

PHILIPPIANS: OVERCOMING BROKEN DREAMS GOD'S WAY
"Part IV: Gaining God's Honor By Meeting The Needs Of Others"
(Philippians 2:1-11)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Just over a week ago, in an effort to bring the Elian Gonzales issue to a resolution, federal agents with assault weapons stormed the home of Lazaro Gonzales, breaking down a door, and taking Elian from his relatives' home. The goal was to reunite him with his father.

Instead of settling the issue, this move sparked more debate:

(a) Supporters of the government's invasion argue international law need to be upheld: though Elian's mother died trying to bring him out of Cuba, his father who is from Cuba says he wants his boy back.

The relatives failed to abide by the law of giving Elian up and so the federal officials felt obliged to invade the home as they did.

(b) Critics of the move cite deep concerns about the motives and ends of this action. (1) Fidel Castro as a cruel dictator might well have sent Elian's father to America with dictatorial strings attached, making it impossible for him to do anything but Castro's will lest terrible consequences befall is *other* relatives still back in Cuba. (2) Knowing Fidel Castro has declared children in Cuba the property of the **state**, and that Elian's father is himself part of Cuba's communist party, Cuban Americans fear if Elian is returned to Cuba, Castro will heartlessly "brainwash" the already-traumatized, motherless child for his own welfare. (3) Wanting to insure Elian never returns to such a **dreadful, humiliating** fate, they have reservations about turning him over to the government! (4) Also, critics such as the editors of Investor's Business Daily claim the President, who is under a cloud of shame as an impeached official, desperately wants to leave a positive legacy for his administration. They think he is trying to return Elian to Cuba to make peace with Castro to end the Cuban embargo. Then he can be seen as the one who solved the decades-long Cuban crisis!

How could such conflict FUELED by fears of PAST disruptions to the honor and well-being of so many in Miami's "Little Havana" or problems with the President's own failure regarding personal honor have been resolved?

How can WE deal with the loss of honor and its chaos to relationships in our OWN pasts so emblematic in the Cuban American community or in our President's case?

(We turn to the sermon "Need" section . . .)

Need: "Though never aiming to be conceited, how can one gain RESPECT following his experiencing painful or unjust SHAME in his past! Is there any helpful direction from God on this issue?!"

- I. **As we already noted, Paul wrote to believers at Philippi who were tempted to promote selfish ambitions that only frustrated human relationships and yielded strife with its unhappiness, Phil. 2:3.**
- II. **This problem arose from a deep FEAR of LOSING one's honor arising out of Philippi's painful, unjust PAST:**
 - A. Philippi, a Roman colony, was built to give displaced Roman soldiers loyal to their emperor the *consolation* of Roman citizenship in living in Philippi. This move meant to **pacify** them for their losses of estates in a civil war over class wealth and fame, Burns, *West. Civ.*, p. 218ff.
 - B. Hence, the inhabitants of Philippi were understandably hungry to **preserve** their status from being lost *again*, a fact that led to their asserting personal interests at the cost of relationships; evidence of this drive is seen in Paul's call to avoid strive and vain glory, Phil. 2:3
- III. **Thus, Paul ADDRESSED not only the SURFACE need to avoid selfish ambition, but told his readers HOW to DO so WHILE OVERCOMING their FEAR of a loss of HONOR as well:**
 - A. On the **surface**, Paul admonished his readers to replace selfish ambition with selfless concern for the interests of **others**, Phil. 2:1-4:
 1. Knowing that these Christians had come to appreciate the consolation they had in Christ from the hostile, demeaning world around them, he urged them toward unified humility, 2:1-3.
 2. He called them to focus on the interests of one another rather than selfishly promoting one's own agenda at the cost of others, 2:4.
 - B. But going **MUCH deeper**, Paul showed them **how** this could be accomplished **while also overcoming** the deep **fear** of a loss of honor in honoring others this way, Philippians 2:5-11:
 1. Paul used the loftiest illustration available to describe how his admonition could work -- the selfless servitude of Jesus, Phil. 2:5.
 2. He described that servitude in its *extreme* selfless expression:
 - a. Though Jesus Christ was of the same nature and essence as God the Father, being equal with Him in every way, Jesus took upon Himself the form of a servant to become the God-man, 2:6-7.
 - b. Then, in this servitude role, Jesus stooped to do the most lowly and **necessary** task for **others** -- humbling Himself to die on the cross for the sins of the world, Philippians 2:8. (2 Cor. 5:21)

3. Now, BECAUSE of this INVALUABLE SERVICE toward addressing MAN'S NEED of REDEMPTION from sin, God the FATHER has REWARDED Jesus with the highest honor:
 - a. Verse nine is introduced with the conjunction translated as "Wherefore" (KJV) ["Therefore" NIV] that supplies an inference, or a conclusion one makes by way of the supplied evidence, cf. Arndt & Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon., p. 197; UBS Greek New Testament, p. 684.
 - b. This means the events recorded in verses 9-11 were the logical result of what Jesus had done as described in verses 6-8. In other words, **because** He stooped so low to address our greatest **need** -- supplying an atonement for our sin by dying on the cross in our place, God the Father has **REWARDED** Jesus with enormous honor over all others!
 - c. That honor places Jesus Christ above all others throughout the universe as all will bow the knee and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father, Philippians 2:10-11.
4. Accordingly, Paul implies by this illustration that if we believers humble ourselves to look out for and address the needs of one another, instead of fearing a loss of honor in the process, we can expect **God** to **reward** us with honor in the end. Note how this teaching is mirrored in 1 Peter 5:5b-6 and Proverbs 3:34.

Application: To handle a deep-seated FEAR of losing our RESPECT before others or a DEEP NEED to GAIN honor due to painful DISHONOR in our PASTS, (1) believe in Christ Who went the extra mile to stoop to bear our SINS, and become children of God in the process, John 3:16 with Phil. 2:5-8. (2) In doing so, God the Holy Spirit comes to indwell us permanently to EQUIP us to live as Jesus lived, 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 5:16; 1 John 2:6. (3) Then we (a) can rely by FAITH upon GOD to take care of our need for HONOR, and (b) courageously launch out to stoop to meet the needs of fellow believers, Phil. 2:3-4. (c) In His time, God HONORS us in fashion as He did Jesus, John 12:26.

Lesson: To overcome a deep FEAR of losing RESPECT, or to deal with a great NEED to REGAIN it, God urges us as BELIEVERS to draw from the power and EXAMPLE of Christ to leave our HONOR with GOD to address, and sacrificially meet the needs of fellow believers around us! >

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

If we apply Paul's instruction to the Elian Gonzales case, we might have witnessed the following different, **edifying** scenario:

Let us suppose the President of the United States and the Attorney General would have both become committed believers in Christ and controlled by the Holy Spirit. Let's suppose they, with a **few plain clothed** body guards would have slowly driven up through the crowds to the Gonzales home in his limo at **noon** that Saturday before Easter. Then suppose the President and Attorney General had gotten out of the car, dressed **humbly** in **casual** clothes and **bravely** walked **through** the crowds to the Gonzales' front door.

Someone in the Lazaro Gonzales family would have come to the door and asked what he wanted, and the President could have said before the microphones, cameras and crowding onlookers these words:

"I come here today in good faith. I know you are concerned about letting Elian return to an unjust future in Cuba. I know many Cubans have suffered greatly because of Fidel Castro's regime.

Yet, the law requires Elian be reunited with his own father.

Accordingly, I am here to ask you to help me safely and peacefully deliver him to his father who is here in this country.

Furthermore, I assure you that we will do whatever we can to insure Elian's future just safety and liberty are secure. If through our investigation we find that this means he must not return to Cuba, I will do all in my power to keep Elian in this country in the name of justice.

I have not come here today as a dictator, but as your friend and elected public servant of the people of the United States. I share in your concern for the trauma that little Elian has suffered during his trip to these shores, for many of our country's forefathers have suffered in coming to this land. I share in your love for liberty and justice for all as a fellow American. So I ask that you either bring Elian and come with me, or, if you would permit, that you give him to me that I may carry him in my own arms until he is safely reunited with his father."

Such an approach could have gone FAR to calm the fears in "Little Havanna"! Such a move could have given this President the positive legacy he so much longs to have for his administration!