

Humility Within The Church

1 Peter 5:1-11

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: ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, 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. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ⁵ Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. 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. ⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 5:1-11 (ESV))

In most every way, the church should be the “safest” place a person could ever be a part of, safe spiritually, safe emotionally, and safe physically. But is it?

Compared to the secular world and all of its trappings, yes, the church is far safer. And in most all matters spiritually, emotionally and physically, yes, the church can be said to be one of the safest involvements a person could hope for. But again, is the church truly a safe place to rest our weary souls?

While I can declare to you that the church is the very best place for each of us, we know from everything that takes place within them, that “safety” is not a certainty for us.

As we read the beginning word of this chapter, we know that God is speaking of this very matter of “safety”. The first verse begins with the word “so”, or “therefore”. And as we look back over the past chapter to see what the “therefore” is speaking about, we see that one of the primary focuses of these words given by Peter is that of “fiery trials” and “sufferings”, sufferings coming from all quarters, even from within the church, and even from God Himself. Sufferings!

So then, no, being within the church, the “Body of Christ” is not always “safe”. But it is “good”, very “good”! The very best that we can ever hope for!

We read and hear about these matters of troubles and suffering and lack of safety taking place in some of the big-church congregations, but those troubles often seem far removed from us. Where the difficulties are most felt and understood by you and me is at our local level, within the smaller individual bodies of believers like ours here at Houlika Presbyterian Church. And simply put, we are just ordinary people with ordinary lives, just a group of wretched sinners that have recognized our dilemma of needing a Savior and have received the salvation that Christ has offered to us. And we gather here each Sunday to praise and worship the Lord Jesus for all that He has done for us, and then also hoping to bless one another, offering comfort and joy and fellowship to each other. And that is all very, very good!

But with all that being true, where and how does unity and safety and joy sometimes, perhaps often, go wrong within churches like ours? The answer is, the “world, the flesh and the devil” do not stop at that doorway as we walk in each Sunday. In one way, that is good, in that this is the only place that the “world, the flesh and the devil” can be properly dealt with, the world redeemed, the flesh reborn and the devil defeated.

But our preparation to deal with those enemies and our defenses against their attacks against us never seem to be fully adequate. And so, as we go about all the many activities and duties of the church, we often suffer.

What are some of the most obvious pitfalls and weapons that are used to disrupt what should be a haven of safety and protection within the church? According to these words here in our text, the first and most effective tool used to disrupt our haven of safety and joy is that of “pride”. The word, “pride” is not used here in this passage, although the word “proud” is; but the counterpart of “pride”, “humility” is used, and so we know then that “pride” will be our biggest stumbling block to unity and peace and safety and joy within a church. And that is where our message will focus today, on “pride”. In truth, “Pride” in any place or circumstance is a sure and certain destructive force to reckon with. But when pride is allowed to catch root and grow and flourish within a church, the resulting effects can be especially devastating.

Here, through the words of the Apostle Peter, God is giving an especially strong warning to the people of this church. And while there has not been much mention of “pride” being of particular issue in any of the previous chapters of this Book, these words seem to be more than just a preventive measure of warning.

Here, Peter begins by addressing the “Elders”, the leaders of the church, because it is in the leadership that such matters as “pride” and the “world, the flesh and the devil” will either gain their momentum or be stifled. Peter strongly exhorts these “Elders” to carry

out their “duties” in a just and diligent manner, because it is in the leadership of the “Elders” that the church will have its first line of defense.

Listen, verse 2,

² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, 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. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Peter 5:1-4 (ESV))

Here, the word “elder” doesn’t necessarily imply an older aged man, though an “Elder” should be of sufficient age to have experienced many things and to have gained “Spiritual” wisdom from those experiences.

But above all, there is no room for “pride” within an “Elder’s” heart as he carries out the duties of his position. In our Presbyterian Churches, the position of “Elder” is regarded to be one of “high Spiritual calling”, leading the church in all matters “Spiritual”.

It would seem, as we look at our small churches here in rural Mississippi, that “pride” would not be the biggest of issues, with such small congregations and minimal finances to deal with. But “pride” can be a wretched enemy in any size church. Sometimes our rural churches have been “ruled over” by select families with no other voices allowed within the decision making for several generations.

It is imperative that we acknowledge that “pride” does not stop at the door of any church, and that neither does the chief proponent of pride, Satan himself. Here, we are warned about that. Verse 8,

⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. (1 Peter 5:5-8-9 (ESV))

Satan and His minions are very, very real. And they are ever and always at work doing what they do best. They “steal, they kill and they destroy”. And they do it in so many ways, from simple rumors, to accusations, to anger and frustration, lack of forgiveness and on and on.

And surely within the devil’s handiwork will almost always be the underpinnings of “pride”. I like the way that Oswald Chambers defines “pride”. He calls it, “my claim to my right to myself”. That seems to say it all! As each church member walks through the

doorway of their church each Sunday, “pride” walks in with us. And so also, do the demons of satan.

Frightful isn't it. We want to think that everyone within the pews are loving and kind and trustworthy. And that satan's demons are barred at the door. But they are not, that is, unless we do our part. Listen to these words again.

⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. (1 Peter 5:5-8-9 (ESV))

Here, we are told that the devil (and his demons) are simply a matter of fact. They really do roan to and fro, everywhere, in churches, outside of churches, everywhere, seeking whom they may “devour”. Isn't that a scary word, “devour”, so graphic. I don't even want to think about being “devoured”. But folks, this is taking place every day, all around us, in our neighborhoods, in our families, in our friendships, and unfortunately within our churches, demons grabbing hold of men and women's minds and emotions and leading them to do things they would not otherwise do.

A close relative of ours, a beautiful young wife, mother and part time member of the staff of a thriving church, suddenly found herself being pursued and tempted and seduced by the Pastor. The affair went on for several months before the devil took his next step in the relationship, that of revealing it to the church membership, immediately “devouring” the church and many of its members.

Folks, satan and his demons are crafty and well skilled at their trade. They “steal, they kill, and they destroy”. And they are constantly roaming to fro seeking whom they may devour.

The dear family that I just spoke about has somehow been able to survive that awful episode in their lives. But no sooner did they change to a different church that a similar incident involving a whole other family took place at that new church, destroying it. Truly, satan does roam to and fro, seeking whom he may devour.

What is the remedy for such matters as “satan's” attacks and the ravages of “pride”? We're told in James 4,

⁶ . . . “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” ⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (James 4:6-8 (ESV))

This is God's perfect remedy. The problem is "pride", the enemies are the "world, the flesh and the devil" and the remedy begins with "humility". Yes, unfortunately, if we want to continue down the path that satan sets us on, God will permit us to travel that path, all the way to our being devoured and destroyed. But if we will "humble" ourselves, God's grace will begin to prevail. When we submit ourselves to God and resist the devil, the devil and his demons will flee from us. When we draw near to God, He draws near to us.

This is God's remedy and it is a perfect one. But how do we begin to do our part? We start by listening for and hearing the gentle call of Jesus. In Matthew 11, He tells us²⁸ "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."²⁹ "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS."³⁰ "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30 (NASB))

Note carefully in those words that Jesus only mentions one thing about Himself that He wants us to learn, "humility".

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Yes, Jesus wants us to learn many things about Him, but none is as important as His "humility". And note those same words also in verse 5 of our text,

⁵ . . . 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.
(1 Peter 5:5-7 (ESV))

"Humility" must be the guiding force within the church, any church, young people and old, large church or small, whatever the circumstance or venue. Humility is the only character quality that can carry a church through all of its many difficulties and turmoil. One last thought before we close . . . verses 10 and 11,

¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.
(1 Peter 5:1-11 (ESV))

We don't like the thought of "suffering" being a part of our church membership, so much so that many members, at the first onset of suffering quickly change to a different church. And that takes place over and over again throughout their lives.

But folks, our churches were built for suffering, called in other places in these scriptures, "the sufferings of Christ". Suffering is a needful involvement. It is how we help our fellow believers to get through their difficulties of life, and in turn, they help us through our difficulties. It is what the "body of Christ" is supposed to do.

So may I encourage each of us to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, but to faithfully and humbly gather ourselves together each week to praise and worship our Lord. And if we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us and bless us beyond any measure we could ever hope for or imagine.

Listen as we close! Verse 5,

⁵ . . . 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.

(1 Peter 5:5-7 (ESV))