

Humility

The Foundation of Prayer

Gen 32:9-10

1

9 Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord, who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will prosper you,’ **10** I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to Your servant; for with my staff only I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies.

In this passage we see the prayer of Jacob on the occasion of him preparing to meet Esau again after the deception of their father, Isaac. He has split his people into two companies thinking that if Esau were to attack one the other might survive. He prays to God acknowledging that he has obeyed God in coming back to his country there to be blessed, and he also, in humility, recognizes that he is unworthy of the favor that God has shown to him. **2**

Jacob was far from faultless, but neither do we see him portrayed as evil. He seems to possess a strength of character and a force of judgment, and at times this strength seems to be a snare for him. He doesn’t always exhibit the calmness of Isaac or the serenity of Abraham, but he does show the same loyal humility towards God.

Prov 15:32-33

3

32 He who neglects discipline despises himself, But he who listens to reproof acquires understanding. **33** The fear of the Lord is the instruction for wisdom, And before honor comes humility.

Solomon here shows a progression. He writes that to neglect discipline is to despise yourself. The discipline under discussion is self-discipline. He is saying that we must control ourselves in light of the commandments of God. He expands that idea of discipline by showing how discipline is to be applied, by listening to the reproof of those scriptures. He then comes to the conclusion of this line of wisdom when he says that the “Fear of the Lord” is the instruction for wisdom. When we come to God in fear, respect, reverence, then we are coming to God in wisdom and gaining wisdom from His truth. If our response to God is seated only in some sort of a sense of obligation, but is not rooted in the reverence of faithful obedience, our response is not founded on wisdom. And that is Solomon’s last statement...

4

“Before honor comes humility”

The honor here is the honor of gaining wisdom from God’s instruction, allowing ourselves to be disciplined by that instruction and being reproved by it. That is the wisdom Solomon is talking about and it is predicated upon whether or not we come to Him through His truth in humility.

That’s what Paul is talking about in...

Col 3:12 5

12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;

In this context Paul talks about the humility that as Christians we are to have is to be exhibited towards one another. But in...

Acts 20:18-19 6

18 And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, **19** serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews;

Here Paul describes his service to the Lord as being a service of humility. Paul understood doing God's will, regardless of what that might entail, is to be done in humility towards God and towards our fellow man.

Tapeinophrosune 7

(tapeinofrosu/hn NT:5012), "lowliness of mind", is rendered "humility of mind" in Acts 20:19, KJV (RV, "lowliness of mind"); in Eph 4:2, "lowliness"; in Phil 2:3, "lowliness of mind"; in Col 2:18,23, of a false "humility"; in Col 3:12, KJV, "humbleness of mind," RV, "humility"; 1 Peter 5:5, "humility."

It becomes pretty apparent that the idea is to not think of ourselves too highly, not only in regard to God but also in regard to others. That is obvious in Paul's statement in Acts,

8 ***"I serve the Lord in humility"***

Regardless of the trials that serving God brought to him, Paul did not consider himself to be too good to face them, not when it came to serving God.

Now look back at Jacob's statement in...

9 **10** I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to Your servant

What we see in his prayer is his recognition that he had done nothing, could do nothing, to merit or deserve the blessings that God had shown him. "I am unworthy," this brings us to our first point...

10 1) Humility is to be the attitude of prayer

James 4:10 11

10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

Jacob understood what this attitude meant. He came before God in prayer and humbled himself in God's presence. Peter addresses this same thought in...

1 Peter 5:6-7 **12**

6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, **7** casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

Continually in the scriptures we see the idea that if we are to be exalted, lifted up to be with Christ in eternity we must first come to God through Christ in humility. Christ talks of this in...

Luke 14:11 **13**

11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

He says much the same thing in Luke 18:14. If we think of ourselves too highly and do not come to God in humility, He will not lift us up. Notice what Christ says in...

Matt 18:2-4 **14**

2 And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, **3** and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. **4** Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

What is it about a child that Christ would use them as the example of how we are to come to Him? I used to think it was the innocence, I'm not so sure of that anymore. How can I come to Christ in innocence when I come to Him with sin? This is not to say that a child is not innocent, that's not the point, but I think Christ is referring to other qualities of a child, their trust, their acceptance of what they are told. Now, in the context, Christ does use the innocence of a child in His illustration when He says that a man must become like a child or they will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. We do become innocent when we are forgiven of our sins by coming into contact with the blood of Christ through faithful obedience. So, we are to come to God trusting in His love, His promises, and His commandments through Christ by humbling ourselves, having a lowliness of mind.

15 2) The strength of prayer is founded in the attitude of humility

I think we are all familiar with the story of the Pharisee and the publican. The Pharisee is seen praying and note what he says...

Luke 18:11-12 **16**

11 The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. **12** 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'

Where is the humility in this prayer? Where is attitude of coming into the presence of God humbling oneself? It isn't there. We see the Pharisee exalting himself in his own eyes and remember what Christ had to say about exalting ourselves, when we do we receive all the glory we are going to get.

In contrast to this attitude of arrogance and pride Christ then tells of the tax-collector...

Luke 18:13

17

13 But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'

The contrast is so obvious. The Pharisee came in arrogance and pride while the publican came in humility. Now note the results...

Luke 18:14

18

14 I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

What justified the publican was his own recognition of his condition of sin and his total reliance on the forgiveness of God to remove that sin. The Pharisee failed in his prayer because he did none of the above.

Our communication with God is to be from the heart, admitting our failings, seeking His love, help, comfort, and forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

Jacob prayed not as before men, but as before God; and he cries,

19

"I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies"

This idea is perfectly consistent and truthful in the context of humility. Humility is not telling things that we don't believe, lies, about ourselves: humility is coming to the right estimate of yourself as based on the standard of God's word. When Jacob spoke to Laban, it was a righteous estimate for him, who had worked so hard for so little, to claim that he had a right to what God had given him; but when it came to coming before God, it was the honest and sincere measurement of himself against the standard that Jacob gave to himself to say,

"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant"

We cannot correctly pray to God until we have correctly assessed ourselves in relationship to His word. Remember the standard must be the word, not other men. Isn't that what Christ says in...

Luke 18:10-11

20

11 The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

The Pharisee tried to measure himself against his perception of the publican rather than the truth. There are so many problems with that, not the least of which is that that kind of a measurement is based on our judgment, not God's, and friends, to put it as bluntly as I can, our judgment isn't valid.

This is an immature, childish form of self-justification that doesn't work. This is what a child does, he blames someone else for his mistakes. When we stand before Christ in judgment, woe to us if our defense for the life that we have chosen to live is...

21

Satan made me do it

Now, here's the thing. That may very well be true. When we sin, we fall prey to the temptations, trials, whatever that Satan places before us, he does bear a burden for those temptations. But God has given us what we need in every way to overcome the mistakes and sin we commit, if we will but humble ourselves before Him according to His truth in Christ. So we come to the last point in this lesson...

22

- 3) True humility is seen in our prayers

Note Jacob's comments...

23

- A) "I am not worthy of all thy mercies"
B) "I am not worthy of the least of all the many mercies which thou hast shewed unto thy servant"
C) Thou hast kept thy word and been true to me, but it was not because I was true to thee. I am not worthy of the truth which thou hast shewn to thy servant"

How many of us can claim to be worthy of God's blessings? Who of us can claim to have come before God in complete submission to and perfect obedience of His commandments? Who of us can claim mercy without a confession of our unworthiness?

Matt 8:5-8

24

5 And when Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, imploring Him, **6** and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented." **7** Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." **8** But the centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed.

What a testament of faith and trust that this centurion gives to Christ, and note our Lord's response...

Matt 8:9-10

25

10 Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel.