

A Lesson in Humility from Job

A few weeks before I began to compose this essay, I had a very painful, non-life threatening but yet severely debilitating and prolonged physical problem. During the most painful moments, I cried out to God for mercy. Other times I simply cried out WHY! Our Father chose to take a while to answer my mercy petition. After awhile, He allowed the intensity of pain to lessen considerably, as for the basic affliction, He chose to let it continue. I'm persuaded to believe, however, that with this pain, this was a clear enunciation that, as with Paul and his "thorn," He was telling me that His grace was enough. My thorn remains, but through His blessed grace He has given me the strength to deal with it calmly and with acceptance. My "why," however, was quickly and simply answered by a single word that came to me with unmistakable clarity, "JOB."

How wonderful is the Lord to those who rightly call themselves by His name, Christians! He faithfully answers all prayers of all who are His. Jesus made this commitment several times during His earthly ministry. Prayers are not all answered promptly as was this one, nor are they all answered in a manner that the petitioner would like to have them answered. But they are all answered in strict accordance with God's will, in His perfect timing, and in the way most beneficial to the one who has petitioned. With this in mind, what is the substance, the message, the lesson that I am to understand, give thanks for, appreciate, and learn from this very severe personal ordeal?

Before I can come to a firm understanding and answer to this question from the place my Lord has led me, I must first examine the several messages to be found in the Book of Job, because the answer I am to receive may or may not be self evident and very likely will require considerable spiritual insight as well as much self-examination.

What is in the Book of Job that is the answer to my question? Job is a book rich in many insights of great value for those who seek better understanding of some of the ways in which God often deals with individuals, as well as what goes on in the spiritual realm. In

a more comfortable condition, and under different circumstances, I would probably have been persuaded to do a more extensive study than this, and write a more detailed interpretation of this precious book. However, right now my purpose, as already noted, is to seek and find the answer to my “why” from the source that I believe my Lord has provided. I also believe that I have been persuaded to write about this search for the benefit of anyone who happens to read it and may be seeking an answer under similar circumstances. If this topic interests you, and unless you are very familiar with the Book, it would be beneficial to read at least those portions that relate to what here follows.

In Job we first see an informative and very surprising dialogue between God and Satan. It tells us:

1. God and Satan are on “speaking terms.”
2. Satan was man’s accuser from the earliest days, just as Revelation tells us that he has continued to be throughout the ages.
3. Satan has great powers to hurt.
4. His use of these powers can occur only by the permissive will of God and then only to a divinely authorized degree and for God’s own divine purpose. This is extremely difficult for our very limited human minds to understand. But we must understand it, or at least unconditionally accept it. We must because that is the way it is.

Satan asserts, on a seemingly casual inquiry by God, that Job is being only superficially righteous, that because God has allowed him a fine family and great wealth, that he can afford to be pious because he has not been tested. Therefore, Satan claims that if Job were to be deprived of these things, he would no longer worship God but instead curse Him. The Scripture seems to suggest that God accepted this challenge as to Job’s innate righteousness by allowing Satan to kill all of his children and eliminate all of his wealth but not hurt him physically. As a result of this colossal tragedy, Job’s faith never faltered for he accepted the fact that God has the power to give and also take away.

Then Satan again appeals to challenge Job's faith by pointing out that he suffered only emotionally and economically but had not suffered physically. God responded by allowing Satan to plague him with boils and other maladies over his entire body but does not allow him to be killed. To add to this already horrible suffering, three of his friends come to "console" him, but only suggest that he must have been an awfully sinful person to have been punished so severely. On top of that, his wife urges him to curse God and die. How bad can it get? Yet Job, although he wishes he had never been born, does not forsake or curse God at any time throughout what must have been many months of intensely cruel and unusual punishment.

A dialogue between Job and his friends goes on for about 30 chapters during which Job masterfully and in faith defends his righteousness and God's supreme authority. However, as yet the "whys" of Job's predicament are not explained. Then, as the three friends complete their discouragements, a fourth observer, Elihu, comes on the scene with some far better council and the beginning of a real explanation. He apparently heard the earlier dialogues and expresses wrath against the three for being completely ineffectual and lacking in love and wisdom that should have been theirs at their advanced ages. Then he analyzed Job's view of God. Here we begin to get to the root of the problem. First Elihu sees Job's view of God as One who is capricious, that is a God who changes, who acts out of feelings like people do, according to His mood. He points out that Job seems to believe that God mistreated him without justification in a capricious way. The second problem Elihu sees is that Job sees God as silent, not saying anything to him, let alone not answering his prayers. Job finds this silence disheartening, a sign of abandonment. He fails to take into account God's timing and style in dealing with us, as we so often do as well. Elihu observes several ways in which God speaks to us. One of them is through pain. Now we are getting somewhere! He tells Job that his very suffering is God speaking to him!

C.S. Lewis's book "The Problem with Pain" points to this manner of God's voice most powerfully.

We can rest contentedly in our sins and in our stupidities, and everyone who has watched gluttons shoveling down the most exquisite foods as if they did not know what they were eating, will admit that we can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

Then Elihu continues to examine Job's view of God and points to his erroneous belief that God is unjust, unfair and unwilling to explain what is going on. In Chapter 34:9 Elihu speaking of Job "*For he hath said, it profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself with God.*" In other words, one might as well do as the wicked do because it now seems clear that trying to follow godly ways provides no benefit. This is a serious departure from Job's earlier expressions of understanding, where he made note of the righteousness of God to give and take away. It would seem that Job is slowly backsliding in his faith, due to the continual extreme pain, the reason for which seems to be unexplainable. But Job has not yet cursed God, although one might conclude that he is not far from it. However, Spirit-filled Elihu now takes up the truth about God's character starting with the next verse. He assures Job that God cannot be unjust, but also that He is above any accountability to man. We must know without doubt, if we are genuine believers in our Creator God that He is infallibly just. How or why should He be otherwise? We know that He is all knowing, and all-powerful, and we realize that He created man in His own image for His expressed purpose of having a family of faithful believers to be with Him throughout eternity. Therefore, why should, or how could, He play games, be distrustful and needlessly punish or deliberately hurt without cause? This could not possibly be the God of love, the Triune Godhead of which our blessed Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, is a part! But Job had no knowledge of Jesus and His mission on earth as we do. He, nevertheless, had the essence of Jesus' purpose on the cross when he was able to speak with great conviction of his own ultimate resurrection in Chapter 19 verse 25, 26.

In Chapter 34 verse 10 through 29, Elihu establishes the fact that God is a just rewarder as well as a just executor of punishment. Therefore, he says in verse 31 that God's chastisement is just, and that one should not be offended by it. But Job believes that he has been treated unfairly because he has been a righteous man, that his heart is right, and that he has tried to serve God. However, as we can see, he has erroneously believed he could do it by his own efforts, by his own righteousness. Perhaps now we begin to see more of the problem. The most difficult lesson God tries to teach us is to recognize evil where by our selves we see nothing but good. Whether we realize it or not most of what the world teaches as good is evil, and what it teaches as evil is often that which is good. Our best efforts to do even that which is good are but filthy rags in God's sight until there occurs a severe change of heart. It is our dependence on, and only on His gift of salvation, and His gift of righteous direction that has any lasting value. This is expressed through our work in humility and gratitude, and only by these means can our work bear righteous fruit. In believing in his own self-earned righteousness, Job expressed what can only be considered pride, rather than humility, in his dealings with God.

It's important here to distinguish the difference between self-righteousness and the righteousness imparted to the believer through his or her faith. Self-righteousness is the I-did-it-myself kind. "I take my righteousness most seriously; I read the Bible and believe it; I go to church; I help the poor and needy; I refrain from all the evils spoken of in the 10 Commandments. I'm not perfect, but I'm far better than most around me." It's the "I this" and "I that" that puts the "self" in self-righteousness. Scripture tells us of two genuine forms of righteousness, that of the law and that of faith. Righteousness under the law, the "I did" kind, would be genuine, if one kept the entire law, never sinning even once, that is keeping every single nuance of the law over one's entire life. Only Jesus was able to do this. No human can. Therefore, there can be no benefit to the soul from any attempt by man to achieve this form of righteousness. A single sin, no matter how small, would completely cancel that attempt at righteousness. Righteousness under the law is self-righteousness, its man's doing God's commands without God's help. The beginning of humility comes when we realize we are totally helpless within ourselves in this endeavor, and begin to seek God's grace through faith in Jesus. Thus genuine

righteousness is the result of faith and the act of divine grace. In Romans 4:3 we find that “Abraham believed God, and it was counted (imputed) unto him for righteousness.” Verse five goes on to say that works don’t bring righteousness, only faith can do that. We know from Ephesians 2:8 that we are saved only by grace through faith, and that is God’s gift which no amount of work can achieve nor in any other way be obtained. Righteousness flows from that saving faith. If we have that quality of faith, we may know that we have God’s righteousness in us, but we have absolutely no claim to it as being of our own doing. It should be the prime focus of our gratitude and not in any way held up as indicative of any self developed quality by which we can feel or claim as making us superior to any other human being. More blessed, yes, but not better. Job was of the same dispensation as was Abraham. But Abraham’s faith had been thoroughly tempered and then proven by the test God chose when He commanded him to sacrifice Isaac. The Book of Job tells us of another way in which God tempers and then tests His own. Up to the recorded portion of Job’s life, it seems apparent that he had not been so dealt with. Therefore, Job had imputed righteousness to himself as a result of all of his pious behavior, good works, and his own interpretation of what he believed was God’s law. Job and Abraham lived before the law was given to Moses.

We might now reconsider what may have seemed like a charade between God and Satan at the beginning of the Book. It was God who initiated this contest, not Satan. God was, of course, well aware of the superficial condition of Job’s presumed righteousness. But as Satan observed, it had never been tested. Therefore, neither its spiritual depth nor its sustainability could be known, that is to either Satan or Job. Our all-knowing God, of course, knew the works orientation of Job’s righteousness and what the outcome of this test would be. But His love for Job and the greater purpose He, no doubt, had for him required a purification that could only come from the severe lesson which He was allowing Satan to implement. This is an extremely important lesson for all of us. That’s why this Book is part of sacred Scripture! The lesson for all of us is the ugliness of self-righteousness. Job was honorable, honest and upright by God’s own testimony as recorded in verse eight of Chapter one where God describes Job as “*there is none like him*

on earth, a perfect and upright man that feareth God and escheweth evil.” However, he was yet absent of God’s righteousness.

How many of us can claim such a report by the Creator of the universe? However, where spiritual growth is concerned, Job obviously had some distance to go and a change of course to get there. His self-righteousness was a blockage to spiritual growth into God’s righteousness. Therefore God chose to advance that growth through what appears to be the only way it could happen. Just as iron must be tempered through extreme heat, so must man be tempered in the spirit by some form of adversity. Much later, Jesus said in John 15:2 “*...every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit.*” Job was being purged.

Now we begin to see the crux of the matter beginning to manifest. Righteousness is an essential quality for all who enter God’s eternal realm. However, only God is qualified and has the only power and right to convey and to judge one’s righteousness. Man is not qualified to do so, especially regarding himself. Where self-righteousness dwells in the heart, Jesus will not. Self-righteousness by Webster’s definition is “to be filled with or showing a conviction of being morally superior or more righteous than others; smugly virtuous.” This was Job’s problem and it is a problem that plagues all of humanity. The only antidote is its opposite, humility, and this only through our emulation of Jesus.

After Elihu’s expressions of wisdom and sage advice, God finally answers Job’s prayer by appearing to him to finish the task of setting Job straight in this matter of self-righteousness. God begins by rhetorically asking him where he was when God created the earth. He continues on, in the final four chapters, to ask seventy-seven questions of a similar nature, each attesting to God’s power, glory and omniscience. These serve as examples of the infinite difference between God and all mankind. They hammer home with great force the fact that any form, or the tiniest amount of self-righteousness, is nothing less than self-esteem that is nothing different than pride by another name. And we all know that pride is the sin most hated by God. Based on God’s comparison between Himself and Job, how can he or anyone claim himself or herself any amount of

self-righteousness, when all righteousness belongs to God and only God? What qualities can the most exquisitely molded pot claim, as it's own doing and not that of the potter? Remember the conversation between Jesus and a rich young man in Matthew 19:16, 17? The young man called Jesus "*good teacher*" and Jesus responded with "*Why do you call me good? No one is good but One, that is God.*" Had the young man known whom he was calling good, he would have reaffirmed that statement! But here is an admission by Jesus Himself, that no one is good except God! The rich young man claimed that he was already obeying all of the laws of Moses. But that was not enough, as it was not enough for Job or for us. What does that say to those who feel justified in claiming any good in themselves, that is, claiming to have any self-righteousness? In order to grow in the faith and goodness in God's eyes, only an ever-growing humility will suffice. We must decrease so that He can increase in our hearts.

As noted earlier, God spoke of Job as unique among mankind, a *perfect and upright man who feared God and turned away from evil.*" How blessed would any of us feel to receive such a report card from our Creator? But God, of course, saw far more than we could recognize. Man in his fallen state is far from perfect at his very best. Reference to the original Hebrew word, translated here as "perfect," indicates that it might have been better translated as "usually pious, gentle, plain, undefiled, or upright." Nevertheless, Job was about as good as a man could get by his own definition, a man to whom God had given much and from whom God had the right to expect much, apparently more than Job was providing or could provide in his self-righteous state. Job, impeded by his pride in his own virtue as are we all, perceived that he had reached a fairly high level of adherence to God's ways and sought no greater height of godliness, although it was certainly in him to rise higher, had it not been for that self-righteousness, through which he deemed himself already quite "good enough" to meet God's standard. He lacked humility, the pre-requisite virtue for fruitful service to God. Self-righteousness had to be purged from him as God purges even those who do bear any fruit so that they can bear even more.

We have here in this Book only a small part of Job's biography. From this, however, it seems safe to conclude that God may have had a greater purpose for Job, and we were privileged to see only one aspect of God's grooming of him for that purpose which may have been here on earth or somewhere in the heavenlies. We have witnessed God's similar grooming of Joseph as he went into the pit, then into slavery, then to seven years in prison, all of which prepared him to be the prime minister of the greatest empire of that day, as well as the savior of the tribe which became the Hebrew nation. We also see such grooming by God of Moses in his 40 years as heir apparent of the kingdom of Egypt, then 40 years as a lowly shepherd followed by a quick crash course in how to twist the tail of the serpent Egypt, followed by bringing the whole nation Israel out of Egypt, and for another 40 years being God's "walking companion," spokesperson, mediator, and ruling representative to that nation.

Out of all of this, what is God's message to all of us and to me personally, since He led me to Job for the answer to my cry, "why." I'll not attempt to speculate on what the Job story may mean for you. I'll do well if I can sufficiently fathom and articulate what I believe its purpose is for me. This, I believe, can be summarized in one simple phrase: an abundance of self-righteousness and a dearth of humility. Until I examined this message to Job as also a message to me, I would never have accused myself of these severely debilitating faults, much as Job never saw them in himself until God used the "megaphone" of pain and suffering to get his attention, as He also did mine, although in a much milder manner. As noted earlier, self-righteousness is nothing less than self-esteem, which is simply pride by another name. Satan was the epitome of pride as Jesus was of humility. Humility and pride cannot peacefully co-exist in the same heart, or decorate the same soul at the same time. While the Holy Spirit may dwell in a genuinely saved soul, He cannot function effectively in a prideful heart, but only in one, which has given itself over to Jesus in full humility. In 1Thessalonians 5:19 we are told not to quench the spirit, that is the Holy Spirit. There are a number of ways in which our sinful nature tends to do this. Each in some way can be traced to pride, to a lack of humility. Only through the activity of the Holy Spirit guiding our efforts can there be any

fruitfulness in our works, fruitfulness that will survive God's judgment in that final day of accounting.

Worldly values highly promote self-esteem. In one sense the cornerstone of modern physiological teaching which pervades all advice related to one's human development, consists of building up one's self-esteem, rather than addressing the core issue of all difficulties – sin. Isn't there something quite ironic in this observation? Man's principal construct, his cornerstone of faith in dealing with human relational difficulties, is in developing self-esteem, and thereby, in effect, shrugging off the fact of his sinful nature and by this means diverting blame from himself. Jesus, our cornerstone, our great healer of all ailments, was humble, and taught, humility as the way toward genuine righteousness, eternal peace and spiritual security. Think about this in the context of the evil one who has been temporarily allowed power over this world. It's the great deceiver Mr. Pride himself. To influence mankind to take on this, his principal characteristic is the easiest way for him to assure for himself a very large family with which to share hell!

All who claim to be Christians and know somewhat about what Jesus taught realize that humility is an important virtue. Many of us are quite "proud" of how great is our humility, much like the Pharisee who thanked God that he was not as lowly as the publicans praying next to him, as shown in Luke 18:11. Often outward expressions of humility are just that, outward expressions, premeditated and originated in the head, not from the heart. If humility is not from the heart and placed there by the Holy Spirit, it is not Christian humility.

From what we read about Job, he was a good man, one generously endowed with wealth and a good family. He prayed and sacrificed to God, and no doubt he was honest in his dealings and generally an upright man. Absent of any trial, temptations or serious trouble or grief, it is human nature to become more and more complacent, self-satisfied and self-righteous. Worship becomes more of a ritual than a heart-felt expression of gratitude for God's generosity. Prolonged generosity in any form or from any source becomes an entitlement. After awhile, there develops a complacency which can degenerate into

apathy as well as a growing belief that we possess an intrinsic goodness, otherwise why should we be so blessed? That inevitably evolves into self-righteousness. It would seem that that is where Job was at the point his story begins and God set up the process for his rehabilitation and spiritual advancement. God recorded it all as an example from which we all need to learn. He might very well have ended the Book of Job with what He told us so many other times, when a profound message had been delivered, *“He who hath an ear to hear let him hear.”* Only those who are born-again have ears equipped to hear these words and understand their meaning. Those of us, who have such ears and a heart willing to receive, should gain much from the example, if we will but examine ourselves in this context.

This Biblical example has touched me deeply because I know that I was directed to it. It was written for me. The steps from complacency toward self-righteousness, as outlined above, represented what I now see as having been my own. And our dear Lord expressed His love for me by calling them to my attention by way of His “megaphone” of pain. I suspect that He probably tried gentler ways to get my attention, but I was probably too wrapped up in myself to hear them! I pray that now I have the message. I pray that I will have the good sense and willingness to meaningfully apply it. But who can be sure? My heart is no better than any other heart. It is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Such a heart can deceive even the most well intended soul. But because of the grace of God I also have a new clean heart, as do all who are born-again. The Holy Spirit within us has the power to conquer that evil, self-righteous heart if we will only let it. My “thorn,” as with Paul’s, seems to have become a permanent fixture, a continuing reminder that God’s grace is enough, and indeed it is!

As I reviewed what I had written above, it became apparent that I should try to elaborate more on the importance of humility and to deal more thoroughly with the issue of self-righteousness.

Regarding humility, we must, as Christians, take our cue about this, as with everything else, from Jesus. On that basis here are a few thoughts on the subject that He Himself

preached. First, however, we do well to realize that with just one single act, the Creator of the Universe defined the ultimate expression of humility by becoming man, one of His own creation of creatures. In Philippians 2:5, 6, Paul reminds us of this: *“Let this mind be in you, which was also Christ Jesus; Who made Himself of no reputation (to have made Himself empty of His Godness) and took upon Him the form of a servant; he humbled Himself and became obedient to death...”* If you seek Christlikeness, here was humility personified! Now let us see what He preached:

- *“I am among you as he that serveth”* (Luke 22:27) This is God Himself telling us He came to serve. That’s humility.
- *“He that humbeleth himself shall be exalted.”* (Luke 18:14) Humility leads to exaltation.
- *“The Son can do nothing of Himself...”* (John 5:19) If the Son of God could do nothing of Himself as man, that is nothing of spiritual value, what does that say about our own puny self-efforts?
- *“I can of mine own self do nothing; My judgment is just, because I seek not my own will”* (John 5:30.) If the Son of God, in His position as Son of man, would not apply His own will, how can we, those corrupted sons of the first Adam, have the audacity to presume that any will of our own can have the slight amount of merit?
- *“I receive not honor from men”* (John 5:41) It doesn’t matter what man thinks of you, only God’s assessment matters. Walking in humility may offend man, but God delights in those who do.
- *“For I came down from heaven not to do mine own will”* (John 6:38) Jesus admits coming down from heaven, but not as a free and separate agent of God but one who is in total spiritual unison with the Father and was a full-strength reflection of His divine will.
- *“I seek not my own glory.”* (John 8:40) Jesus goes on and on stating in effect that He is nothing and the Father is all. This, of course, was true in His position as the Son of man. In heaven, before and after His visit on earth, He was and is part of the Triune Godhead, equal in every way with the Father. His over-riding message in these verses was of His comparative nothing as man. With that as His

assessment of His role as man, how can we believe that we are anything more than beings of even less than that amount of nothingness? Jesus goes on to teach His disciples (that is us, if we are in Christ) about humility.

- *“Learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.”* (Matthew 11:29) (Lowly, low in rank as in a military order.) Meek is not weak. Jesus, though meek, showed Himself strong and forceful when He overturned the money changer tables in the Temple, and when He repeatedly called the Pharisees, the spiritual leaders of the day, hypocrites and sons of Satan for their self-righteousness, their twisted beliefs and their attitudes. Here He taught that those having spiritual humility must, nevertheless, rise in justified indignation and action to every occasion where God is being blasphemed, and make known God’s truth.
- *“And whosoever will be chief among us, let him be your servant, Even as the Son of man came not to be minister unto, but to minister.”* (Matthew 20:27, 28) How forcefully He demonstrated this humility of a servant when He washed His disciples feet at the last supper!! If Christ is in us, we also must have a servant’s heart and so minister to our brethren and sisters in Christ. Washing their feet was symbolic of that humility and servanthood that must characterize our moment-by-moment, heart-felt Christian walk.
- *“Whatsoever therefore shall humble himself (express his own humility) as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”* Matthew 18:4 *“He that is least (showing greater humility) among you all, the same shall be great.”* (Luke 9:48) Again the promise of eternal benefits from a heart full of humility having no room for self.
- *“he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.”* (Matthew 23:11) Jesus was the very greatest and accepted the role of servant, the ultimate of humility. How can we who are inherently so much lower than Him have the audacity to think more of ourselves! As His bondservants, we are to gladly accept that role of servanthood in all humility. Humility must not be limited only toward God, that’s the easier part, but it must be a deeply, heart-felt humility toward all mankind as He so clearly exemplified.

Scripture continues to advocate this humility as an essential element in a genuine Christian life. The message is found throughout the Epistles, as evidenced of how well Jesus taught His apostles. They each lived exemplary lives of humility and taught the same wherever they went.

Now, regarding this matter of self-esteem. This worldly cancer seems to have even metastasized throughout the entire Christian body. Speaking ill of it as I have here, may be quite upsetting to those who have had their lives steeped in its alleged virtue and importance from the worldly perspective. After all, a lack of self esteem is synonymous with always feeling depressed and bad about yourself, isn't it? How can one succeed in life with that attitude? We must feel good about ourselves and love ourselves before we can love others, right? Like everything else Satan promotes, there is an element of truth masking his evil intent. In our discussion about Job, the evil side has been reasonably well examined. It's become evident that self-esteem is simply another way to express pride, the sin most detested by God. In the secular world, Satan's domain, pride and self-esteem are deemed to be essential characteristics of a well-adjusted individual. If one's efforts result in an outstanding achievement, isn't that justification for self-esteem? The world lauds an achiever, such as a great actor, or sports figure, a successful politician, or an accumulator of wealth. If the world esteems them, then why shouldn't they esteem themselves? It's all very natural, sensible and appropriate. To have it otherwise would be to discourage extraordinary effort and practically eliminate advancement in all fields of endeavor. Is it possible to separate pride from self-esteem and from self-righteousness? One can rationalize anything, and most of us do. But these three words are so closely related in meaning that we do our intellect a grave injustice if we try to do so from the Christian perspective

So what is the answer for the Christian, the genuine born-again, redeemed, ardent follower of Christ Jesus? Doctrinally, it's quite simple. From an applicational viewpoint it is much less so. It's been wisely said that if we don't have a clear understanding of the question, it's not possible to appreciate the answer! I pray that the question is quite clear, and the answer begins with humility. The genuine born-again Christian has gone through

several spiritual modifications before he or she has reached that most precious state. First there must be repentance, a turning away from the world and toward Jesus. This turning must result in a sincere heartfelt acknowledgement of who Jesus is, what He achieved on the cross, and what it means for every individual who will accept Him in faith. But before this acceptance can have any real substance, there must be a full recognition of the fact that one is a hopeless, condemned sinner for which there is no escape, except through Jesus. The result of this, when fully understood, can only bring forth a great personal shame and humility and a sacred commitment of love and obedience to our Lord Jesus. There are some who will take issue with the need for each of the steps to salvation as here noted. There is a widespread belief that there are adequate short cuts to salvation, and we need not necessarily involve ourselves with these more difficult issues of repentance, conviction, obedience and humility. After all, there is seldom even any mention of these things from the present day pulpit, therefore, how can they be so vital? Only ignorance or avoidance of God's whole Word can explain such a view. Trivializing these necessities of salvation is to do the same regarding one's eternal destiny, which is not a trivial matter.

Now how did we get back to humility? Didn't we cover that adequately already? YES, but not in the context of the self-esteem dilemma. It's been rightly said that humility is the first duty and highest virtue of man," and that "humility is the only soil in which graces take root; the lack of humility is sufficient explanation of every defect and failure." These words are from the great 19th century Christian teacher, Arthur Murray. Those who have a full measure of the spirit-given quality of humility have neither the need nor the capability for having self-esteem, self-righteousness or pride, or any other form of self-aggrandizements man is capable of devising for himself. Humility is what can empty the soul of self, and before the Holy Spirit can have full reign in the new heart of a saved soul, that "self" must be gone. With the "self" gone, how can there be any self-righteousness or self-esteem? Does that now mean that we must mope, feel bad about ourselves, and make no effort to achieve, or rise in our chosen profession, trade or vocation? Not in the least!!! We are to use all of our God-given attributes to the fullest!! As born-again Christians we are the earth's most blessed and should be the most joyous

of all people for that reason. The key to it all is to know fully and continually who is responsible for any and all of our achievements and to give full, unrestricted credit to Him, our God.

If we have been emptied of self, then we are nothing and He who is in us is our everything, and, therefore, all we achieve is His doing, not ours. All credit, all praise belongs to Him, not us. With self out of the picture, self-esteem is likewise, and only gratitude to our Lord remains as our response to any and all achievements. In one sense, our desire to excel and to achieve should be even greater than those who are of the world, because what we do is for our Lord and not for ourselves.

Removal of all self from our souls is a most difficult task. It's one that we have absolutely no ability to accomplish. Only Jesus can do it through the Spirit. It's a grace accompanying salvation, yet its one that even the Holy Spirit cannot accomplish, unless we let Him. It's our inherited sinful nature to resist, to cling to self, to not want to let go of who we are, for it means letting go of the world and the many forbidden delights we have grown to enjoy. Thus it is an on-going process. It's what is meant in Philippians 1:6 where the Holy Spirit through Paul says, "*Be confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*" What a great promise! If we can only let go of self, He will do all the rest! Here we learn that it is a continuing process; we need not become discouraged when the result isn't as fast as we may wish it to be. God will not forsake His own, but will continue molding them, removing the self from them until either physical death or the rapture, for that is our "day of Jesus Christ." That is the day we will meet Him at His heavenly throne of judgement where crowns will be confirmed, when our earthly conduct will be judged, and our eternal assignments given.

Those who are saved souls would do well, when they witness one of their brethren having received the blessing of some achievement, to not praise the person, but instead praise the Lord in gratitude for having used that person as His instrument of achievement. This act of not praising the person, but instead praising God, will help that person to avoid any

thoughts or feelings of self-accomplishment. If we can only learn in our hearts to always have gratitude toward our Lord for using us rather than attributing any credit to ourselves, we will soon be seeing solid evidence of Philippians 1:6 working in us.

In summary, the full, mature, born-again Christian needs no self-esteem and should be repulsed by even the thought of it. That Christian knows who is doing the good works. He or she knows that they are but conduits through which the Holy Spirit accomplishes His purpose. Then, gratitude for the privilege of being so used will become their treasure, far exceeding any petty and fleeting feelings of pride, which it has replaced. Pursuing that blessed state of Christian maturity takes one along a treacherous and difficult road, the end of which few will ever reach in this lifetime. I believe that it will be the sincerity of effort, and not the final result, that God will judge.

There is one more point I am persuaded to make at the risk of being accused of beating this thing to death. It is another message that seems to have resulted from this ordeal. That is, that unless we are continually diligent in our worship and prayers, and are ever self-examining of our spiritual condition, we are bound to have lapses into some level of complacent, self-satisfied righteousness. This was Job's problem and is endemic throughout the Christian world. I certainly have been no exception. This, I believe, is also what God wanted me to see through His dealings with Job. As we move on, believing that we are fully in the faith, there is a tendency to reach a plateau, a comfort level, and then to stay there, complacent and self-satisfied. This is not appropriate for any true Christian. God wants continuous growth and we dearly need it, because at our very best we fall far short of where we want to and ought to be, if we but examine ourselves critically. It seems that for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose, He has the right to expect considerably more for having given them so very much. I believe that unless we voluntarily "raise the bar," that is continue to increase our commitment by growing in faith, worship, obedience and fruitfulness, we risk the possibility that he may in some persuasive way "raise the bar" for each of us as He did for Job, and in a much less painful way, for me. Is there really any amount of gratitude and evidence of that gratitude, large enough to suffice for His gift of eternal life with Him

in the heavenly places? Are any of us who are so blessed, giving of ourselves all we really can, and ought to, in the way of worship, prayer, obedience and fruitfulness to His glory? Who can honestly say yes? I know that I can't.

God's message made that much clearer to me, and I pray that this, and the message to be found in the Book of Job, will cause you to increase your awareness and sensitivity to your own position on the ladder to eternity.