

The Christian life is a humble life. God teaches us to repent of our sins. We know there is nothing we can do to earn his favor. We don't deserve anything he gives us. As Christians, this is a very basic lesson we have learned. Even if you have been blessed with all sorts of earthly influence and recognition, you know – if you're a Christian – that your life is one of humility before God. It's true that this is because we are completely unworthy of anything he gives us. But there's another and even more basic reason why the Christian life is a humble life. It's because Christ's earthly life was a humble life.

Jesus took the lowest seat. He humbled himself. From eternity, he shared all honor and glory with his Father. But he hid his glory under the form of a servant. He always had every right to the glory of his Father, yet he waited for his Father to honor and exalt him at the proper time. This is how he saved us from dishonor, eternal shame, and condemnation. His humility, his obedience, his waiting upon the Father is what we trust in. It is the very object and foundation of our faith. We rely on our Lord's meekness. As David sings in Psalm 18, "Your humility made me great." God's humility, God's meekness, God taking the lowest seat at the table, is what establishes us, unworthy sinners, to be righteous.

It's truly an incredible thought. But as incredible as it is, God gives us the faith to believe it and rely upon it. God credits his own humility to us. By this little seed of faith, we fully receive the very obedience, suffering, and death of his Son. So just as he was raised from the dead and given the greatest honor in heaven, so will God exalt us. In fact, we already have this honor. We who believe in Christ and are baptized into his precious name, God has already seated with him in heaven.

And in the meantime, as we walk on earth and carry around our dying bodies, he honors us with food of which the angels themselves long to catch a glimpse. He gives us his own Holy Spirit, sustaining us with his own living voice, and nurturing us with his own body and blood. Even now, in the gathering around his throne of grace, in the assembly of his powerful Word, he invites us to walk about his altar. Today, right now, we are his honored guests.

So now, what does our humbled and exalted Lord teach us? He who honors us with his own inheritance, who called us to be heirs of his own kingdom, who has given us a status greater than we could have ever imagined – what does he say to us? He tells us to take the lower seat. Walk with humility. Count yourself to be less significant than others. Bear with one another in love. Put up with the weaknesses and annoyances of those around you. Don't try to impress the popular and influential people of this world. Instead, give attention to those who can't give you anything in return.

Jesus says that those who honor themselves will be humbled, but those who humble themselves will be honored. He's speaking to us who have already been honored even more than the highest angels. He speaks to us who have every right to boast of our standing before God. We who have been called to be a royal priesthood are taught by the one who called us to humble ourselves.

Now, we need to understand why the Christian life is a humble life. Yes, it's because everything we have from God is a gift, unmerited, completely unearned by us. But more

importantly, it's because Jesus shares everything he has with us. So as St. John says, as he is, so are we in this world. If Christ has given us everything he has, then it follows that we begin to resemble him, think like him, talk like him, and even smell like him. St. Paul says that we are an aroma of death to those who are perishing and an aroma of life to those who are being saved. We are strangers in this world, because that's how Jesus is. So Jesus teaches us to live this Christian life, to bear our crosses, and not expect our honors and praises right now. Because we are holding a much greater treasure, which is kept for us in heaven.

Jesus is not teaching us to be ashamed of our standing before God. He's not teaching us to speak with less confidence. It isn't arrogant to boast that you know that you will be saved, unless such confidence is built on your own feelings of accomplishment and security. But don't be fooled by false humility. We should boast in the promise of our Savior. We should boast that the head of the heavenly banquet has already invited us and called us to come up to the high seat. We should strive to keep this precious gem shining all around us.

And yet, this is the point. When you strive for pure teaching, then you are not striving to be liked by the world. The world wants unity. The world wants peace. And the world looks to powerful, influential, charismatic, and relatable people to accomplish such unity and peace. But when you strive to keep the unity that only the Holy Spirit gives, then this will rarely if ever give you a spot at the table. When you strive for peace with your fellow man by relying on the word and doctrine of your Lord, then most people won't recognize your efforts. We shouldn't be ashamed of this. We should speak God's Word with humility, not because we are afraid of how the world will react to us. No, Jesus isn't teaching us to be timid or cowardly. Instead, we speak God's Word with humility, because we know that it is the power of God to salvation. We tremble before it. And we know that the Lord who gives it to us also wants to give it to all people.

When you put all of that together, then you get a lot of humility in this life. You get a lot of disappointments. You encounter a lot of apathy, even a lot of anger and hostility. It's humbling. It's often humiliating.

And yet, we rely on this doctrine of our Lord to bring about what the world can't recognize. We can boast in this doctrine of our Savior, defend it, and insist that it's true. We don't need to pull punches when we say that there is salvation in no one else than Christ. We don't need to downplay any truth from God's Word. It's our inheritance. It's our greatest treasure. But when people don't receive it well, when you aren't given that promotion or you aren't invited to sit with the cool kids, don't despair. Don't go on Facebook or some other social media platform to air out all your complaints. You might get a lot of heart and prayer emojis, but all you're doing is seeking sympathy from the world. Instead, turn to him who invites you to a much higher seat. Because he will hear your complaints with more care, understanding, wisdom, and attention than all the vain sympathy of this world. And join your fellow saints right here around the altar where your Lord serves you with the highest honor.

It's very common for Christians to get discouraged by the humility they experience in the world. They see how they don't fit in at work or school. And then they get obsessed with fitting in. Then they imagine that they don't fit in with their own church. So they run

### 3 Trinity 17 – Luke 14, Eph. 4

around, trying to find some place that will accept them. Or they go out and start their own ministries. But if you think you are going to be at peace once you find a place where you seem to fit in, then you are never going to be at peace. Lots of Christians end up jumping from church to church, getting baptized two or three times, all because they are trying to find a place where they feel at home. But they can never get that invitation to the higher seats at the table. And eventually, they lose that warm, welcoming feeling.

But what makes you fit in at church? What gives you peace? It isn't the same thing that makes you feel included in this world. St. Paul says that the unity and peace we have come from the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit gives this to us only through his Word. So instead of looking at a church as a place for you to fit in with people, first listen to what is being taught. Is the pure doctrine of the Scriptures taught there? Is the hope of eternal life in Christ proclaimed and confessed? Does that congregation acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins? Is the Word of God taught in its purity and the sacraments administered according to Christ's command and promise? Then this is the church for you. St. Paul doesn't tell you to try to find a congregation that's a good fit for you. No, there is one body and one Spirit. We were called to one hope. There is one Lord, one Faith, and one baptism. There is one God and Father of us all. This is what we confess together in the Creed. And it is only through this confession that we know we are accepted.

You may notice that several people in this world have more honor and prestige than you do. Perhaps you see people in church who are more talented, more accomplished, more joyful, or just seem to have their house in order better than you do. But consider this. Those same people have one and the same hope that you do. Those same Christians have staked their entire eternity on the same Christ and the same baptism. They call upon the same Father. Their faith and confession is ridiculed and attacked in this world just as much. Because it's the same faith and confession. It didn't come from them. And it didn't come from you. It is a free gift of God who invites us to come up and dine with him.

This is how you bear with one another in love. It's when you recognize that no matter how well off or well to do you are in comparison to your fellow saints, you confess together the same saving doctrine of Christ. So take the lower seat together in this world. If you have more of these world's goods, then share them. If you don't have as much, then don't let it bother you. You have the Word of your Savior. You have the highest treasure there is. So receive it with meekness. Because it has the power to save your soul. Let this be your boast and your confidence, even if you have to bear mockery and humiliation on account of it. It's good for you to be humiliated in this world if it drives you to cling more firmly to Christ and his Word.

So cling to the humility of Christ. Take his yoke and learn from him. For he is meek. His burden is light. And his humility gives you honor. Amen.