



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Growing in Humility Matthew 5-7; 11.29-30; Luke 18.9-14

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Introduction

1. We'll begin with Jesus' story in Luke 18.10-14. Verse 14 mentions the important New Testament theme of justification, being acquitted of our sins and made right with God. Jesus said whether or not we are justified depends on whether we humble ourselves.
2. Obviously, then, "humility" is important, a truth we conclude from multiple references to humility in both testaments and especially from the repetition of the word in the New Testament.
 - a. Different forms of the word translated "humble," "humility," or "lowly" appear 34 times.
 - b. Forms of the word translated "meek" (or "gentle") appear another sixteen times.
 - c. Sometimes, the ideas of "humility" and "meekness" appear together.
 - d. We're not surprised, therefore, to see Jesus say that humility is the condition of justification.
3. But knowing humility is important is not the same as understanding it or *growing* in it (should we be proud of growing in humility?). We need to define it and think about how to grow in it.

Body

- I. What Is Humility?
 - A. An English dictionary illustrates how "humility" is popularly understood.
 1. "not proud or haughty : not arrogant or assertive.
 2. "ranking low in a hierarchy or scale : INSIGNIFICANT, UNPRETENTIOUS."¹
 - B. Popular-level understanding often over-emphasizes terms like "not assertive" and "insignificant."
 1. So, some think that to be properly humble, we must be self-effacing, even self-belittling.
 2. But we sometimes show we're not completely on board with that understanding.
 - a) Do people who acknowledge their ability in a given area—e.g., musicians, athletes, teachers, doing a resume (!)—show a lack of humility by doing so?
 - b) Indeed, was Jesus, who said he was "meek and humble" (Matt 11.29) not humble when he made statements like these?
 - (1) "I am the light of the world" (John 8.12).

¹ "humble." Merriam-Webster.com. 2019. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/> (June 24, 2019).

- (2) "I and the Father are one" (John 10.30).
- (3) "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14.6).
3. That question is not asked idly; some have used a variation of it in their argument against belief in God.
 - a) Paul Copan cites the atheist Richard Dawkins who charged that "God is obsessed with 'his own superiority over rival gods' and is therefore narcissistic and vain, characterized by "an unhealthy self-preoccupation,"² in other words, not humble.
 - b) Copan argues that the problem is that the common understanding that Dawkins assumes is actually a bad definition of humility.
 - (1) Pride is "an inflated view of ourselves—a *false* advertising campaign promoting ourselves . . ."
 - (2) Humility, rightly understood, is the opposite; it entails "having a *realistic* [true] assessment of ourselves—our weaknesses and strengths."
 - (3) "True humility doesn't deny abilities but rather acknowledges God as the source of these gifts, for which we can't take credit. What do we have that we didn't receive (1 Cor. 4:7)? *To be humble is to know our proper place before God—with all our strengths and weaknesses*" (all from Copan; emphasis added).

II. Testing Our Definition.

A. Look again at Jesus' parable in Luke 18.

1. What was the difference between the typical Pharisee, known for being zealous about his faith, and the tax collector, known as a compromising collaborator?
 - a) Both were honest in their self-assessment.
 - (1) The Pharisee's prayer listed what Pharisees typically did and didn't do (vv. 11-12).
 - (2) The tax collector knew he was unworthy to enter God's presence and needed mercy as "the sinner" (τῷ ἁμαρτωλῷ, *tō hamartōlō*) (v. 13; NASB; cf. Isa 6.1-7).
 - b) Compare the focus of the two prayers.
 - (1) The Pharisee was self-focused: note the repetition of the first person pronoun and the literal way the NASB translates the direction of his prayer: "to himself" (πρὸς ἑαυτὸν, *pros heauton*; v. 11).
 - (2) The tax collector focused on God and prayed accordingly.
 - c) The most important clue is in verse 9 where we learn why Jesus told the story: to make a point to those who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt."
 - (1) "Righteous" (δικαίος; *dikaios*) is the noun form of "justified" (δικαιόω; *dikaioō*) in v. 14. Jesus told the parable to some who trusted in themselves for justification.
 - (2) Note: the word "others" (λοιπός; *loipos*; v. 9) appears in the phrase "other men" (11).
2. What was the difference? One man depended on God (was humble); the other did not.

B. Jesus' great invitation underscores the importance of humility and helps us begin to see what is necessary for growing in humility (Matt 11.29-30).

1. We can focus on the rest he offers and his easy yoke and light burden.
2. But, focusing on the outcomes can lead us to minimize what lies at the heart of his call.

² Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), Olive Tree Bible ebook edition, Chapter 3.

- a) A personal call: “come to me . . . learn from me . . . I will give you rest.”
- b) A call to imitate his humility, his submission to God; literally translated: “because (ὅτι; *hoti*) I am meek (πραῦς, *praus*) and lowly / humble (ταπεινός; *tapeinos*)³ in heart. . .”

III. Growing in Humility.

- A. The connection Jesus made between meekness and humility in his invitation (Matt 11.29) is not the first time in Matthew’s account that he connected the two ideas.
 - 1. At the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, his manual for discipleship, Jesus said that those who will be blessed need to be: mournful, probably over their sins (Matt 5.4; cf. the tax collector); and meek, a word that means “strength under control” (Matt. 5.5).
 - 2. But, first they must be “poor in spirit” (Matt 5.3).
 - a) “Poor” (πτωχός; *ptōchos*) was used for the poorest of the poor; poverty-stricken in spirit.
 - b) The NEB translated it, “How blest are those who know their need of God.”
 - c) That describes the tax collector in Jesus’ story in Luke 18.
 - 3. The remainder of the Sermon is both a commentary on that fundamental principle and a guide for what it will look like in practice.
- B. Humbled before God, we need to be growing character that:
 - 1. Hungers and thirsts for righteousness (v. 6).
 - 2. Shows mercy the way God shows mercy (v. 7).
 - 3. Is pure in heart, that is, sincere in motive (v. 8).
 - 4. Seeks to *make* peace, the state when things are as they should be (v. 9).
 - 5. Commits to God to the point of enduring anything for his sake (v. 3 in action) (v. 10).
- C. The submission begins with the inner man and makes a difference in the way we:
 - 1. See and treat others with regard to hatred, sexuality, marriage, honesty, retaliation, and esteem (5.21-48); note: the righteousness is to exceed the Pharisees (vv. 17-20; see Luke 18).
 - 2. Perform the duties and rituals involved in approaching God (6.1-18; see esp. v. 1).
 - 3. Think about, trust in, and use our material goods, our stuff (6.19-34).
 - 4. Engage with others: treating other sinners as we want God to treat us; meeting the needs of others like God does (7.1-12).
 - 5. Seek to uphold and protect the truth of his teaching (7.15-20).

Conclusion

- 1. The final seven verses of Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon tell us that the rest of the message is not a series of good ideas, a blueprint for mental health, or a list of wise suggestions for an ideal life. They are teachings to be lived and will serve as the standard of judgment (Matt 7.21-27).
- 2. So, if you want to grow in humility, begin with the basic idea that humility is submission to God, aware of who you are compared to who he is and your need for him. Then, trust and obey him.

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³ The verb “to humble” (ταπεινῶω; *tapeinōō*) meant (1) “cause to be low spatially, make low, level,” (2) “make / consider unimportant,” (3) “cause to be / appear low in status, in disparaging sense humble, humiliate,” or (4) “cause to experience loss, . . . be in need” (Frederick William Danker, with Kathryn Krug *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2009], 347).