

Humility Toward One Another

One Another Duties

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Bible Text: 1 Peter 5:1-5; John 13:1-17

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From Augustine are these words, "For those who would learn God's ways, humility is the first, the first thing, humility is the second thing, humility is the third thing." John Flavel wrote, "They that know God will be humble. They that know themselves cannot be proud." And based upon such texts as the following reading first from Ephesians 4 at verse 2, after being called to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called," Paul writes, "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." That began with humility. And then in Philippians 2 at verse 3, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself." And then in Colossians 3 at verse 12, "And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility." Then in 1 Peter 3 at verse 8, "To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit." Those texts joining the comments of Augustine and John Flavel and then the text of our concern this morning, 1 Peter 5:5, "You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another." Putting that all together, it's rather obvious to be able to say this: humility is a primary and indispensable disposition if there are to be brotherly relations in the church. Without humility, it's not possible, that pervasive, felt sense of who one really is, it's from that that humility grows, accurate self-assessment, that felt sense that in reality I am a dependent dying creature.

I was before the open grave yesterday. It can be quite a potent reminder if I'm in my right mind of who I really am. I am contingent mortal who one day will have his corpse lowered into the grave. The idea of being tough guy and invincible and all the rest, it's a sign of mental insanity. It's a fantasy. It's a delusion. I'm a dying mortal and then beyond that, I'm not only a dying mortal but in and of myself I'm a guilty, utterly depraved rebel against the God of heaven. That's who I really am. That's my identity. Humility is the fruit of coming to grips with it.

Humility in the language of the apostle is thinking so as to have sound judgment about one's self. If one has sound judgment, not skewed, not judgment that has been blinded and skewed by the smoke of conceit, but if I am thinking as to have sound judgment about myself, realizing, reckoning, coming to grips with the reality I am a dependent

mortal and an accountable guilty sinner, I am dependent on grace alone, whatever I have received in life a measure of health, gift of endowment, opportunity, provision, whatever I have received from whence did it come? Not of myself, it came from him who gives to all life, breath and all things.

When those realities are reckoned with, humility is the fruit. Not the denial that God has given one certain endowments, not the denial that God has given one certain advantages, that's not humility, that's dishonesty if he's given them to you, but from whence did they come? And to whom are you accountable for the use and stewardship of them? Brethren, humility built upon that foundation is a vital necessity if there are to really be mutual relations in a given church, the kind of relations that we have been considering now in the "one another" passages of the New Testament. Without humility, again, there is smugness, there is defensiveness, there is touchiness, there is distance, and these things preclude unified, communicative, brotherly relations and you know that. In the language of Kenneth Wuest, "The exhortation to put on humility as a working virtue," and I hope it'll become clear by the end of this evening why he describes humility as a working virtue, "The exhortation to put on humility as a working virtue which would make all other virtues what they should be, thus workable in the Christian scheme of things. The other virtues such as kindness, generosity, justice, goodness, longsuffering when saturated with humility are most acceptable and praiseworthy, but when seen in a proud person, are like clanging brass or tinkling cymbal."

What happens when a proud person at least goes through the motions of trying to help you? How do you feel in that circumstance? If that becomes really just an opportunity for that proud person to display his superiority or you may feel put upon, condescended unto, humiliated and what externally may have the bare form of an act of kindness when it's really driven by self-display, you may well feel patronized to. Pride is a pollutant that just poisons human relationships.

Brethren, we take up this morning "one another" directive 24 with reference to the larger outline that I don't think you have in your presence, the directive that concerns humility toward one another, and if I were going back and rearranging the larger outline, I would probably put this at number 2 if I were thinking in terms of priority. Number 1 being love, number 2 being humility, and we can be reminded that the two are connected. In 1 Corinthians 13, love does not brag and is not arrogant, in other words, love is humble.

You have before you, I trust, the four point outline that I want to review right now, the roadmap for where we will be going this morning and into this evening with regard to 1 Peter 5 at verse 5. The first of the four headings, a word we don't often use today, "whence." Whence, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another. In other words, where did that come from? Did it just fall out of Peter's head or was there a train of thought, a source, a place from which this imperative came? In what way did Peter come upon the directive, "clothe yourselves with humility toward one another"? The interest here is the context, what has preceded, and the transitional word in verse 5, "likewise," that is a connector to the context, thus whence this directive.

Secondly, who is to be clothed with humility toward one another? Well, the answer as we'll see is plain, verse 5, "all of you." All of you. Look around. Look at the ones to your right and left, front and behind that constitute the "all of you" in this little church. Think about our diversity in all kinds of circumstantial matters, our temporal differences, notwithstanding what they may be, "all of you," universally, "clothe yourselves with humility toward one another." Those temporal differences do not give grounds for anyone to be proud or contemptuous or envious. "All of you," including me, "clothe yourselves with humility."

Well then, thirdly, and perhaps the most interesting heading. We discussed it a bit yesterday or the language here in our men's prayer meeting. What is it to be clothed with humility toward one another? The interest here especially is upon that imperative translated "clothe, egkombosthe," my Southern for that Greek, a word that suggest something. We talked about it yesterday, men, what does that word suggest? It suggests that Peter's mind was going back to an episode and an episode that I would add occurred over 30 years earlier, it's the episode in John 13 when our Lord girded himself with a towel and washed the disciples' feet. I offer it's that episode that is being drawn into this passage and is informing it. Peter was recalling almost, well we can't say certainly or dogmatically, but I think with a strong inference we can say that what Jesus did when he girded himself with a towel and washed the feet of the disciples and Peter was the fellow who spoke up as if to protest, and the correction he received and what followed he never forgot. What is it to be clothed with humility toward one another? It is to put around yourself, as it were, the apron of humility, the slave's apron of humility and as a working virtue selflessly serve one another. You don't do that truly from the heart with a big head.

Then finally verse 4, or excuse me, heading 4, why clothe yourselves with humility toward one another? Well, one way we can say it is this: because if you don't, God declares war on you and he will reduce you. He will lay low your pride. Why clothe yourselves with humility toward one another? "For God is opposed to the proud," it's the language of an army in battle formation before an enemy, "but gives grace to the humble." That's a powerful reason. You can either have God as your enemy or your friend.

Alright, well, that's where we're going, brethren. Let us take up now the first of those four headings. We go back to "whence. Whence, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another." By what way did this imperative come to be here in verse 5? Well, noting chapter 5, going back to verse 1 as the chapter begins in a letter largely taken up with the matter of the Christian suffering for righteousness' sake, Peter now gives valuable instruction to elders. And maybe, it's not certain again, but maybe coming out of chapter 4 into what we call chapter 5, the rationale is this: if the brethren in the churches are going to persevere under persecution, they've got to have faithful shepherds leading the way, doing their duties. And now we have counsel for those men who are elders or pastors or overseers in the church.

Peter writes, "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you." The elder, or plural elders, referring to the ones who are going to be commanded in verse 2, "shepherd," and they're

going to shepherd exercising oversight. Those are obviously interchangeable terms signifying the same man, who may be called an elder, who may be called a pastor or a shepherd, who may be called an overseer. Peter says, "I exhort the elders among you, as your pope who is infallible." No, it doesn't read that way. What did Peter claim for himself? "As your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed." That was Peter's self-identity. In a sense, no one is special, but a fellow elder with regard to these men in the churches who are elders, a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker of the glory to be revealed.

Now verse 2, the imperative, "shepherd," bound up in that imperative of the ideas of providing for, protecting, feeding, guiding, "shepherd the flock of God among you." He's referring to local visible flocks of sheep or churches in the areas named in the introduction of the letter in "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, churches scattered in those regions of Asia Minor, flocks of sheep, of God's sheep, Christ's sheep, and these men are being charged to shepherd those flocks.

Then very informatively there are three participles. You've got whence and you've got three participles. Three participles that are explaining how these shepherds are to do this. The first participle, "exercising oversight." Then to shepherd the flock of God by the function of government or superintendence or oversight, "not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness." They are to shepherd God's flock in the way of governing it, overseeing it, superintending it. There is delegated authority invested in these shepherds and they are wisely within their jurisdiction to use that authority to oversee the people of God. But then the second participle that informs them of this shepherding, verse 3, "nor yet as lording it over," not bullying, not domineering, not bossing around, "nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge," and now a third participle, "but proving to be examples to the flock." That's the platform of effective pastoral authority. It's not the ability to out-dispute someone or, you know, overwhelm them with vocabulary and words. No, it's example and with that, in my own judgment, nothing else matters. It's all phony. Proving to be examples to the flock.

Then the promised reward to these men, "And when the Chief Shepherd," the Arch Shepherd. These men are shepherds but there is a Chief Shepherd, the good and great Shepherd, the Lord Jesus. "When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

Well, here you have, getting back to our first heading, a category of people in the church addressed. You have elders addressed, the counsel about how they should go about shepherding the flock of God. Back in chapter 2, you have the duties of citizens set forth, verses 13 to 17. Chapter 2:18-25, the duties of servants were set forth. Chapter 3:1-6, wives were addressed and that was introduced with "likewise," same term we have in verse 5 of this chapter. And then husbands were addressed in chapter 3, verse 7, "You husbands, likewise." And coming back to our text, verse 5, "You younger men, likewise."

What does this term "likewise" mean? Well, it's the term that is connected to this "whence comes this directive." Likewise signifies that something's coming that is a part of the same series, here of those in the churches, various demographics in the churches with certain duties, yet "likewise" is telling you there's a new class of demographic to be addressed, younger men. In other words, "likewise" is telling us there's correspondence, correspondence to what has gone before, these various groups of people in the churches Peter is writing, and there is distinction. He is not writing now to citizens or servants or wives or husbands or elders, he's writing to younger men who are in the churches. The series of instruction continues but there's also transition to younger men. Verse 5, "You younger men, likewise. I've had counsel," Peter is effectively saying, "to other particular groups making up these local flocks of God. My counsel is continuing yet to another group called younger men." There is correspondence with what has preceded and there is transition to a new class, younger men, and then later, all of you. So there's a sense in which Peter's line of thinking is continuing and yet there is an element of newness in terms of who is he addressing.

Now note in verse 5 under this heading of whence this directive, clothe yourselves with humility comes, younger men. That could be a designation for younger men to be subject to the elders in terms of those men who occupy the pastoral office. Younger men could be a designation for members of a given church with the thought that usually the elders, "You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders," elders are usually older and more mature men. He could be setting out the fundamental duty of the members of a church, to use the language of Hebrews 13:17, "Obey your leaders and submit to them for they keep watch over your souls as those who would give an account."

Now that understanding, the understanding that younger men are being addressed in terms of being subject to the elder office-bearers of the church, that seems to flow right with the context, and I believe back in the mid-80s when this passage was dealt with, that is how it was preached. In John Brown's great work on 1 Peter, I looked through a bit of it last night, that's the argument he establishes. The other side is this, younger men who are addressed in verse 5 could be a designation for younger men to be subordinate to, deferential to those men in a church who are senior in years. In other words, this is an entirely age-related directive to this point. It's a command, some would say, to respect, you younger men to respect the older men of a given church. That kind of deference, respect, subordination whether it is to the elders as office-bearers or the elders, younger men, who are senior to you, it's that thought that leads to the subject of humility. Why? Because without humility you'll never do it, you'll never be subject to your office-bearing elders nor to the gray-haired crew sitting in your pews. You'll think you know more than them, you ought to be able to have your own way, your innovations are best.

But which of the interpretations does Peter intend? I'm not so sure I know but I know one thing: both are true. In a sense, we don't have to pick. "You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders." If what Peter has on his mind as he writes that is subjection to the church's office-bearers who are called elders in the previous verses, then those younger men need that pervasive lowliness to obey and submit to their pastoral leaders. If this is entirely age-related and younger men are being told here by the Apostle Peter to be

subject to those men senior to you in age, more mature, more experienced, then you're also going to need humility to subject yourselves to them. It is all to say that the imperative, "clothe yourselves with humility," comes to us by way of Peter writing about relations in the church where there is a large place for subordinating yourself to your office-bearers, to your fellow members who are older than you. Peter's concern continues to be those who constituted the churches to whom he's writing, their relations to one another, member to office-bearer perhaps, member to member perhaps, and he realizes that these relations must be in a climate of humility if it's going to work. If there is not humility, there is going to be division and self-aggrandizement, these going this way, these going the other way, no mutual submission. That's the train of thought from whence comes the directive, "clothe yourselves with humility toward one another."

Now I want to read some English translations of verse 5 before we go on to one more heading, who is to be clothed with humility toward one another? Before taking up the second of the four headings, J. B. Philips in his paraphrase, he paraphrases verse 5 this way, "You younger members must also submit to the elders." Now he doesn't really give a way who he thinks these elders are, merely senior men or office-bearers. "Indeed, all of you," as we're gonna see this broadens out beyond younger men, "all of you should defer to one another and wear the overall of humility." Interesting language, the overall of humility. J. B. Philips is obviously thinking in this language Peter is going back to that night 30+ years earlier in the Upper Room when Jesus girded himself with a towel and washed the disciples' feet. "Wear the overall of humility in serving each other. God is always against the proud but he's always ready to give grace to the humble."

The old ASV translates verse 5 this way, "Likewise, ye younger, be subject unto the elder. Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another." Now the old translators are bringing out this idea that this humility is, as we said, a working virtue. It's not something just closeted in the soul. A man or a woman who is humble like the Lord Jesus is going to manifest it in service. "Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another: for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble."

The NIV translates it this way, "Young men, in the same way, be submissive to those who are older." Now they're looking at this entirely chronologically. "Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'"

One more, it's the Amplified and in the helpful way of the Amplified, they just try to get it all in. Their translation of verse 5 probably goes on for about 12 or 15 lines, one verse. "Likewise, you that are younger and of lesser rank, be subject to the elders, the ministers and spiritual guides of the church, giving them due respect and yielding to their counsel. Clothe," in parenthesis, "(apron yourselves), all of you with humility as the garb of a servant so that its covering cannot possibly be stripped from you, with freedom from pride and arrogance toward one another. For God sets himself against the proud, the insolent, the overbearing, the disdainful, the presumptuous, the boastful, and opposes, frustrates and defeats them, but gives grace, favor, blessing to the humble." That's the

Amplified translation of one verse because the Amplified in its distinctive way tries to bring out nuances that underlie the English translation.

Well, one more heading for this morning, that is number 2, who, who is to be clothed with humility toward one another? Verse 5 simply says, "and all of you." The thing expands further. Elders have been addressed, younger men have been addressed, and now the final expansion, all of you. "And all of you to one another." All in the church, the younger and the elders, the slave and the free, the male and the female, the married and the single, the shepherds and the sheep. All of you to one another are to be humble. The community as a whole. All without distinction in the church communion, in the language of another. The inclusive "all of you" draws in the younger Christians with the older, draws in the shepherds with the sheep. The mutual character of humility enjoined is stressed by the forward position of "one another." All ages. All sexes, which are still only two. All classes. Again, in the language of others.

All of you. And again to make this personal, brethren, think of those in our own church comprehended by those words. Think again of the differences, the temporal differences among us, even a church of 50-some members. The diversity is pretty considerable. Yet all are to clothe themselves with humility to one another across the wide spectrum of temporal and circumstantial differences among us. No one here has valid reason to take on an air of superiority, of self-display. Pride is poison in the church. Pride renders brotherly relations a bare, cold, formal show. No heart. No grace. No love.

Who is to be clothed with humility toward one another? Every one of us at Ballston Lake without a single exception. And think of the freedom and the openness and the confidence such an indiscriminate universal reality would bring if all of us clothed ourselves with humility toward one another. Think what that would be like and you had to go and correct a brother, you wouldn't have that knot inside because you'd know you'd be going to one clothed with humility, that has an accurate sense of who he or she is. Just think of the freedom. You wouldn't have that knot in your gut when you have to go and correct somebody. No, there would be freedom and confidence.

As one writes, "The proud Christian is a contradictory character, as much so as it would be to say a wicked saint." What kind of contradiction is it to say a wicked saint? It's as much a contradiction to say a proud Christian. They don't go together. As this one writes, "The whole Gospel in its precepts, its great example, its glorious prospects, tends to humble the pride of man."

Who is to be clothed with humility toward one another? "And all of you," that's the answer, "clothe yourselves with humility toward one another." Now number 3 and a little homework and we're done. What is it to be clothed with humility toward one another? Here's the homework: this afternoon sometime, turn aside and read John 13:1-17. The bright light of our Lord's example tells us what it is to be clothed with humility to one another.

Let us pray.

Father, I pray that we would be an assembly of Your people, diverse, some with temporal and material and circumstantial advantages, others without, some young, some old, some single, some married, but Father, a church where all of us have taken upon ourselves the apron of humility to selflessly serve one another in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Father, may we re-engage our war on what remains of contradictory pride and, Lord, may we be put in mind again of how utterly irrational it is for a dying mortal, natively guilty and corrupt and answerable to You, for such a mortal to have a big head. Father, I pray that self-display and conceit and pomp and boasting and all such things would be put away and that every one of us who names the name of Christ would know His humility as the perfect Son of Man, and would lay ourselves out in selfless service to one another. Father, may this be the climate of our church to the honor and glory of You, the Triune God. Amen.