



FEED MY SHEEP

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The Virtue of Humility (conclusion)

Part 4: Humility, self-esteem, pride and free will

At the end of the last issue, we were discussing what is meant when we are told in the Bible to have a “sober” view of ourselves. Continuing on that thought, being humble does not require us to be dishonest about ourselves by disparaging ourselves when we know it is not true. That is false humility. I can understand it done jokingly, of course. But when someone seriously puts him or herself down, denying their God-given talents, intelligence, skills, or abilities; *that* can be just as spiritually destructive as is haughtiness. Furthermore, *true* humility does not obligate a person to treat himself with contempt in his words or actions. Doing that is, in effect, despising the grace of God. Plus, it comes across as phoniness. Many people will see through that type of self-deprecating attitude or behavior and realize that it is, in reality, a pitiful plea for praise by that person.

False humility is being hypercritical of self. This can manifest itself in many ways. Sometimes adolescents go through a phase where they think they are just about the ugliest or skinniest or fattest or clumsiest or dumbest person in school, if not on God’s green earth altogether. They usually get over it, but sad it is to see the person who does not grow out of that self-pitying, self-despising attitude.

It also might be carried over into adulthood in numerous other forms. For example, I think many of us may have experienced difficulty in forgiving *ourselves* for our past failures. Perhaps we are learning to forgive *others*, even those who have hurt us most deeply. *That* is a real challenge. But for some of us, it is an even greater challenge to forgive self. I speak from experi-

ence. It seems to be just so very difficult. But I think I understand the root problem in that type of situation: it is a paradox again! Because it gives evidence of a most paradoxical combination of both very *low* self-esteem and very *high* self-esteem. How so? Well, as for low self-esteem [imagine this spoken in a *whimpering* tone]:

“I feel so terrible about myself because of my past failures. I am just a rotten, no good, ugly, dumb, fat, lazy scumbag of a human being. I don’t think I can ever forgive myself for what I did. It’s just too awful!” That reveals a person with no self-esteem, right? Yes, but at the same time, this is combined with inordinately *high* self-esteem. How so? Well, because as a Christian I *know* that *however* terrible my sins have been,

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

Therefore I know that God has forgiven me. So who on earth do I think that I am that I can withhold forgiveness from myself when the sovereign King of the universe has already forgiven me? Is that not close to the epitome of arrogant pride? Talk about high self-esteem; that is off the charts!

In reality, the two ends of self-esteem are two manifestations of the same root cause: which is pride! Persons with supposedly low self-esteem are usually masking their wounded pride. It is self-pity. In the street vernacular, it’s the attitude that “I was such a neat guy; I was such a cool dude; now I really blew it!” Or in the Christian vernacular, it’s the attitude that “I was doing so well spiritually; I was making such spiritual

progress; how could I have done such a thing! How could I have fallen so low?!" Do you see how that is nothing more than wounded pride?

Then, on the other extreme, by refusing to forgive myself when God has forgiven me is a case of *me placing myself above God!* What arrogant pride! In connection with this, let us look at a passage which is a favorite of all the futurist prophecy preachers. I formerly adhered to that eschatology. I understand how they interpret this and other passages to be predicting some future, one-world-government dictator, who is going to be THE antichrist, except here they say he is called the "Man of Sin."

I reject the notion of a singular antichrist, ...except that perhaps there is an *application* of this passage (below) in the singular antichrist sense. It has nothing to do with futurism though. THE antichrist is present now. Now, dear reader, if you have been inculcated with futurist doctrine, try to erase those interpretations from your mind for now and try to see this with no preconceived interpretation.

2 Thessalonians 2:3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;*

Paul says don't become anxious because the "day of Christ" is not going to be here until first there is an apostasy, (a falling away from the truth), and that "man of sin" is revealed. Please understand that I am not saying my view is the *only* application of this passage, but I believe it is one of perhaps several valid levels of understanding. This is personal, you see. What is the day of Christ? The day of Christ is bad news for the wicked and good news for the believers. The day of Christ is the day of translation to immortality.

But Paul said that was not going to happen until first there is an apostasy. That can be seen historically in any number of ways. There is no question that false doctrine was being widely taught even before the deaths of the original apostles. But who is this "man of sin?" I say it is *me*, and it is *you*, as long as we have a certain mindset: the mindset that we are in charge of ourselves. That man of sin is the son of perdition (destruction). In other words, that man, that mindset has to be destroyed before you or I can enter into immortality. How is this man of sin destroyed? By fire,

which symbolizes the Law-Word of God. When we properly understand the sovereignty of God, we realize our place, just like the Canaanite woman recognized her place (discussed in the last issue). By the doctrine of man's alleged free will, what are we actually doing? To answer that, I am going to personalize verse 4 as I read it.

4 Who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that I as God sit in the temple of God, showing myself that I am God.

What temple is being spoken about here? The futurists keep looking to the false state of Israel over there in the Middle East, and they keep talking about a temple that the Jews are going to build, and then how this one world dictator is going to arise and make a treaty with the Jews and then break it after three and a half years, and then go set himself up in that temple and demand to be worshiped as God. Well, the Jews may try to build a temple some day. It doesn't matter one whit if they do or if they do not.

God is not interested in physical temple buildings of wood and stone anymore. The true temple is the corporate body and the individual bodies of Christian believers. The throne in the temple is right here between our ears and in our hearts. The throne is our mind; it is where the orders of the King come from. The question is, who sits on the throne in your and my temple?

Thus when Paul talks about the man of sin setting himself up in the temple of God and being worshiped as God, showing that he is God; my dear brothers and sisters, this is talking about you or me, or any believer who has this *blasphemous* notion that our will can override God's will. **That puts us above God, does it not?** And perhaps not even aware of it, we end up worshipping our self as God, because I am the one who has the final say, my free will makes the final decision. Blasphemous! -I say. I know *blasphemous* is a strong word, but it is the truth. Blasphemy consists in attributing to man (or the "devil") the things that belong to God. I affirm that God is totally sovereign; He does not play second fiddle to me and my so-called free will. If He is not totally sovereign, He is not sovereign at all! For a much greater and detailed exposition of this whole issue, obtain my book, *Sacred Secrets of the Sovereignty of God*. \$25 postpaid.

Many churches preach about some character called Satan or Lucifer. Well, for our purposes here, I don't care what your concept of Satan is, but just notice what the Bible records about his sin.

Isaiah 14:12 How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!

13 For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north:

14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.

You see, even "Lucifer" in his sinful pride wanted to be like, or be equal to God. But we, with our alleged free will demand that we are above God. We could compare that to the other passage which many declare is a description of Satan, although the passage clearly tells us who is being spoken of, in this case, the prince of Tyre. Notice here the similarity to Paul's phrases in 2 Thessalonians which we just read.

Ezekiel 28:1 The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying,

2 Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thine heart *is* lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet thou *art* a man, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God:

Whether the Man of Sin is Lucifer or you and me, pride is the root of all sin. The corresponding opposite is the virtue of humility. God requires us to walk humbly before Him. That means that we acknowledge our place. We must (continually) throw down the Man of Sin inside the temple of our minds. *That* is pleasing to God. Well, so much my interpretation of the man of sin. I hope you will give that some serious thought.

It appears to me that many Christians have a false notion of humility in that they believe that true humility require us always and in every circumstance to esteem everybody else higher than our self. Now I know Paul says in Philippians 2:3 that we should "in humility, let each esteem other better than themselves." That is a general statement which is generally appropriate, but is it *always* and *everywhere* true? Let me make up an example to demonstrate my point. Better yet, let us

take a historical event and use that. Back in approximately April of 2001, there was an American EP3 Orion surveillance plane which was forced to make an emergency landing on communist Chinese territory. Let's assume for the sake of illustration that it was clearly the Chinese fighter pilot's fault, that he was a "cowboy" just hot-dogging and playing chicken with clumsy, relatively unmaneuverable propeller-driven EP3 Orion.

Now while the Chinese are unjustly demanding that President George W. Bush make a full apology, should President Bush esteem the Chinese premier more highly than himself and say (falsely): "Oh, we're sorry. We are totally at fault here. What can we do to please you? You say you want to execute the 24 crewmen as spies? Well, gosh, whatever you think is right. We just want to esteem you higher than ourselves."

Obviously, that is an exaggerated example to make the point. But the principle applies in many places. In the Christian community, there are levels of authority and responsibility. Those charged with leadership must fulfill their mandate. You see, Paul's exhortation to esteem others higher than ourselves has to be understood in context. This is even brought out more clearly by Paul himself in Ephesians 5. The word humility does not appear in verse 21, but the idea of submission clearly implies humility.

Ephesians 5: 20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;

21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

Again, this is a general statement. But does this mean that the elders are to submit to the deacons in matters of church government? No! And the example that Paul gives is in the marriage context:

22 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.

But the word of God never tells husbands to submit to their wives, because that is not the Biblical order in the family unit. So the general statement of verse 21, about submitting yourselves one to another, does not mean that everybody, no matter what their position or role, is to submit to everybody else.

At the same time, however, President Bush can

speak to the janitor of Podunk, Pennsylvania Christian church and he can esteem the janitor higher than himself in many ways without compromising his responsibilities as president of the United States. Similarly, the pastor, elders and deacons of Podunk Christian church can also esteem the janitor higher. It means we treat the man with dignity and respect and do not think of ourselves as any more worthy in God's eyes than is anyone else. Period!

It reminds me of an advertising blurb I saw recently for a book in which it read in part: "YHWH could restore our nation with a small flick of his finger...BUT Israel is not worthy of his salvation." ..."but when our Israel nation takes a stand against Anti-Christ..." and the implication was that when we do, we will be worthy.

Friends, when did you or I or any collection of individuals—Israelite nation or not—when did we or when will we ever be worthy of salvation? Never! That's the whole point of God's grace and mercy. If we ever became worthy, then it is something God owes us and it is no longer grace.

This relates to self-esteem in that there is a level of *healthy* self-esteem. It is having a true and moderate opinion of our worth and value. The CEO of GM has more value and worth in a very practical sense than does the janitor in the Chevy plant. But in the eyes of God, neither of them is worthy of salvation. Moreover, the janitor who is humble may be more pleasing to God than a proud CEO. Conversely, a CEO can be humble and a janitor can be very proud.

The proper attitude of humility is that we always recognize that as Paul says it "I am what I am by the grace of God." Humility is not a weak and timid quality; it is understanding that *all* that we are and *all* we accomplish is given to us from God. We can excel in various areas e.g.; we can be brilliant in academics, talented in sports, skilled in mechanical areas or artistic in arts and crafts, wise in business, and wealthy as a result, etc. But *all* comes from God. One of the reasons God brought Israel into the wilderness was to teach them humility. Can you see how God might bring us into our own personal wilderness to humble us as well?!

Deuteronomy 8:2 And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, [WHY??] to humble thee, ...16 Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might

humble thee, ... 17 And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. [That is the pride that must be eradicated.] **18 But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth,...**

Why is Bill Gates so wealthy? Because God gave him the power to get wealth! Humility is the antidote to pride. Here God humbles Israel in their wilderness trek so that they will acknowledge that all wealth comes from God. God gives both prosperity and poverty. There is nothing wrong with riches per se. Rather, the abuse and false "prosperity gospel" comes in when preachers tell their flocks that all they have to do is become Christians and believe and they will have as much wealth as they desire, especially if they plant a "seed faith," i.e., money in the minister's collection basket. We need to understand that being poor is not necessarily any more spiritually pleasing to God than is being wealthy. But I am afraid that all too many Christians actually take pride in their poverty as though it somehow makes them more spiritual than a person of wealth. Moreover, it is often an excuse for laziness, plain and simple.

So the crux of this portion of the lesson is that if God has blessed you with talents to be successful in business and to get great wealth, then do it! It does not prevent you from being humble. The two can co-exist. There are two very prominent examples in Abraham and Job of how great wealth co-exists perfectly with great humility. I think one of the simplest yet most important principles we can glean about humility is this: if we do not humble ourselves, God will do it for us. But when God does it, it can vary from embarrassing to extremely uncomfortable to downright painful. In the words of the great scholar, Erasmus, the debating partner of Martin Luther: "It is in vain to gather virtues without humility; for the spirit of God delights to dwell in the hearts of the humble."

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