

The Character of Humility: Humbleness

What does it mean to be humble? How does God use the term? Among the Bible's earliest use of the term, God presents the idea of "humble your souls."

29) "And this shall be a perpetual statute for you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall **humble your souls** (H: 'ānâ nepeš, G (LXX): tapeinoō ho psychē) and not do any work, whether the native or the sojourner who sojourns among you; 30) for it is on this day that atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you; you will be clean from all your sins before Yahweh. 31) It is to be a sabbath of solemn rest for you, that you may **humble your souls** (H: 'ānâ nepeš, G (LXX): tapeinoō ho psychē); it is a perpetual statute. (Lev 16:29-31)

27) "On exactly the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you, and you shall **humble your souls** (H: 'ānâ nepeš, G (LXX): tapeinoō ho psychē) and bring an offering by fire near to Yahweh. 28) And you shall not do any work on this same day, for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before Yahweh your God. 29) If there is any person who will not **humble** (H: 'ānâ, G (LXX): tapeinoō) himself on this same day, he shall be cut off from his people. 30) And as for any person who does any work on this same day, that person I will cause to perish from among his people. 31) You shall do no work at all. It is to be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your places of habitation. 32) It is to be a sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall **humble your souls** (H: 'ānâ nepeš, G (LXX): tapeinoō ho psychē); on the ninth of the month at evening, from evening until evening you shall keep your sabbath." (Lev 23:27-32)

Both Hebrew ('ānâ) and Greek (tapeinoō) terms translated into English as "humble," which is often misunderstood depending on one's perspective.

From God's view, being humble before God describes the attitude that brings man into a right relationship with Him. Humility is to know how lowly one really is before God. The context here at this moment, to the nation of Israel, is God introducing His holy nature, omnipotence, and omniscience through the Mosaic Covenant.

From a human being's view, this focus on one's status often meant lowly and of poor economic condition, which the nation of Israel could identify with given their fresh memory of Pharaoh.

But without any theocentric consideration, this focus on one's status may result in two extremes - either arrogance and pride or a downcast servile attitude of unimportance.

Throughout the Old Testament, God tries to remind His people what attitude is necessary to learn and live by the ways of God.

2) And you shall remember all the way which Yahweh your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might **humble** (H: 'ānâ, G (LXX): kakoō) you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. 3) And He **humbled** (H: 'ānâ, G (LXX): kakoō) you and let you be hungry and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of Yahweh. (Deut 8:2-3)

Here, Greek translators of the LXX, translate the Hebrew 'ānâ with the Greek kakoō, which means "to oppress or maltreat" to discourage the wayward from living apart and independent of God. The passage is clear: God tests whether you truly love and desire Him in your heart, and those that do desire Him, learn and know God's word so that one may live by them.

While the Old Testament primarily places an emphasis on being humble towards God the Father, the God the Son in the New Testament places an additional emphasis on being humble towards your fellow man. How is one humble towards their fellow man?

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In today's culture, being lowly is to be avoided; overcome the shameful image as a "doormat" with thought and act! In the best sense, be unassuming. But is this anthropocentric view Jesus Christ's message of humility?

After His resurrection, Jesus Christ teaches His disciples in person what it means to be humble towards your fellow man, and they are enabled through the Holy Spirit. It is practical – how you think is how you behave.

Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of My Father upon you, but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." (Luke 24:44-49)

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any **fellowship of the Spirit**, if any affection and compassion, fulfill my joy, that you think the same way, by maintaining the same love, being **united in spirit**, thinking on one purpose, doing nothing from selfish ambition or vain glory, but with **humility of mind** regarding one another as more important than yourselves, not merely looking out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this way of thinking in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although existing in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a slave, by being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, **He humbled** (G: tapeinoō) **Himself by becoming obedient** to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil 2:1-8)

With salvation, whether initial or sanctification clearly in view, humility regards another as more important than yourself.

This "fellowship of the Spirit" implies an intentional cooperation with the Holy Spirit, and the apostle Paul explain that it is "through the perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures," that enables the "mind of Christ."

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through the perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Now may the God of perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the **same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus**, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom 15:4-6)

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the depths graciously given to us by God, of which depths we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual depths with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the depths of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually examined. But he who is spiritual examines all things, yet he himself is examined by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will direct Him? But **we have the mind of Christ**. (1 Cor 2:12-16)

With the mind of Christ, a genuine Believer thinks like Jesus Christ:

For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. (John 6:38)

For I did not speak from Myself, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment - what to say and what to speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me." (John 12:49-50)

Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. (John 14:10)

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If one understood God's intended meaning of humility and being humble as Jesus Christ demonstrated, one would:

- 1) Clearly grasp how lowly one really is before God and learn His word and holy ways.
- 2) Value others, including strangers and enemies, as being more important than yourself, which is only possible by cooperating with the Holy Spirit (John 14:10), because life is only possible through the good news of Jesus Christ.
- 3) Obey God's word to the point of death.

Jesus illustrates how biblical humility defines the greatest in heaven with a simile.

1) At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2) And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, 3) and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4) Whoever therefore will **humble** (G: tapeinoō) himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5) And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; (Matt 18:1-5)

When Jesus called a child over, the child recognized the reality and authority of a caring adult.

To enter the kingdom of heaven, one must have faith and "become like children." Like this child, who recognized the reality of a caring authority, one must respond obediently to Jesus Christ.

With child like innocence, the child placed a simple inherent trust in God the Son and responded obediently to His call.

The greatest in the kingdom of heaven is one who humbles himself before God. Like this child, who placed a simple trust in the authority of a caring adult, one must place a similar trust in Jesus Christ that obeys and lives by His words.

References:

1. Brown C, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, (1979).