

God Gives Grace To The Humble

Seeking Humility Through Service and Obedience

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Several decades ago, I heard a man speak on the subject of humility, and he was commonly viewed as an openly prideful man. Many of the thoughts of his message were considered to be of a hypocritical nature. That so impacted me (knowing what many of the brethren thought of this man who gave this message) that I have always hesitated to speak at all on the subject of humility because of not wanting to come across in that way. So, I do feel like I should qualify this sermon by saying that this subject is first to me, and second to you. As I point, there are three fingers pointing back at me and one at you. I am maybe three times as guilty of this as you, and this is the approach I will take in this sermon.

I thought it was good to at least qualify that. We all have pride, and I know that I have my full share of it.

Humility is perhaps one of the most elusive of all godly characteristics. Yes, most of us easily notice pride in people, but genuine humility is not easy to see because humility, like love, does not parade itself and is offered in a spirit of respect, submission and obedience. In the brazen and insolent world, humility, like meekness, is viewed as weakness. Since humility is a condition of the heart, it can be faked, or imitated outwardly.

God can see pride or humility of the heart whereas, in contrast, we human beings see mainly what appears on the surface. It makes it easy for any of us to give an impression that we are something that we are not, and this is why a person of a prideful heart can appear humble outwardly.

False humility stresses outward show. Often, people in the world try to "humiliate" or afflict themselves outwardly as a kind of self-punishment to show how humble they are. In extreme cases, some Hindus will lie on beds of nails, various Muslim sects will slash themselves with knives, and a few Catholics will flail themselves with whips. Buddhists, and other eastern religions, sometimes crawl on their knees over rough surfaces until their flesh is torn and bleeding to honor their god. Others take vows of abstinence, give up all pleasures in life, or just do without something for Lent depending on the degree of self-affliction that they desire to place upon themselves.

The apostle Paul warned against this kind of humiliation.

Colossians 2:18 Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,

False humility, like self abasement, consists mostly of negative rules, as Paul continues with here:

Colossians 2:21-23 "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

God wants our humility to be inward and genuine, not a performance just to be seen by others. Once coming from the heart, humility's fruits will become outwardly evident, but it is not something that we have to work on showing.

The society in which we live sometimes influences us to feel guilty if we enjoy ourselves in a lawful way; that there is some guilty feeling that we should feel from that. Religion has been seen in such a way through the centuries, and it is often associated with the practice of asceticism, or denial of oneself or one's body.

Sometimes people feel it is not right to own anything of quality and, therefore, we should always buy inferior products. Others may feel that we should own practically nothing and just be poor for God. There are many ways that people pervert the idea of humility, and the way that they try to show it in an open way.

There are many other ways in which humility-for-show may be evidenced if we are not careful; even such a seemingly healthful thing as being a vegetarian can be an outward show of false humility.

I Timothy 4:1-5 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be

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refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

It is quite clear in the Bible that when God inspired the writers to speak of food, it is understood that the term "food" refers to those things God has commanded us to eat, and does not include those things which God has commanded us not to eat. For example, God is very clear in Leviticus 11 on which animals are food and which animals are not.

According to Barnes' Notes,

The word here used—*brooma*—means, properly, whatever is eaten, and may refer to animal flesh, fish, fruit, or vegetables. It is often, however, in the New Testament, employed particularly to denote the flesh of animals; Hebrews 9:10; 13:9; Romans 14:15, 20; I Corinthians 8:8, 13.

Paul lived by God's clean and unclean meats law of Leviticus 11; he was not saying everything is good for food, but those things which God approved. Nowhere does the Bible call unclean meats such as swine, pork, ham or pig (all synonyms for the same word) food.

Did you know that Hitler was a vegetarian, at the recommendation of his doctors, from 1931 to his death? But he gave into his generals' recommendation that they feed their troops meat for protein so that the German soldiers would have enough protein to sustain their endurance in many of the long marches and the vigorous battles. He recognized, just from a scientific point of view, that a person needs meat as a source of protein to give them physical strength.

Romans 14:2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.

We see there a spiritual principle. Maybe on occasion, perhaps for a certain health problem, a person may only eat vegetables for a certain amount of time. But, when it becomes a way of life, Paul is saying that it is a doctrine of demons. We have to be very careful what fads that we get involved in, and we also should be very careful not to let it be an issue of pride for us, which it has become with this fad in America.

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According to the website keepkidshealthy.com, the vitamin B-12 is primarily absorbed from animal products. A lack of B-12 causes such things as anemia, soreness, nervous system disorders, weakness, and many more things. Over the long term, it has devastating effects on the body. The absorption of iron is higher from meat, chicken and fish. The best sources of zinc are meat and yogurt. Protein and amino acids are provided in greater amounts from meat. Vegetarian diets generally have a lower number of calories than diets with meat and dairy products. This is just a sampling of the malnutrition that is possible from a vegetarian diet.

I express this to you, within this subject of humility, to caution us all to be careful in what fads we follow, that it is not done in a prideful attitude or of knowing better than others. It has been shown, time and time again, that a diet without meat causes a person to have all types of long term illnesses, and also to be even weaker. One man told me that he just been eating vegetables for a few days, and he went out to do some hard work, and he did not have the sustenance to withstand the whole day. He had to go back to eating more protein from meats.

Often, the true expression of humility is very difficult to discern. The point is that God wants to see in us true inward humility and obedience, not merely acts that are outward in form only. As Christians, we seek to develop humility, but we do not fully understand it, especially with all of us having some element of pride within us. Yet, it is one of the most important virtues for keeping the Passover in a worthy manner!

I Corinthians 11:27-29 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

As we will see later, humility is a major aspect of what Christ showed us in how to keep that Passover service. So we will examine ourselves today in the area of true genuine humility.

Are we really willing to make the sacrifices necessary to be humble? Are we eager to give up pride and our desire to control others to obtain this essential godly trait? Just because we may esteem ourselves small, which we are, and think lowly of ourselves, does not necessarily mean that we are humble. A person may be insignificant and he may realize his insignificance according to the world, and yet be far from humble.

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Some people think of themselves as humble, but are full of envy and jealousy. Some become depressed because they see their own callousness and unimportance, and some may be rebellious against their responsibilities and realize their negative tendencies. Low-mindedness is not lowly-mindedness. Depression is not humility. Sometimes I think that people misunderstand those different emotions.

God requires all true Christians to esteem others above themselves, or better than themselves.

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

Paul did not mean that he, as an apostle, should look on the members of the church as being above his apostolic office, or that a pastor should consider his position less important than that of an usher. We are not to have feelings of inferiority about ourselves. We should not act like we have humility over our abilities when we are better skilled or more qualified than others to do a task, or hold an office. This is an area that I think we commonly misunderstand about humility.

This exhortation by Paul does not mean that everyone should think that everyone else is better in every way than himself in moral character, in outward conduct, or in natural and inherited attributes. That would be impossible in some cases, and untruthful in many others for us to think that way. We all have our strengths and we all have our weaknesses.

Several other translations of Philippians 2:3 help clarify our understanding on the word "*better*" in verse 3.

The English Standard Version (ESV) translates verse 3 in this way:

"Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves."

The New American Standard Bible (NASB) states:

"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself;"

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The Young's Literal Translation (YLT) says:

"Do nothing in rivalry or vain-glory, but in humility of mind one another counting more excellent than yourselves—

The Amplified Bible (AMP) paraphrases it this way:

"Do nothing from factional motives [through contentiousness, strife, selfishness, or for unworthy ends] or prompted by conceit and empty arrogance. Instead, in the true spirit of humility (lowliness of mind) let each regard the others as better than and superior to himself [thinking more highly of one another than you do of yourselves]."

We see a similar vein going through all of those translations. We must count the other person more excellent, more significant, or more important.

You get the idea that Paul is conveying. Philippians 2:3 expresses the idea of being lowly in mind, unassuming, humbling ourselves in preference to others. This is critical to understand. In preference to others is giving the preference of whatever we are doing to others, rather than taking it upon ourselves and fulfilling our own desires. Humility is putting the interests, cares, and comforts of others above our own, and forgetting ourselves in sacrifice and service. Two key words in humility are "sacrifice" and "service."

Earlier Paul admonished the Roman members to do the same.

Romans 12:10, 16 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

As we read these scriptures having to do with humility, we find that we really have our jobs cut out for us. It is so hard to overcome that pride that is running through the network of our minds.

We are also to extend this attitude of honor to those in the world. We have a responsibility to be an example of God's love, kindness and good works to everyone.

Christ said regarding His disciples,

John 17:15 I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.

We are in the world, and we have to deal with the world in that way.

Matthew 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

We know that those good works that people in the world see should be as a result of the way that our heart has been converted, and the way that our character has been developed in a godly way.

Genuine, true humility is found in the alliance between realistic self-respect based on truth and dedicated self-sacrifice in service. A person who knows his own gifts and abilities, and yet is willing to serve those who have nothing with which to offer in return, shows a humble attitude. Esteeming others above ourselves describes the attitude God wants us to develop as an essential approach to life—whether toward each other, or toward the world.

Since humility reflects godly character, Jesus is the epitome of humility. He not only strongly impressed upon His disciples the need to have humility, but was in Himself its personification. Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He came forth from God and would go back again to God, and still His incomparable superiority over human beings did not influence His desire to serve.

Mark 10:45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

Jesus was so meek and lowly in heart, so humble in spirit and ready for service, that He girded Himself with a towel and washed the disciples' feet. Genuine humility leads the strong to serve the weak. It never underestimates its own worth, but in unreserved unselfishness it is ready to sacrifice its own needs at any moment for the good of others. That is exactly what we see Christ doing in this example that John recorded:

John 13:3-15 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His

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hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this." Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "You are not all clean." So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you."

He acknowledged that He was their Teacher and their Lord, but He was still a humble man. He demonstrated His humility by His action of washing their feet, which He instructs and commands us to do as well.

As we see in this example, genuine humility loses all its self-conceit, but never loses all its self-respect. This is consistent with upholding one's personal dignity and integrity of character. Christ was, and is, of the greatest dignity.

Yet, He humbled Himself to become a man. He made Himself of no reputation. He did not come to be ministered to, but to minister. He was the servant of all. He never forgot that He was a servant and He never forgot His dignity at the same time.

When Pilate asked Him if He were a king, He answered that He was. He stood in kingly majesty before the mob, in kingly serenity before the magistrates. He hung as king on the stake. Yet, He was never haughty, and He never forgot His humility, because it was an integral part of His godly character.

Jesus was made in the likeness of man, and was found in manner as a man after being divine and powerful. In sharp contrast, this is something that Satan would never do.

Philippians 2:5-8 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

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who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross [stake].

Jesus' perfect example throughout His life is what Paul admonishes the Philippian members to develop within themselves, and by extension to us. Christ did not attempt to please Himself, but put the needs and feelings of others above His own, and He did it for His entire life.

Romans 15:2-3 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself;

Over and over again Christ demonstrated an attitude of service toward everyone around Him. He showed lovingkindness to the poor and the downtrodden. He was concerned for Publicans and sinners. He took a personal interest in little children. In this way He showed His concern was outgoing for all classes of people and age groups. He respected everyone in the way that He treated them.

Jesus even had concern for the thief on the stake while He Himself was dying. He remained humble through thick and thin and lived His life as a lowly servant.

God has called us out of this world not only to repent of our sins, but also to repent of what we are—self-seeking and self-centered people. Developing true humility requires that we turn to Him with all our hearts so that He can infuse in us the mind and nature of His Son Jesus Christ. We have seen just an inkling of the wonderful character that Christ not only displayed, but also is instilling in us.

God wants us to lose our sense of self-consciousness and replace it with an attitude of wanting to see others grow, advance and prosper. There is no room for gossip or for cutting someone down when it comes to developing humility.

Jesus obeyed even when obedience ended in death. The point of this expression "obedient to the point of death" is this: We may willingly and even with pleasure obey another where there is no specific risk. But it is another story when obedience is in the face of fatal danger.

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In every decision that we make, we either do God's will or we do our own fleshly will. There is a constant conflict between the two opposing forces.

Galatians 5:17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

Paul was a man who displayed a lot of humility, but he also realized that he had a lot of pride. He was constantly working to rid his life of that pride. He realized, from a spiritual standpoint and the desires of his heart, that the things that he wanted to do he did not, and the things that he did not want to do he did.

Whenever we do our own will, we exalt ourselves, because God tells us to do the opposite of what our fleshly wills dictate. But, when we exalt God and His will, we subjugate our own self-will. This battle has been illustrated using a seesaw comparison. Our fleshly will is on one end and God's will is on the other. Because they are opposites, when one is exalted, the other is subjugated or abased. So you see this constant battle going on within us. As we develop more humility, the pride side of the seesaw goes down, but if we let the pride take over, the humility side goes down. There is a direct relationship between the two.

If we exalt God and His ways in our lives by obeying His laws and fulfilling His will, then our self-will will be humbled. Of course, this is what we are trying to do.

The apostle James does not suggest, but commands us to submit to God in proactive obedience.

James 4:7 "Therefore submit to God."

The use of the word "therefore" means that there is a reason for his strong admonition to submit.

God sets Himself against the proud, that is, those who refuse to submit in obedience to Him. He gives lavishly of His grace to the humble, that is, those who surrender in full agreement to God's will.

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

James' comment, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" is a quotation from Proverbs 3:34:

Proverbs 3:34 "Surely He scorns the scornful, but gives grace to the humble."

The word for proud in James 4:6 is *huperephanos* which literally means "one who shows himself above other people." Its real problem is that it is a thing of the heart. It means haughtiness. But a person suffering from it might appear to be walking in downcast humility, while all the time there is, in his heart, a vast contempt for all others.

The proud have an undue self-esteem. They have a high and unreasonable conceit of their own excellence or importance. This may extend to anything: to beauty, or strength, or accomplishments, or family, or country, or clothing, or position, or religion. We can be proud of anything that belongs to us, or which can in any way be construed as a part of or regarding ourselves. It is amazing the things that we have noticed people around the world becoming proud over. People can be proud over how violent they are, or how good they are stealing or lying. We find that today in commercials—it is amazing to find a commercial that does not glorify lying in some way, and most of the time the commercial itself is a lie. It is amazing what people can find to glorify themselves with, or glorify their products with.

I am not referring to a correct estimate of ourselves, or to the mere knowledge that we may excel others in certain areas. We can know that we have more strength or greater accomplishments in education or in job skills, or greater wealth than others, and still not have pride regarding it.

Although very difficult, it is possible to have a correct estimate of ourselves, and attach no undue importance to ourselves because of it. Every human being on earth has some pride. The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile toward God, because it does not submit to God's law, and in reality it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But if we are true members of God's church we are not in the flesh but in the Spirit if, in fact, the Spirit of God dwells in us.

By continually working to overcome pride, we work toward the goal of having a heart that is not lifted up, that claims no undue regard for itself, that concedes to all others what is their due, and that is humble before God. It is obviously a very tough thing to develop, and we really cannot do it without God's Holy Spirit.

A person who has this heart feels that all he has, and is, is nothing in God's sight. The humble person is willing to occupy his appropriate place in the sight of God and his fellow human beings, and to be esteemed just as he is.

Along with these talents, skills or gifts that we have been given, we have to work all the harder to develop the humility that rids our lives of that pride that comes so easy from having more than someone else.

Pride goes beyond this and gives to us a degree of self-estimation which is not warranted by anything that we have. In contrast, God looks at things as they are, and consequently He detests and humbles arrogant claims.

Proverbs 8:13 The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate.

Proverbs 16:18-19 Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.

We see people today in this society striving to climb the corporate ladder so that they can be wealthy and powerful like those who lead the corporations of the world. Really what they are seeking, and what they are working toward, is a life of pride and power. We know that this is what Satan offers those who follow him.

Pride manifests itself in many ways such as: praising ourselves, adoring our own physical appearance, giving a false superior impression, contempt and slander of others, envy at the talents and skills of others, anxiety to gain applause, distress and rage when slighted, impatience of contradiction, and opposition to God Himself.

A proud heart shuts itself off from God for three reasons:

A proud heart does not know how much in need it is. It admires itself so much that it does not recognize its lack of virtue and, therefore, is in a miserable condition. That is the way that all habitual sinners are.

A proud heart treasures its own independence. It is not obliged or grateful to anyone, not even to God. We see this quite often in independent "Christians" who refuse to be part of any group or to "follow a man."

A proud heart does not recognize its own sin. It is occupied with thinking of its own goodness and never realizes that it has any sin from which it needs to repent of and be saved from. We know that sin separates us from God, and if pride is such a horrible sin, then it is dramatically separating us from God.

A proud heart cannot receive help, because it does not know that it needs help, and, therefore, it cannot ask. In contrast, the humble heart that James is encouraging us to develop is not a weak-kneed thing. It has two advantages with regard to Satan and help in time of need.

The first advantage is a humble heart knows that if it takes a resolute stand against Satan, it will prove him a coward. The great example and inspiration is Jesus in his own temptations. In them, Jesus showed that Satan is not invincible; when he is confronted with the word of God, he flees from authority as a thief would the law.

We have to fight our battles with Satan in humble submission to God, not according to Satan's terms. When we say, "The Lord rebuke you!", we are not saying "I rebuke you!" We have no power to rebuke Satan, and so we must call upon the power of God in humility, in obedience, and in submission to God, realizing that our own human power cannot fight against spiritual principalities without the power of the Holy Spirit. It gets back to seeing ourselves realistically.

If we feel that we are being bothered by such satanic influence of any kind and we ask God to rebuke Satan, we do just that. We ask God, in humility, to please rebuke Satan's influence. If we say "I rebuke you," then Satan is going to have a heyday with us. We do not have the power, and we have to call upon God's mercy and His power.

The second advantage is a humble heart knows that it has the greatest privilege of all, that is, access to God. Paul was inspired to write in Ephesians 2:18, "For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father." We can be certain that we will find mercy and grace to help us in time of need.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

James 4:7-10 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn

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and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.
Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

These verses tell us that God is tirelessly on our side. He is always reliable with regard to our needs and is always abundant in supplying them. He always has more grace at hand for us, as James tells us there in verse 6. He always has more and more to give. His resources are never depleted. His patience is never exhausted. His initiative never stops, and His generosity knows no limit —"He gives more grace."

But grace, in God, has a connection in man. James points to God's sufficiency, then points to our responsibility. In verses 7-10, there are no less than ten commands to obey. The indwelling Spirit is not a means of instant and effortless help—rather, that Christ dwells in His saints even while we give in to human weakness.

There is not an inexhaustible supply of grace sweeping us along to an effortless holiness. The benefits of grace and more grace, as James words it, are ours along the road of obedience and more obedience. With more obedience comes more grace. The God who says, "Here is my grace to receive," says in the same breath, "Here are my commands to obey."

James makes the link between grace and the life of obedience by means of two "therefore's" in verses 6 and 7. First, because "more grace" is available by God's gift in verse 6, therefore, scripture makes clear by whom this grace may be enjoyed: God gives His grace to the humble. He is giving there a qualification for receiving that grace.

In verse 7, James says, "Therefore," then he gives us a series of commands to obey that spell out the terms of a humble walk with God. These are commands whose effect is summarized in verse 10 as humbling ourselves before God, with the promised result that He will lift us up.

In other words, the Bible not only tells us what is true, but also how to respond to what is true. The truth is a super abundant supply of grace, as verse 6 implies. The response is an obedient walk with God, itemized in verses 7-9.

James begins his description of the humble walk with God by commanding active allegiance, in verse 7. We must have no doubt in our minds whose side we are on; and by our lives we must leave no doubt in the minds of others that we are God's called subordinates and Satan's unyielding opponents. Remember when Peter denied Jesus Christ and the cock crowed, his confusion over whose side he was on was manifested.

The English translation into the word "submit" in verse 7 does not do full justice to the Greek that it translates, mainly because some ways in which we use the idea of submission point to an end of struggling and the onset of passivity. In this way, we "submit" to superior forces; further resistance is useless. In this modern sense, for the duration of the war we would stand idly by as prisoners of the enemy.

You have seen the pictures of the concentration camps, and prisoner of war camps, where the captives are standing behind the security fences longingly peering through to the outside and to freedom. This is not what James is picturing here.

The word James uses is much more an "enlistment" word which indicates the taking up of allegiance to a great Superior in order to engage in the fight under His banner. Jesus was obedient to his parents; we citizens of heaven are to be "subject to" the authorities. Even more so, we are to be subject to God and Jesus Christ and have enlisted to do Their work.

Romans 13:1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

The English verb "subject" in Romans 13:1 is from the Greek *hypotasso* and it refers to a subordinate's readiness to await commands and to do the will of the superior. That is the type of submission we are to have.

Since John Ritenbaugh (for the last three sermons) has been speaking on submission, loyalty and that type of thing, I do not want to encroach upon his subject; I want to make this talk about submission very short.

James 4:7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

"Submit" in verse 7 is not a word for someone who is carrying the attack over into the enemy camp, but for someone who is manning the defenses, knowing that enemy pressure is ceaseless and that he is constantly under fire.

It is important to notice that it is those who have subordinated themselves to God who are commanded to stand firm against the devil. Our sanctification by God does not take

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us out of the conflict. On the contrary, it is the very act of decisive enlistment as His underlings which brings us into the firing-line and calls Satan's attention to us as objects of attack. This is not to say that we join God's church; God calls us, but we must respond positively or negatively. A positive response is a declaration of allegiance to God, which puts us in the thick of the conflict Satan has brought against God.

Submission is not the same as obedience. Instead, it is the surrender of one's will, which leads to obedience. I did not feel like I could talk about humility without at least mentioning that much about submission as it is a core factor element of humility.

James continues his description of the humble walk with God by commanding a deliberately cultivated fellowship that we should intentionally and purposefully develop in our relationship with God.

James 4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

The command is "Draw near to God," and we find ourselves encouraged to obey it by the promise which goes along with it, "and He will draw near to you." This is not talking about being "called," but it is talking about continuing and improving our relationship, through fellowship, with Jesus Christ and God the Father.

Our human nature, however, has a perverted tendency to want to reverse this order and to think: "God draws near to us and then we draw near to Him." From a human viewpoint it seems like it would be easier to have a relationship with God if He initiated the conversation within our prayers. James said "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." So we see there a principle that we can apply to our prayers. We are to hit our knees and acknowledge God and talk to Him, and He will react and intervene in our lives.

We learned in verses 6 and 7 that more grace is given to those who set their feet on the path of obedience. God enriches with the grace of His presence those who obey His command to seek His presence. To draw near is the first obedience required of those who have subordinated themselves to God and intend to resist Satan.

James is laying out for us an organized process of obedience. The first element in the conflict is this central battle to be near God. This is the battle for consistency and diligence in Bible study, prayer, worship, fellowship, and cultivating every opportunity whereby we can draw near to Him. This is one of the main reasons that we should make every effort to be here at services every week. Of course, that is unless we have some

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contagious disease, and then it becomes an act of love to stay away and not give people that.

Fellowship with God, and its consequent blessing of His fellowship with us, does not just happen. We cannot drift into it any more than we can drift into holiness. We are commanded to thoroughly wash our actions with a comprehensive purification of our thoughts.

James 4:8 Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

We are told to clean up our outer life of the hands, and the inner life of our hearts. It touches on specific acts of wrong-doing. This means that the designation "sinners" points to individual sins; it also touches the inner disloyalty of the double-mind. In other words, the righteous requirement of the Bible is that our words and deeds and emotions and thoughts should all be purified. Inwardly and outwardly we must be clean, because only the pure in heart will see God.

In James 4:8, James uses the same word translated into English as "double-minded" that he uses in James 1:8 where he says, "He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

This is the sin of being two-faced, or in one word a hypocrite, and of wavering inconsistency with God. In this comprehensive purification, notice in James 4:8 who is to be the agent: "Cleanse your hands, you sinners." This is not the work of the Holy Spirit; it is the work of the energized Christian. It is our responsibility. We may be energized by Christ in us, but He does not do it all for us.

We are commanded to clean up our conduct and our hearts, with the help of the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ. But, we have to keep this command at its proper place in the sequence of developing humility. Logic might suggest that we have to clean up our lives and then draw near to God. I have heard people say, at times, "I need to stay home and get my act together before I start attending church." That is just backwards. How can you get your life together if you are not here learning how to do it?

James' logic is otherwise, because it is when we know the reality of God's presence by drawing near to Him and submitting to Him that we find ourselves motivated by the desire to be like our God. In this way we are prepared for the command to lament our sin and to repent of it.

James 4:9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

We do not really comprehend the full extent of our spiritually deficient condition. Nevertheless, the purpose of God is to lead us down into the lowest place of self-awareness and lamentation. This is the goal of the will of God. Our decisive allegiance with God—our purposeful taking of sides—leads into the presence of God. This in turn prompts the longing to be like Him in holiness.

As always, the more we pursue His likeness, the more deeply and sorrowfully our sinfulness and shortcomings are exposed. We tend to realize this much more at Passover because we have worked at taking a good, accurate and realistic look at ourselves in preparation for it. Jesus Christ set the example and the standard of the humble walk with God, and humbling ourselves is the only way up from our lowly condition.

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

We have to make a great amount of effort to overcome our pride to develop humility, but it is God who lifts us up and glorifies us at that proper time.

James wraps up his point with an emphasis on godly humility. God graciously gives aid to the humble; therefore, "Humble yourselves." James is emphasizing the specific form of humbling is that of repentance for the sin of focusing on the pleasures of the world rather than having reverence for God.

All it takes is a quick survey of scripture to realize that one of the great lessons of the Bible is the principle that it is only "the humble" who can know the blessings of the graciousness of God. God will save the humble person.

Job 22:21-23 "Now acquaint yourself with Him, and be at peace; thereby good will come to you. Receive, please, instruction from His mouth, and lay up His words in your heart. If you return to the Almighty, you will be built up; you will remove iniquity far from your tents."

Job 22:26-29 "For then you will have your delight in the Almighty, and lift up your face to God. You will make your prayer to Him, He will hear you, and

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you will pay your vows. You will also declare a thing, and it will be established for you; so light will shine on your ways. When they cast you down, and you say, 'Exaltation will come!' Then He will save the humble person."

God will save us if we are humble. That indicates to me that if we are attending God's church, but we are not humble, that maybe we will not be saved; it is that important. It appears that God will only save the humble.

In chapter 2 of the book of Zephaniah, God inspired the prophet to direct his warning to God's own people after he described the judgment of the Day of the Lord. Now he calls for the descendants of Israel to repent before the Day of the Lord arrives.

Zephaniah 2:1 Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, O undesirable nation,

The translation into the English word "undesirable" does not convey its meaning accurately here. The meaning is, "having no desire to return to God." It is referring to a group of people who have sought their own pleasure in the world.

Zephaniah 2:2-3 Before the decree is issued, or the day passes like chaff, before the LOORD's fierce anger comes upon you, before the day of the LOORD's anger comes upon you! Seek the LOORD, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the LOORD's anger.

He is encouraging people who have lived uprightly and godly, according as he prescribes by his word, to seek the Lord, to seek right living, and to seek humility all the more as the Day of the Lord approaches. It seems that these people have let down, or been worn down, to the point that they have little or no desire to return to God.

We see an element of Laodiceanism here where people are focused on the world and their material goods. They do not feel that it is necessary that they attend services every week, and if they do, they may not even bother to dress up like they would if they were appearing before the President of the United States. They may even come in sandals and shorts at times. We see the attitude carried over in this way. Here are people who are very lackadaisical, if at all even concerned with what God is concerned with.

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Although they might have come to services each week, they were not really seeking God and drawing near to Him. Zephaniah is encouraging people who have lived uprightly and godly, as he describes, to seek the Lord and to seek living righteously.

In seeking humility, a person cannot perversely murmur against God's dealings, or the way that God is doing something in our lives or even in the world. Humility requires patiently submitting to God's will and confidently waiting for deliverance.

True repentance of the heart must be manifested in works: seeking the Lord and doing what He commands. The "humble" are to "seek the Lord," which is defined in the same verse as seeking righteousness and humility. Only the "meek" (or humble) are exhorted because nothing can be done at this point with the rest.

These meek know they are helpless, so they are called to seek three things that will help them to be ready for the day of the Lord. First, they are to seek the Lord. It is His wrath and judgment that His day will bring on those who do not seek Him.

Second, in contrast to those who have abandoned Him, the humble are to seek and to live godly lives, marked by "practicing justice," that is, doing what He commands and applying God's way of life.

Third, in scripture, justice is accompanied by righteousness, which is also to be sought, as is further submissive obedience to God and humility.

All three of these positive responsibilities must be carried out instead of seeking our own prideful pleasures. We see here a major area that we all have a problem with pride in, and that is seeking our own pleasures, seeking those things that are in the world. We do not commonly think of that as a way of pride.

Isaiah declared a warning command to God's humble people with regard to their responsibility during the coming judgment:

Isaiah 26:1-5 In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: "We have a strong city; God will appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks. Open the gates, that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in. You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever, for in YAH, the LORD, is everlasting strength. For He brings down those who dwell on high, the lofty city; He lays it low, He lays it low to the ground, He brings it down to the dust.

"Trust in the Lord," in verse 4, is another way of saying "Seek the Lord." The sense is: Do not ever let your confidence in God fail. Do not let calamity, or adversity, or persecution, or poverty, or trial of any kind prevent your seeking and having total confidence in Him. This statement is additional support for the idea in verse 3, that the mind that is stayed on Him—the mind that seeks the Eternal—will have peace. We see that seeking God also brings humility, peace and righteousness.

Zephaniah 2:3 Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness . . .

The humble seek righteousness and work with God even in the face of suffering, which in and of itself is a severe experience. The apostle Peter knew what threats and imprisonment were like, and eventually he experienced his own martyrdom. With this in mind, he writes about the judgment of God on sin that results in the curse of suffering and death. But, Peter sees God's judgment in terms of hope and our responsibility to do good works in spite of our own suffering.

In I Peter 4:12-19, Peter is alluding to the prophecy of Malachi 3:1-3 where Malachi prophesies of the Day of the Lord. God's appearing will bring a refining process to purify His people and make their offerings acceptable to Him.

In I Peter 1:17, Peter spoke of the refining of our faith through fiery trial. He tells us that we are God's house, His spiritual temple. Then, in I Peter 4:17, he uses Malachi's image of the purifying of the house of God through fire. And you know the house of God to be His church.

I Peter 4:17-19 For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

Judgment must begin with the house of God, the church. The fiery trials that we experience are the refining fire of the Lord who has come to His temple. We should not be surprised by fiery trials, but should rejoice in the evidence that the Holy One has taken up His dwelling with us.

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Fiery trials are not easily persevered, but testing does not destroy us; it aids in saving us. If even God's saints must patiently endure these judgments, think of the wrath that awaits the world who mock and persecute the people of God.

Peter is not calling into question the security of the salvation kept for us. The word for "scarcely" in verse 18 means "with difficulty"; it does not imply uncertainty of the outcome, but the difficulty of the road that leads to it.

God's purging of His people is not a process that takes place after death, as you well know, nor is it punishment that atones for sin. Rather, His purging is the discipline of suffering and trials by which the faith of His people is purified as gold in the furnace.

The humble seek righteousness and work with God, even in the face of suffering. Suffering helps build humility because it places us in a condition where we realize the frailty of our own bodies and existence. We are left with little or nothing of which to be proud.

Knowing the merciful purpose of our Father in heaven, we can commit ourselves to Him in our suffering. Jesus Christ suffered according to the Father's will. Although the Father wills our suffering for a different purpose, it is still for His glory.

The word "commit" in verse 19, is used for making a deposit. The Hellenistic world lacked our modern banking system. Someone undertaking a journey might deposit his funds with a neighbor while he was gone. Naturally, he would be concerned about his neighbor's integrity. Since many of us do not know our neighbors or know them very little, I am pretty sure that we would not deposit our funds with them. Although I am sure we would with many, if not all, of the brethren that we have come to know and love so closely.

Committing our lives to God in righteous acts in doing good does not come from a proud heart. We have a faithful Lord and Savior who understands how hard it is to develop humility. Nevertheless, we have to treat others righteously even while we suffer.

II Timothy 1:12 For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

There is no exception clause in a contract that says we only have to do good when we feel good. The actions of a humble and contrite heart are not thwarted by suffering.

God can save, but He can also punish. Hope is held out to the repentant, humble, and submissive person, but the way is not guaranteed to be easy. For even the most devout are among those who have broken God's laws, and God calls them back. So God's decision to save is ultimately and finally a decision of grace.

Regarding Jesus Christ, Peter says in I Peter 2:24, "who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed." Upon giving us grace, God expects us to give the rest of our lives in obedience to Him.

We are required to seek, by both careful examination (especially at this pre-Passover time) and constant effort, so that we can understand our responsibilities and can do our duty. Humility is something that we grow in by degrees. It must be developed over time.

Zephaniah 2:3 Seek the LOORD, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the LOORD's anger.

The humble are described by Zephaniah as those who do God's righteous will, that is, those who seek diligently to fulfill what God has commanded as right. In this light, "seeking the Lord" is explained as seeking righteousness and humility.

The virtue of humility includes the feeling of obligation because of all that has been given to us, and of the heartfelt recognition of our shortcomings in the proper and effective use of those gifts, which we cannot even praise ourselves for having used well. We have all not used the gifts that God has given us to the best of our ability. Genuine, true humility is found in the alliance between realistic self-respect based on truth and dedicated self-sacrifice in service.

Our part in the process of salvation is a mere shadow compared to what God provides. There is no doubt that for those of us who are sincerely striving to live our lives righteously, it is a very difficult walk. We count the cost in our faithful decision to be baptized and we find the cost on our part is our own lives in complete devotion to and sacrifice for God, His Son, and His church and to His way of life.

But God is not requiring us to do what is impossible. Yes, we are constantly humbled by our failures and have to go to God through Jesus Christ over and over again for forgiveness, strength and encouragement. Hopefully, we are not going to Christ and God the Father for the same sins over and over again. Hopefully, we are overcoming

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those.

Lack of humility is something that we spend a lifetime trying to overcome and we do need to go over and over again to God the Father through Jesus Christ and asking for help to develop this proper godly humility in us.

Who are those who seek to be humble? Simply put, the humble are those who willingly obey and submit to God's pleasure and will for them, rather than proudly insisting on satisfying their own desires for pleasure. Like Jesus Christ, the humble are not here to be served, but to serve.

One of the most wonderful aspects of His grace is that He will never leave the humble nor forsake them. James wrote: "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up."

Peter wrote, "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."