

Humility

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“Oh Lord, it’s hard to be humble - when you’re perfect in every way.” So goes the lyrics from a tongue-in-cheek song by Mac Davis that was a hit in 1980. Humility. Something we all lack from time to time. A lack of humility has caused numerous problems in personal relationships. It causes untold difficulties in business and politics. Wars have been started and fought because of a lack of humility. Many a man’s downfall can be attributed to his lack of humility. “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18).

Humility is a characteristic that for many of us is difficult to attain. It’s something that people fail to see the absolute importance of. And yet, it’s one of the most notable characteristics of Christ - one that we are enjoined to have in order to be Christ-like. Why is humility important? How does humility make us better?

Humility will help us in our service to others. It’s almost impossible to serve others without humility. Oh sure, you can do things for people and go through the motions of service, but without humility, it’s not really service. How many times have you been to a restaurant and had a “server” that didn’t know the meaning of service? The problem is the lack of attention or care the server is placing on the customer. The customer is not as important as he/she is. She’s had a bad day and it’s obvious - she doesn’t care how her attitude affects you. She doesn’t think of your needs.

But humility puts the other person first. It thinks of the other person’s interest ahead of your own. “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself” (Phil. 2:3).

Jesus is given as the ultimate example of humility in Phil. 2:5ff. He had every right and privilege but was willing to give all of that up in order to serve his own creation. That’s humility. That’s looking out for our interests, even though we didn’t deserve it. If Jesus did that for everyone, then shouldn’t we show humility and look for ways to serve our fellow man for whom Christ died?

Humility will help us put everything in proper perspective. Pride, the opposite of humility, says “I’m perfect in every way.” Pride is the reason for the saying, “Those people who think they know everything are a great annoyance to those of us who do.” And that’s true. Those of us think we’re always right have a problem with humility. The truth is, we’ve all been wrong before, and when it comes to Christianity, we’ve really been wrong. We’re all sinners (Rom. 3:23) who need the grace of God, and we must be willing to admit this fact if we’re to have fellowship with God (1 John 1:8). Nobody is any better than anyone else. No one deserves salvation more than anyone else. Not one of us can count on our own works to get us to heaven.

And so, we need to be careful when judging other people and their supposed lack of spiritual maturity. Instead of looking condescendingly upon them with a lack of humility on our part, we need to realize that we all have a long way to go. While it's important to help our brothers and sisters grow in the knowledge and grace of our Lord, we are not the standard - Jesus is! It's easy to be prideful when we compare ourselves with someone who is not as mature as us. It's much more difficult to compare ourselves with the perfect, sinless Jesus. That takes humility.

Humility will help us in our obedience to God. At the heart of every sin is selfishness. The sins we commit are not done thinking of other people or of God and His will. They're committed because of our own selfish desires (James 1:14-15). Ultimately, it's a battle of the wills. Our will vs. God's will. Pride says, "I'm going to do what I want to do." Humility says, "nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Matt. 26:39). Once again, Jesus is our ultimate example of humility. He did not desire to endure the pain and anguish of the hour of trial. He didn't want to experience the suffering and the separation from His Father. But He was willing to submit Himself to the will of His Father.

So it should be with us. Our Father, who created us and has every right to expect us to follow His law, deserves our obedience. It's not a strange thing to expect our earthly children to be humble and submit to their earthly father. Why should it be strange to expect the same humility and obedience to our heavenly Father?

When we humble ourselves to His will, obedience naturally follows. And you know what? It's much easier at that point. I didn't say it's easy - I said it's much easier. There's no doubt about it - it's difficult to give up what we want to do many times. But if we first learn humility, then everything else starts to fall into place.

Instead of singing, "Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble - when you're perfect in every way," let's sing, "Make me a servant, just like your Son," and, "Make me a servant; take all my pride, for I would be lowly, humble inside." Humility. It's where it all starts.