

Revolutionary Disciple
Week #3: The Church Sphere

The most revolutionary trait that a follower of Jesus can have in this present culture is humility.

Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. ² Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. ³ Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. Ephesians 4:1-3

Pride is simply being self-absorbed. I am focused on what I am thinking, feeling, and interested in. **The problem with pride is that it negatively affects all of our primary relationships** because we miss so much of what is going on with others, as well as **missing what God is up to** around us.

Pride kills discipleship.

Humility is knowing who you are in relation to God and choosing to go lower. You have been brought from **death to life**, **adopted** into his family, **raised up with Jesus**, and made into a **masterpiece**.

In our combative, me first, follow your dream, anxious culture, there is nothing more revolutionary than a disciple of Jesus who is learning humility. And there is nothing more revolutionary **than a church filled with people learning humility from Jesus.** This idea was so revolutionary when **Paul wrote** first these words, that he was redefining the word humility. What do I mean? To that point in Hebrew literature and in Greek/Roman, the word they used for humility only meant submitting or coming under **someone who was above you or your equal**. What Paul describes in this Ephesians passage is submitting to or coming under someone who is **below you!** Boom! **That's what Jesus did.** We were below him and yet he made himself our servant by suffering and dying on a cross for our sins.

Spheres Diagram. We start in the middle by waving the white flag and surrendering to Jesus. Today we are going to look at what **humility looks like in the church.**

In order to learn humility from Jesus and practice it in the church, we need to see what the church is.

Here's where we start. **Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church.** Ephesians 5:23B

Jesus is the architect and owner of the church.

We need to look at what Jesus says the church should be before we can look at what humility would be in the church.

We could read a bunch of scriptures to understand how Jesus designed his church, but there isn't time for that in this setting. Here's the shortened version of that. The church that **Jesus designed and leads must have these aspects to it:**

- There must be teaching from God's word.
- Fellowship or community.
- Worship of God.
- Service to each other and the world.
- Reaching out to help others learn to follow.
- Meeting together regularly.

Here's one scripture that is very important for that last point. **And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near. Hebrews 10:25**

¹⁵ Then he asked them, "But who do you say I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ Jesus replied, "You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. ¹⁸ Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'),^[f] and upon this rock **I will build my church, and all the powers of hell^[g] will not conquer it. Matthew 16:15-18**

This clearly states that the church did not exist until Jesus built it. He was able to do that because he is the messiah, the Christ, King, Son of God. The key phrase is, **"I will build my church"**. Then he goes on to say that what he builds **cannot be stopped**. Not even the powers of hell can stop this thing that Jesus has designed and built. **What we build, on the other hand, stops it.**

Here's what pride will do when we don't focus on what the designer and owner wants for his church. This comes from the book, *The Revolutionary Disciple*. **"Sometimes we think of church like a buffet. We get to place on our plate whatever suits our taste at the time. I don't like big groups, so I will only go to a small group, we think. I only like one-on-one fellowship, so I will hang just with a few friends—that is good enough for me. Humble discipleship, on the other hand, allows the Lord to call the shots. It teaches us to say no to ourselves and yes to God. Whatever he says, we are all in—heart and soul. We submit to his ways over ours." Pg. 110**

A buffet is about choosing what I feel like eating today. I'm in charge of designing my meal, the restaurant simply puts out all of the options of what a meal could mean within the boundaries of their menu.

The Greiners love to go to the redneck Riviera. That is no other than Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. This is the peoples' beach. There is no pretense or uppity attitude. One of the things we like to do is go to one of the three thousand seafood buffets. These are so overwhelming that **you have to have a strategy.** Their strategy is to get you to eat and drink a lot of things that cost them very little so that you fill up before eating the expensive stuff. The glasses of sweet tea are massive. There are tons of biscuits, corn bread, hush puppies, mac and cheese, and rice and salad. These are typically at the beginning of the line. My strategy is to not be sucked in by their **calls of warm comforting goodness** in order to get to the shrimp, scallops, flounder, crab legs...And finally I save some room for the **greatest of all southern desserts, key lime pie.** And don't even try to argue with me, because you would be wrong.

That's a great plan, but it's my plan designed by me around my tastes, hunger, and twisted sense of trying to make them pay, instead of me. If we approach the church that way, then it really isn't the church, because Jesus no longer is designing it for his purposes, but I am.

Humility says that the church isn't all about me, what I want and what I need. I need some things that I don't think I need because they are challenging, hard, complicated; you know, like relationships. Sometimes it's our past hurts, our particular type of brokenness that encourages us to avoid parts of what Jesus says his church is. When we take the buffet approach, or the consumer approach, we are fighting against the church's design and, therefore, its designer.

We say this all of the time, the church is not the producer of spiritual goods and services that I receive and consume which will give me a happy life, allow me to get into heaven. In the case of the church, the customer is not always right. If I think I'm to be treated that way, then I am wrong.

The church that Jesus designed and owns...It is the context in which I learn humility from Jesus.

We give up our preferences and comfort for the glory of God and the good of the church. When we know who we are in Christ and choose to go lower within the church, we have the opportunity to be like Jesus by doing what he did, sacrificing comfort for the betterment of the whole. Submitting to one another helps us learn humility from Jesus.

This happens when **older people sacrifice what they would prefer in music in order to serve those who are younger in age and spiritual maturity.**

Church is the **playground, or boot camp**, for learning humility from Jesus.

Much of what you learn that you need to know gets learned on the playground. All of the relationship stuff like sharing, encouragement, dealing with conflict, helping one another, cooperating with one another, is all learned on the playground. **The church is where we play together and learn humility from Jesus.** He teaches us through the **things that we experience together that push us to choose humility over pride.** You could say the **church produces the need to learn humility.**

The church is humility boot camp. In boot camp my kids learned the most basic things that allow someone to be an effective soldier, no matter what part they will play in protecting and serving our country. Soldiers cannot be effective if they haven't learned to follow their commander, trust one another, be disciplined in the little things, so they can be in the big things, use a weapon...**These are foundational things that make them effective at protecting our country** and being ready to go into harm's way so others don't have to.

The church is where we learn Jesus, like humility, so that we can be effective as we go and we know that when we go, the gates of hell cannot hold us back.

Here's a situation that is very real for us today. **"When leaders call for a church to go entirely online or when individuals stay at home to watch services online, we have to ask ourselves why: Are we staying home because we are sick and don't want others to get ill? OR are we staying at home because we are selfish. Church is never a one-way transaction, something we only receive. Online serves a purpose, but we must recognize its severe limitations. How can we physically serve one another, hug one another, and the other 'one another' commands in the New Testament if we don't regularly gather in a physical room together? How can we submit to the waters of baptism or receive communion if we don't experience church in person."** Pg 114

Let me say it again, if you are sick or have some condition that makes getting COVID dangerous for you, then for now, stay home. But God's design for the church is that you are physically together with one another and that is the context where Jesus can teach us humility as well as anything else he needs us to learn. This is where **I give up some comfort or**

preference for the good of others. That is, knowing who I am in relation to Jesus and choosing to go lower.

This is one of the verses that **describes the church Jesus designed** and owns. ¹⁸ But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. ¹⁹ How strange a body would be if it had only one part! ²⁰ Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. ²¹ The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you." 1 Corinthians 12:18-21

I cannot say that I don't need the church. It's even stronger than that. **If I am a disciple of Jesus, one of his followers, then I don't have the right to reject the church!**

I knew a guy who used to attend a church. **He stopped coming because he was doing something that the Bible definitely told him not to do,** but he justified it and did it anyway. I saw him some time after and he said, "We have all of our family over on Sundays and that's our church. Not according to how God defined it. **Your family isn't a church.** Your family can be in a church, but it isn't a church on its own. **The church is a fellowship, a community, not one family** that is too easily controlled by the father, mother, or the strongest personality.

One of the great gifts of the church outside of America is the leader and writer from China Watchman Nee. **The Lord calls us to learn obedience in the body, the church, as well as in the home and in the world. Were we to learn well in the body, we would have no difficulty in other areas. The church is where we should begin to learn obedience [to Christ]. It is the place of fulfillment even as it is the place of trial. Should we fail here, we will fail everywhere. If we learn well in the church, the problems of the kingdom, of the world, and of the universe can be solved."** *Spiritual Authority, Watchman Nee 82.*

That brings us to another verse about the church. ¹⁷ **Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit.** Hebrews 13:17

Understanding that **some have been harmed by church leaders or leaders in general,** so this is a difficult verse. This can be **misused by leaders who aren't godly and have personal goals for being in ministry,** not because God designed and called them to do it.

My confession is that I've avoided this topic because it seems self-serving. There have been times when I wanted to read this to a person

who was disregarding my leadership, but that was wrong thinking. My motives were wrong. I wanted to **be right or win**, or whatever.

We are quick to judge liberal churches for saying, "that can't mean that" or "that's out of date" when looking at sexual standards. We can't do the same thing with this. It is in God's word, so **let's try to understand it**, not avoid it and hope things work out ok.

Remember, humility has boundaries like we have said, injustice and abuse. If a church leader, like pastor or elder or SS teacher, is **clearly living outside of God's way** or is proposing something that **isn't biblical**, then that is different.

I had a friend who was pastoring in a southern state coming from Michigan. He planned a big 4th of July community outreach. They had fireworks, games, free hot dogs, and they got to know a lot of people in their neighborhood and town. He was so fired up. Fast forward to their next board meeting, where he is to reflect on this event that he planned. He comes in to the board and tells them all of the amazing things that happened, how they fed so many people and met kids from the neighborhood for the first time, etc. There was a pause before the chair of the board said, "We hear what you are saying, but we are not going to do that event again." The pastor asked why. The board member hemmed, hawed around a bit and then basically said that it was about all of the black kids that were there. The pastor was blown away. **He had not gotten any hint of this when he interviewed** for this position. The board then explained that since **he wasn't around here, he wouldn't understand** how things work. Puzzled, he asked but what about _____ who are black and attend this church?" He then said, "you aren't going to like this, but here's the truth, they know their place."

My friend felt like the only thing he could do was to allow them to continue to lead their church into something that wasn't the church Jesus designed by leaving. He wasn't going to fight the whole board. He let them know how he felt and resigned.

I am one leader, or one of his under shepherds. I feel he has called me to do this. Even though I am a leader, **I am accountable** to people to whom I must be ready to humbly submit. Within the church, I have to be accountable to other key leaders, called elders. **They need to know how I'm living, how I'm leading, and will challenge me if I'm getting off base.** I submit my goals for each year to them. They also have the right to ask me **how my marriage is going.**

Pride causes us to want to be our own authority inside the church, but be accountable to no one. That's a self-absorbed attitude inside a community based upon covenant relationship with Jesus and one another. **I've met a few people like this** in my time of ministry in three churches. They want to direct things from behind a curtain. They **want control**, but are **not willing to accept the accountability**. These persons want to affect the direction of the church, but not be called on the carpet if it doesn't work. **That's pride.**

To whom much is given, much is required.

This means that in the church we need to...**Humbly allow your leaders to lead.**

We cannot create conflict with the leaders of the church over a preference or a disagreement. If the elders, as a whole, tell me that I need to do something different or address something they see, then I have to come under that.

The leaders who prepare our worship are spiritual leaders. But I've known folks who only come **when certain people are participating** or they will **step out until the music is over** and then enter for the sermon. We have to let those leaders lead.

There was a man who challenged the pastor on a point of structure that he didn't agree with. That was fine, but when that pastor asked the man **to trust him, he couldn't do it.** So he went directly to the board and some other leaders.

Again, the boundary is if something is clearly unbiblical or there is some way the leader is outside the bounds of how he or she should be living. (**Illegal, immoral, unethical or unbiblical.**)

"I don't like coming when I am watching on the screen." Here's a news flash, **no one prefers the screen.** Again, when we **sacrifice our comforts and preference** for others, we love others like Jesus loves. This is something that **allows us to be one church in two locations.** It's as if we are saying that **the part that matters is the sermon,** not the people sitting listening to the sermon, nor the worship. **It's not a buffet, the church is more effective when we allow leaders to lead** and we give them someone to whom they are accountable. I am accountable to the elders, **Julie, Deb, Matt, Melissa, Jen, and Tammy are accountable to me.**

God has no obligation to bless our attempts at making the church our spiritual buffet. What happens at a buffet is **we eat too much and don't serve enough and we get lethargic and less effective** after being there.

Are you willing to do the little things that your leaders ask you to do? What if you were faithful in small things? When Matt or Jen asks you to bring your kids or help out in some way.

Do you attempt to do what I ask you to do at the end of the sermons? Are you too busy to serve in simple ways, like chairs? Are you resisting getting into a bridge group when the pastor and Elders have established as a vital part of this church.

Here's another boundary for leaders. **But Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. ²⁶ But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. ²⁸ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matthew 20:25-28**

As leaders, God has called us to lead. But, it is God's design that we do it through serving and wanting the best for others, not ourselves. Jesus' style leadership is not about giving orders to people who do what the leader wants them to do. It is about knowing who you are in relation to God and going lower.

That brings us to our purpose as leaders. It is a purpose that can only be done by leading like Jesus describes in this last verse.

Church leaders are given authority for the purpose of building up the body.

¹¹ Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. ¹² Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. ¹³ This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-13

What is the outcome of this submission to one another? We become more effective in service to others.

Dr. Dave Burckhart is the leader of the Warner Camp BOD, which I am a part of. We are starting a new campaign to make the camp more effective. Each board member is to be on a committee as a part of that process. I looked at the different options and picked the one I liked most or felt like I could do moderately well. When asked by Dave, the leader God had put in place, where I wanted to serve, I gave him my choice. He paused and

said "Bill, you could do that, but I really see you on the development team." That's the raising money team, which is the one I was trying to avoid. He then said, "That's where I would like you to serve, I think you are perfect for that team." At that moment I had to trust Dave and submit to what my leader wanted, so I did.

Fast forward to our meeting this past week. I was not looking forward to it. We met online and started talking about a phrase that would **capture the why of this campaign.** Words and phrases started running through my mind. Others were throwing ideas out there and then something that I felt really strongly about started getting traction and the excitement was building in all of us. **The Holy Spirit was moving. I started talking and scripture was coming out of my mouth, there was passion about what I felt, why I was for the camp that has a ropes course dedicated to my son, Quinten.** We all left that meeting knowing that God was speaking something to us that was going to affect the ministry of Warner Camp well into the future.

Dave had to lead. He listened to God's voice and had the courage to tell someone twice his age to listen to what God was telling him. My job was not to pull the pastor card or the age card or whatever, but to submit to what Dave wanted. **And because I did, I got to watch the Holy Spirit move. I got to see a glimpse of the kingdom. I got to make my son proud. In my pride, I could have missed the whole thing because I looked at the options like a buffet and picked what I had a taste for.**

Pray these three questions:

1. Do I have a problem submitting to authority in the church?
2. What is the source?
3. What one thing do I need to do to practice humility in the church?

This might be something you need to take to prayer and honestly reflect with a mature brother or sister who you know won't just tell you what you want to hear.

Listen to what God's Word says about the church.

Do the "One Another Passage Study" (This is a download referred to at the end of the chapter. Let me know what you think of this last part).