**Who is Most Important to You?**

“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves.” This fascinating (and difficult) challenge was made by the apostle Paul in Philippians 2:3. Christ calls on us to rise above typical human emotion (love your enemies, for instance) and considering others more important than ourselves is another example.

Humility is a fundamental component of this admonition. Jesus turned the human concept of greatness on its ear when He said, “The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.” (Matthew 23:11-12). Arrogance and discipleship are never compatible.

But my self-image is only half the picture in Philippians 2. Regarding someone else as more important than myself is a function, not only of my self-image, but also the way I view the other person. Notice that this evaluation of importance is not based on an objective consideration of personal characteristics (intelligence, wisdom, appearance, accumulated wealth). If so, we could take 100 people, define the relevant characteristics, quantify those characteristics for each person and rank them in order of importance based on their score.

The scenario in Christ’s admonition is two people, one regarding the other more important and the other regarding the first as more important. By any objective measure, they cannot both be more important than the other. You see, the focus is not on objective measures but on an individual’s *regard* for others. Christ’s disciple will show deference to another as if they are more important, regardless of what the objective evidence suggests.

Philippians 2:3 shines a spotlight on the importance of tolerance. Now there is a concept that has been grossly distorted in our society to mean acceptance of anyone who happens to agree with me. Those who tout this brand of “tolerance” spew the most vile hatred imaginable on anyone who dares to challenge their ideas. That, my friend, is the furthest thing from tolerance.

Scriptural tolerance is not turning a blind eye to sin. But often the annoying idiosyncrasies of others have nothing to do with sin. They are simply a nuisance. If I expect everyone around me to walk on water, I will never be able to fulfill Philippians 2:3 in my heart and life. If I am ultrasensitive to every slight, every unkind word, every undesirable habit, I am failing miserably in my quest to regard others more important than myself.

This divine model for how we interact with others suggests an automatic overlap of profound regard. That means everyone will be bending over backwards to listen to others and to show care and concern for others. That is the beautiful life our loving Creator wants for us.

**John McKee**

**West Murray church of Christ**