

## CLOTHE YOURSELF WITH HUMILITY

*5 I exhort the elders among you—I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ and also one who has a share in the glory that is going to be revealed—<sup>2</sup>shepherd the flock of God that is among you. Do not exercise oversight [merely] because you must do so, but [do so] willingly for God. [Do not do so] for material gain, but with a willingness [to serve]. <sup>3</sup>Do not lord yourselves over those who are under your care; on the contrary, be examples for the flock. <sup>4</sup>Then, when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never tarnish. <sup>5</sup>Likewise, younger men, be submissive to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another; because “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” (1 Pet. 5:1-5)*

### **Introduction**

When the legendary Knute Rockne was head football coach at Notre Dame University, a weekly column appeared in the school newspaper written by “Old Bearskin.” But no one on campus had a clue as to the true identity of “Old Bearskin”—all they knew was that “Old Bearskin” was highly critical of the football team. In his column “Old Bearskin” spared no words in bombarding each player for his shortcomings and inept performances. When the players complained to coach Rockne about the severe criticism they were receiving from “Old Bearskin,” he would sympathize with them and encourage them to do better.

The writer of that column in the school newspaper was never identified—until after Rockne’s death. When Rockne died, “Old Bearskin” and his column died with him. “Old Bearskin” was none other than Knute Rockne himself—and “Old Bearskin” really was the players’ best friend. Rockne was aware of what happens to football heroes whose success on the field went to their heads. As “Old Bearskin,” Rockne’s criticisms were intended to help the players avoid the pitfalls of pride.

Just as a star athlete can become inflated with pride, so can the leaders of the church, and so can the Christian in the pew. In one form or another, for one reason or another, pride is a natural tendency of the sinful human heart—a tendency that still clings to the Christian even though he has a new heart. The Apostle Peter counters that tendency with these words: *“All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another; because ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’”* (vs. 5b.)

### **I. Clothe Yourself with Humility, ...by Looking to Christ**

Peter describes himself as *“a witness of the sufferings of Christ.”* As we go through life, we are confronted with many role models: parents, teachers, athletes, political leaders, characters from history, godly Christian brethren, etc. But as Christians, our greatest role model is none other than Christ our Savior. For some

three years our Lord served as a very visible role model for His disciples. As a role model, one very striking example of His humility and willingness to serve, even the lowliest of men, is recorded in the Gospels. It begins with the request made of Jesus by James and John:

*Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came near to him and said, Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we shall ask you. <sup>36</sup>He said to them, What do you want me to do for you? <sup>37</sup>They said to him, Grant that we may sit [with you] in your glory—one at your right hand and one at your left hand. <sup>38</sup>But Jesus said to them, You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink? Or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am about to be baptized? <sup>39</sup>They said to him, We are able. Then Jesus said to them, The cup that I drink, you shall drink; and the baptism with which I am baptized, [with that baptism] shall you also be baptized. <sup>40</sup>But to sit at my right hand or at my left hand is not mine to give; on the contrary, it is for those for whom it has been prepared <sup>41</sup>Now when the [other] ten [disciples] heard about this, they began to be indignant against James and John. <sup>42</sup>Then Jesus called them to himself and said to them, You know that those who are recognized as rulers among the Gentiles lord it over their subjects; and their high officials rule over them [with tyranny]. <sup>43</sup>But it must not be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever desires to be great among you, shall be your minister; <sup>44</sup>and whoever desires to be first among you, shall be servant of all; <sup>45</sup>for, indeed, the Son of man came not to receive ministry, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. <sup>46</sup>Then they came to Jericho. Now as [Jesus] was leaving Jericho, along with his disciples and a large crowd of people, a blind beggar, [named] Bartimaeus, ([whose name means,] the son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside. <sup>47</sup>When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. <sup>48</sup>But many people rebuked him, ordering him to keep quiet. But he cried out all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me. <sup>49</sup>Then Jesus stood still and said, Call him. So they called the blind man and said to him, Take courage. Get up; he is calling for you. <sup>50</sup>Throwing aside his garment, [the blind man] leaped to his feet and came to Jesus. <sup>51</sup>Then Jesus asked him, What do you want me to do for you? And the blind man said to him, Rabbi, I want to receive my sight. <sup>52</sup>Jesus said to him, Go your way; your faith has healed you.. Immediately he received his sight, and followed him along the road. (Mk 10:35-52)*

Note the characteristics of James and John. They are occupied with themselves (vs. 35-37) and insensitive to Jesus or their fellow disciples. Just prior to their request, Jesus announced that He was about to be put on trial and executed by the religious authorities:

*They were on their way up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going ahead them. [The disciples] were astonished; and those who followed them were afraid. [Jesus] again took the Twelve [aside] and began to tell them what was going to happen to him. <sup>33</sup>He said, Listen, we are going up to Jerusalem; but the Son of man will*

*be betrayed to the chief priests and the scribes; they shall condemn him to death, and hand him over to the Gentiles. <sup>34</sup>[The Gentiles] shall mock him, and spit on him, and scourge him, and kill him; but after three days he shall rise again. (Mk. 10:32-34)*

James and John are self-seeking and personally ambitious (vs. 35-37.) Furthermore, they are self-confident; they are convinced they can do and endure whatever it takes to attain and maintain the seats of power (vs. 38-39.) Note, too, the consequence of their selfish, self-centered attitude: resentment and divisiveness on the part of the other disciples (vs. 41.)

To combat and correct this sinful attitude, our Lord presents a radically different definition of greatness: in the kingdom of God, greatness consists in self-giving, humble acts of service (vs.42-45.) By His actions Jesus communicates a radical example of humility, as He humbles Himself and graciously puts Himself at the disposal of the blind beggar (vs. 46-51,) asking the beggar (vs. 51) the same question He had previously asked James and John (vs. 36.)

Some time after this incident, while He and His disciples were gathered in the upper room, the Lord Jesus provided them with yet another radical example of humility in action:

*It was just before the Passover Feast. Knowing that his hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father, and having loved his own who were in the world, [Jesus now] loved them to the fullest extent. <sup>2</sup>It was during supper, and the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray [Jesus]. <sup>3</sup>Knowing that the Father had put all things under his authority, and that he had come forth from God and was returning to God, <sup>4</sup>[Jesus] got up from the supper [table] and laid aside his robe. He took a towel and wrapped it around his waist. <sup>5</sup>Then he poured water into the basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him ... <sup>12</sup>After he had washed their feet and put back on his robe, he sat down again. Then he asked them, Do you understand what I have done to you? <sup>13</sup>You call me, Teacher, and, Lord, and you speak correctly; that is what I am. <sup>14</sup>If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup>I have given you an example, you also should do as I have done to you. (Jn. 13:1-5,12-15)*

In washing His disciples' feet, Jesus voluntarily performed the most menial task, a task reserved for the lowliest of household servants (vs. 4-5.) Jesus' love for His disciples gave Him the motivation to perform such a service (vs. 1.) Jesus' knowledge of His relationship to God His Father gave Him the "security" to perform such self-forgetting, self-abasing service (vs. 3.) What our Lord did for His disciples was also intended to serve as an example for us (vs. 14-15.)

The example of our Lord's life, especially His humble act of service rendered to His disciples in the upper room on the evening prior to His betrayal (recorded in John 13,) had a profound impact on Peter. Remembering how the Lord Jesus had clothed Himself with a towel as He engaged in the humble act of washing His disciples' feet, Peter writes, "*All of you, clothe yourselves with humility.*"

Let us clothe ourselves with humility, by looking to Christ our Savior as our Example. As the Lord Jesus told His disciples on the occasion of His washing their feet, "*I have given you an example, you also should do as I have done to you*" (Jn. 13:15.)

## **II. Clothe Yourself with Humility, ...in Your Exercise of Leadership**

Peter indicates that the elders are to serve as shepherds to the church, which is viewed as being God's own flock. The role of the shepherd was not a glamorous nor a prestigious position, note 1 Samuel 17:28, "*When Eliab, David's oldest brother, heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked, Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the wilderness?*" Eliab rebukes David for leaving his charge and demands that he return to the wilderness to tend his sheep, as opposed to be with the men of war as they engaged in the important matter of defending their fellow countrymen. In contemporary terms, being a shepherd would be the equivalent of being a caretaker or custodian, as opposed to a business executive.

A true shepherd sacrifices himself for the sheep. Consider Jacob's testimony: "*This was my situation: The heat consumed me in the daytime and the cold at night, and sleep fled from my eyes*" (Gen. 31:40.) Furthermore, a true shepherd was willing to risk his life for his sheep. David reports to King Saul, "*Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, <sup>35</sup>I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it*" (1 Sam. 17:34-35.)

The elder must view the congregation as a flock that belongs to God, which He has entrusted to the care of the elders. As such, the elder is commanded to "*exercise the oversight.*" The elder is to see that the sheep are provided with the "green pasture" of God's Word upon which to feed spiritually for the nourishment of their souls, as the Apostle Paul reminds Timothy: "*All Scripture is breathed out by God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*" (2 Tim. 3:16-17.) Furthermore, the elder is to guide the sheep in the paths of righteousness in imitation of Christ the Good Shepherd, of whom David testifies, "*He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake*" (Psl. 23:3b.)

But the elder is further exhorted, *“Do not lord yourselves over those who are under your care.”* The elder must be careful that he does not imitate Diotrephes, of whom the Apostle John writes:

*I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the pre-eminence, will have nothing to do with us. <sup>10</sup>So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church. (3 Jn. 9-10)*

From John’s description, it is clear that Diotrephes exercised an almost cult-like control over the congregation, an ungodly misuse of spiritual authority for which the Apostle John rebukes him. In contrast to such men as Diotrephes, the elder must seek to be like the faithful and wise servant in our Lord’s parable:

*Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? <sup>46</sup>It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. <sup>47</sup>I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. (Matt. 24:45-47)*

The elder must take warning from the negative example of the unfaithful, wicked shepherds of Israel. In distinction from them, he must conscientiously care for the sheep:

*The word of Jehovah came to me: <sup>2</sup>Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: This is what the Lord Jehovah says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? ... <sup>4</sup>You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. (Ezk. 34:1-2,4)*

Peter now proceeds to exhort elders to *“be examples for the flock.”* The elder should be an example of self-denial for the sake of Christ and for the spiritual welfare of the flock. In this regard, consider the testimony of the Apostle Paul: *“I try to please everyone in every way; not seeking my own benefit, but the benefit of the many, so that they may be saved. **11**<sup>1</sup>Follow my example, just as I [follow the example] of Christ”* (1 Cor. 10:33-11:1.) The elder should be an example of one who is striving for the kingdom of God, recognizing the true and ultimate value of that heavenly kingdom and giving it number one priority in his life. Again, note the personal testimony of the Apostle Paul:

*Brothers, I do not regard myself as having [already] taken hold of these things; rather, I do this one thing: forgetting the things that are behind and reaching for the things that lie ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on to the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus ... <sup>17</sup>Join in following my example, brothers, and*

*take note of those who are walking in accordance with the model you have in us.* (Phil. 3:13-14,17)

Then, too, the elder must set an example of steadfast faith and commitment to Christ in the midst of adversity and trial: *"You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit"* (1 Thess. 1:6,) such is Paul's testimony to the Thessalonians.

Finally, the elder must heed the exhortation the Apostle Paul issues to Timothy: *"set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity"* (1 Tim. 4:12.)

Let us clothe ourselves with humility, in our exercise of leadership—whether it be in the church or in the home.

### **III. Clothe Yourself with Humility, ...to Serve One Another**

Just as the elders are to exercise the oversight in a spirit of humility—not flaunting their God-given authority, nor exploiting it for personal gain—so, likewise, the younger men are to be submissive to their elders (vs. 5a.) That is to say, there is to be respect for the authority that God has ordained and under which He has placed us. This applies to the home: *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, because this is right. <sup>2</sup>"Honor your father and your mother,"—which is the first commandment with a promise"* (Eph. 6:1-2.) This also applies in the church:

*Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.* (Heb. 13:17)

All of us are exhorted to *"clothe yourselves with humility—to conduct ourselves in that godly spirit of humility and submissiveness—toward one another."* The Apostle Paul elaborates upon this exhortation:

*You were called for freedom, brothers, only do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the sinful nature [to express itself]; rather, serve one another with love—<sup>14</sup>for the whole law is fulfilled in one commandment, [namely] this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>15</sup>But if you bite and devour each other, watch out, or you will be consumed by one another.* (Gal. 5:13-15)

We have been set free by Christ and made free in Christ for the purpose of serving one another (vs. 13.) We are now free to fulfill the law, which commands us to love our neighbor (vs. 14.) But if we misuse and abuse our spiritual freedom, we will suffer the awful consequences (vs. 15.)

Yet another exposition of Peter's exhortation to "*clothe [ourselves] with humility,*" is found in Philippians 2:3-4, "*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but with a humble mind let each one consider others as occupying a higher position than himself. <sup>4</sup>Let each one be concerned not only about his own interests, but also about the interests of others.*" We are to consider each other as being "*higher than yourselves;*" that is to say, we are to view ourselves as being in the position of servant to one another (vs. 3.) we are to be concerned not only for our own legitimate needs, but we are also to concern ourselves with the legitimate needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ (vs. 4.)

Let us clothe ourselves with humility, to serve one another.

### **Conclusion**

In one form or another, pride is the natural tendency of the sinful human heart. The Apostle Peter counters that tendency with this command: "*clothe yourselves with humility.*" We must take serious this command and seek to heed it, because "*God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble*" (vs. 5b.)