

Let Us Be Humble

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor.

(Romans 12:10)¹

All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable [expedient]. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor. (I Corinthians 10:23-24)

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you. (I Peter 5:6-7)

Introduction

The Bible has much to say about humility and its counterpart, pride. We are exhorted to be humble and are warned against being proud. Why is this? Humility is not part of our sin nature, whereas pride is. Our natural tendency is to be prideful and not humble. Like love, however, the fact that both believers and unbelievers can demonstrate humility in their thoughts and actions is by the grace of God—He works through all people for His purpose.² However, believers should have a greater desire to live humble lives because we should recognize why we ought to be humble. Furthermore, we have the means to be humble because we are in Christ and the Holy Spirit is working within us (Ephesians 2:4-6; Romans 8:1, 9-11).

Of first importance, this study is directed toward believers—those who are saved from the consequences of their sins by the grace of God. Everyone sins and falls short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Because of our sin, we cannot approach God in His righteousness. In fact, in our natural sinful condition we don't (and can't) even seek God (Romans 3:10-11; 8:5-8). The just, or deserved, consequences of our sinful condition are spiritual death and eternal separation from God in hell (Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:11-15). Thankfully, God provided the one and only remedy for our sin by sending His Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins (Romans 5:6-11). God then raised Him up, demonstrating that Christ was victorious over sin and death (I Corinthians 15:56-57). To obtain the benefit of Christ's death for us, we must believe from our heart that He died for our sins, was buried, and rose again (I Corinthians 15:1-4; Romans 10:8-10). No works of righteousness of any kind are required—we're saved by the grace of God simply by believing what He did for us through Christ at the cross (Romans 4:4-5; Ephesians 2:8-9). Do you believe that Christ died for you?³

What is the definition of humility? Based on standard dictionary definitions, characteristics of humility include being aware of one's own shortcomings, modest or unpretentious, and meek; showing deferential respect or consideration of others and being submissive; and lacking high station. These

¹ All references are quoted from the *New American Standard Bible* (1996). Words in brackets are either equivalent words from the *King James Version* or, if in italics, were added by the author for clarification.

² Try to imagine our world without love and humility. Satan is the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:1-3), but is constrained by God who is sovereign over all. By His grace and for His purposes, God also blesses those who are spiritually lost (Matthew 5:43-45).

³ See the author's **Good News!, Which Gospel?**, and other studies that explain the gospel of salvation in greater depth.

attributes contrast with pride, which is defined as having an excessively high opinion of oneself, and being conceited, arrogant, and boastful.

Believers have a great reason to be humble. Being undeserving sinners who are saved by the grace of God should cause us to humble ourselves before God. We will explore this more fully later on. For now, let us see what Scripture says about humility and pride. Although referenced throughout the Bible, in the interest of time and space we will focus (with a couple of exceptions) on what is said in the New Testament. The verses and passages typed out below are from the *New American Standard Bible* and are provided for convenience, but it would be best to look them up in your own Bible to read them and their context to understand the greater meaning intended by God.

Brethren, we need to examine ourselves, perhaps by putting ourselves in the shoes of those who know us best. How do people including our spouse, members of our family, friends, coworkers, etc., see us? Do they understand us as being humble or arrogant? Can they count on us to be considerate of their needs or desires, or do they know that we put ourselves first? Likewise, how do our words or actions come across to acquaintances and strangers who we encounter in our day-to-day lives? Finally, how do we think God, who knows all things and the motives of our heart, sees us? Please consider these things while reading the following Scripture verses and passages.

Be Humble

Good and upright is the Lord; therefore He instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble [meek] in justice, and He teaches the humble His way. (Psalm 25:8-9)

When pride comes, then comes dishonor, but with the humble [lowly] is wisdom. (Proverbs 11:2)

Humility is expressed in many forms. Although all are related and overlap to some degree, some of the forms of humility as described in Scripture include being gentle, modest, content, considerate, submissive, forgiving, and thankful. The only person in Scripture who demonstrated all forms of humility is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:5-8; I Peter 2:21-24). Although we are constrained by our sinful nature, we need to remind ourselves of His humility and the exhortations to be humble throughout Scripture, and endeavor to conduct our lives with humility.

Humility is Being Meek (Gentle)

The words *meek* and *meekness* when describing another person often tend to be used in condescending or belittling ways. We might think of a meek person as being a pushover or as one who has little or no self-assurance—someone who is weak. This is not how God describes meekness, however. Moses wasn't a pushover even though God considered him to be humble (Numbers 12:3), and Jesus spoke with authority (Matthew 7:28-29; 23:1-39; II Corinthians 10:1). To turn the other cheek or to be patient when wronged requires an inner strength that comes from God (Luke 6:27-30). The Greek words for *meek* and associated words are used to describe gentleness, moderation, and consideration for others, which represent humility.

Blessed are the poor in spirit [not spiritually arrogant], for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle [meek], for they shall inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:3-5)

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness [meekness]; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. (Galatians 6:1)

Let your gentle spirit [moderation] be known to all men. The Lord is near. (Philippians 4:5)

But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness [meekness]. (I Timothy 6:11)

The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness [meekness] correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth. (II Timothy 2:24-25)

Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable [uncontentious], gentle, showing every consideration [all meekness] for all men. (Titus 3:1-2)

But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness [meekness] and reverence. (I Peter 3:14-15)

Humility is Being Modest or Unpretentious

Modesty is another attribute that tends to have a bad reputation. That is because it is natural for us to want to draw attention to ourselves through various means. Think of all the ways that we do this. For example, do we show off our financial success or luxurious taste through the kinds of clothes we wear, the vehicles we drive, or the homes we own? Do we want people to praise us for our skills whether they be in athletics, academics, or the arts? Do we want others to be attracted to ourselves through our charisma?

It is not a sin to be financially successful, accomplished in our endeavors, or admired by others. However, how we accomplish these things (and the motives for doing so) and how we use them can be sinful (I Timothy 6:7-10, 17-19). On the other hand, we can fall into the trap of being proud of our modesty—we may want to be noticed and praised for our modest means and behavior. Is this any better?

Scripture addresses modesty through our motives. We are instructed not to do things for the purpose of being noticed by others. Instead, we are to do the right things for the right reasons and because it is the right thing to do (Romans 12:17; Colossians 3:23; I Peter 2:15, 20; 3:17; 4:19). If we do all things for the Lord rather than to gain the attention of others, then those around us will benefit in one way or another.

Beware of practicing your righteousness [alms—giving to the poor] before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that

your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.
(Matthew 6:1-4)

When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6:5-6)

Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly [walk honestly] toward outsiders [unbelievers] and not be in any need. (I Thessalonians 4:9-12)

Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. (I Peter 3:3-4)

Whatever you do, do your work heartily [from the soul], as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. (Colossians 3:23-24)

Humility is Being Content

It seems to be a struggle for many (most?) of us to be content. It is so easy to want something different or more than we have. But this is not God's way. He has promised to provide for our needs, but we may not even realize He is doing so if we forget to be thankful to God for what we have.

And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19)

We may feel or say that God isn't meeting our needs because of various circumstances. In the above verse Paul was writing to the Philippian brethren who were living their faith and being used by God to meet the physical needs of Paul while he was in prison (Philippians 4:10-18). They were relying on God and would have been more apt to see how God was working in their lives and meeting their needs. If we look to God instead of ourselves, I believe we will realize that God is, indeed, providing for all of our needs. Furthermore, we may discover that our definition of *needs* is different than what God considers our needs to be.

By wanting or striving to get more than we have indicates that our focus is on ourselves, which is the opposite of humility. God wants us to be content. He wants us to acknowledge that He is in control and working all things together for our good (Romans 8:26-28; Philippians 2:12-13). God wants us to realize that He is able to do far more than we could ask or think. He also wants us to go to Him in prayer with all of our concerns, with thanksgiving. If we do, then we can know the peace of God, which is a natural consequence of being content.

And He [the Lord] has said to me [Paul], “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. (II Corinthians 12:9-10)

Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. (Philippians 4:11)

But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. (I Timothy 6:6-9)

Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself [the Lord] has said, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5)

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us. (Ephesians 3:20)

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

Humility is Showing Deferential Respect or Consideration for Others

God is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). That is, no one is more deserving of His grace than another because God sees all of us as dead in sin prior to salvation, and by His grace sees all of His children as equally alive and blessed in Christ once saved (Ephesians 1:3-7; 2:1-7). No one *earns* the favor of God. If God does not consider our differences—that no one is more worthy of salvation than another (Romans 3:21-23; 10:12; Galatians 3:26-28)—then we should not consider others as more or less worthy of our respect or consideration.

God wants us to love and be at peace (if possible—Romans 12:18) with our fellow brethren and be devoted to them. Furthermore, instead of being offensive or self-centered, He wants us to consider others as *more important* than ourselves, and put their interests before our own. This same consideration applies to unbelievers with whom we associate, for we are to live as Christ’s representatives (II Corinthians 5:20). We ought to humbly serve one another, seeking each other’s good and uplifting each other as opportunities arise.

Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty [seasoned] again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another. (Mark 9:50)

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor. (Romans 12:10)

Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. (Romans 15:1-2)

All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable [expedient]. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor. (I Corinthians 10:23-24)

Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks [Gentiles] or to the church of God. (I Corinthians 10:32)

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. (Galatians 5:13)

So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. (Galatians 6:10)

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling [salvation] with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:32)

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4)

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. (Colossians 3:12-13)

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders [unbelievers], making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. (Colossians 4:5-6)

Remind them [the brethren] to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration [all meekness] for all men. (Titus 3:1-2)

To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic [compassionate], brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit [courteous]. (I Peter 3:8)

Humility is Being Submissive

Being submissive to others is another concept that many of us seem to struggle with, and yet we do it all the time. As children we should have been submissive to our parents by being obedient to them (Ephesians 6:1). As students, we were submissive (or at least we should have been) to our teachers by behaving in class and completing our assignments. As employees, we are submissive to our supervisors

or employers by doing our work as instructed or expected. As citizens, we are submissive to our government by obeying its laws and paying our taxes.

Perhaps the struggle is because we often resent having to be submissive. We behave submissively because we feel that we have to instead of desiring to do so. We forget that we should do the right thing because it is the right thing to do. How often did we disobey our parents simply because we didn't want to do what we were told to do? How often do we bend or break company rules to our advantage or simply because we're tired of so many rules? How often do we intentionally exceed speed limits because we think they are an infringement on our personal rights or that it is OK unless we're caught? Unfortunately, many people, including the children of God, prove by their actions that they are not submissive.

Being submissive is recognizing that someone or something is more important than ourselves. It is another way of showing respect or consideration for others—not only for those who are in authority over us but to those with whom we associate every day. Brethren, we ought to be submissive to God because He is the Almighty God who saved us by His grace. We ought to submit ourselves to others because Christ provided the greatest example of humility by submitting to God for our sakes by dying on the cross for us. Furthermore, we ought to submit to our governing authorities because they are established by the will of God.⁴ Our attitude and behavior are noticed by others and affect them, and we may never know when God is using us to change another person's life. Let's humbly be submissive, from the heart, as we ought to be.

Submitting to God

And Mary said, "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:38)

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (I Corinthians 6:19-20)

For the love of Christ controls [*constrains*] us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. (II Corinthians 5:14-15)

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8)

Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you. (James 4:10)

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. (I Peter 5:6-7)

⁴ See the author's **Governing Authority** for a comprehensive discussion on why and how God wants us to submit to those in authority over us, as well as instances when we should not submit to them.

Submitting to Others

And be subject [*submit*] **to one another in the fear of Christ** [God]. (Ephesians 5:21)

Servants, be submissive [subject] **to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.** (I Peter 2:18-19)

In the same way, you wives, be submissive [in subjection] **to your own husbands⁵ so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.** (I Peter 3:1-2)

You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. (I Peter 5:5)

Submitting to Governing Authorities

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. (Romans 13:1-2)

Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration [all meekness] **for all men.** (Titus 3:1-2)

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. (I Peter 2:13-17)

Humility is Forgiving Others

Forgiveness is another expression of humility. First of all, we should be humbled by the fact that Christ died for our sins. He who knew no sin became sin for us (II Corinthians 5:21). Christ gave up His position at the right hand of God to come to earth as a man and humbled Himself to God the Father by obediently dying on the cross for us (Philippians 2:5-8). Brethren, every one of us was an enemy of God and not one of us deserves His saving grace (Ephesians 2:1-3; Romans 5:6-10). Not only were we forgiven of our sins when we believed the gospel of salvation, but God's forgiveness covers all sins that we subsequently commit (Romans 3:21-28; 8:1-4). Again, that is something we do not deserve.

⁵ God established the husband's authority over his wife (Ephesians 5:22-24). However, too many husbands abuse this authority and show little or no respect for their wives. They forget that they are instructed to love their wives as Christ loved the church—so much so that He died for us (Ephesians 5:25-30). They also forget, through their own pride, that they are no more important spiritually than their wives (Galatians 3:28).

We need to humbly remember what God did for us through Christ when others sin against us by saying or doing things that hurt us in one way or another, whether they do them intentionally or not. Admittedly, this is not easy. But then, dying on the cross wasn't easy. The greatest example of forgiveness that we have was when our Lord asked God to forgive those who were crucifying Him (Luke 23:34). Stephen, also, asked that God would not hold the sin of those who were stoning him to death against them (Acts 7:58-60).

True forgiveness comes from the heart and does not need to be verbalized. Will the one who hurt us be changed through our forgiveness, or even acknowledge that their words or actions hurt us? That is entirely up to God and is not a condition of our forgiveness. Although God reconciled us to Himself through the death of Christ (Romans 5:10-11), there is no promise for us that forgiveness will reconcile us to each other (we should *try* to be at peace with one another, but it isn't always possible—Romans 12:17-18). May we endeavor to humbly forgive others as God has instructed us to do.

In Him [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His [God's] grace. (Ephesians 1:7)

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:32)

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.
(Colossians 3:12-13)

As demonstrated above, we are to forgive those who sin against us because God has forgiven our sins. How far does this go? How often should we forgive someone who hurts us through words or deeds? Peter asked our Lord this very question as recorded in Matthew 18:21-22 and Luke 17:3-4. When we consider these passages together, we find that if someone (a "brother") sins against us and asks for forgiveness (repents), then we are not only to forgive him seven times, but seventy times seven times. I don't believe there is anything special about these numbers—they seem to mean that if a person asks for forgiveness, then we should forgive. This would be in accordance with forgiving others because we are forgiven. Furthermore, we can and should be forgiving even if someone doesn't ask for forgiveness, as our Lord did at the cross and as Stephen did while being stoned to death.

Forgiveness to this extent is admittedly very difficult to do, but doesn't God forgive us no matter how often we sin against Him? In actuality, at the very moment we believe that Christ died for our sins, God not only forgives our past sins but has already forgiven us for our sins committed from that moment on—He sees (knows) us in Christ (Romans 3:21-26; 7:18 – 8:2; Ephesians 1:3-7; 2:4-7). Consequently, we never see in Paul's letters a command or exhortation to confess our sins for God's forgiveness, either for salvation or for our daily walk. That is because we are already forgiven.⁶ As

⁶ Confessing sins was associated with repentance and water baptism for the remissions of sins (Matthew 3:1-2, 5-6; 4:17; Mark 1:4-5; Acts 2:37-38). This was an essential part of the *kingdom* message proclaimed by John the Baptist, Jesus, and His twelve disciples to the people of Israel. They weren't confessing specific sins, but the fact that they were sinful and disobedient to God. The well-known verse I John 1:9 is usually, but mistakenly, applied to daily confession of our sins so that God will forgive us. Brethren, we are already forgiven. (Continued on next page)

believers we are, however, to acknowledge our sinfulness and have a repentant heart (a desire to change) because this leads to closer fellowship with God and a realization of His peace (II Corinthians 7:8-10; II Timothy 2:24-26).

But how far should this go? Do we just continue to take abuse from someone? There is a hard lesson in Scripture about separating ourselves from those who sin. As an example, because of problems within the Corinthian church, Paul referred back to the Old Testament about God's command to His people (Israel) to not associate with the unbelieving nations (II Corinthians 6:14-18). In applying this precept to believers today, he explained the need to separate ourselves from unruly brethren and those who were teaching false doctrine (I Corinthians 5:9-13; Romans 16:17-19; II Thessalonians 3:6-11, 14-15; Titus 3:9-11). Why is this? For one thing, bad company corrupts good morals (I Corinthians 15:33-34). The Corinthian church was being negatively impacted by continuing fellowship with an outwardly immoral fellow believer (I Corinthians 3:1-3; 5:1-2). Additionally, continually taking abuse can lead to mental, physical, and spiritual turmoil within ourselves and can tempt us to sin in response. Although reconciliation is desirable and should be pursued, there is no guarantee that it will work out (Romans 12:17-21). We need to prayerfully consider if or when we should separate ourselves from an abusive person or situation.

Finally, are we to forgive and forget? The way our brains are wired, it is difficult to forget hurtful things that are done or said to us (or things we have done to others). If we don't forget, does that mean that we haven't really forgiven that person? Not necessarily. It is about *how* we remember it. Are we still holding it against them? If so, then we likely didn't really forgive them. On the other hand, are we remembering it for a better purpose, such as for realizing the grace and graciousness of God through true forgiveness from the heart, or using the experience as an example of growth or spiritual maturity in our lives? Let's endeavor to be truly forgiving. Also, as we remember that we are forgiven by God, we should also forgive ourselves for past sins and not dwell on them; otherwise, we are denying the grace of God and being self-centered instead of humble (Romans 7:21 – 8:4).

Humility is Being Thankful

Giving thanks is an acknowledgment of a favor, gift, or benefit—it is an expression of gratitude. It can be for something tangible that we receive, or simply a humble response to the love or support someone else gives us. If we are truly thankful, we are acknowledging that we are dependent on someone in some way or another. On the other hand, being ungrateful is proving that we think we are self-sufficient. Doesn't it feel good when we are thanked in some way for something we did for someone else?

We have so much to be thankful for, beginning with our salvation through the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 1:13-14; Colossians 1:12). In truth, when we believe from our heart that Christ died for our sins, we are thanking God for His indescribable gift to us (II Corinthians 9:15; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9). We ought to be thankful for all that God has provided for us, acknowledging that He is working everything out for our good (Romans 8:28-30; Philippians 1:6). We ought, also, to be thankful to and for family, friends, coworkers, and even strangers

This verse is referring to the same type of confession as before—for salvation—for the people of Israel and will be applicable to them after the rapture (see I John 3:4-9; Ezekiel 36:22-27).

who help us in so many ways. Finally, we ought to be thankful for our fellow brethren and how God is working through them.

We should not expect to be thanked for doing what we are expected to do. If we are working for someone, we are paid to do our job (Romans 4:4). Nor should we voluntarily do things for others with the expectation of being thanked or receiving recognition. Instead, we are to do all things for the Lord, giving thanks through Him to God our Father (Colossians 3:23). As believers who have received everything by the grace of God, however, we should be thankful to those who help us or work for us. Thankfulness from the heart is the outward expression of inward humility.

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. (Romans 1:8)

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation [for your fellowship] in the gospel from the first day until now. (Philippians 1:3-5)

Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. (Romans 16:3-4)

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

Let the peace of Christ [God] rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. (Colossians 3:15)

Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (Colossians 3:17)

In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (I Thessalonians 5:18)

Be Not Proud

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling [a fall]. It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud. (Proverbs 16:18-19)

A man's pride will bring him low, but a humble spirit will obtain honor. (Proverbs 29:23)

Perhaps to understand humility better, it is worthwhile to understand pride, which is the opposite of humility. Unfortunately, it is often easier to be proud than humble. Scripture has much to say about pride, and mostly not in a good way.

Moses was used mightily by God, yet God considered him to be the most humble man on earth (Numbers 12:3). However, in one act of pride, by striking the rock to bring forth water instead of speaking to it as God commanded, Moses was prevented from entering the promised land (Numbers 20:8-12). Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, was exceedingly proud of his accomplishments; the Almighty God, however, humbled him and apparently saved him by His grace (Daniel 4:28-37).

There are a number of aspects of pride discussed in Scripture. As with humility, they all are related and overlap to some degree. We express pride by boasting in ourselves, being arrogant toward others, thinking too highly of ourselves, judging others, seeking retribution, and feeling sorry for ourselves if we suffer persecution for the sake of Christ. Let's examine ourselves, brethren. Are we thinking or acting according to humility, or according to pride?

Humility is Not Being Proud

First of all, Scripture expressly tells us *not* to be proud of who we are or what we do. God does not want us to desire to be mighty or seek the praise of man. We are not to consider ourselves as better than others. By doing so, we are proving that we are self-centered and forgetting that all we have is by the grace of God.

Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

(Matthew 23:12)

“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All of these things proceed from within and defile the man.” (Mark 7:21-23)

“But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave [servant] of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:43-45)

“And His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him. He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble.”

(Luke 1:50-52)

And He began speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table, saying to them, “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give your place to this man,’ and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. “But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 14:7-11)

For you were called to freedom [liberty], brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. (Galatians 5:13)

But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6)

Humility is Not Being Boastful

How often, and in how many ways, do we boast in ourselves? It is our nature to take credit for our accomplishments and to seek the adulation of others, and sometimes financial reward, for those accomplishments. Perhaps we enhance our appearance or physique to be noticed or envied by others. Although we may tire of others boasting in themselves, we may not even notice how we boast in ourselves. It is easy to forget that our salvation is an unearned and undeserved gift of God, and that all we have is from God (Romans 8:31-32; Ephesians 1:3).

Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. (Romans 3:27-28)

Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another. (Galatians 5:26)

There is room for a particular kind of boasting, however. We should boast in the Lord—not in what we have done for Him, but what He has done for us. Instead of letting everyone know how often we pray, how much money or time we give to the Lord, or how many souls we think that we led to Christ, we should be quietly (inwardly) thankful for what God is accomplishing or that He is using us for His purposes. In a similar sense of boasting, Paul proudly spoke of other believers for their faithfulness and walk for Christ, while giving credit to God (II Thessalonians 1:3-4).

But by His [God's] doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." (I Corinthians 1:30-31)

But he who boasts is to boast in the Lord. For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends. (II Corinthians 10:17-18)

Regarding being inwardly thankful, let's take a look at Mary, who demonstrated her humility in such an amazing way. As part of God's plan, He chose Mary, who was betrothed to Joseph (who was in the line of David in accordance with prophecy—II Samuel 7:8-17; Ezekiel 37:24-28; Matthew 1:1-17), to be the mother of His only Son in human form. In the account in Luke 1:26-38, we learn that the angel Gabriel told Mary, who was still a virgin, that she would miraculously conceive the Son of God. What was Mary's response? She didn't ask why God would choose her and she didn't gloat for being chosen. Instead, she humbly responded to Gabriel that she was the bondservant of the Lord and was ready for God to do what the angel had said.

Later, in Luke 2:8-20, we have the account of the shepherds soon after the birth of Jesus. After the shepherds related how the angel of the Lord had appeared to them and told them about the birth of the Savior of Israel, those present with Mary in the stable wondered at the things that the shepherds told them. Mary, however, treasured those things, *pondering them in her heart*. Would we humbly respond in such a way to such amazing things of God, or would we tell the world, probably with some pride and embellishment (i.e., boasting), through one or more social media platforms?

But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. (Luke 2:19)

Humility is Not Being Arrogant

Arrogance is a display of presumptuous or insulting (insolent) behavior through manner or speech by someone who is convinced of their own importance. An arrogant person is one who is overbearingly proud. Bragging is a common demonstration of arrogance. Being arrogant, therefore, is a form of boasting. As with boasting, we may not even be aware of the ways in which we are portraying our arrogance.

Amongst brethren, arrogance presents itself in many ways, though most of us would refuse to consider ourselves as being arrogant. We have separated ourselves into many denominations based on different understandings of Scripture (and because of differing traditions), and it is not uncommon for brethren of one denomination to behave arrogantly toward brethren of another denomination. Paul reprimanded the Corinthian believers, calling them carnal, for dividing themselves according to their personal preferences (I Corinthians 3:1-7). He also had a stern warning for Gentile brethren who thought they were superior to the Jews because they had rejected their Messiah (Romans 11:17-21). How often do we make arrogant judgments regarding others?

My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? (James 2:1-4)

Believers have done the same thing regarding political party affiliation. Somehow, one's faith, or one's sincerity of faith, has been tied to one or another political party and strong divisions ensue between brethren. We should remember that God is sovereign and truly in control (Romans 13:1-7; I Peter 2:13-17), and should reconsider whether we should even be members of a political party regardless of the country we live in.⁷

Even making plans can be a symptom of arrogance. We should make our plans with humility, realizing that God is working things out according to His will and not our own will (Romans 8:28-30; Philippians 2:12-13). Another display of arrogance that unfortunately is common among brethren toward each other or to unsaved people is using knowledge, or presumed knowledge, to belittle others or as a verbal weapon. Furthermore, we should not act or react toward each other with arrogance, remembering that through love we should humbly consider the needs of others first (Philippians 2:3-4).

Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know. (I Corinthians 8:1-2)

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered. (I Corinthians 13:4-5)

⁷ See the author's **Governing Authority** that addresses this issue.

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.” Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.” But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. (James 4:13-16)

Humility is Not Having a High Opinion of Oneself

Thinking that we are somehow special (e.g., smarter, wiser, more accomplished, more blessed, etc.) in contrast to others is another, though perhaps less obvious, form of arrogance. Generally, we have a low opinion about those who come across as thinking they are better than everyone else. However, our own words and actions often reveal an inward haughtiness that we may not realize that we have. What does Scripture say about this?

Too often some brethren consider themselves spiritually better than others. We may feel that because we study the Bible more often, do more work for the Lord, have a better understanding of Scripture than other brethren, or associate ourselves with people we consider to be important (I Corinthians 3:18-23), that we will receive more rewards or have a higher position in heaven than our fellow brethren.⁸ Unfortunately, such thinking demonstrates a misunderstanding of grace. We were saved by the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8-9; II Thessalonians 2:13-14), we were given a measure of faith by the grace of God (Romans 12:3), what we understand about the things of God is by the grace of God (Ephesians 1:15-21; Luke 24:44-45; Acts 16:14), and everything we have is by the grace of God (Romans 11:34-36; I Corinthians 2:12; Ephesians 5:20). We did not earn, or deserve, any of these things. We need to dial down our self-importance—humble ourselves—and be thankful to God.

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed [ignorant] of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. (Romans 11:25)

For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. (Romans 12:3)

Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. (Romans 12:16)

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. (I Corinthians 10:12)

Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. (Galatians 6:2-3)

Humility is Not Being Judgmental

If we have an inflated opinion about ourselves, it is usually manifested in a judgmental attitude and behavior toward others. This sense of judgment is one of condemnation toward other people. Because of their words or actions, we feel they are worthless, deserving of punishment, or possibly even undeserving of salvation. As accusers we either believe that we would not do such things, or are simply

⁸ See the author’s **Are Rewards Our Goal?** that discusses living for Christ and our motives for doing so.

blind to the fact that we actually do them. Brethren, the motives of our heart will be judged at the judgment seat of Christ, so let's leave such judgment in the hands of God (II Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10).

“Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.” (Matthew 7:1-5)

Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. (Romans 2:1-2)

Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God. (I Corinthians 4:5)

There is a different kind of judgment. It is one of discerning right from wrong with the intent of repentance in ourselves or in others (I Corinthians 5:9-13; I Corinthians 11:27-32). Scripture is provided for us not only for doctrine (teaching) and for our training in righteousness, but also for reproof and correction of our fellow brethren (II Timothy 3:16-17). We are exhorted to admonish fellow brethren who have deviated from the truth of God's word in their understanding and behavior (Romans 15:14; II Thessalonians 3:14-15). However, we must be careful how we admonish others, so that we do so with humility (gentleness) rather than in a condescending or judgmental (*holier than thou*) way. Regarding the unsaved, on the other hand, we are not exhorted to try to change the world and its sinful ways (I Corinthians 5:9-10)—we can only present the gospel of salvation to the lost and represent Christ to the world through our own lives (II Corinthians 5:20).

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. (Galatians 6:1)

We urge you, brethren, admonish [warn] the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. (I Thessalonians 5:14-15)

The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth. (II Timothy 2:24-25)

Humility is Not Taking Justice into Our Own Hands

A judgmental attitude can easily lead to a desire for retribution. As discussed earlier, God wants us to forgive others because He has forgiven us. This forgiveness leaves no room for taking justice into our own hands. Let's examine ourselves on this matter. Brethren, how often have we wanted to pay someone back for a wrong, or perceived wrong, that they committed against us? How often have we

actually done so? This is a natural reaction for many of us, but it is a reaction derived from our sin nature.

Wanting a person to suffer for committing a wrong against us is another symptom of pride. Fighting for our personal rights is self-centered and is contrary to the will of God. This applies whether the perpetrator is a believer or not. From God's perspective we are not to treat unbelievers differently than we treat believers—that would be hypocrisy (Galatians 6:9-10).

Instead of retribution, we are exhorted to *not* take into account a wrong suffered or take our own revenge. Instead, we are to love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us, and pray for those who mistreat us. These things may seem impossible, but they are what God wants from us. We can do them because we have the Holy Spirit within us (Romans 8:9-11), so we need to humble ourselves before God and let the love of God and of Christ shine through us. Furthermore, let's leave justice in the hands of God.

“But I [Jesus] say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. (Luke 6:27-29)

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered. (1 Corinthians 13:4-5)

Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? (1 Corinthians 6:7)

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” “But if your enemy is hungry, feed Him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:17-21)

Humility is Not Complaining About Suffering for Christ

As Christians, generally speaking, we seem to feel so persecuted for our faith and are quick to complain about it or to stand up for our *Christian rights*. Laws at all levels of government and prevailing attitudes are supposedly targeting Christians: monuments to the 10 commandments are removed from public places; we are not allowed to pray in public schools; saying “Merry Christmas” is frowned upon or discouraged; etc. Brethren, these things are not persecution as described in Scripture; in fact, they are only perceived (manufactured) forms of persecution brought on ourselves—self-inflicted—due to our own misunderstanding and misuse of Scripture.⁹ In these examples, we need to remember that we are no longer under the Law of Moses (Romans 6:14; Galatians 3:10-14; Colossians 2:13-14), we are not to

⁹ See the author's **Christian Suffering** for a discussion on what is, and what isn't, suffering for Christ and how God desires us to respond to true suffering.

pray to be seen by the public (Matthew 6:5-6), and we are not instructed to celebrate the birth of Christ every year (II Corinthians 5:16-17; Galatians 4:9-11).

It is definitely true that all who live their lives for God and in Christ, in accordance with correct application of the word of God (II Timothy 2:15; Colossians 1:9-12), will suffer persecution to some degree. Examples of such persecution are provided for us throughout Scripture (e.g., Acts 7:51-60; Hebrews 11:35-38). There are places in the world today where believers are suffering loss of jobs or property, imprisonment, bodily harm, and even death for their faith. More of us, however, suffer in less obvious ways such as personal humiliation or loss of fellowship with friends and family. How should we respond to true persecution? Contrary to human nature, we are not to complain or fight back. Instead, we are to consider our suffering for God and our Lord Jesus Christ as a blessing. We should not, however, turn our blessing into a source of pride by boasting in our suffering as a badge of honor or to bring attention to ourselves.

Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against because of Me [Christ]. (Matthew 5:11)

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. (Romans 12:14)

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me. (Philippians 1:27-30).

Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (II Timothy 3:12)

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him [God] who judges righteously. (I Peter 2:21-23)

But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness [meekness] and reverence. (I Peter 3:14-15)

Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. (I Peter 4:15-16)

Why Should We Be Humble?

Hopefully, we have seen, at least within the limited scope of this study, what the word of God says about how we should be humble through our thoughts and behavior, in contrast to thinking and exhibiting prideful traits. Brethren, the bar is set very high, and it is doubtful that any of us is always humble. Sin, unfortunately, will always get in the way and pride will manifest itself from time to time.

However, it should be our desire to live humble lives and not let sin be master over us (Romans 6:12-14).

It is one thing to know *how* to be humble, but *why* should we endeavor to be humble? Because of our sin nature, we can't just will ourselves to be humble. If we were able to do so, then there would be much room to be proud of our humility. Pride will win. To be truly humble, I believe that we need to recognize and understand the grace and sovereign will of God. Furthermore, we should never forget the humility demonstrated by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:3-8)

For us to actually live humble lives as exhorted in Scripture, we first need to believe the gospel of salvation—without the Holy Spirit working in us we are unable to live a life that is pleasing to God (I Corinthians 2:11-16; 15:1-4; Ephesians 1:13-14; Romans 8:1-4, 9-17). Subsequently, as we grow as children of God, we need to acknowledge our natural condition, understand that our salvation is a gift of God, recognize that it is God who opens our eyes to understanding, and believe in our heart that God is sovereign in all things.

Humility is Admitting Our Natural Condition

Brethren, we need to recognize who we are before God. It should be very humbling to remember who we were before we were saved, and who we are now because we are saved. Prior to believing the gospel of salvation, every person is dead in sin and an enemy of God (Romans 5:6-11). Even after salvation we retain our sin nature, so we will continue to sin. We should be humbled by this truth because God loves us despite our sin and has blessed us with all spiritual blessings—He sees us as alive in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-7; Colossians 2:8-14). However, we are not to desire to sin; instead, we are exhorted to flee from sin and sinful temptations (Romans 6:1-14; I Timothy 6:9-11).

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air [*Satan*], of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:1-7)

Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is

in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (I Corinthians 6:18-20)

But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form [appearance] of evil. (I Thessalonians 5:21-22)

Recognizing our own sinfulness and understanding that everything good that we have is by the grace of God should humble us (Luke 5:8). It should also inspire us to be less judgmental and to have a more forgiving attitude toward others. The Apostle Paul remembered who he was before he was saved. Although a leader in the Jewish religion and respected by his peers, he was actually God's leading enemy as he tried to destroy the church of God (Philippians 3:1-7; Acts 22:1-5; Galatians 1:13-14).

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:32)

For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (I Corinthians 15:9)

After his salvation and during his ministry, Paul understood that he (and every believer) was still a sinner in whom was an ongoing spiritual battle (Romans 7:14-25), and that he was an apostle purely by the grace of God (I Timothy 1:15-16; Galatians 1:1). This awareness of his own shortcomings played a part in how he conducted his ministry and why he exhorted the brethren to walk worthy of their salvation.¹⁰

I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin. (Romans 7:21-25)

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable [unsearchable] riches of Christ. (Ephesians 3:8)

It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. (I Timothy 1:15)

Humility is Understanding that Our Salvation is a Gift of God

We need to understand that our salvation and our sure hope of eternal life is from God and according to His will, and not of ourselves. Because of our pride we may claim, or at least believe, that we are saved because we exercised our free will—we are convinced that God saved us because of our own decision or choice. Brethren, this isn't what Scripture says.¹¹ We need to humbly realize that our salvation is purely by the grace of God. We were dead in sin until God, by His matchless grace, opened our eyes to our need for salvation and enabled us, through His Holy Spirit, to believe the truth of Christ's

¹⁰ See the author's **Walk Worthy** for a discussion on how God wants us to live in response to our gift of salvation.

¹¹ See the author's **Salvation and the Sovereignty of God** that examines God's role in our salvation.

death for our sins. We are saved not because we chose to be saved, but because God chose us to be saved.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13)¹²

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. (Romans 5:6-11)

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (Romans 8:28-30)

For consider your calling [*salvation*], brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame [*confound*] the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." (I Corinthians 1:26-31)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons [*children*] through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us [*made us accepted*] in the Beloved. (Ephesians 1:3-6)

But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. (II Thessalonians 2:13)

¹² See also John 6:37, 44, 65. We are not saved because we received Christ by exercising our own free will. We receive Christ (we are in Him and He is in us—Ephesians 2:4-6; Romans 8:1, 9-11) when we believe the gospel of salvation, and we are able to believe the gospel because God chose us for salvation from the beginning (Ephesians 1:3-7, 13-14; Romans 8:28-30; II Thessalonians 2:13-14; Acts 13:48).

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions [sins], made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:4-9)

For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:3-7)

Humility is Recognizing that God Opens Our Eyes to Understanding

As just mentioned, we are only able to understand the gospel of salvation if God enables us, through His Holy Spirit, to believe the truth of Christ's death for our sins (II Thessalonians 2:13). In fact, there is no truth concerning God that we are able to believe unless He opens our eyes to that truth. It is very humbling for us to admit this, and I'm afraid too many of us don't do so. We would rather believe that we understand the things of God because we are smart, because we study the Bible diligently, or because of some other personal reason. Why is this? It is because of pride—it is our nature to do so. Brethren, we ought to be thankful to God, not only for our salvation but for any measure of understanding that He has given us.

Then He [Jesus] took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again." But the disciples understood none of these things, and the meaning of this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said. (Luke 18:31-34)

Now He [Jesus] said to them [the disciples], "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. (Luke 24:44-45)

A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening: and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. (Acts 16:14)

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining [comparing] spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised [discerned]. (I Corinthians 2:12-14)

For this reason I [Paul] too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart [understanding] may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His [God's] calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might. (Ephesians 1:15-19)

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will and in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so the you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. (Colossians 1:9-10)

Humility is Recognizing God's Sovereignty

So, our salvation is by the will of God, and our measure of understanding of the things of God is by His will. These are just two aspects of God's sovereign nature. Brethren, God the Father is the Almighty God. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords—God is the Sovereign of the universe (I Timothy 6:13-16).¹³ Perhaps most believers agree that God is sovereign; however, in our daily experience, most of us don't really believe that He is sovereign in all things.¹⁴ Through our attitude, conversations, and prayers, we too often demonstrate our belief that God, somehow, is subject to our will instead of us being subject to His will. Brethren, we need to recognize who God is and humble ourselves before Him—we need to submit to His sovereign will. By doing so we will experience the peace of God that surpasses all comprehension (Philippians 4:4-7).

What shall we say then? There is no injustice [unrighteousness] with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. (Romans 9:14-16)

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect [perform] it until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6)

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work [do] for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will bring about at the proper time—He [God] who is the blessed and only Sovereign [Potentate], the King of kings and Lord of

¹³ Our Lord Jesus Christ *will be* King of kings and Lord of lords when He rules the world from New Jerusalem during His kingdom on earth (Revelation 17:14; 19:15-16). However, this passage is about God the Father who has always been and always will be King of kings and Lord of lords (Deuteronomy 10:17).

¹⁴ See the author's **Salvation and the Sovereignty of God** that shows how God's sovereign nature and will are described and demonstrated throughout Scripture.

lords, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him [*God*] be honor and eternal dominion! Amen. (1 Timothy 6:13-16)

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. (James 4:13-16)

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you. (1 Peter 5:6-7)

Summary

Humility versus pride—Scripture makes a great distinction between these two traits. Keeping in mind all the preceding verses and passages, please consider the following questions. Is it more humbling to:

- Think of ourselves first, or to consider others first?
- Consider ourselves special, or realize everything we have is from God?
- Insist on having our piece of the pie (figuratively or literally), or to share it or even give it up?
- Wish we had more, or be content with what we have?
- Help others for recognition or praise, or to help them because they are in need and because it is the right thing to do?
- Boast in our achievements, or to thank God for working through us?
- Ridicule or disparage others, or to say and do things that uplift others?
- Insist on exercising our perceived Christian rights, or to accept true persecution as a blessing with thanksgiving to God?
- Demand or exact justice for a wrong that we suffered, or to leave judgment and vengeance to God?
- Think that God is subject to our will, or to acknowledge and sincerely believe that we are subject to His will?

I hope you agree that the latter alternatives demonstrate the humility that God desires us to exercise in our daily lives. Brethren, we are exhorted to walk worthy of our salvation in which we were called by God to Himself. To do so we must humble ourselves before God. This may require regular reexamination of ourselves because it is so easy to fall prey to pride.

Therefore I [*Paul*], the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling [*salvation*] with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

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