

Last week in our “Practical Christianity” series, we saw how doing comes from being and to ensure that our being is even better than our doing, we must continually pursue Christ-like character. Our goal is to get to the place where our being and doing, reflects his glory and character (Romans 10:31). The pursuit of Christ-like character means we constantly look, “In the mirror and not out the window,” as it were, so as not to blame, deflect, or get defensive, regarding our character flaws. Unlike the ...

***I-always-look-out-the-window-and-never-into-the-mirror- so-that-I-can-blame-others-for-who-I-am.***

...therapeutic, victimized, crowd of today, we own, confess, repent, and trust God’s powerful grace to help us overcome every one of our weaknesses and issues. By far, the best place to develop Christ-like character is our local church, with small groups being the forum of love, acceptance, and encouragement. Today let’s dive even deeper into our being by seeing how we can practically develop a Christ-like attitude.

### **Attitude**

Attitude is a mental state derived from our experiences and emotions. It is generally forged in our family-of-origins and by those we trust and respect the most. Attitude is a choice which determines how we handle situations and circumstances. It is a prism through which we interpret the world and respond to it. Attitude, however, is ultimately an expression of our character. When 1<sup>st</sup> century Greek philosopher Epictetus said,

***It’s not what happens in you but how you react to it that matters...***

He was referring to our attitude. Austrian psychiatrist Victor Frankl confirmed Epictetus’ insight when studying why he, and others, were able to survive the horrors of the Holocaust, while the vast majority didn’t. He concluded, “*It’s not what happens to you but in you.*”

Attitude explains why two people can have opposite reactions to the same thing. For instance, one gets embroiled in a conflict and takes flight while the other, stays and fights. One shrinks from a challenge while another embraces it. Developing a Christ-like attitude is crucial not only for our mental and emotional health, but also for our mission to lead people to Jesus Christ. I know people that love the Lord but have such cantankerous, curmudgeonly, and contrarian attitudes, even the devil doesn’t like being around them. Bad attitude is Christ/Church repellent. But the good news is, we can change our attitudes so that they can become endearing, attractive, and irresistible.

### **Jesus Attitude**

There are many aspects of Jesus’ attitude that are endearing, attractive and irresistible. I’m sure we love and admire, his attitudes of love, forgiveness, mercy, and compassion. However, there is one we must adopt because it is foundational. We find it in the first Christian Hymn of the Church, Philippians 2:1-8

***1 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having***

*the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

The word Paul used in v2, translated, “like-minded” is the one he used for “attitude” in v5. The word is “*phroneo*” and it ties attitude more into our mindset rather than our emotional disposition, although it is an admixture of both. Ultimately, we become what we think because thinking forms our attitudes and influences our emotions. Nonetheless, which of Jesus’ attitudes does Paul want the Philippians to adopt?

### **Made Himself Nothing**

V7 gives us a clue when it says, “He made himself nothing.” What does that mean? It doesn’t mean Jesus was depressed and had no self-esteem. It means that although Jesus was God, he didn’t assert his divine prerogatives and privileges, when he “took on flesh” and came to this planet. Instead, he “laid those aside” to become a “servant of servants.” Jesus did so most poignantly on three occasions: throughout his three-year public ministry, the Last Supper when he washed the Disciples’ feet, and during his crucifixion. So, when we boil it all down, the foundational attitude Jesus’ possessed, and we must attain, is humility. Now I’m not entirely sure what was going on with the Philippians, but when Paul warns them in v3-4 ...

*3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

... it is obviously the attitude of humility was in short supply. When it is, selfishness and arrogance rush in to take its place. And when you must pull out the “Big Guy” for an attitude check well, you must be one very screwed-up congregation. Perhaps facing similar problems, Peter told his congregation (1:3:8)

*All of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted and keep a humble attitude.*

Rightfully so, this text is used to motivate folks to engage in the serving opportunities of their church and community. Before I apply it differently this morning, let me add that if you are a Christ follower and are not serving anywhere, you need to keep having “come-to-Jesus-meetings” until it becomes natural to you.

### **Offense Proof Your Life**

When James writes, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (4:6) he means that all good things spring from humility because God graces it. Conversely, all bad things come from pride because God opposes it. However, one of the good things about humility is that it “offense proofs” our lives. Is it me, but have you noticed how easily offended people are these days? The slightest of slights, along with a few “M&Ms” (mistake, misunderstanding, and miscommunication), folds

relationships faster than an overcaffeinated origami artist these days (cancels). Unfortunately, this “thin skin” attitude is widespread inside and outside the church. However, when we adopt the humility of Christ, we lay down our right to be offended just as he laid down his rights as God. Therefore, we don’t need to be right all the time, don’t need to defend every position, or die on every hill, and don’t need to issue ultimatums. We can admit our character imperfections. Humility offense proofs our lives because it helps us not to take criticisms personally, but with a grain of salt and even a motivation to improve. Furthermore, humility helps us ward off attitudinal cancers like bitterness and resentment. Jesus was routinely criticized yet he never once got bitter, resentful, or even passive aggressive.

### **Conclusion: 3Cs of Attitude Change**

Before we participate in Communion, here are 3Cs of practical ways to change our attitudes.

- **Choose to develop a Christ-like attitude of humility. The Bible commands it so it must be something we can do, so let’s. From our opening clip, George Constanza chose to have an angry attitude. We can choose not to.**
- **Call a close friend when a bad attitude starts seeping into your soul. A bad attitude is self-inflicted misery. Don’t waste your limited and precious time on earth wallowing in one when a phone call to a positive friend will snap you right out of it (not a “commiserator”).**
- **Commit to being around good/godly attitudes. Attitude is infectious, and we are the sum-total of the five closest people in our lives. So, when possible, steer clear of the Eeyores and George Constanzas of the world. You’ll never be sorry you did.**

If the 3Cs don’t work, try the “Ashley-Attitude-Incentive.” When my niece Ashly detected a bad attitude, she would saunter up to you with her “attitude jar” and say, “Bad Att-itude.” You were compelled to pony up a quarter and put it in her jar. She became wealthy at a very young age (lol).