

Rethinking Your Attitude

A Study of Philippians 2:5-11

Characteristic of Completeness: Humility

Big Idea: Humility is power restrained for reconciliation.

Related Scriptures: Proverbs 18:12; 29:23; Isaiah 2:11, 12, 17; 53:2; Daniel 4:37; Matthew 18:4; 20:26-28; 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14; 22:27; John 13:14; Ephesians 5:2; James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6

Introduction:

- A. I have a confession to make. I love my wife. And I hate her. I love my children. And I hate them. I love my friends. And I hate them.

I think everybody has love-hate relationships to negotiate. And they're not just the explosively hot-and-cold relationships we think of most often when we hear the term, "love-hate relationship." We can love and hate quietly, passively, steadily.

Isn't it true that we can experience both the greatest joy and the greatest pain in our closest relationships? Isn't it true that we can experience both the greatest satisfaction and the greatest conflict in our closest relationships? These are the love-hate relationships.

And love-hate relationships bring conflict. There are disagreements and offenses and anger and resentments and violations of trust. And these conflicts can be very difficult to resolve. Let me show you a video clip of the kind of conflict that can settle in like a fog.

(Show video, ► "Story_of_Us" here.)

- B. I'm learning that interpersonal conflicts have a lot to do with power. Conflicts often boil down to power struggles. I've been flipping through some of Cathy's textbooks recently, one in particular titled, ► *Interpersonal Conflict*.¹

1. From the book, I learned that power is a bigger issue than I thought. The authors, Wilmot and Hocker, ► say,

*Just as energy is a fundamental concept in physics, power is a fundamental concept in conflict theory. In interpersonal and all other conflicts, perceptions of power are at the heart any analysis.*²

2. I ► also learned about some of the ways power struggles manifest themselves in relationships. Again, I quote from the ► book:

¹ William W. Wilmot and Joyce L. Hocker, *Interpersonal Conflict*, 6 ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2001).

² *Ibid.*, 95.

. . . communicative interactions show a lot of “one up” responses, or attempts to demonstrate conversational power over each other. ▶ Partners might say, “She is just trying to control me,” or “I’m not going to let him push me around.” ▶ People, whether married couples or work colleagues, try to “keep score”—watching the “points” they have vis-à-vis the other party.³

▶ . . . the focus for a dispute becomes power—who has the right to move the other. ▶ The teenager who says, “You can’t boss me around,” the spouse who shouts, “Just who do you think you are?” ▶ and the co-worker who states, “Well, we’ll just see who the boss is around here?” are all highlighting power and giving it center stage in the dispute.⁴

3. I ▶ also learned that power struggles can play out in latent, sneaky ways.
- a. For example, some people use power by denying their own use of it. Wilmot and Hocker ▶ say,

The speaker can deny that he or she is [using power] by using a number of common ploys, such as saying, “I’m not myself when I drink,” or “It’s just the pressure I’m under that’s making me act like such a grouch.” ▶ You may hear the claim “I can’t help it. . . .” To say that you are not responsible for your communication lets you exercise control while denying that you are doing so.⁵

- b. Another ▶ use of power is passive aggression. The authors ▶ explain,

In passive aggression, a person acts aggressively (in one’s own self-interest, without much regard for the other) by being passive, or unconcerned, when the other person needs a response. ▶ Passive aggression is displayed when people feel they have a low level of power, whether they do or not, since it appears to be a safer way of expressing anger, resentment, or hostility than stating such feelings directly. ▶ [A] list of common passive aggressive behaviors has been expanded to include the following:

- ▶ *Forgetting appointments, promises and agreements*

³ Ibid., 98.

⁴ Ibid., 99.

⁵ Ibid., 103.

- ► *Slipping and saying unkind things, then apologizing*
- ► *Acting out nonverbally, such as by slamming doors and banging objects, but denying that anything is wrong*
- ► *Getting confused, tearful, sarcastic, or helpless when certain topics come up*
- ► *Getting sick when you've promised to do something*
- ► *Scheduling two things at once*
- ► *Evading situations so that others are inconvenienced*

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4. All ► this leads me to believe that, in order to successfully resolve conflicts in my love-hate relationships, I better understand and control my own exercise of power in those relationships.

Just think of some of the terms we use to describe conflict in relationships. Stubborn. Bullheaded. Sneaky. Manipulative. Run over. Abused. Stalemated. Estranged. Deceived. Aggressive. Passive. Gameplaying. Stonewalling. Mudslinging. Backbiting. Venting. Stuffing. Throwing down. Taking over. Giving up. These are all power words. The exercise of power can determine whether conflicts are resolved or simply refueled.

So how can we get better at resolving conflicts through power management?

- C. We get a lot of help in this from the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians. You see the believers in the Philippian church were experiencing interpersonal conflicts. That's why Paul stresses getting along together and loving one another in the first part of the letter. Later, in Philippians 4:2, Paul even calls out two women by name, Euodia and Syntyche, and encourages them to resolve their conflict and get along.

Our text today is ► Philippians 2:5-11. It's a very famous passage, rich in doctrine concerning Christ. Many scholars believe that, in this passage, Paul is actually quoting a hymn that was already in common use within the early church.⁷ Theologians have spilled a lot of ink, musing over some deep and mysterious theological issues that arise from the text, some of which have been given big names. There's the kenosis, the emptying of Christ. There's the hypostatic union, the union of two natures, deity and humanity in one person, Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man.

These are lofty doctrines, but Paul does not quote the hymn to correct some doctrinal error in the Philippian church. Paul quotes the hymn to use Christ as an example of

⁶ Ibid., 114.

⁷ Ralph P. Martin and Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians, Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 43, rev., Bruce M. Metzger, ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 99; Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text, The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, eds. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 186.

the kind of attitude toward power that we need to reconcile love-hate relationships. Paul holds out Jesus as the consummate model of power management, showing us how we are to understand and control our own power in love-hate relationships.

This is for you, Euodia and Syntyche. This is for you, Bob and Cathy. This is for you John and Jeff. This is for you Julie and Linda. This is for you.

I. In ► Verse 5, Paul says,

^{NAU} Philippians 2:5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus

The ► “this” refers back to Verses 1-4, and in particular, Verse 3, where Paul encourages the Philippians and us to have “humility of mind.” That’s the attitude which “was also in Christ Jesus”—an attitude of humility. Our ► Characteristic of Completeness for the week is humility.

To ► “have this attitude” means “to develop an attitude based on careful thought.”⁸ So, Paul is inviting us to rethink our attitude based on Christ’s attitude. Christ’s attitude gives us a fresh way of looking at humility. I want to show you that, according to Christ’s model, humility is power restrained for reconciliation. That’s my ► big idea: humility is power restrained for reconciliation. I’m going to be spending the rest of my time this morning explaining what I mean by looking to Christ’s example.

A. First, ► Christ’s humility is reflected in what He did *not* do. Strangely, He did not exercise power. He restrained the use of His own power, particularly at a time when you’d think He would want to use it the most. Verse 6 ► says Jesus is the One . . .

^{NAU} Philippians 2:6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped

1. This verse asserts that Jesus was and is God.

- a. The English word, ► “form” can be a little misleading because we often use it to describe an outer appearance that is distinct from inner substance. But in this case, the Greek word describes the very nature or essence of something.⁹ Jesus is God.
- b. This is confirmed when Paul says Jesus, “did not regard ► equality with God a thing to be grasped.” The clear implication is that Jesus was and is equal to God. The term, ► “grasped” means wielded or exploited. Jesus didn’t have a mind to exploit His deity. Jesus is God.

⁸ W. Bauer, F.W. Danker, W.F. Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., s.v. “φρονέω,” (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), hereinafter abbreviated BDAG.

⁹ BDAG, s.v. “μορφή.”

c. Think ► with be about the implications of Christ being God. What does the deity of Christ tell us about Him? We could spend the rest of our lives on this topic alone, but I just want to mention just three things very briefly.

- (1) First, if Christ is God, then He's definitely got power. He is all-powerful.
- (2) Second, if Christ is God, then He loves sinners. That's a good thing because we're all sinners. We know God loves us because many places in the Bible tell us so.
- (3) And there's a third thing that may surprise you. It may even offend you, but I beg you to hear me out.

If Christ is God, then He came to earth in a love-hate relationship with us. Jesus can relate to love-hate relationships because that's exactly what He has with us.

You see, here's an unsettling truth that does not play well in marketing research focus groups: God hates sinners. And, if Christ is God, then He must hate sinners. Thus, the love-hate relationship.

One Bible scholar, D.A. Carson, explains it this way. He ► says,

. . . the Bible insists that God is simultaneously angry and loving. . . .

► *In the Bible, God's wrath is a function of his holiness. His wrath or anger is not the explosion of a bad temper or a chronic inability to restrain his irritability, but rather a just and principled opposition to sin.* ► *God's holiness is so spectacularly glorious that it demands that he be wrathful with those of his creatures who defy him, slight his majesty, thumb their noses at his words and works, and insist on their own independence—even though every breath they breathe, not to say their very existence, depends on his providential care.* ► *If God were to gaze at sin and rebellion, shrug his shoulders, and mutter, "Well, I'm not too bothered. . . . I don't really care what they do,"*

surely there would be something morally deficient about him. ► Should God care nothing for Hitler's outrages? Should God care nothing about my rebellion and your rebellion? If he acted this way, he would ultimately discount his own significance, sully his own glory, besmirch his own honor, soil his own integrity.

► That is why in Scripture God is sometimes portrayed as blisteringly angry. ► Moreover, it is important that we reject the common evangelical cliché on this subject: "God hates the sin but loves the sinner." The second part may be true, but, as it stands, this antithesis is fundamentally mistaken and is clearly refuted by Scripture. ► For example, fourteen times in the first fifty psalms alone the texts insist that God "hates" sinners, "abhors" those who tell lies, and so forth.¹⁰

Need proof? Listen. Psalm ► 5:5 addresses God directly, saying,

^{NAU} Psalm 5:5 . . . You hate all who do iniquity.

Psalm ► 5:6 says,

^{NAU} Psalm 5:6 . . . The LORD abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit.

Psalm ► 11:5 says,

^{NAU} Psalm 11:5 The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, And the one who loves violence His soul hates.

In ► Romans 5:10, we are told that Christ came to die not for us, His pals, but for us, His enemies. It says,

^{NAU} Romans 5:10 For if while we ► were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

¹⁰ D.A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 37-38.

And finally, in Exodus ► 20:5, God says,

^{NAU} Exodus 20:5 “. . . I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God . . .”

God describes Himself as a husband deeply wounded by the spiritual adultery of His bride. We are the adulterous bride, and God is jealous for our affections. Jesus came to earth as the jilted Groom.

2. Think ► of it. Jesus as God came deeply offended by our spiritual adultery. Jesus as God knows every hidden and lurid detail of it. And Jesus as God had all the power to exact revenge. He had every right to make us all pay. He did not.

► ^{NAU} Philippians 2:6 . . . He . . . did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped

B. Well what He did He do?

1. He deprived Himself of the use of His own power.¹¹ That’s what Paul means in ► Verse 7 when He says,

^{NAU} Philippians 2:7 but [Jesus] emptied Himself . . .

This does not mean that His power or deity was diminished in any way. He simply surrendered His prerogative to use it to His own selfish advantage.

2. How did He empty Himself? Verses ► 7 and 8 explain that He emptied Himself by . . .

^{NAU} Philippians 2:7 . . . taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

- a. This tells us that Jesus is fully human: ► “made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man.” This doesn’t mean that He just looked human. He was and is human. Jesus is fully God and fully man.

¹¹ BDAG, s.v. “κενύω.”

What are the implications of His humanness? Among other things, Scripture tells us that this means Jesus was tempted in every way that we are.¹²

I take it this means He was tempted to go off on us the way we are tempted to go off on those we hate and love. Only He was tempted far more.

Jesus is God. But He is also human. Put yourself in His sandals. You've created the universe and every human being in it. But the people sin against you. They turn their backs on you, thus creating a love-hate relationship. They are completely incapable of making things right on their own. They can't possibly pay for what they've done.

But you still love them, and so you humble yourself to become one of them so that you can pay for their sins on their behalf. You decide to satisfy the demands of your own justice.

You don't have to. You've done nothing wrong. You are perfectly innocent. You can make them all pay. And yet, you become one of them so that you can go to the cross and take their punishment on yourself.

That's what Paul is saying in ► Verse 8:

^{NAU} Philippians 2:8 . . . He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

So you're Jesus, and all along the way to the cross, the people you have come to save hate you for no good reason. Their hatred is born of arrogance and selfishness. They blow you off. They marginalize you as a good teacher, but not God. They mock you. They spit on you. They torture you. They crucify you.

And yet, all along, you have the power to put a stop to it. You have the power to destroy them. With just a word, you can call down 10,000 angels wipe out all these hateful people.

How do you feel in His sandals?

Humility is power restrained.

¹² Hebrews 4:15.

People come to me for help in the midst of relational conflicts and they say something like, “Bob, you don’t know what it’s like. You don’t know how badly she has treated me. You don’t know how much he has hurt me.” They’re right. I don’t know. But Jesus knows.

The real question is do you know how much Jesus suffered for you?

- b. In the midst of His love-hate relationship with us, Jesus humbled Himself all the way to the cross. Humility is power restrained.

But why? Is He a relational pacifist? Is He a doormat? Is He a “wuss?” Is He an enabler? Is He codependent?

No. He is a ► bond-servant. That’s what Paul says in Verse 7. Jesus is a bond-servant. He came to serve us.

You see, humility is power restrained *for reconciliation*. He chose to empty Himself, to restrain His power for the sake of making reconciliation with us possible. He died for us.

- c. Are ► you willing to follow His example? Are you willing to humble yourself in your love-hate relationships? Are you willing to humbly restrain your power in order to make reconciliation possible?

Humility is power restrained for reconciliation.

1. Listen to this principle explained from an entirely secular perspective in the textbook I mentioned earlier, ► *Interpersonal Conflict*.

As unlikely as it might seem, higher-power parties can limit their power by refusing to use all the currencies they have at their disposal. ► A militarily powerful nation that refuses to invade a neighboring country and a physically powerful spouse who refuses to inflict damage on the other spouse are examples of a high-power party limiting power usage. ► If the high-power person refuses to engage in “natural” responses, this restraint can alter the automatic nature of a destructive cycle. ► In this self-regulating approach, power is given to a higher partnership or unit, instead of being used as an individual right.¹³

2. Besides ► my own love-hate relationships, I see a lot of people in conflict. It’s a part of being a pastor. At the risk of grossly oversimplifying my counsel

¹³ Wilmot and Hocker, 121.

to people in conflict, this is basically what I have to say: Somebody is going to have to die for this relationship to live.

I can imagine Euodia and Syntyche going at it. And Paul says, “Hold up. Stop fighting long enough to think for a minute. Consider the example of Jesus. Somebody is going to have to die for this relationship to live.” That’s what Paul is saying in our text.

3. How do we do that? Remember it’s an attitude of humility. Let me give you an example.

Years ago, when I was a businessman and had two small children at home, Cathy and I had an ongoing conflict over me being late for dinner. You see, I’ve always been a driven, Type-A kind of guy, working lots of hours. I’d leave for work long before anybody else got up in the morning. And too often I’d be late for dinner.

After arguing about this for a while, we did the reasonable thing. We reached an agreement. I would go to work as early as necessary, but I would make every effort to be home by 5:30PM so that we could have dinner together as a family.

I thought I was holding up my end of the deal. I would squeeze in as much time as I possibly could at work, and I’d arrive home at 5:33PM. Or 5:34PM. Or 5:35PM.

Before continuing with the story, let me say at this point that Cathy and I recently took some personality tests. They revealed that, by nature, my basic desire is to be right. Cathy’s basic desire is to be loved.

Anyway, back then it was baffling to me that Cathy continued to be irritated at my being late by just a few minutes. She wasn’t nasty about it. In fact, she seemed a little puzzled herself at being irritated by such a small thing. The debates continued.

I’ve got to say that Mr. “I’ve got to right” scored more points in the debates than Mrs. “Please love me.” I had the power to score and I did score early and often. “Haven’t I made sacrifices and improved?” “Do you hold anybody else to this standard?” “Aren’t you being a little legalistic and ungracious?” “I’m not holding up the meal; the brocolli is not even done.” “Will I ever be able to jump high enough for you?”

But no matter how much I scored, we were never really reconciled on the issue. My exercise of power wasn’t getting us anywhere. Finally, Cathy asked a

question that killed me. She said, “Bob, are you ever three minutes late to a meeting with a client?”

I died that day in a good way. You see, I was never late for a meeting with a client. Not by a single minute. And all this time, all Cathy was really trying to say was, “Bob, I wish you would show me that I am more important to you than your clients.” The real issue was not about being three minutes late. The real issue was about needing to do a better job of loving my wife the way Christ loved the Church, showing her how important she is to me.

But for a long time, I just couldn’t see it because I was too proud, too busy trying to wield the power I had to vindicate myself, to be right. I humbled myself that day, surrendering my power to score points in a debate. I decided to die so that my relationship could live. Vindication went to the cross so that reconciliation could rise again.

Humility is power restrained for reconciliation.

Being late for dinner has never again been an issue. . . . Our current issue is the purchase of dog toys. I’ll keep you posted.

4. How about you? Do you need to die today so that your relationship can live? I’m not talking about being a doormat. I’m not talking about putting up with abuse. I’m talking about an attitude of humility.

Humility is power restrained for reconciliation.

II. What will happen when you humble yourself like Jesus? What will happen when you surrender your power for the cause of reconciliation?

A. Let’s be real. In some cases, reconciliation may not occur. Christ’s humility made reconciliation possible, but not everyone chooses to be reconciled with Him. By His death and resurrection for our sin, Jesus Christ humbly offers reconciliation to all who will simply believe Him for it. But I’m afraid many leave the offer on the table and remain forever estranged from God.

B. But humility is worth it. Humility is worth it because it makes reconciliation possible. Moreover, humility is worth it because the Bible tells us that, if we follow Jesus in being humble, we will also follow Jesus in being exalted one day.

1. Paul reveals the result of Christ’s humility in ► Verses 9-11, saying,

^{NAU} Philippians 2:9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ► 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in

heaven and on earth and under the earth, ► 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

2. Similarly, when we follow Jesus in being humble, we will also follow Jesus in being exalted. James ► 4:10 tells us,

^{NAU} James 4:10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

Humility is power restrained for reconciliation.