



"A man who fails to transcend and master himself actually becomes lower than the beasts."

—Robert W. Godwin

04-Feb-11

The Unique Greatness of Our God (Part Five)

In these essays, we have tried to grasp a measure of how wonderful [God](#) is, and while some of the things we have seen are awe-inspiring to consider, we realize that they are inadequate attempts to describe an infinite God. On the other hand, realizing God's greatness makes us all too aware of how far short humanity falls. What does the Bible say about man's true state?

David asks the same question: "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?" ([Psalm 8:3-4](#)). The king of Israel gazed into the heavens, as we did in Part Three, and wondered, "Why God? You are so vast and Your mind is so incomprehensible. Why do you deign to think about us, much less care for us?" He obviously does not have a very high opinion of mankind in comparison to God.

[Matthew 22:39](#) may seem a strange place to look for man's place before God, but consider what Jesus teaches: "And the second [great commandment] is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." For our purposes, we can paraphrase this to imply a kind of equality among human beings; we are to treat everyone equally with the same love that we show ourselves. Note that His command does not suggest our neighbors' worthiness, but only that we should express godly love toward them.

[Philippians 2:3](#) ups the ante significantly: ". . . in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself." The apostle Paul urges us to respect other people as better than ourselves. This is the spiritual attitude we, in humility, are to have toward others. As in the previous example, this approach could make a person think more highly of mankind than is deserved, but God provides other instruction to give us the balance we need to gain a proper perspective.

What Paul writes in [I Corinthians 1:26-29](#) is one of these balancing points:

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of [the world](#) to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

Though we are to have love and esteem toward fellow men, Paul tells us plainly that members of the church—representative of the majority of mankind—are not wise, mighty, or noble but foolish, weak, base, and despised. Matters have begun to look a little grim for humanity; we do not have much of which to be proud.

To make it worse, our own Savior says in [Matthew 7:11](#) that mankind is evil! We will find, as we take a short tour through the Old Testament, that Jesus' statement is a summation of the Bible's view of man. Be warned: This may get personal.

What is written in [Proverbs 30:2-3](#) seems contradictory to fact, especially as it appears in a book of wisdom collected by Solomon: "Surely I am more stupid than any man, and do not have the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom nor have knowledge of the Holy One." The next verses reveal that the author's declaration of stupidity is to be understood in comparison to God, so verses 2-3 are universal in nature. Every person is stupid. Everyone lacks understanding and wisdom. Before God, every individual seems unlearned and thickheaded.

[Psalm 73:22](#), a psalm of Asaph, concurs and piles on: "I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You." The word "like" is not in the Hebrew text; it should read, "I was a beast before You," making it less of a comparison than actual fact. In Asaph's estimation, we sometimes sink below the level of human, resembling animals in our behavior, giving ourselves over to beastly urges rather than exhibiting self-control.

In [Job 25:5-6](#), where Bildad is speaking to Job, humanity descends still further: "If even the moon does not shine, and the stars are not pure in His sight, how much less man, who is a maggot, and a son of man, who is a worm?" Could there be a worse comparison? Humans are like the slimy, creeping creatures of the earth that exist to break down rot and refuse. What makes this worse is that our Savior says the same thing about *Himself* in a prophecy in Psalm 22:6! "But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people." As a man, [Jesus Christ](#) was God in the flesh, and if He considered Himself a worm, what does that make us mortal, corrupt, ignorant human beings?

It may be hard to believe, but the Bible's comparisons cut us down even lower:

Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the balance; look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before Him are as nothing, and they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless. ([Isaiah 40:15-17](#))

Notice how this comparison proceeds. We begin as mere water molecules among the nations, which are just a drop in the bucket, and as tiny dust particles, as the nations are leftover dust in the pan of a balance. However, on second thought, that is not nearly insignificant enough. We are nothing—no, *less* than nothing and worthless on top of that!

By this point, we should feel thoroughly inconsequential and small, and this is the proper attitude to have when comparing ourselves with God. If we feel this way, we are well on the road toward the godly attitude that Jesus describes as "[poor in spirit](#)" ([Matthew 5:3](#)), whose bearers will possess the Kingdom of God.

In the book of Job, God is trying to teach Job something very similar to what we have come to understand in this essay. When Job finally grasps the lesson, he says to God, "Behold, I am vile. What shall I answer You?" ([Job 40:4](#)). The Hebrew word behind "vile" literally means "light" in terms of weight. Job may as well be saying that he feels so insubstantial that a breeze could blow him away at any moment. This word could also be rendered as "utterly insignificant." He had grasped the lesson. Later, he tells God, "Therefore I abhor myself, and [repent](#) in dust and ashes" ([Job 42:6](#)). So, finally understanding the massive difference between God and himself, he would be wise to shut up, as God had every right to do to him whatever He pleased.

Fortunately, God does not leave us as nothing and less than nothing. Without Him, that is indeed what we would be: We would be without [hope](#) and without purpose. But when God enters our lives, when He initiates a relationship with us, everything changes. We are still worms and maggots, but when God is working with us and in us, helping and guiding us, we are more like caterpillars that can become butterflies. We just need to persevere with Him.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Love's Basic Definition](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

John Ritenbaugh reiterates that love is not a feeling, but an action- defined by John as keeping God's commandments (I John 2:3), the only means by which we can possibly know Him, leading to eternal life. While what humans consider love is self-centered and carnal, God's love is essentially others-centered. When God begins the love cycle, by His Spirit, He gives us His love; then it only becomes matured in us as we use it (loving God and loving our neighbor by the keeping of His Commandments). If we don't use it, then it bounces off from us and nothing is accomplished. Using God's love may be compared to learning to skate; the more we use it the stronger it gets. Beginning as a feeling, it doesn't become love until an action is taken.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Sticks and Stones](#)

by Ted E. Bowling

As members of God's church, what are we to do when destructive words come our way? Ted Bowling advises us not to take to heart everything people say. We must learn to take everything in our lives with much patience and longsuffering, which will result in peace.

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