



# FEED MY SHEEP

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## The Fruit of Humility

### *Part 1: Going to heaven? Not without humility!*

In the past few issues, we took a time-out to set forth some of the basic principles of the doctrine of grace. The primary reason for that detour was so that we would understand the fruits of the spirit in proper perspective.

In other words, that even as we exhort one another to live lives of virtue and even as we encourage one another to strive to produce these fruits in our life that we would all understand clearly that *all* that we do is due to the grace of God. We have all declared chapter seven spiritual bankruptcy, remember?

As we study the various fruits of the spirit, we will all be seeking to implement them in a greater way in our daily lives. But whatever is praiseworthy in our Christian walk, it is because of the grace of God *causing* us to *desire* to do it in the first place and then *enabling* us to actually perform it. Whatever virtues we possess, it is not a cause for our boasting of our great spiritual status.

We are nothing in and of ourselves. We are nothing except what God deigns to make us and to give to us out of His gracious loving kindness. This applies to all the fruits of the spirit. This will become unmistakably obvious in this and succeeding issues as we study the fruit or virtue of humility. The apostle Paul writes in

**1 Corinthians 13:13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (NKJ Version)**

If love is the chief of all virtues, then humility is its

handmaiden. Love cannot truly be love without humility because love flows through humility. All the other fruits and virtues likewise flow through humility.

One of the great doctors of the early church, John Chrysostom, said it this way: "Humility is the root, mother, nurse, foundation, and bond of all virtue." The title of this two-part message is

Over the past several years, I have often spoken of being an overcomer. It has become apparent to me that there is a thread of continuity that runs through and ties humility in with forgiveness, grace, jubilee and overcomership. I have often stated that to be an overcomer, one must apply the principle of jubilee. That means we must be forgivers.

Being forgivers means giving grace to others, to those who have offended us. Remember the definition of grace? It is *unmerited* favor. In other words, perhaps the person who has offended you does not *deserve* your favor; but that is exactly what it means to show grace. Isn't that what our Father does for us?

Later, I will show the link between humility and forgiveness, and thus demonstrate the thread which ties humility to being an overcomer. So, if you are striving to be an overcomer, the fruit of humility must be evident in your character.

Let us begin, though, by looking at the Webster's 1828 dictionary definition for the word humility. For the word *humility*, it says: "1. In ethics, freedom from pride and arrogance; humbleness of mind; a modest estimate of one's own worth. In theology, humility con-

sists of lowliness of mind; a deep sense of one's own unworthiness in the sight of God, self-abasement, penitence for sin, and submission to the divine will."

Humble, humility—two forms of the same word. To be humble is to possess humility; although, in the KJV, this is sometimes expressed as "lowly" or "lowliness of mind." For example, we find Paul writing to the church at Ephesus.

**Ephesians 4:1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,**

**2 With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love**

Let's compare and contrast humility with humiliation. Up until quite recently, to humiliate had only one basic meaning, which was right in line with being humble. To humiliate simply meant: to lower in condition. Thus, in theology when we speak of the humiliation of Christ, it refers to the entire earthly life of our Lord. He lowered His Godhood into a lower condition: manhood. That was His humiliation.

In the past couple of decades or more, however, the word humiliation has come to have other and more negative connotations. Now it also carries with it the meaning of degrading someone or of being degraded by someone. This degrading or debasing may or may not be justified, but it causes shame or embarrassment.

Let me give you a couple of illustrations of humiliation as it is now more commonly understood. First, you could picture a man who humiliates his heavy-set wife in front of all her friends and relatives by giving her a bathroom scale at her birthday party. Or, you can imagine how a college professor frequently humiliated one particular student by berating him for his stupidity in front of the whole class.

To humiliate can have either that kind of negative meaning or simply the neutral meaning of lowering one's condition. I think it is a truth that *if we do not humble ourselves, then God will do it for us*; and often this comes in the form of humiliation. Here is a little example of that; and it's a true story, as far as I know.

There was a very famous classical pianist a couple generations ago named Paderewski. And there was an American college student who thought of herself quite highly when it came to playing piano. Well, she went

off to Europe and visited the home of Beethoven in Bonn, Germany.

She asked the guard for permission to play the piano. After she had played a few bars of Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata," she stopped and turned to the guard and said: "I suppose *all* the great pianists have played during visits here."

"No, miss," said the guard, "Paderewski was here two years ago but he said he was not worthy to touch it."

People often say: Pride goes before a fall. That is actually a shortening of the Bible verse which states:

**Proverbs 16:18 Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.**

Hopefully, the young lady learned a lesson from that incident. If she had any conscience at all, she should have blushed with shame. Proverbs 11:2 was also written for her at such a time.

**Proverbs 11:2 When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom.**

The word *lowly* there could have been translated *humble*. "But with the humble is wisdom."

The virtue of humility seems to be unique among all the other virtues in that it has a paradoxical quality to it that no other fruit of the spirit seems to have. What I mean is that we can consider ourselves as patient without losing the virtue of patience. We can say that we are longsuffering without losing the virtue of longsuffering. These are all relatively speaking, of course. We can say that we are kind and gentle and meek without losing those virtues.

But the minute we say, even within our hearts, that "gosh, I sure am getting humble. I am really achieving this virtue of humility," that is the moment we are losing humility. Pride is creeping back in. That is what I mean by the paradox of humility. It is that paradox that makes it somewhat humorous to say—and you've heard me offer this joke before: Hey! Have you read my latest book, which is entitled: *Humility and How I Achieved It?*

In the remainder of this issue and beyond, we are going to be seeing how the Scriptures teach that hu-

mility is *required*, how that humility is *rewarded* and how humility is *exemplified*. Later, I will discuss the very important topic of how to avoid false humility, primarily in the context of what is generally called self-esteem today. Is self-esteem good? Is self-esteem pride? What is the proper understanding of self-esteem?

God sets out several of his *requirements* for man in the passage beginning in...

**Micah 6:6** *Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?*

**7** *Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*

Oh, brothers and sisters, do you see what that is saying? Can you see that as a reference to aborting babies? Could that be saying: I sinned and ended up pregnant; therefore I will sacrifice the baby.

**...shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?**

God will have none of it!

**8** *He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

Of all the things that could have been listed here as requirements for man, God chose to emphasize only three, and one of them is humility before God. Do you think humility is important? Yet I daresay that humility is probably not on the list of daily goals for most of us, is it? Why is it so hard for us to seek humility? The answer? Because we are proud! It goes against that most basic and fundamental of all sins: the pride of self. Humility means recognizing that someone else is in control. And that is Someone with a capital "S," the Lord God Almighty.

**Humility is a requirement** for entering the kingdom of heaven. We know that being an overcomer qualifies one for *rulership* in the kingdom of heaven. But it seems that the Bible also teaches that, leaving overcomership aside, just getting into the kingdom of

heaven *as an ordinary Christian* will require humility.

**Matthew 18:1** *At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*

First, let's notice their question: they did not ask Jesus about the requirements for getting into the kingdom, but rather about being the greatest in the kingdom. But how does Jesus answer them?

**2** *And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,*

**3** *And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

Jesus does not immediately answer their question about being the greatest. First, he simply sets forth a couple of requirements for even *entering* the kingdom. We can all agree that being converted is a requirement for entering the kingdom, but what is this additional requirement about becoming like little children? Well, I think the meaning becomes clear as Jesus then goes on in to actually answer about being the greatest.

**4** *Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

It seems obvious that the quality about becoming as little children in verse 3 just to *enter* the kingdom is the same quality referred to in verse 4 about being *greatest* in the kingdom. Everywhere in the world, in every society and in every era, it is a fact that children are of lower station than are adults. That makes them humble by comparison.

This doesn't mean that every single child is some saintly example of humility. Some kids are just plain, snot-nosed brats, usually thanks to lack of discipline from their parents.

The point Jesus was making about being humble as a child was obviously speaking of children as a class or group being humble in relation to a group of adults. Children are of a lower station in society. In that sense, they are humble.

One can also make a case, of course, that many children exhibit true humility in the sense that they are docile; they are teachable; they are eager and ready to

learn. They are not proud to think that they know it all. They recognize their lack and they desire to sit at the feet of an adult and learn.

When we become adults, some of us lose that teachable spirit, that humble childlike quality, and we become too proud to learn anything from anybody. "I'm just going to let the Lord teach me." Have you ever heard that?

Humility is required to just get in the door to the kingdom of heaven; how much more so then must it be a prerequisite and a preeminent character trait of those who are to rule in the kingdom. The words of Jesus are equally clear about this.

Remember in Mark 10, beginning somewhere about verse 35 where the Boanerges Brothers, the Sons of Thunder, James and John, tried to get Jesus to promise them the #1 and #2 slots in the hierarchy in the kingdom, and in verse 41, it relates how this upset the other ten apostles, so Jesus took time to explain to all of them that the way to the top is through the bottom. The way up is down. Consider:

**Mark 10:42 But Jesus called them *to him*, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them.**

**43 But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:**

**44 And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.**

Just as a point of clarification here, the word "minister" in verse 43 does not mean that if you want to be great, you have to be a minister in the sense of a full-time preacher, teacher, evangelist, etc. A minister simply means one who serves another.

In America we call our high cabinet officials by the title of Secretary. We have a Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, etc. But in Great Britain and many other nations, they use the term Minister, don't they? And the very greatest and highest servant of all is called the Prime Minister.

So it does not matter what your occupation or station in life is, we all have opportunities to minister to others every day. Parents minister to their children;

children can minister to their parents to their level of ability. Preschoolers can help mommy pick up the toys. As they get older, children can and should minister to their parents and their siblings in a greater way as perhaps they prepare the meal or clean up the kitchen after a meal.

Grown children can and certainly ought to minister to the needs of their aging parents when necessary. The methods of ministry are as varied as the activities of life. Everyone can minister to others. This is Christian service. This is love with its handmaiden of humility.

A thought occurs to me at this time, a note for young people, especially; although really, it is applicable to any Christian, and that is: don't think that God is calling you to go off and do some great missionary activity, whether here in America or abroad, if you cannot or have not already demonstrated your ability and willingness to serve in the most humble of duties right where you are. You could say we should blossom where we are planted first.

We have seen how the virtue of humility is a requirement for entry into the kingdom of heaven. And we have seen how it is even more so a requirement for rulers in the kingdom, for those who would be overcomers. In the next issue, we will examine the *rewards* of humility.

*(To be continued.)*

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