

“If My people humble themselves...”

R. Stanley, 13 April 2020

One of the oft-quoted Bible texts with reference to prayers for safety and deliverance during any calamity is 2 Chronicles 7:14, “If My people who are called by My Name will (1) HUMBLE THEMSELVES and (2) pray and (3) seek My face and (4) turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sin, and heal their land.” Do we notice that of the 4 things God requires of His people in this text for the healing of the Nation, the first one is HUMBLING OF OURSELVES?

God’s intense dealing with me in the recent years has been in this area. By nature I am a proud guy. In spite of the several humiliating experiences God has taken me through over the years, I cannot say I have humbled myself enough. God’s patience is still making me.

It is the realisation of our unworthiness which results in the understanding of God’s worthiness. The word “WORSHIP” comes from an Anglosaxon word, meaning, “WORTHSHIP.” It is humbling of ourselves which makes worship acceptable before God. The one who realized his unworthiness most was John the Baptist, the greatest of all prophets according to Jesus. He confessed, “There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose.” This confession is reported in three Gospels (Mk 1:7; Lk 3:16; Jn 1:27). Apostle Paul makes a reference to it in a Synagogue sermon (Acts 13:25). This loosening of sandal strap is done by slaves, not even by servants. This self-humbling is an ongoing experience. In essence John said, “He must keep on increasing, and I must keep on decreasing” (Jn 3:30).

Recently I came across in the Bible repeated references to the questions, “Who am I?” and “What am I?” and similar confessions. These are expressions of utter humility by certain Bible characters. In this article let’s look at seven of them —

1. Abraham

“Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord” (Gen 18:27).

Abraham spoke these words to God in Heaven while interceding for Sodom. He started with 50 righteous men in the city, and came down to 45,40,30,20 and 10 (vv22-33). The confession referred to above was when he bargained for 5 less than 50. When one calls himself as “dust and ashes,” he perhaps cannot humble himself any further. These are useless stuff fit to be thrown into dunghill only. Though he looked so insignificant in his own sight, God had great regards for this Patriarch. The following observations are both challenging and encouraging —

■ Abraham is the first one to use the word “worship” in the Bible. To the two young men, who accompanied him and Isaac to Mount Moriah, he said, “Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and **worship**, and we will come back to you” (Gen 22:5). By “worship,” Abraham meant sacrificing of his only son whom he loved (v2). Can ...2

there be a better definition for worship? Worship is not to excite *us* but to exalt *God* with the best of what we have. It is not to make *us* happy but to gladden the heart of *God*. How much our modern worship practices fall short of Abraham's understanding of it!

■ Abraham is the first one to be called a "prophet" in the Bible. Believing his half truth about Sarah, King Abimelech took her. God rebuked the King in a dream for taking another man's wife. When the King pleaded his innocence, God told him, "Restore the man's wife; for he is a **prophet**, and he will pray for you" (Gen 20:7). To be the first one to be called a prophet, and that too by God Himself, was not an ordinary honour. It was this man who called himself as "dust and ashes" (18:27). Let's beware of getting puffed up in mind on the basis of God's calling and gifting. Whether I am an Apostle or a Prophet or an Evangelist or a Pastor or a Teacher, I must never forget that I'm only "dust and ashes" before my God.

■ Abraham is the first one to be called the "Friend of God." Before telling him of his anger over Sodom and Gomorrah because of the great outcry and very grievous sin, God spoke to Himself, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing? For I have known him..." (Gen 18:17-19). Picking up from this statement of God, Apostle James wrote, "He was called the **Friend of God**" (Js 2:23). The intimacy God had with Abraham is amazing. It's generally said that familiarity breeds contempt. Not so with Abraham. He called God the "Judge" of all the earth (Gen 18:25). While interceding for Sodom, he said twice, "Let not the Lord be angry" (vv30,32). Our communion and closeness with God and His communication with us should not curtail our reverential fear for Him.

■ Abraham is called the "father" of all those who believe (Rom 4:11). Apostle Paul calls him so because of what God told him when He changed his name from Abram to Abraham: "I have made you a **father** of many nations" (Gen 17:5). "Abram" means "Exalted Father." "Abraham" means "Father of a Multitude." One speaks of exaltation, and the other of expansion. Walking perfectly before the Lord was the vertical dimension of Abraham's life (v1). Walking in the land through its length and its width was his horizontal dimension (13:17). In Apostle Paul's writing, an entire chapter is allotted to Abraham (Rom 4). No other Old Testament character is given such prominence in the New. The New Testament and the genealogy of Jesus begin with Abraham (Mt 1:1). When God exalts us in our job or ministry, it's easy to imagine that we have come to that position because of our skillfulness and hard work. No doubt God honours these two things, but he is never obliged to promote us. It's the grace of God that brings us to covetable positions.

■ Of all the OT characters, it was to Abraham that the people of Israel were called to look to, in order to understand their roots. Isa 51:1,2, "Listen to Me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the Lord: Look to the **rock** from which you were hewn, and to the hole of the pit from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your **father** and to Sarah who bore you; for I called him alone, and blessed him and increased him." In his own estimate, Abraham was "dust and ashes" (Gen 18:27). But God calls him a "rock!" "Before honour is humility" (Prov 15:33b; 18:12b).

2. Moses

*“Moses said to God, **Who am I** that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” (Ex 3:11)*

God revealed His purpose concerning His people to Moses through the vision of the burning bush (Ex 3:1-10). This was such a marvellous vision that both Jesus and Stephen referred to it in their discourses (Lk 20:37; Acts 7:30,35). Moses saw the invisible, heard the inaudible, chose the imperishable, and did the impossible (Heb 11:27). There are several outstanding things spoken about Moses —

■ The testimony of the Word of God concerning Moses is striking: Num 12:3, “Now the man Moses was very **humble**, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.” The context of this text is noteworthy. His sister Miriam and brother Aaron spoke against him concerning the Ethiopian woman he had married (v1). They gave religious colour to their criticism; “Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?” (v2). Moses did not defend himself, though he would have been deeply hurt by the unkind criticism of his own brother, who was his mouthpiece, and his own sister, who was his song leader. “But the *Lord* heard it!” (v2). The first response of Moses to the criticism was his prayer for his sister who criticized him and was struck with leprosy: “Lord, please heal her, O God, I pray” (v13). If Moses had not been a humble man in this scene, he would have hit Miriam by his left arm and Aaron by his right, finished them, and buried them! That was what Moses was before the Lord shaped him in the wilderness for 40 years (Ex 2:11-15; Acts 7:21-28).

■ God spoke to Moses “face to face as a friend” (Ex 33:11a). While defending Moses before Miriam and Aaron, God challenged them, “Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision, and I speak to him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; he is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in riddles; and he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?” (Num 12:6-8). According to these words of God, which are in poetical form in our Bibles, Moses was **more than a prophet**. Jesus referred to John the Baptist as the “greatest of all prophets” (Mt 11:11). About him we read that he performed no sign or miracle (Jn 10:41). But about Moses it is written that there had not arisen in Israel a prophet like him in all the “signs” and “wonders” which he performed by “mighty power” and “great terror” (Dt 34:10-12). To maintain humility before God and man, when God powerfully manifests spectacular gifts through us, is definitely a challenge and that’s where true greatness lies. We must pray, “Lord, hide me, but reveal Yourself!” When we honestly make such a request, people would glorify “God” who gives such power to men (Mt 9:8).

■ Though Abraham is the first one to be called, “My servant,” by God, it is Moses who is more frequently called so than any other in the Bible. While challenging Miriam and Aaron, God referred to Moses as “*My servant*” twice (Num 12:7,8). While commissioning Joshua after Moses, God told him, “Moses *My servant* is dead. Now therefore arise and go ...” (Josh 1:2). The other references where Moses is called the “servant of God” are 1 Chr 6:49; 2 Chr 24:9; Neh 10:29; Dan 9:11. Even in Heaven the

song they sang is called “the song of Moses, the **servant of God**” (Rev 15:3). He was denied entry into Canaan but not into Heaven! He was one of the two visitors from Heaven who spoke to Jesus at the Mount of Transfiguration (Mt 17:3). Mark reports that Elijah appeared “with Moses” (Mk 9:4). Luke says that Moses and Elijah appeared “in glory” (Lk 9:30,31). Titles and designations must not make us proud and arrogant. Humility should be our crown.

■ Only one Psalm is attributed to Moses: Psalm 90. It is titled as, “*A Prayer of Moses the **man of God.***” Spend some time meditating on this Psalm. Its richness and coverage of truths are amazing. Verse 10 is one of the favourite texts of the aged people: “The days of our lives are 70 years; and if by reason of strength they are 80 years, yet their boast is only labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away!” And Moses balanced it in verse 15: “Oh Lord, make us glad according to the days in which You have afflicted us, and the years in which we have seen evil.” As far as the patriarchal age is concerned, we can say that Moses died too young, even before he developed cataract (Dt 34:7). He is the only person for whom God Himself conducted the funeral without a congregational service (Dt 34:5,6). The devil was interested even in his dead body, and he had a dispute with Michael the archangel (Jude 9). Thank God no one knows where He buried Moses. Otherwise the people would have erected a shrine on the spot, just like Peter wanted to build a tabernacle for Moses on the Transfiguration Mount (Mt 17:4).

We are called the “children” of God. Anyone who wants to grow to become a “man of God” or “woman of God” has several lessons to learn from Moses the man of God. He walked in close fellowship with God (Num 12:8; Dt 34:10). He was faithful in all matters in the house of God (Num 12:7; Heb 3:2,5). The writer of Hebrews dared to compare the faithfulness of Jesus to that of Moses (Heb 3:2-5). When God told Moses that He would strike the people with pestilence lest they enter Canaan, he pleaded passionately before Him to pardon them (Num 14:11-19). But when God denied him entry into Canaan, he graciously accepted it without speaking a word (20:12). Any disqualification in this world, for whatever reason, for the man of God, will not deter him from walking with God faithfully with his eyes on the “reward” in Heaven (Heb 11:26b). No one can snatch from him the garment of humility (1 Pet 5:5 b).

3. King Saul

*“Am I not a Benjamite, of the **smallest** of the tribes of Israel,
and my family the **least** of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin?
Why then do you speak like this to me?” (1 Sam 9:21)*

These were the words of Saul in response to what Prophet Samuel said concerning God’s choice of him to be the “commander” over His people (1 Sam 9:20; 10:1). It shocked Saul when Samuel told him that the “desire” of Israel was on him and on all his father’s house.

Benjamin was the youngest of Jacob’s twelve sons. His dying mother named him as “Ben-Oni,” meaning, “Son of my sorrow” (Gen 35:18). But his father, Jacob, named him as “Benjamin,” meaning, “Son of my right hand.” Benjamin was the full brother of

Joseph (v24). Look at Jacob's prophecy concerning Benjamin: Gen 49:27, "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil." This prediction was that the Benjamites would become mighty warriors. About them we read in 1 Chronicles 12:1,2, "They were among the mighty men, helpers in the war, armed with bows, using both the right hand and the left in hurling stones and shooting arrows with the bow." Apostle Paul was of the tribe of Benjamin (Phil 3:5). No wonder he was a fighter both before and after conversion!

■ Very sadly, King Saul did not maintain the spirit of humility and realisation of his nothingness before God until last. This resulted in his sinful behaviour. He did not wait for Samuel to offer the burnt offering. When Samuel delayed a bit, Saul felt compelled to do it because people started leaving him, and the Philistines could come down on him anytime (1 Sam 13:8-14). This people-oriented behaviour made Saul disobey "the commandment of the Lord God" (1 Sam 13:8-14). This **irreverential act** of Saul angered God and he bypassed him for David (vv13,14). God picked up a man "after His own heart."

■ Another sin of Saul was **self-projection**. He set up "a monument for himself" (1 Sam 15:12). This is a subtle trap for anyone in leadership. The heroworshipping culture of the world of movies and politics has percolated into Christianity, especially into the ministries of certain popular preachers. The religious stardom is obnoxious in God's sight. A conscious and consistent effort on the part of charismatic preachers to reflect all the praises of men towards God, who alone is worthy, will alone save them from many a peril. An oft-repeated statement of Jesus is, "Whoever exalts himself will be abased, and he who **humbles** himself will be exalted" (Mt 23:12; Lk 14:11; 18:14b).

■ Thirdly, Saul was guilty of **partial obedience**. God had commanded him to "utterly" destroy the Amalekites and fight against them "until" they were consumed (1 Sam 15:3,18). But he and the people spared the best of the cattle, and all that was good. They utterly destroyed only which was despised and worthless (v9). This made God to "greatly regret" to have chosen Saul to be the first King of Israel (v11). When God shared His feelings with Prophet Samuel, he was so grieved that he spent a sleepless night crying unto God. Samuel called Saul's partial obedience as "rebellion" equivalent to witchcraft, and "stubbornness" equivalent to idolatry (v23). It is at this time Samuel reminded Saul how he was "little in his own eyes" at the time of God's appointment as King (v17; 1 Sam 9:21).

Beloved, maintaining brokenness and lowliness of mind till the end is not easy for any Christian, whether in leadership or not. God "removed" Saul and "raised" David. This became a historical lesson which Paul quoted in one of his sermons during his first missionary journey (Acts 13:21,22). This has happened in the lives of so many servants of God. Our impressive personality and inherited skills may disturb our equilibrium if we don't stay watchful and cautious (1 Sam 9:2). We must ever keep in mind that God's choice is based purely on His grace. This would keep us humble till the end. When we reach heights in God's work and get success over success, a periodic check-up whether we walk in early humility before God will save us from many a disaster.

4. David

“*Who am I?*” “*What am I?*” David asked such questions on several occasions in his life. Here are four of them —

■ When King Saul offered his daughter, Merab, to David, he said to Saul, “*Who am I, and what is my life or my father’s family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the King?*” (1 Sam 18:18). It so happened that she was given to another guy. Saul’s younger daughter, Michal, developed a liking for David. When Saul through his servants offered her to David, he gave a similar reply: “Does it seem to you a light thing to be a King’s son-in-law, seeing *I am a poor and lightly esteemed man?*” (v23). Becoming the King’s son-in-law was no ordinary matter. Several youths have spoilt their character in marriage alliance. David’s marriage to Michal was not without problems, but he remained humble before God all through. When he returned with the ark to Jerusalem, dancing before it, Michal voiced her harsh criticism that he was dancing shamelessly forgetting that he was the king. Here’s David’s response: “I will be even more undignified than this, and will be **humble** in my own sight” (2 Sam 6:22).

■ We observe David’s humility when King Saul was chasing him. He asked Saul, “After whom has the King of Israel come out? *Whom do you pursue? A dead dog? A flea?*” (1 Sam 24:14). David said this in spite of the fact that he could have killed Saul when the latter had gone into a cave to attend to his needs. In fact he had cut off a corner of Saul’s robe (vv3,4). Don’t we forget our nothingness when challenged by our enemies? A word to those in Christian ministries: When God expands and blesses your work, it is observed worldwide that the number of your enemies increases, even as He adds more and more wellwishers and supporters. As you necessarily keep yourself encouraging in the Lord, don’t forget your nothingness. Take it as an occasion to humble yourself further before the Almighty. In our fallen nature we can never say we have humbled ourselves enough.

■ God told David through Prophet Nathan that it would not be he but his son, Solomon, who would build Him the temple. Here’s David’s response: “*Who am I, O Lord God? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far?*” (2 Sam 7:18). The narrative reads like this: “Then King David went in and sat before the Lord; and he said ...” It’s implied that David sat on the floor and humbled himself with this confession. It’s easier to confess such words at the initial stages, and not after reaching heights! God reminds us often of our lowly estate. This is what He told David: “I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people” (v8). Read through the Thanksgiving Prayer of David from verses 18 to 29. He addresses God eight times as “O Lord God!” Pure worship! The quality of our worship gets enhanced by humbling ourselves more and more before God. Let those of us addicted to chairs come down to sit on mats before God. You cannot fall from a mat!

■ After giving the plan to his son Solomon for the construction of the temple, David urged the entire congregation to fully support him who was “young and inexperienced” (1 Chr 28:11; 29:1). He told them how he gave abundantly from his “own special treasure of gold and silver” (29:3). He confessed that it was all because of the affection he had for God’s House. He then motivated the people for liberal giving (v5). The people’s response

was overwhelming. With abounding joy, he blessed the Lord and said, “O God, *Who am I*, and *who are my people*, that we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things come from You, and of Your hand we have given You!” (v14). David did not boast of his fund-mobilising capacity! Let’s strike a deathblow to the rat race between fund-raisers of various Churches and parachurch organisations.

Before moving to the next character in our study of humility, let’s briefly compare the responses of King Saul and King David when they were confronted for their sins. When Samuel questioned Saul why he dared to make the burnt offering himself, he gave excuses. In the matter of the Amalekites he resorted to blameshifting. As a self-defense he built a monument for himself. Contrarily, when David was confronted by Prophet Nathan for his sin of adultery and murder, he confessed, “I have sinned.” When God sent a plague because he numbered the people, he asked Him, “Surely *I* have sinned, and *I* have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have *they* done?” (2 Sam 24:17). Without humility, confession and repentance will not be genuine.

5. Solomon

*“Who is able to build God a temple,
since heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him?
Who am I then, I should build Him a temple,
except to burn sacrifice before Him?” (2 Chr 2:6)*

After selecting many thousands of labourers and overseers for the building of the temple, Solomon sent a request to Hiram, the King of Tyre, to spare for him a chief architect for the work, and also timber (2 Chr 2:3-10). It is in this request to Hiram that Solomon made the above statement (v6). It’s heartening to note that Solomon inherited such a spirit of humility from David his dad. Solomon had many superlatives to his credit —

- Solomon was the wisest man in his time. God told him in dream, “Behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor any like you arise after you” (1 Ki 3:12). “All the earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart” (10:24).

- Solomon was the richest and the most honoured King. In the same dream referred to above, God told him, “I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honour, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days”(1Ki 3:13). His wealth is explained like this: “All King Solomon’s drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the House of the Forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; not one was of silver, for silver was accounted as nothing in his days” (10:21). This is perhaps more than the riches of some of our Arabian Sheiks!

- Jesus recognised the superlatives of Solomon when He used statements like, “Even Solomon in all his glory...” (Mt 6:28,29). He called Himself “greater than Solomon” while referring to Queen of Sheba who came all the way from the Southern end of the world to hear Solomon’s wisdom (12:42; 1 Ki10:1).

With all these excellencies, Solomon realised his unworthiness. Let not blessings make us proud. Here comes God’s word through Prophet Jeremiah: “Let not the wise

man glory in his wisdom; let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me” (Jer 9:23,24). Whatever we have is only what we have received from God. Apostle Paul challenged the Corinthian Christians, “Who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” (1 Cor 4:7). The first thing Paul wanted Timothy to “command” the rich was “not to be haughty” (1 Tim 6:17). Towards the end of his life, Solomon got lost in the enjoyment of blessings and pleasures, and left the Blessor. This can happen to anyone. The name “Solomon” means “peace,” but he died without the peace of God. He had wisdom for others, but not for himself.

Thank God for the thorns from Him which prevent us from exalting ourselves for whatever reason (2 Cor 12:7). Thorns keep us safe on our thrones!

6. Mephibosheth

He bowed himself, and said, “What is your servant, that you should look upon such a dead dog as I?” (2 Sam 9:8)

After the death of King Saul, David enquired, “Is there not still some one of the house of Saul, to whom I may show the kindness of God?” And Ziba, one of the servants of Saul, answered, “There is still a son of Jonathan who is lame in his feet” (2 Sam 9:3). He was referring to Mephibosheth. David arranged to bring him to his place. When Mephibosheth had come to him, he fell on his face and prostrated himself, and uttered the words quoted above (vv 6,8).

To start with, David did not ask, “*Is there* someone in the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness?” Rather, “*Is there NOT* someone in the house of Saul?” David did not simply say, “kindness” but “the kindness of God” (v3). He ordered, “Mephibosheth shall eat at my table like one of the king’s sons” (vv10,11). This privilege was extended to him for all the days of his life.

We see ourselves in the character of Mephibosheth. He was “lame in both his feet” (v13). He was helpless. This is what’s told about us: “When we were **still** without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom 5:6). Saul as an enemy was after the life of David. “But God demonstrates His love towards us in that while we were **still** sinners, Christ died for us” (v8). It was David’s own initiation that found out Mephibosheth to enjoy his kindness and favour (2 Sam 9:1-3). Jesus told His disciples, “You did **not** choose Me, but I chose you” (Jn 15:16a). Apostle John restates this truth in 1 John 4:10,19, “In this is love, **not** that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins... We love Him because He **first** loved us.” Paul illuminates this truth still more brilliantly. He writes in Ephesians 2:8,9, “By grace you have been saved through faith, and that **not** of yourselves; it is the gift of God, **not** of works, lest anyone should boast.” Beloved, it’s Jesus who is the “Author” of our faith, **not** we (Heb 12:2). It’s God who has **begun** a good work in us (Phil 1:6). It’s God, who, of His own self, predestined us, called us, justified us, and would glorify us (Rom 8:29,30). It is “His” purpose (v28). Let’s join Jacob and say, “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, which You have shown Your servant” (Gen 32:10).

Our feet will be on level ground only as long as the above truth stays fast and fresh in our minds. This is what would keep us from the better-than-thou attitude. Can Mephibosheth ever boast of his privilege of joining David at his dining table? Someone should carry him to the table to be seated with David. There were no motorized wheelchairs those days, I suppose! Justification is by grace . Sanctification is by grace. Glorification would be also by grace. John Newton (1725-1807) was a slave trader who, after his conversion, helped abolish slave trade. He composed a timeless hymn in 1772 —

<i>Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now am found; Was blind, but now I see!</i>	<i>'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears relieved; How precious did that grace appear The hour I first believed.</i>
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I personally cannot think of a better title than “Amazing Grace!” for my life story. My eyes became full when the 784-page autobiography of Dr. Billy Graham (1918-2018) was released under the title, “Just as I am.” Let’s all sing this —

<i>Just as I am, without one plea, But that Thy blood was shed for me, And that Thou bidd’st me come to Thee, Lamb of God, I come! I come!</i>	<i>Just as I am, Thou wilt receive, Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve, Because Thy promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come! I come!</i>
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The father did not insist on a close haircut, a clean shave, a soap bath or a change of dress before he could embrace his lost son! “But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had **compassion**, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him” (Lk 15:20). It was the younger son’s humility that positioned him laudably in the father’s house (vv19,21). The elder boy’s refusal to enter in was lamentable (v28). He was proud of his so-called meritorious works (v29). Unfortunately we have too many “elder sons” in our Churches. Let’s humble ourselves. Let’s humble ourselves to the uttermost.

We believers are warned of the possibility of forgetting our sinful past. When David commanded his own soul not to forget the benefits from God, the first one he mentions in the 5-item list is “forgiveness of sins” (Psa 103:1-5). He brings out the 4-dimensional love of God in this Psalm: Height (v11), Breadth (v12), Depth (v13) and Length (vv17,18). Apostle Peter warns us of “shortsightedness” and even “blindness” when we forget how God in His mercy has purged us from our old sins (2 Pet 1:9). One reason why God used John Wesley (1703-1791) more than his peers was that he was ever conscious of God’s amazing grace which saved him. Pointing to a drunkard dragged by policemen on the street, Wesley told his associates, “There goes John Wesley but for the grace of God!” “Father God, let me never forget that I am a Mephibosheth at the dining table with the Son of David!”

7. Paul

Among the New Testament writers, Apostle Paul stands out for his exhortations on humility and his life of humility. He presented Christ as the embodiment of humility (Phil 2:8). For his teaching on humility, read Romans 12:3; 1 Corinthians 1:28,29;
...10

Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:12 and Titus 3:2. Paul confessed his absolute unworthiness in three important areas —

■ **“The chief of sinners.”** Paul called himself so before his trainee, a junior! (1 Tim 1:15). This he said in spite of the fact that he had excelled his contemporaries, even before his conversion. He claimed, while writing to the Philippian Christians, that he was “blameless” as far as the Law was concerned (Phil 3:6b). Which means, he had no moral sins, and his cruel acts were religion-based. His devotedness to Judaism was also superlative: Gal 1:14, “I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the tradition of my fathers.”

■ **“The least of saints.”** Paul mentions these words in his Epistle to the Ephesians in which he dwells much on the subject of salvation by grace. Eph 3:8, “To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” I wonder how he could call himself “the least of saints” when he was frequently challenging others to follow him and imitate him (1 Cor 11:1; Phil 3:17; 4:9; 2 Tim 3:10; 1 Thess 2:10-12). This is the beauty of true humility.

■ **“The least of the apostles.”** Here again, while he was celebrating the grace of God, Paul called him so: 1 Cor 15:9,10, “I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was in me.” The plus points of Paul’s apostolic career are worth noticing. He had a consistent life from the beginning to end (Acts 20:18,19). He testified that he “wronged no one, corrupted no one, defrauded no one” (2 Cor 7:2). Thirteen out of twentyone Epistles in the New Testament were authored by him.

To summarise, Paul had humility concerning his (a) sinfulness, (b) saintliness and (c) service. He is a humble follower of Christ and he is worth following!

Conclusion

The Christian world speaks more about “filling” and hardly does it make any reference to “emptying.” Of Jesus we read that He first “emptied” Himself, and then “humbled” Himself (Phil 2:5-8). Without emptying ourselves of whatever we think is great in us, we cannot experience true humility. More the emptying, more the filling. This divine law is best illustrated in the story of the prophet’s widow for whom Prophet Elijah performed a miracle of increase of oil. When she said that she could not get any more empty vessel, the oil ceased (2 Ki 4:6). God rewarded the 24 elders with crowns and thrones in Heaven. First, they cast their crowns before the Lord, saying, “You are worthy” (Rev 4:10,11). Next, they stood up from their thrones, fell on their faces and worshipped God (11:16). The honour we receive even from God should go back to Him. This is humility that ascends to God like a sweet-smelling aroma!

(This article is available in Tamil also.)

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