Humility and Submission

Let us open the Holy Scriptures to Ephesians, chapter 4, verses 11 to 13. *"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."* Amen.

In these verses we see God's plan for us as human beings and the purpose He has for us. He has set in the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to make us complete, so that we come to the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

Together we will try to study one trait of the Lord Jesus' character that we too should make our own. It is a hard trait to acquire, but we will see how we can come to have it, because it matters greatly for us.

First we will read in 1 Corinthians, chapter 1. Here God speaks to us about the traits of the Lord Jesus, among them the one we are going to talk about. We read from verse 27 through verse 29: *"But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence."* Amen.

God chose the foolish, the weak, the base and the despised things, and one of these describes the Lord Jesus and ought to describe us as well. We will study so as to understand that we too must come to have this quality that the Lord Jesus had.

Let us go and read in Zechariah, chapter 9, beginning at verse 9: *"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee."* The Lord Jesus is described as righteous and victorious, yet also lowly, riding on a colt, as the verse says: *"he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."* Amen.

As King, the Lord Jesus reigns over people and rules them, and His subjects are under His authority. The Word of God presents the Lord Jesus as a lowly King, a trait we are urged to study and take on ourselves, given how valuable and important humility is.

To understand this better, let us define humility: it means lowliness and submission. Although kings generally submit to no one, the Lord Jesus is submitted to the heavenly Father. The world often looks on humility as something negative and contemptible, a sign of weakness. We notice that from birth children tend to be disobedient, and parents work hard to raise them to obey. For example, a child absorbed in play or in a book may not respond right away when a parent calls them to come to the table or to do a chore, unless they have been taught to.

Humility is not valued in society, but in God's eyes it is an essential virtue. The Lord Jesus Himself is the supreme example of humility, as we see from the prophecy we read and from His own words in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 11, verses 28 to 30: *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."* These words urge us to seek refuge in the humility and rest that only He can give. *"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* Amen.

When we read these verses, perhaps we have not looked at them closely enough and have treated them as separate. We took the yoke of Christ as a metaphor and read the word *"lowly"* as something apart from what the yoke means. But what does the yoke stand for? Traditionally, oxen were bound to a yoke so they would not stray from the path and could be guided. The yoke was used to control and direct the animals. *"Take my yoke"* means: *Before the Father, I submitted to a yoke to do His will, not My own.*

This is where our difficulty lies: when we are asked to give up our own will. The Lord Jesus had discernment, but He submitted His discernment to the Father's will. *"I am lowly."* We might think that although He is lowly, we do not have to be. Yet if we want to be like Him and reach the fulness of His stature, we too must be lowly in heart.

So if we accept the yoke of submission and humility, it is good for us. And the burden we carry because of the yoke becomes light. When we think of this yoke, of submitting in the church, how do we react? With dread, fear or alarm, wondering what will happen to us if we accept it. But what does the Lord Jesus tell us? *"Take my yoke."* He urges us to accept it and to learn of Him, because He is lowly.

The Word of God, in Acts chapter 8, speaks about the humility of the Lord Jesus. We should know that the dictionary definitions of humility come from God, the Creator of all things. He defined humility, and people adopted that definition, telling us that being humble means being lowly and submissive. In chapter 8, verse 33, we read the first part: *"In his humiliation his judgment was taken away."* This is a great challenge for us: to have our right to judge taken away.

We must hold back from judging and let ourselves be led by the Lord so that we understand what we ought to do. It is essential that we keep reading about the Lord Jesus, not only speaking about Him and praising Him, but setting ourselves a clear goal and striving to reach it. When we read, we should do it for our own understanding and growth.

The Epistle to the Philippians speaks to us about the Lord Jesus. I believe that once we have read and reflected on the text, we will realise how hard it is to be humble and what the consequences are when humility is lacking. We read from Philippians 2, verses 5 to 8: *"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly

exalted him."*

We will also read from Peter's writings, which you probably remember, *"that he may exalt you in due time."* At the time He had set, the Lord Jesus was exalted, but before that He was humbled. *"And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death."*

Earlier someone mentioned that the Lord had moved their heart to obey. Yes, certainly, the Lord. But not only in a general way; in everything the Lord commands. When the Lord says, *"Obey them that have the rule over you,"* that too is a command of the Lord, and we cannot refuse it, because that would be disobedience to Him. We must follow everything the Lord commands. Continuing in the Epistle to the Philippians, we read a promise in chapter 3, verses 20 and 21, to keep in our hearts: *"For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."* Amen.

The promise is meant for those who embrace this lowly state, that is, those who are humble. Humility means lowliness and submission, and these qualities have to be cultivated. The Lord Jesus showed submission in His relationship with the Father, not only through humility but through complete submission, which is a hard thing for us. To understand humility better, we turn to 1 Peter, where God speaks to us about it. Humility is required of everyone, whatever their role in society: children, husbands, wives, women and men.

In 1 Peter, chapter 5, verses 5 and 6, we read: *"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time."* These verses stress the importance of humility and submission in our relationships, telling us that God opposes pride but gives grace to the humble and submissive.

The apostle James, in chapter 4, confirms that God gives grace to the humble. To grasp how much God values humility, we turn to Psalm 25, which shows us that humility is a trait of the Lord Jesus' character and must be sought like a precious treasure. Psalm 25, verse 9, says: *"The meek will he guide in judgment,"* stressing that God teaches the humble His way.

So humility is essential, and we must strive to attain it and have it in us. The apostle Peter urges us to be clothed with humility and to humble ourselves under God's hand, because God gives grace and teaching to the humble. David says in Psalm 25: *"The meek will he guide in judgment."* This shows us that through humility God helps us learn to walk in His righteousness and to know His way.

Psalm 119, verse 67, reflects on humility: *"Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word."* This verse underlines how important humility is for keeping God's word. Verse 71 carries the thought further: *"It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn

thy statutes."* These verses teach us that humility is essential for understanding and learning God's statutes.

We can pray for humility, asking God to teach us to be humble, because without humility we go astray and do not keep His word.

The world often despises submission, but for God's children it is a treasure of great price that we must seek. In Matthew, chapter 18, verses 2 to 4, the Lord Jesus teaches us the worth of humility: *"Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."* Amen.

These teachings show us that humility is a condition for entering God's Kingdom and that we must humble ourselves to be great in the kingdom of heaven. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. The question *"What does it mean, humble as a little child? As this little child?"* invites us to reflect on the example of humility the Lord Jesus gave by calling a child into the midst of the others. That child, coming when called, teaches us about obedience and submission. Not in the sense that it robs us of who we are; rather, it calls us to follow Him in lowliness.

When we turn our attention to the book of Joshua, chapter 1, we are invited to think about the submission of men. There seems to be a dilemma about where submission fits in the life of a man, who is seen as the head of the woman and of the family and who is expected to lead. Yet even the Lord Jesus, though He was King and Lord, showed us how we must submit.

Turning to Joshua 1, verses 16, 17 and 18, we see an example of submission and obedience: *"And they answered Joshua, saying, All that thou commandest us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go. According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee: only the Lord thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses. Whosoever he be that doth rebel against thy commandment, and will not hearken unto thy words in all that thou commandest him, he shall be put to death: only be strong and of a good courage."* Amen.

These words may seem strict or even harsh today, but at the time they reflected a common understanding of submission and of what happened when authority was not respected. The whole people expressed this submission to Joshua, recognising his authority and following him as one. Severe as the stated punishment for disobedience was, it underlines the importance of obedience and unity within the church.

Think of Korah and his company, if you remember: what were those men punished for? They reasoned that God was with them too, not only with Moses. In the church there is an order. Who made this order? God. He set Moses in place, He set Aaron in place, and He established an order.

But Korah and his company stepped out of that order. Submitting blindly means acting without discernment, as if someone had taken away your ability to think. That is how we may think of it when a person tries to control the discernment of others. But how is Joshua regarded? As the man of God. Is he regarded that way? Yes. *Only may God remain with you, and we will follow

you.*

Let us also go back to the New Testament to see whether things stand the same way, and let each of us examine himself. We read from 1 Corinthians, chapter 4, verses 14 to 17: *"I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. For though ye have ten thousand instructers in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church."* Here we are given a model for how we relate to one another.

In verse 14, Paul says: *"as my beloved sons I warn you."* Even if you had ten thousand instructors, and there are teachers in the church too, aren't there?

Even if you had ten thousand instructors, you do not have many fathers. Let us think of a simple, practical, everyday illustration. Even if we had ten thousand teachers at school, how many parents do we have? Two: mother and father. Whom must we obey? Mother and father, or the teachers? Teachers come and go. If our parents decide to move us from one school to another, that teacher is no longer there to have any say over us.

A teacher is there to teach us geography or chemistry, not to bring us up in the deepest sense of the word. When we go to school and have a geography lesson, the teacher tells us about mountains, hills and rivers; he does not give us spiritual upbringing. In maths we don't get lessons on how to live or not to lie; that teaching comes from our parents, and we must listen to them.

That is why we are told to follow in the footsteps of those who went before us. In the body of Christ a bond is formed between a father and his children, and we follow him in submission.

In 1 Thessalonians, chapter 1, verse 6, we find words of the apostle Paul that also appear in 1 Corinthians, chapter 11. In Thessalonians Paul says: *"And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost."* Amen.

This is an example of people obeying the call to follow in his footsteps and the Lord's. If Paul teaches us to live in humility, then he himself was humble. In 1 Corinthians 11 he says: *"Be ye followers of me,"* showing that he himself followed the example of the Lord Jesus.

Next, let us come back to Joshua. In the book of Joshua the people tell him: *"All that thou commandest us we will do."* And in 2 Thessalonians, chapter 3, verses 4 to 6, we read: *"And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you."* This shows confidence that the people will submit and obey.

Then the verse: *"And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ"* expresses the desire that hearts be directed toward God's love and toward the patience Christ showed. *"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after

the tradition which he received of us."* Amen.

We have confidence in the Lord that you do and will do the things we command you. To command means more than to advise or encourage; it is an act of authority. We are confident that you will do what we command, that you will keep our word.

Then the name of our Lord Jesus Christ is invoked: "We command you, brethren." Today people no longer say *"I command you,"* but it is important to understand what a command involves. When someone gives a command, he expects to be obeyed. *"Be ye followers of me. Obey them that have the rule over you."* The question arises whether Paul was over them and had the authority to command, and from the context it seems that he did.

Let us explore this teaching further. Turning the pages of Scripture, we come to the epistle to Timothy. We ask ourselves why submission and humility seem so far from us; perhaps because the practices in the church that cultivate these virtues are no longer there. *"That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God,"* Paul tells Timothy, *"great is the mystery of godliness."*

Reading from chapter 1, verses 1 to 3, we see that Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour and of the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope, writes to Timothy, his own son in the faith, wishing him grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. As he leaves for Macedonia, he asks Timothy to stay in Ephesus so that he might charge some that they teach no other doctrine.

Paul addresses Timothy, his true son in the faith, and gives him a command, yet at the same time he begs him to stay in Ephesus to command others not to preach false teaching. To command means to exercise authority, not merely to advise or encourage. A command only makes sense if there is submission; otherwise it does not achieve its purpose. We need to think carefully about this principle.

Throughout my life I have met many people who say they submit only to God. That statement calls for discernment, because submitting to the authorities God has established can also be a form of submitting to Him. Timothy faced a dilemma: if the people in Ephesus had told him, *"We don't submit to you, we submit only to God,"* he still had authority to command them, according to the apostle Paul's teaching. Paul writes to Timothy in verse 18: *"This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck."* This relationship between Paul and Timothy, described as that of a father to a son, points to the need for humility in our relationships.

It is important to clothe ourselves with humility in all our relationships, as the Lord Jesus showed us. Humility is essential for following Jesus' example, and without the desire to be humble and submissive we cannot claim that we want to be like Him. In chapter 5, verse 7, we are told: *"And these things give in charge, that they may be blameless."* This underlines the

importance of obedience within the church.

In chapter 4, verses 11 and 12, Paul tells Timothy: *"These things command and teach. Let no man despise thy youth."* This urges Timothy to stand firm in his teaching whatever his age, and not to let his youth become a reason for contempt.

In conclusion, it is essential that we learn humility and clothe ourselves with it, that we seek and rejoice in opportunities to be humble and submissive. In the letter to Philemon, verses 8 to 10, Paul shows this attitude: *"Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient, yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee."* This shows that although he had authority to command, Paul chose to make a request, showing humility and love.

"Being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds." Verse 8 interests us greatly: *"though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient."* Who was Philemon? Who was Paul? Paul had spiritual authority and boldness in Christ to command Philemon, because Philemon was one of his converts.

Parents also have authority to give commands to their children, and they need it if their upbringing is not to end in disaster. We also read verse 21: *"Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say."* Amen. This letter from the apostle Paul to Philemon was not written at random, but with confidence in Philemon's obedience. We must be obedient in the church, remember the humility of the Lord Jesus, and be humble so that He may exalt us in due time. In Ephesians 5:21, humility is shown to be essential for learning submission: *"Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God."*

This verse is addressed to men and women alike, urging them to submit to one another in the fear of God. Husbands are told to love their wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it. Amen.

When we reflect on this verse, we can understand it better by thinking of the human body. In the body the members are interconnected and work together; for example, the kidneys filter substances out of the blood, while the pancreas, the stomach and the heart each do their part for the good of the whole body.

In the same way, if the sole of the foot or the toes did not respond to commands, we would have trouble walking. Normally, when we are healthy and not paralysed, the members are subject to one another, and that is what lets us move. In the same way we ought to be subject to one another in the fear of Christ, each contributing to our growth together.

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." This requirement is hard, just as it is hard for men to submit in the church. At home, where women and men share responsibilities such as cooking, submission can be a challenge. Yet submission is essential for spiritual growth, just as the Lord Jesus was submitted to the heavenly Father. God gives grace and teaching to the humble, while He resists the proud. Deuteronomy says that those who would not obey out of pride were to be severely punished: *"Thou shalt put away the evil from

Israel. And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously."*

Just as the church is subject to Christ, so wives are to be subject to their own husbands in everything. This submission is often seen as degrading, as if it took away a person's identity or discernment and kept them from making decisions. Yet it is important to remember that these teachings are addressed to churches and must be understood in their spiritual context.

In Colossians, chapter 3, these letters to the churches urge us to remember these principles and apply them in our life of faith. The apostle Paul wrote to the churches in Ephesus and Colossae to guide them in how they ought to live. From verse 18 he gives specific instructions to different groups of people: *"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged. Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men."* Amen.

These groups include wives, husbands, children and servants. Today the word *"servants"* can be understood as employees. In Ephesians 6:5-8, Paul goes on to speak about the relationship between servants and their masters: *"Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart."* Amen.

In Philippians, chapter 2, Paul speaks about the importance of submission, which he holds in high regard. He suggests that submission brings rest to the soul and that its absence leads to turmoil. Chapter 2, verse 3, says: *"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."* Amen.

Paul stresses that submission is not to be limited to those in positions of authority but must be practised in humility and mutual respect. He urges each person to esteem the other above himself and for all to submit to one another in the fear of the Lord.

This is a theme Christ took up in the New Testament. Submitting to one another is not easy, but it is what the Lord Jesus calls us to do. *"Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God"* is a call to humility and to recognising that we need to put ourselves at the service of others. Verse 4 urges us to look not only to our own interests but also to the good of others: *"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."* This is the mind that was also in Christ Jesus, and we are called to share it.

When we think about submission, we can picture a factory where we work in a large team; each person contributes to a common goal. In the same way, building the image of Christ in us requires submission. Without it, we cannot build. People often look on submission with contempt, as if it were something base or as if it robbed someone of who they are. But having a spiritual father who guides us in the truth does not mean we can no longer think.

"Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God" is an exhortation from the Word of God showing us that submission is an essential part of our faith. In *Hebrews 13:17* we are told: *"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you."* This verse underlines the importance of submitting to those who lead us spiritually, because they are responsible for our souls.

Submitting to God and to our spiritual fathers should not be seen as losing our identity, but as a way of drawing closer to the Lord Jesus and being shaped into His image. The one who has the rule over us, our spiritual father, is called to lead us to Jesus and help us grow spiritually.

That is his task, and we should be open to his guidance. Let us ask ourselves whether it does us any good to keep Jesus out of our lives. Let us turn to the Word of God to understand what it says about disobedience, and let us reflect on how submissive we are, how much we want to be submissive, and whether this is something we truly value. If it has not been so until now, let us resolve to make submission a priority, because only through it can we grow spiritually and gain the image of Christ in us. He was the supreme example of humility.

Titus chapter 1, verse 10, tells us that there are indeed many unruly people, especially those of the circumcision, who are vain talkers and deceivers. *Verse 16* shows us the consequences of disobedience and how God sees the disobedient: they stand against Him; they profess that they know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate. Amen.

When we do not submit, as wives to husbands, as brothers and sisters to one another, or to those over us, we deny God by our works, even though we claim to know Him. God regards us as abominable, disobedient and useless for every good work, because disobedience keeps us from doing good. Let us ask the Lord to help us understand these things.

We are not stopping at this point of view alone. The subject of submission, and of whom we ought to submit to, is much broader, and we do not have time to go into it in detail now. Let us focus on what we have learned and on the responsibility that falls to us: to be submitted to the Lord and to those He has set to lead us. Amen.

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