

Humble Yourselves Under the Mighty Hand of God PHBF 05.22.11

TEXT: 1 Peter 5:1-7

Scr. Reading: 1 Peter 5:1-7

Words for kids:

1 Peter

Harold Camping

- Long, painful tradition. In this country whole denominations (JWs, 7th Day Adventists) have arisen from this ill-fated obsession with predicting the return of Jesus.
- Pagan – palm reading, tarot cards, horoscopes and fortune telling
- Gives rise to scoffers who ridicule any legitimate warning about judgment day: “Where is the promise of his coming?” (2 Pt 3:4)
- Our response:
 - Name false prophets, pray for their public repentance
 - Compassion and correction of followers
 - Ourselves – examine our own hearts for the roots of what led Camping and his groupies to this place: pride (no church, no accountability, private interpretation) and self-deception (deeply sincere, acting on those beliefs, but obviously deeply wrong. How? Self deception)

Thankfully, our text from 1 Peter helps us examine our own hearts in these areas. Pride and humility are Peter’s main subjects, but I want you to first think about this dangerous problem of self-deception. As we begin to examine Peter’s warnings about pride, I want you to ask yourself if it’s possible that you might be self-deceived about whether this applies to you.

If I were to ask you to list your top three vices, would pride be on that list? Top 5? Top 10? I want to suggest that it should be Number 1 on the list for every one of us. Christian theology has long taught that pride is behind every other sin. Every other sin we commit is second; pride is always first. This means we must assume pride is the most powerful vice in our life. To the extent we don’t see it, we are self deceived.

So let us learn a lesson from Harold Camping and his followers this morning. Let’s let the word of God expose our self-deception, convict us of our pride, and ready our souls for the grace that comes to those who humble themselves under the mighty hand of God.

You’ll be glad to know Peter begins his attack with me. Actually, he

addresses three groups in this passage: elders – Lars and myself (vv 1-4), younger people (v 5a), all of you (vv 5b-7). The message to all three is the same—humble yourself under the people to whom God has called you.

ELDERS (vv 1-4)

1 Peter 5:1 *So I exhort the elders among you...*

I take the terms “elder” (πρεσβύτερος), “pastor” (ποιμήν = shepherd), and “overseer” (ἐπίσκοπος = bishop) to be synonymous (cf. Titus 1:5, 7; Eph 20:17,28). In fact, Peter uses all three terms here, two of them in verb form: “I urge the elders, shepherd the flock, exercising oversight.” “Elder” conveys the dignity of the office. “Overseer” denotes its authority and administrative function. “Pastor/Shepherd” conveys its orientation to people. And by the way, the overwhelming NT pattern is that each church have more than one of these men. The Jerusalem church had elders (Acts 11:30), Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in the new churches they planted on their journeys (Acts 14:23), and that pattern is sustained in the NT letters (1 Tim 4:14, Titus 1:5, James 5:14).

Why does Peter address elders here? Peter does lead in with the word “therefore” (which the NIV omits!?!). No doubt Peter’s mention of “the household of God” (4:17) has turned his attention to the church and its leaders. If judgment begins with the church, it probably focuses on church leaders first of all (cf. Ez 9:6). Four subpoints in Peter’s instruction to elders: the way he addresses elders, their responsibilities, their manner, their reward.

1. The way Peter addresses the elders (v 1).

1 Peter 5:1 *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:*

Lest he sound too haughty, warning the elders of the coming judgment, he identifies himself personally with them, not above them. He uses words like “fellow elder” and “partner in the glory.” Peter doesn’t

establish his credibility with the credentials we might expect. He hints at his apostleship (“witness of Christ’s sufferings”), but he doesn’t begin there or emphasize this. And he certainly doesn’t lay claim to special authority as the bishop of Rome or the Pope. He emphasizes his solidarity with other elders in a “I’m preaching to myself” sort of way. Why? He’s setting an example of the humility he’s about to commend to the elders and the rest of his readers. He’s practicing what he’s preaches – putting himself below the people to whom God called him.

If you were Peter with his credentials, how would you have handled this situation? How do you describe yourself? How do you relate to those below you—children, the poor, servers at restaurants, custodians at work... Do you identify with them or do you see yourself above them?

2. The responsibilities of elders (v 2)

1 Peter 5:2 *shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight...*

Two primary duties in this text: shepherd and exercise oversight.

Shepherd. Shepherding is the people work of the pastor—teaching, counseling, encouraging, protecting, tending, guarding. One wonders if Peter had in mind his conversation with Jesus along the Sea of Galilee (Jn 21) where Jesus charged him to “Feed my sheep.”

But notice the next phrase: “the flock of God.” It’s an important reminder that the sheep do not belong to the pastors. The sheep belong to God Himself (cf. Acts 20:28).

“Among you” limits the scope of this ministry. It’s personal and practically doable. “Care for the God’s sheep who have gathered around you.” NOTE: There is not a random gathering of sheep around any elders. Verse 3 uses language (“those allotted to you”) which indicates that God forms these relationships and draws certain sheep to certain shepherds. He charges shepherds with specific people to care for.

What is a church? A church is a flock of sheep God has gathered to Himself under certain shepherds. The formation of churches is a

fulfillment of God’s promise to seek out His lost sheep, gather them to Himself, and oversee them:

Jeremiah 23:3-4 ³ *Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply.* ⁴ *I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the LORD.*

(cf also Ezekiel 34:11ff)

It’s an incredible and wonderful responsibility. God entrusts His sheep to specially appointed pastors for their lifetime, and He expects these men to return His sheep someday well-fed and secure.

Exercising oversight. Elders not only care for the flock; they oversee it. They rule and manage it. This is one of the prominent ways elders are different from deacons. God has vested elders alone with ruling authority in the church—not deacons, not treasurers, not trustees.

Key question: How should they express their authority? This is where we begin to hear Peter’s call to humility...

3. The manner of elders (vv 2b-3)

1 Peter 5:2b-3 *...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.*

Peter describes elders’ oversight with 3 negatives and 3 positives: not under constraint, not greedy for money, not lording over. Some commentators see these as the biggest areas of temptation for pastors, the pastoral “Big Three”—a slacker’s work ethic, a greedy heart, and a lust for power.

“Not under compulsion but willingly.” No one should be forced into the office (1 Tim 3:1). This is what many mean by the term “call” – an inward, God-given compulsion to do this ministry. Ask me how I know I am supposed to pastor a church and my answer will be, “I just know.” (For me: desire for usefulness → Willingness → irresistible compulsion)

“Not for shameful gain but eagerly.” The motivation to pastor certainly

should not be financial. The ministry is an easy place for a lazy man to make a living—little accountability, limited tangible outputs, committed and gracious people around. May it never be here at Parker Hills!! (my own habits of keeping office hours, maintaining accountability)

“Not domineering over those in your charge but being examples.” Not driving the sheep, but leading them by example. Remember Peter’s example of how he identifies with other elders.

“Those in your charge” is a term which literally means “lot” or “portion”—“those allotted to you.” An interesting cross reference is Dt 9:29, where Israel is said to be God’s “inheritance” (same word). Under the Old Covenant, God took Israel to Himself and took responsibility for the nation’s care and oversight. Now He has entrusted that responsibility to elders in local churches. Verse 2 uses the phrase “as God would have you,” which is literally “according to God.” God tasks elders with the duties He had formerly fulfilled Himself. He gives elders an allotment of people and charges them to show His own love, care, forgiveness, and service to His people.

A pastor is a steward whose ministry has been entrusted to him by God. Its duties are prescribed by God. He is not a CEO or entrepreneur, applying business principles to grow the company. He is not a coach, cheering on the players and shaping a winning program. He is not a strip mall manager, developing a collection of trendy stores which target individual audiences and needs. A pastor is a prophet, not a professional. He’s a pray-er, not a strategizer; a shepherd, not a business manager; a holy man, not a celebrity. God tells His pastors exactly what they must be and do to call and care for His church—shepherd the flock, exercise oversight, preach the word, pray down God’s blessing.

The pastoral ministry is not a profession. It’s a divine calling. Professionals are wise; pastors are fools. Professionals are strong; pastors are weak. Professionals are honored; pastors are scorned. Professionals are resourceful; pastors are empty, panting after God. (cf. Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals*) Pastors are sent by God to save people from hell and make them live as joyful, suffering foreigners in the world.

Who would ever answer this call? Who COULD ever answer this call? Pastors who sense the gravity of their calling cry out with Paul, “Who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Cor 2:16). Peter gives the answer: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

4. The motivation for elders (v 4)

1 Peter 5:4 *And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*

Here is the reward for fulfilling this calling faithfully: the unfading crown of glory. We look to eternity for our reward. We want what comes from the hands and lips of Jesus, not the praise of men. The sorrow and suffering of self-humbling is only temporary. Reward is coming!

Paul describes his churches as his “hope and joy and crown of boasting before the Lord Jesus at his coming... For you are our glory and joy” (1 Thes 2:19-20). This seems very much in line with how I envision crowns and rewards in heaven – give me a sanctified church, a group of people whom I’ve loved and counseled and prayed for and washed with the water of the word. This would be crown enough for me.

YOUNGER PEOPLE (v 5a)

1 Peter 5:5 *Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders.*

Is this a reference to church elders here, or is it a general reference to people who are more advanced in age? I’m inclined toward the latter, as the NIV renders it: “Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older.”

One clear indication of pride is disdain toward those older than you. Out of touch. Irrelevant. Weak. Past their time. Need to step aside. Humility honors age. It lets older voices speak first, and it really listens. This is because only the humble assume they have anything to learn. Parents, teach your children to honor those older than them *simply because they are older*. Teens, kids, the older someone is, the more you should respect them.

ALL OF YOU (vv 5b-7)

1 Peter 5:5-7 *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.*

v 5 "clothe yourselves." You can imagine Peter reflecting on how Jesus literally clothed Himself in humility by laying aside His robe and wrapping a towel around His waist, preparing to wash the disciples' feet. Humility is an outfit Peter encourages all of us to put on at the start of each day. Why? Because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

God actively sets Himself against proud people. Stop for a moment and consider how terrifying it should be to have in our heart something God utterly abominates.

Why does He so hate pride? Notice verse 6: "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God." In the previous verse, Peter wrote: "Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another." But now he shifts the object of our humility from people to God. Why? Because humility and pride are fundamentally Godward attitudes, even if we manifest them primarily toward other people.

As one old commentator put it, pride is essentially **contending for supremacy with God** (Charles Bridges). At its essence, it is self-glorification. It's no surprise then that God abominates pride. He hates pride more than you or I hate anything.

How can we humble ourselves before God? Verse 7. Unfortunately, the NIV begins a new sentence here with a stand-alone verb, obscuring the connection between v 6 and v 7. Verse 7 is not offering a new command. It's explaining how to humble yourself before God, namely, by casting your cares on Him. Humbling yourself is not a negative act of lowering oneself; it's a positive act of entrusting oneself to God for help.

Worry is an expression of pride. How so? Anxiety occurs in my heart only when I'm trying to be self-sufficient, i.e., when I'm proud enough to believe that I am all I need. When believers are filled with anxiety, it shows they are convinced that they must solve all their problems themselves. The only god they trust is self. Humility rolls burdens off on Jesus; pride tries to carry them alone.

If you think about it, friends, this call to humble ourselves is simply a call to believe the gospel all over again. The gospel reminds us that we can never fix our problems on our own. We are so messed up, God had to come to us Himself and rescue us. Do you feel the fearfulness of how the slaughter of the innocent Son of God witnesses to your own unworthiness? Do you recognize that your sin was such a huge problem, God had to kill His Son to fix it? If you do, it will profoundly shape how you view yourself.

See, humility is at the very heart of Christianity. Salvation comes to those who admit their need, not to those who prove their worth. Pride feels independent and self-sufficient, but humility knows it needs to be cared for.

See that last phrase: "because he cares for you"? Here is the ultimate reason for humility – because God cares for you. A great barrier to putting others first and humbling yourself before them is the concern: who will care for me? God will. His hand is mighty and His heart is gracious. He can care for you far better than you can care for yourself.

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