

THE HUMILITY TO BE HELPED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT
James 1:18-21

(NASB): "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls."

INTRODUCTION

Abraham Lincoln often proved himself a remarkably wise President and a Christian-principled man. If the verse, "everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger" was not actually dear to his heart, he lived as if it was. During the Civil War, Lincoln once sought to gain a key politician's cooperation by agreeing to order certain regiments to be transferred to the politician's district. Edwin Stanton served as Lincoln's Secretary of War during most of the War. When he received the order, he refused to carry it out. He told Lincoln's messenger, "The President's a fool!" This was reported to Lincoln. How do you think most Presidents would respond to such outright criticism and insubordination? Lincoln was keenly aware that Stanton's effective management of the War Department had organized the massive military resources of the North and helped to guide the Union to victory. Lincoln therefore wisely and humbly responded to Stanton's rebuke with these words: "If Stanton said I'm a fool, then I must be, for he is nearly always right. I'll see for myself." He went to Stanton, calmly listened to his arguments against the President's proposed action, and quickly realized Stanton had saved him from a serious mistake. He withdrew his order.

Is humility a weakness or a strength? Salmon P. Chase, Governor of Ohio, U.S. Senator from Ohio, and 6th Chief Justice of the U. S. Supreme Court, misread Abraham Lincoln's humility as personal weakness. When Chase lost the Republican nomination for President to Lincoln, he agreed to be Treasury Secretary because he thought he could control Lincoln and run the country as he thought best. Chase was undeniably brilliant. But he had one major fault (according to many who knew him best): He viewed himself as the fourth member of the Trinity! After Chase learned to yield his abilities to Lincoln's wisely strong, though humble, guidance, he performed his greatest service by establishing a unified nationwide banking system and by instituting the use of paper "greenback" currency to give the nation a uniform paper money system.

Today's focus is what we lose if we live as though our own views of what is right or wrong should be given the same respect and authority as God's views. We may even mistakenly assume our main purpose in life is to teach *others* what *they* must change to live as God wants them to live. Many scribes and Pharisees of **Jesus'** day thought like this. **Jesus** denounced them as "blind guides" and "whitewashed tombs" who had usurped God's exclusive privileges. Rather than admit **Jesus** ("God in the flesh," **John 1:1, 14**) was right and they were wrong, they led the effort to crucify Him (**Matthew 12: 1-14; Matthew 23:24-28**).

Our main purpose in life is to learn what *we* must change to live as God wants *us* to live. In **Matthew 11:29**, **Jesus** appeals to us: "Take My yoke upon you [become My disciple] and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." The Greek word used here for "gentle" means that as a man and human being, **Jesus** was "not pushy about getting his own way." This word also appears in **Matthew 5:5**, where **Jesus** said, "Blessed are the gentle ["meek"], for they shall inherit the earth." Have you ever been pushy about getting your own way? Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), Irish playwright, novelist, and poet, observed, "Selfishness is not living as one wishes to live. It is asking others to live as one wishes to live" (in other words, to live as *you* want them to live). Selfishness includes, of course, insisting everyone accept the importance of our opinions over theirs. A visitor asked a girl age five if she was in her daughter Linda's room at school. The girl immediately replied, "No I'm not. Linda is in *my* room." A painter once asked an observer at an art gallery, "What is your opinion of my painting?" "It

isn't worth anything," came the reply. "I know," said the painter, "but I'd like to hear it anyway." What strife do we promote by pushing others to accept our views of right and wrong, especially if we insist our views must also be God's views? Our sermon points are What We Lose by Insisting We Are Right and What We Gain by Agreeing God Is Right.

I. WHAT WE LOSE BY INSISTING WE ARE RIGHT

James 1:12-16 warns we may be trapped into fateful responses to temptation if we *underestimate* the enemy (Satan's schemes to ruin us), *overestimate* ourselves, or *misestimate* (poorly evaluate) God: (NLT) "God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him. ¹³ And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, 'God is tempting me.' God is never tempted to do wrong, and He never tempts anyone else. ¹⁴ Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. ¹⁵ These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death. ¹⁶ So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters." These "Fateful" ("fatal, deadly, or disastrous") responses to temptation boil down to refusing the help and guidance God offers us because we're convinced we already know what's best for us to do or believe we can handle this situation on our own. Life can become disastrous when each of us assumes God's role in deciding what is right or what is good for us to do! A young pilot had just passed the point of no return (nearer his destination than departure airport) when the weather changed for the worse. Visibility reduced to a few feet as fog lowered nearly to ground level. The ink seemed still wet on his certificate verifying he'd qualified for instrument flying. Entrusting himself to cockpit instruments would be a new experience. The landing at a crowded metropolitan airport unfamiliar to him worried him the most. Until he came within radio contact of the tower, he remained alone with his thoughts. His instructor practically forced him to memorize the rulebook. He didn't care for it at the time, but now he was thankful. Finally he heard the voice of the air traffic controller, who almost immediately told him, "I'm going to put you on a holding pattern." "Great!" the pilot thought. Like most of us, in moments of crisis, taking action, not being forced to wait, is what he wanted. It went against his grain to accept his safe landing was in the hands of the man in the tower. He could draw upon his previous instructions and training, but he must still entrust himself to the voice of an air traffic controller he couldn't see. Aware this was no time for pride, he called out, "This is not a seasoned pro up here. I would appreciate any help you could give me." "You've got it!" he heard back. For the next 45 minutes, the controller guided the pilot through the blinding fog. As course and altitude corrections commands were obeyed, the young pilot was guided around obstacles and away from potential collisions. Relying upon the rulebook's words firmly placed etched in his mind, and putting faith in the gentle voice of the controller, he landed safely at last. When we equally entrust ourselves to God's guidance through the Bible and His Holy Spirit, we can safely pass through any trial or temptation.

Proverbs 12:15 says, "A fool's way is right in his own eyes, but whoever listens to counsel is wise." **Proverbs 14:12** warns, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." When God acts to block our folly—through the teachings of the Bible, our Church, our friends, or authority figures such as parents whom the Lord has placed in our lives to protect us—our most common sinful response is [can you guess?] anger. Someone put a sour twist on the advice, "When you're angry, always count to ten before you say anything," by adding, "This will give you more time to come up with the right insult." It's within the context of correcting our short-sighted anger over our faults that our Lord tells us emphatically, "But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." Our angry, prideful hostility to God's correction, by His Holy Spirit and others God chooses, is often the single greatest factor that cheats us from experiencing the quality of life our Lord longs for us to enjoy by aligning ourselves with His right principles for living.

II. WHAT WE GAIN BY AGREEING GOD IS RIGHT

If we are to avoid losing out upon the quality of life God offers us, we must comply with His condition in **vs. 21**, "Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the

word implanted, which is able to save your souls." Humility is an absolute prerequisite for growth as a follower of **Jesus**. The root idea of "humility" is "not rising far from the ground." We are "humble" if we do not overestimate our importance or the rightness of our views, and we are willing to submit ourselves humbly as learners to God, the truths of God's Word, and to those through whom God wishes to lead and guide us. This same Greek word is found in **James 4:6**, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Dick Jones maintained such a fine record of community service that he came to think his whole town depended on him. One morning he awoke with a high fever. His wife called their Dr., who happened to be a dear friend who lived next door. He diagnosed Dick with viral pneumonia and prescribed a few days' bed rest. "But I can't," Dick objected. "I have a breakfast meeting at the school where I'm President of the PTA Board. There's crucial business at the office, a luncheon date, three important appointments this afternoon, and then the Building Committee at church this evening." When the Dr. insisted, however, he reluctantly agreed to spend the rest of the morning in bed. His high fever triggered some sort of trance while he slept. He beheld angels gathered around God's throne. Everything seemed to be in disarray. An angel passed the Lord a sheet of paper to explain the great state of confusion prevailing in Heaven. God then exclaimed, "Oh, no! What am I going to do? How will we manage today? Dick Jones is sick!" When he awoke, Dick Jones thanked the Lord for his illness that day. He got God's message!

An earlier sermon based on **James 1:17-18**, "God's Faithful First Fruits," demonstrated that salvation is much more a matter of being saved *for someone* than it is being saved *from something*. God redeems us not so much to save us from Hell's destruction, as wonderful as this is. God saves us to experience the sweet joys of eternal fellowship with Him by freeing us of spiritual enemies of sin and Satan that seek to cripple, wound, and ruin us.

In the Old Testament era, Israelites expressed thankfulness for God's blessings of protection and bounty, and honored God's claims upon them as His redeemed community, by offering Him the first fruits of their material prosperity (**Deuteronomy 26:1-12**). God calls upon us, New Testament Christians, to honor His claims upon us as a people "redeemed with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ" (**I Peter 1:18-19**) by offering *all* of ourselves to Him. This means we will humbly yield every aspect of our lives, our thoughts, and our attitudes to the Lord for His correction and purification. **Ephesians 1:13 & 2:1-5, 10** (NLT) beautifully describes the quality of life our Lord longs for us to embrace: "And when you believed in Christ, He identified you as His own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom He promised long ago. Once you were dead, doomed forever because of your many sins. You used to live just like the rest of the world, full of sin, obeying Satan, the mighty prince of the power of the air. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passions and desires of our evil nature. . . . But, . . . we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things He planned for us long ago."

CONCLUSION

Jazz musician Thomas Andrew Dorsey (1899-1993), was known as "the father of black gospel music." *Peace in the Valley*, written and composed by Dorsey in 1937, was one of the first gospel songs in America to sell a million copies. He became the first black American elected to the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame and to the Gospel Music Association's Living Hall of Fame. But his career began much differently. In the early 1920's, Thomas Dorsey was known for the sexually suggestive lyrics of his original music. Then in 1926, he came under conviction and called upon the Lord for salvation. True to his new commitments to **Jesus Christ**, he gave up the sexually-laced music and began to write gospel music.

Dorsey struggled to survive for years. The worldly crowd who'd been his biggest fans thought his new music was too spiritual; the spiritual crowd thought his new music remained too worldly. The worst night of his life came in August, 1932. Times were hard for nearly everyone trying to survive the Great Depression; especially entertainers. Then he received a telegram telling him his pregnant wife had suddenly died

in childbirth. His newborn son died two days later. Filled with grief, Dorsey's faith in a loving, caring God was shaken. *At such times, people either turn away from the Lord in defiant despair, or they affirm their devotion to the Lord despite their despair.* Dorsey chose to turn to his Heavenly Father with a child's trust and devotion. He poured his grief and need of comfort into a song that has blessed millions: *Precious Lord, Take My Hand.* We will sing it to the Lord as our closing hymn. Because Thomas Dorsey continued to believe God is right in all that He does and in all that He allows to happen to us as His children, despite the earthly sorrows that tore his soul, the Lord took Dorsey in hand from that point on in his life. He guided Dorsey with wisdom and opened doors to blessings that allowed him to achieve personal and enduring success beyond all his expectations. His compositions have appeared in the hymnals of virtually all American churches and English-speaking churches worldwide! Let's sing now Dorsey's faith in the goodness and love of our Heavenly Father and Lord, *Precious Lord, Take My Hand.*