

## Doctrine of Humility

(Adapted from Doctrines on Diskette by R. B. Thieme, Jr., Berachah Church, Houston, Texas, 1950-2003)

### Introductory Scripture:

1. Num 12:3, Moses and humility (orientation to authority)
2. 1 Pet 5:6–7, the concerns of life thrown on the Lord (orientation to life)
3. Ps 34:2; 56:11, the soul glories in the Lord (orientation to self)

### A. Definition.

1. Humility is the quality or characteristic of being humble, free from pride and arrogance. The Greek noun for humility [*ταπεινοφροσύνη* (*tapeinophrosune*)] has both a favorable (proper orientation) and negative (self-abasement) sense. The word connotes the overriding quality of *orientation to authority*.
2. Biblical humility is recognition of the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ and submitting to that authority. The mandate of James 4:10 to “Humble yourselves in the presence/ sight of the Lord and He will exalt you” is a mandate to be oriented to divine authority and occupied with Christ so that you depend or rely on Him (not self) in every circumstance in life.
3. Relying on God in every circumstance of life removes “me” as the central part of life’s equation and demonstrates proper *orientation to life*.
4. Since the Bible is the mind of Christ, submission to the authority of the Lord demands consistent perception, metabolization (assimilation), and application of His Word. Only then and with the filling of the GHS is self controlled or brought low, humbled. Neglect or rejection of the Word of God is indicative of preoccupation with self and rebellion towards God (Rom 1:18–25).
5. While the noun “humble” has many definitions, ranging from “feeling of insignificance and a feeling of inferiority” to “low in rank or low in importance,” none of these definitions relate to the biblical word. Biblical humility is neither derogatory nor undue self-deprecation. It is not degrading one’s self, or self-effacement, or asceticism. Self-effacement is often based on false humility. All forms of asceticism are related to the most subtle forms of pride and arrogance. Asceticism is a labor of self-promotion disguised as self-denial.
6. Biblical humility is an attitude one has toward self which is reasonable, accurate, and based on a relationship with the Lord, objectively evaluating one’s own life in the light of what the Word of God teaches.
7. Biblical humility, as an expression of Bible doctrine in the soul, is an understanding of our own helplessness and an appreciating of what God in His grace has done for us. Once we understand that God the Creator is the central figure in His plan for our lives and we are His creatures, we learn proper *orientation to self*. Biblical humility is the very core of Christian integrity and virtue.
8. Humility, therefore, is proper orientation to authority (organizations and people), life (people and circumstances), and self (guess who?).
9. Humility produces objectivity and teachability. Objectivity is a prerequisite for teachability. Teachability is a prerequisite for spiritual growth. Arrogant people are subjective and non teachable, maturing only in the “school of hard knocks” if they ever mature.

“Good and upright <sup>9</sup>is the LORD; therefore He teaches sinners in the way. The humble He guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His way.” (Ps 25:8–9)

**B. Humility is a state of honor and integrity.**

1. Biblical humility is “to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called ...with all humility” as per Eph 4:1. “To walk worthy” is to act honorably (Phil 1:27; Col 1:10).
2. There is no honor without humility. Respect for the Lord is the prerequisite for biblical humility. Humility is the prerequisite for honor in the Christian way of life.

“The fear/reverence of the LORD *is* the instruction of wisdom [teaches wisdom], and before [in front of] honor *is* humility.” Prov 15:33

Just as fear of the Lord is the instruction/ training for wisdom, so humility is the basis/ foundation for honor (Ex 20:20).

“When pride/presumption comes, then comes shame/dishonor [dishonor follows arrogance]; but with humility *comes* wisdom [wisdom follows humility].” Prov 11:20

“A man’s [generic] pride will bring him low/shame/dishonor, but the humble in spirit will retain/grasp honor/glory.” Prov 29:23

**C. Humility as a Mandate and Motivation for Life (Is 14:12-15).**

1. The mandate for humility is found in Pro 3:33-35: “The Lord’s curse *is* on the house of the wicked (what the righteousness of God rejects, the justice of God judges), but the home of the just He blesses (what the righteousness of God approves, the justice of God blesses). Although to the scornful He gives scorns, yet to the humble He gives grace. Glory the wise shall inherit, but fools are being exalted with shame/dishonor.”
  - a. “The house of wicked” is the family whose lives reject the righteousness of God and various kinds of authority and live contrary to the divine plan. Parents pass on to their children their own rejection of God and His authority (Rom 1:18). It is a family which promotes the many aspects of occupation with self and not occupation with the LORD.
  - b. “The home of the just” is the family living under God’s plan, daily adjusting to His righteousness through confession of sin, learning Bible doctrine, growing in spiritual maturity.
  - c. “The wise” person is the one who, through humility, is teachable, grows in grace, and pleases the Lord in his daily life.
  - d. “The fools who are being exalted with shame/ dishonor” are the ones who spend their whole lives promoting self and are eventually exalted, but with shame and dishonor.

2. James 4:5-6 quotes Prov 3:34: “Or do you think/suppose that the Scripture says in vain/to no purpose, the Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously [anthropopathism-passionately]?’ But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore be subject/ submit to God.” In the context of Proverbs, the “proud” refers to the believer or unbeliever; but in the context of James it refers only to believers. James teaches proper orientation to God (authority), life, and self. This is biblical humility and is the basis for proper motivation in life. If we are constantly filled with inordinate ambition and competition, muscling our way ahead in life and focused on self, we are 180 degrees out of phase with God’s plan and purpose for human history.
3. Humility is mandated so that we might properly orient to authority, life and self.

“Likewise you younger people [those under authority] be subject/ submit yourselves [aorist passive imperative verb] to *your* elders [those in authority]. Indeed, [when it comes to everyone’s personal relationships] all of *you* continually be submissive/ respectful [present passive participle] to one another, and be clothed with humility [how we treat one another, outward manifestation], for ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you [We humble ourselves by casting our cares on Him].” 1 Pet 5:5-7

- a. The relationship among believers in the local church should always be one of humility or grace thinking.
- b. To “be clothed with humility” is the Greek way of expressing overt interaction. Clothing (actions toward one another) is an outward expression of inner thought.
- c. “That He may exalt you in due time” means that if God doesn’t promote you, you are not promoted. God will only give promotion or achievement when the believer advances to a point where his promotion or achievement is compatible with his capacity to appreciate it so that the advancement will not make him miserable. This is proper orientation to life.
- d. “Casting all your cares on Him for He cares for you” is an expression of humility. We humbly allow God to take our problems and we move out [“cross the river” like Joshua] observing His [God’s] solutions.

“For whoever exalts himself will be humbled [divine discipline], and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Luke 14:11

“For not he who commends/presents himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.” 2 Cor 10:18 [the imagery is someone

being presented in court. We don't muscle or force our way into an audience with royalty. We must be commended or presented.]

Principle: Never covet what God has not provided in grace.

- e. Self-exaltation includes all the various facets of arrogance, 2 Tim 3:2-5. "For men/ persons [believers] will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, slanderers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, wicked, unloving, unforgiving, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of good [proper], traitors/ treacherous, thoughtless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form/outward appearance of godliness/ respectability [God likeness] but having denied/disowned its power [acclaiming self], in fact, avoid such persons as these."
4. Biblical humility is an essential quality for the believer's capacity for Christian service.

"Now the man Moses *was* very humble, more than all men who *were* on the face of the earth ... He is faithful in all My house [responsibilities]." Num 12:3, 7

Principle: Christian service performed from humility, proper orientation to God, life, and self, glorifies/ pleases God (what the righteousness of God accepts, the justice of God blesses), while Christian service performed from selfishness glorifies self (what the righteousness of God rejects, the justice of God judges). We are disciplined for our selfishness and our works are burned. Humility orients everything in life to God and His grace, while arrogance orients everything in life to self. Without humility we are improperly motivated and without virtue.

5. Biblical humility is a basic ingredient for proper relationship with others including: appreciation, consideration, compassion, gracious attitude, patience (Phil 2:3; Col 3:12-13).

#### **D. The Provision for Humility at Birth.**

1. No one is born with humility. Just as biblical humility for the believer is developed through proper orientation to God through obedience, knowledge, and application of the Word of God, humility is first developed for all members of the human race through the authority system of laws of divine establishment as first stated in the Mosaic Law and in Rom 13. These divinely delegated systems of authority include: parents, teachers, coaches, police officers, judges, in the military (NCOs and officers), bosses, etc., and are the basis for enforced humility. Authority is not only delegated by God, but invented by Him as the environment of freedom for the function of human self-determination. Without a system of authority, we would have anarchy.

2. Just as the chicken came before the egg, so authority came before human freedom. No baby is ready for freedom. The baby has natural, instinctive self-centered arrogance. Humility has to be learned and acquired.
  - a. Humility begins in the home with obedience to parents. The home provides the environment for enforced humility. Parents are the first authority in life to train, teach, inculcate, orient to life, and bring the child into obedience to authority (Deut 6:6).
  - b. The first responsibility of the child in the home is obedience to the authority and mandates of the parents.

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise: ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.’” Eph 6:1-3

“Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.” Col 3:20

3. The child’s obedience to the enforced humility of parental authority is the key to his attainment of genuine humility (grace orientation from spiritual growth), honor, and long life. The humble child learns how to say “no” to the many temptations of life in their formative stage. With genuine humility, the child will develop a sense of destiny, make decisions from a position of strength, and recognize the attacks of the cosmic system, and avoid the devastating traps and snares set by Satan’s tacticians.

#### **E. The Provision for Humility at Spiritual Birth.**

1. Spiritual birth is regeneration, the imputation of eternal life to the human spirit created by God the Holy Spirit, which means the birth or beginning of the spiritual life (and subsequent spiritual growth) (John 3:3).

**John 3:3** Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly (most assuredly; solemn truth), I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see [witness, realize, experience] the kingdom of God.” [John is referring to the Messianic Kingdom. Those who do not have faith in God coming out of the Age of Israel would not continue into the Millennial Kingdom. They would experience the Baptism of Fire, be removed from the earth and go directly to the Lake of Fire (Matt 25:41).]

Many things (biblical truth) must be learned, and this again requires objectivity and teachability which we acquire from humility, 1 Pet 1:23.

**Peter 1:22** Since you have purified your souls by obeying the truth [the Word of God (Ps 119:9, “How can a young man keep his way/ life pure? By living according to Your Word”)] in sincere love [without hypocrisy]

of the brethren [believers], love one another fervently [(stretched out or all out manner) with a pure [confession of sins, 1 Jn 1:9] heart [Jas 4:8],

**1 Peter 1:23** having been born again, not of corruptible seed [human, sinful, contaminated genetics] but incorruptible [spiritual, eternal, imperishable], through the word of God [by means of] which lives and abides forever, [Peter says, since you have been “born again,” you are able to purify your lives by obeying the truth of the Word of God, and the change in your life occurs because it came from something that is imperishable.]

2. God has provided for every believer the game plan for the Church Age, a series of mandates and priorities delineated only in the Word of God (Rom 12:2 *cf.* 6:12-13; Phil 1:27-2:4; 2 Pet 2:2).
3. The divine provision for the believer includes the authority of the Word of God and the teaching of the Word as taught by the pastor-teacher (Eph 4:11; Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:5).
4. The believer who submits himself to the teaching of the Word of God grows in grace and honors God. The believer who rejects the pastor’s authority and the authority of the Word of God is arrogant, unteachable, and dishonors God (2 Pet 3:14-18).

**F. The Perfect Example of Humility and Virtue in Life: The Lord Jesus Christ (Phil 2:5-8).**

1. The greatest example of genuine humility in all of human history is our Lord Jesus Christ in His humanity. His mental attitude (Lk 22:42, “not my will by Yours be done”) and His tremendous humility (Lk 2:49, “I must be about My Father’s business”) gave Him capacity for life, which in turn provided a foundation for love and happiness. He was not focused on Himself, but God’s plan for His life (Heb 12:1, 2).
2. This is the subject of Phil 2:1-11, which begins by pointing out where humility exists—in the mental attitude/thought process of the believer.

“Therefore if *there is* any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. *Let* nothing *be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind [humility] let each esteem/ regard others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. [And now Christ’s example of this teaching.] Therefore, this attitude of unity, humility, and concern for others must be continually thought in y’all, which was also in Christ Jesus, Who because He [Christ Jesus] pre-existed in the form/ outward manifestation of God, He did not regard/ think being equal with God something [outward manifestation] to be grasped at/seized, but He emptied Himself by taking the form of a bondservant [human body], by coming into existence in the

likeness of men [mankind]. And because He was found/ in the condition of the appearance as mankind, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the extent/ point of the cross, even a death by means of/ produced by a cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Phil 1:2-11

There is no greater illustration than the humanity of our Lord.

- a. As a member of the human race, our Lord had to learn humility from the authority of His parents (Heb 5:8). As He grew, He learned authority orientation from the training of His parents and the authority of Scripture so that He was able to chose never to sin (Heb 4:15; 2 Cor 5:21). When tempted by Satan, He continually relied on the power and promises of the Word of God (Matthew 4; Deut 8:3; 6:16; 6:13).
- b. He accepted the authority of God the Father. He was free to avoid the cross, but He humbled Himself in obedience to God’s plan for His life. There would be no salvation without our Lord’s humility.
- c. Our Lord humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of the death of the cross.

**G. True Humility as found in the Word of God is the quality that allows us to live the Christian Life.**

Introductory principle: Humility is the quality/state of proper *orientation to authority, orientation to life, and orientation to self.*

1. Orientation to Authority: 2 Cor 12:7; The apostle Paul’s orientation to authority.
2. Orientation to life: Matt 11:29; The Lord’s provision in our lives is a relief from the daily burden of arrogance. Arrogance destroys our lives.
3. Orientation to Self: Matt 20:28; Our lives are not about us. If the Lord came to serve, then who in the world am I?

In the end, living a life of humility, obedience to the Word of God, is honorable (Prov 18:12; 29:23) and exalting (1 Pet 5:6).