

Humility – Romans 12.1-8

Team Talk 5

Introduction

Recap on the Term

- This term we have been looking at Romans and the theme of growing community – looking at the key characteristics of a healthy Christian community.
- We've looked at Identity, Commitment, Hope and Integrity and this evening we are going to be looking at humility.

Introduce Romans 12.1-8

- Paul starts this section with the word 'therefore,' because what he is going to say is the consequence of the argument so far.
- Paul has spent 11 chapters on what God has done for us – how despite our failings, Jesus died in our place, demonstrated his love for us, and poured his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.
- Now he is about to talk about how we should respond to what God has done - what we should do 'in view of God's mercy.'

Humility

- And the first thing that Paul says that we should do to respond is to be humble.
- Paul sees humility as the primary virtue of the Christian life. He puts it before even love, which he will come to next.
- What is humility?
- The *Oxford Dictionary* defines 'humble' as having a low estimate of one's importance.
- It means considering other people (and God) as more important than ourselves.
- It is not the same as low self-esteem, which is about thinking badly of yourself – thinking that we're ugly, or stupid.
- It means that we might know that we are beautiful or intelligent, but not to consider us any more important as a result.
- Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, said about Karl Barth, the great theologian, that 'Karl Barth knew that he was a brilliant theologian, but he knew that being a brilliant theologian meant absolutely nothing.'
- As C. S. Lewis put it, 'Humility is thinking less about yourself, not thinking less of yourself.'

Question: Is humility a good thing? Why is it a good thing?

1. Humility transforms our relationship with God

- First, Humility transforms our relationship with God, enabling us to worship him and to be obedient to him.
- Paul says, 'Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship.'
- Worship is the fundamental attitude of the Christian to God, giving God all the glory and offering all of ourselves (our minds, our emotions, our bodies, our songs, our relationships, our work, our rest) to him.
- But worship is only possible if we have humility.

Personal illustration of finding it difficult to worship: I find it difficult to worship when singing on a Sunday because I am absorbed in my thoughts and worries. This is a lack of humility – for I am considering my concerns to be more important than God's glory.

- Pride means being self-absorbed, but humility enables us to look outwards.
- Humility moves us from being focussed on ourselves to being focussed on God – and this is what enables our lives to become characterised by worship.
- Paul goes on to say, that having a humble attitude will mean that we 'will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.'
- Humility not only helps us to worship; it also enables us to be obedient.

Personal illustration: The reason I find it difficult to obey God and do what he wants is that I put my will and desires above his. This is a lack of humility.

- Humility means considering God's will for our lives and his desires for us to be more important than our own desires and wills – and it is this which enables us to be obedient.
- Humility is vital for our relationship with God as it enables us to worship him and be obedient to him.

2. Humility transforms our relationship with ourselves

- Secondly, humility transforms our relationship with ourselves.

- Paul says, 'Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself in sober judgement.'
- Humility is the key to having good self-understanding.

Illustration of self-delusion: One of the most distressing things about the X-Factor is the public auditioning of those who are without talent, and yet who believe that they are.

- But even if we are not quite as extreme as those who audition for X-Factor, it is easy to delude ourselves – telling ourselves that we are better or more popular than we are, or that we are worse than we are.
- Pride encourages us to believe that we are more important than we are; humility enables us to get the right perspective on ourselves.
- We should see ourselves as people who are created by God, and in the creation stories God looks on humans and says that they are very good.
- But we are also fallen – we are not what we could be. Our desires, our emotions, our wills, our bodies, our appetites are all corrupted, and so we have made bad decisions and there are things in us which are not as God would like.
- Humility enables us to recognise our created goodness, but also be honest about our weaknesses.
- Without humility we try to pretend that we are better than we are, hiding our faults and promoting our successes.

Personal Example of promoting successes or hiding faults.

- But with humility comes the ability to be honest about our failings, so that we don't have to hide anything or boast about anything.

Personal Example of admitting weakness.

- Admitting weakness is one of the hardest things to do; it requires humility.
- Humility is the key to true self-knowledge.

3. Humility transforms our relationships within the Church

- Thirdly, humility transforms our relationships within the Church.
- Paul moves on from describing how humility affects our self-understanding, to looking at how it affects relationships within the Christian community.
- Humility encourages us to see ourselves as part of a community, in which we all have different parts.
- Pride encourages us to think we can do everything ourselves – that we don't need other people.

- Humility recognises that we all need each other.
- Paul is saying that we all have our gifts, and we need to recognise our own, and then do our part.
- For some it is prophesying, for some it is serving, for others it is teaching or leadership, or encouragement, or generosity, or mercy (which probably refers to serving the poor).
- But for Paul the key is to hold our gifts humbly.
- This means that we recognise what our gift is, and not try to be something we are not.

Personal example of what you feel your role might be, and what it definitely isn't.

- We need to recognise our gifts are *gifts*, things we have received from God, rather than have earned or have by right.
- And notice that there does not seem to be a hierarchy of gifts – some gifts don't seem to be more important than others – they are all important.
- Some of the lower profile gifts, like serving and encouragement, are put before leadership, for example.
- So if you're a leader you shouldn't feel at all more important than people who serve quietly.

Illustration: The son of Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, is called Pip. When he was about 14 used to have a friend round to stay quite a lot at Lambeth Palace. One day his friend was watching the news with his parents and Rowan Williams was being interviewed, and he said to his parents, 'Oh look, there's the man who does the hoovering at Pip's house.'

- The three adjectives that Paul uses for the use of our gifts are 'generously, diligently, and cheerfully'. These are all characteristics of humility.
- Generosity means giving as much as we can, because we consider the needs of other more important than our own. Diligence means never giving up on our tasks for one another, keeping their good always in mind. And cheerfully means considering it a huge privilege to be able to serve one another.
- Humility is the key to the Christian community working together effectively.

4. Humility transforms our relationship with the world

- Fourthly, humility transforms our relationship with the world.

- Paul says, in verse 2, that we should not conform to the patterns of this world – we should be distinctive.
- And he says that we should be transformed by the renewing of our minds – we should have a different perspective, a different way of thinking.
- Paul will soon talk about our distinctive love that we should have for each other, but the first way that we should be distinctive is our humility.
- Humility is incredibly counter-cultural.
- At the time when Paul was writing the Greek philosophers condemned humility as a negative concept. They respected justice, truth and other virtues, but they saw no good in humility.
- It is similar today.
- We live in a world where success and prominence are the aim.
- The majority of school aged children, when asked what they want to be when they grow up, answer, 'A celebrity.'
- Humility is one of the primary ways that we can be counter-cultural.
- When we turn down promotion, or choose a job paying less, in order to do something we believe in more, when we are honest about our failings and modest about our successes, when we look to hang out with people at the bottom of society or on the edge, rather than the people at the top, people notice.
- It is also a way in which we have a great influence on those around us.

Illustration: In 1937 an American, Dale Carnegie wrote the book, How to Win Friends and Influence People. It gave simple advice on being successful in business, winning people round, leadership skills and better relationships. It was an overnight success and has since sold 10 million copies and been translated into 36 languages. His message is basically that the best method of winning friends and influencing people is humility: praising others at every opportunity, being slow to criticise, admitting one's own mistakes immediately and not drawing attention to the mistakes of others.

- Humility is not just a counter-cultural way of living, it is also incredibly effective in the way that we work and have relationships with one another.

Conclusion

- Humility will be a vital virtue that we will need to have if we are going to be the kind of community that God is calling us to be in Brighton for

humility transforms our relationship with God, with ourselves, with one another, and with the world.

- How do we become more humble?
- It is something we do, and something that God does.
- When the Bible talks about humility it often comes in the form of a command:
- In 2 Chronicles 7.14 God says to Israel, 'if my people, who are called by my name, will **humble** themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.'
- It is something we do – we humble ourselves.
- And we humble ourselves by worshipping God, putting ourselves below him, by acknowledging our weaknesses to ourselves and to each other, by serving God and one another, choosing to do all the least glamorous tasks.
- It is something we do, but it is also something that God does.
- It is a work of the Holy Spirit.
- It is one of the things that you notice often when people become Christians – they have a new recognition of their weakness, and a new desire to serve one another.
- And so we pray that God would fill us with a spirit of humility – that we might draw closer to God, know ourselves better, love one another more fully, and have a greater impact on the world.