

Your Soul's Greatest Enemy

1 Peter 5:5-7

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Several years ago the Orlando Sentinel, the newspaper there in Orlando, published an article about a new ride the amusement industry was considering and marketing at the time. The article noted that Renaissance Entertainment of Orlando is marketing a ride entitled “Ego Trip: A Ride About You.” I'm not making this up. The ride, the article said, which they hope to sell to a theme park or to operate at fairs, will use the riders' names, the riders' photos and the riders' voices to create a totally personalized experience. As paparazzi snap their photos and adoring fans call their names, riders will attend their own movie premieres. They'll visit an art museum where they'll view paintings of themselves done by Picasso, Warhol and van Gogh. Then they'll attend a political rally where they'll be urged to run for president—That's a scary thought.—and then a sporting event where they will be the one to make the difference in the contest and will be hailed and praised for their athletic prowess. Finally, they'll enjoy a ticker tape parade in their honor. Afterward, the article says, ego-stroked riders will proceed to the gift shop—You saw this coming, didn't you?—where they can buy all sorts of stuff emblazoned with their own images. There's a ride I'm glad that, as far as I know anyway, hasn't been picked up. But the very fact that it was contemplated, that it was proposed by a company and attempted to be marketed, shows where our culture is. Sadly, our self-esteem-drunk culture not only finds pride entertaining, as in a ride like this, but it actually declared pride to be a friend of the soul, to be necessary for true self-fulfillment.

Let me ask you this morning, what do you believe is the greatest danger to your Christian life, the greatest danger to your soul? There are many, very real dangers that we face as believers. But the greatest danger that we face is not what the average Christian thinks, because with one voice the Scripture identifies the greatest danger to our souls as nothing other than our own pride. Tragically, pride in our world has become a virtue. It's so much a part of the culture that it's even hard to see. We are like fish who don't recognize that they're wet, because we're so

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surrounded by the culture of self-esteem and pride. But according to the Apostle Peter, who learned the lesson the hard way, pride is the soul's greatest enemy. That is because it isolates us from both the grace of God and the God of all grace. This is the lesson we'll discover in 1 Peter.

Peter wrote this first letter of his from Rome around the years AD 64-65. He wrote, according to 1:1, to churches that were scattered throughout the region we know today as Turkey. Roman persecution had begun to accelerate in the Roman Empire, because Nero had blamed the Christians for having something to do with those massive fires that spread through Rome and destroyed so much of it. So the theme of 1 Peter, as he writes in that environment of escalating hostility, was standing firm through suffering. Its purpose was to teach them and us how to live as Christians when we live in a culture in which there is escalating hostility.

And when you get to 1 Peter 5, Peter begins to deal with relationships in the context of the church. He begins in verses 1-4 addressing the elders, the leaders of the church. But in verse 5 Peter transitions. He transitions from the leaders of the church to the members of the church. He addresses us all. Let me read it for you. First Peter 5:5-6:

You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all of your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

Now the obvious theme of this paragraph is humility. In fact, Peter provides us with his own sort of propositional statement right in the middle of this paragraph in the words of the proverb that he quotes. Notice verse 5: "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Now

notice, on each side of that proverb there are three imperatives, three commands. Verse 5, "Be subject to your elders." There's the first one. The second imperative, verse 5: "Clothe yourselves with humility." And the third imperative comes in verse 6: "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God." Notice how Peter connects all three of those imperatives to the proverb. Notice, after the first two imperatives he uses the word "for" to introduce the proverb. And then at the beginning of verse 6, coming out of the proverb, he says "therefore." So the proverb, then, is like a hinge on which this entire passage swings. The proverb presents the biblical case for humility. And the three imperatives on each side of the proverb provide for us the practical path to humility. The biblical case for humility; the practical path to humility.

Let's begin by looking at the proverb which provides for us the biblical case for humility. It's in the words of the proverb. The proverb here is the Septuagint translation of Proverbs 3:34, and it is one of those timeless, inviolable laws of God's moral universe. Look with me at the first half of the proverb: "God is opposed to the proud." The Greek word translated "proud" originally meant "to shine above others, to see yourself as the brightest light" or "to show oneself above others." That is, to see yourself as rising above the hoi polloi, rising above others and being elevated because of your own intellect or your own gifts or your own reputation or whatever it might be. The main idea of this word "proud" is to look down on everyone else. Toward others, this kind of pride sees itself as the standard. When you're proud, you see yourself as the standard against everyone around you should be judged, and none of them measure up. Toward God, pride demonstrates itself as self-sufficiency and independence. "I can manage on my own. I don't really need God's help."

It's a terrible sin, pride. It was the first sin in the universe. Pride began by spontaneous generation in the heart of heaven's greatest creation. Through pride, the being who was once the chief guardian of the holiness of God became the evil being that we refer to as Satan. Through Satan, pride was part, at least, of the first human sin, and may have been the essence of the first human sin. Since the fall, pride comes naturally to every single one of us. We receive it through

the sin nature we inherit. As John Calvin points out, "There is no man who does not cherish within him some idea of his own excellence." Not a single one of us is exempt from this sin

But the fact that it is so common doesn't make it less dangerous. In fact, listen to what Jonathan Edwards, the great American theologian, writes:

Pride is the worst viper in the heart. It is the first sin that ever entered the universe. It lies the lowest of all in the foundation of the whole building of sin. It is the most secret, deceitful and unsearchable in its ways of working of any lust whatsoever. It is ready to mix with everything. And nothing is so hateful to God, contrary to the Spirit of the gospel, or of so dangerous consequence. And there is no one sin that does so much let the devil into the hearts of the saints and expose them to his delusions.

You notice the real emphasis in Edward's words is that pride is incredibly deceitful. We can be filled with pride and not even recognize it as such. Pride can enable us to write a book called *The Ten Most Humble People in America and How I Taught the Other Nine*. Pride can cause a man who has a chain of Christian radio stations, who has the Bible in which it says from our Lord's own mouth no man knows the day or the hour of His return, and in spite of that to predict the day and hour when Christ will return and to bring great shame on the name of Jesus Christ. By the way, at least in that (as Al Mohler noted) he's a false prophet, because in the Old Testament, you get one prophecy wrong, that was it. Pride is insidious. As David Rhodes writes, "Pride is the dandelion of the soul. It's root goes deep; only a little left behind sprouts again. Its seeds lodge in the tiniest encouraging cracks. And it flourishes in good soil."

Pride can manifest itself in so many different ways that I can't even begin to exhaust them this morning. Let me just give you a few examples of how pride can manifest itself in our hearts. We can proud of our accomplishments. "Look at what I've done." Do you remember

Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4? He reflected and said, “Is this not Babylon the great which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?” We can look at our accomplishments and really think they’re because of us, because we were so smart, because we’re so good at what we do. We can be proud of our position. The Pharisees certainly were. You remember in Matthew 23, Jesus said that the Pharisees loved the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the market places and being called rabbi by men. They loved that elevation, the position they enjoyed. We can be proud of our spiritual activities. Think about this. You can be sinfully proud for doing the right thing. Jesus warned us of this in Matthew 6. He said be careful even when you pray or when you give, because you can be tempted to pride in the middle of those spiritual activities. We can be proud of our spiritual gifts. Paul warns about this in Romans 12. When he’s talking about spiritual gifts in the church, he says be careful: “I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.” You can look at your spiritual gifts and be proud. We can be proud of our knowledge. And this is a real temptation in a Bible church where we’re committed to learning and understanding the Bible. Paul, 1 Corinthians 8:1, when he starts to deal with the whole issue of Christian liberty, says those who have the knowledge of the truth can allow that knowledge without the balance of love to become arrogance.

Pride causes us to be critical of the sins of others while we tolerate and excuse our own. Pride fills us with envy over the gifts and opportunities and reputations of others. Pride causes us to see ourselves as superior to others. Pride is believing our convictions are more godly, our preferences are more important, our views are more accurate, our personality is more winsome, our plans and ideas are more practical, our gifts and abilities are more useful, our heart is more spiritually mature. If any of these attitudes reside within our hearts, we are guilty of the sin of pride. We need to ask ourselves the question Paul asks in 1 Corinthians 4: “What do you have that you did not receive?” Think about that. What do you have that you did not receive? His

second question is, “And if you [received] it, [then] why do you boast as if you had not received it?”

How does God react to our pride? It’s a crucial question. Look again at verse 5: “God is opposed to the proud.” That is a shocking statement, because the word “opposed” is a military term. It means “to station or arrange against.” It describes God vividly, as taking up His weapons against and going to battle with a proud person. We’ve all watched on television and seen in various wars that have been fought in our lifetimes, we’ve seen artillery bombarding enemy positions. That is the graphic meaning of the Greek word “opposed.” God takes up His weapons and continually launches His artillery against every proud heart. You say, what is that artillery? Listen, God has just the right weapon, just the right smart bomb for every human heart.

But He is at war with the proud. Proverbs 16:5, “Every one who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord; assuredly, he will not be unpunished.” The prophet Isaiah describes a time in the future when God will abolish pride. Isaiah 2:12, “For the Lord of hosts will have a day of reckoning against everyone who is proud and lofty and against everyone who is lifted up, that he may be abased.” He goes on in Isaiah 2:17 to say, “The pride of man will be humbled and the loftiness of men will be abased; and the Lord alone will be exalted on that day.” In fact, to humble the proud is part of what it means to be God. Can I say, it’s God’s job description to humble the proud? You remember when He talks to Job and He was getting onto Job for sort of taking the place of God? He said to him listen, you want to be God? Alright. You want to do that? Then here’s what you need to do. You first must be able to look upon everyone who is proud and make him low, look on every one who is proud and humble him.

Now the proverb that Peter quotes here, Proverbs 3:34, in its own context back in the Book of Proverbs, is contrasting the way of the wicked and the way of the righteous. The wicked are proud scoffers against God; the righteous have humbled themselves before God. So this proverb, then, in its context in the Book of Proverbs, is a reminder that pride is antithetical to being a true

believer in God. For us who are Christians, pride is antithetical to being a follower of Jesus Christ. But here in 1 Peter this proverb is a warning, a warning that even for us as Christians pride remains the great enemy of our souls. Let me put it bluntly: God opposes pride in His believing children just as strongly as He opposes pride in unbelievers. You say, can you prove that? Again and again and again. Let me just show you a couple of examples.

Turn back to 2 Chronicles 26. Here we meet a man by the name of Uzziah, one of Judah's kings. He became king at 16 years of age, and he reigned for some 52 years in Jerusalem. But notice what verse 4 says about him. Second Chronicles 26:4:

He did right in the sight of the Lord according to all that his father Amaziah had done. He continued to seek God in the days of Zechariah [And this is not the Zechariah who wrote the book Zechariah but an unknown prophet.], who had understanding through the vision of God; and as long as he sought the Lord, God prospered him.

And then the chronicler goes on to describe all of the successes that Uzziah had. But notice, after the successes, what comes in the middle of verse 15? "Hence his fame spread afar, for he was marvelously helped until he was strong." What happened? Verse 16:

But when he became strong [when he was successful, when he was prosperous], his heart was so [literally, lifted up] proud that he acted corruptly, [What did he do?] and He was unfaithful to the Lord his God, for he entered the temple of the Lord [the Holy Place] to burn incense on the altar of incense. [Which only the priests were allowed to do.] Then Azariah the priest entered after him [along with] eighty priests of the Lord, valiant men. They opposed Uzziah the king and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the

priests... you have been unfaithful and [you] will have no honor from the Lord God.

Uzziah didn't like it. He was enraged. But verse 19 says, "While he was enraged with the priests, the leprosy broke out on his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord, beside the altar of incense." They saw what had happened. "They hurried him out of there [verse 20], and he himself also hastened to get out because the Lord had smitten him. King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death." Not only could he not go into the Holy Place, but as a leper he couldn't even go near the temple. "For he was cut off from the house of the Lord." Remember, this was a man who was a true believer in God. This was a man who most of his life lived in faithfulness to God. But when he succeeded, when God allowed him to prosper, he became lifted up with pride, and God responded to that pride in one of His own.

You see it again, in the life of King Hezekiah. Go over just a couple of chapters. Second Chronicles 32:24. And these are just a couple of examples.

In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill; and he prayed to the Lord, and the Lord spoke to him and gave him a sign. But [watch what happens, verse 25] Hezekiah gave no return for the benefit he received, because his heart was proud; therefore wrath came on him and on Judah and Jerusalem.

In other words, the Babylonian captivity came in part because of the pride of Hezekiah, one of God's own. God takes pride in His own just as seriously as He does in unbelievers. Pride led Miriam to rebel against Moses' authority and to have the plague of leprosy in herself. Pride led David to number the army and brought a great plague in which 70,000 Israelites died. Pride moved Peter to swear his loyalty to Christ and led to his denial a few hours later. To keep pride from growing in the heart of the apostle Paul, God sent him what Paul called a thorn in my flesh. Literally, "a stake through my flesh." We don't know what that was, but the point is, God

brought into Paul's life something, intentionally, to keep him from exalting himself. That's how strongly God felt about it. Listen, if we ignore the pride in our hearts and we allow it to grow undisturbed, we have declared war against God, and, more importantly, God declares war against us.

He is opposed to the proud, but notice, He "gives grace to the humble." The most popular definition of grace, you know, is "unmerited favor." And that's true as far as it goes. But I like A. W. Pink's definition better. I've mentioned it to you before. A.W. Pink defines grace like this: "It is the favor of God to those who not only have no positive desserts of their own, but also who are thoroughly ill-deserving and hell-deserving." In other words, grace is this reality in God: it's part of God's character to delight in doing good, not simply to those who don't deserve that goodness, but to those who deserve exactly the opposite of that goodness. It's not just unmerited favor, it is favor in spite of demerit. And Peter says God is giving grace to the humble. This is how God consistently acts. This is God's constant practice. He is giving grace to the humble. Don't misunderstand. It's not that we earn grace by our humility. Grace by definition isn't deserved, can't be earned. But God has set a prerequisite, a condition that must be present where He bestows grace. God only bestows grace where there is humility.

Now what is this humility? It's interesting. The Greeks use this word *humility*, but they didn't consider it a virtue. In fact, they thought it was demeaning. But the New Testament authors, under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, take an Old Testament Hebrew concept, the Old Testament word *lowly*, and they adopt this Greek word which the Greeks hated. They adopted it for the New Testament, because the Greek word translated *humility* literally means "lowly-mindedness." One Greek lexicon translates it "a deep sense of one's moral littleness." It's the opposite of self-esteem. It's the opposite of narcissism. It's the opposite of pride.

This is a foundational change that happens in every believer. If you're here today and you're a true believer, there was a time in your life when your perspective on yourself thoroughly

changed, and you came to see yourself as humbled before God. In a few months we'll go to the Sermon on the Mount. And the Sermon on the Mount begins with the Beatitudes, and what's the first Beatitude? What is the first step, if you will, into the kingdom over which Christ rules? "Blessed are the poor in spirit [the beggars in spirit], for [to them belongs] the kingdom of heaven." That's how it starts. That's why Jesus told that parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee going to the temple. And the tax collector wouldn't even lift up his eyes to God, but he looked down and he beat his chest and he said God, be propitiated to me, may Your wrath be satisfied toward me the sinner. That's humility.

And two places in the New Testament (here in 1 Peter 5 and in James 4) we're told that God resists the proud Christian and gives grace to the humble Christian. This is absolutely essential for our spiritual development. Augustine, the great church father, wrote, "For those who would learn God's ways, humility is the first thing, humility is the second, and humility is the third." Martin Luther wrote, "It is God's nature to make something out of nothing as when He made the world. That is why He cannot make anything out of him who is not yet nothing."

Humility is a necessary virtue for every Christian, because it's only to the humble that God gives His grace. And grace is absolutely essential in the Christian life. In fact, Peter uses the word *grace* some nine times in his two letters. And he connects grace with our election in eternity past, with our salvation in time, with our sanctification, and even with the Second Coming. Grace is essential to our spiritual life and survival. We can accomplish nothing of true spiritual value in the Christian life apart from grace. As Charles Spurgeon said, "If we think we can do anything of ourselves, all we shall get from God is the opportunity to try." This is one of the inviolable laws of the universe. It's like gravity. You know that gravity is there. It's something God has written into His physical universe. You can embrace it, acknowledge it and thrive physically, or you can deny it and bring great harm to yourself. The same thing is true with this law. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. That's the biblical case for humility. It's in that proverb.

I want to look, secondly though, at the practical path to humility. How do you get from A to B? How do you move from where we all are by nature, proud, to humble? Well ultimately, understand that humility is a gift of the Spirit of God, according to Galatians 5. It's part of the fruit the Spirit produces in our lives. You can only, ultimately, be truly, biblically humble if you're a believer and the Spirit is at work in your heart. But how does the Spirit actually produce that change? How does the Spirit begin to move us who are proud from that pride to humility? The path is defined for us in the three imperatives that are on each side of this proverb.

The first step, then, on the path from pride to humility is the first imperative. Let's put it like this: submit to human authority. If you want to move from pride to humility start here. Look at verse 5: "You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders." Now some commentators only see here a lesson about young men honoring older men, but it's far more likely in its context that Peter means that younger men should submit to those who serve in the office of elder in the church. There are at least two reasons. There are more than two, but two reasons stand out that I would take this interpretation. First of all, the Greek word "elder" in verse 5 is exactly the same word for elder back up in verse 1. And clearly, in verses 1-4 Peter is referring to the office of elder. And there's no compelling exegetical reason to change that meaning when you get to verse 5. A second reason though has to do with how Peter uses the Greek verb "be subject." That verb he uses some six times in 1 Peter. Every other time, five other times it means to submit to someone who is in a duly constituted position of authority over you. So that must be what it means here as well. So Peter then is saying that younger men in the church are to submit themselves to those who are in a position of authority in the church. He singles out that group, because, obviously, younger men can be frustrated with how slowly things move at times and other issues. So he singles them out because of that. The Greek word "be subject to" has military overtones. It's what a person in the military does to his commanding officer. You submit your will to theirs, place yourself under the authority of another.

Now the primary application of this principle clearly is that young men in the church submit to elders in the church. But the general principle here is much broader. If you want to pursue humility, start by submitting to the human authorities God has placed in your life. Whether it's government or whether it's in your home or whether it's in the work place or in the church, submit your will to the structure of human authority that God Himself has put in place. Unless the authorities in your life are commanding you to do something contrary to the Scripture, submit your will to that authority structure that God Himself established. This is the first step to humility.

You say well, what should that look like? What should my submission to human authority look like? If I had time to develop it, there's so much the Bible says about this, but let me just condense it to a simple series of statements the Westminster Confession makes about our response to those in authority. Listen to what they wrote. There's a lot of wisdom here. Here's what it means to submit yourself to authority:

Show those over you respect in attitude, words and actions. Pray for them. Thank God for them. Imitate their virtues. Cheerfully obey their biblical commands. [In other words, when they tell you to do something that isn't contrary to the Scripture, do it.] Willingly accept their correction. Be loyal to them. Have a forgiving spirit toward their sins and weaknesses. And bring those over you in authority honor by how you behave.

That's what it means to submit to human authority, whether it's in government or in your home or in the church or in the workplace or wherever you are under the authority of others. Authority is a human structure, but one that was created by God for order on the planet. So submit yourself. If you want to move from pride to humility, you must first submit yourself to proper human authority in your life.

Secondly, become a slave of everyone. Become a servant to everybody else. See that as your purpose for being. Look at verse 5, middle of the verse: “All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another.” Peter’s now talking to all the members and all the leaders of the church. No one’s here excluded. And he uses a very unusual Greek verb: “clothe yourselves.” In fact, it’s only used here in the New Testament. It refers literally to tying on the apron of a slave. You know what Peter’s mind was going back to. Peter’s mind was going back to that incident on the night of the Last Supper after they had eaten when Jesus got up, took off His outer cloak, put on the towel of a slave and went around and washed the feet of all the disciples. And He said this is how I want you to think about each other: you are here to serve them just as I am here to serve you. That’s how you’re to think.

Notice, the slave’s apron we’re to put on is humility. What does this mean? What does this look like in real life? If you want a commentary on this command, look at Philippians 2, beginning in verse 3. Paul uses, here in Philippians 2, the same Greek word for “humility,” and he sort of develops it. What does this look like? Verse 3, “Do nothing from selfishness.” That’s seeking personal goals, personal agendas. “Or empty conceit.” That’s seeking personal glory. So don’t do anything you do for your own personal agenda or for your own personal glory. Both of those are built on what? A foundation of pride.

Instead, verse 3, we are to “regard one another as more important than yourselves.” This is not, as I’ve said before, the spiritual version of Eeyore, you know, from Winnie and the Pooh, Winnie the Pooh. I’ll get it right in a minute. It’s been a while since I read those books to my girls. This isn’t that. This isn’t a “Oh woe is me.” You know, “I’m so bad.” That’s not the idea here. “Regard.” That word describes carefully evaluating the evidence and coming to a verdict. We are to look at the evidence and come to the verdict that other people are more important than ourselves. Notice, he doesn’t say that means that everybody’s gifts are less than ours. That’s not true. There always will be people who are more gifted than you and less gifted than you. He’s

not saying that everybody's less intelligent than you are. There will always be people more intelligent than you are and less intelligent than you are. What he says is, we are to regard others as more important than ourselves. It means we're to see everyone else as deserving of more honor, more respect and more service than we deserve. And then in verse 4 he defines what that looks like. He says, "Look out... for the interests of others." Look for a way to serve other people. Put their needs, their service, ahead of your own needs. And, of course, as verse 5 points out, the supreme example of this kind of humility is Christ and the incarnation—who wasn't thinking of Himself when He came here, let me tell you.

So then, to clothe yourself with humility, as Peter says in 1 Peter 5, is to regard everyone else as more important than myself and to willingly serve them before I serve myself. Is that your mindset? Is that your mindset, if you're married, toward your spouse? Is that your mindset, if you have children, toward your children? Is that how you think of the people around you here in this church, that you exist to meet their needs, to serve them, to look out for them in the same way that Christ came to look out for us? Or do you see yourself as the one who should be served, who should be honored, who should be admired? You say, how can I get to that place? Lloyd Jones was right. The way to get from our normal pride to seeing others as more important than ourselves is to go to the cross, because when we see what our sin cost Christ, it humbles us in the dust.

So if you want to move from pride to humility, you must submit to human authority, become a slave of everyone, and thirdly, we must embrace God's providence in our circumstances. Look at verse 6: "Therefore [that is, because God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble; in light of the fact the proverb is true] humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time." The Greek word translated "to humble yourselves" literally means "to make yourself low, to bow before someone." It means recognizing God's authority in our lives. Of course, that means submitting to His Word. Back in 1:2 He says we were "chosen... to obey Jesus Christ." You were elected by God in eternity past to obey Jesus.

But it means more than that here in chapter 5. In the context of 1 Peter 5, to humble ourselves under God's hand means to accept His providence in our circumstances, and to do so even when it means trials and troubles and difficulties. Even if it means—Look back at 4:12.—fiery trials. Even if it means hard times. Let me just ask you, are there circumstances in your life right now that you're having a hard time embracing? Peter says, "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God."

That expression, by the way, "under the mighty hand of God," that's a favorite Old Testament expression of God's absolute power. You see, nobody can contemplate God's absolute, irresistible power without bowing before Him in fear and humility. I love what the Puritan Stephen Charnock, in his great book *The Existence and Attributes of God*, writes about God's power. Listen to what he says:

God can arm the weakest creature for our destruction, and disarm the strongest creatures which appear for our preservation. He can command a hair, a crumb, a kernel to go awry and strangle us. He can make the heavens brass over our head, stop [close] the bottles of the clouds, and make the fruit of the fields droop, when there's still a small time to harvest. He can arm men's wit, wealth, and hands against themselves. He can turn our sweet morsels into bitter, and our consciences into devouring lions. He can root up cities by moles, and conquer the proudest by lice and worms. The omnipotence of God [Charnock says] is not only the object of the believer's trust, but also the believer's fear. How should we adore that power which can preserve us, when devils and men conspire to destroy us? And how should we stand in awe of that power which can destroy us, though angels and men should combine to preserve us?

Humility begins with seeing God, seeing His character and His perfection and His power. And when we see God for who He is, we can't help but be humble. You remember Isaiah. "Woe is

me, for I am ruined!” Why? “For my eyes have seen the King.” What about Job, the most righteous man on earth? He said, “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my [eyes see] You. Therefore... I repent in dust and ashes.” You see, when we struggle with pride, it’s because we haven’t really come to see God for who He is in His glory and majesty. You ever been outside at night on a moonless night? You look up at the sky, the stars look so bright, but they disappear completely in the light of the noonday sun. When we really see God in His glory, our brightness fades into nothing.

Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God. Why? Look at verse 6: “[So] that [here’s why] He may exalt you at the proper time.” “At the proper time.” That expression is used most commonly in the New Testament to point forward to what happens when Jesus comes back. We can experience some degree of exaltation from humility in this life. That happens in the Scriptures. We read—even Nebuchadnezzar would be a great example. He was greatly humbled, and yet God raised him up exalted him even in this life. But this expression points forward. The ultimate fulfillment of this promise to exalt us doesn’t come until Christ comes back in His day and in His hour. Only then will we be exalted before all creation as God’s children and the special objects of His care. We are to humble ourselves until then.

Let me ask you this. If humbling ourselves before God is so important, how can we know whether or not we are? One of the chief ways we can demonstrate a humble heart of submission to God is found in verse 7: “Casting all your anxiety upon Him.” Notice, verse 7 does not start a new sentence. In the Greek text, as it is here in the NAS text, “casting” is a participle. It modifies the main verb of the sentence, which is all the way back at the beginning of verse 6: “humble yourselves.” Casting tells us how to humble ourselves under God’s mighty hand. Here is one of the greatest tests of our humility toward God. Do we cast our anxieties on Him? The Greek word for “casting,” by the way, is the word that means “to throw something on someone or something.” The only other time it’s used in the New Testament is when the disciples threw their cloaks on the colt that Jesus rode into the city of Jerusalem. Peter means that if we’re going

to humble ourselves before God, in prayer we must throw everything on God that makes us anxious.

And notice his encouragement to do this: “Because He cares for you.” Think about that for a moment. As one author says, “If it is a concern for you, it is a care to Him.” If it is a concern to you, it is a care to God. He cares. If you want a simple test of your humility before God, just ask yourself this simple question: what do I cast on God in prayer, and what do I decide I’m fully capable of handling myself? It’s in prayer that we show our dependence is truly on God and not on ourselves. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

So if you want to pursue humility, submit to human authority, become a slave of everyone, and accept God’s providence in your circumstances. Now, I don’t know about you, but when I see that it discourages me, because that is an impossible standard. Isn’t it? And that brings me right back to Christ and the gospel. I can’t fully meet that standard. I need to pursue that, that’s the goal of my life, but there’s only one person who’s ever lived who’s been that. Jesus our Lord lived a life of humility. He submitted to all the human authorities in His life. Think about Him submitting to imperfect human parents. He served us as His slave. That’s why He came. He did not come, He said, to be served, but to serve. And He embraced His Father’s providence in all of His circumstances, daily, throughout His life. And at the very end, when it came to separation from His Father, He cries out in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Not My will, but Yours be done.” May this mind be in us which was perfectly lived out in the life of our Lord.

Peter wanted us to be on guard against the greatest danger in our spiritual lives. It’s a danger that not only puts us on a collision course with others, it puts us on a collision course with God. And it steals from us the one thing we must have to grow spiritually, and that is God’s grace. God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. Let’s pray together.

Father, we are reduced to the dust when we see this standard and when we look honestly at our own hearts. Father, we pray for forgiveness. We pray that You would forgive us for exalting ourselves, from climbing, as it were, the throne of our own selfhood, and from that exalted position proclaiming I am, when only You are. Father, forgive us. I pray that we would learn the lesson, not the hard way the way Peter learned it, but Lord, from Your Word may we learn the lesson of the importance of humility. May we follow the path that Peter has outlined for us in this passage today. Help us to submit ourselves to the authorities You've placed in our lives; not chafe at that, not resent them, not disobey them and make their lives difficult; but see ourselves as serving You as we submit to them. Father, I pray that You would help us to take up the mindset that we are not here to be served but, like our Lord, to serve, to serve Him and to serve Him by serving others. And Father, help us in our lives to embrace Your providence; not to rebel against even the hard times, the trials, the difficulties; to embrace them and ask You to sanctify those things for our own spiritual good. And Father, in the middle of it, help us to express our dependence by casting all of our anxieties on You knowing that You care for us. I pray for the person here today, Father, who's never humbled himself or herself before You. May this be the day when they get alone with You and, like that tax gatherer in our Lord's story, Father, may they beat their chest and cry out for Your mercy. We pray at the glory of Jesus Christ and in His name, amen.