

Humility: Do you have it? Messiah did!

Philippians 2:5-11

Humility may be one of the most elusive qualities of a Messianic disciple. As the adage goes, 'once you believe that you have gained humility, you have lost it.' In Philippians 2, Rav Shaul uses all his powers of persuasion to foster humility in the fledgling disciples from Philippi. Shaul presents the humble life of Messiah as the ultimate model of humility. "If *there is* any comfort from *Messiah's* love . . . then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love *as Messiah*. . . do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves" (Phil. 2.1-3).

One of the best readings of Shaul is to recognize this recurring call to *imitatio Christi* throughout the Epistles. We do ourselves injustice to ignore this explicit biblical call upon our lives to change. This call is to leave our own ways and to follow the higher ways modeled in the life of Yeshua. Scripture calls us to personal revolution: "For My ways are higher than your ways as the heavens are higher than the earth." Søren Kierkegaard also warns against a reading of Scripture that falls short of personal transformation:

The matter is quite simple. The Bible is very easy to understand. But we . . . are a bunch of scheming swindlers. We pretend to be unable to understand it because we know very well that the minute we understand we are obliged to act accordingly. Take any words in the New Testament and forget everything except pledging yourself to act accordingly. My God, you will say, if I do that my whole life will be ruined. Herein lies the real place of Christian scholarship. Christian scholarship is the Church's prodigious invention to defend itself against the Bible, to ensure that we can continue to be good Christians without the Bible coming too close. Dreadful it is to fall into the hands of the living God. Yes, it is even dreadful to be alone with the New Testament.

In approaching one of Shaul's most gripping descriptions of Messiah, we must remember Scripture's purpose. We are not primarily called to intellectualize, homologize, rationalize, or theologize these words, but to live them. The introductory clause of Philippians 2:5-11 makes clear the intent of the passage: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Messiah Yeshua" (Phil. 2.5). The willingness of Yeshua to walk a humble path from the heights of divinity to the life of an obedient 'servant' is intended to change us!

Your attitude should be the same as that of Messiah Yeshua: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a tree! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Yeshua every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Yeshua the Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:5-11).

Kenotic theology, as found in the teaching of the Catholic theologian, Karl Rainer, teaches that Yeshua was not fully aware and gradually developed his self-consciousness of divinity. Yet Shaul's message becomes clearer when we realize that this so-called *Kenosis* passage does not describe the emptying of Yeshua, but rather the *concealment* of Yeshua's divinity under a veil of flesh. The veiling of Messiah's glory demonstrates more fully the intense humility of Yeshua. *Immanuel*, God with us, in full cognizance of his divine glory, became like us and walked among us.

Yeshua, the example of humility, presents us with a choice. On either side of Philippians 2:5-11 are verses that point to alternative paths.

Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Phil. 2:4)

For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Yeshua the Messiah. (Phil. 2:21)

The life of humility expresses itself in a life of service, a life that looks out for 'the interests of others'. A life of humility, a service-oriented life, will be challenging, especially as we serve in the midst of an emerging Messianic Jewish community. At the same time, such a life will lead to exaltation, whether it is on earth or in heaven. When God exalts him, we will be exalted with him. The Father

will unveil Messiah's full glory to the world, and we will be revealed in glory as followers of Israel's Messiah. God, Messiah, and Israel will be exalted at the culmination of time. This expectation punctuates the end of the Shacharit service with the *Alenu*. One Messianic adaptation of this prayer includes a reference from Philippians:

Therefore God also highly exalted Messiah and gave him the Name that is above every name, so that at the name belonging to Yeshua every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth. And it is said: the LORD will be king over all the world; on that day the LORD will be one and God's name will be one. (Conclusion of *Alenu* based on Philippians 2:9-10 and Zechariah 14:9)