DOCTRINE OF HUMILITY

I. Introduction.
   A. The concept of humility is something that is almost unique to the Biblical faith, a virtue to which other religions accord no honor and which some even fail to recognize or acknowledge.
   B. Many of the ancient and modern philosophers likewise ignore the concept of humility, and many even belittle it.
   C. Greek philosophers despised humility because to them it implied inadequacy, lack of dignity, and worthlessness.
   D. Aristotle, in his systematic doctrines of wisdom praises a high-minded self-sufficiency that is quite the opposite of humility.
   E. Centuries later, Friedrich Nietzsche castigated humility as part and parcel of a perverted morality, in which inferior individuals like Paul the apostle own up to their own baseness, weakness, etc. and exalt servility to the apex of excellence.
   F. In fact, modern pagans view humility as no moral virtue, stating that it is designed to use guilt to obliterate the ideology of individualism from the face of the earth.
   G. They declare that it is a term employed by the incompetent, those less capable of escalating themselves or anyone else, and is designed to bring achievement to ruin.
   H. Humility, in their view, is designed to cripple the individual and use one’s own guilt to punish oneself, a pernicious form of ego abuse.
   I. As we will observe, the cosmic views of reality are flawed due to their failure to comprehend spiritual issues in general and this issue specifically. ICor. 2:14

II. Vocabulary.
   A. Hebrew vocabulary.
      1. הָנָה (‘anah), verb, to be put down or become low, to be depressed or downcast. The nuance of this verb is that of affliction, to inflict pain or punishment on someone to force them into submission.
         a. הָנָו (‘anaw), adj., stresses the moral and spiritual condition of the godly, implying that their state in the cosmos is one of suffering rather than worldly happiness. This word emphasizes the intended outcome of affliction: humility.
         b. הָנוֹה (‘nahoh), f.noun, 7X, humility, greatness. This term sets forth the dual qualities gained by a man in the school of affliction: humility that leads to true greatness before the Lord.
2. ֲלָעָל (shaphel), verb, The basic meaning is to be low, to crouch, or bow down. Although the verb denotes physically low, its most important use is found in the figurative sense of abasement, humbling or humility. The Aramaic cognate ֲלֶעָל (shaphal) is used 5 times and has a similar nuance, the objective state or condition of being low and/or humble.
   a. ֲלָעָל (shaphal), adj., 20X, low, lowly, or humble.
   b. ֲלֶעָל (shephel), m.noun, 2X, a low estate or place, a humble position.

3. ֳנָרָק (kalam), verb, to cause shame or humiliation, to humble, to reduce one to a lower position in your eyes or in the eyes of others. This family of words deals with the emotional aspects of being humbled, the shame, confusion, reproach or dishonor that comes on the one being humbled.

B. Greek vocabulary.
   1. ταπεινώω (tapeinoo), verb, 14X, to make low, to lessen, to humble or abase. In a moral sense, this verb means to make humble, to humble oneself.
      a. ταπεινός (tapeinos), adj., 10X, used of the condition of persons that are or have been brought low, humbled or submissive.
      b. ταπεινόφροσύνη (tapeinophrosune), 7X, f.noun, a compound from the term meaning to think or be of a certain mindset and the term lowly. Hence, this term means to have humility, lowliness of mind.
   2. πραΰτης (prautes), f.noun, 11X, a quality of gentleness, meekness, having strength to accommodate another’s weakness. This term is used in conjunction with humility and denotes a quality that those that are humble possess.
      a. πραΰτος (praus), adj., 4X, mild, soft, gentle or meek.

III. Definition and description.
   A. Webster defines humility as one who is of a humble mind, freedom from pride or arrogance, lowliness of mind, state or condition.
   B. He states that the humble person is one that is not proud or assertive in spirit, lowly, one near the ground as opposed to being high or pretentious.
   C. Related concepts would include lowliness, meekness, gentleness, and poverty of spirit.
   D. However, in modern usage humility often connotes undue self-deprecation, verging on a false sense of inferiority, obsequious kowtowing based on the attitude that “I’m nothing”.
   E. A biblical definition of humility would be the ability to understand and reflect reality, neither thinking too highly of yourself (pride/arrogance) nor thinking too lowly of yourself (false humility and self-abuse). Rom. 12:3 “For through the grace given to me (Paul’s writing reflects a realistic view based on the working of God in his life and his understanding of and participation in the policy of grace) I say to every man among you (God wants each one of us to be oriented to Him and the reality that is His plan of grace, correct thinking is for everyone)
not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think (the tendency of people is to have some exaggerated self-esteem, thinking that we are better than we are, often caused by comparing ourselves with others, which is foolish) but to think so as to have sound judgment...(this implies that we should recognize God’s grace in our lives and the blessings He has bestowed on us and not function in some pseudo self-effacing way that effectively denigrates the truth)

F. Therefore, humility is biblically defined as a virtue that places a proper perspective on all things, our sins, failures, weaknesses, etc., as well as our gifts, achievements, etc.

G. This is impossible if one is not grounded in a recognition of who God is and has an understanding of, and participation in, His plan of grace.

H. In effect, humility is the ability to see God, yourself, and others in the proper light, viewing all things without exalting yourself or denigrating yourself in an unhealthy way.

I. False humility, humility pushed to an extreme, results in self-abasement, extreme self-criticism, and a lack of self-confidence that can effectively paralyze an individual.

J. Biblical humility is not the inverted conceit that disguises itself as lowliness, it is not a subtle form of masochism that enjoys its own debasing, nor is it some cowardice that protects itself by a groveling servility.

IV. An understanding of the nature and character of man and God is necessary for an accurate understanding of humility.

A. The Bible is quite clear on the absolute, transcendent superiority of the essence of God to all that has ever been or ever will be. Isa. 43:10-13, 44:8, 45:5-7

1. Every aspect of the divine essence is superior to what we observe in mankind.

2. God is righteous and just; we are sinful and unfair.

3. God is the sovereign king of the universe; we cannot even rule ourselves.

4. God has and will always exist; we live about seventy years and our success is fleeting.

5. God is love; mankind is selfish and self-centered.

6. God is omnipotent; humans are dependent and vulnerable to disease, aging, death, war, weather, etc.

7. God is omniscient; we are constantly pursuing information.

8. God is omnipresent; we are limited to one point in time and space.

9. God is veracity; mankind wonders if there is truth, can it be known?

10. God is immutable; we change with the wind, unstable as water.

B. Knowing these things, one should recognize that human beings are incapable of attaining the perfection that is the Divine essence through their own nature or efforts. Rom. 3:23

C. While man was the greatest of His creations, that creation did not remain in its original, perfect state but was corrupted by the introduction of the genetic STA, producing spiritual death. Gen. 2:17; Rom. 5:12ff
D. This produced an adversarial situation, in which the creature was hostile and alienated from the Creator, with no chance of changing his situation in his spiritually dead condition. Eph. 2:1-3; Col. 1:21; Rom. 3:9-18

E. God did what mankind could not do, intervening in grace and providing the potential for a relationship with God by sacrificing His own Son. Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8; Eph. 2:4; IJn. 4:9-10

F. Thus, God redeemed mankind from its fallen position in Adam and offered the human race a relationship with Himself, contingent only on their faith in His Son. Jn. 3:16
   1. We have been redeemed from the slave market of sin, and our sins have been forgiven. Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14
   2. We have been declared righteous and have peace with God. Rom. 3:24, 5:1
   3. We have been set free from the law of the STA and death. Rom. 8:2
   4. We have been delivered from darkness (Satanic/cosmic viewpoint) to light (the divine viewpoint). Col. 1:13
   5. Our citizenship has been transferred from the kingdom of Satan to the Kingdom of Christ. Col. 1:13

G. True humility takes all these facts into account and gives us a proper perspective on God, His plan, and our place in it via grace, recognizing that all the merit lies in the object of faith and that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh;… Rom. 7:18

H. In spite of all the great blessings that God has provided through grace, we must always seek to view ourselves as God views us, being cognizant of the fact that we all stumble in many ways. James 3:2

I. The proper attitude is expressed in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9ff
   1. The parable is aimed at those that reject humility and exult in their own righteousness. Vs. 9
   2. The Pharisee represents religious self-righteousness, focusing on the abilities and achievements of an unregenerate man. Vs. 11-12
   3. The tax collector, recognizing his irretrievable state and total sinfulness, demonstrates the proper attitude when dealing with the Righteous God. vs. 13
   4. His prayer demonstrates his recognition of his sins, guilt, inability to deal with them, as well as the fact that only God can retrieve him from his sinful condition. Vs. 13

J. Further, we find from a study of the scripture that God prizes the one that recognizes these things, possessing true humility, and takes delight in exalting that person. Ps. 10:17, 25:9, 37:11; Isa. 66:2; Jms. 4:6

K. Following salvation, the believer must seek humility, being cognizant of his own sin nature, the ease with which he falls under its control, and the willingness we all have to exalt ourselves. IJn. 1:8,10; Heb. 12:1; IICor. 12:7
V. Humility is commanded. Zeph. 2:3; Jms. 4:10; IPet. 5:5-6
   A. All human systems of pride that exalt themselves against the Lord will ultimately be humbled. Job 40:11-12; Prov. 29:23; Isa. 2:11-17, 25:11-12
   B. This is true both at a personal and national level. Ex. 10:3; Lev. 23:29; Lk. 1:52
   C. The content of John the Baptist’s ministry and communication dealt with the fact that God would humble the glory of man. Isa. 40:4; Lk. 3:5
   D. The Divine irony is that those without humility will be humbled by God and those that humble themselves will be exalted. Matt. 18:4, 23:12; Lk. 14:11, 18:14
   E. In fact, those that lack humility often arrogantly despise those that possess it. II Sam. 6:12-22
   F. The adjusted believer, like his God, desires that those that exalt themselves against the plan of God be humbled. Job 40:12

VI. Jesus Christ is the ultimate example of humility. Zech. 9:9; Phil. 2:5-8
   A. The great kenosis passage in Philippians 2 deals with the absolute humility of the God/man.
   B. In His preincarnate state as deity, the Eternal Son demonstrated His willingness to take a lower place to advance the plan of God. Phil. 2:6
   C. He laid aside His rights to independently exercise His will, and condescended to become a human being.
   D. We would refer to that as the humility of God, the refusal to look out exclusively for His own interests or image. …who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped…
   E. As the God/man, He must be willing to give up the overt display of His preincarnate glory, veiling it in order to work among the men that He came to save.
      1. This does not mean that He ceased to be God, or have the preincarnate glory as part of His essence; something observed on the mount of transfiguration. Matt. 17:2
   F. In the union with an unglorified humanity, a body subject to temptation, distress, weakness, pain, sorrow, and humiliation, he humbled Himself completely submitting His will to God’s at every point. John 5:19,30, 6:38, 8:28, 12:49
   G. Next, He had to voluntarily embark on a life that made it necessary to submit Himself to a voluntary restriction of His attributes; including, never using His omniscience to make His path easier, suffering all the inconveniences of His time, never using omnipotence to avoid fatigue or serve Himself, etc.
   H. Jesus Christ gave up the independent exercise of His divine attributes and submitted Himself to the mighty hand of God.
      1. This is completely evident when the hand of God required Him to submit to the ultimate form of degradation. Phil. 2:8: Matt. 26:39
   J. He asserted His own humility in Matt. 11:29, indicating that saying one is humble is not an evidence of pride. Num. 12:3
   K. His humility is very prominent in such places as Matthew 3:13-15, John 13:3-5, and Matt. 21:5 cf. Zech. 9:9
L. It should be evident that Jesus Christ was the most humble man that ever lived, yet His humility was not incompatible with His boldness, confidence, authority, uncompromising demands, and severity. Jn. 18:20; Matt. 7:28-29, 16:22-23, 23:1ff

VII. Individual graces associated with humility.
A. Phase 1 salvation/forgiveness. Matt. 18:1-4; Lk. 18:9
B. Phase 2 deliverance. 1 Kings 21:29; II Chron. 12:7-12, 32:26; Job 22:29; Prov. 6:3
C. Wisdom/Bible doctrine. Ps. 25:9; Prov. 11:2; James 1:21
D. Gratitude and thankfulness. Ps. 34:2, 69:32; Lk. 1:47-48
E. Effective prayer. IIChron. 7:14; Ezra 8:21; Ps. 10:17; Dan. 10:12
F. Forgiveness. Col. 3:12-13
G. Vindication, honor, and promotion in time and eternity. ISam. 2:7; Ps. 37:11; Prov. 15:33, 18:12, 22:4, 29:23; Dan. 4:17; Matt. 5:5; Lk. 1:52; Jms. 4:6
H. God’s power is directed toward the humble for blessing in general. Isa. 66:2; Lk. 1:48
I. Humility is absolutely necessary to spiritual advance. Micah 6:8
J. Humility is superior to human viewpoint success in the cosmos. Prov. 16:19
K. Testing from the Lord is often designed to bring man to the point of humility that the Lord requires. Deut. 8:2,16

VIII. Corporate Church success is dependent upon humility.
A. Unity comes through humility. Eph. 4:2-3; IPet. 3:8
B. Service proceeds from humility. Jn. 13:13-15; Phil. 2:3-4
C. Humility must characterize the ministry of right pastor. Acts 20:19
   I. This is clearly demonstrated when he teaches the truth of doctrine, having only the best interests of his congregation at heart, with no regard for what is in it for him monetarily. IICor. 11:7
D. The rejection of the communicator established by God is a demonstration that one lacks humility. IIChron. 36:12; James 1:21
E. Right pastor is humbled/humiliated when he is forced to use severity with right congregation due to refusal to apply. II Cor. 12:21

IX. National prosperity is rooted in the virtue of humility. IIChron. 7:14; Ezek. 17:24; Lk. 1:52
A. Humility will characterize national Israel during the Millennium. Zeph. 3:12

"But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.”

Isa. 66:2