

# The Importance of Humility

## **Introduction**

From what I can see, one of the items that Scripture emphasizes - in both the Old and New Testaments - is the importance of being *humble*.

In fact, there are a number of different “facets” of humility that Scripture speaks about. In other words, the Bible talks about being humble in several different “areas” of our lives.

So, let’s take a look at Scripture, to see if we can identify some of those areas.

## **Humility with regard to knowledge**

One of the areas in which Scripture emphasizes humility is in the area of *knowledge*. It is human nature for us to think that we have “everything figured out” - and therefore, we don’t need to listen to anyone else’s advice.

The book of Proverbs has quite a bit to say about this very issue. Here is an excerpt:

Proverbs 12:15 (ESV):

<sup>15</sup> The way of a fool is right in his own eyes,  
but a wise man listens to advice.

Proverbs 15:5 (ESV):

<sup>5</sup> A fool despises his father’s instruction,  
but whoever heeds reproof is prudent.

Proverbs 28:26 (ESV):

<sup>26</sup>Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool,  
but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.

Those passages certainly seem to put to rest the idea that people can rely *exclusively* on their own knowledge.

Another point to note is that the apostles were given information *directly* from God and Jesus. So, does that mean that the apostles knew *everything* that there is to know about God and Jesus? Scripture gives us some information about that question:

1 Corinthians 13:9-10,12-13 (ESV):

<sup>9</sup>For we know in part and we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup>but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

<sup>12</sup>For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

1 John 3:2 (NIV):

<sup>2</sup>Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

So, it appears that even the apostles did *not* have complete knowledge of the truth - and if *they* didn't have complete knowledge, then it doesn't seem very likely that *we* have such knowledge, either...

Finally, many people appear to be of the opinion that *they* have the absolutely correct, *infallible* understanding of Scripture - and as a result, they believe that they do not need *anyone else's* assistance in interpreting Scripture at all.

However, is that idea *supported* by Scripture? That is, does Scripture tell us that we can just "figure out" the Bible, all by ourselves? Consider this passage:

Acts 8:26-35 (NIV):

<sup>26</sup>Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." <sup>27</sup>So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, <sup>28</sup>and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. <sup>29</sup>The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

<sup>30</sup>Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

<sup>31</sup>"How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

<sup>32</sup>The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,  
and as a lamb before the shearer is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.

<sup>33</sup>In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.  
Who can speak of his descendants?  
For his life was taken from the earth."

<sup>34</sup>The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" <sup>35</sup>Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

I think that the humble attitude of the Ethiopian is one that we should foster!

## Humility with regard to importance

Our human nature also tends to give us an inflated view of our own *importance*. In other words, we all like to think of ourselves as “VIP”s.

As it turns out, Scripture has quite a bit to say about this item. First, here is an example from Isaiah:

Isaiah 66:1-2 (NIV):

<sup>1</sup> This is what the LORD says:  
“Heaven is my throne,  
and the earth is my footstool.  
Where is the house you will build for me?  
Where will my resting place be?”

<sup>2</sup> Has not my hand made all these things,  
and so they came into being?”  
declares the LORD.  
“This is the one I esteem:  
he who is humble and contrite in spirit,  
and trembles at my word.

I think that that passage is trying to give us “perspective” on our relationship with God. In addition, that passage *explicitly* states that God esteems people who are humble!

An exaggerated view of our own importance can also lead to arguments with others. Even the apostles were not immune to such temptations, as seen here:

Luke 22:24-27 (ESV):

<sup>24</sup> A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. <sup>25</sup> And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. <sup>26</sup> But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. <sup>27</sup> For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

Jesus directly addressed this question of “who is the greatest” - by stating that the person who is the most *serv*ing of others is the greatest! I suspect that that is *not* the answer that the apostles wanted to hear...

Finally, when people have an inflated view of their own importance, that can often cause them to “put on heirs” - and *expect* to be treated with undue honor. Jesus directly addressed that issue as well, with a famous parable:

Luke 14:7-11 (ESV):

<sup>7</sup> Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, <sup>8</sup> “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast,

do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, <sup>9</sup>and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. <sup>10</sup>But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. <sup>11</sup>For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

This parable speaks about seating at a wedding banquet, but I think it has a *much* broader application. Basically, I think that Jesus is telling us that we should *de-emphasize* our own importance - regardless of the situation.

In other words, we should leave it to *other people* to recognize our abilities and accomplishments - as opposed to us boasting about *ourselves*.

### **Humility with regard to righteousness**

Finally - and most importantly - it is human nature to think that we, ourselves, are actually "good people". We readily see the sins that *other people* commit - and we are always ready to *condemn* them for it - but we rationalize, or overlook, our own failings.

Jesus really "took people to task" for that attitude. Here is just one example:

Matthew 7:3-5 (ESV):

<sup>3</sup>Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? <sup>4</sup>Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? <sup>5</sup>You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

As a result, I think we should take a long look at *our own* lives, before we start to condemn *other* people for their supposed lack of righteousness.

The apostle Paul also made some very explicit statements about people's lack of righteousness. Here is one such statement. Note that the passage below is actually a paraphrase of Psalms 14 and 53 - i.e., Paul was quoting King David:

Romans 3:10-12 (NIV):

<sup>10</sup>As it is written:  
"There is no one righteous, not even one;  
<sup>11</sup>there is no one who understands,  
no one who seeks God.  
<sup>12</sup>All have turned away,  
they have together become worthless;  
there is no one who does good,  
not even one."

That passage is pretty clear - *none* of us are righteous, no matter how much we might *think* we are.

Here is the most important item to note: If a person considers himself to be righteous, then that attitude can *interfere* with the person's *relationship with God*. Consider this passage:

Luke 18:9-14 (NIV):

<sup>9</sup>To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: <sup>10</sup>“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup>The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup>I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

<sup>13</sup>“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

<sup>14</sup>“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

In other words, if a person has the attitude that he is following God *absolutely perfectly*, then that attitude will *dissuade* the person from asking for forgiveness from God. Of course, if we do not *ask* for forgiveness, then we will not *receive* it.

As a result, the attitude that we, ourselves, are righteous before God is *extraordinarily dangerous*.

## **Conclusion**

The concept that followers of God should have a humble attitude is listed all throughout the Bible - it is a consistent theme. So, from what I can see, believers should try to *follow* that principle, and foster humility in their own lives. After all, if *everyone* had a truly humble attitude, then it occurs to me that there would be *far* fewer arguments in the world...

Of course, that is just my understanding - I certainly do *not* claim to have the absolute truth!