

## 12. The Humility of the Wise (1Q 2015—Proverbs)

**Biblical material:** Proverbs 30, Luke 18:9–14, Job 38–40:2, 1 John 1:9, Rev. 3:14–18, Psalm 104:24.

### Quotes

- Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less. *C. S. Lewis*
- Humility does not mean thinking less of yourself than of other people, nor does it mean having a low opinion of your own gifts. It means freedom from thinking about yourself at all. *William Temple*
- It was pride that changed angels into devils; it is humility that makes men as angels. *Augustine*
- Humility is the solid foundation of all virtues. *Confucius*
- Life is a long lesson in humility. *James M. Barrie*
- Nothing is more deceitful than the appearance of humility. It is often only carelessness of opinion, and sometimes an indirect boast. *Jane Austen*
- It is well to remember that the entire population of the universe, with one trifling exception, is composed of others. *Andrew J. Holmes*

### Questions

How do we become humble without being proud of our humility? Why are wisdom and humility tied together? What happens when the wise lack humility? What should we really be asking for? How does the aspect of humility fit into the controversy over God's nature and character?

### Bible summary

Proverbs 30 recognizes the importance of humility—for who of us has gone to heaven and returned with heavenly wisdom? The writer asks just two things from God: “Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.” Prov. 30:8 NIV. His greatest concern is not to misrepresent his Lord. Luke 18:9–14 records the story of the Pharisee and the tax-collector—spiritual humility was shown by the latter. God's eventual response to Job, and Job's humble reply are noted in Job 38-40:2. God's faithfulness is demonstrated in his forgiving us as we confess (1 John 1:9). The church of Laodicea is proud and thinks it doesn't need anything. But God replies pointing out its great needs. How much humility is needed here! (Rev. 3:14–18). All that God made he created in his wisdom (Psalm 104:24).

### Comment

Humility is a word rarely heard these days. Instead it's all about doing your own thing, achieving your own dream, making a success of yourself. The odd thing is that as soon as we take the fame seriously, it goes to our heads, and we are changed. Pride means being absorbed with ourselves and our own needs/position. That is why it is so hard for God to break through such situations, and he often has to use desperate remedies. The wise will pay attention, and recognize the humility that God himself exhibits. For God himself does not seek power and position, but demonstrates a spirit that is totally selfless. God, surely, could be expected to demand his position as supreme ruler, and in reality

cannot cede that because of who he is. But in the deliberate placing of all things under Christ's feet, God the Father shows how he honors true humility and selfless service (see Eph. 1). God's final goal is that all should live together in peace and harmony, following the principles of his good and just government that is based on humility and selflessness.

The war in heaven was not like an earthly war, and nor is the "Christian war." The battle is not won by force, but by humility. It is not by might, nor by power. It is by God's spirit, which is spirit of peace, love, joy, happiness, long-suffering—and all the other divine virtues. If the war could have been won by power, then *all-mighty* God could already have won. The argument however is not over who has the most power. The war is over how that power is used, over the legitimacy of God's government, over the real nature of his character which is humility personified.

So how do we "help God win"? The question is of course flawed, since God can surely win without our aid. But he has invited our participation, and we certainly make our contributions, to one side or the other. We may sometimes think that we can in our own power fight on the right side and gain the victory. But the Bible makes it clear that the battle is not against flesh and blood and that the issues are truly on a huge scale. Our little battles are only meaningful as they play into the wider scheme of things. Our role is to identify with God and his character, not because we are forced to, or induced to, but because we agree that right is right, that the moral laws of the universe are entirely well-founded and not arbitrary at all.

Recognizing what we are up against should lead us to be very humble about our own strength and abilities. In and of ourselves we have no capacity to defeat the devil and his unjust use of force. We are to make the right choices, to place ourselves on the side of righteousness and truth, demonstrating in our lives that whatever comes we will not give up our clear conviction that God is telling the truth and is entirely trustworthy. For the war can only end in victory as God is finally proved entirely and eternally right.

Humility in our truth-discovery journey is also essential. As André Gide said, "Believe those who are seeking the truth. Doubt those who find it." Not categorically, but always examine the evidence.

Finally, on speaking the truth about others, and humbly avoiding the cardinal sin of malicious gossip: "There is so much good in the worst of us,/ And so much bad in the best of us,/ That it hardly behooves any of us/ To talk about the rest of us." —Edward Wallis Hoch

### **Ellen White Comments**

Mutual forbearance is called for. We should love and respect one another notwithstanding the faults and imperfections that we cannot help seeing; for this is the Spirit of Christ. Humility and self-distrust should be cultivated, and a patient tenderness with the faults of others. This will kill out all narrowing selfishness and make us large-hearted and generous. {ST Mar. 5, 1885}

Let a Christian walk with the Lord in all humility of mind and he is called narrow, bigoted, exclusive. If he is zealous, the world will call him a fanatic... Let the Christian be whatever grace can make him, and the world cannot understand it. It is the unseen, inner life that is woven with the life of God, represented as hid with Christ in God, that the world cannot discern. {1888 928}