
Others First -- Children

Philippians 2

Introduction You may find this hard to believe, but when I was a kid, I was very skinny, tall, and had white hair. I was easily bullied. In fact, so much so, that at the end of second grade, the class bully caught up with me on the way home from school. (In those days, kids walked to school – from kindergarten through high school.) I was afraid of this kid. He was mean and always wanted to pick fights with anyone he came in contact with. He caught up with me at the corner and, rather than fight this bully, I ran across the street with my head down running just as fast as my legs could carry me. What I hadn't done was look for cars that were turning the corner. I hit my head on the door of the car that was turning left from the cross street and my left leg slide under the car. The rear tire ran over my leg just above the ankle. I spent the rest of the school year and the entire summer in a cast from my hip to my toes.

My father's reaction was the typical reaction of most fathers. My father had a very rough childhood. He had drunken parents who cared less about him, or his other siblings. He grew up in a very rough part of San Francisco. So this latest incidence of running from a bully was the last straw, as far as he was concerned. He was going to teach me how to fight. And he did. I'm ashamed to tell you what I did once I learned how to fight. That's for another time.

There was one refrain that he kept telling me, "You look out for #1 because nobody else is going to". If I heard that once during my days at home, I heard it a million times – "look out for #1 and screw the other guy." In fact, I still hear it from him.

What he had learned and was passing on to me was the way that he had figured out this sinful world worked. The only way to survive is to play the world's game better than they do. And that's what he taught me.

We find this philosophy spelled out clearly in Philippians chapter 2. Paul describes us as naturally prideful, self-centered, conceited, looking out only for our own interests, and believing we are in a rivalry with others. That sounds so familiar to me.

A Description of the Old Self

(v. 3-4)

Look at the description that Paul gives in verses 3 and 4. He commands us to do things that are not the way that they currently are. He says that we are involved in rivalry between us, conceited, proud, and self-centered. What does that look like in real life?

We blindly rush in the direction of self-love and think that we have good reason for exalting ourselves and despising all others when we compare them to ourselves. We believe that what we have is somehow something we deserve or have earned and we swell with pride. We must have the best, be the first in line, have the biggest portion, have the largest selection, be able to drive as fast as we want and yet, not have to let anyone crowd in front of us.

The many sins that we have, we are very careful to conceal from others and convince ourselves that our sins are minute and trivial. We often love them as virtues. For example,

someone might pride herself in her ability to defeat others by her ability to use words effectively. She loves that ability and doesn't see it as sinful. In fact she believes that it is a virtue that should be developed more fully.

Yet, when others have these same sins, we exaggerate those sins and look down on them as awful sinners and inferior to us.

When we observe qualities in others that we admire in ourselves, we trivialize them and make sure others know how far superior we are to them. We have such an exaggerated opinion of ourselves. It doesn't matter how bad we are, we still have an exaggerated opinion of ourselves.

When I was a deputy sheriff with the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office back in the early 1970's, one of the assignments was working in the county jail. One of the rules in the jail was the protection of child abusers from the other prisoners. Someone who abused children was considered the lowest of human beings. A cold-blooded killer believed that he was superior to a child abuser and that he was not as bad or evil as that child abuser. We are no different. We have an exaggerated opinion of ourselves which allows us to think we are superior to others.

To top it off, life goes smoothly and peacefully until someone believes they are superior to us, are better than we, or not as sinful as we. That is when our pride rears its ugly head even higher and we defend our sins, our gifts, our accomplishments, and our opinion of ourselves. That smooth and peaceful existence disappears into ugly anger, contention, and fighting.

What is expected from the Christian

(v. 1,3,4,5)

But there is a problem with what we are by sinful nature. Our sinful nature is the opposite of what Paul is teaching in this passage. How do we go from being people who are filled with pride, self-centered, conceited, and believe that we are in a rivalry with others to what we are supposed to be?

We must change our minds.

This can only be done when we are Christians. We have this ability because we are in Christ. Look at verse 5. <READ> We have this new mindset because we are Christ's. This cannot be manufactured in our own strength. We do not have the ability to change our thinking without the enabling grace of the Holy Spirit Who gives us the mind of Christ. Look at what He gives us the ability to do in verse 1: We can be encouraging, we can show comforting love, we can fellowship in the Spirit with a spirit of cooperation, we can have an affection for others, and we can have compassion and sympathy for others. In verse 3 he tells us we can do things without believing that we are in a rivalry for superiority and that we can be honest about ourselves, not having conceit. He also tells us that we can be humble and think that others have more significance than we do. In verse 4 he tells us we can think about others and their interests and well-being. All of this because this mind is ours in Christ Jesus.

The key is humility

(v. 3,8)

We are told in verse 3 that we are to have an attitude of humility. This humility is foreign to our way of thinking, but it is the key to counting others more significant than ourselves. We are told in verse 5 that we are to have this mind among ourselves which we find in Christ. What is that mind? We see what that mind is in verse 8. Between verse 5 and verse 8 we are given an account of what Christ did. He left the throne and took the form of a human being. The infinite Son of God gave us the ultimate example of counting others more significant than Himself. He was the second person of the Godhead and counted His Father's plan as being more significant than His own deity. And verse 8 says that He humbled Himself by being obedient to the point of dying on a cross. Christ is our ultimate example of humility. He took the form of the ones who hated Him. And He was humbled by His obedience to His Father's will.

How do we change pride and conceit into humility? We become obedient to what the Scriptures say. What do they say? **First, we must evaluate ourselves truthfully.** Romans 12:3 says,

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Part of that sober judgment involves believing the truth about who we are and what we have. 1 Cor 4:7 says,

For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

We take what has been given to us as a gift from God. We take credit in the way we look, in the place we live, in the possessions we have, in the giftedness that we have, in the skills that were given for development. There is nothing that we are or have that is not a gift from the Father for our stewardship to the body of Christ. So when we believe we are superior to others, we are believing a lie. When we are more interested in our own lives than in the lives of others, that is showing our lack of humility and our desire to believe a lie. We must believe the truth about ourselves. We must realize that we are not the best, are not the only one who has it right, that we can learn from others, no matter their station in life.

I just finished reading a book written by Steve Saint entitled *The Great Omission*. I will not give you a book report, but one of the things that slapped me across the face was my opinion of those natives who live in the Amazon jungle. I looked down on them in the sense that I considered myself more intelligent and highly educated and I didn't run around in only a G-string. What Steve pointed out was that just because these Indians could not read scratchings on a paper, did not mean that they did not possess great intelligence. It was very evident to him that there were those who possessed great intelligence. As Dave Powlison said we cannot minister to anyone about whom we believe we are superior.

The **second** point in changing pride and conceit into humility is that **we must put ourselves in the other person's place.** In Romans 15:2-3 Paul says:

Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me."

We are being obedient when we look for ways that we can help someone else in their walk with the Lord.

The **third** point in changing pride and conceit into humility is that **we must work hard to be obedient**. But we are given a promise in verses 12 and 13. As we work at humility, God promises that He will give us the desire and the ability to do what He requires.

The **fourth** point in changing pride and conceit into humility is found in verses 2 and 13. **We must be motivated by the joy of serving God and by completing the joy of others**.

The **fifth** point in changing pride and conceit into humility is that **we must remember how much Jesus did for us and the example He left**. Where would we be today if Jesus had our attitude toward others? When we consider the great price that Christ, in His humility, paid, we must bow in complete repentance to our cold, conceited, prideful, and self-centered life.

You may be asking yourselves why I have spent so much time working through these issues. The reason is that I want to build a foundation for this week's and next week's applications. We need to know, as Ephesians 4 states, what we are to put off (stop doing) and what we are to put on (begin doing to replace what we stop). That is the way that we will bring about change.

What is involved for children putting others first

I would like to begin this section by letting you know that I am limiting it to younger children – toddlers, primary, and junior ages. As I outlined at the beginning, putting others first is not something that humans do naturally. As anyone who has had any dealings with children knows, the concept of others is completely foreign to them. So that means that parents must be involved.

I would like to start by looking at the wrong attitude of parents toward putting others first as far as their children are concerned. We have been teaching about putting others first, and some parents may believe that putting others first in relation to their children means that they need to be more concerned about what their children want. Perhaps you have been too strict or have not given your children all that they say they need to be at the top.

When we talk about parents counting their children as more significant than themselves and to be looking to the interests of their children, we are not saying that parents should have a child-centered home. Parents who are looking to the interests of their children in this way are actually looking more to their interests than to their children's.

(The following information about child-centered and God-centered homes is taken from Chapter One of *The Heart of Anger*, by Lou Priolo.)

What is a child-centered home? That is a home in which a child believes and is allowed to behave as though the entire household, parents, siblings, and even pets exist for one purpose – to please him.

It is characterized by:

Children being allowed to interrupt adults when they are talking

They use manipulation and rebellion to get their way

They dictate the family schedule (including meal times, bedtimes, etc.)

They are allowed to take precedence over the needs of the spouse

They have an equal or overriding vote in all decision making matters

They demand excessive time and attention from parents to the exclusion of other biblical responsibilities of the parents

They escape the consequences of their sinful and irresponsible behavior

They are allowed to speak to parents as though they were peers

They are allowed to be the dominant influence in the home

They must be entertained or coddled out of a bad mood rather than disciplined out of it

When a home is run this way, the parents are looking out for their interests and not the interests of their children. They are more concerned about having time to themselves, being comfortable, not being interrupted, and doing what they want to do when they want to do it. This is not looking to the interests of their children.

When parents look to the interest of their children, they will be training their children in such a way that they have a God-centered home. That is a home in which everyone is committed to pleasing and serving God. God's desires are exalted over everyone else's. This teaches children to serve rather than be served, to honor rather than be honored, to give rather than take, and to be loving rather than selfish.

It is characterized by:

Children who know the joy of serving others

They cheerfully obey parents the first time

They do not interrupt parents who are speaking to each other

They do not manipulate others

They know that they are not always going to get their own way

They work their schedule around their parents' schedules

They may have input in family decisions but not necessarily an equal vote

They understand that God has given their parents other responsibilities in addition to meeting their needs

They suffer the natural consequences of their sinful and irresponsible behavior

They do not speak to parents as though they were peers, but honor them as spiritual authorities

They esteem others as more important than themselves

They fulfill household responsibilities

They protect themselves from certain bad influences

They do not divide parents on disciplinary issues

They are not more intimate with either parent than the parents are with each other

This is what it means for parents to be looking at the interests of their children.

An everyday illustration

One of our members asked me a question during the 9:15 Adult Bible time this summer when we were going through the video series, “A Case for Kids”. She brought up the subject of games in the lives of children. If we are trying to teach children to “look to the interests of others” and “count others more significant than themselves”, then should we be allowing our children to play games, since they foster competition and an attitude of me first.

I gave her the very definite answer that I didn’t know and that I hadn’t thought that one through, but that I would. Well, I have been thinking about games and I would like to use them as an example.

Suppose we decide we’re going to have some quality family time. What better way than by playing a game, right! Let me ask you, “What is the progression of events from then on?”

It would go something like this:

First, there would be a chorus of voices, each one with the game that they want to play.

Following the realization that there isn’t a consensus on which game to play, there would be the all-too-familiar responses, both in words and actions, in order for each to get their own way.

The regular umpire (whichever parent normally steps into these situations) gets involved with the familiar solution of trying to be fair, especially the older children being fair with the younger.

There is disappointment, pouting, whining, negotiating, crying, and manipulation when a game is finally chosen, by whatever means that decision normally happens – either by parental decree, or by shaming the children into agreeing.

It is apparent that people who invent games know the human condition very well. What is the next item to deal with after the game is setup? That’s right, who is going to go first. I have yet played a game in which there is no way of choosing who goes first that is not done in an objective manner, either by rolling dice, or picking a card. Can you imagine what it would be like if children had to come to a decision about who goes first without an objective method?

And there is the game Nazi. This is the person or persons who make sure the pieces are in just the right place and that only the proper number of spaces are moved, or the proper number of pieces are on the board at any given time.

Games have their place. They can help teach younger children how to count, and how to do things in an orderly fashion. The beginning games like Candy Land don't require any strategy. That's why younger children can play. The winner is chosen strictly by the way the cards are drawn. There is nothing that a child can do to boast of his superiority.

Can we teach our children about looking to others interests even at this young age? Absolutely! How about helping them to look to the interests of others in the choosing of the game. How about allowing someone else to go first who hasn't gone first for a while. When there is the victory squeal and the boasting of superiority, wouldn't this be a great time to point out in the Scriptures that even the roll of the dice, or the shuffling of the cards is determined by God (Prov 16:33).

But as children get older, the games begin to teach how to think logically and how to strategize and plan different scenarios based on unknowns. They teach how to identify weakness and to capitalize on it. Now things are getting more involved.

Can we teach our children about looking to others interests in strategy games? I believe so. Again, allowing others to go first. Helping younger or less experienced players understand the consequences of their moves.

Let's review the 5 points of change:

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, knowing that God is at work in us, as well.
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.

Can you see how you can use games, as well as so many others opportunities to teach the others first way of life? Such as at the dinner table when there are only two chicken wings and everyone wants one. Such as being aware of things that need to be done around the house and they are done without being asked to. How about the kids at school. Can we teach about the kid who dresses differently, or is struggling with school work, or that is the bully, or is new to the school, or during lunch, or during classroom time. The opportunities are endless.

One of the problems that we face in putting the needs of our children first is our own sin. Later in Philippians 4:9, Paul tells them to practice the things that they have learned and received and heard and seen in him. We must model what we teach. And we don't see the opportunities like we should because we are struggling with our own pride and conceit.

What about those who are home schooled. Can we teach them these principles in that atmosphere? And what about the home school get togethers? Can these be a time to teach these principles?

Teens and Others First

Let me say something to you teens. This is a time when peer pressure is great. I'm out of the loop to know how kids refer to those who are "different", but you know what those terms are. Will you humble yourself, count others more significant than yourselves, and look to the interests of those with whom you are involved. Are you willing to suffer the consequences of others when you befriend the geek, when you come along side the "ugly" one, when you are concerned that someone is failing a subject that is your strength? Are you willing to put yourself out to help someone else who is less proficient than you, whether it is in sports, or art, or music, or social skills? Will you have the mind of Christ that is willing to say the hard, unpopular things to kids who are throwing their lives away? Are you more concerned about where they are going to spend eternity than about what your friends will say about you and how they will treat you? Will you give your employer 100%, even when he doesn't deserve it? Will you honor your parents even when they don't deserve it? Will you help with younger siblings in whatever needs to be done?

Children and Church

As we develop this others first way of living, what happens at home will naturally flow over into what happens here. What about interrupting the service by going in and out during special music or the preaching? What about not cleaning your shoes off before you drag mud, dirt, snow into the building? What about honoring those who teach? What about helping those who are not paying attention? What about those that are hurting? Those that are different? Those who are in authority? Those who disagree?

Let's take a quick summary of the principles that I have tried to illustrate tonight. These principles are going to be used next week, as well, as we talk about spouses and how they can practice putting others first.

Conclusion

We have the mind of Christ as Christians.

We have the command to obey.

We have God at work in us to give us the desire and the ability to do this.

We have the motivation – joy in Christ and joy in others.

We have Christ as our example.

We must teach them to be servants.

We must teach them to sacrifice for others.

May God give all of the enabling grace, as He has promised, to work hard at putting others first.