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“For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted,” Luke 14:11.

Humble Yourself

Lesson Aim: To generate a spirit of humility.

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Humility is an elusive virtue. The moment one is satisfied that he has it, he has just lost it. It is so unselfconscious that the one who is most humble is the least aware that he is humble.

Humility comes through spiritual vision. When one sees himself as he is, and sees God as He is, the heart is humbled. Humility does not come by deeds of merit, good intentions, or great sacrifices. It is the natural result of a right relationship with God.

Today's study aims to generate a spirit of humility in you. Approach the lesson with the prayer, “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.” Be ready to respond to what God speaks to you through His Word.

I. DEFINITION OF HUMILITY

A. The Bible gives a correct definition of humility.

The concept is expressed in the Old Testament by the term, “meek.” It stands in contrast to the spirit which is stiff-necked and self-assertive. It acknowledges dependence upon God and is loyal to undertake to follow His will and guidance.

Moses is called a meek man. **“Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth,”** Numbers 12:3. He was a man who was totally available to receive the Word of God and to follow the leading of God.

In the New Testament, humility is that spirit which reverences and submits to the judgment of God. It does nothing from selfishness or conceit,

but takes upon itself the form of a servant and becomes obedient to death, just as Jesus did (Philippians 2:8).

It honors all men and loves the brotherhood (1 Peter 2:17). It puts away all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, with all malice: and is kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving (Ephesians 4:31, 32). The New Testament describes a humble person as reverent, truly devout, unselfish, kind, and merciful, reflecting the qualities of God.

B. The thesaurus will present a false and a true concept of humility.

(1) The false concept is expressed by the terms, self-abasement, confusion, mortification, shame, eating humble pie, disgrace, degradation, and curse. (2) The true concept is expressed by the terms, meekness, modesty, submissiveness, condescension, and unpretension. The former is man's concept; the latter is God's concept. Take care how you view humility.

C. A derived definition of humility can be expressed.

“Humility is a characteristic way of acting toward God and man with meekness and patience, not seeking self-advantage.” It is an attitude which manifests lack of concern for personal prestige.

Humility is primarily an attitude which determines a mode of action. It does away with selfish pride, arrogance, and violence, and furnishes the possibility of peace and harmony between God and man and between man and man.

II. IMPORTANCE OF HUMILITY

Humility was regarded as one of the most important qualities among early Christians, as is indicated from the number of references to the virtue and the number of terms (humble, lowly, meek) used to express it.

A. Humility is one of the first of the beatitudes of Jesus.

“**Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth,**” Matthew 5:5. It was given among the first because it underlies all the rest of the qualities described as “blessed” in the beatitudes.

B. Humility is the way to true greatness.

Jesus used a little child to teach the lesson of humility to His disciples. He told them, “**Whoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven,**” Matthew 18:4. Three times Jesus spoke the great principle of spiritual paradox:

“**Whoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted**” (Matthew 23:12; Luke 14:11; Luke 18:14). The principle might be otherwise expressed, “The way up is down.”

Jesus expressed the truth in these terms: “**Whoever will be great**

among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26-28).

C. Humility is necessary to receive the truth of God.

Many things are hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed unto “babes” instead because it seemed good to the Father to make truth available to the humble (Luke 10:21). The worldly-wise and self-sufficient man will not receive the truth of God. He is among those of whom Paul wrote, **“The world by wisdom knew not God”** (I Corinthians 1:21). God's truth is available to all, but it is received only by those who are of a teachable spirit.

D. Humility is commanded of all Christians.

The apostle Paul called Christians to witness the humility of Jesus, their Lord, and to imitate His blessed example.

The Son of God had the highest privilege of existence in the essence (“form”) of God, enjoying equality with God. He did not count that privilege a thing to be grasped selfishly and guarded. Instead, He emptied Himself of all divine privileges, took up the form of a servant, and humbled Himself to die the shameful death by crucifixion.

E. A special blessing is promised to the humble.

“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time,” I Peter 5: 6.

Another element of God's blessing is expressed by another apostle. **“But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you”** (James 4:6-8).

Look what blessings are promised the humble. (1) God will exalt him. (2) God will give him more grace. (3) God will enable him to overcome the devil. (4) God will draw near to him. Those blessings are yours in exact proportion to your humble availability to God.

III. EXAMPLE OF HUMILITY

Jesus gave two parables to teach the importance and influence of humility. In the first, humility is applied to man's ambition to achieve importance (Luke 14:7-10). In the second, humility is applied to man's practice of hospitality (Luke 14:11-14). Those two parables have an important message for Christians in today's world.

A. Applied in the area of ambition, humility teaches one to take the

lower place by his own choice.

Jesus and many others were in the house of the chief Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath. A man was present who was suffering from dropsy. Jesus healed him.

The excitement was immediate and universal. A great miracle had happened.

Then came the time to recline at the table for the meal. There was a sudden and obvious scramble by those who thought themselves to be most important to occupy the places of greatest honor. Each one sought to show himself more important than the others, though humility would have taught him to let the others have first place.

The custom of eating meals was different in New Testament times. The people did not actually sit about the table, as is done today, but rather they reclined on couches. Many of the couches would permit space for three people. The center place was thought to be the most important. The guests at the dinner rushed to get the center position.

Jesus taught them how humility would affect them. He said a humble person would take the lower place. If the host at the dinner thought him more important than others, he would invite him to move up higher. Otherwise, he was in the correct place.

The lower position should not be taken for the purpose of being invited higher, for that would be an act of pride. Take the place you honestly feel you should occupy, in view of what you know about God, and you will take the lower place.

B. Applied in the area of hospitality, humility teaches that hospitality is to be given freely to those in need.

“Friends, brethren, kinsmen, and rich neighbors” will be able to invite you to a dinner equal or superior to the one you served them. But “the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind” will not be able to repay you. God will repay such acts of hospitality, and His payment will be far better than man’s could ever be.

IV. WAY TO HUMILITY

James 4:7-9 is a divine road map which shows you the route to true humility. Follow that way.

The way to humility is a different way. It is contrary to the flesh-nature in each person. It involves a resolute mastery of the will, a forcible compelling of the self to yield to God. James used the imperative verb, “submit,” to show the difficulty and the necessity to following that way.

One moves toward humility by a determined putting aside of self interests. He makes time for God, rather than following selfish interests (television, radio, sports, reading, or social activities). He “draws near to God” (James 4:8).

He resolutely deals with his conduct to make it pure, obeying the command of God to cleanse the hands and purify the heart. He experiences sincere sorrow over his failures. He surrenders to God his personal interests and welcomes the Savior to become Lord. All that is involved in the divine imperative expressed in James 4:7-9.

James 4:7-9 can be applied in very practical terms to Christian conduct.

(1) One submits to God by saying “Yes” to every divine requirement thus deferring to God's will and yielding to His control. (2) One draws near to God by resolutely putting out of the life anything which stands between him and God. (3) One cleanses his hands by a discipline of conduct which keeps the actions in line with God's standard of righteousness.

(4) One purifies his heart by guarding against any wrong attitude or motive which would influence the course of his life in a direction contrary to God, (5) One mourns and weeps when the love for sin dies in his heart and he is sincerely sorry that he has sinned against a holy God. (6) One humbles himself in the sight of the Lord by an act of the will in which he surrenders all rights to himself and welcomes the government of God over body, soul, and spirit.

Pride is the great foe which must be contested and overcome by the person who would be truly humble. What is pride? The dictionary will define pride as an over high opinion of oneself; exaggerated self-esteem; excessive belief in one's own worth, merit, superiority, and importance; a self-esteem accompanied by insolence and rude treatment of others.

Pride is, as one has expressed it, “the high opinion that a poor, little, contracted soul entertains of itself.” Pride is the subtle and serious enemy of the child of God.

Pride originated with Satan. His beauty and high station caused him to be lifted in pride (Ezekiel 28:17). He set his heart to be like the Most High God (Isaiah 14:14). He set his heart as the heart of God (Ezekiel 28:6). His pride moved him to rebellion and caused him to be cast down.

Pride is related to every sin. Every person who is lifted up with pride will fall into the condemnation of the devil (I Timothy 3:6). Pride must be dealt with resolutely in order for the life to be pure and the spirit humble before God.

Pride is destructive. Jeremiah 49:16 says pride deceives the heart. Daniel 5:20 warns that pride hardens the mind. Proverbs 13:10 announces

that pride brings contention. Psalm 73:6 cautions that pride binds as a chain. Proverbs 16:18 forewarns that pride brings destruction. Proverbs 28:25 informs that pride stirs up strife. Proverbs 16:5 declares that pride is an abomination to the Lord. Jeremiah 50:32 concludes that pride will cause one to stumble. No wonder pride is hated of God and is harmful to man.

What is God's attitude toward a spirit of pride? The Bible declares that God hates pride to such an extent that it is an abomination to Him (Proverbs 6:16, 17). God sets Himself in battle array to “resist” the proud at the same time He “gives grace” to the humble (James 4:6). He is so opposed to pride that He has announced the destruction of those who are proud (Proverbs 15:25). He prewarns that the ultimate end of pride is shame (Proverbs 11:2).

God loves the spirit of humility. Jesus Himself is “**meek and lowly in heart**” and receives every one who is of a kindred spirit (Matthew 11:28-30). He gives His grace freely to the people who approach Him in humility (James 4:6), and they find His grace is more than sufficient for every need (II Corinthians 12:9). His special presence is manifest with every one who draws near to Him (James 4:8). He exalts and honors the truly humble person (James 4:10).

Practice the grace of humility. Watch out, however, against a “voluntary humility” (a false exhibition of a humble spirit which one does not truly possess) which is sin cloaked in religious clothing (Colossians 2:18, 23). Humility always involves obedience. The practice of the grace of humility is to live a life of willing obedience to every command of God.