

# Dignity & Humility

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[ 0 : 00 ] Thank you for praying this week out in Spain. This week we have some stuff up, ministers and missionaries checking over there. It was a really encouraging time. And Jose Sigourvia, who we support, it was really good to see his work and to see many other really faithful men, people that have devoted decades to small churches and yet are beginning to see growth.

So it's a really good time. Now in July and August, I'd like to kind of prepare for next year, the next academic year. And a couple of people are going to preach tonight and I'm going to give you some of the fruit of what I'm reading at the moment. I'm doing a ministers conference in October and I'm going to speak on the Apostle Paul as a minister.

And so tonight I want you to pretend you're all ministers. The Apostle Paul is a great model. He's a great apostle, isn't he? We look into him as the one who has written so much of the New Testament. He is unrepeatable in that sense.

He is a great model as a minister, he is a great minister, as a church leader, and he is a model as a Christian. And so tonight you might have to do a little bit of the work of application on your own to see how this applies to you.

But I hope you'll be as excited as I am in what we've found. I want to speak tonight on the Apostle Paul and self. And self image, if I can put it like that. I don't know what your self image is. I hope you don't think about it that much.

[ 1 : 34 ] But we live in an age where people are obsessed with me and self. And I don't want to go potholing into the subconscious of the Apostle Paul tonight. Because the Apostle Paul was a Jesus Christ centred man.

And the Apostle was not interested in himself. He was not preoccupied with himself. His desire was to know him, to know Christ.

And in a generation that is self absorbed, we have to be a church that is Jesus Christ absorbed. But I do think we have to have a balance of a biblical view of ourselves.

And a person's self concept will go a long way towards determining his worth. If we've got too high an opinion of ourselves, or too low an opinion of ourselves, then that will be shown in our lives.

The worship of the temple of Apollo and Delphi entered into the temple under the motto, And that will be shown in our lives.

[ 3 : 07 ] When you see someone who is angry with people, that person is often angry with themselves. And is simply venting that anger on other people.

A person who is insecure in themselves, they will be touchy and self protective. And they'll be quick to take offence when they're disintended.

And so I think it's really important that we see ourselves as we should in the light of the Bible. And the Apostle Paul is a really great example. How did Paul see himself?

We can give a really complex answer to that. But I want to hold in tonight on two things. Two strands from his self concept. And on one level they seem to be contradictory.

But in fact they are complementary and both are vitally necessary. So we're going to see in Paul number one, dignity. And number two, humility.

[ 4 : 09 ] Paul took his job as a leader in Christ's church with extreme seriousness. The Apostle Paul believed that he was a man of destiny.

He believed that he was a chosen instrument of God. And the Apostle Paul believed that he was somebody who was engaged in a work of supreme importance. And I will show you that in three ways.

First he had great dignity in what he was doing. Because he considered the purpose for which he'd been set apart.

He considered the purpose of his life to which he'd been set apart. And we're going to begin in his mother's womb, bizarrely. As his starting point. He seeks to understand himself. And explain himself. And the Apostle Paul that we read of in the New Testament believed that he had been a man set apart. I'm going to give you lots of Bible tonight. But I'm not going to get you to turn into the references.

[ 5 : 08 ] If you want them you can ask me later. In Galatians chapter 1 and verse 15. He says, God has set me apart even from my mother's womb. And the movie which he uses now means separation.

That even when he was in his mother's womb. He was set apart for a specific or expressed purpose. Set apart for a purpose from my mother's womb. The same word is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

The firstborn was set apart for God. The first fruits of the harvest were set apart for God. The Levites, the priests of the Old Testament. They were set apart for God. And again and again the word is used for the people and the things which were separate from God.

And so in the New Testament we see the same word used in Acts 32. The Holy Spirit set me apart, says Paul. Set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I call them.

He begins his great letter to the Romans. And he says that he has been set apart for the gospel of God. That God has set him apart for a specific purpose. He was set apart for the gospel of God.

[ 6 : 16 ] But more specifically he was set apart by God to be a missionary preacher. To be someone who would bring the gospel to the nations. If you know your Bibles and all you'll be familiar with Jeremiah chapter 1.

Where God says in this amazing verse. Before I formed you in the womb I knew you. Before you were born I set you apart. I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.

And Paul is very self-consciously echoing those words from Jeremiah 1 in Galatians 1.15. God set me apart from my mother's womb so that I might preach, I might teach him.

Among the Gentiles or among the nations. And Jeremiah was set apart to be a preacher. And so was Paul from the very first moment of his life. There's another parallel in Isaiah chapter 49.

In one of those servant passages which looked forward to the Lord Jesus. And Isaiah says, listen to me you islands. Hear this you distant nations. Before I was born the Lord called me.

[ 7 : 22 ] From my birth he's made mention of my name. And now the Lord says, he who formed me in the womb. To be his servant. To bring Jacob back to him. And gather Israel to himself.

Is it too small a thing? For you to be my servant. To restore the tribes of Jacob. And to bring back those of Israel I've cared. I will make you a light to the Gentiles.

To the nations. So that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth. And again there's a parallel isn't there? The apostle Paul knows that passage from Isaiah.

And Paul sees him as part of the Messiah of the Lord's people. That he continues the Messiah's mission.

The servant of the Lord. Taking the gospel of God. The message of God. To the ends of the earth. And so it's a tremendously high view.

[ 8 : 17 ] Of what he was to do. It's a tremendously high concept of his calling. He's been marked out from all eternity. By God for mighty purpose. He's been called and shaped in time.

To be God's chosen instrument. His Jewish background. His rabbinical teaching. His knowledge of the Greek language and culture. His Roman citizenship. All those have been worked together by God.

To equip and prepare the apostle Paul. For the work that he was interested to do. And that gave him tremendous dignity and authority.

As he thought of his calling. Or you can think of the way secondly he speaks of himself. How does the apostle Paul describe himself?

Take his favourite term which is apostle. And apostle means the saint one. The saint one by a superior on a mission of great importance.

[ 9 : 21 ] The representative of a man. The one sent by a man. Is as a man himself. So if you've seen the representative.

If you've met the apostle. You've met the risen Christ. The apostle of God is as God himself. The apostle of Christ is as Christ himself.

That's why we don't have apostles today. New Testament says that the apostle was to be a witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Who has been directly and personally commissioned by Jesus himself.

He is a man who has been chosen by God. To receive the message of Christ. It's a term of immense dignity and authority. And privilege.

And in 10 of the 13 letters that we have from the apostle Paul he uses it. He is called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God 1 Corinthians. He is an apostle not sent from men nor by man.

[ 10 : 26 ] But by Jesus Christ and God the Father. That's Galatians. He is an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Saviour and of Jesus Christ our home.

He is no self made apostle. He's a false apostle. But an apostle who has received his commission from the risen Christ.

Well think of the term servant. How often Paul uses that word when he describes himself. He says Paul and Timothy servants of Christ.

Paul a servant of Christ Jesus. When we think about the word servant. We often think don't we immediately of humility. Of the word slave.

And I think there is a sense in which that's right. But the New Testament uses it in a slightly different way. Our mind raises to submission and humility and loneliness.

[ 11 : 25 ] The fact that he has no rights at all before his master. Paul believed that in many ways.

He did believe that. In writing to the Corinthians. After there was that kind of a superstar personality in college. He says after all what is Apollos?

What is Paul? What are we but servants? But I think when the apostle Paul calls himself a servant. He's not actually using that in there as a term of humility.

He is a servant of Christ. It's rather a badge of honour. And authority. It's one of those times when New Testament words have New Testament meanings.

Sometimes we have to go back to the Old Testament. To find out what the New Testament is speaking about. They give us the meaning. And so think of the servant of the Lord in the Old Testament.

[ 12 : 27 ] Abraham. The Lord's servant. Moses. My servant. David. My servant. Isaiah. God's servant. My servant.

My servant. The prophets. And the servant of all servants. Was Jesus Christ. And when Paul says a servant of Christ Jesus. He's not particularly at that point expressing.

At that very point. Humility. Although he felt it. He is overwhelmed with dignity. He is overwhelmed. With honour.

That he is. The servant of Christ. He is privileged. To bear that name. It was said. Wasn't it. That the slaves of Caesar.

Rejoiced to be known. As his servants. Paul says. I am a servant of Christ. He remembers that encounter with Jesus. And when he first met the Lord Jesus.

[ 13 : 26 ] And he kneels on that road. And the glorious figure. Of the Lord Jesus. Appears to him. To appoint him as a servant. And as a witness.

Of what you've seen of me. It's a term of great dignity. And privilege. Think of some of the other words. That he uses. He says. We are Christ's ambassadors.

A plenimentary of the King. The ambassador goes. To entreat. He goes. With terms of peace. To those who need it. He says. Of this gospel.

I was appointed a herald. To Timothy chapter 1. Verse 11. Bearing a message from the King. With all the authority of the King. Behind it. Let a man show account of us.

As stewards. Stewards of the mystery of God. 1 Corinthians 4. A steward. One who is entrusted. With another person's goods.

[ 14 : 24 ] And has the responsibility. Of his friends and them. He says. We speak as men. Approved by God. Entrusted with the gospel. We are God's fellow workers.

And when you put all those things together. There is mighty privilege. And responsibility. And Paul says. By his grace. This is what I am. Or you can look thirdly.

At the authority. That he exercised. Paul was not a non-entity. Paul was not a man. Who was easy to push aside. Or to ignore.

He was a man of weight. Of force. Of strength. Of self-conscious authority. And we see it. In his relationships.

With people who are not Christians. In Cyprus. Where the Bible. Moves from calling him Saul. To Paul. And he confronts the sorceress. With vigor and authority.

[15:23] He says. You are a child of the devil. And an enemy of everything that is right. And the hand of the Lord is against you. And we see him standing.

And afraid. In Athens. Before the kind of intelligentsia of the day. In Areopagus. And he's not intimidated. He's not embarrassed. And he speaks to these men.

With power. And with authority. And he's not apologising. Here is a man. With weight. He can stand before. Governor Felix. And strike fear.

Into his heart. He speaks to the government. Of his day. About self-control. And righteousness. And judgment to come. He chose the king Agrippa.

And he says to the king Agrippa. Do you believe the prophets? It's a tremendous force of authority. He's sailing to Rome. And there's a great storm. There's going to be a shipwreck. And Paul.

[16:23] Emerges as the leader. The one to whom men turn for advice. And counsel. What force there is in this man. And when we think of his authority.

To believers and Christians. When his authority was attacked. Like it was in Galatians. Galatians. He takes pain. To defend his office. With passion.

He says. If you go to church. And if anyone is preaching. A gospel to you. Other than the one you accepted. Other than the one I preached to you. Or even an angel preached to you.

Let him be accursed. He says. I'm really astonished with you Galatians. That you are quickly deserting. The one who called you. By the grace of Christ. Let no one cause me trouble.

For I bear on my body. The marks of Jesus. Or in Corinth. Right. He said. Do you need some. Letters of recommendation to you. Or from you.

[17:21] Do I need that? Do I need letters of recommendation for you. You know that you are a letter from Christ. A result of our ministry. And that is why I write these things.

That when I come. I might not have to be harsh. In my use of authority. Even in the letters. Where Paul doesn't use the word apostle. That note of authority is evident.

We command you. He says in 2 Thessalonians. If anyone does not obey our instructions. Take special note of him. Philemon. Where Paul is so tactful.

And gentle. But there is an iron glove in that fist. In Philemon. He says. Although in Christ Jesus. I could be bold. And I could order you.

To do what you ought to do. Yet I appeal to you. On the basis of love. And everywhere in the New Testament. The impression is given. Of a man who is convinced. That he holds a position.

[18:19] Of vital. Vital importance. His authority isn't to be disregarded. His preaching is to be received. As the word of God. As it actually is. One Thessalonians.

He's a rock like man. He's a man of strength. And courage and force. And yet at the same time. In this same person. There is a great deep consciousness of sin.

And unworthiness. He says. I'm the least of the apostles. And so certainly. Let's see the humility. Of the Christian leader. He says. I do not even deserve to be called an apostle.

He describes himself. As less. Than the least. Of all the saints. Have you ever thought about that? Logically. Doesn't even make any sense. Does it?

How can you be less. Than the least. You can't be. Paul would say. I am. Some of the statements. [19:21] By the apostle Paul. Are taken by many people. With a large pinch of salt. Some people think. There is a morbid sense. Of guilt.

Here was a tormented man. A psychologically disturbed man. Who had a guilt complex. Who was driven by demons. And self-loathing. Nietzsche described Paul.

As a much tortured. Much to be pitied man. An exceedingly unpleasant person. Both to himself. And to others. Others suggest. That he is guilty.

Of just a little. Pardonable exaggeration. That he is painting. His sin. In kind of. Dark colors. So that other people.

Might not. Feel so bad at him. He is saying. Oh. I am as bad as you. I am worse than you. I am the chief of sinners. But actually. You know.

[20:16] What he is doing. Is not exaggerating. Paul meant. What he said. And I think again. That shows us. In three ways. First of all.

Paul was humble. Because of his past sins. The memory. Never left. The apostle Paul. Of his pre-conversion life. The terrible sins.

Against God. That Paul committed. By persecuting his people. His first appearance. In the bible. Is at the martyrdom. Of Stephen. Where the first Christian preacher. Is stoned. And it says.

In Acts 8. Verse. Is when Paul is giving approval. And it's a present. Continuous tense. He's there giving approval. He wasn't there.

Thinking. This is a terrible thing. That should never have happened. Paul's first settled conviction. Was that the death of Stephen. Was a good thing. He went home that evening. And he said to his wife. It was a good day today.

[ 21 : 11 ] The right thing happened. And he woke up. The following morning. And he still thought. It was a good thing. He approved. But in Acts 8. Three. There's a particularly. Horrid word. Where it says.

Paul made havoc. Of the church. It's used often. Of a wild animal. In its angry. Destructive. Behaviour.

It's like a bull. Getting into a vineyard. And feeling trapped. And there's furious rage. And in his fury. And in his rage.

He went from house to house. And he dragged off. Men and women. And he put them in prison. And he says. I persecuted followers. Of the way. To their death. And then. When they were put to death.

I cast my vote against them. I went from synagogue. To synagogue. To have them punished. He writes to the Galatians. You've heard of my previous life. Way of life.

[ 22 : 05 ] In Judaism. How intensely. I kept on. Persecuting. The church of God. And I tried to. Ravage. And sack it. As a city. Is sacked. By an invading army. It's a frightful.

Fanaticism. In the apostle Paul. Even. Terrorism. Hendrickson says. Paul can never forget those days. A blasphemer.

And persecutor. And a violent man. He'd been a great sinner. And the memory of what he'd done. Kept him humble. Secondly.

Here's the shocking thing to us. He was humble. Humbled. By his past righteousness. It was not only his past persecution. And the things that he'd done against the church.

That caused him regret. But Paul came to see his righteousness. His law keeping. His religiosity. That too was sin. He expressed it clearly in the passage that we read.

[ 23 : 05 ] That once he put confidence in his own flesh. Once he put confidence that he was a Jew in pedigree. That he had an impeccable upbringing. As to the righteousness of the law.

I'm blameless. He said. I considered it to my profit. I relied on it. I raised my assurance. That I was a religious person. He took his law keeping.

And Paul presented it to God. And said to God. God you have to forgive me. Look. God. And now he says. Whatever was my profit. I now consider lost. The sake of Christ.

And he glories in Christ Jesus. And he says. Put no confidence in the flesh. He's abandoned all the works of the Lord. He's abandoned trying to be religious.

I consider the rubbish. That I may gain Christ and be found in him. Not having a righteousness of my own. That comes from the Lord. But now.

[ 24 : 04 ] All I hope. All my trust. Is found in faith in Christ. That is my only hope. And that righteousness. Comes from what God is by faith.

And Paul is saying something. Very very profound to you and I. But the religious person. The respectable person.

Is living a life. Which is fundamentally sinful. Why? Because he's not relying on God's grace.

He's relying on himself. For himself. The religious person. Is misusing the law. To try and place God. Under an obligation to him. To maintain himself.

In God's presence. Herman Riddinost says this. Boasting in the law. In trying to burden away to people. And go on. Boasting in the law.

[ 24 : 58 ] Is fatal. Because it no longer relies. On the grace of God himself. But on man's activity. In this manner. Man becomes confident.

And strong. Against God. The flesh boasts itself. Instead of boasting about God. Zeal. Zeal for the law. Can alienate a man from God.

And has precisely the effect. Of making him a sinner. Riddinost goes on to say. This confronts man. Not only with his deficiency. But casts his gain.

What he thinks he's done. Into the balance. And compels him. To not only acknowledge his sin. But to renounce his very virtues. To renounce his very virtues.

Before God. To become a Christian. You have to come to see. That your whole life. Like my whole life.

[ 25 : 58 ] Has been an offence. To the God of grace. His law keeping. Was sinful. As well as his law breaking. To be a Christian.

You have to realise. That you are sinful. When you're at your very worst. And we've been sinful. When we've been at our very best.

As the Apostle Paul. His righteousness. His past righteousness. What he thought. Had got him right with God. Captain Humboldt. His arrogance. And pride.

Preeding myself. And boasting before God. What my sin. My sin. Thirdly. By greeting. The present struggle. Captain Humboldt. Paul knew nothing.

Of the Christian leader. Who presents himself. As a kind of. Spiritual superman. That is far removed. From the ordinary. Frailties.

[ 26 : 58 ] And weaknesses. He acknowledged. His imperfections. And his struggles. And his defeats. Listen to him. From Romans 7. What I want to do.

I do not do. But what I hate. I do. I have a desire. To do what is good. But I cannot carry it out. For what I do. Is not the good. I want to do. No. The evil that I want. I do not want to do. This I keep on doing. There is a lot of controversy. There is a lot of controversy.

About that passage. Isn't there. Who is he speaking about. Let me ask you this. When you first read that. Doesn't that passage. Chime. With your heart. Doesn't it. Charles Hodge says the inward conflict here described every Christian understands and that is right Apostle Paul says I'm a man like you you remember how he spoke to his goal in Philippians 3 his great goal was to know Christ we read it but immediately afterwards he says don't mistake me it's not that I've already obtained this or I'm already perfect that is my aspiration but it's not my achievement that's my goal I have reached it and he acknowledges his creaturely weakness he speaks of three men that came to visit him in prison and he says I was encouraged by them

I needed them I was lonely his experience in Asia when he was under great pressure Charles the Corinthians he says we are hard pressed on every side we are perplexed for certain Christians they're never perplexed today but you and I we are perplexed aren't we some people pretend they know all the answers Paul says I didn't know what to do I think that's fine in an elders meeting I think that's fine sometimes in a Christian I don't know what to do you've got a thorn in the flesh and he doesn't say he doesn't say well I knew at once I had this strange feeling that this was something I was going to have to live with all my life this difficulty Paul says I had to pray on and on and on and the Lord had to tell me listen for you're not going to have to live with this he's an intense human man he says to the Corinthians I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling and here was a man who had no airs and graces he said once to the people of Listerate he said we are also men of the same nature as you now let me try and apply this quickly

[ 29 : 49 ] Paul had immense authority and yet that on itself that on its own would have made him very harsh and obscure and intimidating and Paul was another instinct he was a broken man he was a humble man he was overwhelmed by the riches of God's mercy and that gave him a warmth and a humanity and a compelling gentleness and this balance of authority and humility is essential for the church's leadership the world attacks it doesn't it the world looks at church leaders as a joke as effeminate weaklings that come to a promise you all and the church can attack it I think at times we're so terrified of leadership being overbearing that congregations actually refuse to follow ministers and elders get treated like dog study bodies to run here there and everywhere and everyone's back and call leave it to dot dot dot dot dot there is something in ourselves that questions our authority sometimes for every Christian leader every Christian leader has those questions occasionally I get asked to speak at public schools

I think they're kind of like a voice from the working class occasionally so I'm wheeled into Egypt and Arbor and places like that and they are amazing places I don't know if I've ever been to them they are amazingly well run headmaster's office you're ushered in for a cup of tea and it's so incredible really and the staff respect him place is jammed full packed of able people and it runs like clockwork and then I go I go to my wooden shed at the bottom of the yard and it feels shabby it feels tawdry

for an hour or two and every Christian leader feels a sinking in their heart thinking what am I doing isn't this really important and Christian leaders have many things that come on us to attack our sense and authority and so what has happened in this country is that Christian leaders have become weak and ineffectual and apologetic terrified of offending and so you see the big I don't even period Darylmas who's simpering kind of pink-cheeked limp-wristed giggling cheek-drinking nitty and that's what he is he's a figure of fantasy and we get brainwashed by that and so ministers can be like little dogs you're little dogs you're the tender little dogs you grow you grow a little dog and it's going off don't they but if you pat a little dog they'll do anything for you you scratch their ears oh they actually see that they do grovel and compromise and apologise they'll do anything if you scratch their ears now in a Christian leader today he's not an apostle it's very important to say that we have not Paul's unique commissioning we are not apostles but I do want to say to you that if you are a preacher of the gospel God has chosen you in eternity he created you he shaped you into the person that he wanted you to be and he has called you to a serious to preach and to teach to proclaim the word of God in his infallibility and authority and if you're going to be a Christian preacher you must be convinced of your calling convinced of your message I love the words of the apostle of Jesus and Saul on the Damascus road he says now get up get up and stand on your feet I will be into you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness to what I have seen of you and what I will surely get up stand on your feet for Christ to appear to you and commission to you to his service we need that as Christian leaders and yet we also need personal humility there are now very able men and they're orthodox men and yet there is a coldness about them and something about them that is not attractive and we want to say to them you are very very clever you are very very bright but have you ever cried you've read the books and you have them taped but have you ever made a fool of yourself have you ever gone home on a Sunday afternoon and buried your head in the desk and said

Lord forgive me coldness so preachers write answers but they're like robots and I think it's right for those who preach to be frightened and to tremble at God's word to be broken down and if that isn't you don't do it and we need to learn don't we from this ex-baracy of the ugly barren arrogance we all need this of a religious life that is divorced by grace divorced from grace that is an ugly thing because all our righteousness is as filthy rags and self if anything should keep us humble sometimes I despair that I will leave my dirty egotistical hands on every single thing I do for God and so when you're doing something for the Lord is that I find it when

[ 35 : 58 ] I'm praying for God's blessing on my students and I was this afternoon and God says to me why are you praying for blessing are you sure it's for me is it not just a little bit for you we have to sing away at that time well yes for that mercy I don't know but I believe it's your word less than the least that I the blasphemer the violent man should preach among the Gentiles dignity and humility and we live with this great tension we are sinners but we are saints we are beggars and yet we are princes and that is the Christian life that's the Christian life for you it's what God said in Psalm 113 isn't it he raises the poor from the dust and he lifts the needy from the ashim to make them sit with princes that the princes are his people and when we do that we personify the gospel and so you as a Christian as a child of

God you have great dignity and yet you are a sinner what is the gospel it is that Jesus saves sinners it is that Jesus saves sinners and we come as saved redeemed forgiven chosen blessed and you sinners as far as in prayer let's pray