

*Humility:  
Our Calling*



## On Humility and Pride

*“Finally, 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. Don’t repay evil for evil. Don’t retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and he will bless you for it.” 1 Peter 3:8-9 (NLT)*

C. S. Lewis wrote, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it’s thinking of yourself less.” Sometimes we mistake humility for a low opinion of our own abilities, when in reality humility is to keep our abilities in check. The Apos-

tle Peter tells us that as Christians we are called to humility. We are called to think of ourselves less and to think of others more.

We shy away from humility because it is a hard grace to practice. “We live in a competitive world that worships winners. We are rewarded for proudly asserting ourselves. Demanding attention may bring worldly visibility and success, but it does not wear the clothing of Christ (*Courageous Gentleness*, Mary Ann Froehlich, p. 109). No one wants to appear a weak loser. However, it takes more courage to hold our tongue and deny self than the world is willing to admit. There was no one more cou-

lead to the sin of adultery and fornication. I will never forget visiting with my aunt and her concern over a woman who came to the assemblies like she just rolled out of bed. Her expression was, “That woman just doesn’t have any pride.” From what we just observed in this writing, that might seem like a good thing. There are those that due to too much pride come just to show their expensive dress. Then there are those who don’t seem to care enough to put on a clean shirt to come to church. That very dangerous sense of pride that deceives and destroys our spiritual focus seems to be a part of us that leads us to care. If we don’t care about ourselves, others, and most importantly God, we will not be the servant God wants us to be. If we don’t take pride in our work, we likely will not do a very good job. If we remember that all we are and have comes from God then we can keep these feelings where they need to be. We will be

proud to be a Christian, which will lead us to humbly serve others with care and respect.

Perhaps one of the best ways to get the proper perspective is found in Romans 1:16. Here Paul says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth...” We should all be honored to be Christians and this will lead us to do our very best. As Paul talks of himself in 1 Corinthians 15:10 so should we. “I am what I am by the grace of God.” The enemy pride will not overtake us with that attitude.

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were half baked, old and weak but had no clue. They could still have returned to God but their pride prevented them from seeing their terrible condition. Pride will always prevent us from instruction or correction. When we know it all who can teach us anything? We read in Proverbs 26:12, “Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit?

There is more hope of a fool

Pride will always prevent us from instruction or correction.

than of him.” All of us have likely done some foolish things in our life that we regret. These unfortunate choices can serve as great teaching experiences if pride does not get in the way. A proud person feels he does no wrong and that he is always right. This is why it is so difficult for him to submit to God’s direction. Psalms 10:4 teaches us, “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his

thoughts.” Why would they listen to God or anyone else? Their pride tells them they know more than anyone else.

Pride brings deception of strength. The Edomites in Jeremiah 49:16 thought they were safe because they lived in the mountains and cliffs. They thought no one could conquer them. God would soon teach them that their pride in themselves and not Him is no strength at all. Little wonder that God says He hates pride in Proverbs 6:16-17.

Perhaps the question comes to mind why God gave us the feeling of pride. Like so many things we have it has to be used and trained properly. Fire is so useful when we cook, heat or refine with it. When out of control it destroys homes, forests, and human life. God gave to us the desire to be with a man or a woman in the union of marriage; a blessed relationship that can bring much happiness. These desires can also

rageous than Jesus, and yet when he was beaten, mocked and spit upon he opened not his mouth.

In this issue of BC we want to explore this Calling of Humility and also take a look at its opposite: Pride. One of the best definitions of humility is found in Philippians 2:3-8 where Paul writes that we should not act out of selfish ambition but in humility we should value others around us. And he points to Jesus as our perfect example. Jesus taught that the greatest in his kingdom would be the servant (Matt. 23:11-12). The Apostle Paul wrote to Titus that we should be gentle toward all (Tit. 3:1-20). We are told in Numbers 12:3 that the man Moses was more humble than all men on earth. Moses once killed a man who was beating a Hebrew slave, but there must have been some things that changed in his life. There are many instructions and examples in the Bible on the grace of Humility.

Pride is every bit our enemy.

Lucifer, the son of the morning, was cut down to the ground by pride (Isa. 14:12-15). Many people equate Lucifer with the Devil and if this association is correct then we have found the source of pride. Here are just a few of the evils of pride: it hardens the mind (Dan. 5:20); it produces spiritual decay (Hos. 7:8-10); it keeps us from making real progress (Prov. 26:12); it hinders us from coming to God (Psa. 10:4); it deceives us (Jer. 49:16); and it is hated by the Lord (Prov. 6:16-17). No doubt it is hated by God because of all of the evil that it brings into our lives.

Our thanks to Robert Teague and Ron Collins as they help us to explore Humility: Our Calling and Pride: Our Enemy.

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## Humility: Our Calling

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Pride is pretty easy to spot. Most of us know it when we see or hear it in people: Attention-seeking. Arrogance. Haughtiness. Bragging. Boasting. One-upmanship. Always having to have the last word. You can probably pin each of these on a few folks you know without having to give much thought. But it occurs to me that we do not as readily recognize humility as we do pride, no doubt due to its very definition and quality.

If humility is fundamental to our Christian "calling," then what is it? We need to know and be able to spot it when we see it. First, we need to know what humility is not. It is not self-deprecation or self-loathing. You have probably known folks who have such a low opinion of themselves that they constantly put themselves down or grovel in self-pity. Right about here is where this thought came to my mind, "But what about Job who said, 'Therefore I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes?'" (Job 42:6) Isn't that self-loathing? So

what about Job? We'll come back to him later in this article.

The truth is we all probably know and readily recognize the manifestations of humility, even if we do not automatically translate them as

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humility's virtues. Perhaps our most clear recognition of the full range of its virtues is in Jesus who scripture holds up as the pattern for our calling to humility. Just about everything we need to know about being like Jesus in our calling to humility is summed up in these six verses:

3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the inter-

remains one of our greatest enemies. Look at what James tells us in James 1:14, "But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed." Sin comes from within and not from without. My desire to at least be equal if not better than you still derails my spiritual focus quicker than anything else.

Jesus chose some very special men to be his apostles. Most of them would die a martyr's death because of their dedication and devotion to the cause of Christ. Yet when they were with Jesus and the expectation that the kingdom of Israel would rise again, they all seemed to want to know who would be second in command. The mother of James and John even enters the picture to see if she can somehow get her boys an edge in this area. The other ten were said to be indignant over this request (Matthew 20:24). What drove this request and the ensuing indignation? Was it not pride? When Jesus met with his apostles the night

before he was crucified he left us the memorial supper we keep to this day. He also gave another important lesson of serving by washing their feet. Jesus knew the damage pride could do and tried to show them the beauty of serving.

When the great empire ruled by Nebuchadnezzar was handed to his son Belshazzar, he had virtually everything. All feared him and he decided who lived or died. With all this power his pride hardened his mind (Daniel 5:20). Just like Eve trying to be like God, Belshazzar did not humble himself before God. As a result he was driven into the fields and lost his kingdom to Darius the Mede. He knew well the wisdom of Solomon in Proverbs 16:18, "Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall."

The Northern Kingdom of Israel was in a state of destruction and they did not even know it. Hosea tells us in Hosea 7:8-10 that they

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## Pride – The Enemy

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When we take a look at Adam and Eve we have a real opportunity to see humans without many of today's excuses. After all, could they blame their parents as so many are prone to do? They did not have any parents, so no excuse for their failing here. How about society? Many see the sinful world we live in and are sure that is why they cannot do better. Government and school are usually a reason we believe all is falling apart. We can't blame those Democrats or Republicans for their downfall. We can't even blame a liberal agenda in school. How then was the serpent going to make his approach? Some of the tools he uses today were simply not available. It has been noted that all the earthly elements listed in 1 John 2:16 were present at the first temptation. Eve looked at the fruit and saw that it was good for food which we equate with the lust of the flesh. She also

observes that it is pleasant to the eye which seems like lust of the eyes. These two are just what she sees when she looks at the fruit. The serpent

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The real difference in her mind was his assertion that it would make her wise.

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did not point these two observations out to her. No, he knew even though it looked pleasant and tasty this was not enough to make her eat. The real difference in her mind was his assertion that it would make her wise. Pride was the enemy, wasn't it? Eve's desire to be as smart as God had to be the real driving force that led to her downfall. The world has changed a lot since the time of Adam and Eve. We now have billions of people, smog, pollution, wars and a world far different than the Garden of Eden. One element that hasn't changed is our pride. It still

ests of others.

5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,

7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

(Philippians 2:3-8)

Humility is about being called to love and serve others sacrificially. We know it when we see it in Jesus as pictured in the text above. We recognize it when Jesus washed his disciples' feet and said, "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." (John 13:1-17) From Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) we recognize humility as compassion. Humility is explained to us when we read:

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs." (1 Corinthians 13:4-5 NIV) You

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Humility has no problem with ego or letting others have the glory or prestige.

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are true to your calling when you love like that. Humility has no problem with ego or letting others have the glory or prestige. For example, if you are content with taking "the least important place" rather than presuming "the place of honor" is yours for the taking, then according to Jesus, you are acting out of humility. (Luke 14:7-11 NIV) Jesus further explained that the greatest in His kingdom would be the servant of all, and that "whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Matthew 23:11&12) If you have mastered the capacity of heart to be forgiving toward others by which you "keep no record of wrongs" (1 Corinthians 13:4)

and the discipline of not always having to be right -- regardless, but leave yourself some wiggle-room just in case you might be wrong, these are strong indicators you have mastered humility.

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**Humility always seeks to surrender to the will of God without hesitation or complaint;**

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Humility is about our calling to obedience like Jesus, who "humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." (Philippians 2:8) Humility always seeks to surrender to the will of God without hesitation or complaint; it does not entertain notions of justifying or excusing our behavior or actions that do otherwise. Any refusal to be obedient to God's Word and will is the height of arrogant pride on our part. Anytime I sense I need to be taken down a notch or two, this passage always comes to mind:

"...be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Therefore humble yourselves under

the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." (1 Peter 5:5-7)

It seems obvious to me from the above that humility is also about our calling to repentance. Scripture describes an occasion when the Lord appeared to Solomon and said, "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will

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**...humility is also about our calling to repentance.**

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hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14)

Whether it is a nation, a church or an individual, our need to truly repent equals humility. This is where Job comes back into the picture, when he said, "Therefore I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:6) Job humbled himself under the mighty hand of God. Then what? God exalted him in due time! (Job 42:12-17) His is the only proper re-

sponse for anyone who finds themselves under the searching eyes and probing questioning of the Almighty, like Job did as recorded in Job 38-42. Any nation, church or person who recognizes and acknowledges that the Lord God Jehovah, by virtue of being sovereign Creator of heaven and earth, "can do all things and no plan of His can be thwarted" and whose knowledge is an awesome wonder (Job 42:1-3 NIV) can't help but humbly bow the knees in repentance.

Humbling yourself under the mighty hand of God is about submitting to His will, His ways and His plan for your life. You are true to His calling when you humbly accept His inspired answers, like about what to do to be saved. When people asked the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" and were told to "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit," that settled it for three thousand souls who gladly accepted the message and were baptized. (Acts 2:37

-38, 41) How about you? The same can be said if you embrace God's moral values and not those being popularized by the world. The popular standards accepted in today's culture are based on what scripture describes as the lustful "cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does" and do not come "from the Father but from the world." (1 John 2:16 NIV) Humility rejects the so-called "logic" behind the popular trends of the day that seek to justify, legitimize and legalize sinful practices and immoral perversions.

In the end all the virtues of humility come out on top. God sees to that. If you humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, just as promised, He will exalt you in due time. The Proverb is true: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

...Robert Teague  
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