

HUMILITY: THE EVIDENCE OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Alex Mulamootil

St. Augustine said “It was pride that changed angels into devils; it is humility that makes men angels.” Humility is a rare virtue in our society nowadays. We live in a dog-eat-dog culture. People believe that in order to be successful you have to be aggressive. The teachings of self esteem have gone to the extreme that people may be overly prideful and even worship themselves.

The Bible says in 2 Chronicles 7:14 “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 will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” This is concrete proof that God works when His people humble themselves. It is the promise of the Lord and He cannot lie.

We must understand that nobody has ever been anybody in the Bible unless he has practiced humility. The Bible’s Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11 is full of people who, first and foremost, humbled themselves and then were able to be used by God.

Humility is a grace that is to be treasured. In James 4:6 says: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Proverbs 15:33 says, “The fear of the LORD teaches man wisdom, and humility comes before honor.” We also read in Luke 14:11, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Humility permits us to do something for others without expecting something in return. The humble person is always mindful of his relationship with God. He seeks to please God by his every thought and action. Humility is not a weakness; it is strength, a knowledge and wisdom without equal. Humility is a love that is divine in nature and is an indication that God’s love lives in the heart. The Bible says in Proverbs 18:12 “Before his downfall a man’s heart is proud, but humility comes before honor.”

The dictionary defines the word ‘humble’ as ‘not proud or arrogant; modest’. It is a spirit of deference and submission. It is not slavery or weakness, but it is the free will of a person to bring himself under subjection so that what needs to be done is accomplished.

Humility is a modest estimation of one’s self. Romans 12:3 says “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”

Humility is a self-abasing attitude, Jesus says in Mark 8:34 “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” The cross was a symbol of shame, disgrace and humiliation. When someone had been judged by the magistrates as guilty of a crime, they were sentenced to be crucified on a cross, which the Bible calls a curse, “cursed is he that hangs on a tree”. For a person to willfully take up the cross meant that they didn’t care about the shame, disgrace, humiliation, or so-called curse as

long as they could do what needed to be done so they would be like Christ. Humility is not seeking after popularity and glamour in the eyes of society but in the sight of God and that God may be glorified.

Simply stated, humility means being of a low estate. It is seeing others as higher than us. This should be the attitude of our ministry -to see others as greater than us and help them to grow in the Lord. Humble people are not particular about position and don't brag about their achievements. They are not worried about the fanfare and recognition. If we look at the mission of John the Baptist, we understand that his purpose was to preach repentance, which is the humbling of a person before God in order that they may receive salvation. The Bible says in Luke 3:5 "Every valley shall be filled up and every mountain and hill made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth." John's purpose was to make ready the hearts of people, to cause them to become humble and receive salvation. He understood his purpose; therefore, brought himself under subjection, he didn't become arrogant and prideful, but understood that he had to decrease so that Jesus would increase. John the Baptist was poor in spirit, that is, humbled.

In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5), the 1st beatitude is "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This is poor 'in spirit' and not 'poor spirited'. Poor in spirit means to be broken of self. You are not relying on yourself for anything. The apostle Paul said "I know that in me, that is in this flesh, dwells no good thing." Hannah was so poor in spirit that she couldn't speak a word, but knew God could hear her heart.

Roman 12:2 says "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God". The mentality of man is that we are proud of our self-reliance and independence. We strive to reach a level of independence that can never be accomplished, we feel as though "All I need is what I have or what I can get". We say, "I can do it all myself and I don't need God".

This is the 'I-syndrome', but what we must understand that 'I' is the middle letter of 'pride', it is also the middle letter of 'sin', and the middle letter of 'die'. When we get wrapped up in the "I syndrome", which is pride, pride is the antithesis of God and the opposite of humility; therefore, it is a sin, and sin brings forth death. Becoming poor in spirit is getting rid of the "I syndrome" and developing the image and likeness of Jesus Christ, which is the meaning of the word 'Christian' anyway. Jonathan Edwards stated, "Nothing sets a person so much out of the Devil's reach as humility"

There are two very distinctive descriptions of poor: poor by circumstance or poor by choice. 'Poor by circumstance' is when I have nothing surplus in terms of my material riches. I have met my needs in many cases, but not all my desires, because I am not able to afford them financially. On the other hand, 'poor by choice' means 'I have or could have anything, but I'd rather deny myself so God may be glorified'. Though poor in the eyes of man, the poor in spirit - the humble - are rich in the eyes of God and will enjoy

the kingdom of heaven. Such humility is the wisdom of the spiritually mature in realizing their self-inadequacy and not seeking after self-sufficiency.

Humility causes a person to have the Barnabas attitude. Barnabas brought Paul to the Apostles when he first came to Jerusalem. During their mission, Barnabas was in charge. But when he saw God was working through Paul, he humbled himself and let Paul have the forefront so that God may be glorified. Barnabas didn't worry about prestige or position; he was satisfied with just being used by God and being a servant unto God. That is the mature attitude and I pray that God will give that kind attitude to each one of us.

Jesus said in Matthew 11:29 "I am gentle and humble in heart." When Jesus came into the world he disrobed Himself of His glory and came in the likeness of man to suffer and be tempted in every way we are, yet without sin. Christ understood that His purpose from the foundation of the world was to be slain and was obedient to God; therefore, was as a lamb led before the shearer, dumb never mumbling a word. He portrayed humility even at the point of death. Jesus' servitude was done willingly. He never had to be prodded or pumped up to do His Father's will. He understood His purpose and did what He knew had to be done without reservation. He was truly humble.

Humility is an obedient mindset, for obedience is better than sacrifice. Humility is the result of understanding our spiritual condition and our relationship with God or the lack of it. D.L. Moody once said 'The beginning of greatness is to be little, the increase of greatness is to be less, and the perfection of greatness is to be nothing.' This is what John the Baptist meant in saying, "He must increase, but I must decrease"(John3:30, KJV). We must understand that the deeper our humility is, the greater the measure to which God can and will use us. The sacrifices precious to God are that of a broken spirit and a contrite heart.

When you humble yourself and present yourself to God as a broken vessel, He takes the pieces and begins to put them back together, not the same old way but in a new way. He fills the empty spaces with His love and sets you apart from everyone else. Your situations begin to turn around and you realize that God is blessing you exceeding abundantly above all you can ask or think. Why? You chose to humble yourself!