

Humility

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Luke 18:9-14

What do you think is the most important characteristic of a strong Christian? Things like, being a caring person, being honest, being someone who can boldly share the truth of the Good News of Jesus Christ might come to mind. Many Christians may feel like true Christians are the leaders who are bold and confident in their teaching others about the truth of God and Jesus. But, on the other hand, there are non-Christians who say things like, “Christians think they know it all!” Or, “They think they’re better than everyone else!” Once we’re confident of the truth of Jesus Christ, it’s easy to feel a bit superior to those who do not know about Jesus. And yet, we are all sinners. We are all lacking when it comes to following God’s perfect will and loving others as God loves us. God is the Almighty Creator of the universe. God is our Creator, and we are the creatures. God is perfect, and we are imperfect. Think about it! This is the reality. It’s been said, “They that know God will be humble, and they that know themselves cannot be proud.” We are not as great as we may sometimes think. The Good News is that through God’s Son, Jesus Christ and his sacrifice for us on the cross, we see how much God loves us. By God’s grace we are forgiven, and accepted into God’s family. The deeper we understand this, the deeper our humility will be.

Author, Andrew Murray, believes the most important characteristic of a Christian is humility. After reading his book, and seeing all the Bible passages and explanations he gives, I’m inclined to agree with him. Jesus Christ taught and modeled humility, but his disciples showed the opposite of humility until after the Spirit of Jesus came upon them at Pentecost. After that, they too were able to follow Jesus’ way of humility. Christians also are on a journey to learn to follow in a similar way. This is reflected in our relationship with God as well as in our relationships with each other.

Today’s reading from Luke 18 is a famous story of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisees were highly trained religious leaders, while the tax collectors were despised as traitors. The Romans were ruling over the Israelites. They chose people to collect taxes from them. Their salaries were whatever they decided to collect beyond what Rome demanded. Many tax collectors became rich while working for “the enemy.” Jesus tells this story for people who “trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt.” That reminds me of people today who accuse Christians of thinking like they are better than others. In the story of the two men praying, notice that the Pharisee seems to be praying more to himself. “I...I...I...”. I do this and I do that... But, the tax collector seems to be more focused on God, and confessing his sin, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” If we look more closely at what the Pharisee says, it is all great things. He fasts twice a week. The law only required fasting once a year. He says he gives a 10th of all his income. The law only required giving a 10th of certain things rather than all of his income. He was definitely relying on his own righteousness, forgetting that he was also a sinner in need of God’s grace. The tax collector, on the other hand, was open about his sin and need for God’s grace in his life. Jesus says he is the one who went home “made right” with God. Jesus concludes, “All who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Throughout the Bible, Jesus teaches the importance of humility. He scolds the disciples for disputing about who would be the greatest in heaven. He challenges them, saying that if they do not become like little children, they cannot be a part of God’s kingdom. Jesus modeled humility when he washed the disciples feet after their last supper, saying “if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.” (Jn 13:14) He set an example of humble servant leadership. Philippians 2 begins with a famous passage that talks about his humility. I’m starting in verse one:

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind,

having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ Is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus showed us what it means to be humble.

In the Bible, Jesus is sometimes called “the Lamb of God.” Lambs were routinely sacrificed for the sins of the people. Jesus represented the ultimate sacrifice. We are now forgiven and freed of the condemnation of sin. Notice that God’s way in Jesus was not through violence or force. Instead, it was through humility, love and sacrifice for us. The deeper our relationship with God, the more we will be challenged to be humble before God, as well as in relationships with other people.

To be humble is to be able to admit when we’ve made a mistake. It’s so easy to fear making mistakes, thinking we may lose people’s respect. The funny thing is that if we admit and confess when we could have done better, we may end up gaining respect. It’s a sign of inner strength to be open about our shortcomings. When we try to hide our weaknesses and pretend to be better than we actually are, we easily lose the respect of others, since the reality of our weaknesses are often sensed by those around us anyway. I often struggle in this area, so much so that I fear making mistakes. Rie tells me I need to step out and get used to making more mistakes rather than hiding in the background until I have everything figured out! May our goal be to follow in the humble footsteps of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! Let’s pray.

Loving God, forgive us for the times we’ve trusted in our own righteousness rather than being humble before you and before others. Teach us true humility that we might rely on your power, and your grace rather than our own efforts to be respected by those around us. May our pride be in your goodness. Today, as we take time to listen to each other, we pray for your Spirit’s presence. Draw us all closer to you. Grant us ears to hear each other. And, may we follow your leading. O God, have mercy on us. We pray this through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.