*Humility*

1 Peter 5:5-7

5/7/23

1 Peter 5:5-9 contain six commands that form Peter’s closing thoughts to the letter. He has taught us how the gospel affects our behavior in civil life, in marriage, towards the world, with other believers in general and with spiritual leaders specifically. And, lest we fall into the trap of legalism, he has repeatedly anchored his teaching in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Belief always precedes and empowers obedience. Now, he wraps his teaching up by giving us six final exhortations. We will consider three of them this week and three of them next week.

The first command, found in the first half of vs. 5, is directed at younger men. The command is to be subject to their elders. Given the context, elders refer to the leadership of the church. This is the third time we have encountered the topic of submission in 1 Peter. In Ch. 2, we were told to submit to the civil authorities that God has placed over us. In Ch. 3, women were told to submit to their husbands as leaders of the home. And now in Ch. 5, young men are told to be subject to the leadership of the church. We established the fact that elders receive spiritual authority from God that they are to use to serve the church.

Remember what submission is. Submission is recognizing that someone has a legitimate authority claim in your life, so you willingly bring yourself under that authority. When I say that elders have a legitimate authority claim in your life, I am not saying that they have universal authority. Just as was the case with the government, God defines the sphere of authority elders have, and we are to submit to them within that sphere. If an elder seeks to exercise authority outside the sphere God has given them, noncompliance is not the same thing as insubordination, depending on your attitude in the circumstance. Elders are given spiritual authority to speak the truth of God into your life, to call you to obey it, and if necessary to correct you when you refuse to submit to God’s word. The proper use of this authority is a gift from God to His people.

Now, why does Peter single out young men with this command? Traditionally young men tend to kick against authority as they seek to establish independence. We see this challenge in our culture with both men and women. Young people refuse to recognize, let alone respect, any authority. Yet within the realm of the church, it is to be different. Those who hold the office of elder deserve respect. Elders should be looked to for leadership, sought for counsel, and if their advice is rooted in the Bible, it should be carefully considered.

Although Peter gives this command to the young men, it is not limited to young men. Hebrews 13:17 tells all Christians to submit to elders. When an elder leads well, it is for your spiritual thriving. If they are not leading well, become disqualified, or abuse their authority, 1 Timothy 5 teaches the church how to deal with that. Thus, the command to submit does not place elders in a position of untouchable authority. Yet that does not tend to be the problem in the power balance of North Americans minds. The greater challenge most of us have is bringing ourselves under the authority of someone God has placed in our lives.

As I have reflected on the attitude of submission, I have concluded that it is the result of humility. So, it is no surprise to me that the next two commands focus on that quality. In the second half of vs. 5, we are told to clothe ourselves with humility. Then in vs. 6 we are told to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. Humility is one of those things that we recognize when we see it, but it can be hard to define. Humility means you have a modest or even lowly view of yourself and your importance. To put it another way, humility means you think rightly about who you are in relationship to God and in relationship to other people.

Notice four things about this command. First, it is universal in scope. Peter says *all of you*. Humility is a quality for all God’s people. Christ showed us what true humility is when he left His lofty position in heaven to come to earth as a man to live our life and die our death so that we could not only be saved but could also be made co-heirs with Him. Jesus humbled Himself on the night of His arrest when He washed the disciples’ feet, doing the job that no one else was willing to do. Afterward, He told His disciples to do the same for one another. A humble person does not see a task as below them; instead, they willingly sacrifice to serve others because they value them. Humility is a quality every Christian should seek.

Second, humility is something we must work to cultivate. The natural bend of our flesh is to have an inflated view of ourselves. Sin causes us to devalue God and over value ourselves. By nature, we compare ourselves to others, especially those we view to be ‘below’ us; and we tend to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. This is why we must clothe ourselves with humility. True humility is something we must *put on* like a clean shirt. It takes work to cultivate it. Our minds must be reprogrammed by God’s word so that we begin to see ourselves through the lens of Scripture. We need Scripture to remind us how much greater God is than us; and we need scripture to remind us how sinful we are; and we need scripture to tell us that we are not superior to any other person. God creates all people as equal bearers of His image. Within the realm of the church, there is no hierarchy. We are all sinners saved by the grace of God. These truths should give us a modest view of ourselves. In the same way we must get dressed every day, we must seek daily to put on the garment of humility. Greatness in God’s kingdom is found in being the servant of all. We know we have achieved true servanthood when people treat us like a servant, and we are okay with it. Then we imitate Christ, who did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.

Third, humility is to be directed towards one another. It is human nature to categorize and value people based on personal standards of worth. This is sinful, for only God is pure enough and wise enough to determine a person’s worth. He showed how much He valued us when He sent His Son to redeem us. We must clothe ourselves with humility towards one another so that we begin to see one another the way God sees us and to serve one another the way God desires us to serve each other. Humility causes us to look out, not only for our personal interests, but especially for the interests of others because we genuinely view them as important. Humility is the missing quality in our self-absorbed culture of radical autonomy that demands everyone bend to our will. But such an attitude has no place in the church; for we are to exercise humility towards one another, sacrificing ourselves for the corporate good of the church.

Finally, humility is motived by the desire to walk humbly with God. All sin has its genesis in pride. It was pride that caused Satan to seek to usurp God with himself; and it was prideful allure of replacing God with herself that enticed Eve to take the fruit. Pride is the seedbed of sin. Indeed, pride goes before a fall. It should be no surprise to us when we read *God is opposed to the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.* Those who imitate the humility of Christ will find God sustaining them by His grace. God is resistant to and distant from prideful people; but He is drawn to and ever present with those who are humble. The closer we draw to God and the more we feed on His grace, the more accurate view we will have of ourselves, our sinful struggles, and our inability to do anything apart from God.

This leads to the third command of our text. Because God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble, we should seek to humble ourselves under His mighty hand. Again, this command reminds us that humility is a choice the flows from thinking rightly about God and ourselves. If there is anyone’s presence who should cause us to see ourselves as lowly and insignificant, it is God. He is the awesome, unapproachable Creator and Sustainer of the universe. He is so majestic that the angels around His throne cover their eyes while crying *Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory*. We sing of God’s greatness in the hymn that says *Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible hid from our eyes. Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days, Almighty, victorious – Thy great name we praise!*

Yet the pride of human hearts seeks to replace God with us. We are forever trying to be the masters of our own souls and the captains of our own fate. God had to send His Son to redeem us from the mess we made in our attempt to be God. Therefore, the Christian seeks to humble themselves before God, allowing the majesty of who He is, the power He uses to save and sustain us, and all the other excellencies of His nature to teach us the unfathomable distance between the infinite greatness that He is and the frail finiteness of who we are. This alone will humble us under His mighty hand.

The humility here is not one of fear. Yes, His hand is mighty; but He uses it to save. Humility does not mean we come cowering before God; but it does mean we approach Him with the knowledge that we are nothing like Him, and that He alone is worthy of our adoration and worship. Humility is not a false self-abasing that says *if I degrade myself to God, God will elevate me to be a person of significance.* True humility knows that God exalts His people, but realizes that they are unworthy of it. It is only God’s grace that exalts us. Thus, we humble ourselves before God for the incalculable blessings He has lavished on us in Christ Jesus.

At this point you may be thinking, *pastor, how do I know if I have humbled myself under the mighty hand of God?* I think the best place to look for an answer to that question would be at the frequency and substance of your prayers. This tells us a lot about how we view God. Failure to pray indicates that we do not think we need God’s involvement in our day to day lives. Many people only pray when life is clearly beyond theirr control. Yet, when life seems manageable, prayer goes out the window. Why? Because we think we can handle life just fine on our own. But a humble person knows that every good and perfect gift comes from above. The very air we breathe comes from the gracious hand of God. That knowledge should drive us to prayer.

Self-sufficiency has overtaken the church. Why do so few churches have prayer meetings? And why do churches that still have them have so few people attending them? Because we are pretty sure we can sustain church life on our own. Prayerlessness indicates that we think we can do the work of God without the power of God; and we have gotten so adept at marketing and so weak in our understanding of the gospel, that we have learned to keep a social entity that looks very similar to a gospel church functioning without the power of God. We have become like the church at Laodicea, where Christ is outside the church knocking, asking His own people to let Him in, that He might fellowship with them; yet they were so content in their spiritual apathy, that they did not even realize Jesus was no longer among them.

Just because we pray does not mean we have humbled ourselves before God. If our prayers consist of us telling God how the universe would be better if He conformed His actions to our will, then we have not humbled ourselves before God. True prayer is an expression of humility, for it shows our dependence on God. Humble people pray like the tax collector in Matthew 6 who cried *Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!*

This is why vs. 7 tells us to cast all our anxieties on God, because He cares for you. When we cast our anxieties on God, what we are saying is that we are needy, we are broken, we are weak, and we can do nothing to solve our problems. We give these cares to God because He is all-sufficient, all powerful, infinitely perfect, infinitely good, possessing the fullest expression of love, mercy, and grace. Because He loves us with an unfailing love, we can take our hurts, failures, and shortcomings to Him knowing He is the solution to everything that is wrong with us and around us. Even if He, in His goodness, chooses not to take away the source of our anxiety, we can rest in His sovereign goodness knowing that He has not abandoned us to our misery. He loves us and has designed it for our good; He alone knows what is best; and He will sustain us by His grace, for He has promised to complete the good work of grace He has started in His people. It is truly humbling that God would love us so much that He would engage in the minutest of details of our lives *because He wants to.*

Submission to God or any authority that God places in our life originates in a humble heart. May we be people who are so captivated by His love that humility flows from us in expressions of prayer and humble serve done for His glory.