



"The doctrines of grace humble man without degrading him and exalt him without inflating him."

—Charles Hodge

21-Jul-17

The Role of the Outcasts (Part One)

Have we ever wondered why [God](#) seems to delight in choosing the weak and base things of [the world](#) to demonstrate His work? In our reflective moments, do we ponder the significance of the apostle Paul's sobering reminder to the worldly, carnal Corinthian congregation in [I Corinthians 1: 26-29](#), which applies to us as well?

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.

Why does God, in His supreme [wisdom](#) and sovereignty, carve out a special role for rejects, off-scourings, and castaways? Are there perhaps some characteristics of outcasts and undesirables—at least in the world's eyes—that we need to emulate?

Several years ago, longshoreman-philosopher Eric Hoffer wrote a provocative essay, "The Role of the Undesirables," in which he compared the pioneers of America, Australia, and the outer reaches of Siberia to tramps and failures, people for whom the established society had no purpose or prescribed niche. Hoffer writes:

With few exceptions, this seems to be the case in the settlement of all new countries. Ex-convicts were in the vanguard in the settling of Australia. In this country, a large portion of our earlier settlers were fugitives and felons. The exceptions seemed to be those who were motivated by religious fervor such as the Pilgrim Fathers and the Mormons.

Upon reflection, Hoffer's "exceptions" also fit into his "rejects and failures" notion. The Pilgrims were rejects and cast-offs from the Anglican Church, which considered them undesirable heretics. The restless pioneer or pilgrim spirit appears to have emanated from a feeling of discontent, a feeling of having failed or having been frustrated in one locale, hoping for and desiring something better in a new one.

One of my grandfathers, feeling a keen disappointment at his social and economic status in Europe, in an act of desperation, indentured himself as a servant for a time to pay for his passage to the New World for a chance or opportunity for a better life. Feeling himself as a misfit or "lowborn" in the Old Country, he felt he had nothing to lose by emigrating to America.

Hoffer contends that much of the credit for shaping new civilizations must go to the "poor, the outcasts, the misfits, and those who are in the grip of some overpowering passion—to merge their wasted lives into something grand and complete." He continues:

History contrived an earth-shaking joke when it lifted by the nape of the neck lowly peasants, shopkeepers, laborers, paupers, jailbirds, and drunks from the midst of Europe, dumped them on a vast continent and said: "Go to it; it is yours!"

Perhaps the most popular theme in literature and motion pictures revolves around the underdog or failure making good. This perennial theme of rejection, [repentance](#), and regeneration also permeates the Scriptures. For instance, we experience a satisfying catharsis or relief when the prodigal son, as he hits rock bottom, "comes to himself." Notice [Luke 15:16-19](#):

And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. But *when he came to himself*, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'"

This "coming to himself" and his repentance was preceded by a stark realization that he had failed, resulting in a total loss of pride and leading to a humble submission to his father's will. It seems axiomatic that unless someone is willing to give up the self, admitting failure and acknowledging that he is needy or [poor in spirit](#), he cannot be taught.

The feeling of lack or neediness results in the teachable attitude displayed by the Ethiopian eunuch in [Acts 8:31](#), who humbly asked Philip, "How can I [understand], unless someone guides me?" The sense of helplessness, the sense of failure, the sense of rejection, God uses as a motivator for restorative, regenerative action.

The interrelationship between, on the one hand, humility and wisdom, and on the other, pride and stupidity or foolishness, is a recurring theme throughout the Bible:

- Surely he scorns the scornful, but [gives grace to the humble](#). ([Proverbs 3:34](#))
- When pride comes, then comes shame; but with the humble is wisdom. ([Proverbs 11:2](#))

- Before destruction the heart of man is haughty. And before honor is humility. ([Proverbs 18:12](#))
- But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit. . ([Isaiah 66:2](#))
- God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. ([James 4:6](#); [I Peter 5:5](#))
- Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. ([James 4:10](#))
- Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time. ([I Peter 5:6](#))

At the very top of the list of things the Lord hates ([Proverbs 6:16-19](#)) is a proud look, suggesting haughtiness, arrogance, and a feeling of superiority. God's displeasure with the [Laodicean](#) church is their arrogant, self-satisfied assumption, "I am rich and become wealthy and have need of nothing" ([Revelation 3:17](#)). In the latter part of the verse God Almighty suggests that the key to the regeneration of the Laodicean mindset would be in their acknowledgment of neediness, helplessness, dependency, and an admission of having failed.

In Part Two, we will explore more examples of God working with those who had a teachable attitude.

- David F. Maas

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Living By Faith: Humility](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh (1932-2023)

God's Word is a discerner of the innermost thoughts of the heart. In His supreme sovereignty, God has an awareness of each and every one of us. In our natural, carnal state, we are full of pride, wearing it almost as an ornament around our neck. Sadly, humility does not come naturally; it must be put on as a garment. Sometimes we grab a counterfeit garment, displaying cringing obsequiousness rather than true humility. There is a huge chasm between pride and humility—the latter a created attribute of character. To humble ourselves is not to put ourselves down like the excessively obedient, groveling Wormtongue in the movie Lord of the Rings. Instead, we need to place our total dependence on Almighty God, deferring to His will, as is demonstrated in the behavior of the repentant tax collector, the prodigal son, Solomon's humble request for wisdom and understanding, and Isaiah's declaration of his unworthiness. Paradoxically, God stoops to us when we humble ourselves. Humility produces honor from God; if we humble ourselves, He will hear us. Because we are spiritually broke, we need Him.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Before Honor Is Humility: The Story of Andrew](#)

by Martin G. Collins

The apostle Andrew is a sterling example of humble service. Martin Collins takes what little we know about this early Christian and shows how Andrew's character should encourage the average Christian.

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).

