never help me with these kids, or any of the housework. Would it be too much to ask for you to at least take your dirty dishes to the sink? Oh, what's the use. You don't care about anyone but yourself, you pig-headed slob."

This did not sit well with John. He countered, "And who do you think makes all of this possible? Being a stay-at-home mom doesn't come anywhere close to the high-powered executives that I have to bow down to all day. If I don't do my job, and do it well, then, not only will we loose *this* happy home and everything that *you* enjoy, but the company will go down the tubes. And I suppose you would cheer. Everyone else knows how hard I work. Why don't *you* give me a little respect? Why can't *you* see how tired I am and the amount of stress I'm under. *I'm* selfish and self-centered? Look who's calling the kettle black? You have always been the one who is waited on around here. It's been that way ever since we got married." The rest of the conversation is not worth repeating. It is one in a long list that is getting longer, happening more frequently, and becoming more nasty.

This is the last of our messages for this year's Family Enrichment Conference. We are looking at **Others First** as it has to do with our spouses. I would like to use John and Mary as our case study this evening and see how we can help them to apply the **Others First** command as we find it in Philippians 2. Let's ask God to help us as we apply his Word to life as we know it. <PRAY>

Review of last week's main points

The first thing that we must see is that God is at work helping both John and Mary to obey Philippians 2. They are to count others more significant than themselves, and to look to the interest of others. Wayne Mack, in his new book, *Humility – The Forgotten Virtue*, says that God uses many things to humble us. He suggests that God allows other people to rebuke and criticize us, as well as misunderstand and misrepresent us.¹ We have taught that a husband and wife are brother and sister in Christ first, who are also able to participate in the most intimate of relationships on earth. I am not saying that marriage has as its purpose to sanctify you, but I am saying that no one knows us better than our spouses. It is no wonder that God would use our spouses to help us in this matter of putting others first.

Last week I made the point that the key to putting others first is humility. I get that from verses 3 and 8. In verse 3 we are told to humble ourselves and in verse 8 we find the supreme example of humility which is found in Christ. His example is one of being a servant and being a sacrifice.

The opposite of humility is pride. Stuart Scott defines pride as "the mindset of self (a master's mindset rather than that of a servant): a focus on self and the service of self, a pursuit

¹ Wayne Mack, *Humility – The Forgotten Virtue*, pages 132-135.

of self-recognition and self-exaltation, and a desire to control and use all things for self. Proud people believe that all things should be *from* them, *through* them, and *to* them or *for* them. Pride is competitive toward others, and especially toward God. A proud person believes that life is all about *them* – their happiness, their accomplishments, and their worth.”²

On the other hand, Stuart Scott defines humility as “the mindset of Christ (a servant’s mindset): a focus on God and others, a pursuit of the recognition and the exaltation of God, and a desire to glorify and please God in all things and by all things He has given. Humble people have their focus on others out of a desire to love and glorify God. They have no need to be recognized or approved. They have no need to elevate self, knowing that they have been forgiven and that God’s love has been undeservedly and irrevocably set on them.”³

I don’t think that there is anyone here who would say that John and Mary were exhibiting humility. So how can we help them to change from “Me First” to “Others First”?

Practical help for change

Last week I also mentioned 5 points that we need to consider as we work to put others first:

1. We must evaluate ourselves truthfully.
2. We must put ourselves in the other person’s place.
3. We must work hard to be obedient.
4. We must be motivated by the joy of serving God and by completing the joy of others.
5. We must remember how much Jesus did for us and the example He left.

Those of you who have been around the Chapel for any length of time are familiar with the teaching of the heart. But let me briefly review the concepts. Please turn your Bibles to Hebrews 4 verses 11-13: <READ>

Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Hebrews tells us that our hearts do two things: they believe and they want. Our actions, choices, and emotions come from what we believe to be true and what we want. So in order to evaluate ourselves truthfully and put ourselves in the other person’s place, we must change what we believe to be true and what we want. We must believe what really is true and want what pleases God, not ourselves.

² Stuart Scott, *The Exemplary Husband*; page 179.

³ Stuart Scott, *The Exemplary Husband*; page 187.

So let's see how we can help John in his situation. What does it appear that John believes to be true? It seems he believes that he is more important than his wife. He believes that he can talk any way he wants to his wife. It's OK for him to give the best of his life to his job, and not his family. It's OK if he doesn't develop an intimate relationship with his wife. It's OK for him to believe that he doesn't have to sacrifice and serve his wife and her needs. He believes that she should be serving him. He believes that he deserves peace and quiet at home. He believes that he doesn't have to be involved in the rearing of the children. It's OK to be irritable and impatient. John believes that he is a self-made man. It is his hard work and dedication that have taken him to the place where he is. There are probably other things he believes to be true. But these are a good start.

The next question is, are these things really true, or is John believing lies? I'm not going to take you to the specific Scripture references, but I am going to list the things that are true in John's situation. John is not more important than his wife, and in fact, he is the one who must be serving and sacrificially loving her. John must be careful to speak to his wife only in ways that are good for building her up, and as are fitting for the occasion, so that it will minister grace to her. It is a godly testimony for John to be the best employee that he can be, but not at the expense of his wife and children. He must be on his game when it comes to his family. John should be Mary's best friend. She should be able to say without hesitation that John is her best friend. She can tell him anything and he is free and open to tell her anything. John doesn't deserve anything but eternal hell. He is Christ's ambassador and must be mindful of his responsibilities to serve Christ well, especially at home. Scripture is clear that both parents are charged with the responsibility to rear their children. This is not woman's work. Neither is the housework. John should be looking out for his wife to see if she legitimately needs his help in keeping the home running in a God-honoring way. And John should be the picture of patience, always learning about his wife, teachable, serving, and building others up. John should also realize that he has nothing that he has done. Everything that he has, and is, and will be is from the Hand of God alone. This is what John should be believing, since this is the truth.

So that is potentially what John is thinking. What does John want? It appears that John wants to be free to live his life in comfort, without interruption, and being treated in the manner in which he deserves. He wants recognition from his boss, he wants love and admiration from his wife, and he wants kids that will parent themselves. Are these God-honoring wants? The answer is no.

John must want to minister to his wife in a self-sacrificial way, love her as Christ loved the church, parent children for the glory of God, and want to bring joy to the heart of God and his wife. In short, John must want to be a servant and be sacrificing both his rights and his reputation, just as Christ did.

How about Mary. What does it appear that Mary believes to be true? It appears that Mary believes that she is destined for a life of servitude to her husband and children. She believes that the person she married doesn't live with her anymore. She feels cheated. John gets all the fun and she gets all the dirty work. John has an exciting social life and she doesn't and probably won't as long as the children are home. She doesn't have any close friends. She is all alone. She has a burden that is too heavy to bear. There is no end in sight. What's it going to be like when the kids are gone and John is worse than he is now. Things will never

change. If she would have known that marriage to John was going to be like this, she would have probably had second thoughts.

Are these things really true? Is Mary believing lies like John is? Again, I'm not going to reference the exact Scriptures, but I'm just going to list what the Scriptures say are true. Mary can have joy in her position as wife and mother. God has not given her more than she can bear. He knows and will not allow more than she can handle. She is focusing on her situation more than on God. She is allowing herself to become downcast. She does not see God as big and her problems as small. She has forgotten that God loves both she and John and that He is at work in both of their lives. God can grant repentance to both parties. She believes that confronting her husband as her brother in Christ is not her responsibility. She plays "what if" games with her life. She lives in the past. She does not believe God when He says that He gives life and gives it more abundantly.

What does Mary want? She wants a prince charming to take her away. She wants to be loved and adored and cherished. She wants to be made the queen of the home. She wants to have the opportunity to develop as a person and have fun like everyone else. She wants kids who are delights to parent. She wants a trouble-free life. She wants her husband to be a God-honoring man so they will have a happy life together.

Are these godly wants and desires? Not according to Scripture. Mary must want to please God with her life. She must want to serve her children by being a godly mother, as well as submit to her husband as a godly wife. She must want to be used of God in the life of her husband by bringing a Godly rebuke to him. In short, Mary must want to be a servant and be sacrificing both her rights and her reputation, just as Christ did.

Now, I think that I can hear what you are saying to yourselves. "Greg, this all sounds very nice and spiritual. But this is not real life. How does it work in real life?" That's a good question. Let me see if I can help in a practical way.

First of all, how can we get a handle on what we are believing and wanting? I think that one of the best ways that you can know this is to write down what you say to yourself. You know, the self-talk that you do in your heart. Sit down and write it word for word as best that you can remember it. Then look at it and evaluate whether each of those statements is true. Also look at what you want and see if it is for self, or for God and others. Next to each false statement and ungodly desire, write what is God-honoring and what is true. Keep this list close at hand and refer to it often, especially when a situation presents itself.

Then pray, asking God to give you both the desire and the ability to change your thinking and your wanting. That's what He promised in Philippians 2:12-13.

Next, confess your sinful thoughts and desires to your spouse and ask them to help keep you accountable. If you have difficulty talking about this with your spouse, then you know that you are extremely proud! During your times together, you can share you list with your spouse. Then you can ask for them to make any additions that they believe you have missed. Then have them help you prioritize the list so that you can begin working on the top 1 or 2 items. You can also make plans on how you can help each other to change. Let's suppose that John and Mary have agreed that his "talking down" to her is one of the first things that needs to be changed. They could develop a sign that would help John to recognize that he is talking down again. Perhaps it's a pulling on the ear, or giving the time out signal. Whatever

it is, it must be agreed that this is the time for John to stop and look at his heart. What is he believing and what is he wanting, and to change it.

Finally, work hard to change, knowing God is working, too. Let me give you a couple of examples of how you can change your thinking and wanting.

Let's take John first. He could make some 4X6 cards with the things that he should be believing and put them in the car so that he can refer to them on his way home. He could also be using his drive home to remind himself that he is going to the place where he has a very important ministry to perform. And he prepares himself to be a servant and a sacrifice as soon as he pulls up to the house. He changes his routine and makes sure that he kisses Mary and lets her know how much he missed her. He takes each of the kids into his arms and kisses them and tells them that he couldn't wait to get home to them. He makes sure that he sets aside some time with Mary and each of the kids before bedtime. And he makes sure the TV stays off for the evening. And he should be giving thanks to God continually for all that He has given to him.

How about Mary. How can we help her? She could also make cards for what she should be thinking and wanting and put them on the refrigerator or at the sink. When the days are trying, she can pray asking God to give her the desire and the grace to please Him during these times. She can be preparing herself and the kids for when John gets home, because he has agreed to call her before he is leaving the office. He has also talked with her during the day to give her an idea of what his day has been like. She could have a chance to change her routine and make sure she is receptive to John's arrival. She can ask about his day and be genuinely interested. She can make sure that dinner is a time that all enjoy by changing the kids schedule around dad's, if possible. And she can have a continually thankful spirit as she goes through the day. She should also seek John's help in keeping her accountable for her thinking and wanting. As she and John begin to share each other's lives in a more intimate way, she can make sure that she does not criticize him or make him feel inadequate as he starts to change. She should be encouraging and showing a helpful attitude.

Don't allow your own pride and the busyness of life to steal away what God has been doing in your life these past 3 weeks. Begin tonight by starting your list and talking to your spouse. Make wise use of your pastors and other mature believers who can come along side.

Conclusion

And remember this, that one of the most devastating characteristics of pride, is that it blinds us to its existence. One of the Greek word form categories for pride has the idea of being enveloped in smoke, conveying the idea of blindness. Don't allow this to happen. But also included in that is the sensitivity to pride in others. Use the resources available to help you get a handle on pride and humility for the glory and joy of God as well as the joy of yourself and others.