



Fire and Ice Sermon Series

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The Humble Soul the Particular Favourite of Heaven

by Ebenezer Erskine¹

“When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, There is lifting up; and he shall save the humble person.” —Job 22:29.

“Be ye 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.” —1 Peter 5:5, 6.

“Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off.” —Psalm 138:6.

It is not material to inquire when, or upon what occasion, this psalm was penned. In the beginning of the psalm, the psalmist enters upon a firm resolution to praise the Lord; and he lays down several excellent grounds of praise and thanks-giving through the body of the psalm. As,

1. He resolves to praise God for the experience he had of his love and faithfulness, in the accomplishment of his gracious word of promise to him, ver. 2: “I will praise thy name for thy loving kindness, and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.” God has a greater regard to the words of his mouth, than to the works of his hand: Heaven and earth shall pass away, but one jot or tittle of what he hath spoken shall never fall to the ground. —Some understand this of Christ, the essential Word, in whom he has set his name, and whom he has so highly exalted, that he has given him a *name above every name*.

2. David resolves to praise God for the experience he had of God’s goodness in hearing his prayers, ver. 3: “In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me: and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.” God granted him a speedy answer; for it was in the very day that he cried that he was heard: and it was a spiritual answer; he was *strengthened with strength in his soul*. Would you have

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soul–strength for the work you have in view? Then cry unto him who is the *strength of Israel* for it; for “he giveth power to the faint, and he increaseth strength to them that have no might.”

3. He resolves to praise God for the calling of the Gentiles, which he foresaw by the spirit of prophecy, ver. 4, 5. The prosperity and enlargement of the kingdom of Christ, is what fills the believer’s mouth with hallelujahs of praise.

4. He resolves to bless God for his different ways of dealing with the humble and the proud, for his grace to the one, and his contempt and rejection of the other, in the words which I have read: *Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off.*

It is the first part of the verse I design to insist upon. —Where we may notice,

1. The character of the gracious soul; he is a *lowly* person, one that is emptied, and abased in his own eyes. He sees nothing in himself, either to recommend him to God or man: on which account he is sometimes called *poor in spirit*, Matth. 5:3. He has got something of the mind and spirit of Jesus in him and so has *learned of him* who is *meek and lowly*, Matth. 11:29.

2. We have here God’s transcendent greatness; he is the *high Lord* or Jehovah. He is “the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, and who dwells in the high and holy place, to which no man can approach.” Who can think or speak of his highness in a suitable manner? It dazzles the eyes of sinful mortal worms, to behold “the place where his honour dwells.” O how infinite is the distance between him and us! “There are none among the sons of the mighty that can be compared unto him.” Yea, “the inhabitants of the earth are before him as a drop of a bucket, and as the small dust of the balance.” He is not only *high* above men, but above angels: cherubims and seraphims are his *ministering spirits*. He is “high above the heavens;” for “the heaven,” yea, “the heaven of heavens cannot contain him.” And “he humbleth himself” when “he beholds the things that are in heaven.” O, sirs, study to entertain high and admiring thoughts and apprehensions of the glorious majesty of God: for “honour and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.”

3. You have the amazing grace of this *High God*: though the distance between him and us be infinite, yet he hath a regard to the *lowly*. The apostle Peter expresses this by “giving grace to the humble,” 1 Pet. 5:5: God is “good to all;” he distributes the effects of his common bounty to the good and bad, to the just and

unjust: but he reserves his special grace and favour for the meek and lowly soul. What farther is needful for explication, will occur in the sequel of the discourse.

Observe that the lowly and humble soul is the particular favourite of the high God. *Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly.*

This truth is so evidently founded on the text, that I shall not consume time in adducing other texts of scripture to confirm it. Many that I might name will fall in, in the prosecution of the doctrine; which I shall attempt, through grace, in the following method.

- I. I shall give some account of this lowliness and humility, and show in what it consists.
- II. Prove, that the humble and lowly soul is the particular favourite of heaven.
- III. Why God has such respect to the lowly.
- IV. Lay before you some marks or characters of the lowly and humble soul.
- V. Offer some motives pressing you to seek after it.
- VI. Offer a few directions or advices how it may be attained.

I. The *first* thing proposed is, to *give some account of this lowliness and humility, that you may know in what it consists.*—Now, lowliness being a relative grace, we must consider it in a threefold view. Either, 1. As it has a respect to ourselves. Or, 2. As it has a respect to others. Or, 3. As it has a respect to God.

First, I say, it may be considered with respect to ourselves. And so it implies,

1. Low and under-rating thoughts of ourselves. The humble soul has low thoughts of his own person; as David, “I am a worm, and no man.” “I am less than the least of thy mercies,” says Jacob. He has low thoughts of his pedigree: he is not like the princes of Zoan, who valued themselves on this, that they were the offspring of ancient kings. Some think there is none like them, because they are of such a clan, and such a family, they have such lords and lairds for their relations. But the humble soul makes little account of all these: “Who am I,” says David, “and what is mine house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?” He considered himself as “the degenerate plant of a strange vine;” as a rotten branch of the corrupted and fallen family of Adam he views “the rock whence he was hewn, and the hole of the pit whence he was digged,” saying as in Psalm 51.5: “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Again; the man

has low thoughts of his own abilities for any work or service he is called to perform in his generation. O, says the lowly soul, I see I am nothing, I can do nothing; I cannot of myself think a good thought. "I am not sufficient of myself to think anything as of myself," says Paul. I cannot read, hear, pray, communicate, meditate, or examine myself: I see such sin and imperfection attending every duty I set about, as may justly provoke a holy God to cast it back like dung upon my face: I am sure "my goodness extendeth not to him." I see I cannot subdue one corruption, or resist the least temptation, when left to myself; I fall before it, and must needs be carried down the stream like a dead fish, unless the Lord's grace be sufficient for me. Again; the man has low thoughts of his attainments, whether moral or evangelical. "O," says Agur, "I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy." And Paul, the great apostle of the Gentiles, did not reckon that he had attained, or that he was already perfect; but he forgets those things which were behind, reaching forth unto things that were before, Phil. 3:12, 13.

2. This lowliness and humility with respect to ourselves, has in it a self-
abhorrence; which is yet a degree beyond the former. The man sees so much sin and guilt, so much emptiness, poverty, and vileness about himself, that, with holy Job, he cries out, "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Agreeably to which is that text, Ezek. 36:31: "Ye shall remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities, and for your abominations."

3. It has in it a singleness of heart in the discharge of duty, without vain-
glory, or Pharisaical ostentation. It argues a proud hypocritical spirit, to pray, or give alms, or do any duty, to be seen of men, that we may procure a name to ourselves, or the approbation of others. I am afraid, there are many that attend sermons, and sacraments, with a design to maintain their credit and reputation among their neighbours. Verily, such "have their reward;" but a sorry one it is, when they have got it: the day comes, when this fig-leaf covering shall be *torn*, and your nakedness, emptiness, and hypocrisy, exposed before men and angels. The humble and lowly Christian will make conscience of duty, although none in the world should see him; yea, the more retired he is, he loves it the better: he cares not though, in things of this nature, his left hand know not what his right hand doth.

Secondly, This lowliness and humility, considered with respect to others, has these things in it:—

1. A preferring of others above or before ourselves. Agreeably to this is the apostolical command, Phil. 2:3: "Let nothing be done through strife, or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." Not that a child of God should think a profane reprobate in a better state than himself; but every true child of God will see so much in himself, as will make him ready to think the worst reprobate as good, or rather better than he is by nature; and he will see, that the least of saints have something in which they excel him. This was the disposition of the great apostle, he looked on himself as the chief of sinners, and the least of the saints.

2. A looking upon the gifts and graces of others without a grudge. He will not say, This or that man darkens me: no; he rejoices to see the gifts and graces of God's Spirit abounding towards others: "Would God," says Moses, "that all the Lord's people were prophets." And then he will shun all vain comparison of himself with others: he will not say, "Stand by, for I am holier than thou; "or, with the proud Pharisee, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, or even as this publican." No, he rather sinks in his own esteem, when he looks on others, as Agur did, Prov. 30:2.

3. It has in it an affable, courteous carriage toward all, 1 Pet. 3:8. Religion does not countenance a sullen, morose, and haughty carriage; no, on the contrary, we are expressly commanded to be "gentle, showing all meekness unto all men."

Thirdly, This lowliness and humility of soul may be considered with reference to God. And so it implies these things following: —

1. High and admiring thoughts of the majesty of God. When God discovers himself, the man sinks into nothing in his own esteem. "O," will the humble soul say, with Moses, (Exodus 15:11,) "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, amongst the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"

2. A holy fear and dread of God always on his spirit; especially in his immediate approaches unto the presence of God, in the duties of his worship. Says he, The very angels cover their faces with their wings before him, crying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts;" how then shall I, "a man of polluted lips," take his holy name into my mouth? This makes him, with the publican, to smite upon his breast; to stand afar off; crying "God be merciful to me a sinner." That is the language of the humble soul, which you have, Psalm 15:1: "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? and, Psalm 24:3: Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? and who shall stand in his holy place?"

3. It has in it an admiring of every expression of the divine bounty and goodness toward men in general, and toward himself in particular. “O,” says he, “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? and, Who am I, that thou hast brought me hitherto? Is this the manner of men, O Lord God? And what can I say more?” as David. And what more can be said! for “praise is silent for thee, O God, in Zion.” A silent admiration of the grace and condescension of the great Jehovah, is the highest degree of praise we can win at in this life, while our harps are so mistuned by sin.

4. It has in it a giving God the glory of all that we are helped to do in his service. When the man succeeds in discharging duty in any measure comfortably, he will not sacrifice to his own net, nor burn incense to his own dragnet: he will not, like proud Jehu, say, “Come, and see my zeal for the Lord.” No, that is not the way of the humble soul; he knows that he has all from the Lord, and therefore he will give all the glory to him, saying, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name be the glory. I laboured,” says Paul, “more abundantly than all” the rest of the apostles; “yet not I, but the grace of God, which was with me. —By the grace of God I am what I am.”

5. It has in it a silent resignation to the will of God, and an acquiescence in the disposals of his providence, let dispensations be ever so cross to the inclinations of flesh and blood. “Here am I,” will the poor soul say, with David; “let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.” The man sees awful sovereignty in dispensation, which makes him to say, “Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?” He sees, that his furnace is not by the ten thousandth part so hot as his sins deserve; and therefore silences his soul, with the church, saying, “Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Thou hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve.” He sees, that the cup put into his hand, is far from the bitterness of that cup that was put into the hand of Christ; and this makes him to say, “If these things were done in the green tree, what shall be done to” such a *withered* stick as I am? and therefore I will even be *dumb with silence* before him, not opening the mouth, because it is the Lord that doth it.

6. Although all these things I have named be the ingredients and concomitants of true humility; yet I think the very soul and essence of gospel-humiliation lies in the soul’s renunciation of itself, and going out of itself, and going in to, and accepting of the Lord Jesus Christ, as its everlasting all; as the all of its light, life, strength, righteousness, and salvation. And I think, that a man never passes the verge of moral humility, till self-righteousness be dethroned, till the high and towering imaginations of the man’s own righteousness by the law be

levelled by the mighty weapons of the gospel, and he brought to submit to the righteousness of God for justification, which is, in the gospel revealed “from faith to faith.”

In a word, the humble and lowly believer is content to be nothing that Christ may be *all in all* to him: content to be a fool, that Christ may be his only wisdom; content to be, as he really is in himself a guilty condemned criminal, that Christ may be his only righteousness; content to be stripped of his filthy rags, that he may be clothed with a borrowed robe. O says the humble soul, “Surely in the Lord alone have I righteousness and strength: in him will I be justified, and in him alone will I glory,” Isa. 45:24, 25: “Yea, doubtless,” says humble Paul, “I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him; not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith,” Phil. 3:8, 9. And so much for the *first* general head, namely, the nature of this lowliness.

II. The second thing proposed was to *show that the lowly and humble soul is the particular favourite of Heaven*. This will be abundantly evident, if we consider,

1. That when the Son of God was here in our nature, he showed a particular regard to such. You have a clear instance of this in the centurion, Matth. 8:8. The centurion there addresses Christ in behalf of his servant, who was grievously tormented of the palsy: Christ, in the 7th verse, promises to come to his house and heal him. Well, see the lowliness of the man’s spirit, ver. 8: “Lord,” says he, “I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof.” And what a large commendation Christ gives to the man, you see in ver. 10: “I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.” And (ver. 13,) he grants him all that he asked, “Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.” The same we see in the Syrophenician woman, Matth. 15:27. The lowliness and humility of her spirit made her to submit to all the repulses she met with. When Christ calls her a dog, she takes with it, saying, “Truth, Lord,” I am a dog, and shall be content if I may but have a crumb, the dog’s portion. And what follows on this? “O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt.” Thus, I say, Christ in the days of his flesh, discovered the greatest regard to the humble; and he is the same now in a state of exaltation that he was in a state of humiliation.

2. When God gives the grace of humiliation, it is a sign that he intends more grace or that soul: 1 Pet. 5:5. *he giveth grace to the humble*. You know men use to lay up their richest wines in their lowest cellars; so God lays up the richest

treasures of his grace in the heart of the humble and lowly. And hence it comes, that the humble Christian is ordinarily the most thriving and growing Christian. The humble valleys laugh with fatness, when the high mountains are barren; so the humble Christian is made fat with the influences of Heaven, when lofty towering professors are, like the mountains of Gilboa, withered and dry, because the dew and rain of the graces and influences of the Spirit are suspended from them.

3. Honour, exaltation, and preferment is intended for the humble soul: “Before honour is humility,” says Solomon. Psalm 113:7,8: “He raiseth the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people.” They shall be as it were his ministers of state, that shall attend his throne, and have place among them that stand by.

4. God’s eyes are upon the humble. Indeed, the eye of his omniscience beholds all the children of men; but his countenance beholds the humble and upright soul: Isa. 66:1, 2: “Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? for all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.” The humble soul is the object of his particular love and care: “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in their behalf.”

5. Not only God’s eye, but his ear is toward the lowly soul: Psalm 10:17. “Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: —thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.” Would you have preparation for a communion-table? Would you be brought to God’s seat, and have a hearing there? Then come with lowliness and humility of soul.

6. The great Jehovah, the infinite God, dwells in and with the humble: Isa. 57:15: “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.” God has a two-fold palace where he dwells; the one is in heaven, the other is in the heart of the humble Christian. He says of the humble soul, as he said of Zion, “This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell, for I have desired it.” And for what end will he dwell in the heart of the humble? it is to revive and comfort them. The new wine of the consolations of God, which are not small, shall be poured into the heart of the lowly soul. He will “comfort them that mourn

in Zion, *he will* give them the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”

7. As God dwells with the humble, so the humble shall dwell with God in glory for ever: Matth. 5:3: “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” (which is the same with the lowly spirit,) “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” They shall sit not only at his by-table here below, but be admitted to sit down at the high table of glory, and to eat and drink with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, yea, with the King of glory himself. It is the humble that surround the throne above, as you see, Rev. 4; they take their crowns off their heads, and cast them down before the Lamb, saying, “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power.” Thus, you see that the humble soul is the particular favourite of the high God.

III. The third thing in the method was, to inquire why God has such a respect to the lowly.

Ans. 1. God has such a respect to the lowly, not as if this frame of soul were meritorious of any good at his hand, but because this is a disposition that best serves God’s great design of lifting up and glorifying his free grace. What think you, sirs, was God’s design in election, in redemption, in the whole of a gospel-dispensation, and in all the ordinances of it? His grand design in all was to rear up a glorious high throne, from which he might display the riches of his free and sovereign grace: this is that which he will have magnified through eternity above all his other name. Now, this lowliness and humility of spirit best suits God’s design of exalting the freedom of his grace. It is not the legalist, or proud Pharisee, but the poor humble publican who is smiting on his breast, and crying, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” that submits to the revelation of grace. And truly I never think a man truly humbled till he be brought so far off his law-foundation, on which he stands by nature, as to lie down like a worm at the feet of sovereign grace, heartily content to be indebted to free grace for life, righteousness, pardon, and salvation.

2. God has such respect to the humble soul because it is a fruit of his own Spirit inhabiting the soul, and an evidence of the soul’s union with the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom alone we are accepted.

3. This is a disposition that makes the soul like Christ; and the more a person resembles Christ, the more God loves him. We are told, that Christ was *meek and lowly; he did not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets:* though he was the *brightness of his Father’s glory*, yet he was content to

appear in the form of a servant; though he was rich, yet he was content to become poor, that we through his poverty might be rich. Now, the humble soul, being the image of Christ, who is *the express image of his Father*, God cannot but have regard to him.

IV. The fourth thing in the method was, to lay before you some marks by which you might try, whether you be among the humble and lowly, to whom God has such a regard. You have especial need to try this now, when you are to make a solemn approach to God at his table. “Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat.” If you want this lowly frame of spirit, you cannot be welcome guests at the supper of the great King.

Now, for your trial, I shall suggest these things following.

1. The lowly soul is one that is many times ashamed to look up to heaven under a sense of his own vileness and unworthiness; as we see in the poor publican, and in David, Psalm 40:12: “Innumerable evils have compassed me about, mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up: they are more than the hairs of mine head, therefore my heart faileth me.” Indeed, when by faith he looks to his cautioner, and his everlasting righteousness, his mediator and intercession, he has boldness to enter into the holy of holies, and can come with boldness to the throne of grace: I say, when he *looks* to Christ he is *not ashamed*, Psalm 34:5. But when he looks to himself, as he is in himself, he is even “ashamed and confounded” before the Lord, and ready to cry out with the prophet, Isa. 6:5: “Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips:” how shall I speak unto *the King, the Lord of hosts*? Or how shall I appear before him?

2. He is one that is many times put to wonder that God has not destroyed him. He wonders that God has kept him out of hell so long, or that he has not let loose his hand, and made an utter end of him: and therefore he is much in adoring mercy, and long-suffering patience, with the church, Lam. 3:22: “it is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.”

3. He is one that is most abased under the receipt of the greatest mercies and sweetest manifestations. We see this in the instance of David; when God promised to build him a sure house, and gave him a promise of the Messiah to spring of his loins, the man is not lifted up, but on the contrary, is filled with wonder that God should stoop so far toward the like of him: “Who am I,” says he, “that thou hast brought me hitherto?” The nearer that the humble soul is admitted to God, the higher that he is lifted up the mount of enjoyments, he falls lower and

lower in his own esteem. When Abraham was admitted to plead with God on the behalf of Sodom, Gen. 18. How does he sink into nothing in his own eyes? “Behold, now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, who am but dust and ashes.”

4. He is one that renounces the law as a covenant, and disclaims all pretensions to righteousness from that quarter: “I through the law, am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.” O, says the man, when he looks upon the law of God in its spirituality and extent, what can I expect from that quarter but wrath and ruin? Yea, I am condemned already by the law; and if God mark iniquity, according to the tenor of it, I am undone for ever: Psalm 130:3: “If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities; O Lord, who shall stand?” So, then, try yourselves by this: Has a discovery of the law of God, in its spirituality, made you to own and acknowledge that all your own righteousness is but *as filthy rags, dung and loss*?

5. He is one that has high, raised, and admiring thoughts of Christ, and of his law-biding righteousness. As for the person of Christ, O how the humble soul admires that: the lower he falls in his own esteem, the higher does Christ rise in his esteem. In Psalm 73: David is laid so low in his own eyes, that he cries, (ver. 22,) “So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.” Well, while it is thus with him, what are his thoughts of Christ? See it, ver. 25, 26: “Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.” And as for the righteousness of Christ, O how does his soul admire that, and clasp about it! O, says he, I have no works, no righteousness of mine own, to commend me to God, or with whom to stand before him: but he is “the Lord my righteousness; *and* I will go on in his strength, making mention of his righteousness, even of his only.”

I might give you several other marks of this lowliness of soul. I shall only name these two or three farther. As,

1. He is one that looks on sin as his greatest burden, saying, with David, “Mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me.” And particularly indwelling corruption, the fountain of sin; O how does he mourn and groan under that, saying, with Paul, Rom. 7:24: “Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!”

2. He is one that values himself least, when others value him most. O, says he, others see only my outside; but if they saw the swarms of abominations, that I see and feel in my own heart, I would be a terror to them. When the multitude is

crying, “Hosanna to the Son of David, he is riding, meek and lowly, upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass.”

3. He is one that is not puffed up with the falls of others, like some, I Cor. 5:2; but rather the falls of others contribute to humble and empty him the more of himself. He sees, from the out-breakings of [sin in] others, what is in his own heart, how much he is obliged to God for restraining grace: for if the bridle were but laid on my neck, will the humble soul say, I would be soon carried into the same excess of riot with others.

4. The humble soul is one that is thankful for little; he will not despise the day of small things: like the woman of Canaan, he is content with the crumbs that fall from the children’s table. The humble soul is content with a bare word from the Lord. “O,” says David, “God hath spoken in his holiness, I will rejoice.” He thinks much of a single word from the Lord’s mouth, and waits for it, as the servants of Benhadad, that caught at every word that dropped from the mouth of the King of Israel.

5. The humble soul is content and desirous to know what is God’s will, that he may do it. Paul is no sooner humbled, but he cries, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” Give grace to obey, and command what thou wilt.

V. The fifth thing in the method was, to offer some motives to press and recommend this lowliness and humility of spirit.

My *first* motive shall be drawn from the excellency of the grace of humility; and its excellency especially appears in two things:

1. It assimilates the soul to Christ. Men are inclined to imitate the example of the great ones of the earth; but here is the most noble pattern that ever was, even an incarnate Deity, saying, “Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly.”

2. It is the distinguishing character of a Christian. The people of God are ordinarily called the *humble* and *meek of the earth*. A proud Christian is a contradiction; for pride is just an antipode to true religion. O what a difference did it put between the Pharisee and the publican! The proud Pharisee brags to God, as it were, of his good works; “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.” But the poor publican stands afar off, as if the Majesty of Heaven were about to strike him dead; and yet the publican goes home to his house justified, while the other is rejected.

Mot. 2d, Consider how reasonable this lowliness and humility of soul is. Whatever way we view ourselves, we shall find it highly reasonable. It is highly reasonable, whether we look to ourselves in particular, or the evils of the land and day in which we live.

1. I say, take a view of thyself, man, woman, and thou shalt find ground of humiliation. For,

1st, Thou art a creature sprung of earth, whose “foundation is in the dust,” and cannot pretend to a higher extract than the very earth under thy feet. Hence is the exhortation of the prophet Jeremiah, “O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord.” Earth in thy original, earth as to the supports of nature, and shall return unto the earth in the end.

2dly, Thou art not only a creature, but a frail creature whose breath is in thy nostrils. Thou standest continually upon the brink of an endless eternity. And as there have but a few years passed over our heads since we arose out of the dust; so, ere it be long, death will sweep us off the stage; and then all our beauty, strength, stature, and other bodily excellencies, will be covered with rottenness. In Isa. 40:6–8, you see it is the cry both of heaven and earth, that *all flesh is grass*. Solomon, giving a description of the life of man, sums it all up in two short words “There is a time to be born, and a time to die.” He leaps over the intermediate distance between man’s birth and his burial, as a thing that was not worthy of his notice. He is born, and then he dies. The moment of time between the womb and the tomb is so short, might he say, that it does not deserve to be named.

3dly, Thou art not only a frail, but a sinful creature, wholly overrun with that loathsome leprosy, “from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot.” O sirs, what reason have we to be humble, who have defaced the image of God, cast dirt on all the divine attributes, trampled his law and authority under our feet. The sinner has swallowed a cup of deadly poison, which will infallibly destroy him, if infinite mercy and free grace prevent not. What ground has he then to be proud? “O,” says the prodigal, “I have sinned against heaven, and therefore am no more worthy to be called thy son,” or to have the room of a *hired servant* in the family.

4thly, Thou art not only a sinful creature, but an impotent creature, that can do nothing in order to thy own help and relief. If God had not “laid help upon one that is mighty,” we had been all of us this day sinking under the fiery mountains of eternal vengeance and wrath. Such an impotent creature is sinful man, that, as to natural things, he cannot make one hair of his head white or black, or add one cubit to his stature. And so helpless is he, as to spiritual and eternal concerns, that

he can no more change the wicked habits of his heart, or the wicked ways of his life, than the Ethiopian can change his colour, or the leopard his spots.

5thly, Thou art a variable, changeable, and inconstant creature; liable to many alterations, both as to thy outward lot, and thy inward frame. The man that is in greatest esteem to-day, may have his reputation ruined by the invenomed tongue of calumny to-morrow. In a word, thy health may soon be changed into sickness, thy riches into poverty, thy strength into weakness, thy beauty into ugly deformity. And as for thee, believer, though thy state be firm like the mountains, yet thy frame is but a changeable thing. Perhaps thou mayest be saying with David one day, "By thy favour my mountain stands strong;" and the next day crying out, "I am troubled with the hiding of his countenance." Although, perhaps, the candle of the Lord may be shining on thy tabernacle, yet in a little thou mayest be going "mourning without the sun."

2. This lowly frame of spirit is highly reasonable, if we look abroad in the world, and particularly the land in which we live. O what great cause of deep humiliation have we this day before the Lord, when we take a view of the abounding profanity of our day! All ranks have "corrupted their way;" a flood of atheism and wickedness, Jordan like, has broken down all its banks. Have we not reason to be humbled for the universal barrenness that is to be found amongst us, under the drops of the glorious gospel? May not the Lord say to us, as he said of his vineyard, Isa. 5. "I planted thee in a fruitful soil;" I took all imaginable pains upon thee, by ordinances, by the rod, by mercies and crosses; yet, after all, "when I looked that they should bring forth grapes, behold, they brought forth wild grapes?" Again; have we not reason to be humbled for the lamentable divisions that are to be found among us? "Ephraim against Manasseh, Manasseh against Ephraim, and both they together against Israel." Because of *the divisions of Reuben*, there are *great thoughts of heart*. Church and state are divided. And, among other divisions that have been of late, we are like to have a new division in point of doctrine.

There is a handful of ministers, who have lately put in a petition to our National Assembly, in favour of some of the pure and precious truths of the gospel, which they conceive to be injured by an act of Assembly. There is a mighty cry raised against them, both in pulpits and in common conversation, as if they were *the troublers of Israel*, New-schemers, Antinomians, and what not. Many strange errors are fathered upon them, of which they never once thought. I shall be far from bringing a railing accusation against them who study to wound their reputation, and to mar the success of their ministry: for I look on many of them as great and good men. But if they be helped to bear reproach for the name

of Christ, and for the cause of his truths, with humility and lowliness of mind, the Lord in his own time will find out a way to bring them forth to the light, so as they shalt behold his righteousness. And although their reputation should sink for ever in the world, under a load of calumny that is cast upon them, I hope they think it but a small sacrifice for the least truth of God, which is of more worth than heaven and earth. However, I say, this, among other things, is ground and cause of humiliation in our day, that any of the precious truths of Christ should be under a cloud, and that we should be divided in our sentiments respecting them. Have we not reason to be deeply humbled for our woeful defections and backslidings, which are the ground of our divisions?. We are departed from the Lord, and the Lord is in a great measure departed from us. What a woeful withering wind has blown upon God's vineyard in the land! We are "fallen from our first love," our former zeal for God and his precious truths, and the royalties of our Redeemer's crown. And is there not a lamentable decay as to the power and life of godliness, which has dwindled away into an empty form with the most? To conclude, it is not with the nobles, gentry, ministers, or people, in Scotland, as once it has been; and the worst of it is, that though it be so, though gray hairs are here and there upon us, yet we do not perceive it: we "make our faces harder than a rock, and refuse to return" to the Lord. But I haste to a close.

Mot. 3d, Take a view of the noble patterns of humility that are set before us for our imitation. The saints militant are patterns of it. Abraham, the father of the faithful, in the forecited 18th of Genesis, with what humility does he address himself to God! "Behold, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, who am but dust and ashes." And his grandson, Jacob, follows his footsteps herein, "I am less," says he, "than the least of thy mercies." In a word, Job, David, Isaiah, Paul, and all the "cloud of witnesses," have cast us a copy of humility. Again; the saints triumphant cast us a copy of this grace: they take their crowns off their heads, and cast them down at the Mediator's feet, ascribing the glory of all to him, saying, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." Again; angels are patterns of it: they do not look on it as a disparagement to be ministering spirits to the heirs of glory. With what humility do they cover their faces with their wings in the presence of God! Isa. 6. Again; Christ is a blessed pattern of this grace: "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly:" he has left us an example, *that we should follow his steps* therein. "He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the 'death of the cross.'" Though he was the high God, yet he "took upon him the form of a servant." And therefore "let the same mind be in us, which was also in Christ Jesus," Phil. 2:5. In a word, the infinite Jehovah, the eternal God, casts us a copy of humility: for

“he humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth;” and, as you see in my text, *though he be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly*. And are not all these patterns worthy of our highest imitation? And if all this will not prevail, I offer,

A *fourth* motive, Consider the evil and danger of the sin of pride, that lies directly opposite to it.

1. It is loathsome in the sight of God; he cannot endure to look on it; he beholds it *afar off*. In Prov. 6:16, it is set in the very front of these things that the Lord hates:

“These six things doth the Lord hate; yea, seven are an abomination to him:” and the first of them is a *proud look*. God hates every sin, but he proclaims open war and hostility against the proud.

2. The evil of it appears, in that it is a sign of a rotten heart within: Hab. 2:4: “Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him.” As humility and sincerity, so pride and hypocrisy go hand in hand.

3. It is the fertile womb of many other evils. It is the spring of division: Prov. 13:10: “Only by pride cometh contention.” As I was saying just now, there are a great many divisions amongst us at this day. Church and state is divided, congregations and families are divided, ministers and people are divided; What is the matter? Pride lies at the bottom. If our proud hearts were but so far humbled, as to confess our faults one to another, our divisions would soon come to an end. Again; pride is the mother of error and heresy: a root of bitterness that is troubling our Israel at this day. When men, especially clergymen, who have all a conceit of infallibility with them; have asserted any thing that is amiss in point of doctrine, their pride will not allow them to retract. Truth itself must rather fall a sacrifice, than their reputation sink. Pride of reason is the very soul of the Socinian, and pride of will the soul of Arminian errors, and pride of self-righteousness is the source of that legal spirit which so much prevails in our day. Again; pride is the spring and root of apostacy; for, says Solomon, “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” Peter’s pride was the immediate forerunner of his denying his Lord and Master. But, again, consider that God has a particular quarrel with the sin of pride: he has threatened to “scatter the proud, in the imagination of their own hearts.” You may read a lecture of God’s controversy with the proud, Isa. 2:11–13, &c. “The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down. —The day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up, and he shall be brought low.” And, ver. 17: The loftiness of man shall be bowed

down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.” O what ruin has the sin of pride brought along with it!

1st, It turned angels into devils, and threw them from heaven into hell; “being lifted up with pride, they fell into condemnation,” as the apostle insinuates. God could not endure pride to dwell so near him; and therefore he tumbled them down from heaven, and laid them “under chains of eternal darkness.”

2dly. It was pride that has wrecked all mankind, when it crept out of the higher into the lower Paradise. “Ye shall be as gods,” said the serpent; and immediately the bait was caught at; though, in the event, it made them more like the devil than God.

3dly, We might trace the story of what ruins it hath brought with it upon the ungodly world. Pharaoh refuses to bow so far to the command of God, as to let Israel go; saying, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?” And therefore he and his host shall “sink like lead in the mighty waters.” Haman’s pride brought him to an ignominious end: though he was his prince’s greatest favourite to-day, yet he was hanged to-morrow on the gallows which he had set up for poor Mordecai. Nebuchadnezzar proudly vaunts himself of his royal palace. “Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” and immediately he is turned out from the society of men, and made to eat grass with the oxen. Herod, after his fine oration, receives that applause from the people without any check, “It is the voice of a God, and not of a man; and immediately the angel of the Lord smites him, and he is eaten of worms.”

4thly, As God has punished it in the wicked, so he has shown his resentment against it in his own children. And pass who will, they shall not miss a stroke, if their hearts be lifted up within them “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.” David’s pride prompted him to number Israel, that he might make his boast that he was king over so many thousands; and thereupon a raging pestilence, in three days’ time, sweeps away seventy thousand of Israel. Hezekiah’s pride made him to show his treasure of precious things to the king of Babylon’s ambassadors; and therefore his posterity and his treasures must be carried away to Babylon out of their native land. In a word, though you were as the signet on God’s right hand, you shall not escape a stroke of fatherly wrath and anger, if you allow pride to lodge in your hearts. That threatening shall surely take place, both among friends and enemies, Prov. 29:23: “A man’s pride shall bring him low.” And if it miss his

person, it shall fall heavily on his family: Prov. 15:25: “The Lord will destroy the house of the proud.”

VI. The sixth and last thing I proposed was, to offer a few advices, in order to your attaining this lowly frame and temper of soul which the high God doth so much regard.

1. Go to the law as a schoolmaster; read the ten commandments, and Christ’s spiritual commentary upon them, Matth. 5. View the law of God in its utmost extent and spirituality; for *it is exceeding broad*. This would make the proudest heart to lie in the dust: Rom. 7:9: “I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” The feathers of his pride and legal righteousness soon fell, when the law in its spirituality was set before his eyes.

2. Get Christ to dwell in your heart by faith; for the reigning power of this evil is never broken, till Christ come by the power of his Spirit, bringing down the towering imaginations of the heart, and erect his throne there. The more of Christ, the more humility; and the less of Christ, the more pride. When the Spirit of Christ enters into the heart, he stamps the likeness and image of Christ there. O then, if you would have this humility and lowliness of spirit, “lift up the everlasting doors, that the King of glory may come in:” he brings a glorious retinue of graces with him, of which this is one of the first.

3. Be much [employed] in viewing the glorious perfections of the Majesty of heaven, as they are displayed in the works of creation and providence; but especially as they shine in the face of Jesus Christ, and the glorious work of redemption through him. When the prophet Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up, and his train filling the temple, he cries out, “Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips.” See Job 42:5, 6. “I have heard of thee,” says he, “by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

4. Be much in viewing “the rock whence ye were hewn, and the hole of the pit whence ye were digged;” I mean your original corruption and degeneration; how you are “conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity.” And O how much of this cleaves even to believers themselves, while they are on this side of eternity! There is a *law in the members continually warring against the law of the mind*. This laid the great apostle Paul in the dust, notwithstanding his high attainments.

5. Be much in viewing the vanity of the creature, and all things below. “Vanity and vexation of spirit” is written in legible characters upon all things under the sun. “The fashion of this world is passing away.” Be much in viewing the bed of the grave, where you must lie down shortly, and where rottenness and corruption shall cover you: let this make you say, with Job, “to corruption, Thou art my father; and to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister.” View an awful tribunal, and endless eternity, that is to follow on the back of death, where you and I shortly shall stand panels and receive a sentence from the righteous Judge, which shall determine our state for ever.

6. Lastly, Be much in eyeing those patterns of lowliness and humility which I already mentioned. God, angels, and saints, have cast you a copy of it. But especially be much in viewing the humility and humiliation of the Son of God, which is proposed as the great pattern, Phil. 2:5–8: “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.”

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