



# The Humble Man Feels Small

John M. Brenneman

John Brenneman was an American Mennonite preacher in the mid and late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Shortly after the Civil War he wrote a series of articles on pride and humility which were published in *Herald of Truth* magazine and later compiled into a booklet. This article is the latter part of that booklet. Due to its length we chose not to publish the first part, which deals more with describing pride.

John was tireless in his travels, and his life story would be worthy of retelling. He walked and rode many miles to struggling frontier settlements to further the kingdom of God, sometimes to the neglect of his own farm. In a time when self-assertion is deemed a virtue, this article will indeed seem like a piece of antiquity. And it is ... as the virtue of humility is as old as God himself.

**T**he humble man feels small, poor, bowed, cast down, and unworthy within himself, and esteems others more highly than himself. He never boasts or exalts himself or despises others, as did the proud and conceited Pharisee; but much rather laments his weakness, his failings, and imperfections. He “minds not high things, but condescends to men of low estate.” He does not conform to this world in all manner of empty pomp, and pride, and sinful wantonness. He is usually of a quiet, meek, and gentle disposition, knowing when to be silent and when to speak. He is at all times willing to give place and opportunity to others to express their opinions. In company he observes due modesty, and does not seat himself in the most honorable, but much rather in the lowest place at table. In his deeds, actions, and pursuits, he does not indulge in vain ostentation: his utensils, furniture, and apparel in general being simple and modest, free from useless ornament and decoration; for he feels no pleasure or gratification in such outward splendor; but much rather dissatisfaction, disgust, and abhorrence, knowing that such things are sinful, transient, and vain; and he strives rather to secure the inward ornamenting of the soul by the putting on of the spiritual and divine virtues.

In their corrupt nature, men are generally not humble; but they are more or less disposed to pride from their youth up, which is very displeasing to God. Though they were in the beginning created good and noble in the image of God, exalted and set over all other creatures, yet, by their fall through transgression, they became the poorest and most wretched of all creatures, and notwithstanding their depraved and dangerous state they still frequently imagine that all is well with them, whilst they are even miserable, poor, “blind and naked.”

But God is too merciful to leave them in this wretched condition without help: He is calling, reproofing, and convincing them through His Spirit and other means of grace, in order to awaken them from their sleep of sin; and as soon as a man hears and truly heeds this calling voice, and being convicted, sees that he is a poor, lost, and guilty sinner, and feels that his sins are a burden to him too heavy to be borne, he becomes so much oppressed and bowed down by this burden that he becomes small and poor within himself. Such a person feels then like David, who exclaimed, “I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. All the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears.” He feels as though he were the poorest and unworthiest of all men. Nay, he thinks he is no more worthy to be called a son or a child. He is glad to be reckoned as one of the least, or as a hireling. He can then, and will with a true heart, like the poor publican, smite his breast and pray, “God, be merciful to me a sinner;” or, like David, “create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.”

A man, thus truly penitent and humble in heart, truly turning to God, sincerely seeking Him day and night in prayer and supplication, wholly offering himself in sacrifice to Him, humbly submitting to His powerful hand, and desirous henceforth to live and continue faithful in His service to the end—such a man is, in the Scriptures, called an humble man; and such are they to whom God gives grace.

For example, the woman who was a sinner and humbled herself at the feet of Jesus, washing them with tears and wiping them with the hairs of her head, unto whom He said, “thy sins are forgiven. Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace.” All such penitent and humble sinners, seeking grace, shall obtain it of God through Jesus Christ. For “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” “Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ,” and “of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace,” says John. Grace is, therefore, the opposite of merit; for when a man gives me that which he owes me, and which I have earned by labor, he gives it to me, not out of grace, but out of

indebtedness. But if any one bestows on me good gifts, which I have not merited and which he does not owe me, he bestows them on me purely out of grace. Such a person, therefore, I might call gracious, insomuch as he has bestowed on me his grace or made me a partaker of his grace; that is, he has given or granted me grace.

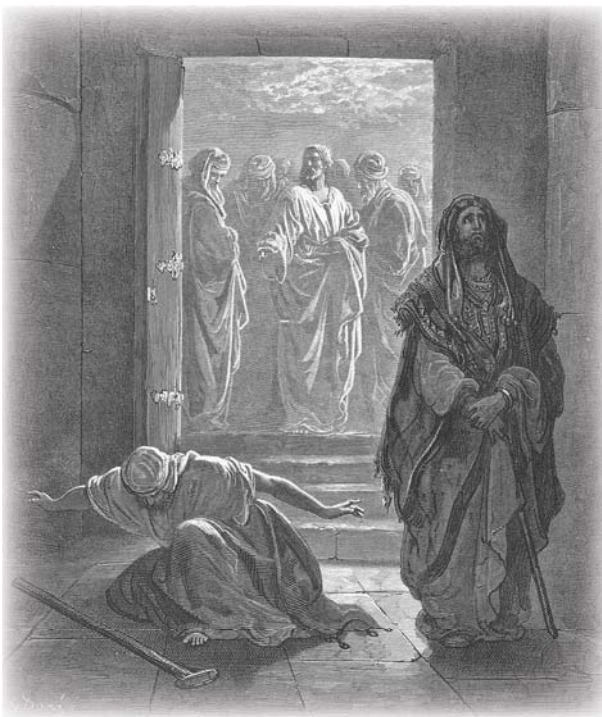
In like manner God has made us partakers of His grace, for He does not owe us anything; but on the other hand we owe Him ten thousand pounds, and have not one farthing with which to pay this great debt. But God will remit it out of pure grace, if we but with true penitence of heart humble ourselves before Him and confess our sins before Him, feel sorry on account of them, and from our heart pray to Him in the name of Jesus for pardon; then “he giveth grace” to us. It is through grace, therefore, that such humble, penitent sinners are saved, and made “accepted” through His dear Son. “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace.” Ro. 11:6. Through grace we are regenerated, and born anew, and accepted through Jesus Christ as children, and made heirs of His eternal and heavenly kingdom; that is “he giveth grace to the humble.”

He gives grace to them even in this life, insomuch as He pardons their sins and blesses them in body and soul with all manner of good gifts; and in the life to come He bestows on them eternal and heavenly gifts and possessions, and eternal joy, rest, and happiness. Oh how unspeakably great is this promise, “He giveth grace to the humble!” For the grace of God is of ten thousand times greater value than the whole world with all its pleasure, pomp, honor, and glory can ever be.

“My grace is sufficient for thee,” He said to Paul—as much as to say, “My grace supplies all your wants; you have need of nothing more.” I believe sincerely that whoever cannot content himself with the sufficiency of God’s grace can never have any real enjoyment; for the grace of God is sufficient for us in time and in eternity. If we are partakers of His grace and confide in it, we have all that we need in order to become happy, glorified and blessed

in this world and in the world to come; and what more can we wish?

But bear in mind, this grace is given only to the humble. O humility, noble virtue! how needful is it! It is worth more than gold and wealth, and worldly glory. Without humility we have no promise of the saving power of grace; and without this saving grace no one can be a child, and consequently neither an heir, of God. Oh how necessary it is that we candidly examine ourselves



**The publican felt small before God.**

whether we are in possession of this indispensable virtue, since on humility alone is bestowed this promise of grace. Without true humility of heart we have no promise of grace; but on the contrary we are threatened with God’s resistance, and His threatenings stand equally as firm as His promises; for the words of Jesus are firm and unchangeable. “Every one that exalteth himself (like the proud Pharisee) shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself (like the publican) shall be exalted.”

We have great cause to humble ourselves: First, on account of our sins, through which we have separated ourselves from God, who is so good, so holy, and so kind. O sin, what a detestable vice! It should cause us to bow down, to humble

ourselves in the dust, and with shame to repent in sackcloth and ashes. Oh! that we were not so obstinate and stiffnecked, and would no longer hesitate to humble ourselves and to bow under the mighty hand of God, since we are nothing at all without God’s grace. Will we then wantonly continue to sin against the grace of God, since we have not for one moment any security of our life? Oh how great the long-suffering of God toward man, since he does not desire that anyone should be lost, but that everyone should repent of his sins, confess them, amend his life, and humble himself.

Secondly, we have cause to humble ourselves, because Christ has commanded it. “Seek righteousness, seek humility: it may be you shall be hid in the day of the Lord’s anger.” Zp. 2:3 “He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

Mi. 6:8 "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God." 1 Pe. 5:6 "In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." Php. 2:3 "Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love." Ep. 4:1-2 "Be clothed with humility." 1 Pe. 5:5

Thirdly, on account of God's precious promises. "He giveth grace to the humble." He has also promised to dwell with them. "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." Is. 57:15 "He shall save the humble person." Jb. 22:29 "With the lowly is wisdom." Pr. 11:2 "Honor shall uphold the humble in spirit." Pr. 29:23 "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Lu. 18:14

Fourthly, the threatenings of God. "He resisteth the proud." "He hath scattered the proud in the imaginations of their hearts." Lu. 1:51 "Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord: he shall not be unpunished." Pr. 16:5 "A man's pride shall bring him low." Pr. 29:23 "Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased." Lu. 18:14 "Be not high-minded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee." Ro. 11:20-21

Fifthly, the example of Jesus Christ. He is "meek and lowly in heart." Behold, what an unparalleled example of humility He left us, when He, the Lord of lords and King of kings, washed His disciples' feet! How condescendingly our Lord and Master stooped and humbled himself. Greater humility, it seems to me, could not have been manifested than Jesus manifested on the occasion, when He said, "If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you."

Are we, then, all perfectly willing thus to stoop and to humble ourselves in conformity to the example of Jesus? Oh, how many Christian professors there are who refuse to do this! We should not, however, when we wash one another's feet, expect thereby to gain our salvation, nor is it for the purpose of washing away outward impurity from the feet; but simply to show obedience, love, and humility; and to show that we are not ashamed of Jesus and of His words. For, if we perform merely the outward act of washing one another's feet, and have not a genuine humility of heart and sincere love towards each other, we shall not in the least be benefitted by it; but rather thereby bring on ourselves greater sin. In lowliness of mind we

should each esteem another better than ourselves. The richest and most highly esteemed should not think himself too good to stoop and wash the feet of the least and the poorest member. If Jesus had bid us do "some great thing," would we not do it? How much rather, then, since He has said, "Ye also ought to wash one another's feet," inasmuch as He has given an example that we should do as He has done; and says, "Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart."

"He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Phl. 2:8 Oh! consider, then. For if Jesus, the Lord of Heaven, thus stooped and humbled himself, took on Him the form of a servant, was spit upon, scourged, and crucified for us, to reconcile us and to redeem us from the curse and from death; how it becomes us to imitate His example and to follow His footsteps in humility!

Now, dear readers, having seen the great difference between the proud and the humble, what will we do? The former God resists, but He gives grace to the latter. Which, then, will we choose? God's grace, or to be resisted by Him? I hope we will choose His grace. Though it is not otherwise to be obtained than by passing through the valley of humiliation, let us not on that account be frightened back; but truly bend and humble ourselves.

Remember, Jesus was humble, He did not exalt himself. Oh what should we not therefore willingly do, to obtain the grace of God? We should humble ourselves before Him with fasting, with weeping, and fervent prayer, till He hears us and gives us grace. My brethren and sisters, allow me to speak freely to you. In what condition do we find ourselves? Are we humble at heart? It will not profit us in the least, if we only assume an outward, dissembling form of humility, without genuine and unfeigned humility of heart; for this alone is valid in the sight of God. "For the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." 1 Sa. 16:7. Yea, He is a Searcher of hearts, and all our thoughts are open to His sight and known to Him.

But if we are truly humble in heart, then, without doubt, "that which is highly esteemed among men," and which "is abomination in the sight of God," will also be abomination to us. For, if we are truly humble, we have also obtained His grace; and if we have His grace, we have also His Spirit; and if we have His Spirit, we are also His children; and if we are His children, we are also partakers of His divine nature, and, if we are partakers of His divine nature, it is indisputably true that "that which is highly esteemed among men," and which "is abomination in the sight of God," must also be abomination to us. Let

us, then, candidly as in the sight of God examine whether we do not still take too much pleasure in those things which are highly esteemed among men. God the Searcher of our hearts knows what is in our hearts: we cannot deceive Him. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked."

However humble we may appear outwardly, yet as long as we approve of the needless and vain ornamenting and decorating of our houses and our families, and do not use our utmost diligence to prevent and to do away with such abominations, I cannot possibly believe that "that which is highly esteemed among men," is abomination to us; and if such vain and worldly aspirations have not yet become abominations to us, we have not yet been made partakers of the divine nature, and consequently cannot be children of God; for the children of God partake of the nature and character of God, which no one can deny.

Oh! who should not seriously reflect on it, when beholding the wickedness and pride of the world. The majority seem to hurry willfully with the great tide of worldly ambition on the broad road to the abyss of ruin. How frightfully they pervert their being, so that they scarcely appear like human beings. It seems that they are not satisfied any more with the form which God gave them. We are forced to think of many that they do not fear God nor regard man.

Should this now come before the eyes or ears of anyone who finds himself sunk and enveloped in the wickedness of pride, I would say to him: "Haste! haste! and deliver your precious soul: flee out of Babel! Flee! Flee, I pray you, out of the Sodom of this perverse and sinful world, that you be not partakers of its plagues. Oh! forsake hastily the broad road of vice, and humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, before it is forever too late. Oh! repent quickly and be converted that your sins may be blotted out. Abase and humble yourself as did the penitent publican, and you will also obtain mercy for your poor soul. Seek grace in humility and not in pride; for again I say unto you, 'God giveth grace to the humble,' and not to the proud. Oh! come, then, I entreat you, everyone who may read or hear this, if you have not already come. Hearken, ye can still find grace: come, all things are ready. 'Come boldly unto the throne of grace, that you may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.' Come now and do not wait for a 'more convenient season.' 'Look diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God.' Heb. 12:15. 'The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.'"

I feel as though I could hardly cease to warn you, O wretched man! Examine yourself seriously and critically by the mirror here placed before you, and consider well what is your character and to which class you belong, whether to the proud or the humble. Oh! examine yourself: it is not a small matter. You may soon, very soon and unexpectedly, be removed from this world, to receive the rewards of God's eternal grace, or to receive "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish," which shall be to "every soul of man that doeth evil." If you find yourself still in the way of the proud, turn, oh! turn, and have compassion on yourself, O man! Be admonished that the indignation of God be not your eternal lot. Permit yourself, I entreat you, to be persuaded.

In conclusion, I hope my readers will receive in love my humble exhortation and examine it closely, and if they find the truth therein brought before them I wish they might heartily embrace the cause and assist me to contend against pride, and to inculcate humility. Especially would I wish to invite my fellow laborers to take the privilege and opportunity to make further remarks on this subject, to improve or supply what is needed to fill up any deficiency that may yet exist.

I wish with my whole heart to all the readers the saving grace of God, the love of Jesus, and the communion of the Holy Ghost. But know, I say again, that God gives this grace only to the humble. May He make this exhortation a blessing to many hearts, that they may thereby be brought to reflect, and in humility to turn to God, if they have not already done so, and to entreat Him for grace while grace is yet offered, that He alone may thereby be honored through Jesus Christ. Amen. ~

A sword against the enemy, is humbleness of heart:  
From him who hath a humble mind he quickly must depart:  
His haughty, proud, ferocious mien humility disdains,  
He cannot even think to be where meekness humbly reigns:  
It wounds him—cuts him to the heart—to see a humble mind,  
Because his nature's haughty, proud—quite otherwise inclined.



*Pride and Humility*, from which this article is taken, can be downloaded freely from:

[www.PrimitiveChristianity.org](http://www.PrimitiveChristianity.org).  
Printed copies can be purchased at:  
Sermon on the Mount Publishing,  
P.O. Box 246  
Manchester, MI 48158.  
[www.kingdomreading.com](http://www.kingdomreading.com)