

Lifeworld.org

“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you,” James 4:8.

Humility vs. Pride

Lesson Aim: To observe that God exalts the humble believer.

L69. Date: July 1966. **Text:** James 4:6-10,13-17.

Topic: God: Will of; Humility; Pride.

INTRODUCTION

Humility is that strange Christian grace which, the moment one is sure he has it he has just lost it! A humble man is marked by an unassuming character in which there is an absence of pride and assertiveness: a mildness and patience of disposition which is marked by absence of pretensions, boastfulness, or conceit.

True humility before God arises from a sense of failure and helplessness. It is expressed in attitude, thoughts, deeds and words. It is more than weaknesses, for true humility is bold in the face of trouble. It can never be imitated successfully.

Humility is a basic quality of Christian character. Conversion introduces one into a life of humility. God makes Himself the enemy of the proud man but the friend of the humble. So, the Scripture promises, **“By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honour, and life,”** Proverbs 22:4. Those who grow the greatest are the most humble, there being no conflict between spiritual greatness and true humility.

In classical Greek writings humility was despised as servile. But the Biblical teachings give it a high place. Before God, man appears as a creature (Genesis 18:27) and sinner (Luke 18:9-14) having nothing in which to boast (Romans 7:18). Jesus has lived an example of humility expressed in selfless service (Mark 10:45; John 13:1-17). Humblemindedness is the spirit which produces fellowship in the church (Romans 12:16; Ephesians 4:2). In

this spirit the most ardent Christian workers will say, **“We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do,”** Luke 17:10.

The opposite of humility is pride. This refers to an overhigh opinion of oneself; exaggerated self-esteem; excessive belief in one's own worth, merit, or superiority. Since pride ignores God; it is akin to idolatry. The Bible everywhere speaks against it.

“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall,” Proverbs 16:18. **“Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil,”** Proverbs 3:7. Jesus warned, **“Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted,”** Matthew 23:12. This study should be pursued with much searching of heart and earnest prayer.

EXPOSITION

I. HUMILITY

1. Humility brings increasing grace, verse 6. The blessed experience of the humble believer is his ever increasing experience of the grace of God. Two times in verse six the promise of “grace” and “more grace” is given. This same promise is repeated in I Peter 5:5, **“Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”** Read further promises in Psalm 138:6 and Proverbs 3:34.

In pride a person will lean on himself. In humility a person will lean on God. The more one leans on God the more sufficient God proves Himself to be. The more one asks and depends upon God, the more God supplies. Thus does He “give more grace.” So gracious is God to the humble believer that His throne is called a “throne of grace” for all who are in need. **“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need,”** Hebrews 4:16.

Paul said salvation was and is “by grace through faith,” Ephesians 2:8. Surely no greater expression of grace could be seen than in the redemption of a sinner. But such a gracious act did not exhaust divine grace. God is not limited to “saving grace” only. “But He giveth more grace.”

His love has no limit, His grace has no measure,
His power no boundary known unto men;
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth and giveth and giveth again.—Annie Johnson Flint.

2. Humility is expressed in submission to God, verse 7. God is never

resisted by the humble man. James uses a military term to set out his meaning. “Submit” means “be subject to your commanding officer.” The soldier is required to obey those whose rank is superior to his own. To refuse to obey is to be subject to court martial and possible severe discipline. So James says the Christian soldier is to be subject to his Commander-in-chief, God. “Be subject with implicit obedience to God at once and once for all.” Nothing less can satisfy the divine requirement.

The opposite of submission is rebellion. There is no middle ground. Therefore any person who is not in submission to God is in rebellion against God. This is a solemn matter, for “God resists the proud.” Look at what former generations have seen in times of rebellion: **“They rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them,”** Isaiah 63:10. No wonder James calls for complete and obedient submission to the authority and will of God.

3. Humility is expressed in resistance to the devil, verse 7. Again, James uses the terms of military operations to explain his idea. “Resist the devil,” he calls. But the term “resist” is a military term meaning “set yourself in battle array to oppose” the devil. This terminology suggests three significant facts. (1) Humility is not spineless passivity but manly courage. (2) The humble man declares himself out-and-out for God and against the devil just as a soldier ready for battle identifies which side he supports and which he opposes. (3) The call to oppose the devil is a call to a most serious task—as serious as entering a war against a fierce enemy.

Resisting Satan demands self-sacrifice and utmost effort. It challenges the best the believer possesses to meet this foe. Yet, he does not meet Satan alone. Paul has written, **“(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds,)”** II Corinthians 10:4. Any believer who sets his mind to resist the devil can do so successfully. Satan is a coward. He cannot stand up against a believer who is trusting for victory from the Lord. **“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil,”** Ephesians 6:11.

4. Humility draws the believer near to God, verse 8. Oh, divine imperative and blessed promise! **“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.”** Psalm 73:28 suggest that the highest blessedness which could come to mortal man is for him to draw near to God. He is “the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy.” To draw near to Him is to be received into His holy dwelling place. Blessed experience! Isaiah expresses the words of the Lord in this manner, **“For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in**

the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones,” Isaiah 57:15.

When the believer stands up against the devil he can be sure that God stands with him. God cannot be consistent with Himself and draw near the proud man. By pride he turns from God and glories in himself. Yet, if he will turn to Him in true repentance God will receive him and lend him power for full victory. Thank God that grace does not flow freely when we are in rebellion. He withholds that we might draw near to Him. The best thing which could come to any man is the nearness of God's blessed presence.

5. Humility cleanses by leading to repentance, verses 8-9. All true drawing near to God involves a rejection of sin. James calls upon his readers to “cleanse your hands.” Dirty hands represent sinful or unworthy conduct. This must be forsaken by the humble believer.

Moreover, James demands the humble ones to “purify your hearts.” As the hands refer to conduct, the heart refers to intention and motivations. James is saying that true humility and service are not merely a matter of correct deeds but also include purity of spirit. God sees both the inner and outer man. Purity of hands and cleanness of heart are elsewhere associated with fellowship with God. Psalm 24:3-4 reads, **“Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation,”**

The Bible everywhere calls upon believers to be pure in heart and hand. These scriptures are but typical of many others. **“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord,”** II Corinthians 7:1. **“If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work,”** II Timothy 2:21. **“And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure,”** I John 3:3. Sin is rebellion against God. No humble man is a wicked man. Humility always leads to repentance and cleansing from sin.

6. Humility results in exaltation, verse 10. Believers are called upon to “humble yourselves.” This is something a person does. Discipline is his task and he must yield himself to God. Observe also that humility must be “in the sight of the Lord.” It is not enough that a person be humble in his own eyes. How does he appear to God? Humility must be true and real for it to be honored of Him who sees the inward as well as the outward appearance.

Nothing short of total submission to God will suffice. Yet, there are repeated promises of glory and honor and exaltation to the humble person. Observe these scriptures. **“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time,”**

I Peter 5:6. **“For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted,”** Luke 14:11. **“Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven,”** Matthew 18:4. Such references could be multiplied from the Holy Scriptures. Are you willing to subdue selfish pride and serve God in humility knowing that such a gracious reward awaits the humble?

II. PRIDE

1. Pride dares God to a contest of strength, verse 6. How does God look upon a man filled with pride? James answers, **“God resisteth the proud.”** Remember that this word “resist” is a military term which means “to draw oneself up in battle array in preparation for the contest.” Pride is essentially a glorifying of self and a dishonoring of God. The proud man sets himself up to resist God. James says God is sure to come upon the scene and do battle against the proud ones. Who do you think will win?

Such is the sin of pride. It is actual rebellion against God. He will not let such an attitude go without proper reward. Now is it clear why Peter also advises, **“Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble,”** I Peter 5:5. This has always been God's attitude. The terrible nature of pride is evident in the . . . words of an Old Testament prophet. **“Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it. What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?”** Isaiah 45:9. Surely proud men do not realize the nature nor extent of their sin. Else they would run from it. God sets himself in battle array against the arrogant and haughty but gives grace to the humble and lowly. 2. Pride is centered in self-will, verse 13. Turning from dealing with pride and humility in principle, James now calls a specific case in illustration. He pictures a businessman laying out his plans without considering the will of God. This man is interested only in what he wants and what will bring him the greatest profit. He gives no consideration to God or any other. This, the Apostle says, is a practical expression of pride.

Pride not only expresses itself by rebelling against God, but it also expresses itself by ignoring God. What man is there who dares think that he

is so important and wise that he can afford to leave God out of his life? Such a man is the proud man against whom God sets Himself to do battle.

James does not condemn wise business planning. He rather condemns making such plans without considering the will of God. The element of pride is evident if the first person, personal pronoun is placed with each verb in verse 13. "I will go . . . I will continue . . . I will buy . . . I will sell . . . and I will get gain." All full of self but no place for God—such plans deserve God's intervention. Read how God interfered with the plans of one such businessman in Luke 12:13-21.

3. Pride presumes upon God's tomorrows, verse 14. Proverbs 27:1 advises, "**Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.**" This businessman was presumptuous. He acted as if he would live here forever, as if all of God's tomorrows were guaranteed to him. How foolish. "**Whereas ye know not what shall he on the morrow.**"

Consider the brevity of life. Who knows whether you will live tomorrow? "**For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away,**" verse 14. The vapour which arises from moist ground or streams of water when the sun first appears is very beautiful. But the very beams of sunlight which called it forth will soon dissolve it. Such is a man's life. It is upon such misty uncertainty that a proud man builds his tomorrows.

Is any man wise to live without considering God? Is a man wise to use good business principles, including complete insurance coverage, but fail to insure his life and work with God? Is any man a wise businessman when he takes such care to plan for things of time and neglects things of eternity? Are you a wise businessman or are you presuming upon God's tomorrows also?

4. Pride ignores the will of God, verse 15. "**Ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.**" In every important decision of life, the will of the Lord should be sought. To act without considering God's will is to dishonour Him. A person whose life might be terminated any moment should be doubly conscious of God's will. Some people try to carry this out to the letter of the law. In casual conversation they repeatedly add, "If the Lord wills." Others write D. V. in correspondence regarding their purposes. (D. V. is abbreviation of the Latin phrase, **Deo Volente**, "God willing.") The Bible requires no such open exhibitions. It does require that no man run the affairs of his public or private life without considering God's will.

Special promises attend those who live in God's will. "**And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever,**" I John 2:17. Jesus speaks of the blessed relationship He

maintains with those who obey God's will. **“For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother,”** Matthew 12:50. What benefits to know and do the will of the Heavenly Father! His will is not grievous.

5. Pride boasts in evil, verse 16. Instead of honestly seeking God's will, so many boast of what they have done and what they plan to do. Instead of humbly and gratefully acknowledging their dependence on God, they exult in their dreams, speak high swelling words of confidence regarding the future and their doings in it, not knowing that all such boasting is evil.

On the contrary, the Bible advises, **“But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord,”** II Corinthians 10:17. **“Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth,”** Proverbs 27:1. The man who plans to live tomorrow without God is guilty of evil just as the man who actually lives today without God. Businessmen, housewives, students, and all the rest of us must learn the “if the Lord wills” spirit of living. This is Christian living. All other is sin.

6. Pride leads into further sin, verse 17. **“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good (i.e., following God's will in all of life), and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”** To know God's will and refuse to do it is most serious. The longer one lives in this knowledge without following God's will the more he sins against God.

God has clearly stated that He regards the proud heart as sinful. Attitude and acts of pride are sin. Of the seven things which are “an abomination” to God, the very first is “a proud look,” Proverbs 6:16-17. Pride is sin. The proud are sinners. 7. Pride will be judged of God. Let the Bible speak here with all its holy authority. God says, **“Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off: him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer,”** Psalm 101:5. Again, the wise man said, **“The Lord will destroy the house of the proud: but he will establish the border of the widow,”** Proverbs 15:25. The most terrible judgment against the proud is spoken by the Lord through one of His prophets. **“For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch,”** Malachi 4:1.

Is it really worth it, that life of proud ignoring of God? When the end shall come and the day of reckoning draws near, will it really be worth it then? The Bible says it is only the fool who denies and ignores God. Prove yourself wise today. **“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time,”** I Peter 5:6.

CONCLUSION

Humility is never cowardice nor weakness. It is a spirit from which pride and self-assertiveness is absent and where dedication to God is preeminent. It expresses itself in a holy resolve which dares to determine God's will and perform it whatever the cost may be.

In this heroic spirit Christians of all ages have lived and served. Only this attitude is acceptable to God. Only the work of the humble can truly prosper under His hand. God cannot afford to approve and honor the sin of pride by prospering the work of the proud. "Submit yourselves therefore to God," James 4:7.

QUESTIONS

1. What is humility?
2. What is pride?
3. Why is pride a sin?
4. What is this lesson's aim?
5. Why does humility bring grace?
6. What military term explains submission?
7. How can one resist the devil?
8. What is God's attitude toward the proud?
9. In what sense is pride presumptuous?
10. How does one know when he is humble?