

THE “WHY” AND “HOW” OF HUMBLING OURSELVES

INTRODUCTION:

Here we are—sermon #9 on this very important topic of *humility*. As mentioned several times during this series, humility is a thread that is woven throughout Scripture. It is a virtue that *Christ displayed*—and is one that should *characterize our lives* as followers of Christ. I had contemplated moving on to something else after Mothers’ Day but felt led to try to tie some of the things we’ve been learning *together* rather than just abruptly stop. This morning I want to look at the “*why*” and “*how*” of humbling ourselves; next week—unless the Lord leads otherwise—we will be looking at the *consequences* of not humbling ourselves.

Today I’ll be sharing three reasons why we should humble ourselves, then four truths to think upon that will help us *humble ourselves*. We will obviously not be able to spend a lot of time on each one, but hopefully it will be enough time to be of some help to each of us.

Let’s consider first the “*why’s*”

1. Why should we humble ourselves?

I’m sure there are more, but I see 3 primary reasons we should humble ourselves. The first one we are going to look at—and really the *only reason* we need—is...

A. Because God tells us to!

We should humble ourselves because *God says so!* We don’t really *need* any other reason, do we?

Because we have already *looked at* some of these verses a couple of times during this series, we *are not* going to turn to them.

II Chronicles 7:14 “If my people, which are called by my name, shall **humble themselves**, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”

James 4:10 “**Humble yourselves** in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up.”

I Pet 5:5 “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be **clothed with humility**: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”

I Pet 5:6 “**Humble yourselves** therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time:”

In addition to these verses, Jesus **concluded two parables**—both of which we’ve looked at—with similar words. In the parable that Jesus spoke after watching how people **chose their seats** at a wedding reception, He said: Luke 14:11 “For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that **humbleth himself** shall be exalted.”

He made a similar comment after telling the parable about the **Pharisee and publican** that went to the temple to pray. Luke 18:14 “I tell you, this man [the sinful publican—not the religious Pharisee] went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that **humbleth himself** shall be exalted.”

Reason #1 to humble ourselves? Because God tells us to!

Reason #2? B. Because if we won’t humble ourselves, God will humble us!

We saw that a couple of weeks ago when we looked at **God’s humbling of Pharaoh**. I want us to go back to the book of Exodus and be reminded of some things we looked at at that time.

Please turn to Exodus 9:16 where we see God’s *stated reason* for *why* He was humbling Pharaoh: “And in very deed for this cause *have I raised thee up*, for to shew in thee **my power**; and that **my name may be declared** throughout all the earth.”

In other words, “I’m displaying my power over you that my name will be declared! People will **know who I am**—and **what I can do**—when they consider *what I have done* to you—the most powerful man in all the world!”

In v 17, we see Moses—speaking for God—asking Pharaoh: “As yet **exaltest thou thyself** against my people, that thou wilt not let them go?” In essence, God is saying to Pharaoh—‘Are you really going to remain hardened against me and my people and not listen to me and let my people go?’

We see a similar statement in Exodus 10:3 “And Moses and Aaron came in unto Pharaoh, and said unto him, **Thus saith the Lord God** of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou **refuse to humble thyself** before me? let my people go, that they may serve me.” Self-explanatory, isn’t it? ‘How long will you refuse to **humble yourself?**’

Turn ahead a few pages to Exodus 15. In verse 1, we see that this is a **victory song** that Moses and the people sang after God drowned Pharaoh’s army in the sea. We’re just going to look at a few verses, but I want to draw to your attention the **pride of Pharaoh**—and the **power of God** that brought Pharaoh down.

--v 6; “Thy right hand, O LORD...hath dashed in pieces the enemy.”

--v 7; “...thou hast overthrown them that rose up against thee...”

Even **after the 10 plagues**—the last one **killing the first born** in every home—Pharaoh somehow thought he could **defeat God and destroy God’s people!** Look at all his “**plans**” in v 9: “I will pursue...I will overtake...I will divide the spoil...my lust/desire shall be satisfied...I will draw my sword...my hand shall destroy.”

--Now v 10 “Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters.” Hard work for God, wasn’t it? I’m kidding, of course—He simply “blew” the wind that was holding the sea back, the waters covered them, and they **sank like lead!**

We need to humble ourselves because if we don’t, God will humble us! He humbled Pharaoh. He also humbled Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel 4:37 “Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment: and **those that walk in pride He is able to abase.**” Mark it down—if God can humble **Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar**, He can **humble you and me!**

Why should we humble ourselves? Because God said we should—and because God will humble us if we don’t! There is yet a third reason, one that is **positive** in nature and it is this...

C. Because it brings us close to God

Take your Bibles and turn now to Isaiah 57.

Verse 15 is an incredibly rich verse that we could easily get a whole sermon from.

--We see God as a **communicator** to His creation in the phrase “**For thus saith** the high and lofty One...”

--We see the **superiority** of God over His creation, what theologians refer to as the **transcendence** of God in the phrases “high and lofty One” that dwells in the “high and holy place.” He is **superior** to us...and **above** us...and **apart** from us. He is **not dependent on us**—but we are dependent on Him!

--We see the **eternality**—the “foreverness” of God—in the phrase “that inhabiteth eternity”

--And we see the **holiness** of God because that is one of the names He gives Himself.

And yet this **eternal, independent, and perfect Being** that “dwells in the high and lofty place”—**seemingly out of reach and unapproachable**—chooses to “ **dwell with him**” also that is of a contrite and humble spirit.”

God dwells with those who are **broken** and **crushed** and **trodden down in heart**—not the proud and hard-hearted. Let that sink in—if we choose to **humble ourselves**, God will **draw near to us** in a way that He won’t do to the proud person!

He doesn’t just **dwell** with us, though. He **comes near** and **revives** us—He comforts and encourages us—by **assuring us of His love for us** in our hearts. Barnes writes: “He is to them what refreshing rains and genial suns and dews are to a drooping plant.”

We have a similar thought in **Psalm 34:18** “The Lord is **nigh unto them** that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.” God doesn’t **despise** the broken-hearted—He draws near to them!

What a **wonderful promise** is ours! Why are we so content to have God be **far off**—when He **wants to be near** us! We can have that nearness of God—if we choose to **humble ourselves!**

Why should we humble ourselves? Because God says we should...and because He will humble us if we don't humble ourselves...and He will draw near to us when we do.

I want us to consider next... **2. How can we humble ourselves?**

Understanding **why** we should humble ourselves is one thing; knowing **how** to do it is quite another. Please note that I am **not claiming to be an expert** on humbling myself! We know, though, from Phil 2:5 (“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus”) that humility is an **attitude** that starts in our thinking. So what are some things we can **think about** that will help us humble ourselves? I'm sure there are more, but here are **four truths** that I believe will help us if we choose to meditate on them.

A. Meditate on God's greatness

Psalm 113:5-6 “Who is like unto the Lord our God, **who dwelleth on high**, **Who humbleth Himself** to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!” If we really understood who God was, we would **be amazed** that **God even considers** what is happening here on earth!

God's **greatness** is another one of those threads that is woven throughout the Bible. However, there are a couple of places where there is what seems like a **higher concentration**—almost a **preoccupation**—with the **greatness of God**. Isaiah 40 through Isaiah 50 is one such place; so is Job 38-42.

Let's turn to the book of Job. I mentioned a couple of weeks ago that God asked Job at least 60 questions to impress upon Job's mind **how great God was**—and how small Job was. You know how hard it is to pick 5 or 6 out of 60 😊! Here are just a few; I made it easier by sticking in one chapter.

Job 38:22-23. Do you know where I keep the snow and hail?

Job 38:31-32. Do you guide the constellations and make sure they stay on track?

Job 38:35-36. Does lightning answer to you—and did wisdom come from you?

Now Job 42:5-6 (read). What was Job's **response**? “Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” In other words, when Job understood who God was, he **humbled himself**.

Truth #1? Meditate on God's greatness.

Truth #2? B. Meditate on our weakness

Not an enjoyable thing to think about, but it will help us to humble ourselves if we are **honest** about how **weak** we are.

i. We can't heal ourselves—or keep ourselves alive.

“Our times are in His hand” (Ps 31:15), our breath is in His hand (Dan 5:23), and “in Him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Our ability to breathe, live, and move comes from God—and if God wills it, He can take those things away.

ii. We run out of strength and get tired.

Isaiah 40:30 “Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall”

iii. Our adversary the devil is more powerful and smarter than we are

Satan was behind Peter's denial of Christ. Jesus told Peter that Satan wanted to sift him as wheat (Lk 22:31), but Peter said he was willing to **go to prison—or even die** with Jesus! What happened? Peter denied Jesus!

iv. We often lack wisdom and aren't sure what to do

II Chron 20:12 “O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; **neither know we what to do**: but our eyes are upon thee.”

v. We can be deceived by Satan or our own deceitful hearts

We see that in **Satan's temptation of Eve** “Yea, hath God said” or **us telling ourselves** that we can “sow” to the flesh—but not reap any consequences.

In light of all this, our **conclusion** should be: “We need God” and our response should be to **humble ourselves** and look to Him for help in our weakness—not look to ourselves. Jer 17:5 “Thus saith the Lord; **Cursed be the man that trusteth in man**, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord.”

Truth #3? C. Meditate on our sinfulness

We are not just weak—we are **sinful!** We know that about ourselves, right? If you are tempted to think of yourself more highly than you ought, here are some questions to remind us of our **lack of obedience** to God:

1. Do you love God with **all your heart?** (Mt 22:37)
2. Do you love your neighbor as yourself? (Mt 22:39)
3. Do you esteem the Word of God as more important than your necessary food? (Job 23:12)
4. Do you seek first God’s kingdom? (Mt 6:33)
5. Do you glorify God with your body and with your spirit? (I Cor 6:20)
6. Do you offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually (Heb 13:15)
7. Do you pray without ceasing? (I Thess 5:17)
8. Do you speak evil of fellow believers? (James 4:11)
9. Do you give to God’s work grudgingly—or cheerfully? (II Cor 9:7)
10. Are you ashamed of Christ and Christ’s words? (Mark 8:38)
11. Are you honest (Prov 11:1)?
12. Are you sharing the gospel—the good news that Jesus saves—with others? (Mt 28:19-20)

If nothing humbles us, an honest look at our **daily disobedience to God** should humble us!

Truth #4? D. Meditate on God’s longsuffering

Take your Bibles and turn to Romans 2. I’m going to let you know “right out of the gate” that I’m going to be taking verse 4 somewhat **out of context**. The context here is this—in Romans 1, Paul addressed the **judgment of God against** the “in-your-face” sins of the openly ungodly. In Romans 2, Paul addresses “respectable sinners”—those who **condemn others** for what they do—even though **they do the same things** (v 1)!

We also know Paul is **speaking to the unsaved** because of v 5: God’s wrath—based on His righteous judgment—is being “stored up” for them because of their hard and unrepentant hearts.

Now v 4 (read). Paul is reminding **Christ-rejectors** that God is rich in goodness...and forbearance...and longsuffering! God’s **goodness** is seen in that He not only gives them **physical life**—He also provided **Himself** as a payment for **their sins** so they could be forgiven and have **eternal life!** His **longsuffering** is seen in that He does not **strike people dead when they sin** and gives them multiple chances—and often times many years—to repent and turn to Christ. But in their **pride** they assume that **because** God is not punishing them **now**, He never will!

Isn’t it true that sometimes we, as **God’s children**, fall into that same mind-set? We know—or at least we should know—that we will **reap what we sow**. We also know that whom the **Lord loves, He chastens**; He disciplines. And yet, because God delays in **correcting** us, we start to presume that **He won’t!**

In essence, then, we are **despising** the riches of God’s goodness and forbearance and longsuffering.

--We despise the riches of **His goodness** when we **take it for granted**—and murmur when He brings difficulties

--We despise the riches of **His forbearance** when He puts up with us in our failures and weakness

--And we despise the riches of **His longsuffering** when continue on in our sin because He doesn’t immediately chasten us.

Our mistreatment of God—in spite of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering—should humble us.

Why humble ourselves? Because God tells us to...and because He can humble us if we don’t...and He draws close to those that do.

How do we humble ourselves? By meditating on the **greatness of God**...and our **weakness** as people...and our **disobedience** as sinners...and God’s **goodness** to us in **blessing** us and **putting up** with us!

So what does God want us to do in light of what we have heard from His Word today?

Humble ourselves, right? What does that look like?

1. For the unsaved, it would be the attitude of the thief on the cross—'I am a sinner, I deserve to be separated from God, and I cannot save myself.' That's called repentance.

But repentance needs to be followed with faith! The thief on the cross also understood that Jesus was perfect...and that He was going to His kingdom...and that He could take people with Him. And so He asked for forgiveness—and Jesus granted it!

2. What does humbling ourselves look like in God's children? I believe it can be boiled down to this:

A gratitude for what God has done for you—and a willingness to do what pleases Him!

II Cor 5:14-15 "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: ¹⁵And that he died for all, **that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.**"