

Humility

Introduction. Oliver Wendell Holmes called humility “the first of all other virtues -- for other people.” What is humility? The root literally identifies something that is “low-lying, not rising far from the ground” and figuratively describes one who is “lowly in spirit, unpretentious, humble.” The noun signifies, “having a humble opinion of one’s self, as reflected in a deep sense of one’s own moral littleness.” The verb means “to make low, fig. to humble.”

Humility, or poverty of spirit, is the opposite of pride, self-righteousness and self-conceit. It is the spirit of one who prefers to learn and obey, rather than to teach and command. Humility always implies unselfishness, obedience and consecration (Galatians 2:20). We are going to try to understand the nature of humility and the necessity of manifesting this disposition.

I. ***Characteristic Of The Christ***

- A. Jesus of Nazareth was above all other teachers in that He gave a perfect example of what He taught. Other great religious and philosophical teachers have given the world moral systems, but have failed to live up to their teachings.
- B. Humility was the fundamental characteristic of His life.
 1. He gave up riches and glory to suffer the humiliation of the cross, in order to redeem a rebellious humanity (2 Corinthians 8:9). He became even poorer than bird or beast (Matthew 8:20). He washed the disciples’ feet to teach them humility (John 13:1-17).
 2. The same poverty of spirit led Him to agonize in Gethsemane until His sweat became as drops of blood, yet the burden of His prayer was always, “Thy will be done” (Matthew 26:36-46; Luke 22:39-46).
 3. The climax of His humiliation came in the agony of the cross. Yet, because He humbled Himself unto death, He was crowned Lord of all (Philippians 2:5-11). His whole life on earth was an exposition of His cardinal precept (John 8:29).
- C. Humility was the fundamental characteristic of His teaching.
 1. Different attempts at happiness:
 - a) Found in asceticism (Buddha).
 - b) Found in dignity and family loyalty (Confucius).
 - c) Found in military power (Mohammed).
 2. Jesus taught that happiness depends upon the condition of the heart and standing in the right relation to God (Matthew 5:3; 23:11-12; Mark 10:28-31). He furthermore taught that humility was the path to greatness (Matthew 18:1-6).

II. ***Characteristic Of The Apostles***

- A. Prior to Pentecost, the apostles were selfish, unspiritual and cowardly. After the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost, they became the unselfish, obedient, courageous champions of the gospel. There are a number of examples of the humility of the apostles:
1. At the Beautiful Gate (Acts 3:12-16).
 2. In the presence of the high priest and the Jewish council (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29).
 3. At the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7:51-60).
 4. On the road to Damascus (Acts 9:6).
 5. In the prison at Philippi (Acts 16:25).
 6. In the presence of the Greek philosophers on Mars' Hill (Acts 17:24-31).
 7. In the stinging rebuke administered to the high priest (Acts 23:1-5).
 8. In the defense before Agrippa (Acts 26:19).
- B. How different from the spirit of the Pope of Rome, who claims to be the legitimate successor of Peter, "the personal representative of Christ upon earth"! To the apostles, everything was secondary to the one great task of serving the Master (Romans 1:14-15; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; 4:9-13; 9:16; Philippians 1:21-24). The attitude of the apostles was that of humble allegiance to the will of Christ (2 Corinthians 6:4-10; 11:23-33; 12:7-10).

III. ***Characteristic Of The Christian***

- A. Selfishness is absolutely foreign to the kingdom of God. The man who is selfish in his actions has not been "born again," even if he has been baptized a dozen times.
- B. God justified the publican, but condemned the self-righteous Pharisee (Luke 18:10-14).
1. A man does not have to advertise his goodness -- all he needs to do is to live the life, and the world will take notice (Matthew 7:20; cf. Philippians 2:3; Colossians 3:12-14; 1 Peter 3:8-9; 5:5-7).
 2. Our eternal state will depend upon genuine repentance, the absolute surrender of the individual will to the will of Christ (Matthew 7:21-27; John 5:28-29; Hebrews 5:9; James 1:9-11; 4:6, 10; Revelation 22:14).
- C. The rich young ruler had a character which the Master admired (Mark 10:17-22).
1. From a material point of view, there is neither virtue in poverty nor vice in riches. Riches merely increase our responsibility as stewards of God.

- a) Lazarus, though poor, went to a happy reward in Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:22).
 - b) Job was an upright man, even though he was materially blessed (Job 1:1-3).
 - c) Abraham, though rich in cattle and land, was a friend of God (James 2:23).
 - d) God accepted the widow's mite, for it was the best she could do (Mark 12:41-44).
2. Although moral in character, and scrupulously strict in religious observances, he failed the crucial test and his selfishness deprived him of eternal life.

Conclusion. The world is looking for the "prints of the nails" in the life of the Christian. Can we live up to the test? Can we show, like Paul, that we have been crucified to the world (Galatians 6:14)? Can we show the world that we are really humble and therefore willing to sacrifice everything for the Master? If not, we are not really "born again." If so, the world will be convinced, and will cry out, as Thomas did, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). John Buchan said, "Without humility there can be no humanity."