

## Christlikeness through Humility

Revelation 4:11

Titus 3:2-8

Muhammad Ali had just won another boxing title. On the airplane the stewardess politely said to him, "You need to fasten your seat belt." Ali replied, "Superman doesn't need a seat belt." To which the stewardess politely responded, "And Superman doesn't need an airplane either; please fasten your seat belt."

If you're trying to become the heavyweight champion of the world, maybe humility isn't tops on your list of personal attributes. However, for those of us who are wanting to be more like Christ humility is an absolute necessity. When we are humble we are more like Christ. Even Christ humbled himself...even to the point of death on a cross. We who would like to be more like him must humble ourselves before God and men as well.

Calvin called humility "the sovereign virtue - the mother and root of all virtue," and Jonathan Edwards said that humility is "the most essential thing in true religion." Such assertions are true, for Jesus said, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*" (Matt. 5:3); and James wrote: "*Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you*" (Jas. 4:10). It would be safe to say that humility is essential to Christianity. You cannot be a Christian without exercising the virtue of humility. Humility is integral to our walk with the Lord. As Micah 6:8 says, "*He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*"

What is humility? St. Bernard defines it: "A virtue by which a man knowing himself as he truly is, abases himself." Sometimes it is easier to understand what something is, by seeing what it does in our life. Let me share a few ideas with you.

### **When we are humble, we acknowledge that only God is worthy of praise...not man.**

There is a wonderful story of the mighty sovereign of the British Empire, Queen Victoria, who sat on her throne, listening to the performance of the Hallelujah Chorus by a great choir. As the words, "and He shall reign forever and ever," poured forth, Queen Victoria rose from her throne and removed her crown.

Romans 12:3 *For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think....*

### **When we are humble we recognize and profess our own fallibility and need for grace.**

When the funeral procession of Charlemagne, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, arrived at the cathedral, they were shocked to find the gate barred by the bishop. "Who comes?" shouted the bishop. The heralds answered, "Charlemagne, Lord and King of the Holy Roman Empire!"

Answering for God, the bishop replied, "Him I know not! Who comes?" The heralds, a bit shaken, answered, "Charles the Great, a good and honest man of the earth!" Again the bishop answered, "Him I know not. Who comes?" Now completely crushed, the heralds say, "Charles, a lowly sinner, who begs the gift of Christ."  
"Him I know," the bishop replied. "Enter!"

**When we are humble we allow for fallibility in others.**

**When we are humble we are more likely to accept the tragedies of life (?) ie., why not you?**

**When we are humble we view others as important – we begin to see how we can learn from them and how we can help them know they are loved.** If you listen to people who routinely engage in Christian outreach activities – carrying the love of Christ to the poor and marginalized of society – you will hear humility lived out. These activities cultivate humility and bring us to point of being able to relate to other people, human-being to human-being.

Mark 10:31 reminds us, *“But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”*

Matthew 20:28 declares, *“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

**Humility brings us to the point of being able to see ourselves as servants of others and of the Kingdom of God.** We are able to live out the words of the Wesleyan prayer:

I am no longer my own, but thine.

Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.

Put me to doing, put me to suffering.

Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee or brought low for thee.

Let me be full, let me be empty.

Let me have all things, let me have nothing.

I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.

And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thou art mine, and I am thine.

**When we are humble, we are better leaders because we are not worried about who gets the credit.**

**Humility enables us to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit.**

Galatians 5:22-23 reminds us of those attributes that cannot exist without humility first being present: *“But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”*

St. Augustine said that there were three important Christian virtues. The first is **humility**; the second is **humility**, the third is **humility**.

### **So, how does one cultivate an attitude of humility in one’s life?**

- **Learn to give up self-defense.** To be humble you must learn to die to what Augustine called “the lust of vindicating ourselves.”
- **Be more harsh on yourself than on others.** Fenelon said, “Can we with justice feel contempt for others and dwell on their faults, when we are full of them ourselves?” Be suspicious of yourself if you get overly exercised about somebody else’s sin!
- **Never get to the place where you consider yourself humble.**
- **Climb for the bottom rung of the ladder (not the top) and be a servant to others.** To truly be a servant means that we not only are willing to take the name and place of a servant, but be treated like one. It has been said that “everybody wants to be thought of as a servant, but nobody likes to be treated that way.” Our tendency is to want to climb for the top - to drop names, to get recognition, to brag on ourselves, to get in good with the powerful people. But the Bible tells us to do exactly the opposite: Proverbs 25:6-7 says, “Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great, for it is better to be told, ‘Come up here,’ than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.” Offer to refill someone’s drink or clear their plate after dinner.
- **Forget yourself.** This is really what you should be aiming for in the fight for humility: to be not conscious of yourself at all. This is especially relevant when it comes down to your motives in what you do: do you do it unto the Lord or for the applause of men? C. S. Lewis said that the relationship between self-regard and the need for approval of others was like an itch that needed to be scratched. “As long as we have the itch of self-regard, we shall want the pleasure of self-approval; but the happiest moments are those when we forget our precious selves and have neither but everything else.” This is subtle. It is easy and tempting to want the approval and nice comments of others after you cook a nice meal, or pray a moving prayer, or give a sacrificial gift. But that is an unhealthy itch that wants to be scratched; it would be better not to have the itch at all.
- **Admit your dependence upon God and upon other people.**
- **Worship in the company of other Christians.**
- **Read the Bible.** You will gain valuable insight into your own nature and tendencies and place in the created order; and, equally valuable understanding of who God is – especially in relation to you. Let all of it lead you to daily reflect on the wonder of the cross.

Neither you nor I may ever be Boxing's heavyweight champion of the world, but if we allow the Holy Spirit to cultivate humility in our lives, we can be heavyweight Christians – people who can provide a Kingdom-honoring witness to the world as we are made more fully into the image of Christ.