



“But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant,” Matthew 23:11.

### **Jesus Teaches About Humility**

**Lesson Subject:** To encourage believers to render service to God on the basis of genuine humility.

**L116. Date:** November 1973. **Text:** Luke 17:7-10; Matthew 23:8-12.

**Topic:** Humility; Jesus: Teachings of.

Western civilization is enamored with the fast-talking, got-all-the-answers, dominating, self-sufficient, aggressive type of man. God estimates men by a different standard. He prizes humility, calling it a priceless virtue in a Christian. It is strange that most people minimize the quality which God magnifies. The Bible makes it clear that humility is absolutely essential to a man of God.

Distinguish between true humility and false humility. What is humility? It is a spirit opposite of pride, conceit, arrogance, and vanity. It never insists upon its own rights nor demands praise for its accomplishments. It never exalts nor parades itself. It never calls attention to itself. Its spirit is always, “You first; I follow.”

There is a false humility. It is mentioned in Colossians 2:18-23 as a misguided, self-conscious asceticism. Such a spirit is not a Christian grace but a fleshly error.

Beware of the supposed humility which is only a covering for weakness or pride.

Humility never parades itself. The person who is truly humble will be unaware of his praise worthy quality. He who speaks of his humility is not humble at all. He who is satisfied with his humble spirit has just lost it; he is filled with sinful pride. Whence comes humility? It never comes from one's looking at himself. It comes from looking at God. When an honest man meets God, he will be humbled by the experience. The purpose of this lesson

is to meet God in His Word that we may render humble service to Him.

## I. EXAMPLE OF HUMILITY

Jesus is the example of true humility just as He is the example in all spiritual matters. He was the greatest man who ever lived. He had power beyond that of any other man. He manifested wisdom beyond human comprehension. He exercised an authority in heaven and on earth. He executed judgment over man and nature. Yet in Him is revealed the finest example of a truly humble person.

Prophets foretold that the Messiah would be filled with a spirit of humility. “. . . **Behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass. . .**” Zechariah 9:9. There were so many glorious things which could have been said about the Saviour, but God inspired the prophet to write, “**He is . . . lowly.**” Behold the humble Saviour and remember His words, “**The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant, above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord,**” Matthew 10:24-25. He was humble. Will you follow His divine example?

Jesus' words bore witness to His humility of spirit. Humility is intimated in His repeated references to submission to His Father. As recorded in the Gospel According to John, Jesus testified that He was sent from the Father (20:21), did the works of the Father (5:30), spoke the words of the Father (8:28), drank the cup given of the Father (18:11), honored the Father (8:49), and was the vine of which the Father was the husband (15:1). His whole life was marked by the attitude, “. . . **I do nothing of myself . . . the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him,**” John 8:29.

Jesus' attitude toward men indicated His humility. He could have demanded much from men because He is sovereign Creator of all. “**All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made,**” John 1:3. As the humble Saviour, he demanded nothing. “. . . **the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many,**” Matthew 20:28. His life marked the truthfulness of those words.

The spirit of the Saviour puts to shame all who call themselves “Christians” (which means “Christ-like”) but who are proud of their attainments, arrogant toward those of lesser accomplishments, demanding for their rights, and requiring acknowledgement of their accomplishments. The example of Jesus is quite the opposite. What man would dare presume

to be superior to Him?

Jesus' actions demonstrated His humility. Remember the events which transpired in the upper room where Jesus and His disciples ate the Passover meal and where He instituted the Lord's Supper. During the dinner period, the apostles got into a dissension over which of them would be greatest in the Kingdom of God. They did not realize that the crucifixion of Jesus was a matter of only hours away. They did not know that at that very hour the shadow of the cross lay heavy upon Him so that he would soon be, "exceeding sorrowful unto death," Mark 14:34. How did Jesus deal with them in their selfish pride and vain ambitions?

Jesus did not rebuke them by calling attention to His personal grief of spirit. Instead He arose and washed the feet of each of His disciples. They were amazed that He would perform the chore which belonged to the lowest servant in the household. In that visual aid, Jesus taught them a blessed truth by which their ambition and pride were rebuked and true humility was magnified. **". . . He that is greatest among you shall be your servant,"** Matthew 23:11. Christian greatness is demonstrated by serving, not by being served.

Jesus' whole life was marked by the spirit of humility. He took no pride in appearance nor worldly success, Isaiah 53:2-3. He took no pride in reputation based upon the prejudices of men, Matthew 2:23. He took no pride in rank, being content to be called "the carpenter's son," Matthew 13:55. He did not insist upon His rights as Master of the disciples and Lord of believers; He ministered to them as the lowest servant, John 13:5.

Such a spirit puts to shame our selfish insistence upon our rights. Jesus showed how un-Christian is the self-sufficient, boastful, demanding spirit. He called us to see ourselves in the light of His example and to become "meek and lowly in heart" as was He.

## II. PRINCIPLES OF HUMILITY

True humility is unself-conscious. It is humble without being aware of itself. Therefore, humility in no wise causes pride in its presence of its ministry. Jesus used the example of a child to point out what true humility is. His disciples were discussing who would be the greatest in the Kingdom. Jesus gave this principle, **". . . If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all,"** Mark 9:25. Then He set a child among them and said, **"Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven,"** Matthew 18:4.

What is there about the humility of a child which caused Jesus to use

one as an example? A child is humble without being conscious of it. He never prides himself in his humility. He is humble by nature, not by an act of the will. He is humble in his heart, not just in appearance. The purest humility is the most unconscious of itself.

**True humility never glories in its attainments but remains ready to serve.** Read again the story which Jesus told about a faithful servant, Luke 17:7-10. He worked hard in the field all day. He did not come in at night and expect his master to bestow praise upon him and to serve his meal to him. He came in expecting to serve his master's dinner. He was still a servant. He was just doing his duty.

According to Jesus, that is the spirit which is to characterize believers. **“So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do,”** verse 10. That is the spirit of true humility. Do you ever wait to be complimented upon your last chore before you begin the next?

There is an old adage which says, “There is no limit to the good a person can do, if he does not care who gets the credit for it.” How does that principle relate to humility?

**True humility never seeks personal advantage nor advancement over another.** Read the advice of Jesus recorded in Luke 14:7-10. He said that when you are invited to a feast, you are not to seek to sit in the place of honor. If someone more worthy than you comes in, you will be asked to move down. On the contrary, sit in a lower place and you will be honored by being asked to move up higher. The principle which He sets forth is: **“For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted,”** Luke 14:11. Humility pays. He who seeks to advance himself will have other men set against him. He who is willing to take a lower place will have men ready to promote him. Think about it. Humility pays.

**True humility is ready to serve freely whether the recipient of the service deserves it or not.** Humility is a grace; it does not ask of any person, “Is he worthy to be served?” It serves without thought of merit, personal profit, or any thing other than the person's needs. Ambition, conceit, pride, and vanity are entirely absent. Is that the way by which you serve others in Jesus' name? Ambition for personal profit and praise for performance are the spirit of unregenerate men, Matthew 20:25-28. It must not be so among Christians.

**True humility is required of those who would approach God in worship.** Jesus told of two men who went into the temple to worship. One

man trusted in himself that he was righteous; he despised others. He stood and prayed “with himself,” recounting to God all the good qualities that were in him. The other man was a guilty sinner, and he acknowledged it. He cried out to God in confession and with a petition for mercy. Which man's prayer was heard? What did humility have to do with it?

Jesus declared that the sinful man “went down to his house justified.” That was the difference in the two men? Humility. **“For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted,”** Luke 18:14. With what spirit do you approach God in worship?

**True humility involves a Christian paradox.** It is, “The way up is down!” Four times the gospels declare, **“But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first,”** Matthew 19:30; 20:16; Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30. Three times it is said, **“And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased, and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted,”** Matthew 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14. One time the statement is recorded, **“Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven,”** Matthew 18:4.

Eight times the principle is stated, “The way up is down.” Such a principle did not come from man, for it is God's way.

If you desire His approval, you must follow His pattern. Humility is a blessed Christian virtue.

### III. NECESSITY FOR HUMILITY

**Believers are to be like Jesus.** His spirit was one of purest humility. When a woman called Him “blessed” He responded, **“... Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it,”** Luke 11:28. When a man knelt before Him and called Him “Good Master,” he responded, **“Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is God . . .”** Mark 10:17-18. Such was the spirit of Jesus. If you are to be like Him, you must be filled with humility. He did not come to receive the praise of men but to give praise to God through serving men. What a worthy spirit for those who believe in Jesus.

**Believers cannot grow to spiritual maturity apart from a spirit of humility.** A beatitude reads, **“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled,”** Matthew 5:6. To hunger and thirst suggests a sense of inadequacy and a consciousness of need. It is a mark of a humble spirit. Such a person is promised a filling. One who is self-sufficient, proud of his progress, feeling no call to a higher plane, will never grow in grace. Only those aware of emptiness will grow. Blessed

are those of a humble spirit.

**Believers seek the approval of God, not the praise of men, when they are truly humble.** They compare themselves with God, not with men. God's standard is, **“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect,”** Matthew 5:48. A believer is not called to be better than his peers but to be better than himself. How can he be proud? To look at God arouses deepest humility, for it shows that we have nothing in which to take pride. At no point can we feel superior. True humility says over and again, **“... I count not myself to have apprehended ...”** Philippians 3:13. What does it matter whether men compliment or not, if we can hear the Lord's “Well done”?

**Religious service has true meaning only when accompanied by a humble spirit.** Jesus related that truth to almsgiving, fasting, and even to prayer, Matthew 6. Be careful of the motive for religious activity. Religious service could be performed for praise or promotion and lose its true meaning thereby. Only what is done with an eye single to the needs of people and to the glory of God (whether you ever get credit for it or not) is acceptable before God.

Never be proud because you have performed religious service. To look back upon service with pride is the same sin as to perform service with a spirit of pride.

Humility is a strange and elusive grace. The moment you are content that you have it, you have just lost it. It is a spiritual grace. It cannot be measured by appearance or performance in the flesh. No person can truly know whether you are humble. God knows, **“... for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart,”** I Samuel 16:7. No one can ever deceive God. He knows the absolute truth about each of us. What is His evaluation of your spiritual attitude as regards humility and pride?

How can a person cultivate the spirit of humility? Here are a few suggestions. Add others to the list as they come to your mind. (1) Refuse to harbor pride. (2) Compare what you do with what remains to be done. (3) Do not compare yourself with a Christian who is weaker than you. (4) Think of yourself in view of what you should become, not in view of what you are. (5) Keep attention centered upon God.

Jesus requires a humble spirit in those who are His disciples, but He does not demand self-abasement. You are made in the image and likeness of God. You are redeemed by the blood of His Son. You are a member of God's family. While upon earth, you are a representative of the King of kings. Do not think of yourself as unimportant or unfit.

“Christian humility is based on aspiration rather than despair— aspiration combined with honesty. The eye is on ahead. It does not say, 'I abase myself, but rather with Paul, 'I have not yet apprehended' . . . It sees clearly one's short-comings and feels deeply one's personal need. From the root of such humility there comes the loveliest flowers: modesty, sympathy, charity of spirit, aspiration for the ideal, constant gratitude for the goodness of God”—Branscomb.

**True humility is self-forgetfulness in devotion to God.** It is possible only when self has died and Christ lives upon the throne of your life, Luke 9:23. If you have ambitions to greatness, here is the way: “. . . **He that is greatest among you shall be your servant,**” Matthew 23:11. Are you available?

### Questions

1. What is humility?
2. Why do we need to be taught to be humble?
3. What is unconscious humility?
4. How can you distinguish between true and false humility?
5. How does Luke 17:7-10 demonstrate humility? '
6. What demonstrated Jesus' humility?
7. How can you become more humble?
8. Explain the paradox, “The way up is down.”
9. Why is humility necessary in a Christian?
10. How does Luke 9:23 relate to humility?