



Leadership Character Humbleness, An Example

by Chuck Gianotti

Humbleness is a critical, but elusive character for elders. I, who am ill-equipped to speak on this subject, as one who falls continually short, come as an admirer of Christ's humbleness. Who of us could arrogate to himself the task of teaching others about humbleness? So, what can be said about this subject then, without relegating myself to the status of hypocrite?

I invite you to join with me in simply observing the humbleness of Christ, with the hope that by so doing we may in some small measure begin to emulate that characteristic in our lives. After all we are told repeatedly in Scripture to fix our eyes, thoughts, minds and hearts on Christ.

First, we are using the word "humbleness" and "humility" as interchangeable. One definition of what we are talking about is this: "A condition of lowliness or affliction in which one experiences a loss of power and prestige. Outside of biblical faith, humility in this sense would not usually be considered a virtue."

This can be seen in the over-arching description of Christ's mission, "*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor; so that you through His poverty might become rich.*" (2 Cor 8:9, NASB)

Obviously, the text is not referring to money. After all, what does it mean to be "rich" when He created and owns everything in existence? The Lord Jesus assumed a condition of lowliness or affliction; He willingly experienced a loss of power and prestige. He set aside His glory.

Let's bring the magnifying glass of observation into focus. How was He humbled?

As the **Absolute, Eternal One**, infinite in every way, He was humbled just by taking on limitation of human flesh.

As a **Teacher**, He was humbled by those who didn't understand His teachings.

As a **Prophet**, He was humbled by those who rejected His message.

As the **Light of the World**, He was humbled by those who loved darkness rather than light.

As the **Bread of Life**, He was humbled by those who refused to take and eat, as it were, His words seriously.

He who gives the **River of Living Water**, was humbled by those parched, hoarse voices that wanted to dam up the spring.

As the rightful **King of Israel**, He was humbled when the people cried out to Pilate, "We have no king but Caesar."

As the **Good Shepherd**, He was humbled when all like sheep went astray.

As the **Great Shepherd**, He was humbled when He was led like a sheep to the slaughter.

As the **Great Discipler**, He was humbled when His disciples just didn't get it.

As the **Foundation Stone**, He was humbled to see His followers building their lives on the shifting sands of worry, fret and fear.

As the **Alpha and Omega** (The Beginning and the End) He was humbled by those who tried to terminate His existence.

As **Jehovah-Jireh** (The God Who Provides) He was humbled when all that He owned was divided up by soldiers at the foot of the cross.

As **El Shaddai** (The Almighty God) He was humbled when too weak to carry His own cross.

As **Elohim** (The Creator God) He was humbled when humans, the pinnacle of His creation, put Him to death.

As **Jehovah** (The Covenant Keeping God) He was humbled when was He forsaken by His Father.

As **Jehovah-rophe** (The Lord Who Heals) He was humbled when He died from unhealed wounds incurred on a Roman cross.

As **Jehovah-nissi** (The Lord our Banner) He was humbled when a banner was put up over the cross mocking Him as King of Jews.

As **Jehovah M'kaddesh** (The Lord Who Makes Holy) He was humbled when treated like a common criminal and executed in a de-based, despicable way.

As **Jehovah-shalom** (The Lord Our Peace) He was humbled by unresolved conflict and a violent death that could not be averted.

As **Jehovah-Tsidkenu** (The Lord our Righteousness), He was humbled when He took on our unrighteousness, as Scripture says, "He who knew no sin became sin for us."

As the **Judge of all earth**, He was humbled by being judged as a criminal by a religious, kangaroo court.

He who is a **Refuge** for the fearful, was humbled when He Himself had no refuge to flee to from the wrath of God.

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Practical Application

The Perfect Church?

by Jack Spender

This title “The Perfect Church” needs some explanation. It might refer to that part of the body of Christ which is now in heaven, for those who are with the Lord have been perfected. Or it might refer to the spiritual position or standing of the bride of Christ even here on earth, “For by one offering, He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.” (Heb. 10:14 NKJV).

Actually, in this article I am not using the term in reference to either of the above, but to the imaginary, ideal local church that so many people are seeking today. Elders and others involved in the Lord’s work have heard it (or what amounts to it) often: “We love this church, but we need to find something that better meets our needs.....so we’re leaving.”

A Time for Honesty

What we do **not** need, is another article that soothes our wounded pride by assuring us that we have the truth, and “they were not of us, so they went out from us.....” There are times when people recognize the sad fact that they are becoming spiritually stagnant, and the place where they are attending offers little hope for growth. The doctrines might be orthodox, and the meetings following one after another, but there is not much life, and no vision. It’s hard to keep warm when the fire is nearly out, and it is very difficult to raise children in such a setting.

Autonomy means that each local assembly will judge itself before the Lord; a practice that must start with the elders as God’s appointed under-shepherds. It is noteworthy that in the record of the seven churches of Asia (Revelation 2,3), despite some real problems, no church was told to dis-fellowship another. Rather each was to remember that the Lord Himself was walking among the lampstands to inspect the light and correct each congregation as needed. When a church stays “lukewarm” it is understandable that

people will move on.

But this is not the problem to which I am referring now. Rather it is a heart problem in the drifting believer that uses for its reasoning the true fact that there really are some problems, both difficult people and things that could be improved. They lack the maturity to realize that the perfect church exists only in their mind and that every imperfection is an opportunity for service!

This is where good leadership is so crucial, for the work must proceed along two equally important tracks. As overseers, elders must be sure that the church is as good as it can be, and as shepherds they must help immature believers to

church is not only likened to a building (I Cor. 3:9) but also to a body (I Cor. 12 :27) which is characterized by life, growth and flexibility.

Before studying the Word, it helps to judge our pride of being correct in all our ways, and to seek for the truth no matter how difficult its implications. Then, as we search through the Scriptures and discuss insights about the church and its fellowship, we can go to the Lord and ask Him to convict us where change is needed. This attitude of humility can be extended in many directions. Often the saints in the congregation will “open up” if they are visited and sense a loving spirit that wants to listen rather than defend.

Then there is the vast resource of other older Christians, who have walked with the Lord for many years and learned some hard but fruitful lessons. Perhaps the most difficult step of all might be to welcome dialog with similar churches in the area that have already (evidently) learned some of the same lessons. Then there are the limitless resources of good books and articles, of conferences, and even the internet used with discernment.

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to change ...
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grow in grace. Some brief observations on both may help.

The Truth Makes Free

There is nothing like an honest evaluation and frank admission of the truth to bring a sense of hope and joy. No matter how bleak the picture, we have to at least begin where God would have us begin. “Consider your ways!” says the prophet (Hag. 1:7). Wise elders may find much to encourage humble hearts, but the assembly is not perfect; with God’s help it can be better, perhaps much better. Here are some ideas to consider.

One of the keys here is a willingness to change. In some people’s minds, the church is the rock of which our Lord spoke to Peter (Matt. 16:18)—immovable, inflexible. But it is Christ Himself Who is the Rock, not the assembly! The

The goal, of course, is to find that refreshing spirit of openness to the truth, of vision to reach out to the lost and the needy, and the creation of a place of refuge and training where all believers can take those baby steps toward maturity.

Getting to the Point

But with all the above in place, it is still true that the flesh is restless and people left to themselves will float around looking for “the perfect church.” Elders should know this and takes steps to minimize the problem. Here are a few ideas:

1) Make sure there are open lines of communication between the shepherds and the sheep. In small churches this can be done directly as the elders regularly check with those for whom they are responsible. Visitations in the home are invaluable. In larger churches where di-

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Encouraging Growth

by Ruth Spender

A recent survey in our assembly showed that 100% of the workload was being shouldered by roughly 40% of those in fellowship. We would certainly like to see that percentage change. Imagine what we could accomplish if more people were willing to get involved in ministry! How are things in your assembly? Do you find yourself dealing with a similar problem?

As we mature in the Christian life we realize that to serve others rather than be served is God's goal for us. As those in leadership we expect to pick up the slack sometimes. While it may feel good or be expedient to do it all ourselves, the Lord is pleased when more saints are serving and the workload is evenly spread among the people. This helps to avoid burnout for all involved.

Peter reminds us that as husbands and wives we are heirs together of the grace of life. With this in mind, how are we doing at encouraging our husbands in their work as spiritual leaders? Are we praying and communicating together

about the Lord's work as a couple? Do we see this work as the most important thing we can be involved in this side of eternity? What is our level of engagement as wives? Are we seeking to do our part in discipling other women, encouraging them to have a more active role in the body life of the church? Growth comes from involvement.

God has given women unique qualities that can be a wonderful asset when put to good use. We can help others by pointing out their strengths and encouraging them in taking baby steps to serve. Consider the fact that women are naturally caring and nurturing individuals. This makes them more sensitive to those who are hurting. Many of these ladies enjoy working with children and youth ministries. Women who are good listeners are able to lighten another person's load simply by listening to or praying for that individual.

Then there are the women who have great organizational skills. Still others are gifted at overseeing food preparation and

fellowship dinners. The possibilities for service are endless. Everyone has something to offer since God has given each of us a spiritual gift.

Think about the transforming power and sense of ownership in an assembly where most, if not all the saints have the mindset, "How can I be a blessing here?" Whether it is stopping to encourage an elderly saint, greeting a visitor, helping out in the nursery or assisting with setup or cleanup, it is all a part of the spiritual work. When visitors walk in to such a place on Sunday morning, their hearts cannot help but be warmed by the glow that such ministry produces. It sets the stage for the Spirit of God to work in our midst and that is something we all desire.

Sisters, we play a huge part in the body life of our assembly. Let us keep our hearts in tune with God so our service for Him has maximum impact. It is an ongoing work. We must not grow weary in well doing, for in due season we will reap if we faint not. 

The Perfect Church? (cont. from page 2)

rect personal follow-up of each individual by an elder is not realistic, small groups meeting in homes, led by younger men who are learning the principles of shepherding with a few families can be a great help. A study of Exodus 18 and the advice of Jethro to Moses will be enlightening.

2) Check the quality of the preaching being given on Sunday. Is the flock being fed, that is, really being nourished? Are the life, ministry and words of the Lord Jesus, the perfect Servant, being expounded carefully as the model for every believer to imitate? Some churches devote most of their time to telling visitors how to be saved. Such should remember that the gifted men are charged with the equipping of the saints (Eph. 4:11,12). Spiritual growth comes only through the Word. When inviting speakers, it can help to ask the question, "What has his ministry done for his home assembly?" Spiritual growth comes only through the Word.

3) Perform an occasional evaluation of the life, activities and meetings of the

church. Biblical principles listed in Acts 2:42 must be faithfully preserved: the teaching of God's Word; fellowship and relationship building among the believers; remembering the Lord in breaking the bread; the gathering for prayer. But what about those programs and activities that have settled in from long years past and may have outlived their usefulness or relevance? How about old traditions that are not found in Scripture but were meaningful to saints long gone? Some of these may help to safe guard our precious heritage; others can be retired. Elders can apply the test "Why are we doing what we do?" to everything. Are these things relevant to the people who we serve today?

4) Finally, reviewing the basics is a job never finished. In so far as possible, every believer must get involved in the practical outworking of faith. Paul writes: "And let our people also learn to maintain good works to meet urgent needs, that they be not unfruitful" (Titus 3:4). In these days urgent needs are everywhere. Ministries (service opportunities) in the

church must be explained to all. Spiritual gifts must be discovered and put to work. "It's all about me" may be a popular slogan in the world, but it is incompatible with God's kind of love and service.

The Bottom Line

Here is the so called "bottom line." Those who are learning to forget self with all its demands and requirements and serve their fellow believers in patient love, will find both joy and contentment.

Think of the contrast between two hypothetical believers (or couples) who spend time in your assembly. One wants to be served and have their needs met. The other comes to serve and to sacrifice for others. The first is critical of people with problems or programs that aren't just so. The second sees wonderful opportunities to serve the Lord by serving His needy ones.

With the former, it is only a matter of time before they will "feel led" to move on. But the latter will constantly be rejoicing that they have indeed found the perfect church.....for them. 

Leadership Character

Humility: An Example

by A.B. Bruce

Excerpted from "The Training of the Twelve," by A.B. Bruce, commenting on Matt. 17:24-27

This story is a nut with a dry, hard shell, but a very sweet kernel. Superficial readers may see in it nothing more than a curious anecdote of a singular fish with a piece of money in its mouth turning up opportunely to pay a tax, related by Matthew, alone of the evangelists, not because of its intrinsic importance, but simply because, being an ex-tax gatherer, he took kindly to the tale. Devout readers, though unwilling to acknowledge it, may be secretly scandalized by the miracle related, as not merely a departure from the rule which Jesus observed of not using His divine power to help Himself, but as something very like

a piece of sport on His part, or an expression of a humorous sense of incongruity, reminding one of the grotesque figures in old cathedrals, in the carving of which the builders delighted to show their skill, and find for themselves amusement.

Breaking the shell of the story, we discover within, as its kernel, a most pathetic exhibition of the humiliation and self-humiliation of the Son of man, who appears exposed to the indignity of being dunned for temple dues, and so oppressed with poverty that He cannot pay the sum demanded, though its amount is only fifteenpence; yet neither pleading poverty nor insisting on exemption on the score of privilege, but quietly meeting the claims of the collectors in a manner which, if sufficiently

strange, as we admit, was at all events singularly meek and peaceable.

The present incident supplies, in truth, an admirable illustration of the doctrine taught in the discourse on humility. The greatest in the kingdom here exemplifies by anticipation the lowliness He inculcated on His disciples, and shows them in exercise a holy, loving solicitude to avoid giving offence not only to the little ones within the kingdom, but even to those without. He stands not on His dignity as the Son of God, though the voice from heaven uttered on the holy mount still rings in His ears, but consents to be treated as a subject or a stranger; desiring to live peaceably with men whose ways He does not love, and who bear Him no good-will, by complying with their wishes in all things lawful.



Humbleness (cont. from page 1)

He who is our **High Tower** was humbled when He was laid in a cold, damp grave.

He who is **Savior** was humbled when taunted for not being able to save Himself.

He who is **Logos**, the Living Word of God, was humbled by the constant barrage of words and invectives at Him.

He who is the **Great "I Am"** was humbled when for three days people thought He was the Great "I was."

Now, **THAT** is humility. If we truly want to be humble, let us meditate on the humbleness of Christ! The only way is to fix our eyes on the Lord Jesus, our example, *par excellence*.



From the Q-File

General Dwight Eisenhower's superior and mentor, George Marshall, radioed congratulations to Eisenhower at the end of the war: "Since the day of your arrival in England three years ago, you have been selfless in your actions, always sound and tolerant and al-

together admirable in the courage and wisdom of your ... decisions. You have made history, great history for the good of mankind and you have stood for all we hoped for and admire ... These are my tributes and my personal thanks." *General of the Army: George C. Mar-*

shall, Soldier and Statesman, by Ed Cray, (W.W. Norton & Company, New York) 1990, p. 531.

Let this kind of legacy be ours as elders, that such has characterized our service for the Church of God.



ELDERS' SHOPNOTES

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