

Exalted Humility

We have seen in Peter's first epistle that he writes to new converts in a Gentile context who are besieged by various trials and persecutions. He has written to remind them that they have a new identity ("elect exiles"), a new hope ("a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ"), and a peculiar calling, namely, to holiness amidst an unholy world. In their calling to holiness, he has reminded them that they must submit to all of the legitimate Gentile authorities while also abstaining from their sinful passions. The motivations for this Christian life are the imminent judgment of God and the beautiful example of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we turn now to chapter 5, we shall see that Peter emphasizes the necessity for humility to live out this peculiar calling in Jesus Christ.

I Peter 5:1-14

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: **2** shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; **3** not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. **4** And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. **5** Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, **7** casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. **8** Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. **9** Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. **10** And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. **11** To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Final Greetings

12 By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. **13** She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. **14** Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

I. We must lead humbly (vv. 1-4)

Peter exhorts the elders in particular to shepherd all the flock and to do so in a humble manner, not as the Gentiles do in lording it over other people. Peter himself was a rather proud man, but Jesus changed him into a humble fellow elder. In all of our leadership, if we would be effective in our Christian lives, we must lead with humility.

II. We must submit humbly (vv. 5-11)

Peter has already explained in chapters 2 and 3 that we must submit to human authorities that are set over us by God's providence, but here he especially points us to the submission that is due to God Himself.

a. We must submit to God's elders (v. 5a)

The elders are appointed in the church for our spiritual welfare. We submit to them out of the fear of God.

b. We must submit to God's people (vv. 5b)

Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 4:7 that everything that we have has been given to us, thus we have no grounds for boasting. We must remember this as we deal with one another in the body of Christ and put ourselves under each other and consider each other's needs more important than our own.

c. We must submit to God's providence (v. 6)

Peter teaches us that there is a day coming when we shall be exalted; in the meanwhile, we must submit ourselves to the exigencies of the present time.

d. We must submit to God's care (v. 7)

If we humbly care for other people, the natural question to arise is: who shall care for us? The answer is that God Himself will care for you; therefore, we can cast all of our anxieties upon Him and Him alone.

e. We must submit to God's battle (vv. 8-9)

Paul teaches us in Ephesians 6 that we are to engage battle with the evil one. We have an adversary. We are on the bull's eye of his targets simply because Jesus is. For this reason we must resist him and remain alert.

f. We must submit to God's crucible (vv. 10-11)

We have learned in 1 Peter 1 that our sufferings are for the purpose of refining our faith and glorifying God. For these reasons we submit ourselves to whatever His providence brings us all for His glory, not our own.

III. We must stand humbly (vv. 12-14)

Peter teaches us in verse 12 that this epistle outlines for us the true grace of God. Many folks will try to move us off this grace, but Peter says we must "stand firm in it." The battle for us is often due to the many privileges we enjoy. Greater financial strength, higher offices, more education all tend to puff us up and make us less open to the leading of God's gospel. Jesus is our perfect example. There is no one more powerful, more wealthy, more learned than our Lord Jesus Christ, and He laid it all aside for our poor sakes. The call upon us is to walk in His steps.

Discussion Questions

1. Why does our Christian life hinge on our willingness to humble ourselves?
2. Describe a Christian leader whose humility is evident. What is it that you appreciate most about his/her leadership?
3. Why is it difficult to submit to elders in the church? What can elders do to make it easier for us to submit to them?
4. Why is it difficult for us to submit to all of our brothers and sisters in the church? How can we better cultivate this virtue in our lives?
5. What makes us rebel against God's providence, especially when difficult times occur?

6. How are Christians today most often tempted to sway from “the true grace of God”? What things can we do better to stand firm in this grace?

Going Deeper

1. How can you more humbly lead in the places where God has given you that assignment?
2. How can you humble your heart in a more godly way in the face of God’s providence in difficult situations?
3. What has helped you the most in standing firm in the grace of God?