

Of Humility.

by John Gill

Humility is a disposition of mind that thinks meanly of oneself and highly of others, ascribing all to God and disclaiming one's own righteousness.

Scripture: Galatians 5:22

Topics: "Humility", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Gill emphasizes the significance of humility as a vital fruit of the Spirit, linking it to thankfulness and contrasting it with pride. He explains that true humility involves recognizing one's own shortcomings while valuing others, rejoicing in their gifts, and attributing all goodness to God's grace. Gill illustrates how humility manifests in various aspects of life, including receiving instruction, enduring hardships, and submitting to God's will. He argues that humility is not innate but a gift from God, cultivated through a proper understanding of sin, Christ's glory, and God's majesty. Ultimately, Gill asserts that humility is pleasing to God and essential for spiritual growth and community harmony.

Transcript

A Body of PRACTICAL Divinity

Book 1--Chapter 14

OF HUMILITY

After "love, joy, peace," mentioned as fruits of the Spirit, "long suffering, gentleness, and meekness," in which "humility" is included, are observed as fruits of the same Spirit also (Gal. 5:22,23 and this naturally follows or accompanies "thankfulness," last treated of; an humble man is always a thankful man; whereas "proud boasters," are joined with the "unthankful, unholy" (2 Tim. 3:2). The proud philosophers would not allow of thankfulness to God for virtue and goodness: "That we live, is the gift of God, says Seneca[1] but that we live well, is owing to philosophy; and, adds he, by so much we owe the more to this than to God, by how much the greater a good life is than life itself."

And says Cicero,[2] "No man refers virtue to God; if it was a gift of his, we should have no praise nor glorying: did ever any man give thanks to God that he was a good man!" How contrary to this is that of the humble apostle (1 Cor. 4:7). Humility, or a "meek and quiet spirit," is a branch of internal worship, or of experimental religion and godliness; it is called, "The hidden man of the heart," (1 Pet. 3:4) and is very

necessary in the performance of every part of external worship and service; "Serving the Lord with all humility of mind" (Acts 20:19).

In considering which I shall, 1. First, show wherein it lies, and in what it appears and manifests itself. 1a. In a man's thinking meanly and the worst of himself, and well and the best of others; observing that rule of the apostle's, "In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves," (Phil. 2:3) such an humble saint was the apostle himself, who reckoned himself, "less than the least of all saints, and the chief of sinners;" such an humble soul thinks no good man has such a sinful corrupt heart as he has; or has so much sin dwelling in it: one reason is, because his own sins and corruptions are more known to himself; while those of others lie more out of sight; he thinks every saint has more grace and holiness, more spiritual knowledge and experience than he has, and says with Agur, "that he has not the understanding of a man," that is, of a good man (Prov. 30:2), whereas, on the contrary, a proud Pharisee thanks God he is not as other men are, "such a great sinner" as others, and says, "Stand by thyself, I am holier than thou" (Luke 18:11; Isa. 65:5). 1b.

In not envying, but rejoicing at the gifts and graces of others. Humility is like charity, "it envieth not;" Moses was a very meek man, above all men which were upon the face of the earth, and he said to Joshua, "Enviest thou for my sake?" that is, the gifts bestowed on Eldad and Medad; "would God, that all the Lord's people were prophets" (Num. 11:29; 12:3). When David related his experiences of divine grace, his triumph of faith, and glorying in the Lord, he observes; "The humble shall hear thereof, and be glad," (Ps. 34:2) so John the Baptist, when he takes notice of the vastly superior gifts, grace, usefulness, and success of Christ, says he, in a very humble and modest manner, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30,31). 1c.

In ascribing all he is and has to the grace of God; confessing that he has nothing but what he has received; and therefore would not glory, as though he had received it not; but says, with the apostle, "By the grace of God I am what I am," (1 Cor. 4:7; 15:10) he frankly acknowledges, that it is of the free grace of God alone, that he is elected, redeemed, justified, pardoned, regenerated, and shall be saved; and not through any works of righteousness done by him; and therefore gives all the glory to it. 1d.

In disclaiming his own righteousness, and submitting to the righteousness of Christ; the Spirit of God having convinced him of his want of righteousness, of the insufficiency of his own to justify him before God, and that after having done all he can, he is but an unprofitable servant; and that through pride in himself, and ignorance of God's righteousness, he heretofore submitted not to the righteousness of Christ, yet now he desires to be found in it (Phil. 3:9). 1e. In a willingness to receive instruction from the meanest saint; "Give instruction to a wise man," if he is an humble man, and not a scorner, he will be thankful for it, "and will be wiser: teach a just man," not one that is righteous in his own eyes, and despises others, "and he will increase in learning," (Prov. 9:9) so Apollos, though an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, did not disdain to receive instruction from Aquila and Priscilla, tentmakers, who took him and taught him the way of God more perfectly. 1f.

In kindly receiving admonitions given; and, indeed, it is only to such that they are of any advantage, and meet with success; a proud, haughty scorner rejects them with contempt (Prov. 9:8), an humble man will take the reproof well, and consider it as an instance of love to him, and will love the reprover more and better for it, as David says he should (Ps. 141:5). 1g. In bearing patiently all injuries done to him, and putting up all affronts offered to him. Humility, like charity, is "not easily provoked," and "beareth all things:" humble saints will bear, "with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in

love;" such who "put on kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering," will not only bear with and forbear one another, but will "forgive one another, even as Christ forgave them" (1 Cor. 13:5,7; Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12,13).

When Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses, who is observed to be the meekest man on earth; as an instance of it, he was so far from resenting the affront, that he prayed for Miriam that she might be healed of the leprosy with which she was stricken for it (Num. 12:1-3,13). 1h. In submitting quietly to the afflicting hand of God; humble souls are still under the rod, hearken to the voice of it, are obedient to it, patiently bear it without murmuring, humble themselves under the mighty hand of God, and resign their wills to his; as Aaron, Eli, David, and others have done (Lev. 10:3; 1 Sam. 3:18; Ps. 39:9). 1i.

In not seeking great things for a man's self, and after things too high for him. It is good advice given to Baruch; "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not," (Jer. 45:5) an humble man will not: it is a sign of a proud, ambitious man so to do; to aspire after things out of a man's reach, and beyond his capacity; "Lord, says David, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me," (Ps. 131:1) especially it argues great pride and vanity, when a man seeks to be wise above what is written; an humble man will not pry into things secret, but will be content with what is revealed (Deut. 29:29).

And therefore, 1j. Humility appears in subjecting a man's reason to divine revelation; then is a man humble when every imagination, reasoning, and all high thoughts are cast down, and brought to the obedience of Christ in his word; when men have recourse to the law and to the testimony, to the sacred scriptures, and make them the standard of their faith; and, like the noble, diligent, and humble Bereans, search into them, whether things be so or no; for "if any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words," the doctrines of Christ contained in the scriptures, he is proud, knowing nothing (1 Tim. 6:3).

This pride in men is the chief cause of all controversies and quarrels about religious things. 2. Secondly, Let us next consider from whence this grace of humility, or such a disposition of mind, arises. 2a. Not from nature; but from the grace of God: man is naturally a proud creature, though he has nothing really to be proud of; not of his wisdom, which is but folly; nor of his wealth, which is uncertain and transitory; nor of his beauty, which is vain, and may be made to consume away like a moth; nor of his outward goodness and righteousness, which pass away like a morning cloud and early dew.

Pride is one of those things which are within a man, in his heart, and proceeds from thence, and defiles him; but true humility is from God, from his Spirit and grace; and therefore meekness, or humility, is reckoned among the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22,23). 2b. From a true sight and sense of sin, and the evil nature of it, under the illumination and conviction of the Spirit of God; when sin appears to be "exceeding sinful," and such a sight is humbling: while a man is insensible of the inward corruption of his nature, and of the sin that dwells in his heart, and is so inattentive to the sins of life that he thinks himself in a manner blameless; he will, like the proud and haughty Pharisee, thank God he is not as other men are: but when a man comes to see the vileness of his nature, the swarms of sin within him, as well as the iniquity of his life, like the humble publican, not daring to lift up his eyes to heaven, will smite upon his breast and say, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" and very often so it is that a sin which a man has been guilty of, though the guilt of it is removed from him, yet he retains such a sense of it, as that it keeps him humble all his days; this was the case of the apostle Paul, who, having been a persecutor of the church of God, though he obtained mercy, and knew his sin was pardoned, yet a sense of that sin always abode with him, and was an humbling consideration to him (1 Cor. 15:9), and if a man has not any particular sin that thus affects

him, yet the consideration of indwelling sin, and the daily infirmities of life, a sense of them will keep him humble continually. 2c.

From a view of the insufficiency of a man's own righteousness to justify him before God; while a man trusts in himself that he is righteous, he will be proud of himself, and despise others; while he fancies that, "touching the righteousness of the law, he is blameless," he will be stout hearted, and not submit to the righteousness of Christ; while a Pharisee has a few husks to fill his belly, and some rags of outward righteousness to his back, he will be as proud as Lucifer: nor will any man be truly humble until he finds himself "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;" which, when it was the case of the apostle Paul, and not before, then he desired to be "found in Christ, and in his righteousness" (Phil. 3:9). 2d.

From a sight of the loveliness and glory of Christ; a sight of which will put a man out of conceit with himself, and make him look little and mean in his own eyes; as it did Isaiah, when he saw the glory of Christ in a very exalted and resplendent manner (Isa. 6:5). Christ is the Sun of righteousness; and, as with respect to the natural sun, it is in its own light we see it, and in a ray or beam of it behold innumerable motes, otherwise not discerned by us; so when Christ, the Sun of righteousness, shines forth in his light, we see his glories and excellencies in their luster and splendor; and our own sins, failings, and infirmities; all which tend to humiliation.

When that supernatural light shone about Saul the Pharisee, he became at once as humble and submissive as may be, and said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" a sight of Christ, and of the glory of his person, though seen but through a glass, is transforming, and changes "into the same image;" one part of which image lies in meekness, or humility of mind. 2e. From a view of the greatness and majesty of God, and of the frailty and vileness of man compared together: this was what humbled Job, and brought him to a right sense of things, and to a suitable behavior under the providence of God towards him; when, having contended with God, he is called upon by him out of the whirlwind to answer; and, being confounded with a sense of God's greatness and his own vileness, replied, "Behold, I am vile; What shall I answer thee?" and still more plainly and fully, having observed the omnipotence and omniscience of God, thus humbly expresses himself, "I have heard of thee, by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes!" (Job 40:4,5; 42:5,6). 2f.

From a spiritual knowledge of divine things; natural knowledge "puffeth up;" the wise philosophers among the heathens, with all their boasted morality, were as full of pride as men could well be; their characters are, "proud boasters," (Rom. 1:21, 30) a Pharisee, with all his knowledge of the law and of righteousness, is a vain empty man, and is proud of what he does not truly understand; and so he will remain, till he comes to know Christ and him crucified: and then he will "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord," whom he only then will determine to know, and in whom he will glory; no man is truly humble till he learns that mortifying lesson, "If any among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise" (1 Cor. 3:18). 2g.

From an experimental knowledge of the gospel scheme; the tendency of which is, to stain the pride of man, to abase the creature, and exalt the riches of divine grace; to prevent men from glorying in anything of themselves, and to exclude all boasting in them: it places salvation entirely on the grace of God, to the exclusion of works, as the cause of it; the Spirit of God, in the gospel, blows a blast upon all the goodness of men; and such who are evangelized by it, or cast into a gospel mould, that form of doctrine into which they are experimentally delivered, are always humble, meek, and lowly minded.

I say experimentally, because men may have notions of evangelical doctrine, and be proud of these notions, not having a true experience of them. 3. Thirdly, the excellency and usefulness of this grace. 3a. It is well pleasing to God; "A meek and quiet spirit is in the sight of God of great price," highly valued (1 Pet. 3:4), the Lord takes pleasure in such, and therefore beautifies them, and puts an honour upon them; he looks at him that is poor, of a contrite and humble spirit, with delight and complacency; and to such modest souls he says, "Let me see thy countenance--for thy countenance is comely;" when a proud look, and one proud in heart, are an abomination to him (Song of Sol. 2:14; Prov. 6:16,17; 16:5). 3b.

It makes a man most like to Christ, who was prophesied of as lowly, meek, and humble; and who says of himself, and proposes himself for imitation, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly;" and the apostle beseeches the saints, "by the meekness of Christ;" and which appeared throughout his whole state of humiliation on earth; see (Zech. 9:9; Matthew 11:29; 2 Cor. 10:1). 3c. It is the saints' clothing and ornament; pride is the devil's livery; but humility is the clothing of the servants of Christ, the badge by which they are known; so some observe the word signifies a servant's garment in (1 Pet. 5:5), "Be ye clothed with humility;" not that it is the saint's robe of righteousness, and garment of salvation, or his justifying righteousness before God; rather his inward garment of sanctification, at least a part of it, which makes all "glorious within;" and it makes a great show it, a man's outward conversation; both in his walk before God, with whom he is required to "walk humbly;" and in his conversation before men, humility makes him to shine, and greatly recommends him; it is very ornamental to him; the word translated "clothed," in the above text, has the signification of ornamental knots, as some think; and a meek spirit is called an "ornament;" it is thought there is an allusion to the ornaments of women, and to knots of ribbons wore by them in one part or another as on their breasts; and it is as if the apostle should, say, Let others adorn themselves with knots as they will, but let your breast knot be humility. 3d.

It is of great use in various duties and exercises of religion; it is of use in prayer, to behave before God with a proper awe and reverence of him; considering, that he is in heaven and they on earth; that he is the great God and an holy Being, and they "dust and ashes," sinful dust and ashes, who take upon them to speak unto him: and such humble souls God regards; "he forgetteth not the cry of the humble" (Ps. 9:12), the prayer of the humble publican was heard, and he preferred to the proud Pharisee (Luke 18:14).

It is of use in preaching the word; which should be done, not in an ostentatious way, to show a man's parts and abilities, and with great swelling words of vanity; but the Lord is to be served in the gospel of his Son, "with all humility of mind," and with a subjection to the word of God, as the rule. And it is of use in hearing and receiving the word; "Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls" (Acts 20:19; Jam. 1:21). And it is of use in giving a reason of hope, and making a confession of faith before men; "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear," (1 Pet. 3:15) which may have respect both to him that asks the reason, which should be asked, not in a haughty, insolent, and imperious manner, and with an intention to expose and deride, such deserve no answer; for pearls are not to be cast before swine, nor what is holy to be given to dogs; and with respect to him that gives the reason, which should be done with the fear of God, and with a view to his glory, and not to display a man's own gifts and knowledge.

Likewise it is of use in restoring backsliders, who are to be used in a spirit of meekness, gently and tenderly (Gal. 6:1), and so in instructing such who oppose the gospel, and contradict themselves (2 Tim. 2:24,25). Also it may be made use of in a man's conversation to great advantage, and recommend him, and the religion he professes, unto others (Jam. 3:13), not in a way of pride and boasting, but with humility and lowliness of mind; see (1 Pet. 3:1-4). 4. Fourthly, The arguments, reasons, and motives, encouraging

to such a disposition of mind. 4a.

The displeasure of God at a contrary behavior and conduct; "Be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud," (1 Pet. 5:5) he sets himself against them, and it is a dreadful thing to have God an opponent; there is no standing against him and contending with him; of all men the proud are an abomination to him, these are a smoke in his nose; those who exalt themselves and despise others are sure to be abused; he scatters the proud in the imagination of their hearts, confounds their schemes, and brings them themselves to destruction. 4b.

God gives more grace to the humble; for that is the meaning of the phrase, "He giveth grace unto the lowly," (Prov. 3:34) which is referred to in (1 Pet. 5:5), and so explained in (Jam. 4:6), that is, more grace; for a man must first have grace ere he can be humble, or to make him humble; and then more grace is promised and given to him as such. 4c. The Lord dwells with humble persons; they are a fit and proper habitation for God (Isa. 57:15; see Isa. 66:1,2). 4d. When such are disconsolate and sorrowful, the Lord comforts them, and fills them with joy and gladness; for this end the gospel is preached, and was preached by Christ himself, to be "good tidings to the meek;" and when these are cast down, through the prevalence of sin, the force of temptation, and divine desertions, whereby they are humbled, the Lord raises them up again; "the Lord lifteth up the meek," (Ps. 147:6) and there is a gracious promise, that "the meek shall increase their joy in the Lord" (Isa. 29:19). 4e.

When they are hungry and in want of food the Lord feeds them to satisfaction; "the meek shall eat and be satisfied," (Ps. 22:26) yea, when they are in distress God will work miracles for them, rather than they shall want (Isa. 41:17-19). 4f. When they want direction and instruction, he will guide and teach them; "the meek will he guide in judgment; the meek will he teach his way," (Ps. 25:9) guide them into all truth as it is in Jesus; and teach them the ways and methods of his grace towards them; and the ways of duty, in which he would have them to walk. 4g.

Humility is the way to preferment, to honour, grandeur, and happiness; "before honour is humility; yea, by humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honour, and life," (Prov. 16:18; 18:12; 22:4) and this is God's usual way, to abase those that exalt themselves, and to exalt them that are humble (Luke 18:14). 4h. An inheritance is promised to the meek and humble; "the meek shall inherit the earth," (Ps. 37:11) the same is promised by Christ (Matthew 5:5), not the present earth, and the things of it; though good men have the promise of the life that now is, and are heirs of the world, and the world is theirs; but the new earth, in which none but righteous men will dwell with Christ a thousand years (2 Pet. 3:13). 4i.

Such are and shall be saved; "and he (God) shall save the humble person," both temporally and eternally (Job 22:29), he saves such in time, in a time of temporal judgments on the earth, God then arises to save all the meek of the earth; and when Christ comes to judgment with righteousness, he will judge the poor, and reprove with equity, for the meek of the earth (Ps. 76:9; Isa. 11:4), and he will save them eternally; for they are the same with "the poor in spirit," whose is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3). ENDNOTES:

[1] Ep. 90.

[2] Deut. Natura Deorum, l. 3. prope finem.

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