

# How to Be Humble and Know It

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## Preface

Indulge me, please, just for a moment. Briefly, think of the person who has wronged you most, or perhaps the vilest person you know, or have ever heard about. Now, just try to imagine God saying ... this person is your moral superior, above you.

In other words, try to esteem others *better* than yourself ... *all* others. (Php 2:3) The people who snub you, cut you off in traffic, gossip about you and turn others against you, treat you unfairly, wound you, persecute you ... your enemies ... what if they are all, indeed, morally superior to you? What if, in the final analysis, when your entire life is revealed and evaluated on Judgment Day, *you* end up ranking last, the very worst person who ever lived.

In your own mind, is this even a possibility? How do you know?

Why does it matter? Who cares?

If we lack anything today, we lack a robust, working definition of humility, one with shoe leather on it. Pride is what alienates us from God, from each other, and deprives us of mental and emotional health, yet few of us are aware of our own pride, or know how to detect it, much less overcome it.

Humility is the only soil in which the fruit of Heaven grows; Pride must die in us, or nothing of Heaven can live in us. Humility identifies the children of God; if we have no humility, we have nothing worth having.

This is radical, of course it is, challenging our souls on the very deepest level. Would we expect the key to peace and joy to be anything less? Come with me on a painfully glorious journey, a journey into freedom, into the heart of God.

## Introductory

Are you humble?

Wow. Few questions appear to unsettle the god-fearing soul like this one.

We sense that humility is a virtue, yet if we claim to be humble it sounds like a boast, suggesting at once we are proud. But if we admit we are not humble, we feel compelled to explain why, that we try to be humble and fail. Or perhaps we dismiss the question as inappropriate, that it is not for us to say, and avoid the subject altogether.

But in dealing with such a core virtue, is this hesitation and uncertainty acceptable? Can we afford to *not* be humble, or to be unsure if we are? God *commands* us to humble ourselves,<sup>1</sup> so how can we rightly neglect this?<sup>2</sup> If we want to draw closer to God, is it not clear that we must all begin here?<sup>3</sup>

Without humility we are proud, an abomination to God,<sup>4</sup> contrary to Him<sup>5</sup> and to each other,<sup>6</sup> in a dreadful state from which we must immediately find deliverance.<sup>7</sup>

So, why do none of our answers satisfy, nor any variation of them? Perhaps the dilemma lies in our ignorance: not understanding what humility is.

And ignorance here is no small thing. Humility is not just any virtue, it is the gateway virtue,<sup>8</sup> square one, apart from which there *is* no virtue.<sup>9</sup> If we do not know what humility is or how to recognize it, we might very well be proud and self-deceived about it.<sup>10</sup>

One thing we can be sure of: a complete, working definition of humility will be consistent with the entire revelation of God; the LORD would not command us to be humble, and then encourage us in anything that is inconsistent with humility.<sup>11</sup>

## End Notes

1. “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.” 1Pe 5:6
2. “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” Ja 4:17
3. “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *ye* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *ye* double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and *your* joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.” Ja 4:8-10
4. “Every one *that is* proud in heart *is* an abomination to the LORD: *though* hand *join* in hand, he shall not be unpunished.” Pr 16:5
5. “But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.” Ja 4:6

If God is resisting the proud, then the proud must be opposed to Him, contrary to Him.

6. “He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife: but he that putteth his trust in the LORD shall be made fat.” Pr 28:25

“The Christians are right: it is Pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began.” C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York, Macmillan, 1943, p.95

7. “Could you see what every stirring of pride does to your soul, you would beg of everything you meet to tear the viper from you, though with the loss of a hand or an eye. Could you see what a sweet, divine, transforming power there is in humility, how it expels the poison of your

nature, and makes room for the Spirit of God to live in you, you would rather wish to be the footstool of all the world than want the smallest degree of it.” *Spirit of Prayer*, Pt.II, Edition of Moreton, Canterbury, 1893, p. 73

8. “And so the life of the saved ones, of the saints, must needs bear this stamp of deliverance from sin, and full restoration to their original state; their whole relation to God and man marked by an all pervading humility. Without this there can be no true abiding in God's presence, or experience of His favor and the power of His Spirit; without this no abiding faith, or love or joy or strength. Humility is the only soil in which the graces root; the lack of humility is the sufficient explanation of every defect and failure. Humility is not so much a grace or virtue along with others; it is the root of all, because it alone takes the right attitude before God, and allows Him as God to do all.” Andrew Murray, *Humility*, New York, Anson D. F. Randolph & Co, 1895, pp. 6
9. “The fear of the LORD *is* the instruction of wisdom; and before honor *is* humility.” Pr 15:33  
If there is honor in virtue, and if humility precedes honor, then there is no virtue apart from humility.

“According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride ... Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.” C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York, Macmillan, 1943, p.94

“Evil can have no beginning but from pride, and no end but from humility. The truth is this: Pride may die in you, or nothing of heaven can live in you.” William Law, *Spirit of Prayer*, Pt.II, Edition of Moreton, Canterbury, 1893, p. 73

10. “There is no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves.” C.S. Lewis, *Mere*

*Christianity*, New York, Macmillan, 1943, p.94

11. “All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” 2Ti 3:16-17

## Common Misconceptions

So, what *is* humility? How do we identify pride and humble ourselves, as our LORD has commanded?

Before going straight to a working definition, let us first consider the most common misconceptions about humility being taught today, and how each one is inaccurate or insufficient. A good first step to fully appreciating a biblical perspective is seeing how our own understanding is lacking.

### Admit to Pride

In his famous chapter on Pride, which he calls, *The Great Sin*, C.S. Lewis ends with the following confession: “I wish I had got a bit further with humility myself: if I had, I could probably tell you more about the relief, the comfort, of taking the fancy-dress off – getting rid of the false self, with all its ‘Look at me’ and ‘Aren’t I a good boy?’ and all its posing and posturing. To get even near it, even for a moment, is like a drink of water to man in a desert ...

“If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud. And a bigish step too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed.”<sup>1</sup>

If anyone could help us understand pride, and how to become humble, it might be C.S. Lewis, arguably the greatest Christian intellect of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Having warned us that a proud person cannot know God, being in the complete anti-God state of mind,<sup>2</sup> he tells us that the first step toward humility is to admit our need, that we indeed have a problem with pride. His advice may, at first glance, seem like a good place to begin, since no one can claim to be completely and permanently free of pride. Yet if we consider his counsel carefully, he ends by effectively defining humility as thinking oneself to be proud, a type of recursive contradiction which is, at best, confusing.



While it is true that we all have room to grow here, his counsel implies we can never know if we are growing, or if we have acquired any humility at all; as soon as we think we might have some, Lewis appears to claim that we immediately lose it. This discourages us from thinking about our own humility, much less pursuing it with any diligence.

Yet, if we are to actually obey God and humble ourselves, this perspective turns out to be insufficient, impractical ... on a topic of central importance in our spiritual life. There *must* be more here: if our only strategy in this mortal struggle is to admit we are losing, how can we ever hope to overcome?

How are we to identify this devastating sin without a clear, practical definition? And how can we purpose to grow in humility if we, by definition, can never know we are the least bit free of our pride?

Would the God of hope leave us in such a hopeless place?<sup>3</sup> Without any way to ensure that we are increasing in humility? His nature implies otherwise: if God assures us that we can find Him and know Him and walk with Him, and know that we are,<sup>4</sup> and if everyone who is proud is an abomination to Him, contrary to and opposed to Him, then we may be certain He has made a way for us to understand what humility is, to actually become humble, and to recognize this state in ourselves.

## **Self-Deprecation**

So then, is humility always disapproving of our own actions and behavior, walking in self-deprecation, always pointing out our own faults and shortcomings, refusing to acknowledge any goodness within ourselves?

This is perhaps the most common idea of humility, and C.S Lewis agrees it is a mis-conception, saying, “Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call ‘humble’ nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he

is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what *you* said to *him*.”<sup>5</sup>

We find the scripture in agreement: the godly in scripture do not tend focus the attention of others primarily on themselves, even if it is to point out how unworthy they are.<sup>6</sup> This self-effacing behavior is in itself unloving, for there is nothing beneficial in it; it is simply another form of self-centeredness, leveraging our own sinfulness to gain sympathy and center-stage. The godly are evidently less self-focused and more others-centered; this is the essence of loving our neighbors as ourselves, and it is intrinsic to godliness.<sup>7</sup>

In knowing our worth in God, that we are complete in Him,<sup>8</sup> we may be secure in His love for us, and find our need for personal validation met in Christ. While we ought not to be afraid to confess our faults to others we trust and ask for prayer,<sup>9</sup> elaborating on the details of how sinful and broken we are is not edifying to anyone;<sup>10</sup> it cannot be a significant part of a righteous witness and testimony.

And in being thorough here, we must also consider a little known yet deeply significant fact: the godly, rather than ignoring or denying their own goodness, feely and openly acknowledge their own inward excellence and righteousness, and they even point this out to others when it is helpful and edifying.<sup>11</sup>

The apostle Paul provides an excellent counter-example here, telling his friends how he has always demonstrated an excellent pattern of humility before them (emphasis mine). “And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, **serving the Lord with all humility of mind**, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews.” (Ac 20:18-19) Paul was evidently a godly man who understood humility, who knew that he had attained a significant degree

of it, and that he made it a point to tell this to others. Paul shows us that such behavior can indeed be consistent with humility, so any definition we propose must allow for it.

If we cannot acknowledge goodness and excellence within ourselves in circumstances which warrant this,<sup>12</sup> how could we then ever know we are of God?<sup>13</sup> Or encourage others to follow our example?<sup>14</sup> Or avoid thoughtless contradiction as we admit to seeing goodness in each other<sup>15</sup> while ignoring or denying it within ourselves?<sup>16</sup> We must be honest about who we are, and encourage others to follow our example when this might be helpful to them.

We are to love ourselves as much as we love others, and this requires us to be unassuming about ourselves, neither focusing attention on ourselves nor reluctant to stand out in the crowd when this is needful. We should not be threatened by being ignored, nor by being the focus of attention; being secure in God either way.

The humble are no more reluctant to offer themselves as an example of excellence and godliness than they are to point out the same in others. They are unbiased about what they perceive in themselves, the good as well as the bad; hence they have no problem frankly acknowledging their own goodness.

Walking in honesty and love requires being frank and unassuming about ourselves,<sup>17</sup> even if it be admitting our own goodness as an encouragement and example to others. Knowing we are humble and offering ourselves as an example to follow, cannot, in itself, be inconsistent with humility.

We may conclude from this that our good behavior ought not to provide a means of self-exaltation; we need not ignore our own goodness or refuse to acknowledge it before others in order to be humble. This implies that we may not rightly derive our sense of self-worth from our behavior; this is a key point to remember.

## Self-Forgetfulness

These observations compel us to take a step further, and enquire if any kind of self-focus is inherently inconsistent with humility, such that it should be avoided as much as possible, even if we do not seek the attention of others in the process. In other words, does increasing in humility require becoming less and less self-aware? Is it ever a godly thing to carefully examine ourselves? Is it inconsistent with humility to consistently, carefully and diligently consider our own ways and behavior?

This relates to perhaps the second most common misconception of humility, for Lewis himself asserts of the humble man, “He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all.”<sup>18</sup> Timothy Keller, another notable Christian intellect, evidently agrees with Lewis; this is, in fact, the thesis of his best-seller, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*: “This is gospel-centered humility, blessed self-forgetfulness. Not thinking more of myself as in modern cultures, or less of myself as in traditional cultures. Simply thinking of myself less.”<sup>19</sup>

As Lewis and Keller both rightly observe, growing in humility generally moves to being less self-centered and more others-centered. However, thinking about ourselves, paying attention to ourselves, need not imply self-centeredness, or selfishness, at all, as they seem to suggest; it depends on the reason for our self-focus. Being constantly preoccupied with what others are thinking about us, or focused on our own welfare or happiness without regard for others, is certainly inconsistent with godliness. But this need not be our motivation in thinking about ourselves.

Indeed, upon careful reflection, it can be shown that self-forgetfulness in itself is, in fact, entirely **in**consistent with godliness, and profoundly so: though we are not to be self-centered, God does tell us to ponder the path of our feet, and to let all our ways be established.<sup>20</sup> To *ponder* is to think carefully about something, and *the path of our feet* is the sum of our daily choices, thoughts, words and emotions.

*Letting our ways be established* implies considering our journey, and intentionally ensuring that our past and current behavior is grounded in holiness and righteousness.

Since our life path is extending and growing moment by moment, obeying this command requires reflecting often, honestly and soberly on every aspect of our behavior, and consistently seeking to conform our lives more and more to God's way, not drifting off course from one hour to the next. This is, in fact, God's very design for growing in holiness: taking heed to our ways according to His Word: "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word." (Ps 119:9).<sup>21</sup> We cannot do this without thinking carefully, regularly, and extensively about ourselves, so that we may align every aspect of our lives with godliness as well as we are able.

If God **commands** us to be humble, how are we to obey Him without ever thinking about, and intentionally pursuing humility, as Lewis prescribes? If pride is an abomination to God, and can creep into our lives at any moment to take us down,<sup>22</sup> should we not be constantly monitoring ourselves, such that when pride does indeed creep in, we might try and correct this immediately? Should we not vigilantly and consistently root out every trace of pride, as well as we are able, and as soon as we are the least bit aware of it, rather than grieving God and endangering ourselves?

Why would we leave our attainment of humility to chance? Do we presume we will accidentally stumble upon this grace, or that God will work humility in us apart from us ever knowing this, without us intentionally trying to obey Him?<sup>23</sup>

How can we **diligently** add any virtue, moderation, patience, godliness, kindness or love to our faith if we are unaware of ourselves, both where we are and where we have been in our spiritual journey?<sup>24</sup> If we are to add these virtues to our faith, must we not start with the core virtue itself, without which these others are pointless?

If we fail to consistently examine ourselves, considering our ways, will and orientation, ensuring that our lives evidence those things that accompany salvation,<sup>25</sup> particularly the grace of a humble spirit,<sup>26</sup> we may well end up missing God altogether.<sup>27</sup>

This is key: walking in godly wisdom requires healthy self-awareness. Thinking deeply about humility, earnestly seeking to attain more of it, and consistently and diligently examining ourselves to ensure that we are always increasing in it, cannot, in itself, be inconsistent with humility.

## Uncertainty

Is humility then refusing to claim any specific knowledge with certainty, always doubting ourselves?<sup>28</sup> Again, this is inconsistent with Scripture;<sup>29</sup> we can be certain in our understanding of spiritual fundamentals<sup>30</sup> without being unteachable,<sup>31</sup> arrogant,<sup>32</sup> or thinking we already know it all.<sup>33</sup>

Having knowledge of any kind, being confident in this knowledge, and being held responsible for how we respond to the evidence available to us, is key to our design in God,<sup>34</sup> intrinsic to being made in His image, distinguishing us from animals. The very concept of faith itself is supernatural confidence: absolute certainty.<sup>35</sup> We call the alternative *fear* and *unbelief*, which is an affront to God.<sup>36</sup> Certainty is only problematic if we fail to be thorough in our research, refuse to honestly consider evidence which contradicts our current views, or use our knowledge to exalt ourselves by devaluing those who remain ignorant.<sup>37</sup>

Knowledge tends to pride<sup>38</sup> only when we use it as a means to exalt ourselves above others, rather than admitting that without God we would likely be more brutish than everyone else.<sup>39</sup> Godly confidence in our own understanding, knowing Christ Himself is teaching us and enabling us to

understand,<sup>40</sup> to the point of hating claims that are inconsistent with scripture,<sup>41</sup> cannot, in itself, be inconsistent with humility.

## **Serving Others**

Is humility then in serving others, considering them more important than ourselves, and therefore always putting their interests before our own, and not asserting our own value or significance in the context of limited time, strength and resources?<sup>42</sup>

Christ is our example here: He humbled Himself, and took upon Himself the form of a servant.<sup>43</sup> He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.<sup>44</sup> However, Christ did not just do whatever others wanted Him to do; His motivation was to obey and please His Father:<sup>45</sup> nothing more, and nothing less.

Loving others as ourselves certainly tends to make us as interested in the welfare of others as we are in our own, to generally defer to their needs and interests before our own, all else being equal, and to thoughtfully consider their ideas and opinions rather than constantly promoting our own.<sup>46</sup> But *always* putting the needs of others first is devaluing ourselves, which is also inconsistent with scripture; we are to love our neighbors *as* ourselves, not *more* than ourselves.

Consider the value God Himself has placed on us;<sup>47</sup> has He not counted every human soul of infinite importance by making us in His image, and by being willing to become our sin and die for us, to lay down His very life to rescue us?<sup>48</sup> How can anyone be unimportant, or less valuable or significant than another?

Is serving others, in itself, necessarily always a godly thing? It depends on why we are doing it; our motive here is key: if it is simply to please others, then we are not the servants of Christ.<sup>49</sup> Would we still do this, even if our service was deeply displeasing to others?

If we serve to establish our own goodness,<sup>50</sup> or to appear righteous,<sup>51</sup> or fearing what others might think of us if we do not,<sup>52</sup> or to obtain a sense of purpose and fulfillment apart from God Himself,<sup>53</sup> then we are just being selfish in a more socially acceptable way, exalting ourselves through humanitarianism, exposing ourselves in yet another expression of pride. What if no one is ever going to notice? Or if it really makes no difference to anyone else in the end? When our serving no longer serves us, do we turn somewhere else for fulfillment? This is not the example of Christ.

The only righteous motive in ministry is the pleasure and glory of God Himself;<sup>54</sup> as He bids us serve Him through seeking the welfare of others, obtaining the approval of others is not our goal, and our inward fulfillment and satisfaction then lies only in obeying the Master,<sup>51</sup> not in either the praise or fear of men.<sup>55</sup>

Serving others is godly as long as our motives are godly, but this is not the same as humility, for we can, and evidently generally do, tend to exalt ourselves in the process, to think more highly of ourselves than we ought, even as we are serving others.

## **Self-Denial**

Is humility then feeling we are unworthy to enjoy the blessings of God, or even God Himself?<sup>56</sup> Is humility found or enabled in denying ourselves to increase our own discomfort, misery and suffering in an effort to express or deepen our lowliness? Does humility lie in a self-effacing neglect or hatred of ourselves, a dishonoring self-abasement, an attempt to beat ourselves down before God and Man?



As above, this is inconsistent with the way God Himself cares for us,<sup>57</sup> and with how He has instructed us to live.<sup>58</sup> How does refusing to enjoy God's gifts to us glorify Him, or enable us to view either Him or ourselves more clearly? He commands us to rejoice in Him always,<sup>59</sup> and to give Him thanks always for all things?<sup>60</sup> Any self-denying life pattern which does not exude with thanksgiving and rejoicing is dishonoring God and denying His name.<sup>61</sup>

In giving us every good gift to enjoy,<sup>62</sup> God evidently expects us to receive each one gratefully from His hand, and not to consistently refuse Him; He actually requires us to rejoice before Him with our families and friends, feasting to our heart's content in His provision for our needs. Christ Himself often did the same.<sup>63</sup>

What is a godly motive in self-denial? Again, this is only righteous as we are seeking the pleasure and glory of God, enjoying His love for us and thanking Him for all things, when we consider self-denial essential to achieving His purposes, to focus ourselves in seeking His face so that we are less distracted and encumbered with the affairs of this life.<sup>64</sup> Self-denial cannot atone for our sin,<sup>65</sup> or teach us His ways. We have no examples in scripture of godly men who refused to enjoy temporal blessings as a manner of life, and God warns us of those who would use asceticism to lead us astray.<sup>66</sup>

In being harsh with ourselves we tend to be so with others; as we neglect our own welfare, we will tend to be callous towards others. Though it can appear outwardly humble, this kind of neglect is often an implicit dishonoring of ourselves through an unhealthy kind of self-focus; even when it is harsh, it may simply be another way of exalting ourselves, worshipping our own will through our self-neglect,<sup>67</sup> another arbitrary way to devalue others whom we consider worldly, soft and self-serving in their love of ease and comfort.

Loving others as ourselves requires loving ourselves. We must certainly be prepared to endure hardness as good soldiers of Christ,<sup>68</sup> but imposing our own discomfort and neglecting our own needs must serve some other godly purpose; it cannot be, in itself, an expression of humility.

## **Reticence**

Is humility then just minding our own business, staying out of other people's affairs, reluctant to share our thoughts, beliefs and feelings, being private and reserved in our dealings with others? Does humility require that we consider ourselves unworthy or unqualified to share our insights and experiences, or to challenge others in their understanding of spiritual things?

Meddling is, of course, inappropriate,<sup>69</sup> as well as being offensive, arrogant, opinionated, dogmatic and unteachable, incessantly pushing our views on others without listening carefully to them so that we understand and prayerfully consider their point of view. All such behavior is certainly inconsistent with godliness.

However, being uninvolved with and unconcerned for others is also not love: we are to be constantly seeking the welfare of others,<sup>70</sup> encouraging, rebuking, exhorting,<sup>71</sup> and admonishing one another.<sup>72</sup> Failing here destroys the very foundations of spiritual community.<sup>73</sup> The living Christ in each child of God makes us each a precious source of encouragement and insight to others; we are to let our light shine, not hide it.<sup>74</sup>

## **Non-Confrontation**

Is humility then refusing to acknowledge the wrong doings of others, refusing to name sin?

Again, this is inconsistent with scripture.<sup>75</sup> While we are not to be obnoxious in looking for and exposing faults in others, and should be more in a habit of covering sin that is out of character, or under extenuating circumstances,<sup>76</sup> bearing with each other's imperfections and idiosyncrasies,<sup>77</sup> when others wrong us or others, there are times when it is appropriate to address this, confronting those who wrong us.<sup>78</sup> It is perfectly consistent with, and even *required* of godliness, to pursue justice,<sup>79</sup> to speak the truth in love even when it hurts,<sup>80</sup> to seek to resolve misunderstandings and offenses,<sup>81</sup> and promptly encourage resolution.<sup>82</sup>

## **Ignorance**

Is humility then the avoidance of curiosity and exploration, being content in our ignorance, neglecting the deeper truths of the spiritual life?

This is not the noble example of the Bereans, who searched the scriptures daily to verify what they were being taught,<sup>83</sup> nor of the wise crying after knowledge.<sup>84</sup> We ought to be ever seeking to understand God better,<sup>85</sup> to know Him more,<sup>86</sup> and to have more wisdom and insight.<sup>87</sup>

## **Weakness**

Is humility then found in weakness? Not when God commands us to be strong.<sup>88</sup> Perhaps then in a lack of confidence, or in timidity. Not when the righteous are bold as a lion.<sup>89</sup>

## **Implications**

We can serve others, and be proud in our serving. We can be proud in our knowledge, and we can be proud in our ignorance. We can be proud in aloofness and isolation, and in our constant meddling in the affairs of others. We can be proud in ignoring sin in others, and also in incessantly bothering them

about it. We can be proud in our tolerance of wrongs against ourselves, and proud in our indignant unwillingness to let things go. We can be proud in our self-focus, and in living for others. We can be proud in our importance, and proud in our insignificance. We can be proud in our weakness as well as in our strength. We can be walking in the pride of life as a manner of life, no matter what kind of life we are living, if we have no idea what humility is.

What if most everyone is walking in darkness,<sup>90</sup> in wickedness,<sup>91</sup> in pride in all its hideous forms.<sup>92</sup> What if, in our ignorance and brokenness, pride is as natural and intrinsic to us as quenching our thirst,<sup>93</sup> and we are destroying ourselves and each other through it.<sup>94</sup> If we do not even understand what humility *is*, how can we expect to be otherwise?<sup>95</sup>

## **Clarity is Essential**

Perhaps it would be good to establish a rigorous, working definition of humility, one which does no injustice to any text of scripture, which makes sense in the context of life's complexities. On a concept this important, our understanding must be clear, precise, and unarguably wholesome and good. We ought to be able to say without any discomfort or hesitation whatsoever, "Yes I do, in fact, have a measure of humility; I am also growing here, and this is how."

## **End Notes**

1. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York, Macmillan, 1943, p.99
2. "As long as you are proud you cannot know God ... Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind." Ibid, p.94, 95
3. "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." Ro 15:13

“But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1Co 15:57

“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” 1Jn 5:4

4. “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” He 11:6

“And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.” 1Jn 3:19

5. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York, Macmillan, 1943, p.99

6. “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.” Ep 4:29

7. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.” 1Jn 3:14

8. “And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.” Col 2:10

9. “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Ja 5:16

10. “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.” Col 4:6

11. “Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” Ro 14:19

12. “I have remembered thy name, O LORD, in the night, and have kept thy law.” Ps 119:55

“It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect. He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places. He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms.” Ps 18:32-34

There is nothing prideful in being truthful about our own gifts and abilities; anything less is dishonest.

13. "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments." 1Jn 2:3
14. "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you." Php 4:9
15. "And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another." Ro 15:14
16. "For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles." 2Co 11:5  
 There are times when it is loving and appropriate to call attention to one's own gifts, expertise, talents and calling.
17. "Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying." Ro 13:13  
 "But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." 2Co 4:2
18. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York, Macmillan, 1943, p.99
19. Timothy Keller, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, UK, 10Publishing, 1943, p.36
20. "Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established." Pr 4:26
21. "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies." Ps 119:59  
 "BETH Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word." Ps 119:9  
 90% of Psalm 119, representing the ABC's of faith, demonstrates deep self-awareness in prayer.
22. "And any of us may at any moment be in this death-trap ... It is a terrible thing that the worst of all the vices can smuggle itself into the very centre of our religious life. But you can see why. The other, and less bad, vices come from the devil working on us through our animal nature. But this does not come through our animal nature at all. It comes direct from Hell. It is purely spiritual:

consequently it is far more subtle and deadly.” C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York, Macmillan, 1943, pp.96-97

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.” 1Pe 5:8-9

23. “And further, that this humility is not a thing that will come of itself, but that it must be made the object of special desire and prayer and faith and practice.” Andrew Murray, *Humility*, New York, Anson D. F. Randolph & Co, 1895, pp. 6-7

24. “And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge.” 2Pe 1:5  
“Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.” 2Pe 3:14

“And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” 1Jn 3:3

25. “But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.” He 6:9

26. “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Mt 5:2

27. “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” 2Co 13:5

28. “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.” 1Jn 2:3

29. “I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” 2Ti 4:7-8

“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” 1Jn 5:13

“For the which cause 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 that which I have committed unto him against that day.” 2Ti 1:12

Certainty in our relationship with God is not optional; it cannot be inconsistent with humility.

30. “I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies *are* my meditation.” Ps 119:99

The psalmist claims to have more understanding than all of his teachers; again, not a prideful boast, but an honest assessment based on his diligence in meditating on scripture, his earnest love of truth, regardless what it happens to be, and his observation that his teachers are unable to divide the Word thoughtfully and intelligently; being blinded and stunted by their bias, they regularly commit logical fallacies and consistently contradict scripture in their responses and teachings. Refusing to acknowledge this, when it is, in fact, true, is not humility: it is the fear of Man.

31. “If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, derverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.” 1Ti 6:3-5

It is only pride which keeps us from being in wholehearted agreement with godly doctrine. God requires us to be certain enough in our apprehension of spiritual truth to withdraw from those who persist in resisting it.

32. “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.” Pr 8:13

33. “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” 1Co 13:12



“And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.”

1Co 8:2

Remaining teachable, and knowing we can always learn from others, is a given: no one knows everything about anything. Yet this does not imply that we must be uncertain in the knowledge we already have.

34. “For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.” Ep 3:1-7

Paul claimed to have a special knowledge revealed to him by God which was not known in other ages. Paul was accountable for receiving this knowledge, being certain of it, and proclaiming this to others. This is not pride, but honesty for the edification of others.

35. “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.” Ja 1:6

“Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.” Mt 21:21

“That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.” Col 2:2

“And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” He 6:11-12

36. “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.” Re 21:8

37. “Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.” He 5:2

38. Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.” 1Co 8:1

39. “Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man.” Pr 30:2

40. “If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.” Ep 4:21

41. “Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.” Ps 119:104

42. “For I *mean* not that other men be eased, and ye burdened.” 2Co 8:13

43. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:” Php 2:5-7

44. “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” Mt 20:28

45. “Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” Jn 5:19

“I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.” Jn 5:30

46. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." Php 2:4  
"Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God." Ep 5:21
47. "But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows." Lk 12:7
48. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."  
Ro 5:8
49. "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." Ga 1:10
50. "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." Ro 10:3
51. "But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments." Mt 23:5
52. "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe." Pr 29:25  
"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Mt 10:28
53. "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." Php 2:1-2
54. "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." 1Co 10:31
55. "His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." Mt 25:23
56. "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Lk 5:8

57. "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." 1Pe 5:7

"That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." Mt 5:45

58. "Ye are the children of the LORD your God: ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead. For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth." De 14:1

"Seven days shalt thou keep a solemn feast unto the LORD thy God in the place which the LORD shall choose: because the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thine increase, and in all the works of thine hands, therefore thou shalt surely rejoice." De 16:15

59. "Rejoice in the Lord alway: *and* again I say, Rejoice." Php 4:4

60. "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Ep 5:20

61. "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth." Re 2:13

"I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name." Re 3:8

62. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Jas 1:17

"And wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart." Ps 104:15

"Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy." 1Ti 6:17

63. “The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.” Mt 11:19
64. “No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.” 2Ti 2:4
65. “And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.” He 9:22
- “Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”
66. “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.” 1Ti 4:1-3
67. “Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh.” Col 2:23
68. “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” 2Ti 2:3
69. “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.” 1Pe 4:15
- “And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.” 1Ti 5:13
70. “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” Php 2:4
71. “But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” He 3:13

72. “And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.” Ro 15:14
73. “And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it.” 1Co 12:26
- “How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.” 1Co 14:26
74. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” Mt 5:16
- “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” 1Pe 2:9
75. “Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.” Tit 1:11
76. “And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.” 1Pe 4:8
77. “With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Ep 4:2-3
78. “Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil.” 1Co 13:4-5
79. “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.” Mt 18:15

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” Ga 6:1

“Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.” 1Th 5:14

80. “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” Mi 6:8

81. “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.” Ep 4:15

82. “Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.” Le 19:18

“Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.” Ja 5:9

83. “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.” Mat 5:23-24

84. “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” Ac 17:11

85. “Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, *and* liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as *for* hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.” Pr 2:3-5

86. “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.” Ps 27:4

87. "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." Php 3:10
88. "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding."  
Pr 4:7
89. "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." 1Co 16:13
90. "The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion." Pr 28:1
91. "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light." Ep 5:8  
"Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." Ro 1:21
92. "*And* we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness." 1Jn 5:19
93. "For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." 1Jn 2:16
94. "How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?" Job 15:16
95. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children." Ho 4:6
96. "I stand amazed at the thought of how little humility is sought after as the distinguishing feature of the discipleship of Jesus." Andrew Murray, *Humility*, New York, Anson D. F. Randolph & Co, 1895, p. 4



## A Working Definition

A good place to start, as one might expect, is the Word of God. Is there a text which defines humility, or at least points us in a direction, from which we can derive a useful, working definition? I think so.

In teaching on the evils of self-righteousness, Christ says, “For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” (Lk 14:11) Jesus contrasts humility with self-exaltation: having an elevated sense of ourselves in relation to God or other people. So, very simply, we might define pride as the tendency or act of exalting ourselves, a way of making ourselves seem more important or significant than we are, and humility as the opposite: the lack or absence of any tendency, intention or effort toward self-exaltation.

This is consistent with what C.S. Lewis says about pride: “A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down you cannot see something that is above you.”<sup>1</sup> To look down on something or someone you must think it is beneath you, that you are higher; exalting ourselves is thinking too highly of ourselves, which God warns us against,<sup>2</sup> for in this we depart from humility.

Yet, if we are each infinitely valuable to God, and cannot be more important to Him than we already are, we may only exalt ourselves in the following two ways: [1] by purposing to live independently of and/or contrary to God, failing to honor and obey Him as we ought (a vertical dimension), and/or [2] by neglecting God’s evaluation of us, how He measures our worth and significance, and observing some other, arbitrary standard by which we may rank ourselves higher than those around us (a horizontal dimension).

In our God-ward orientation, we might willfully choose to alienate ourselves from our Creator, neglecting to love and submit to Him as we ought, thinking we may live independently of Him, or perhaps even defying Him outright. In either case, we set ourselves up as self-sufficient, unthankful, obstinate little gods who need not trouble ourselves with adoring and pleasing the eternal, infinite, JEHOVAH God. This, indeed, is the natural path for most of us, spearheaded by Satan himself.<sup>3</sup> But some of us understand this to be a losing proposition from the outset, at least for now, and choose to be more subtle about it, pretending to be allied with God, but on our own terms.

We may also exalt ourselves in the horizontal, but since God has already counted each of us infinitely valuable, important and significant, our options are limited; we may only exalt ourselves in relation to others in one way: by devaluing our peers. To accomplish this, we must devise a means to do so, a means to calibrate the value and importance of ourselves in relation to someone else, which of necessity must be contrary to God.

For insight here we may carefully observe the detail in a parable where Jesus illustrates self-exaltation: that of the Pharisee and the publican in Luke 18. The Pharisee selects criteria which make himself look better than others: “The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.” (Lk 18:11-12) This is no coincidence; in self-exaltation it makes no sense to select criteria in which we are all doing equally well, such as having a soul, or a beating heart; we invariably and arbitrarily select measures which distinguish ourselves from others, and which make ourselves look better.<sup>4</sup>

But our measures are not necessarily the measures of God,<sup>5</sup> the way He evaluates human dignity and worth; when we depart from the mind and way of God, we are alienating ourselves from Him. So, it

is also no coincidence that as this Pharisee is devaluing others, he is also just praying with himself, and not connecting with God at all.

We may rank people based on wealth, intelligence, strength, skill, beauty, athletic ability, or in any number of other ways, but perhaps it is on moral grounds where our pride is the most insidious, and also the most common: thinking we are more righteous than others, and thus more acceptable, important, significant or valuable to God.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps this is why Christ consistently singles out this particular kind of measure in His teaching: it is so common, so harmful, and so contrary to God, the opposite of what He requires of us. God tells us to esteem others *better* than ourselves,<sup>7</sup> not (as in some translations) more important (since we are each infinitely important to God), but morally superior.

But, obviously, we have difficulty here: people differ in moral integrity, some much more than others, and we may easily observe those who are living openly wicked, depraved lives.<sup>8</sup> Is it not irrational to blindly presume that such people are more righteous than we ourselves, than we who are trying our best to know and follow God? This also appears inconsistent with scripture; we are evidently able to at least get in the ball park when observing excessive wickedness in others.<sup>9</sup>

To resolve this, we may observe the initial context of Christ's instruction in the above parable (emphasis mine): "And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted **in themselves** that they were righteous, and despised others." (Lk 18:9) We are evidently free to observe that we are more righteous than others when this is obvious,<sup>10</sup> but we err when we trust *in ourselves* that we are righteous, apart from the enabling grace of God.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, how much of our own perceived goodness should we attribute to ourselves, and how much should we attribute to God?<sup>12</sup> What would we be like, if God were to completely withdraw from

us, and cease restraining us from sin? If we think God is responsible for **all** our goodness,<sup>13</sup> then we can observe righteousness within ourselves without taking any credit for it, without boasting,<sup>14</sup> without exalting ourselves over others, and without despising anyone else, no matter what they are doing.

But if we think otherwise, and take credit for some of our own goodness, as if we are the root cause, then we will invariably look down on others who are evidently not doing as well as we are, and exalt ourselves over them. However, unless we can be sure what we would be like apart from God, this is still presumption: God is restraining **everyone** from sin in some way.<sup>15</sup> So, how do we know what we would be like if God was not helping us at all?

And this is the whole point. Being precise here, we are not told to **conclude** that others are better than we are, for that requires a comparison and a moral judgment which we are forbidden to make.<sup>16</sup> **Esteeming** is simply acting as if others **are** morally better, without necessarily knowing they are, or even necessarily comparing ourselves to them,<sup>17</sup> because we cannot ultimately know if we are better or worse if left to ourselves, and since it is unlikely that we are exactly morally equivalent to anyone else.

The only possible non-presumptuous posture, that of humility, refuses to look down on any other person as intrinsically less righteous than ourselves; humility acknowledges that any goodness in anyone is a gift of God, and refuses to presume that, apart from God, anyone else is morally beneath us in any way. It is not a judgment per se, but a refusal to evaluate the intrinsic goodness or badness of others, and therefore giving them the benefit of the doubt.

And as we acknowledge our utter dependence on God, ever seeking to please Him, giving Him thanks always for all things,<sup>18</sup> in particular for His restraining and enabling grace in our lives, when we are also esteeming others above ourselves in the metaphysical realm, in our standing with God in relation

to His Law, which is evidently the most important area of our lives, this life pattern tends to preclude all other forms of self-exaltation.

This perspective reflects Christ's teaching regarding humility in His kingdom: those who humble themselves as little children are the greatest.<sup>19</sup> Small children tend to be free of self-exaltation, haughtiness and ambition; they naturally feel inclined to look up to and emulate their elders; they aren't preoccupied with judging others, comparing themselves with others, or posing and posturing to be more than they are. They readily ask for help, accept their utter dependence on others to care for them, and tend to be trusting, not overly suspicious, cynical or jaded. When properly disciplined and loved, young children tend to be obedient and faithful as well, eager to spend time with their fathers. In these same ways, God's children acknowledge their utter dependence on Him, trust Him and believe on Him, taking Him at His Word, obeying Him and seeking to be close to Him.

These insights lead us to robust, compound, working definitions which we can test and validate.

**Pride:**

- 1. Exalting myself before God by alienating myself from Him and disobeying Him**
- 2. Exalting myself over others by esteeming myself morally superior to them**

**Humility:**

- 1. Loving God by living in thankful dependence upon Him and obeying Him**
- 2. Loving others by esteeming them morally superior to myself**

We thus define humility and pride together; in understanding one we also grasp the other. Each definition comprises both dimensions, vertical and horizontal, and serves to identify pride/humility as we find either or both aspects of a definition descriptive of our present state.

These definitions put humility and pride on a spectrum, as we might expect, giving us degrees of both humility and pride. Extreme pride is thinking we need not answer to God at all, that we may neglect and disregard Him as we please, and that we are better than *everyone* else, more important, significant, valuable and/or worthy than all others, that all others are morally beneath us. Perfect humility is loving God with our whole being, acknowledging our utter dependence upon Him and seeking to be as submitted to Him as we possibly can, and esteeming *all* others better than ourselves, acting as if we are inherently morally inferior to all others, the least worthy when it comes to our own innate goodness.

C.S Lewis identifies similarly: “In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that – and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison – you do not know God at all. ... Whenever we find that our religious life is making us feel that we are good – above all, that we are better than someone else – I think we may be sure that we are being acted upon, not by God, but by the devil.”<sup>20</sup> Thinking we are something in comparison to or apart from God, or in comparison with someone else, *anyone* else, is the essence of pride.

Accordingly, we now have practical tests for perfect humility, and thus for traces of pride: [1] am I doing my best to love and obey God, thankfully acknowledging my utter dependence upon Him, and [2] apart from the constant and undeserved enabling of God, as He restrains me from evil<sup>21</sup> and works

goodness in me,<sup>22</sup> do I concede that I would very likely be the most wicked soul who has ever lived? Do I live this out as a manner of life in my thoughts, emotions, words and deeds?

Any other posture is exalting ourselves against God and/or others, tolerating some measure of pride, and therefore of being abominable to God to some degree. How abominable to God are we willing to be?

These definitions are certainly not common, perhaps not what we might expect, and they might at first seem deeply problematic. But do they stand the test of scripture, and ultimately of common sense? When we reason it out, is this perspective unarguably wholesome, practical and healthy? Is any alternative unreasonable in the end?

## **Analysis**

Firstly, notice that these definitions reflect and parallel the two greatest commandments, loving God with our whole mind, heart, soul and strength, and loving our neighbors as ourselves.<sup>23</sup> This is no coincidence, as central as pride and humility are in the spiritual life; as pride and selfishness are twins, so are humility and love, and they are all lived out in the same two dimensions. As we miss all when we miss love,<sup>24</sup> to miss humility is also to miss all. This is the foundation of our faith.

It is also no accident that we define humility itself as an expression of love; humility is how love believes and perceives before God and Man. When pride is present in our lives, love must then be absent, and we are nothing. We find then a cure for our pride in loving God with our whole heart, and our neighbors as ourselves. The great commandments are God's antidote to pride.

In the vertical dimension, it is perhaps not too difficult to see that neglecting to honor God is a profoundly significant way of exalting ourselves.<sup>25</sup> Yet being unthankful and/or disobedient is also an

offensive self-exalting posture, presuming we know better than God, or that we deserve better.<sup>26</sup> In taking our rightful place as a mere creature before our glorious Creator, it makes perfect sense to submit in every way to God: to love, honor, thank and obey Him as He has commanded.<sup>27</sup> Any other posture is evidently a selfish, irrational, self-exalting one, leading to spiritual bondage and darkness.

Even so, ever since the Fall we have not only been keeping God at arm's length and going our own way,<sup>28</sup> but also making moral evaluations on our own; it is part of our DNA to recognize good and evil, but in departing from God we have taken an additional step: we now presume to define our own moral standard rather than applying God's, assuming we know what good and evil are apart from Him,<sup>29</sup> effectively setting ourselves up as little deities, and crawling up onto God's throne to take His place.

We do this instinctively, without even thinking about it, and apart from God transforming our character at the core, we will all do this nearly all the time. We do not cleave to God as a manner of life, nor do we thank Him in trouble as well as in blessing. We live our lives as we please, checking in with God when we feel the need; and while we are living this way, we take it upon ourselves to decide how culpable other people are and what kind of punishment they deserve for living the same way we are, and we do this without ever consulting God. Most of the time we are entirely unaware that we are doing it.

For example, in the movie *Taken*, about a young woman abducted by a sex trafficking mob, her father (Liam Neeson) tracks down the ring leader and does him in. The justice of the scene is immensely satisfying, at least it was to me: the fiend gets what he deserves, full throttle. Agreement with his brutal termination seems nearly instinctive; anything less would be unjust, frustrating. Why?



Think of any villain in any narrative getting what they deserve: the Nazis being defeated in WWII, the Unabomber finally being caught and convicted, Osama Bin Laden seeing his last. The theme of justice is central to most any conflict between good and evil. God requires us to do justly, but also to love mercy.<sup>30</sup> The key lies in the motivation of our hearts: how does it make us feel when justice is done, or when it is not? Do we take pleasure in the punishment of the wicked? Are we bitter when someone escapes justice, and glad they suffer for their crimes?<sup>31</sup>

How do we know what is just? How do we know what people deserve, or how guilty and culpable they are? What standard do we use in arriving at our conclusion?

Looking at this another way, if we try to rate our own moral goodness, either a specific act or our lives as a whole, on a scale of 0 to 10, 0 being absolute and total wickedness, equivalent perhaps to Satan himself, and 10 being absolute perfection, having the very character and disposition of Christ Himself, what grounds do we have to give ourselves any specific positive value? Is 8 reasonable? Too high perhaps. How about 5, or 2. Might still be too high. Is 1 low enough? Then how about 0.0001? How low can we go? Is it not naked presumption to give ourselves, even on our very best day, any positive value? anything above zero?<sup>32</sup>

I have some idea what absolute perfection looks like in Christ, and I know for sure I do not measure up, but in attempting to determine how close I am to His perfection, or how far away someone else is, I find myself in strange and unfamiliar territory, trying to make measurements in a space where I have no means to calibrate distance.

When God looks at a sinful soul, how does He measure their sinfulness? Are our sins against one another worse than grieving a holy God? Are sins which afflict humans physically and/or emotionally for a season more grievous than those which anger the King of the Universe? How wicked is it, truly,

to not love God with our whole heart, to be indifferent towards Him, lukewarm,<sup>33</sup> to not be abiding in Him with rejoicing every moment of our lives? Who is not guilty of this, nearly all the time?

If God inhabits eternity,<sup>34</sup> simultaneously aware of each point in time, all the time, then He lives eternally in every instance of time; whatever God experiences He always experiences, since He is beyond and outside of time.<sup>35</sup> In other words, Almighty God is eternally present, for an infinite amount of time, in every interval of time, eternally focused on every single one of us every second of our lives. Every moment we neglect to glorify Him, every sin we deliberately sin against Him, all of our unthankfulness and resentment, all of our enmity towards Him, He endures each instance of it forever. How is God going to measure *that* kind of sin? How will He place you and me on His moral scale, in light of our sins against *Him*?<sup>36</sup>

Most of what God hates about us is not even on our radar because there is no penalty or shame associated with it yet. What is a reasonable punishment for not loving God and our neighbor? For a proud look, a wicked imagination, feet swift in running to mischief, or sowing discord among brothers?<sup>37</sup> Most of what we admire in each other is abominable to God.<sup>38</sup> Even if we could see one others' hearts, our moral compasses are generally so entirely broken, we have no idea which way is up.<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps this is why the apostle Paul put so little stock in the moral evaluations of others, even his own, calling it all "a very small thing."<sup>40</sup> We cannot see another's motives, why they are doing what they are. We cannot know all their wounds and insecurities and baggage, what makes them tick. While we are responsible as members of a lawful society to seek justice when others do wrong, it is impossible for us to determine the moral quality of someone else's heart, or even our own entirely; it is a space where we just do not belong; God occupies it well enough, all on His own.<sup>41</sup>

So, God is telling us, “Judge not:”<sup>42</sup> refrain from measuring or evaluating others on moral grounds, we should not try to decide how good or bad someone else is in comparison with ourselves. No other posture is consistent with love. Yet love and humility are also perfectly consistent with justice: we ought not condone or enable anyone else’s sin, or excuse our own. Humility recognizes sin as God has defined it, and applies consequences as God has prescribed them, without deciding how wicked anyone is; this is the only default position which makes sense when we are not equipped to make any kind of final moral evaluation. Deciding how good or bad someone is, and what they ultimately deserve, this is God’s job, and He does not need our help.

## **Synthesis**

If we are unable to place ourselves accurately on God’s moral scale at any positive value, much less place anyone else on it correctly, then how do we compare ourselves with others on this moral scale?

In other words, being very practical, what evidence do you have that you are not, in fact, the vilest person who has ever lived? What evidence *do* you really have that the moral choices you have been making, based on the raw material you have to work with in your upbringing and experiences, will not put you last on Judgment Day?

The answer is simple. None. You have no idea. For all we know, you actually might be the worst person who has ever lived. Unless, perhaps, it is me.

This isn’t merely academic. We are constantly and instinctively ranking others in moral goodness, judging them, comparing them with ourselves and invariably finding someone worse,<sup>43</sup> then we dishonor them and look down on them as if we are God and can tell what they deserve for their bad behavior.<sup>44</sup>

Yet if God commands us to honor *everyone*, from kings, to common laborers, to hardened criminals on death row,<sup>45</sup> how can we esteem ourselves morally superior to anyone else? If we presume another is intrinsically inferior to us, less righteous than we are, when we have no concrete evidence to support this, do we not dishonor them? Do you not feel dishonored when someone else is acting holier-than-thou? We recognize the problem only when we see it in others.

How can we ever compare ourselves with another, and accurately assess where we fall relative to each other on God's moral scale, when even for those of us who tremble at the Word of God,<sup>46</sup> His mercy is essentially immeasurable ... infinite?<sup>47</sup> How can we even begin to pretend to know that the mercy we need from God is less than what our neighbor needs?

The fact that we exalt ourselves so effortlessly suggests we have no idea how far away from God's standard we truly fall; we do not pray like the publican, standing afar off, beating our breasts, afraid to look up and crying, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"<sup>48</sup> Apart from grounding our hope of eternal life entirely in the finished work of Christ, this is the only possible non-presumptuous posture before God.<sup>49</sup>

Yet if we are typical, we do not fail here merely on occasion, but as a manner of life. We exalt ourselves persistently and willfully, without the slightest hesitation or trouble to our conscience. We have trained our souls in this, and we are experts at it. We are not just a little proud, we are overflowing with it.

We seldom, if ever, accuse one another with compassion, with tears, recognizing we likely deserve even worse than they do. As Tim Keller says, "Pride is the pleasure of being more than the next person."<sup>50</sup> We find smug satisfaction in others getting the punishment we think they deserve, as if we know what that should be, or we become frustrated and bitter if they appear to be getting off and not

paying for their crimes. We enjoy pursuing justice, rather than feeling grieved in the brokenness of others, and often resent mercy and compassion.

Implicit in our responses is the thinking that we know how guilty others are and what they deserve, and that we deserve better. We are, in effect, looking down on others, passing sentences as their judges. This is, by our definition, pride -- so common among us that anything else appears wildly unusual, out of sync with humanity itself.

In contrast, arguably the greatest Christian ever, writing more books of the Bible than any other, freely admitted that he was, in his own estimation, the worst sinner who ever lived. The apostle Paul thought of himself as less than the least of all God's elect,<sup>51</sup> the chief of sinners, the least worthy of all mortal souls.<sup>52</sup> When he saw others living for themselves and not for Christ, whom he evidently considered his moral superiors, it moved him to tears.<sup>53</sup> Who lives like this?<sup>54</sup>

## **Implications**

If I am, in my own estimation, likely the vilest person who has ever lived, this changes everything.

***This*** is radical.

We are looking at something so profoundly different than the norm, from what we have been thinking, that it requires a paradigm shift on the deepest level, an overhaul of our entire world view. We must rewire our mindset and orientation on every level to align with this.

How can we even begin to entertain the idea of earning our own salvation, or keeping it, of somehow meriting God's favor by trying to be good, in any way, shape or form? Even if we were perfect, we could not earn anything from God, for absolute perfection is merely our duty.<sup>55</sup> Apart from a Savior

who takes our place before God, taking our punishment and giving us His perfect righteousness, what hope have we of ever surviving the perfect indignation of God?<sup>56</sup> Absolutely none.

And how can we ever hope to evidence those things that accompany salvation unless God not only begins the work of holiness in us, but also completes it?<sup>57</sup> If He does not clean us up, put His Spirit within us, restrain us from evil and work righteousness in us, what hope have we? Absolutely none.

And how can we pretend that the benevolence of God is conditional, that His care for us depends on how well we are doing? He is kind to His enemies as well as His friends.<sup>58</sup> If there is any way we could possibly sin away the lovingkindness of God, we would have already done this long ago.

And why would we try to leverage our talents, skills, money, beliefs or deeds to posture ourselves as more important or valuable than others? What real value can anyone have, apart from how God values us all, as evil as we are, in willing to be our Savior?<sup>59</sup> And how can we conclude this value to be anything less than infinite?

And why would we complain or be resentful for the way we are treated, or how we suffer, if in being the worst of sinners we clearly merit the fires of Hell? What room is there in humility for our complaints, resentment or bitterness?<sup>60</sup> Would not a sobering realization that are being treated much better than we truly deserve, bring forth a continual fountain of profound gratitude, thanksgiving and rejoicing?<sup>61</sup>

And would our own depravity, in itself, provide an excuse for us to be less than our very best selves? Of course not! Being evil, in itself, is no excuse to further exalt ourselves against God and others, and be worse than our best. If we are the very worst there is, knowing all sin harms, grieves and angers God, would we not want to make that worst the best we can possibly make it?<sup>62</sup>

And should our profound sinfulness be a cause for grief? Yes, in a limited and controlled fashion, it is good that we should grieve that we are so evil without God. God sets aside a day in His calendar to be afflicted over sin in and about us,<sup>63</sup> and we do well to fully engage in this.<sup>64</sup> But it is not a cause for despondency and depression, for we are yet infinitely loved, and grace reigns in us as we seek the living God with whatever energies and will we do find that we have.<sup>65</sup> Our primary focus the remainder of the year is in feeding on the majesty of God,<sup>66</sup> glorying in His infinitude, and meditating on His laws,<sup>67</sup> which reveal His amazing nature.<sup>68</sup> In this we have joy unspeakable.<sup>69</sup>

And when sinners harm us or others we can care enough to be angry;<sup>70</sup> angry at what they are doing to themselves and others, and seek justice per God's law, while earnestly wishing things were different. We can be grieved,<sup>71</sup> we can confront in love without retaliating,<sup>72</sup> without vengeance, without malice, seeking the well-being of all, without deciding how good or bad anyone is. We can seek to minimize the harm that is being done, restore relationships, and to avoid some for our mutual well-being,<sup>73</sup> without evaluating anyone morally, without judging them as better or worse than ourselves.

Rather than disdain anyone as beneath us, and devaluing them, we can see everyone as infinitely valuable, yet voluntarily enslaved to their own depraved will, captive to their own lusts and self-deceptions. We can hate what they have made themselves into, and what they are doing to themselves and others,<sup>74</sup> without ever looking down on them; we can have compassion for them,<sup>75</sup> praying for them, acting as if, were not for both the mercy and enabling grace of God, we would be doing worse than they are.

Yet we need not ignore sin, betraying God and destroying ourselves, by refusing to deal with sin justly; He has given us His Law to define how and why to deal certain kinds of sins through civil institutions, for His glory and our own protection.<sup>76</sup> In being faithful to Him we must respect and uphold God's

law as best we can, but we would never do so rejoicing in the destruction of another, gloating their punishment or enjoying their suffering; sin should break our hearts, and move us to tears.<sup>77</sup>

And in recognizing that we should not be struggling to prove we are more important than anyone else, being valued infinitely by God, we are free to be our very best selves, to be excellent for Him, for His own pleasure,<sup>78</sup> whatever that looks like in us, regardless if others value us or not. This is freedom, absolute freedom from insecurity, envy, and all forms of ungodly competitiveness. We can enjoy our own excellence, as well as that of others, without any awkwardness or intimidation.

If and when anyone finds fault with us, we need not be defensive, or protect ourselves, for there is nothing to protect: no one but God can possibly know how bad we actually are without God, and He already loves us infinitely. We are therefore free to consider their claims objectively and to grow, to improve, to prayerfully and diligently rid ourselves of all lies and deception and strongholds as best we can, if there is any merit at all in their accusations. This is freedom from shame and manipulation, freedom from the fear of Man.

And we are free to observe goodness in ourselves and others without any self-exaltation or boasting, for any goodness in us is the work of God, the result of His Spirit working in and through us; this is enabling grace.<sup>79</sup> We are nothing but what we have received from Him,<sup>80</sup> and the more goodness we find within, the more God is glorified in us.<sup>81</sup>

And we are free from fear. Fear of being rejected by God, fear of being rejected by others, fear of not being important or significant or valuable or loved.<sup>82</sup>

And we are free to fail; we have nothing to lose by giving our very best, our all. Failure does not mean rejection, or vulnerability, or being cast away. As God commands us He is willing to equip us, and this



is hope. We have no reputation to mar by not succeeding, if we are giving our best. We have nothing to lose and everything to gain by obeying God and seeking excellence in every area that we can.<sup>83</sup>

And we are free to care for ourselves as well as for others, for we are all equally valuable to God. In loving our neighbors as ourselves, we must also love ourselves. We can live our lives in service to others, yet also in balance, saying “No” when we need rest, or to enabling others in carelessness and ease,<sup>84</sup> fully enjoying all of God’s gifts to us in this life.<sup>85</sup>

And we are free to pursue our gifts and calling, for we do not deserve them; we have not earned our natural skills and talents, but are pleased for God to reap a return on His investment in us, for His sake as well as our own.

And, ultimately, we are free to succeed, to be wildly successful in any and every area of our lives, for that can only be explained by the exceeding grace of God in us, giving us the opportunity, the will and the energy to live for Him, and this will glorify Him immensely.<sup>86</sup> We shall never be tempted to boast in our success, only to glory in our Lord.<sup>87</sup>

And finally, and perhaps most profoundly, humility opens the door for *grace*, the gateway to spiritual success.<sup>88</sup> Grace is not leniency, or mercy, or forgiveness; grace is altogether different. When God gives grace to the humble, He is offering us power, strength, ability, enabling us to be everything He has designed us to be.<sup>89</sup> Grace is “the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life.”<sup>90</sup> When God gives us grace, He is giving us Himself, filling us with Himself, incarnating and manifesting Himself in and through us.<sup>91</sup>

Humility is the easiest yoke, the lightest of all burdens; learn from the Master Himself, and find rest for the soul!<sup>92</sup> Couple it naturally with the fear of God and we find riches, honor and life.<sup>93</sup> Any other way is hard: burdensome, uncertain, troublesome and painful.<sup>94</sup>

Is this good, unassailable and unarguably wholesome, or what!

## End Notes

1. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York, Macmillan, 1943, p.96
2. “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.” Ro 12:3
3. “Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” Ep 2:2-3
4. “Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.” Le 19:36  
“Divers weights, and divers measures, both of them are alike abomination to the LORD.” Pr 20:10  
When we are arbitrary and inconsistent in our choice of moral measures in comparing ourselves with others, we are essentially doing the same thing that a dishonest merchant does when he chooses the scale depending on whether he is buying or selling. The fact that we do not consistently appeal to God’s moral scale reveals our bias.
5. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Isa\_55:9

6. "And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." Lk 18:9
7. "*Let nothing be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." Php 2:3
8. "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works." 2Ti 4:14
9. "In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD." Ps 15:4a
10. "The wicked have laid a snare for me: yet I erred not from thy precepts." Ps 119:110
11. "For who maketh thee to differ *from another*? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive *it*, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received *it*?" 1Co 4:7
12. "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Ro 3:10
13. "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." 1Co 15:10
14. "Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith." Ro 3:27
15. "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth *will let*, until he be taken out of the way." 2Th 2:7
16. "Judge not, that ye be not judged." Mt 7:1
17. "For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise." 2Co 10:12

18. "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Ep 5:20
19. "And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Mt 18:3-4
20. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York, Macmillan, 1943, p.96
21. "For these nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners: but as for thee, the LORD thy God hath not suffered thee so *to do*." De 18:14
22. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure." Php 2:13
23. "Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Mt 22:37-40
24. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become *as* sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." 1Co 13:1-3
25. "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." Ro 1:21
26. "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" La 3:39
27. "Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest." Re 15:4

28. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Is 53:6
29. "And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever." Ge 3:22
30. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Mi 6:8
31. "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: lest the LORD see *it*, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him." Pr 24:17-18
- "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" Ez 33:11
32. "For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself." Ga 6:3
33. "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Re 3:16
34. "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him also *that is* of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." Is 57:15
35. "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day *is* with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." 2Pe 3:8
- See Appendix for further detail here
36. "To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from

mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, *and* be clear when thou judgest.” Ps 51:1-4

This text implies that every sin is first and foremost a sin against God.

37. “These six *things* doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness *that* speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.” Pr 6:16-19
38. “And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.” Lk 16:15
39. “Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.” Tit 1:15
40. “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.” 1Co 4:3
41. “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.” 1Co 4:5
42. “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.” Lk 6:37
43. “For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.” 2Co 10:12

44. “And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.” Lk 18:9
45. “Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.” 1Pe 2:17
46. “For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.” Is 66:2
47. “For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.” Ps 103:11
48. “And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.” Lk 18:13
49. “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” Lk 18:14
50. Timothy Keller, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, UK, 10Publishing, 1943, p.19
51. “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” Ep 3:8
52. “This *is* a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” 1Ti 1:15
53. “(For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end *is* destruction, whose God *is their* belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame, who mind earthly things.)” Php 3:18-19
54. “And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things *which belong* unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.” Lk 19:41-42

55. "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." Lk 17:10
56. "I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, *and* I shall behold his righteousness." Mi 7:9
57. "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ." Php 1:6
58. "But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and *to* the evil." Lk 6:35
59. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."  
Ro 5:8
60. "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:" Ep 4:31
61. "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Ep 5:20
62. "Who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: for there is no respect of persons with God." Ro 2:6-11



63. "Also on the tenth *day* of this seventh month *there shall be* a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD." Le 23:27
64. "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up." Ja 4:9-10
65. "That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." Ro 5:21
66. "And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth." Mi 5:4
67. "But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night." Ps 1:2
68. "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Ps 119:18
69. "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." 1Pe 1:8
70. "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath." Ep 4:26
71. "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?" 2Co 11:29
- "And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour." Ac 16:18
72. "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ." Ep 4:15
73. "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat." 1Co 5:11
74. "And others save with fear, pulling *them* out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." Jud 23

75. “For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things *pertaining* to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.” He 5:1-2
76. “Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment. Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous. That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.” De 16:18-20
77. “But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for *your* pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the LORD'S flock is carried away captive.” Je 13:17
78. “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.” Re 4:11
79. “Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.” He 13:9
80. “I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.” 2Co 12:11
81. “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” 1Pe 1:7
82. “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” 2Ti 1:7
83. “*But* to the saints that *are* in the earth, and *to* the excellent, in whom *is* all my delight.” Ps 16:3
84. “For I *mean* not that other men be eased, and ye burdened.” 2Co 8:13

85. "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy." 1Ti 6:17
86. "That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." 2Th 1:12
87. "But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." 2Co 10:17
88. "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." 1Pe 5:5
- "But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." Ja 4:6
89. "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." 2Co 12:9
90. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance.
91. "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." He 12:28
92. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Mt 11:29-30
93. "By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honor, and life." Pr 22:4
94. "Good understanding giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard." Pr 13:15

## Objections

Well, perhaps this is wholesome and true, and perhaps it is not. It is easy for us to reason our way into a place of falsehood, darkness and lies, further deceiving ourselves and those about us. Our reasoning may be faulty, or biased; we might be blind. How do we minimize the chances of being deceived, if not in carefully considering all reasonable objections to our claims in their strongest possible form, and answering each one with diligence and integrity from the Word, as well as we can?

In other words, each of us individually esteeming ourselves to be the worst sinner who has ever lived raises some very difficult and penetrating questions.

## Presumption

Perhaps the strongest objection we encounter when claiming any measure of humility is that we can never be entirely free of pride – since that implies perfection – and we cannot be perfectly objective judges of our own hearts, so how can we claim to be free of pride at all, or to have obtained any measure of humility, without being presumptuous and arrogant?<sup>1</sup>

Though this objection may seem reasonable at first, it directly contradicts the overt behavior of the apostle Paul, who, in his last visit with the Ephesian church, reminded the disciples (emphasis mine), “Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord **with all humility of mind**, and with many tears, and temptations.” (Act 20:18b-19a) Through his example here, we can affirm that Paul knew what humility was, that he knew he was humble to a significant degree, such that he could point to himself an example for others to emulate, and that he was unashamed to tell others about this when it was helpful to them.

To further illustrate how this might be reasonable, consider the concept of physical health; no one is perfectly healthy; no one ever could be. But it makes no sense then to just ignore the concept of health, or to neglect to pursue a healthy lifestyle, or to refuse to admit that we are doing so and becoming healthier as a result. Health, like humility, is very complex, very personal, and on a spectrum. The key is in defining what we mean by health, and finding an objective way to begin to detect and measure progress within ourselves. Once we do this, whether in the physical realm or the spiritual, we can begin to work at it, given our personal frame and disposition, so that we can grow and improve in this area of our lives.

Similarly, Paul always knew he was imperfect,<sup>2</sup> but he also knew he was a godly example for others to consider.<sup>3</sup> While we will never be perfectly humble, in either its vertical or horizontal dimensions, if we have identified what humility is and how to obtain more of it, we should eventually be able to see that we have attained some measure of humility, that we are more humble than we used to be, and know how to ensure that we are always becoming more and more humble. At some point we should also be able to encourage others to follow our example, so they too can be humble and closer to God.

But there is certainly a kind of unexpected paradox that awaits us here: as we grow in humility, we will likely find that we have been exalting ourselves much, much more than we had thought all along, and in ways we had not even noticed before.<sup>4</sup> The holier we become, the greater sense we will have of our own, innate depravity. But this is not inconsistent with perceiving that we are indeed growing in holiness. A blind man cannot see his own filthiness; the more light we have, and the more healing our eyes receive, the more of our own corruption we are able to detect. As God takes the blinders off, more and more we will realize how dreadfully sinful we actually are,<sup>5</sup> while at the same time thankfully aware that we have never been holier than we are right now.

We will certainly always have room to grow in every area of our lives, and the more we grow the more we may realize how desperately far we have to go, but we should be also able to perceive that we have been truly growing, that we are not where we once were, especially in this area of humility, and that we are continuing ever forward in our journey after godliness.

## **Inaccuracy**

Another obvious objection is that living out this horizontal dimension of humility, esteeming ourselves to be the chief of sinners, implies some form of inaccuracy. Clearly, we cannot all be correct in our estimation of ourselves, that we are each the very worst sinner who has ever lived; only one person can actually **be** the worst, and this distinction appears to have been claimed by Paul the Apostle in Scripture itself,<sup>6</sup> so how can God expect this same behavior of every single one of us?<sup>7</sup>

Again, God is not asking us to **conclude** anything about ourselves, making a final judgment about our own moral condition, or that of any other. As we have already noted, He actually tells us **not** to do this.<sup>8</sup>

What our LORD is doing at present, while we remain ignorant of His ultimate moral evaluation of all men, is telling us to take a non-presumptuous posture. Apart from an ability to conduct precise moral evaluations, we are not to exalt ourselves in comparison with others; we are to consider that we might actually be ranked last in the end.<sup>9</sup> We allow this possibility to impact our estimation of ourselves, and leave it to God to correct us if we are wrong, rather than being corrected in any other posture.<sup>10</sup> The alternative to inaccuracy in this case is arrogance and presumption, which is intolerable.<sup>11</sup> Inaccuracy is only a concern when rooted in carelessness and indifference, which is not our context.

So, Paul is answering correctly for himself here: he was, in his own estimation, likely the most wicked person who had ever lived. He bids us follow his example. There truly is only one correct answer here, yet each person must rightly answer it both uniquely and identically: “It is I.”

## **Dynamics**

Even if inaccuracy is permitted here, very difficult questions remain unanswered. How does this actually work? What are the practical dynamics of humility as we apply this in our daily lives?

For example, while esteeming ourselves to be the worst sinner ever, how then can any of us actually *be* good?<sup>12</sup> How do we explain any apparent goodness within ourselves or others? What is the root cause of this goodness? How can we properly account for it and yet remain humble?

The answer here is perhaps more straightforward than one might think: only God is good;<sup>13</sup> without Him we are totally depraved, incapable of any goodness on our own.<sup>14</sup> Even so, God is absolutely sovereign in the human heart,<sup>15</sup> and is Himself our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification and redemption.<sup>16</sup> We are His workmanship, created in Christ unto good works, which God has already ordained for us to walk in.<sup>17</sup> This is not merely positional, it is practical: any goodness in us is the work of God, moving in and through us according to His pleasure.<sup>18</sup>

Appealing to the sovereignty of God to resolve this is not a strained bit of theology, but perfectly natural; we know instinctively that God can prevent us from doing evil, which means causing some degree of goodness in us. This instinct forms the basis of perhaps the most common complaint from unbelievers against God: He allows the wicked to do evil when He could prevent it. And all our bitterness similarly reveals this instinct, being essentially a complaint that God has allowed others to harm us when He could have protected us. And our prayers all show us the same, being chock full of

this notion; it is impossible to pray consistently as we ought in any other way,<sup>19</sup> as if God is unable to move the hearts of men according to His will.

Understanding the sovereignty of God in our lives enables us to acknowledge and appreciate goodness within us while we consider ourselves incapable of producing this goodness on our own. Even so, we are producing it, the fruit of our hearts; we are doing it, and He is pleased in this.<sup>20</sup> In this mysterious mingling of the human and divine,<sup>21</sup> Christ in us,<sup>22</sup> we can actually **be** good without exalting ourselves above anyone else, considering that without God's enabling grace we would likely be the worst sinner who ever lived. This is, in fact, the law of faith.<sup>23</sup>

## **Appearances**

All theological reasoning aside, perhaps the most imposing problem with our definition of humility is, as we have already observed, our personal experience: what we observe in ourselves and others seems to contradict it; we do not actually **appear** to be the worst sinner ever. There are those about us who are, by all appearances, committed to hating God, mocking Him, grieving Him at every turn, and enjoying the company of those who do.<sup>24</sup> How can we esteem ourselves to be the worst when we do not experience this as a reality in our daily lives, as we are seeking God with our whole heart and seeing the fruit of the Spirit on display in ourselves as we live for Him each day?

Our answer here is inevitably the same, since the question is essentially the same, simply moving us from theory to experience. Paul answers again when he says, "By the grace of God, I am what I am."<sup>25</sup> It is the restraining grace of God which keeps us back from presumptuous sin,<sup>26</sup> and the enabling grace of God which moves in us to be good, to do the right thing in the right way;<sup>27</sup> this is our common experience.



We must also remember that we really have no idea how God is going to measure sinfulness among us. We tend to rank sins based on how they affect ourselves and those we love; in other words, we have a self-centered view of sin. But it would not be unreasonable for God to assess sins directly against Himself more severely than those against our neighbor, any willful sins worse than sins of ignorance, and failure to love Him supremely as the worst of all, being a violation of the greatest commandment. We simply do not think this way when we are evaluating sin, so we may very well be surprised when we see how God lays it all out for us. One day, He certainly will, and it should move us to holy trembling.<sup>28</sup>

Further, in the midst of this earthly sojourn, no one knows the depravity of their own heart;<sup>29</sup> God has not yet given anyone up to fully pursue their own way,<sup>30</sup> so no one yet has been totally unrestrained in their sinfulness.<sup>31</sup> Since we are all uniquely designed by God, with unique potentials for good and evil, we have no idea who among us would actually be the worst if God were to totally let us go our own way. Would it be unreasonable in the end for God to evaluate us based on what we would have done had He not intervened and kept us from doing it? Why not? It is certainly a just assessment of our own nature. Perhaps it is not such a stretch then for us to think similarly in our own case, as a way of esteeming others better than ourselves.

And God must not merely restrain us from evil in order for us to be good, He must also enable us to do the right thing in the right way for the right reason.<sup>32</sup> Our sufficiency in living a righteous life is thus ultimately in the power of God and not in ourselves.<sup>33</sup> Without Christ, we can do nothing worth doing.<sup>34</sup>

With this understanding we can be humble according to our definition, trying to honor and obey God as well as we are able, while acknowledging that without God restraining and enabling us, we would

very likely be doing worse than everyone else (whom God is also restraining in some fashion),<sup>35</sup> that we would be willfully, flagrantly and maliciously breaking God's commands, and exalting ourselves against Him and others as a manner of life. Furthermore, we can assert without hesitation that appearances can be deceiving; *motives* are what God measures,<sup>36</sup> and we cannot see another's heart, or even our own very clearly.<sup>37</sup>

## **Pure Evil**

A reasonable objection to our horizontal definition of humility, which has been crafted under the assumption of a common moral framework, considers one so given to evil they have entirely divorced their sense of significance or importance from any notion of self-righteousness, such that they are disdainful or rejecting the very concept of goodness itself. This is perhaps Lucifer, lifting himself up against God with no interest in or pretense of ever being good, having lost any capacity to feel shame. Here, perfect wickedness qualifies as perfect humility in the horizontal dimension: esteeming all others morally superior while unreservedly pursuing absolute moral depravity.

In this case, we must observe that the vertical component of our definition: *purposing to live independently of and/or contrary to God*,<sup>38</sup> which is the most intuitive aspect of pride, is certainly essential for us in identifying it, and emphasizes the appropriateness of the corresponding vertical dimension of humility: depending entirely upon and submitting completely to God, seeking to fully align with Him.<sup>39</sup>

This objection tends to reinforce the fact that robust definitions for humility and pride must be multi-dimensional; we need both aspects of each definition to be complete. Including only the vertical dimension is not nearly as useful in itself since, in the presence of so many kinds of entrenched deceptions about the nature of God and Man,<sup>40</sup> it does not sufficiently expose our pride.

## **Pure Holiness**

Similarly, another reasonable objection to our horizontal definition of humility, crafted as it is in the context of sin, considers the humility of Christ, Who never sinned. How can Christ be perfectly holy, and also perfectly humble? He cannot esteem Himself to be the worst sinner who ever lived, for sin itself is strange to Him.

Again, as in last objection, the vertical dimension of our definition rescues us: Christ, being God and equal to God, did not exalt Himself before His Father, but submitted to His Father's will, took upon Himself the form of a servant, was made in the likeness of sinful men, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross.<sup>41</sup> In this sense He is meek and lowly in heart, even as He is infinitely majestic, powerful and glorious.<sup>42</sup> And in His humility, He is our example, and bids us follow.<sup>43</sup>

Christ also shows us the inherent interdependence of the two dimensions of humility: in submitting to and obeying God we do not derive our significance or importance from our role or position, and easily find God's estimation of greatness in serving others<sup>44</sup> as He serves us.<sup>45</sup>

And, again, this corner case does not justify abandoning the compound definition we have chosen for a more conventional, but potentially less useful one. Utter submission to God must be central in our concept of humility, yet when our context is a sinful soul, so must esteeming others better than ourselves, for there can be no true humility, a lack of self-exaltation, without both.

## **Good Pride**

Our English word Pride has alternate meanings which might be thought of as virtues, relating to feelings of appreciation derived from the appearance of excellence or honor. Being grateful and thankful that we have performed well, and pleased someone whom we intended to please, or a sense

of dignity and honor in being associated others in a society known for excellence and moral virtue, is not in itself, as many have observed, a sin.<sup>46</sup>

Here, in order to accommodate the inherent frailties of language, we must allow for this word *pride* to have multiple kinds of definitions which are significantly different, and understand what is intended from context. The opposing concept here would be *embarrassment*, rather than *humility*. While these concepts have some similarities, they are certainly different enough to warrant our clear differentiation between them.

### **Inappropriateness**

It is also easily argued that humility itself is not a topic we should study, not a virtue we should pursue, since the very pursuit of humility is (it is assumed) self-focused, and would itself invariably lead us to the pride of being humble.

This would be true if merely thinking we possessed some degree of knowledge or virtue implied that we must proud about it, that we must exalt ourselves through having this knowledge or virtue. Yet this would apply to any kind of knowledge, or any virtue at all. And if this were the case, we could never knowingly and rightly have any virtue or knowledge of any kind, and it would be a sin to pursue any form knowledge or goodness. When carried to fullness, the command to humble ourselves implies seeking total ignorance and the absence of all virtue. If there were ever a senseless, self-destructive posture, I suppose it would be this one.

But we cannot simply draw unnecessary inferences at our whim, especially on concepts of this immense importance; it is the devil's work to suggest nonsense to us, and our work in God to resist him.<sup>47</sup> That pride is not implied in having knowledge or virtue is evident in Scripture. Any inference

or deduction here which is inconsistent with godliness, as painted by God for us in His Word, must be rejected.<sup>48</sup>

Even so, we can learn much from this objection that is valuable: we should never allow ourselves to become the least bit puffed up or exalted in our understanding of humility, or of anything else. Neither should we exalt ourselves as we increase in the virtues, having come to understand and diligently pursue them. Uncovering truth is merely another way of ridding ourselves of lies, and acting in the truth is how we obey God and break loose from the strongholds of the enemy; we must ever be about cleansing our souls of the poison of deception and our lives from its corruption.

It is a cause for thanksgiving when we finally begin to rightly understand anything at all,<sup>49</sup> and – while we need not always be doubting ourselves -- we can and should always retain a sense of incompleteness in our knowledge,<sup>50</sup> looking at every criticism and challenge as a means to deepen our apprehension, appreciation and application of truth.

### **Infinite Like God?**

Another technical objection we might face is that if we are each infinitely valuable and important to God, are we then just as important as God? Since there can't be anything more important than what is infinitely important, does this elevate us to the place of God, and thus invalidate the notion of everyone being infinitely valuable to God, and break our proposed paradigm?

Actually, using mathematics to illustrate, there are different kinds, degrees and densities of infinity. Human significance might be like counting the natural numbers: {1, 2, 3 ...}, which go on forever. Yet between any two of these are an infinite number of fractions to count, and between any two of these fractions, infinitely many more. And all these values can be represented as points within a single

line, but then we might consider a plane comprising an infinite number of lines, and 3-D space with an infinite number of planes, and so on. In fact, an infinite number of mathematical dimensions exist, and an infinity of infinities within each of them.

So, though we are indeed each infinitely valuable, God is infinitely infinite in His supremacy and glory, incomparable in His majesty, perfection and honor. His value and significance so immensely exceeds our own that we are as absolutely nothing before Him. Failing to begin to grasp the infinitude of God, not seeing ourselves as entirely insignificant in comparison with Him,<sup>51</sup> not giving Him the place of absolute honor in our lives, opens the door to pride.<sup>52</sup>

## **Unhealthiness**

Finally, it is easy to anticipate a number of abuses of this concept which would be destructive to mental and emotional health. Using our innate moral poverty as an excuse to sin,<sup>53</sup> or as fuel for self-hatred or neglect, or to be less than our very best selves, is not implied in humility.<sup>54</sup>

Being poor in spirit, recognizing our intrinsic moral poverty, identifies the saints,<sup>55</sup> but we need not be timid, ashamed, or feel vulnerable in esteeming ourselves the worst sinner ever, if this worst is, in fact, the best we can offer.<sup>56</sup> While we do not depend upon our own righteousness to be God's children,<sup>57</sup> we do try to please our Father to enjoy fellowship with Him.<sup>58</sup> It is in not even trying,<sup>59</sup> in neglecting to abide in Him, that we find shame before Him.<sup>60</sup>

## **End Notes**

1. "Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" Pr 20:9

2. “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Php 3:13-14
3. “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.” Php 3:17
4. “Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.” Is 6:5
5. “Wherefore I abhor *myself*, and repent in dust and ashes.” Job 42:6
6. “This *is* a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” 1Ti 1:15
7. “Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.” Php 4:9

Here, Paul encourages Timothy, and thus all believers everywhere, to follow Paul’s consistent pattern of life, including his habit of viewing himself the foremost, most guilty and culpable of sinners.

8. “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.” 1Co 4:5
9. “Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men: for better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither; than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen.” Pr 25:6-7
10. “And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, ‘When thou art bidden of any *man* to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honorable man than thou be bidden of him; and he that bade

thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” Lk 14:7-11

11. “Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.” Ps 19:13
12. “For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.” Ac 11:24
13. “And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *there is none good but one, that is, God.*” Mk 10:18
14. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.” Je 13:23
15. “But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to *the image of Baal.*” Ro 11:4
16. “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” 1Co 1:30-31
17. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Ep 2:10
18. “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure.” Php 2:13
19. “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” Php 4:6



20. "Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more."  
1Th 4:1
21. "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." 1Ti 3:16
22. "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." Col 1:27
23. "Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith." Ro 3:27
24. "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them." Ro 1:32
25. "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." 1Co 15:10
26. "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." Ps 19:13
27. "Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight." Ps 119:35
28. "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Php 2:12
29. "The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Je 17:9
30. "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves." Ro 1:24

31. “For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth *will let*, until he be taken out of the way.” 2Th 2:7
32. “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.” Eze 36:26-27
33. “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency *is* of God.” 2Co 3:5
34. “I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.” Jn 15:5
35. “And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.” Re 6:4
- God does not here incite war among men, all He does is “take peace,” remove the restraint of His common grace which dampens their hatred for Himself and each other and so enables civil discourse in hearts at war with the universe.
36. “Lest the avenger of the blood pursue the slayer, while his heart is hot, and overtake him, because the way is long, and slay him; whereas he *was* not worthy of death, inasmuch as he hated him not in time past.” De 19:6
- Motive makes all the difference between a sin worth of death and an accident not punishable by law.
37. “For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.” 1Co 4:4

38. “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.” Ps 10:4
39. “But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” Ja 4:6-7
40. “They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.” Jn 16:2
41. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Php 2:5-8
42. “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” Mt 11:29
43. “Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;” He 1:3
44. “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.” Mt 23:11
45. “If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.” Jn 13:14-15
46. “Pleasure in being praised is not pride. ... Very often, ‘Is proud of’ means ‘has a warm-hearted admiration for.’ Such admiration is, of course, very far from being a sin.” C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York, Macmillan, 1943, p.97-98
- “For if I have boasted any thing to him of you, I am not ashamed; but as we spake all things to you in truth, even so our boasting, which I made before Titus, is found a truth.” 2Co 7:14

47. "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Ja 4:7
48. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Is 8:20
49. "I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil." Ps 119:162  
 "Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works." Ps 119:27
50. "And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." 1Co 8:2
51. "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" Da 4:35
52. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." Ro 1:20  
 Failing to give God His rightful place in our lives, being unthankful, are described here as gateway sins leading to all other sins.
53. "And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just." Ro 3:8
54. "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which

passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.” Ep 3:14-21

55. “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Mt 5:2

See also Appendix II

56. “Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, *then* have we confidence toward God.” 1Jn 3:21

57. “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” Ro 10:4

58. “Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.” 2Co 5:9

59. “And another came, saying, Lord, behold, *here is* thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: for I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow. And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, *thou* wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury? And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give *it* to him that hath ten pounds. (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.) For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him.” Lk 19:20-26

60. “And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.” 1Jn 2:28

## Application

Yes, humility changes everything. As we start out with our pride corrupting every thought, word and deed,<sup>1</sup> so our growth in humility is equivalent to purifying all that we do.

Pride was evidently the first sin,<sup>2</sup> appearing in Lucifer in the dawn of Creation, and in the end of this age, rather than humble themselves and submit to Him,<sup>3</sup> it is the pride of men that moves them to call to mountains and rocks to hide them from the face of Him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.<sup>4</sup> And in the short expanse of now between the beginning and the end, it is the pride of life, the alienating ourselves from God, living independently of Him, making up moral law as we go, exalting the opinions of men above the revelation of God, caring more about what people think than what God says, this is not of the Father, but of the world.<sup>5</sup> Living in the pride of life, looking for honor from men rather than from God, keeps us from faith in God.<sup>6</sup>

So, our humility or pride will be evident in all our actions, words and thoughts, every reaction and emotion is oriented by and in a tendency toward one or the other; there is nothing outside this scope or concern.

And to the degree pride is present in our hearts, it will also appear in our faces, and be an abomination to God; He hates it.<sup>7</sup>

So, as we examine our hearts, do we, in any sense at all, wish to live independently of God? Are we averse to the fact that we are utterly and always dependent upon Him for everything? Are we cleaving to Him,<sup>8</sup> adoring Him, enjoying Him, experiencing every moment of our lives with Him and in Him, His gift to us and ours to Him?<sup>9</sup> As the four beasts about God's throne are constantly occupied with Him,<sup>10</sup> so ought we to be ever mindful of God, abiding in Him,<sup>11</sup> delighting in Him, enjoying Him. This is our inheritance, our purpose, our destiny, why we are made; anything else is pride.

And do we, in any sense at all, take sin, the breaking of God's Law,<sup>12</sup> lightly or casually?<sup>13</sup> Are we doing our level best to live a balanced, wholesome, holy life in God?<sup>14</sup> Are there pet sins for which we make excuses, protecting and guarding darkness within our hearts,<sup>15</sup> thinking God doesn't mind, or that He

understands and makes exceptions for us?<sup>16</sup> Are we going where He would not go? Saying what He would not say? Doing what He would not do?<sup>17</sup> This is self-exaltation through willful sin;<sup>18</sup> it is uncharacteristic of God's children.<sup>19</sup>

And do we in the slightest way, even as we are doing our level best, think we have any right to the blessings of God? That we deserve His favor, protection or provision?<sup>20</sup> Like the Pharisee in Jesus' prime example, do we thank God we are better than others, **any** others? Or do we consistently pray as the publican, earnestly pleading to God to have mercy on us, acknowledging we fully deserve to be eternally destroyed?<sup>21</sup> Any other posture is a self-exalting one.

And in our families, do we consider our siblings and parents morally better than we are? As parents, do we esteem our children morally superior to ourselves? As husbands or wives, do we count our spouse, even an ex, to be (or have been) our better half? As friends, extended family, employees and bosses, customers and service providers, do we give others the benefit of the doubt, that they are very likely doing better than we would be if we were in their shoes and had their struggles to contend with? As church members, do we see ourselves as less than the least of all saints, that God likely sees more Christ-likeness in each of the other members of our congregation than He sees in us? As fellow citizens, do we feel compassion for those who appear to reject the biblical standard of morality? Do we weep for them as ignorant, self-deceived and lost,<sup>22</sup> thinking, "But for the grace of God, there go I?" Or do we despise them, smug in our self-righteousness, angry they are corrupting our society and culture, presuming we would never stoop to that kind of thing?

This spiritual self-sufficiency, this alienation from God, this tendency to willful sin, this smugness, this feeling of self-righteousness ... all of this self-exaltation -- it is the root of all evil. As C.S. Lewis rightly names it, *The Great Sin*;<sup>23</sup> it is the pernicious root of all our other iniquities.

In my own life, as I have discovered the essence of pride, I see so much more of it in my day-to-day life than I had ever thought possible. I had been viewing my ex-spouse

## End Notes

1. “And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Ge 6:5  
“Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:” Ep 2:2
2. “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! *how* art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.” Is 14:12-14
3. “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.” Ja 4:10
4. “And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” Re 6:15-17
5. “For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” 1Jn 2:16
6. “How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?” Jn 5:44



7. “These six *things* doth the LORD hate: yea, seven *are* an abomination unto him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness *that* speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.” Pr 6:16-19

A proud look must, by definition, be the appearance of our face when we are feeling pride; certainly it has many shades and facets, but God recognizes every dimension of it as enmity against Himself and others.

8. “For if ye shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, and to cleave unto him.” De 11:22
9. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” Ja 1:17
10. “And the four beasts had each of them six wings about *him*; and *they were* full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.” Re 4:8
11. “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.” Jn 15:4

“But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him. And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.” 1Jn 2:27-28

12. “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.” 1Jn 3:4

13. “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” 1Jn 3:9  
“The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.” Pr 8:13
14. “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” 2Co 7:1  
“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” Mt 5:48
15. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear *me*.” Ps 66:18  
“He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer *shall be* abomination.” Pr 28:9  
“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” Re 3:20
16. “These *things* hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether *such an one* as thyself: *but* I will reprove thee, and set *them* in order before thine eyes.” Ps 50:21
17. “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.” 1Pe 2:21
18. “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” Ja 4:17
19. “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” 1Jn 2:4
20. “But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” Is 64:6
21. “And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I

give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” Lk 18:9-14

22. “For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.” He 5:1-2

23. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York, Macmillan, 1943, p.94

## How To

In answering common objections to our definition of humility, we might become convinced we are correct, or at least on the right track. And considering that this deeply affects every area of our lives, impacting and coloring every thought, word, and deed, it seems to be important, critical, something we must address. In its vertical dimension pride harms our relationship with God and grieves Him deeply, and in the horizontal dimension our pride pits us against our brothers and sisters in our efforts to disvalue them. Yet what good is all this insight unless we give ourselves to pursuing humility, to actually becoming humble? How should we go about it? What would that look like?

Firstly, training our souls in holiness is a mysterious work of the human and divine; God commands us to do things that require His power,<sup>1</sup> and then equips us by His spirit as we commit to doing what only He can do. It is impossible for Peter to walk on water, yet Jesus invites him to come.<sup>2</sup> But then Christ doesn't step out of the boat for Peter: Peter must will to do this, and try to obey Him.

God enables through His commands: we must seek His aid, and then begin to do what we can to walk it out as if He is already helping us. We cannot find humility on our own, but find it we must; no alternative is acceptable.

Secondly, we should acknowledge that we each strive for goals in different ways, and developing new habits takes time, especially habits of the mind. We must be creative, persistent, and prayerful; each of us may find a different set of tools to be helpful, and this may vary over time as we grow in Christ. Every journey will look different, but there will be a common thread.

Growing in humility requires: [1] prayerful awareness of how our own hearts are responding, both to God, to the behavior of others, and to life in general,<sup>3</sup> and [2] asking God to help us see when any of

our attitudes, feelings and/or motives are rooted in enmity against Him, or in any kind of presumptuous moral judgment.<sup>4</sup> As we note any trace of pride within, we then [3] ask God to help us reject the way of lying and believe the truth,<sup>5</sup> that He would restrain us<sup>6</sup> and give us repentance and deliverance.<sup>7</sup>

Clearly, this is the work of God, not Man: we cannot deliver ourselves from pride in our own strength; God must help us. But there are things we can do to place ourselves at the wellspring of grace.<sup>8</sup>

## **Become Aware**

It is a labor to know ourselves, to become aware of what we are thinking and feeling as we are thinking and feeling.<sup>9</sup> This is an exercise in self-examination,<sup>10</sup> finding a sense of where we are so we can speak truth to ourselves and grow up more into Christ.<sup>11</sup>

Identifying ourselves might seem like a trivial undertaking, but it can actually be a daunting one. When something pops into my mind, am I always the source? Is that always me, my own heart and my own will, producing that thought or feeling or sensation? It is in our minds where we wrestle with the enemy, not against flesh and blood but against spiritual wickedness.<sup>12</sup> Call it spiritual warfare or whatever you like, not everything we think and feel is our own thought and feeling; learning to discern what is *me* and what is not, and to take responsibility only for me, and to resist what is not of me,<sup>13</sup> is an art we must all learn. It will certainly be harder for some than for others, and it is definitely an adventure, with many pitfalls, dangers and surprises along the way. We do not want to make this journey alone; we need like-minded company.

Once we understand the basics of self-awareness, the rest is simply prayer, practice and inviting others in trusted community to check in with us and ask us how we are doing. Once we start becoming more

aware of our own reactions we can begin to evaluate them in light of God's Way, asking Him to reveal Himself to us.<sup>14</sup>

## **Pray for Insight**

The purpose of self-awareness is not self-absorption or unhealthy self-focus, but to check ourselves with God's perfection,<sup>15</sup> the nature of Christ revealed in His Word by His Spirit. We are to compare every thought and emotion with holiness, with God's Law, and seek to align ourselves with His expectation rather than Man's. This we do imperfectly, of course, but as we learn we grow, and God progressively reveals His righteousness to us, moving us from one degree of faith to another in the power of God.<sup>16</sup> As we meditate on God's Word, He reveals Himself and His ways to us,<sup>17</sup> continually revealing new facets of and insights into holiness.<sup>18</sup> It is the life-journey of faith.

Stating the obvious, any tinge of resentment or bitterness toward God, any sense of resistance towards Him or His way, any rebellion or disrespect, is perhaps the most easily identifiable manifestation of pride and must have no place in us. Each of these dispositions and emotions are ways of exalting ourselves before God, a claim that we deserve better, accusing Him of not knowing what He is doing, or of not being good, wise and perfectly just. Any response not rooted in thankfulness is pride,<sup>19</sup> overtly trampling underfoot the Son of God.<sup>20</sup>

And any sin we are openly tolerating in our lives must go at once: there is no room in humility for rebellion: for willful, persistent sin. We will never be perfect, of course, so we are not requiring sinless perfection of ourselves, but God's children cannot live in rebellion against their Father as a manner of life.<sup>21</sup>

That said, we must be diligent, especially at this level of commitment, to carefully distinguish between the teachings and impositions of Man, and the righteous commands of God. Divine commands are not burdensome and grievous,<sup>22</sup> but those of Man tend to be.<sup>23</sup> God's Law is perfect as it is given,<sup>24</sup> so following it tends to life, health, balance and blessing.<sup>25</sup> He has commanded us to neither add to it nor take away from it;<sup>26</sup> doing so is harmful to us all, any alteration of it at all being a step away from righteousness, godliness and wholesomeness. To the law and to the testimony: that which is not according to the Word is darkness;<sup>27</sup> get chapter and verse for anything our churches or culture calls a sin. God's Law is the called the Law of liberty for a reason.<sup>28</sup>

Again, stating the obvious, in our horizontal concerns, any disdain, scorn or contempt for another,<sup>29</sup> feeling they are unimportant or insignificant, or beneath us in any way at all, is also an easily identifiable manifestation of pride, and must be confronted at once. This is as plain a violation of the gospel as there can be;<sup>30</sup> treat any hint of it like poison in the soul.<sup>31</sup>

It is particularly important to closely examine our hearts as we respond to those who appear to be sinning, whether in fact or fiction. Our immediate, visceral reaction in thoughts, feelings and sensations reveal what lies or truths are operating within us. Do we feel compassion and sorrow welling up within our hearts,<sup>32</sup> or disdain, contempt or indignation? Do we feel bitterness and resentment when they appear to get away with evil and are not immediately punished?<sup>33</sup> Or are we thankful that God may be showing them patience and mercy, and praying for their healing?<sup>34</sup> Is there any pleasure at all in seeing others missing the mark? Does this feed any sense of superiority within us? Can we esteem these souls to be morally superior to ourselves, more worthy of honor, and grieve over their sin, agreeing that we would probably be doing worse if we were in their shoes?

Another common evidence of pride is a contentious spirit: this only comes through pride.<sup>35</sup> When intense, angry emotions well up within us, moving us to defend ourselves from accusation, or to contend with others who we feel have disrespected us or those we love, this springs from a desire to devalue others, triggered as we feel threatened by their attempts to abuse or devalue us. It is an irrational conflict, in which each party dismisses the gospel-centric valuing of God for the carnal evaluation of the other, both souls exuding the pride of life. Such conflict lacks compassion, kindness, and benevolence, being full of self.

Dissenting from wrongful doctrine, appealing to those who are wronging us or others, protecting ourselves, this need not spring from a contentious spirit; we can oppose the actions of others without devaluing them; we can do this from a posture of love and humility. It is when we are exalting ourselves in the process that we are operating in a contentious spirit, trying to put others down, is contrary to His Spirit.<sup>36</sup> Those who indulge themselves in such contention as a manner of life shall not inherit the kingdom of God.<sup>37</sup>

We must also ever beware of any tendency to feel either threatened or validated in the approval or disapproval of others, to be wounded by the fiery darts they throw at us,<sup>38</sup> or to feel overly pleased and exalted in their acceptance and praise.<sup>39</sup> Let opinions be such as they are, the judgments of fallen souls, a very small thing to us.<sup>40</sup> Giving them too much weight is itself the pride of life, and also the fear of Man, elevating the broken estimations of men above God's.<sup>41</sup>

We must also guard against being puffed up through any knowledge, talents, skills or abilities we have, whether natural or acquired through study and practice.<sup>42</sup> This is the competitive nature of pride, always looking to one-up our neighbor, rather than enjoying the gifts of excellence in others as much as in ourselves. Any differences between us and others at this level are gifts, unearned and



undeserved,<sup>43</sup> for even the desire, opportunity and ability to develop ourselves comes from the grace of God.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, feeling superior to others in any way due to our calling, our works or our service is to deny the ultimate source of all goodness within us.<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, we must not be respecters of persons,<sup>46</sup> valuing the powerful, the wealthy, the famous, the beautiful, the brilliant, any more than anyone else. Humility is loving others as they are, recognizing their infinite value, neither fawning over nor despising any other soul.

Finally, any sense of resentment, bitterness, vengeance, or satisfaction in seeing justice served, other than as a vindication of God and for His sole pleasure, is a failure to recognize that were it not for Him, we would certainly deserve worse.

## **Repent**

Observing pride in our hearts, minds, emotions and thoughts is a necessary first step, but observing pride does not root it out. We must deal with the root cause, not merely detect its presence.

The root cause of pride in us is the lie, the wrong beliefs about the nature of God and Man operating within and through us. In other words, the root cause of pride is poor theology, and it is rooted out through repentance, a change of thinking, aligning with God's perspective about Himself and ourselves.

Our definition of humility requires us to acknowledge our inability to conduct our lives in a way that is even remotely acceptable to God without His aid; humility implies that we consider ourselves altogether incapable of doing this as well as others. This posture precludes any form of self-dependence, yet depending on ourselves rather than God alone is woven into much of our theology today. Should we then reject our definition of humility because we cannot find any way to reconcile it

with much of our current thinking, or should we instead acknowledge this insight as a powerful challenge to our theology, and an incentive to explore further?

As we observe prideful reactions and presumption operating within, we are to continually present the truth of God's Word to our minds and souls, asking God to give us repentance and to quicken us in His Word.<sup>47</sup> It is like wearing down a rough stone with a constant drip, washing away the cutting hardness of our hearts with the water of His Word.<sup>48</sup> It is a continual process of re-calibrating, re-aligning and renewing.<sup>49</sup>

To walk this out consistently as a manner of life, we must work this definition of humility into our thinking about God and ourselves at every level: worship, sin, election, salvation, faith, justification, sanctification, sovereignty, free will, eternal security, and how God works in our hearts to accomplish His will -- it must all be reconciled with humility. We must internalize God's revelation of these concepts on every level, completely realigning and rewiring our minds and hearts to conform to His truth. Our entire world view may need to be reoriented, rebuilt, energized by the Spirit and the Word. Every lie, one at a time, must go; we cannot hold any of them dearly, or we will stunt our growth.

In other words, if we are very likely, even on our very best day, the worst of the worst, how can we entertain any dependence upon our own personal moral effort to gain acceptance with God? How can we account for our love for Him, and for our desire to please Him, apart from His choosing us,<sup>50</sup> or how can we hope to succeed in our spiritual journey unless He preserves us to the very end?<sup>51</sup> Working these concepts throughout our theological understanding is part of this rewiring process.

To put it another way, if God is respecting our free will, as so many believe, having provided us a way of salvation, calling us to follow Him, and leaving the rest up to us, how can we esteem everyone else morally superior to ourselves? If at our very best we might indeed be counted worse than those who

do not appear to be seeking God at all, how can we ever hope to be saved? If we are to consider ourselves to be incapable of righteousness apart from God, how can we tolerate a theology which requires us to ultimately depend on our own ability or goodness? If God requires some basic goodness from us to enter His kingdom, over and above what He Himself is willing to provide for us, and if we truly esteem everyone else morally better than we are, how can we ever entertain any hope of eternal life?

Apart from acknowledging our own total depravity and God's absolute sovereignty, what sense does it make to esteem ourselves to be the worst of sinners? If we cannot ask God to make us good,<sup>52</sup> believing He is both able and willing, and that this is our only hope of ever being good, and our only explanation when we *are* good, how can we avoid all forms of self-exaltation? If we cannot acknowledge any goodness within us as entirely His work of grace and not our own doing, how can we possibly be humble?

And what is our only alternative? Cling to a theology requiring self-exaltation? That only makes sense if we are morally superior to those who do not belong to our particular persuasion, or who do not measure up to our own moral standard? And come to Christ at last in this, exalting ourselves in His presence, only to be cast away, found in the end to be workers of iniquity?<sup>53</sup>

If we neglect to refine their theology, what we really believe, our incorrect thinking about ourselves and God will continue to blind us to our own pride, and keep us alienated from the life of God.<sup>54</sup>

This is, in fact, our dilemma: we are either exalting ourselves to some degree through our beliefs about ourselves and God, or we are not. There is no middle ground. What is at stake here is our entire world view: it is everything.

To be humble we must continually remind ourselves that JEHOVAH our God is good and His ways are good; He is ever knocking on the door of our hearts to commune with us;<sup>55</sup> He places infinite value on every human being; He is willing to die for every single one of us, one at a time. Failing to abide in God, alienating ourselves from Him, thinking of ourselves as above God's Law, or more important or valuable than anyone else, to devalue them in any way, is essentially to deny these basic truths – and exalt ourselves.

We must also be continually aware that if God left us to ourselves, and withdrew His grace from us, there is no telling what we would do. Were it not for the irresistible restraining and enabling grace of God, there is no deed so low we would not pursue it.

## **End Notes**

1. “And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.” 2Pe 1:5-7
2. “And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.” Mt 14:29
3. “The spirit of man *is* the candle of the LORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly.” Pr 20:27
4. “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Ps 139:23-24
5. “Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously.” Ps 119:29

6. "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous *sins*; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." Ps 19:13
7. "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will." 2Ti 2:25-26
8. "In the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." Jn 7:37-38
9. "DALETH. My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word." Ps 119:25
10. "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup." 1Co 11:28
11. "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ."  
Ep 4:15
12. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Ep 6:12
13. "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Ja 4:7
14. "Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people." Ex 33:13  
"Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths." Ps 25:4  
"Teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies." Ps 27:11
15. "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." He 4:12
16. "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." Ro 1:17

17. "I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies *are* my meditation." Ps 119:99
18. "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Ps 119:18
19. "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." Ro 1:21
20. "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" He 10:29
21. "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.." 1Jn 3:10
22. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." 1Jn 5:3
23. "For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers." Mt 23:4
24. "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple." Ps 19:7
25. "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." Ja 1:25  
 "But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." Ps 1:2-3
26. "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you." De 4:2
27. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Is 8:20

28. “So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.” Ja 2:12
29. “Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies.” Ps 119:22
- “Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, *and* with the contempt of the proud.” Ps 123:4
30. “But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before *them* all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?” Ga 2:14
- There are many ways in which we can walk contrary to the truth of the Gospel; any consistent manner of life that is inconsistent with basic gospel truth disqualifies us. All our thoughts and motives must be aligned with the gospel in order to be walking with God.
- “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” 1Jn 1:5-7
31. “I hate *vain* thoughts: but thy law do I love.” Ps 119:113
32. “Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.” Ps 119:136
33. “Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning. If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me.” Ps 73:12-16
34. “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children

of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” Mt 5:44-45

35. “Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom.” Pr 13:10

36. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.” Ga 5:22-26

37. “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Ga 5:19-21

Note particularly the appearance of *strife*, *variance* and *emulations*: these are sins inherent in a contentious spirit, which identify us as unbelievers if we live in them. See also:

[ableever.net/wordpress/2016/10/02/variance](http://ableever.net/wordpress/2016/10/02/variance) and

[ableever.net/wordpress/2016/10/08/emulations](http://ableever.net/wordpress/2016/10/08/emulations)

38. “Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.” Ep 6:16.

39. “Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast *day*, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all *men*, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.” Jn 2:23-25

40. “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.” 1Co 4:3

41. “For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” Jn 12:43



“The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.” Pr  
29:25

“For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I  
should not be the servant of Christ.” Ga 1:10

42. “Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge  
puffeth up, but charity edifieth.” 1Co 8:1

43. “For who maketh thee to differ *from another*? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now  
if thou didst receive *it*, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received *it*?” 1Co 4:7

44. “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which *was bestowed* upon me was not in  
vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with  
me.” 1Co 15:10

45. “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of  
the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to  
do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom  
*be* glory for ever and ever. Amen.” He 13:20-21

46. “Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth  
blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous.” De 16:19

If we ought not apply different standards to different people in court, where it could mean the  
difference between life and death, and where we might be the most tempted to do so, certainly we  
should not do so in any common scenario of lesser import.

47. “This *is* my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me.” Ps 119:50

“I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me.” Ps 119:93

“It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they  
are spirit, and they are life.” Jn 6:63

48. “That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” Ep 5:26-27
- “For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” He 4:12
49. “And be renewed in the spirit of your mind.” Ep 4:23
- “The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD *are* right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD *is* pure, enlightening the eyes.” Ps 19:7-8
50. “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.” Ro 11:5-6
51. “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,” Jud 1:24
52. “Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight.” Ps 119:35
- “Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.” Ps 119:36
53. “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” Mt 7:22-23
54. “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: who being past

feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.”

Ep 4:18-20

55. “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” Re 3:20

“But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.” Ro 10:21

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” Mt 23:37

## Help for the Journey

In pursuing this fundamental transformation, our very definition of humility, in itself, moves us to seek the living Christ in others to help us in our pursuit of more humility. Esteeming others better than ourselves naturally moves us to seek advice and encouragement from other godly souls in our pursuit of God.

So, in seeking to grow in humility, it is essential to engage regularly with other God-fearing souls who are also pursuing holiness, and pray for each other in these things.<sup>1</sup> Share your victories and failures, and help each other with encouragement and exhortation.<sup>2</sup> Memorize and meditate on God's Law,<sup>3</sup> especially scriptures which reinforce godly thinking,<sup>4</sup> and quote them to yourself when you find your mind and heart misaligned with humility, praying for God to help you understand and believe,<sup>5</sup> and to make you go in the way of His commands.<sup>6</sup> Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling,<sup>7</sup> leaning on Him as intentionally as you can, every step of the way.

We might summarize our labor here the way God summarizes our entire duty in life: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil." (Ec 12:13-14) Whether our works are good or evil depends on our motivation, whether we are loving and humble in all that we do ... or not.

Clearly, this is not the work of few days, or even a few years, it is the journey of a lifetime. There will always be room to grow here, and we have our God to guide and help us at every turn.<sup>8</sup>

## End Notes

1. “Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard *it*, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.” Ma 3:16  
“How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.” 1Co 14:26
2. “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*. and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” He 10:25
3. “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.” Jos 1:8
4. “For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” Ro 8:6
5. “Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.” Ps 119:27
6. “Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight.” Ps 119:35
7. “Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.” Ps 2:11
8. “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.” Jn 14:18  
“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” He 4:16

## Appendix I – Infinitude Magnifies Sin

In our analysis of the nature of pride, we consider the impact of exalting ourselves against God in light of the fact that God dwells outside of time. A key text to help us understand God’s nature here is: “But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day *is* with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” (2Pe 3:8) Let us carefully explore the implications of this special verse to establish this claim and its significance.

It is not often that God tells us to focus on a particular concept as one of utmost importance. Can we find another statement like this in our Bible: “Do not be without understanding in this one area?”

To be sure, there are certain truths we must not neglect, the nature of humility being one of several. Yet seldom, if ever, are we pointed directly and explicitly at a particular truth and told, “If you are going to understand anything at all, make sure you understand this,” like we are here.

So, let us ponder this fact, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years are as one day.

Let us try to imagine what it would be like ... God experiences a twenty-four hour day in the same way we would experience a millennium. He sees so much detail, such intricate relationships between things that we in our finiteness never notice. It is as if time stands still for Him; He can ponder and examine the most minute details with such thorough and complete consideration that time might as well be irrelevant. He is never in a hurry; He is never late; He is never rushed; He is never delayed; He is never surprised; He is never pressed for time to get things done. He never has to sit and plan something or figure anything out since He knows everything, all possibilities about every circumstance, what would have been if something else had occurred that did not, and everything this implies.

Nothing ever occurs to God. He never thinks of anything new; news never breaks with Him. Think of it ... what is time to an infinite Being? Imagine each second of our life being expanded out into four days, five hours, twenty-three minutes, and twenty seconds. Time would truly be at a stand-still, for all practical purposes.

We could stop here, but it would not be as much fun; when we start doing this kind of thing with time, a recursive process is implied: if a day is as a thousand years to God, and each of those thousand years has three hundred sixty-five (or so) days, then God experiences each one of these as a millennium, each of which has another 365,000 days, each of which is as another millennium to God, and ... and ... and... In other words, God experiences an infinity of time in the smallest time interval that we can imagine. “One day is with the Lord as a thousand years ...”

Now that we have sorted that out, we now reverse everything. A thousand years pass with God like a day does to us. Now, four days, five hours, 23 minutes and 20 seconds go whizzing by every second. Our lifespan is less than three hours. We are unable to engage with the particulars of our lives, but we notice the seasons of our lives are more apparent, the “big picture” is much clearer ... the broad view of earthly existence is more easily in focus. The whole plan of earthly history from beginning to end is compressed into just one week. But then ... 365,000 of these millennium days is just another compounded millennium to God, which feels just like another day to Him, of which there are 365,000 more compounded millennium days in another doubly-compounded millennium, which doubly-compounded millennium He experiences just like we do a day, which... which... In other words, the largest time span we can conceive of passes instantaneously with God. “A thousand years as one day ...”

Then there is that little word “and” in the middle of both of these wonders that joins them together somehow. If each of the above were only true by itself it would be difficult enough to grasp, but we are told that both are true for God! Now what shall we say? Shall we throw more numbers at it? Look at it sideways or upside down? Forcing these two together forces us outside of time altogether. God is evidently not bound by time the way we are. He is the infinite Being who created Time.

Now that we are on the subject ... what is time anyway? Take a minute and try to define it. Not so simple, is it? Try this for a definition: “duration as perceived by sequential experiences.” If that makes any sense, how would we relate it to God after considering Peter’s admonition? Does an infinite Being experience “time” at all? Is anything “sequential” with Him?

What does *duration* mean to Someone Who experiences a millennium every day and every day in a millennium, and “quadruply compounded” millenniums, and such? What is *time* to One who listens to the prayer of a sick child in Argentina, while simultaneously dealing with a screaming mother in the middle of childbirth in Scandinavia, while comforting a wounded soldier in Iraq, while holding the entire cosmos together like a gigantic clock one molecule at a time? Events need not line up for His attention; there need not be a queue of things for Him to notice; He need not manage events in sequence. He governs the universe in a simultaneous continuum of “AM”-ness.

Intricate details of the distant prehistoric past do not blur in His Mind, an unfathomable future of billions of millenniums does not evade His ever minute and clear inspection. All detail in the entire created universe — from the gentle waving of microscopic cilia in deep sea plankton, to the violent smashing of light in the black holes of the farthest astronomic nebula — not only in the present but in all past and future ages — all this detail is the subject of His immediate and untaxed — and unsequenced — attention. “The very hairs of your head are all numbered” ... and He did not need to



count them — He just knows! Cataclysmic events are intricately sequenced by Him simultaneously in galaxies above the sand of the sea shores in number, effortlessly and intimately: “... the stars, He calleth them all by their names.”

There was a day when this incredible Being, this majestic, awesome, timeless GOD ... stepped into time. He became a zygote, an embryo, a fetus. He broke the water of a virgin womb, suckled helplessly at a human breast, and grew up in poverty. He ate and drank and slept, and played in the sand as He grew. He learned to read and write, and eventually acquired a trade and worked for His food. He experienced heat and cold and thirst and fatigue ... and rejection. He voluntarily became homeless, denying Himself the comforts of human sexuality and family.

There came another day when this Being stood as a grown man, on soil which He had spoken into existence, breathing air which He had created, under a sun which held the planets in perfect check at His bidding, circled by furious enemies (!), and said, “Before Abraham was, I AM!” Even as He walked among us, He was evidently outside of time.

We engage with a Being Who sees without an eye, Who knows without a brain. He has no location, He has no age, His strength cannot be measured ... all is effortless with Him. He is vast, immeasurable, boundless, free. He need never move nor think ... He cannot be frightened or worried or strained or intimidated. There are no “close calls” with Him, God cannot take risks — He governs all. “Man’s goings are of the Lord. How can a man then understand his own way ...” much less obstruct God’s way? How can this Almighty Being be threatened? evaded? conquered? tricked?

And we have not yet touched on His purity ... “the stars are not clean in His sight...” My! What has He found impure in the stars? ... else it is that they are part of a material creation containing sinful

men. "...how much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?" (Job 15:16) Yet, He allows us worship Him?!... in all our filth and brokenness?

What does it mean to us ... to be loved by this God? What an indescribable ... awesome ... privilege to be adopted by Him! ... nurtured by Him! "LORD, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him! or the son of man, that thou makest account of him!" Ps 144:3

And we *exalt* ourselves before Him? Really? We *doubt* Him? We deliberately *disobey* Him? We *neglect* Him? We do not wholeheartedly seek Him? We disdain to love Him? What we take for granted!

## Appendix II - Theirs is the Kingdom

In our analysis of the nature of pride, we consider that humility is intrinsic to and identifies the saints: every child of God is growing and increasing in humility, and no one else is. Let us explore and establish this fact.

The first recorded teaching of Jesus is found in the *Sermon On the Mount* in Matthew 5, where He begins: “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (vs 3) What does this mean? Why does He begin His teaching in this way?

Firstly, we may observe that the wording of the second part of the verse, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” describes why Christ says the poor in spirit are blessed, in an immediate interpretive context. *Theirs* implies ownership or relationship: it is not merely that the poor in spirit are *in* God’s kingdom or that they *belong* to it — they *comprise* it; the kingdom of God is *defined by* them: they *are* the kingdom. For if the poor in spirit share the kingdom with one who is not ... then the kingdom cannot be said to belong to the poor in spirit any more than it can be said of anyone ... rendering Messiah’s words meaningless.

And what does it mean to comprise the kingdom of God and yet not be in the family of God, or to be a child of God and not part of His kingdom? Again, such words mean nothing if they are not equivalent; which implies that Christ is expressing a boundary condition, a definition: all who are poor in spirit are also children of God ... and only the poor in spirit are God’s children; all of the children of God are poor in spirit and only God’s children are poor in spirit. One cannot distinguish between being poor in spirit and being a child of God. In effect, Christ begins His teaching by describing what being a child of God looks like, what it means to be born of the Spirit.

Secondly, we may observe that Jesus does not merely say here, “Blessed are the poor.” In a similar text, Luke 6:20, He says directly to His disciples, singling them out specifically, “Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God,” but this is not quite the same as saying all poor people are blessed. In general, since their physical poverty is a constant reminder to them of other types of poverty, poor people are perhaps also likely to be poor in spirit, but this need not always be the case. Jesus is not teaching us that all of God’s children are monetarily poor, or that physical poverty in itself guarantees salvation or produces blessing. To get at what Jesus is teaching we must consider what “poor *in spirit*” means.

To be poor is to have insufficient but necessary means, to lack basic necessities. To be poor *in spirit* then must express a condition of acute and constant awareness of personal spiritual insufficiency, an acknowledgement of one’s inability to meet some type of necessary moral or spiritual standard without supernatural aid.

Yeshua teaches us that being a child of God implies living in a continuing and settled awareness of our own inadequacy to either measure up to God’s moral standards without His constant enablement, or to properly represent Him to others in our own strength. Paul acknowledged this, constantly trusting in and depending on the enabling grace of God to function spiritually: “And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament.” (2Co 3:4-6) Paul knew that without the unwavering, faithful help of God his thoughts and motives would be wholly inadequate, falling entirely short of God’s calling and expectation.

Paul knew that to abide in God was to be a walking savor of Christ to the world, which he was incapable of being in and of himself. “To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the

other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?” (2Co 2:16) Yet Paul knew that he was not walking alone; he knew God was always with him, strengthening him in the midst of his personal weakness: “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” (2 Co 12:9) Yes, it is our happy state to take the yoke of the living Christ upon us and learn of Him who said: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” (Mt 11:29)

Pride is enjoying and pursuing self-exaltation, a willful pattern of thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought, and this is dreadfully wicked: “Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished.” (Pr 16:5) Paul therefore exhorts believers to avoid this pattern of life, even as he acknowledges the power of God enabling him to exhort us so: “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.” (Ro 12:3)

True humility then is not going to the other extreme and thinking of ourselves as less than we truly are, but thinking soberly, realistically and accurately of ourselves. We must therefore acknowledge our gifts and worth and calling in God, for it is real and verifiable, but we must never presume that we are spiritually adequate to walk with God as we should in our own strength apart from Him. Evidently, *only* a child of God can live in this awareness as a manner of life, and *all* of God’s children will tend to do this as a manner of life.

So, as Yeshua begins His teaching He challenges us to examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith. (2Co 13:5) He calls us to prove ourselves, to make our calling and election sure, for if we do these things we shall never stumble and fall in our walk with God. (2Pe 1:10-11)

Jesus does this, not by asking us to examine what we claim to believe, pointing us to our doctrine or our statement of faith, but by examining our hearts, where our true beliefs and doctrines manifest. It is here, in the heart of life as children of God, constantly aware that we are inadequate in ourselves and incapable of pleasing God on our own, where we search our hearts and find that we are indeed walking more and more in His way. We feel the grace of God, His enabling power for the journey of holiness ... to pursue Him, and follow in His steps.