

The main emphasis of this text is the elusive character quality “humility”. The opposite is pride, which is thinking more highly of oneself than one should. As a problem of mankind pride goes back as far as the garden of Eden and will continue as a problem until Christ returns and sets all things right. Pride could very well be one of the most pervasive sins, so learning about humility is important for us all. But the good news is, when we lower ourselves in true humility, God will lift us up!

I. The command for humility has two directions: vertical and horizontal (5:5b, 6a).

1. *Horizontally, humility is commanded in our relationships to one another (5:5b).*

To “clothe” meant literally to tie together two strings in order to join clothing, such as an elegant cape or a servant’s apron. Either would be appropriate here, in the context of elders who serve or of humility which pleases God. In either case humility is something we can decide to put on, not hypocritically, but as a choice of action instead of waiting until one “feels” humble. Humility, like an outward piece of clothing, is also a quality which others experience or observe in us. Though an attitude of the heart, it is demonstrated in our relationships with others. Humility is not thinking negatively about oneself, but being concerned about others and not thinking about oneself.

2. *Vertically, humility is commanded in our relationship to God (5:6a).*

Humility before God is an act of trust and elevates Him in our thinking. For example, we should lift up God in His knowledge. He knows us better than we know ourselves. (Cf. Jer 1:5.) We humble ourselves when we submit to His greater knowledge of who we are. We lift God up and humble ourselves, when we submit to His superior leading. He knows what is best for me and is capable and desirous of doing it. (Cf. Rom 8:32.) More important than the “bigger” questions of life, we have a multitude of commands regarding the day by day decisions which affect those bigger issues, such as be thankful instead of complaining and being slow to anger. (Cf. James 1:19-21). We also elevate God when we give Him our time as part of that which rightfully belongs to God (Mt 22:15ff). If we keep control of our time for ourselves, then we are lifting ourselves up. See also James 4:1-10 for many examples of the failure to humbly submit to one another and to God.

II. The reason for humility can be found in our own self interest (5:5c, 6b).

1. *Humility can be motivated by our desire for success (5c).*

God is on our side when we humble ourselves. When we are proud, He resists us. When we are out to do what we want to do, the manner we want to do it, without any acknowledgment of God, then God will resist us. We will fail in what we truly desire. This is the problem in some writings on leadership: there is little if anything about humbling yourself before God or thinking of others more highly. If we want true success in the things that matter, then we must submit to God, humbling ourselves before one another and before Him.

2. *Humility can be motivated by our desire for recognition (5:6b).*

We want to be praised, to win the prize, to get good grades. Praise and winning is not wrong. God rewards and will praise those who do well. But how we seek to fulfil it and from whom we seek praise is important. Consider others higher than yourself, consider God higher, and He will lift you up at the right time. When we seek to exalt or lift up ourselves, then we are setting ourselves up to be humbled by God. Jesus taught this very same principle when warning against exalting men (Mat 23:11-12).

God’s recognition of us will be in “due time” or at the “proper time”, implying that it is yet future. Some lessons require time to learn, like patience (James 1:1-6). But the “proper time” ultimately will be beyond this present life. The heroes of faith (Hebr 11) did not receive in their lives that for which they hoped. Ultimate recognition and exultation waits for the time when we meet Christ face to face.

III. There are certain practical results of humility (5:5a, 7).

1. *Humility eliminates the problem of age difference (5a).*

The opening command of verse 5 introduces the whole topic of humility to one another and is an example of it. (Although Peter had been writing to church elders, the contrast with “young men” argues in favor of understanding this as a reference to “those who are older” and not the “elders”.) It seems that in many cultures there is a problem between generations. The stronger young may look down on those older who seem weak. The young are focused on their own lives and do not see or appreciate the experiences of the older ones. But age difference is no excuse to exalt oneself over another. With the word “likewise” or “in the same way” verse 5 compares the situation of the younger with that of the elders in verse 1-4. No age group should exalt themselves over another but each should practice humility.

2. *Humility also solves the problem of anxiety (5:7).*

Verse 7 is not a separate sentence and command but is dependent grammatically upon verse 6. It is thus an illustration of how we humble ourselves before God and verse 6 explains how we cast our anxieties upon God. God’s “care” refers to his concern and resulting watchful protection. Anxiety denies our belief in that truth. It often reveals either a rebellion against God’s authority over my life (not humbling myself) or forgetting that God cares. It helps to take whatever time necessary to get back to the Biblical basics. God is great. He is good. He cares for His children. Acknowledge that, submit to Him, and move forward from that basis.

Humility, though seemingly elusive, is worth pursuing. Many of our personal problems may be due to a lack of humility, which we do not recognize as such. E.g., prayer may be unanswered because of our failure to be humble. Interpersonal conflicts may arise out of pride. The whole problem may begin with a lack of humility before God and then is compounded as we refuse to clothe ourselves with humility toward one another. Ask God to work in our hearts and remember well that God is opposed to the proud but He gives grace to the humble.