

Humility Is The Way Up Not Down

1 Peter 5:5-14

Introduction: It is one of the most important characteristics that identifies a Christian. Sadly, it is usually absent in most of our lives. It is AWOL. That essential trait is humility. How important is humility for the disciple of Jesus Christ? Very! It is a character trait repeatedly cited in the Bible and it is at the very heart of possessing the mind of Christ (see Phil. 2:3-5, 8). Let's note the following 10 verses:

- 1) 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and heal their land" (*ESV*).
- 2) Psalms 25:9: "He [the LORD] leads the humble in what is right and teaches them his way."
- 3) Psalms 149:4: "For the LORD takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation."
- 4) Proverbs 3:34: "He [the LORD] mocks those who mock but gives grace to the humble."

- 5) Proverbs 11:2: “When arrogance comes, disgrace follows, but with humility comes wisdom.”
- 6) Proverbs 22:4: “Humility, the fear of the LORD, results in wealth, honor, and life.”
- 7) Luke 14:11: “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” (also Matt. 23:12).
- 8) Colossians 3:12: “Therefore, as God’s chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility...”
- 9) James 4:6: “God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.”
- 10) James 4:10: “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”

Humility is clearly important in the Bible, and it was also important to Peter in the closing verses of his letter. The word itself appears 3 times in verses 5-6. And, how humility works itself out, especially in our relationship to God, is the dominate theme of verses 6-14.

Now, before we take our walk through 1Peter 5:5-14, we need a definition or at least a description of humility. So, let’s turn to C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) and his classic *Mere Christianity*, book 3, and chapter 8. The title of this chapter is instructive: “The Greatest Sin.” The chapter discusses the antithesis of humility,

the sin of “Pride or Self-Conceit.” Here is notes, “it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind” (p. 109). Ouch! This strikes too close to home. But it gets better (or more painful to hear)! He continues, “A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you” (p. 111). Simply put, you cannot see God. Finally he addresses humility, and his insights are once more the essence of the humble person, a person who truly knows who they are and who knows who God is. He writes: “The point is, [God] wants you to know Him, wants to give you Himself. And He and you are two things of such a kind that if you really get into any kind of touch with Him you will, in fact, be humble – delightedly humble, feeling the infinite relief of having for once got rid of all the silly nonsense about your own dignity which has made you restless and unhappy all your life. He is trying to make you humble in order to make this moment possible: trying to take off a lot of silly, ugly, fancy-dress in which we have all got ourselves up and are strutting about like the little idiots we are....the comfort, of taking the fancy-dress off-getting rid of the false self, with all its “Look at me” and “Aren’t I a good [person] and all its posing and posturing. To get even near it, even for a moment, is like a drink of cold water to a man in a desert.

Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call “humble” nowadays:...always telling you that, of course, he is nobody.

Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him, it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all.”

(p. 114; underlining mine). (*Mere Christianity*: New York: MacMillan, 1943, 1945, 1952).

Peter has two overarching charges for his readers which we too would be wise to heed. Both address the importance of humility in the child of God.

I. Humble yourselves toward one another 5:5

Peter has charged pastors to not be “domineering” (*ESV*) or act like “lords” over God’s flock entrusted to their care. Rather, they are to be good examples (5:3).

We can rightly say, pastors should be humble (servant) leaders just like Jesus.

Humility, however, is not only for pastors. Humility is for everyone. We should all seek the mind of Christ we find described in Phil. 2:3-5, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or [vain] conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look not only to his own interest, but rather to the interest of others. Adopt the same attitude [*ESV*, “mind”] as that

of Christ Jesus.” As we properly relate to one another, Peter addresses two specifics.

1) Submit to your leaders

Peter ties his instruction in verse 5 to verses 1-4 and his counsel to the elders (5:1). Younger members of God’s flock (5:2), God’s church, should “be subject [imperative] to the elders.” They should joyfully and voluntarily submit, showing proper respect to their leaders who have been called by God to this assignment (Vaugh & Lea, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 125).

Their submission has a good goal in mind as the author of Hebrews makes clear: “Obey your leaders and submit to them, since they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account, so that they can do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17).

Submitting to good and godly leaders is good for everyone!

2) Wrap yourselves in humility

Peter has a second command or imperative for all of God’s people that he strengthens with scriptural support. The image he uses paints a beautiful picture and also recalls our Lord Jesus washing the feet of the disciples the night he was betrayed (John 13:1-20). All believers “should clothe [themselves] with humility toward one another.” Hiebert notes the phrase

“Cloth yourselves” calls for effective action. The verb, used only here in the New Testament, means to put or tie on” any kind of garment...the picture is that of a slave tying on the apron to serve...” (D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter* (Chicago: Moody, 1984, 1992), 310). Serving others is the natural fruit of humility and Peter grounds his command in the wisdom text of Prov. 3:34, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Schreiner puts it well when he writes, “Believers should heed the injunction to be humble because God sets his face against the proud, but he lavishes his grace upon the humble” (*1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 238). Vaughn and Lea add, “the imagery [is] that of an army lined up against an enemy. The Almighty, as it were, declares war on the proud! (p. 126). The proud make God their opponent. The humble, in contrast, have God as their helper and friend.

II. Humble yourselves towards God

5:6-14

Humility toward one another is very important. Humility towards God is absolutely essential. And it is multi-faceted as verses 6-14 make clear. Verses 6-11 are filled with words of encouragement, instruction, and assurance. Verses 12-14 conclude the letter as a final greeting and benediction. The theme of humility covers them all like as a beautiful blanket of blessing. Nine truths are highlighted. We will address each briefly.

1) Wait on God to exalt you

5:6

Verse 6 continues the theme of humility but turns our attention to a humble attitude and disposition towards God. “Humble yourselves” is another word of command. The object of our humility is “under the mighty hand of God.” This is a powerful image with roots in the Old Testament. Kistemaker writes, “This is Old Testament language that describes God’s rule in regard to Israel. God showed his powerful hand in leading the nation out of Egypt (see, e.g., Exod. 3:19; Deut. 3:24; 9:26, 29; 26:8)” (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986, 198). The same “mighty hand of God” that delivered and rescued the Hebrews is with His church. He saw Israel through their times of suffering, and He will do the same for His people today. But, and this is so important. He will do it in His time not ours! “At the proper time, he [will] exalt you.” We bow down acknowledging his great power and perfect plan, and he will lift us up and exalt us at exactly the right time. Do you want proof? Look to the cross and the empty tomb! Meditate on Phil. 2:6-11. Adrian Rogers says it so well: “God is never early, and He is never late, He is always right on time!”

2) Cast all your cares on God because he cares for you

5:7

One of the blessings of humility towards God is giving him all our anxieties, all our burdens, all our cares. And, we can cast all our anxieties on him for a simple reason: “because he cares for us.” Calvin writes, “as soon as we are convinced that God cares for us, our minds are easily led to patience and humility” (*1 Peter*, vol XXII, 149). That is a good word from the great reformer.

The word “all” is so important in our text. The God who loves us and cares for us wants all our fears, anxieties, and concerns. The big ones and the little ones. None are too big, and none are too small. “Give all your worries and cares to God” (*NLT*) and you will discover he gives in return courage, wisdom, strength, faith, hope and endurance. Jesus is the burden-bearer! We are burden-givers! Give your cares and concerns to the Savior. He has already borne them all on the cross anyway!

3) Be sober-minded

5:8

This is the 4th command in our text. *The Message* paraphrase says, “Keep a cool head.” The *NLT* says, “stay alert!” Both the *CSB* and the *ESV* say, “Be sober-minded.” (cf. 1:13, 4:7). Vaughn and Lea are again helpful, “Recognition of God’s sovereignty and His fatherly care does not negate our responsibility” (p. 127). We must be self-controlled! Awake! Balanced in

our thinking about who we are, who God is, and, as we are about to see, who the devil is!

4) Be alert concerning the ways of the devil 5:8-9

“Be watchful” is a 5th imperative and a natural complement to “Be sober-minded.” If we are balanced and biblical in our thinking, we will be “watchful,” “alert” (*CSB*), “awake,” “vigilant” (*NKJV*). Why? What follows gives us the answer. “Your adversary the devil prowls [continually] like a roaring [continually] lion, seeking [continually] someone to devour.” Like Jesus (John 8:44), Peter believed in a real, literal devil. And, he was very much aware of the tactics of *diabolos*, our “adversary,” our “enemy” (*NIV*). First, he is constantly on “the prowl,” on the lookout, restlessly on the move for prey. Second, he is fierce and ferocious, continually “roaring” like a lion to intimidate and cause fear in the hearts of God’s people. The imagery of the lion also points to his power and strength. However, he is no match for the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5)! Further, the context points to suffering as one of his most effective weapons to strike fear in our hearts. Finally, he is continually looking for those he can “devour,” eat up and swallow (lit. “to gulp down”; Vaught and Lea, 128). The reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546) is well known for his battles with and thoughts on the devil. I find his words extremely insightful on this verse: “Satan is by

nature such a wicked and poisonous spirit, that he cannot tolerate anything that is good; it pains him that even an apple, a cherry and the like grow; it causes him pain and grief that a single healthy person should live upon the earth, and if God would not restrain him, he would hurl everything together in ruin. But to nothing is he a more bitter enemy than to the dear Word; because, while he can conceal himself under all creatures, the Word is the only agency that can disclose him and reveal to everybody how [dark] he is. Since then you have God's Word, Peter says, and you cleave by faith to it, you should know beforehand that Satan will be your enemy; and you should know that he is not only a wise, cunning, but also a very wicked, poisonous and powerful spirit; so that he rules and dominates the whole world; and therefore Christ also calls him in John 14:30 the Prince, and Paul in 2 Cor. 4:4 and Eph. 6:12, the God and Ruler of this world.

If now Satan, thy adversary, were far from you, and would let you alone in peace, he would do little harm; but he will not do that. He is not a thousand miles from you, but encircles you and stands by your side, so close to you that he cannot come closer; he does not lie upon a cushion, and sleeps and snores; but he walks about without ceasing day and night; not that he may joke and play with you, nor because he wishes to see what you are doing; but he is angry and furious, and hungrier than a wolf or lion, and seeks not

how to appease his hunger with thy possessions or to do you harm in other ways, inflict wounds upon your body, or beat you with a club, or burn your house and court; but his only purpose is to swallow you whole. He walks about, tries and seeks everything, until at last he causes you to fall; now he attacks you and stirs you to adultery and anger, then to avarice, pride, etc. If he succeeds not in this way he tries with terror, unbelief, etc., to persuade you to let go of the Word of God and to doubt his grace.” (*Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1982), 224).

Luther’s words perfectly set the table for the counsel of verse 9: “Resist him, firm in your faith.” Resist is another imperative word of command. It calls us to vigilant action and resistance. And how do we do this? The Word of God and the gospel. Remain “firm in your faith.” Stay in the Word and in your faith in God. Heed the counsel of James 4:7-8, “Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” Here is an unbeatable strategy to resisting the devil. We do it in God’s strength not our own. Satan will whip us every time in our own power. But standing firm in Christ, his strength and his Word, Satan will run like a baby kitten because he knows the tomb is empty and the battle has been won!

Again, the words of Luther are worth our careful reflection:

“And though this world, with devils filled,

Should threaten to un-do us;

We will not fear, for God hath willed

His truth to triumph through us:

The prince of darkness grim,

We tremble not for him;

His rage we can endure,

For lo, his doom is sure:

One little word shall fell him.”

(“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” verse 3)

5) Know you are not alone in your suffering 5:9

Resisting the devil and being firm in the faith is greatly assisted by knowing we are not alone nor are we the exception. “The same kinds of sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers throughout the world.”

Suffering for Christ is not restricted or limited. It is worldwide and very intense in certain regions of the world. “Open Doors Watch List 2023” tells us the top areas of the world for the persecuted church are: 1) North Korea,

2) Somalia, 3) Yemen, 4) Eritrea, 5) Libya, 6) Nigeria, 7) Pakistan, 8) Iran, 9) Afghanistan, and 10) Sudan. Suffering in American pails in comparison to what other Christians suffer. Knowing what fellow brothers and sisters are suffering should move us to humility. It should move us to prayer. It should move us to action. Suffering for many is the norm. Casting all our cares on our heavenly Father takes on a whole new meaning when we suffer for our Savior. And, it has a promise attached for those who endure it well for Christ's sake.

6) Rest in God's grace and His promises

5:10-11

Suffering for the Christian is not forever. It is for "a little while" (v. 10). Someday it will end, and it will end never to be experienced again. How do you know? Because "the God of all grace" has "called you to his eternal glory in Christ." Schreiner points out, "'Grace' is a favorite word of Peter's (1:2, 13; 2:19, 20; 3:7; 4:10; 5:5, 12), and here it means that God is both the possessor and giver of all grace. The sufferings of believers are intense, but God's grace is stronger still" (p. 244). His grace moved God to call us to salvation (1:15). His grace also moves God to bestow on us "his eternal glory in Christ." In comparison to eternal glory, our earthly suffering truly is for only "a little while." How then, will we be able to endure our suffering in this life and remain true to the end? Answer: God will do it! He "will

himself restore, establish (*ESV*, “confirm”), strengthen, and support you.”

The God who saved you will sustain you. He got you in the race and he will see you get to the finish line (see Heb. 12:1-2). Peter Davids says of the four words that conclude verse 10, “What Peter has done is pile up a number of closely related terms that together by their reinforcing one another give a multiple underscoring of the good that God is intending for them and even now is producing in their suffering” (Peter Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 196).

There is only one proper response to all that Peter has just written: a doxology of praise. “To him be dominion forever. Amen.” (v. 11). Once more I love the way Martin Luther puts it: “This is the sacrifice of praise that we Christians should offer to God; for since he does all to commence and to complete our salvation, gives us his beloved Son, sends us the Holy Spirit, who strengthens and comforts us through all our lives, sustains us by the pure doctrine, etc., it is right and proper that the honor and praise be his, whose are the work and the power. Therefore, let him be praised in eternity, Amen.” (p. 231).

Verses 12-14 conclude 1 Peter. Schreiner is right, “Verse 12 summarizes the letter as a whole” (p. 247). “Through Silvanus” (or “Silas;” Acts 15:22, 27, 32, 40; 2 Cor. 1:19), may mean he served as an amanuensis or secretary. He almost certainly was the carrier of the letter. Further, he is a “faithful brother” as Peter “considered him.” Peter’s brief letter (5 chapters in our English versions), was “to encourage” his readers and “to testify that this is the true grace of God.” In this encouragement and trustworthy testimony, we are admonished to “stand firm in it!” We are to listen and heed the words of Peter in this letter. His teaching is sound and trustworthy filled with the grace of God. Stand firm and don’t be moved. Griffith Thomas says, “three themes run through 1 Peter: God’s grace, Peter’s testimony, and the believer’s duty” (quoted in Vaughn and Lea, 133). Here we take our stand, and we will not be moved.

8) Rejoice with God’s family

5:13

Peter’s brothers and sisters in “Babylon” send greetings to Peter’s readers. Babylon is most likely symbolic for the city of Rome. Historic Babylon was in ruins at this time, and Babylon both in the Old Testament and New Testament represents that which opposes God and is his enemy (Isa. 13-14; 46-47; Jere. 50-51; Rev. 17-18). In Revelation 17-18 Rome is clearly in view. Schreiner is again helpful, “The mention of Babylon constitutes

another reminder that believers are exiles in their present situation, and the allusion to exile under the dominion of Babylon constitutes a bookend between the beginning and end of the letter” (p. 251). Though we are exiles in this fallen world, we are reminded once again that we are not alone. We have family all over the world! They, like us, have been “chosen” by God. No barriers. We are family! “Mark, my son,” is almost certainly John Mark. Though he failed to endure in the first missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:13), he has now been restored (see Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11) and is with Peter in Rome. He will write our 2nd gospel containing the eyewitness testimony of Peter. If anyone understood God’s grace, it was Mark who was much loved by Peter like a son. He was also loved and appreciated by Paul too!

9) Rest in God’s blessings

5:14

Our letter ends on a double note of love and peace. “Greet one another with a kiss of love” is similar to Paul’s expression of a “holy kiss” (see Rom. 16:16). This was a common way to greet one another in that day and is commonly practiced in many parts of the world today. It reminds us of the family love we share in our triune God. We have one Father, one Savior, and one Spirit who makes us all one.

“Peace to all of you who are in Christ” is a fitting conclusion to the letter and the theme of humility. Peace recalls 1:2. “In Christ” reminds us of where true and lasting peace is found (see Rom. 5:1; Phil 4:7). Where peace reigns, humility is sure to be present. Even if we suffer for Christ’s sake, we will love each other, serve one another, and experience peace with God and with one another, for we know “eternal glory in Christ” is just around the corner. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Conclusion: John Newton (1725-1807) gave us the hymn “Amazing Grace,” published in 1779. I love his song. I also love the wisdom and insights God gave him concerning the Christian life. Concerning humility, he once more blesses the people of God! His words are simple and straight to the point: “I am persuaded that love and humility are the highest attainments in the school of Christ and the brightest evidence that He is indeed our Master” (John Newton, Aug. 31, 1757, letter to Rev. John Whitfield, in *Letters by the Rev. John Newton: Of Olney and St. Mary Woolnoth*, ed. by Josiah Bull (1869). Humility is indeed the way up in the school of Christ. May we all be good students in this school!