

Correcting Misconceptions of Humility

Once it is established that Jesus was the ultimate example of humility, several misconceptions are laid to rest.

Humility is not weakness.

Even the enemies of Jesus testified to His power. It was demonstrated over Satan, over nature, and over every force that opposed Him. Yet in the exercise of His power He was humble, acknowledging that the works He did were the works of His Father (John 5:19). Humble individuals who recognize their own weakness and allow the power of God to work in them are the only ones who are truly strong. The Lord said to Paul, "*My strength is made perfect in weakness*" (2 Corinthians 12:9), causing Paul to respond, "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

Humility does not preclude leadership.

Jesus was "meek and lowly" (humble), but this did not prevent His exercising leadership. He is the great Shepherd of the flock, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Some individuals, citing humility as their reason, refuse to accept the responsibilities of leadership, especially as elders. The fact is that elders must be humble. They are to be sober-minded (1 Timothy 3:2), and this is defined in Romans 12:3 as not thinking more highly of oneself than one should. 1 Timothy 3:6 says that an elder should not be a novice, "lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil." Rather than hindering leadership, humility defines the style of leadership that pleases God. Christ-like shepherds are not lords over those entrusted to them but examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:3).

Humility does not forbid rebuking sin.

Jesus was just as humble when He was driving out the money-changers from the temple in Matthew 21 and rebuking the Pharisees in chapter 23 as when He was blessing little children in chapter 19. In each case He was expressing in His words and actions the will of God, not His own. Humility will, however, affect our manner of dealing with sinners and those in error. "*A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition*" (2 Timothy 2:24-25). "*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted*" (Galatians 6:1).

Rebuking that is done from a spirit of self-righteousness and pride will never be effective in accomplishing God's purpose.

Humility is not inconsistent with personal initiative.

The church needs the input of every spiritually-minded Christian in planning and, executing its work. A song we sing says, "Take my intellect and use every power as Thou shalt choose". Yet some who have useful ideas fail to offer them, feeling that to do so would be inconsistent with humility. Of course, if one demands that his way be accepted and becomes angry if his suggestion is not taken, he does lack humility. Humility demands that "*each esteem others better than himself*" (Philippians 2:3), but it does not forbid our offering our wisdom on a subject for whatever it may be worth in the opinion of our brethren.

Humility does not require that we think of ourselves disdainfully, speak of ourselves disparagingly or grovel in the presence of others.

This is what many people think of as humility. However, this is the opposite of humility. Such a person is thinking too much of himself, however negative his thinking may be. When one is constantly thinking: "How inferior I am, how worthless I am, how useless I am, how poorly I do compared to others" he is thinking of himself all the time. Pride is his problem; he is too proud to be comfortable among those whom he considers superior to himself. Humility is not the cause of such negative thinking; it is actually the solution - not thinking of self at all. A Christian can rejoice in the superiority of his brethren. Furthermore, he can hold up his head in the presence of

all men, not because he himself is so worthy, but because he is a child of the God of heaven, redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus. Jesus did not grovel before any man, yet He was not lacking in humility when He said to a Roman governor, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above" (John 19:11).

Conclusion

True humility replaces self-seeking with seeking first the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33), self-will with doing the will of God (Matthew 7:21), self-reliance with reliance upon God (2 Corinthians 3:5), self-confidence with confidence in God (2 Timothy 1:12), and self-exaltation with exaltation by God (1 Corinthians 4:3-6). These were the qualities that made Jesus humble and the qualities He seeks in us. May we bring ourselves to say truly, even as we sing: *Lord, thy love at last has conquered: None of self, and all of Thee.*

- by Sewell Hall

Correct Application of Matthew 18

It happens again and again. Some brother or sister becomes involved in a sinful activity and it quickly reaches the level of "common knowledge." Many people know about it, and some that lack a conscience about gossiping begin to have a "hay day" with this information. Finally, one or more concerned brethren learn of it and take steps toward correcting the sinful situation. For their efforts they are criticized and blamed for not following proper "procedure." Specifically, they are charged with having not followed the steps set forth in Matthew 18. Here is the text at issue: *"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican"* (Matt. 18:15-17).

Please observe that the situation Jesus describes here involves a private matter — known only by the brother who had been wronged and the one who had committed the wrong. Clearly, it was not a sin against a group of people, and it was not a sin that was publicly known. The scenario our Lord sets forth was very specific. In cases where these specifics are met, this method must be followed.

But, what about situations where a Christian sins a sin which is not directed towards any certain individual, and the sin immediately becomes publicly known. In such instances, Matthew 18 does not apply. Instead, we would be correct in following the pattern set by the apostle Paul in Galatians 2. When Peter was guilty of open hypocrisy, Paul said, "I withstood him to the face . . . I said unto Peter before them all . . ." (vv. 11-14). Public sins are a different matter — Matthew 18 does not 'fit'.

Unfortunately appealing to Matthew 18 is often used to deflect criticism away from the true offender and towards the concerned brethren who are trying to do the right thing. Think!

- by Greg Gwin