

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Submission and Humility: Godly Virtues, Not Liabilities

*Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. (1 Peter 5:5–7, KJV 1900)*

In our modern culture, attitudes such as a submissive spirit that respects others more than self, so much so that you defer and submit rather than combat to gain your aim, and humility are viewed as faults to be corrected, not as admirable and godly traits and behaviors to be cultivated. All of the conservative Christian denominations are suffering severe decline, and many leaders in these groups parade out one fault of their culture after another as their diagnosis of the leading cause. According to one spiritual guru after another, we must either stop doing something that we are doing or start doing something that we've neglected to solve our problem. Just one more program or one more seminar or one more focus group is the magic potion that will fix all of our problems, or so these gurus claim. Yet after decades of endless parades of causes and remedies, the decline continues, only superficially and briefly touched by any or all of the various programs suggested.

If we look at the model of Biblical Christian attitudes and conduct as our measuring rod, I suggest that the scarcity of these two attitudes in both the leaders and the followers in these churches may explain far more than the populist blame game ideas that are so frequently trumpeted. To consciously submit yourself to your brother or sister who is—in your opinion—less godly and devoted or less doctrinally sound than you think yourself to be is unthinkable. To live under a cloak of Biblical humility would leave you powerless to convince others to follow you and your ideas that you simply know are the solution. As long as conservative Christians hide under these prideful attitudes, they should prepare for more decline and for a growing coldness in their ranks. The foundation on which these gurus stand, albeit nicely camouflaged, is pride. Presumably, what the guru knows is undoubtedly right, and anyone who is so blind or ignorant as to disagree is, in the guru's opinion, less devoted to Christ and less informed. Friends, there was a group of religious folks in Jesus' day who lived by this exact attitude. They were called Pharisees, and they continuously disagreed with Jesus and attacked Him. They didn't follow Him. What should be our model for Christian conduct, the Pharisees of Jesus' day or Jesus Himself?

*Likewise, ye younger, submit...* If we think of "elder" in the first verse as referring only to chronological age, we are compelled logically to view "younger" in this verse similarly. If we regard "elder" in Verse One as referring to maturity in the faith, we then are nudged to regard "younger" in this passage in the same way. Maturity in the faith, not pride, or an aggressive disposition, should claim the respect of believers in a given church or fellowship of churches. Seniority, or, in the language of the passage, the position of "elder," should be measured by more than simply years spent in the faith; it should regard depth of knowledge in the teachings of Scripture and a mature, consistent application of Scripture's teachings in life. Lessons such as the passage we now study or Philippians 2 that teach the same behavior, are likely the most widely ignored lessons in the Bible among conservative Christians of our age and culture. As Jesus made Himself of no reputation and became obedient, even to the death of the cross, He stands above all others as our example of model Christian attitudes and conduct.

*Yea, all of you be subject one to another....* Here Peter expands the model. Not only should the younger respectfully submit to the older, but the dominant spirit of all believers should be that Philippians 2 Christ-like attitude of submission and respect for "...the things of others." (Philippians 2:4; a verse that every believer in our time needs to memorize and quote in his/her daily prayers) I have always enjoyed studying the Biblical teachings of stewardship, but this subject has claimed especially fond reflection in recent years. If you examine the membership of any church, large or small, you will see a wide variety of personalities, professions, and interests. It is so easy--and sadly so common--that, when faced with decisions, each person in today's typical church will push long and hard for his/her idea, carefully avoiding or objecting to any and all ideas to the contrary. Do you not see how this common--and commonly accepted--attitude categorically contradicts Paul's teaching in Philippians 2 and Peter's teaching in our study passage? A careful study of godly stewardship might provide the Biblical remedy to the modern Christian problems of pride and self-above-all-others. Whatever I have isn't really mine in the end;

it is the Lord's. He has given it to me to use for His honor. My decisions for its use should be how it might best promote His honor, not gain what "I" prefer. And more fearful; Scripture teaches that the Lord shall always appear in His time and require that His stewards **account to Him** for their stewardship. A steward holds the property of another and is to use it according to its owner's instructions, and for the owner's gain, not for his personal gain. We most honor our Lord's stewardship ethic as we interact with each other by practicing this "look...every man also on the things of others."

*...and be clothed with humility.* One Bible dictionary defines the word humility in this passage as "...lowliness of mind, the esteeming of ourselves small, as we are..." When we strive to gain our way, we esteem ourselves above those around us who may think otherwise than we. I have used a few examples in my preaching on this theme so often that I hope the members of the church that I serve have memorized them, but I pray that they will also practice this Biblical principle when faced with life's decisions. Does one color of carpet or pew cushion honor Christ more than another? How sadly modern Christians forget this Biblical principle of stewardship and fight for their own way over trivia instead of God's important truth, a submissive, humble behavior at all times. The prevalence of this attitude of humility, according to Peter, should be as commonplace as our clothing. We may get up on a given day and dress differently, but we do get dressed. As consistently as we put clothes on our bodies every day, Peter commands us to likewise wear humility at all times, not just on rare occasions. You don't wear clothes on some days and neglect to wear them at other times, do you? Likewise, God commands us to wear humility at all times. If you submitted once or twice to your brothers and sisters over the last five years, you've failed the test. Would you go out in public with clothes on your body only once or twice ever five years? Scripture commands us to make these dual traits of submission to, and regard for, our brothers and sisters in Christ and humility, how we regard ourselves, a permanent, every-day wardrobe that we put on fresh every morning.

*...for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.* This thought should shock us into a sober reflection and self-examination. If we fail to wear humility as consistently as our clothes, we are liable to fall into one prideful trap of Satan or another. While our pride may do harm or pain to those around us, something that Scripture rebukes, Peter warns us that this attitude shall draw God's personal resistance. Whatever the issue, do you want God on your side, or do you want Him against you? In trivial matters such as the decor of a church, God does not indicate any preference for one color or style in a church building over another. He is not more honored by one decor or another. **He is honored by the humble conduct of His**

### ***children who are soft on such things and strong on submission and humility.***

How does God resist the proud? When believers embrace such a destructive attitude as pride that refuses to submit or manifest humility, the Lord remains faithful and convicts His child to repent. And genuine repentance is always answered by His forgiveness and grace. However, when sinful pride becomes so entrenched that it takes over the life of one of His children, the Lord may respond with severe chastening. (Romans 11:22) In the case of the Jews who followed their pride and rejected Jesus as their Messiah and Savior, God cut them off from the blessings of worship, the single quality that blazed a different path for them than for any other ancient nation, and a path that discovered His preserving grace all along the way.

When you see people who seem constantly to be frustrated, who always want what seems to be out of their reach, you may actually be seeing the Lord's resistance at work. As faithful obedience cultivates peaceful joy, pride or any other sin will cultivate a troubled discontent.

As the Lord withdraws in chastening disapproval from His child, the reaction should be immediate alarm and repentance. However, the prideful believer often denies that the Lord has withdrawn and seeks to place blame for his/her problems on others. Sinful pride forbids you from acknowledging that you have sinned. It duplicates the fallen, sinful attitude that both Adam and Eve manifested when God confronted them in the Garden shortly after they had sinned. When God challenged Adam, he tried to blame God, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." (Genesis 3:12) When God confronted Eve, she responded similarly, "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." (Genesis 3:13) And who made the serpent? God. Thus, both Adam and Eve try to turn the blame for their failure and sin back upon God instead of confessing their sin.

Paul lists one qualification for ministry that pivots on overcoming pride, "Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil." (1 Timothy 3:6) We may learn several lessons from this verse. 1) Pride is associated with immaturity in the faith; it is therefore wholly unacceptable in anyone who claims to be mature in the faith. 2) Satan adroitly uses pride to snare the prideful believer into his condemnation. All of these qualifications for the ministry Paul requires in advance of a man's recognition as a minister of the gospel. You don't ordain an unqualified man and hope that he will grow into the office. You observe him and give him opportunity to grow and to mature in his faith-walk to the point that he will embrace humility and avoid pride, not be driven by it. What is true for a novice (Young and immature) in ministry is true for any believer. We pray for grace to conduct godly self-examination and growth in these foundational traits of a robust, healthy faith.

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Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor