

The Posture of the Christian Life – 2 - Humility

Augustine, writing in the fourth century, said, “Humility is the foundation of all the other virtues hence, in the soul in which this virtue does not exist there cannot be any other virtue except in mere appearance. Do you desire to construct a vast and lofty fabric? Think first about the foundations of humility. The higher your structure is to be, the deeper must be its foundation.”

In our series on the Christian life, we have come to a fourth section – the posture of the Christian life. We have said that if we are to meet the priority of the Christian life – loving God, we must submit to a process, knowing Him by living in His presence. Living in His presence requires we adopt a particular posture – that of fearing God. Today we begin defining this fear of the Lord, and we begin with the matter of humility. Augustine elsewhere said, “Should you ask me what is the first thing in religion, I should reply that the first, second, and third thing therein is humility”

Proverbs 22:4 ⁴ *By humility and the fear of the LORD Are riches and honor and life.*

If we are to worship God, know Him, love Him, become like Him and reflect Him to others, the absolute starting point is that we recognise He is God and we are not. Though this might sound all too obvious, a failure to give God His place, as God, is at the root of all our problems. The beginning of all sin is pride and unbelief; the beginning of right relationship with God is humility. The posture of fearing God begins with understanding God's supremacy and humbling ourselves under that.

God has made it very clear that the kind of heart that He blesses with more grace is the humble heart.

Isaiah 57:15 ¹⁵ *For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.*

James 4:6 ⁶ *But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."*

Why is this so?

Pride obscures our relationship with God by treating God as smaller than He actually is, and treating ourselves as greater than we actually are. Pride is a distortion of reality. God can no more work with pride than reason with a lunatic. Pride is a kind of moral madness, where we see ourselves as gods. Pride is foolishness

Proverbs 14:3 ³ *In the mouth of a fool is a rod of pride, But the lips of the wise will preserve them.*

Proverbs 11:2 ² *When pride comes, then comes shame; But with the humble is wisdom.*

With pride goes unbelief, which is refusing to accept what God says about us, about Himself and reality. When we doubt what He says in His Word, we call Him a liar.

1 John 5:10 ¹⁰ *He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son.*

What is humility?

1) Humility is acknowledging the truth about God and ourselves.

Before we can do anything else, we must accept our true position and place under God. Remember we said that the posture of the Christian life, fearing God happens when we see ourselves in light of God. We see God for who He is, and we see ourselves in contrast to Him.

What are some of the hard facts about you?

i. Life is not all about you.

John 4:34 ³⁴ *Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.*

John 6:38 ³⁸ *"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.*

John 8:29 ²⁹ *"And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him."*

ii. Before God, you are insignificant; without God, you are nothing.

Psalms 8:3-4 ³ *When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,* ⁴ *What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him?*

Romans 12:3 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, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.*

John 3:30 ³⁰ *"He must increase, but I must decrease.*

iii. You are needy and dependent on God all the time.

John 15:5 ⁵ *"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.*

2 Corinthians 3:5 ⁵ *Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God,*

iv. You are a sinner and should have been destroyed by God.

Psalms 130:3 ³ *If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?*

Lamentations 3:22 ²² *Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not.*

Those are truths about us which we must acknowledge if we are truly humble. We are not the centre of the universe; we are insignificant on our own; we are helpless without God; we are offensive to God and should not be here except for mercy. Those might not be pleasant thoughts to us, but the Bible says they are true. We either embrace them or we don't. Either God is lying or we are.

Being humble is accepting the truth about ourselves, but it is also acknowledging the truth about God. What are some of the true facts about God?

i. God alone is God.

Isaiah 45:5 ⁵ *I am the LORD, and there is no other; There is no God besides Me. I will gird you, though you have not known Me,*

ii. God deserves obedience and worship simply because of His existence.

Psalm 96:4-5 ⁴ *For the LORD is great and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods.* ⁵ *For all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the LORD made the heavens.*

iii. God owns all things, including you.

Psalm 24:1 *A Psalm of David. The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein.*

To agree that God alone is God, that He deserves worship and obedience for who He is, that He owns everything, including us, is to be humble in mind. Agree with what God says about you; agree with what God says about Himself.

Humility is the starting point for God to work with a person. Humility is understanding your true position before God, so you can walk with Him in truth. In other words, humility is where we recognise God is God, and we are not. We reject the "I AM" and "I will" attitudes of pride.

If you are to correctly think about your true position, you will realise that Christians are three things:

They God's creatures; they are God's children; and they are God's servants. God is the supreme One, we are His creation, His children, and His servants. So when we compare ourselves to God's supremacy, the result is a humble and correct view of self. As a creature I am not self-existent, or self-sufficient. As a child, I do not know all things, nor can I judge perfectly. I do not have the wisdom I need. As a servant, I am not the Lord of my own life, nor do I belong to myself. I am not sovereign over my own destiny. All this ought to drive me to God in humble dependence and submission.

If you are to live in God's presence and come to know Him and love Him, then you must deny yourself, "deflate" yourself, so that you are once again truly in your correct place under God.

Humility is acknowledging the truth about God's supremacy and our true nature before Him. This kind of acknowledgement leads us to the second truth about humility.

2) Humility is transparency

Humility is agreeing with the truth that we are confronted with and acting accordingly. Humble people who live in God's presence do not argue with God's conviction, for then they can never confess, be cleansed and be more conformed to the image of Christ. They know that they must acknowledge who God is, who they are, and respond with open, honest, transparency before God.

What happens when we refuse to deal with God truthfully?

1 John 1:5-10 ⁵ *This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.* ⁶ *If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.* ⁷ *But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.* ⁸ *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* ⁹ *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* ¹⁰ *If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.*

John 3:19-21 ¹⁹ "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ "For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹ "But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

To deny what God says is to retreat from the light. Eventually, we believe our own lies, deceive ourselves and justify our self-centred lives. Pride is the inevitable result. In this state, we cannot enjoy experiential communion with God.

The penalty for rejected light is less light. Eventually, we become accustomed to our darkness, until God may even give us up to it. The tragedy of God giving man over to his own lies is seen in Romans 1:18-25. It is imperative that we respond truthfully to the light we have received.

Luke 8:18 ¹⁸ "Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him."

A humble person wants God to search him thoroughly:

Psalms 139:23 - 140:1 ²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; ²⁴ And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.

Psalms 51:6 ⁶ Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.

The first principle of living in God's presence is this: We must deal with God as He is, not as we want Him to be. We must deal truthfully with the light we have if we want to receive more.

As we encounter the God who is supreme, we respond by acknowledging our dependence, our indebtedness, our sinfulness, our neediness. What He says to us, we do not deny or contradict. We agree with Him, and come to the light, as painful as it might be.

How should we try to cultivate humility in our lives? How can this aspect of fearing God be grown, so that we live in God's presence and come to know Him?

Well, there are some dangers to be aware of. Humility is one of those affections that disappears the moment you notice it. When you are proud of being humble, you aren't humble. When you try to appear to be humble, it is one of the worst varieties of pride. We have to be aware of how our sinful natures will try to turn humility into another opportunity for glorifying self.

What we must keep in mind is that humility is a means, not an end. We are humble so as to know God, not to be honoured for being humble. Humility is never for its own sake. Remember it is part of the posture of the Christian life – an attitude we adopt as we live in God's presence so as to not interrupt the cycle of communion, conviction, confession, cleansing and conformity to Christ.

We must also not mistake humility for a kind of self-loathing or morbidity about oneself. This is often not humility. Instead it is our pride, feeling disgust at ourselves for not being more impressive to others. Being humble is simply being absolutely honest with God, and accepting as true all He says about Himself and you.

With those possible pitfalls in plain sight, here are four ways we can cultivate an attitude of

humility in God's presence.

1) Acknowledge the 'solitariness' of God - that He is solely God. Recognise that He deserves worship, and that He alone deserves your ultimate trust and ultimate devotion. This goes right back to the priority of the Christian life.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 ⁴ "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! ⁵ "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

2) Acknowledge the all-knowing and all-present nature of God. Do not treat Him like someone you can outwit or outrun. This was David's mistake .

Psalms 139:1-12 ***Psalms 139:1** For the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David. O LORD, You have searched me and known me. ² You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. ³ You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. ⁴ For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether. ⁵ You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it. ⁷ Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? ⁸ If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. ⁹ If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, ¹⁰ Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me. ¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," Even the night shall be light about me; ¹² Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You.*

Speak to Him frankly, openly and sincerely. Any time you act pretentiously, you turn away from the light. Any time you act as if you can hide yourself or your motives from Him, you treat Him as less than He is, and you treat yourself as more than you are. Acknowledge that He is everywhere present and all-knowing, and act accordingly. So, as you commune with God, and He begins to convict you, humility remembers that we cannot hide from Him, and instead of retreating, it comes to the light and confesses.

We read 1 John 1:5-10 earlier – people who are walking in the light agree with God about their sin. They do not hide it or justify it in any way. They do not avoid Him or sweep it under the carpet. They confess their sins as it becomes known to them. They agree wholeheartedly with anything the Bible says about them and act accordingly.

You acknowledge His solitariness and so you commune with Him. When He convicts you, you acknowledge His all-knowing, all-present nature and instead of running, you confess.

3) Acknowledge the authority and wisdom of God in His Word.

James 1:22-25 ²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. ²⁵ But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

When God cleanses you, He shows you what you need to put on. If you are to be humble before His supremacy, agree with God that His Word is infallible and true. Do not read it unless you plan to believe it and act upon it. To treat the Bible any other way is to retreat from the light and walk in darkness. Treat every encounter with the Bible as an encounter with God's speaking voice. If you

acknowledge that God is true, and that every word of His is to be believed and obeyed, then humility will act accordingly when the Word is read.

Here is the launching point for everything else that happens while living in God's presence – humility that believes all that God is, and accepts all that the Bible says we are. Acknowledgement. Transparency. God alone is God, I am a creature. God is omniscient and omnipresent, I am a sinner and I cannot hide my sin. God is an all powerful Master and Father, I am a child and a servant, and I trust His Word is infallible.

Like so many areas of the Christian life, what we do before God, translates into something we do before men. If we are truly humble before God, we will also exhibit that humility before others.

What does humility look like with other people?

Philippians 2:3 ³ *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.*

1) Humility extends acknowledgement of one's lowly position before God into a lowly posture before others. Humility esteems others better than self, and looks to serve others. Somebody who keeps acknowledging God's supremacy and sees himself as a creature, a child and a servant will have the same servantlike attitude with others.

Romans 12:9 ⁹ *Let love be without hypocrisy*

2) Humility extends transparency before God into sincerity before men. Once we are open and walking in the light before God, we have no reason to hide behind masks with one another. A humble man is sincere, frank and honest.

The posture of fearing God begins and continues with humility - acknowledging who God is and who we are, being open, transparent, teachable, and correctable. If we do not humble ourselves, we will keep interrupting the process of the Christian life. We will commune with God, but the moment He takes us deeper, and shows us something of His glory, and our contrasting sin, we will retreat and run. We will hide from God, and refuse to confess, or put off. And instead of confession, cleansing and more conformity to Christ, we will experience conviction, guilt, hardening, chastening, until we finally end up where we could have been if we had simply humbled ourselves.

So, let us hear the words of David and James.

Psalms 32:9 ⁹ *Do not be like the horse or like the mule, Which have no understanding, Which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, Else they will not come near you.*

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