

Pride vs Humility - Part 4



Part 4/4

Pride vs Humility
By Derek Prince

At the core of the title of this series, *Pride Versus Humility*, there lies an eternal, spiritual law that operates in every detail of our lives—one which simultaneously governs the entire universe. In Matthew 23:12 Jesus stated this law for the first time:

> For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. (voice)

This same law is repeated twice more in the New Testament, each time coming to us from the lips of Jesus Himself. Jesus attached particular importance to this principle and continually reminded His hearers of its work in their lives.

An Essential Requirement

In the previous three teachings on this topic I explained how this principle applies in our personal relationship to God. Self-humbling is an essential requirement for coming to God initially, and then for all subsequent progress in the spiritual life. The Bible always says, "Humble yourselves ... humble yourselves." In other words, it is something we must do. It originates in the will and is expressed in appropriate action.

In this fourth teaching in this series I am going to take this principle one step further, showing how it applies in our relationship to our fellow believers. You see, our attitude toward God is often revealed in our attitude toward men. This is especially true in the matter of humility—it must be expressed, not only toward God, but toward men.

We often tend to deceive ourselves in matters like this. We claim to have the right attitude toward God, yet in our dealings with our fellow men we demonstrate a completely different and incorrect attitude. The truth of the matter is that if we really have the right attitude toward God, it will also be demonstrated in our attitude and dealings with our fellow men. But if a wrong attitude toward men manifests itself, then it is an indication that some aspect of our attitude toward God is not right.

Three Enlightening Passages

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In this matter of self-humbling, we must apply the principle not only in our direct relationship with God but also in our relationship with our fellow men. Self-humbling is mandated in various places in the New Testament. Let's look at three examples, beginning in Philippians 2:3:

> Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather in humility value others above yourselves. (niv)

Notice, humility is manifested in considering other people better than ourselves. It is the opposite of selfish ambition or vain conceit.

Next we read a short but very important statement in Ephesians 5:21:

> Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. (nasb1995)

The implication is very clear. If we really fear and reverence Christ, it will be manifested in our attitude toward one another. We will not merely be subject to Christ, but we will also be subject to one another. If we claim to be subject to Christ but we are not subject to one another, then our claim of subjection to Christ is not valid.

Our third scriptural example is 1 Peter 5:5:

> All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." (niv)

I like to quote the J.B. Phillips translation of that particular verse, which says: "Indeed all of you should defer to one another and wear the 'overall' of humility in serving each other" (phillips). In the Greek, the word that is translated *clothe yourself* specifically means to *put on* a certain type of apron which was worn only by slaves. In other words, Peter is saying, "Wear the attitude of a slave towards others." That is the true expression of humility.

Abraham's Astounding Humility

Let's look at two examples of the outworking of this principle, both of which are taken from the Old Testament. One is from the life of Abraham, the other is from the life of Jacob. We will start with the example from the life of Abraham, which describes Abraham's relationship and dealings with his nephew, Lot. The record is found in Genesis 13:5–17. It is a rather lengthy passage, but it will be helpful to include every part of it. (*Note that God changed Abram's name to Abraham only later in the account.*)

> Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. And quarreling arose between Abram's herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time. So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are close relatives." (Genesis 13:5–8, niv)

There is a significant implication to that statement "we are close relatives." The Scripture said there were other peoples living in the land (Canaanites and Perizzites) who were potential enemies of both Abram and Lot. So Abram reminded his nephew, "As relatives, we can't afford to quarrel." What was the reason they had to get along? Because they had enemies who would exploit any division between them. How true that is of God's people in the world today! Let's continue with the story to see how Abram behaved toward Lot.

> "Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left." Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. Now the men of Sodom were wicked

> and were sinning greatly against the Lord. The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you." (vv. 9–17, niv)

In this passage we see Abram's astounding humility. Also, I want you to see the profound implications of that humility. Abram was the senior man; the man of God's choice, the man with the special calling, the man to whom the inheritance belonged. Lot was his nephew who was just riding along, as it were, on Abram's train.

However, when the time came for them to separate, Abram didn't take an arrogant position. He didn't say, "I'm the senior, so I'll have first choice. This is what I want." He took a step that really astonishes me. He freely gave Lot the first choice. Abram said, "Whatever you choose, that will be yours. I'll take what's left." Is that not humility? Yet in the closing verses, we see the reward of humility. Let's examine those verses again.

> The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever ... Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you." (vv. 14–15, 17, niv)

Only after the act of self-humbling did Abram see his inheritance. Up to that time he had been standing right in the midst of the inheritance, but God had not really revealed it to him. God only chose to reveal it to him after Abram had humbled himself before his young nephew, Lot. What a picture of the reward of self-humbling! You see, God watches our actions, He sees our motives, and He is always working out that principle: the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

Jacob Bows

The second example of self-humbling is taken from the life of Jacob. I want to show you how Jacob could not get back into his inheritance until he had humbled himself—not merely before the Lord, but also before his brother Esau.

Initially, Jacob had usurped the birthright from Esau by a rather shabby trick. Then, he had been deliberately deceptive in order to get the father's blessing—and that tactic had gotten him exactly nowhere. As a result of these two underhanded and cruel actions, he was forced to run from his inheritance as a fugitive with nothing but a staff in his hand. His next twenty years were spent in exile, working as a servant for his uncle Laban. But in his exile and in his service God blessed Jacob, giving him both a family and great possessions. At a given point, the Lord spoke to Jacob and said, "Now it is time for you to go back to the land that I promised to give you."

Gathering up his wives, his children and his flocks, Jacob turned his face westward and went back. When he reached the border of the land he had been promised, he had a remarkable experience. Scripture tells us that one night when Jacob was alone, an angel wrestled with him—actually wrestled with him all night. Yet Jacob was so strong in himself that the angel could not prevail against him. Eventually the angel just put out his finger and touched Jacob's thigh, putting it out of joint—and making Jacob helpless. As a result, he then clung to the angel and pleaded for the blessing, which the angel granted to him. But from that point onwards, Jacob always walked with a limp. What does that limp mean? It means the end of our own strength and our own confidence. It is our acknowledgment that we cannot progress except by depending on the Lord.

After this encounter with the angel, Jacob still had to meet his brother Esau, who was just on the other side of the ford. He had heard that Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred armed men, and he was terrified. He thought it would be the end of himself, his family and everything he had. But we see what actually happened by reading Genesis 33:1–4:

> Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men; so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two female servants. He put the female servants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear. He himself went on ahead and bowed

> down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother. But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept. (niv)

Do you see this beautiful picture? Here is Jacob, the man to whom belonged the birthright, the blessing, the whole inheritance. He was the one who had wrestled with the angel and encountered the Lord. He was the man of God's choice. Coming to meet him, on the other hand, was Esau—the carnal man, the man who despised his blessing, the man whom God couldn't accept because of his wrong attitude towards spiritual matters. Yet when they met, Jacob, the spiritual man, bowed himself seven times before his offended brother.

What does that number seven signify? It speaks of the Holy Spirit. It speaks of humility worked by the Holy Spirit. Jacob had learned the lesson: he had discovered that pride would get him nowhere. He had humbled himself before the angel, but that was not sufficient. Now Jacob humbled himself before his brother. His self-humbling brought reconciliation with his brother and opened the way for him to enter safely into the inheritance that God had promised.

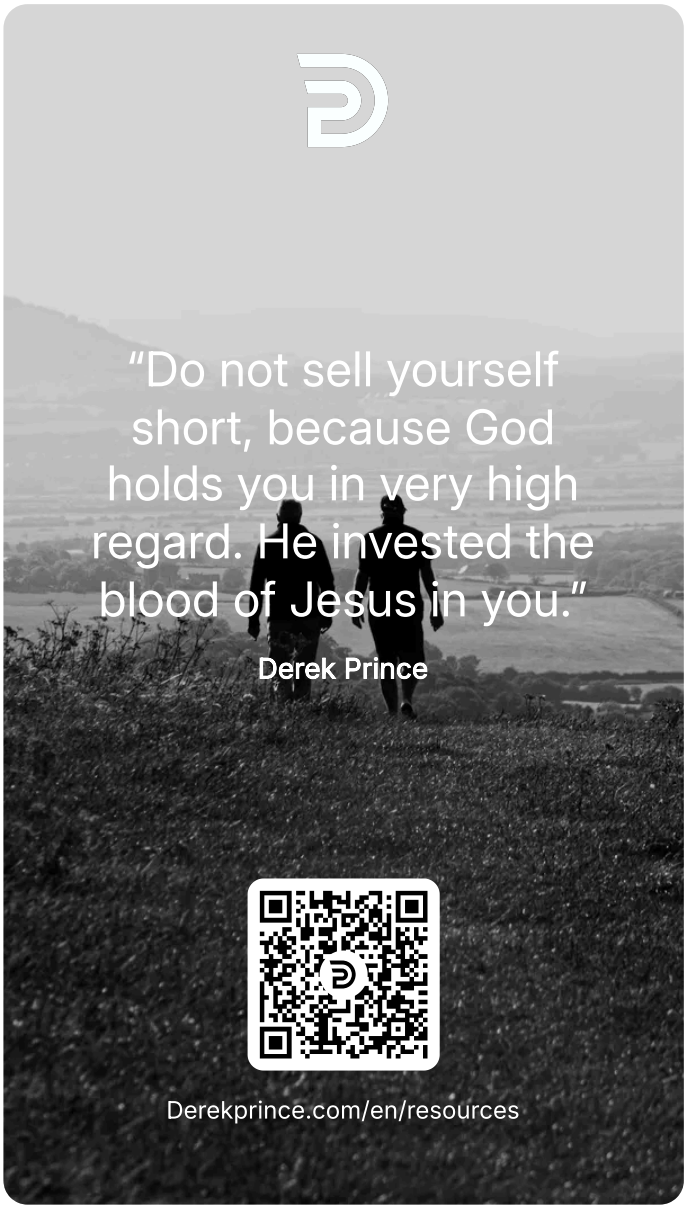
We see that though God promised the inheritance, Jacob could not receive it until he humbled himself both before God and his brother.

A Step We Should Take?

Let me close this teaching with a question: Is there a step the Lord wants you to take in response to what you have just read? Maybe, like Abraham, the Lord is directing you to respond with humility in order to receive a greater part of His inheritance for you. Or maybe, like Jacob, there is a matter of reconciliation with someone that is awaiting a step of humility on your part.

Whichever it is, I encourage you to ask the Lord what response He wants you to make. Then—by all means—take the step He is directing you to take.

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