

## Humbled by the Gospel

<sup>17</sup> And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay *here* in fear; <sup>18</sup> knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. <sup>20</sup> He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you <sup>21</sup> who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. (1 Peter 1:17–21)

One of the famous Christians of the ancient church was Benedict of Nursia. He lived in the fifth century at a time when the church was in turmoil, assailed by corruption from within, social upheaval with the collapse of the Roman empire. He established a Christian community, and taught a way of life to survive the suffering and turmoil that was enveloping everyone.

One of Benedict's famous teachings is what he called the ladder. He pictured the Christian life as a ladder which eventually leads to God and eternal life with God. But this ladder is a paradox. Normally, we simply climb ladders. But this ladder is a kind of paradoxical ladder. To ascend this ladder, you have to go down. Conversely, if you try to push yourself up, you end up going down. By this, Benedict illustrated the idea of humility. In biblical teaching, whoever humbles himself will be exalted, but whoever exalts himself will be abased. Proverbs teaches "When pride comes, then comes shame, but with the lowly is wisdom" "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" "Before honour is humility, and with the lowly is wisdom". So the Bible teaches that humility is the way we grow and become more and more like Christ.

Benedict taught twelve steps of descending to ascend: Fear God, submit your will to His, obey authority, endure hardship patiently, confess sins, accept lowly tasks, see yourself as the least, follow community rule, restrain speech, carry yourself with reverence, speak gently, and let inner humility show outwardly.

As believers suffer, part of their armour is hope, part of their armour is holiness. But a third, powerful part of a Christian's armour during suffering is humility.

Humility, like holiness, is badly misunderstood. Just as people hear holiness and imagine church bells and incense and candles, so people have some odd ideas about humility. If I asked you, what comes into your mind when you imagine a humble person, what would you say? Perhaps you'd picture a rather apologetic, shy and retiring person, eyes down, self-deprecating? Is that humility?

This is important, because we're going to see that humility is commanded in this passage. And we'll soon find out why. Peter is going to describe suffering at the hands of unjust authorities, cruel and harsh workplace managers or authorities, ungodly and unreasonable spouses, and broad rejection for being a Christian. Now one of the ways to make your suffering worse is to respond with pride. Pride says, "I don't deserve this treatment. I'm better than this! I don't have to take this! I don't have to put up with these rules, this pettiness at work, by the government! I refuse to submit to all this! I'm nobody's doormat, nobody's fool! I expect to be respected, treated better."

In our fallenness, we retaliate. We become resentful, vengeful, even bitter. We assume, and the world keeps telling us, that you must fight fire with fire. Stand up for yourself! You don't have to take this!

Now it's not always pride to desire respect, or to want fair treatment, or even to seek change from your authorities. But it is always pride to be angry, to feel entitled, permanently aggrieved,

permanently resentful. And this kind of pride throws fuel on the fire. There's already a fire of sinfulness and selfishness coming from the world, from your authorities, you throw some pride in there, and it just got hotter. "By pride comes nothing but strife, But with the well-advised is wisdom. (Proverbs 13:10) Some people I meet in the counselling room have spent decades "standing up for themselves" and that's why conflict lights up everywhere they go. Every relationship they have, every domain of life is tinged or singed with the fire of conflict, because they are, in fact, very, very, proud.

But humility is more like a fire retardant or extinguisher. It won't always put out the fire of unfair treatment or suffering, but it will insulate you from much of the heat, and you won't add more sinful fuel to the fire. Humility gives you a posture to adopt in the face of suffering, an attitude that will calm your soul, and strengthen your resolve.

Humility is one of those virtues that we always get wrong when we try to "feel humble". When we try to do that, we are really just acting, and trying to pretend we're less talented than we are, or less gifted, or less responsible. And all that ends up happening is that soon our pride becomes quite impressed with how humble we've been, especially relative to all those other proud people. You can't get at humility that way, because humility is a kind of self-forgetfulness, and as long as you're thinking about how humble you are, you are not forgetting yourself.

So Peter shows us how it is done. In this passage, there is one simple command: conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay *here* in fear; Live your lives as pilgrims with humble reverence, with a deep awe and respect and humility. But everything surrounding that command are things to know, truths to encounter that humble us when we understand them. Humility comes by being confronted with truth, truths that overawe us, truths that stun us, truths that make us feel small. That moment when you finally scale that long hike or climb up, and then suddenly see the view from the top of the peak, and you see how high and vast the mountains are, how small and tiny things look from that height, and you instantly are humbled. The contrast between the size of creation and your size simply does that to you, you don't try to do it. You are transported out of yourself as you encounter the power, the glory, the majesty of God's works, and you feel awe, humility, gratitude.

That's what Peter is going to do in the passage. To teach us the humility we will need to face suffering, Peter is going to take us to the mountaintop vistas of the Gospel. The enormous realities behind our salvation, if we simply climb high enough to see them, and see them clearly, will fill us with humility. We will conduct the time of our sojourn here in fear, in respect.

We've already been seeing some awe-inspiring sights: having been chosen, born again, given an eternal inheritance, kept by God's power, enabled to believe and love Christ we haven't seen, living in the age of fulfilment. So Peter is doing more of the same here, but he now wants this practical result, that we will be humbled, so that all our conduct will have humility. Just as we saw that all our conduct is to be holy, so all our conduct is to be humble.

## **I. Be Humbled By the Position of Your Father**

<sup>17</sup> And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay *here* in fear;

Christians call on God as Father. One of the marks of being born again, is we acknowledge a family relationship. We no longer address God merely as God, but as Father. Jesus taught us to pray, and the first words are "Our Father". Both in how we think of Him, and in how we address Him in prayer, we regard Him as Father. This means closeness, intimacy, special favour. We are not God's employees, or God's contract labourers. We are God's children.

The goodness and kindness of that arrangement filled the apostle John with awe and humility. Listen to his humbled amazement: Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God (1 John 3:1). One paraphrase put it this way: “<sup>1</sup> See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are! (1 John 3:1)

But the really humbling thing comes when we contemplate who our Father is. Peter says He is the Final Judge of every human, based on their works. He shows no partiality, no favouritism. His judgement is utterly pure, never swayed by people's rank or status or wealth. He doesn't change His standard when kings appear before His judgement seat, nor when it is an unknown beggar or orphan. The most famous people in the world right now will be judged with exactly the same standard as all the unknowns. Our Father is the Judge.

For the LORD your God *is* God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. (Deuteronomy 10:17)

The apostle John gives us the picture of the Great and Final Day of Judgement.

<sup>11</sup> Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. <sup>13</sup> The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. <sup>14</sup> Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. <sup>15</sup> And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11–15)

The face of the Judge causes creation itself to want to flee away, so holy and perfect is He. I cannot imagine the trembling and the awful fear that will grip the hearts of those who have never accepted God's Son and can call God Father. That is the only way your name is written in the book of Life. Jesus tells you that in the beginning of Revelation: <sup>5</sup> He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. (Revelation 3:5)

If Jesus confesses you, because you have confessed Him, you have had His overcoming, persevering faith, He will confess you before the Father because you are His and He is yours. Christians are those found in the Book of Life, and our works are judged not to condemn us, but to evaluate if they were built on the gold, silver and precious stones of love for God, or whether they were the perishable, combustible materials of selfish, fleshliness. Whatever remains will turn out to be a reward for a Christian. God has judged your sin on the cross, but He will still judge your works by His perfect standard.

Now the knowledge that this is our Father, should cause us to be filled with a healthy and deep respect. Look at much of the Christianity around you and ask, does this have a healthy respect for God as my Father and Judge? Look at the music. Look at the worship services. Above all, look at the conduct. Do professing Christians appear humbled to be children of the Great Judge?

You remember the priests of Malachi's day decided to give God the throwaways of their flocks: bruised, injured, defective animals. Their respect for God was so low that they gave Him the mere leftovers of their service.

A son honours *his* father, And a servant *his* master. If then I am the Father, Where *is* My honour? And if I *am*

a Master, Where *is* My reverence? Says the LORD of hosts To you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?' (Malachi 1:6)

And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, *Is it* not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, *Is it* not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?" Says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 1:8)

God says, try your level of respect, your level of reverence, of humility, with one of your human authorities and see if they will accept it. If not, how can you offer such things to Me, your ultimate Authority?

To see such goodness, that He is our Father, combined with such greatness, that He will judge the whole cosmos who will wish to flee from Him that day, should combine to produce deep awe, respect, honour, a deep sense of gratitude, a profound submission to His will, a childlike awe of His person, a deep dependence on His power, and a diligent zeal to please Him? I should stand at the edge of the cliff, look down and see the Lake of Fire roaring in intensity, look up to see a city of indescribable beauty, and know the difference between the Judge sending me down there or taking me up there is because He has graciously become the One I call Father. The spiritual vertigo I should feel, the knot in my stomach is humility. And I should conduct the entire time of my pilgrimage here with humility.

But there is more. You are not only to be humbled by the identity of our Father, but you must

## **II. Be Humbled By the Price of Your Redemption**

knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

Just like verse 17 began with a conditional "if", so verse 18 begins with a causal word: *knowing*. By knowing what he's about to say, you can conduct the time of your stay here in humble fear.

So what must we know? We were not bought out of our aimless way of life that we got from our family and culture by mere perishable money. We were bought with the costly life and death on the cross of Jesus Christ, who was perfect.

Redeemed, redemption had a long OT history. When Israel were rescued out of slavery in Egypt, they saw it as being redeemed. Freed from slavery. In the Mosaic Law, there were laws for people to redeem someone who had become a servant, or even redeem some land that was going to pass out of a family's hands. By the time of the NT, the Graeco-Romans were very familiar with redemption. The Roman world had slave markets, where humans were put on display, like goods in a shop window. Buyers, consumers would come and buy, redeem a slave to become their own.

And in Rome, different kinds of slaves would fetch different prices. Slaves didn't only do manual labour. Skilled slaves were employed as cooks, as musicians, as teachers, as doctors. The more educated a slave, the more years a household could get from them, the more they cost. Skilled slaves could fetch three times what an unskilled slave would cost. In the case of women, the more attractive and younger, the higher the price, sometimes up to 6000 denarii, the price of a modest villa outside of Rome.

"The slave would receive his or her freedom after depositing money in the temple of a god or goddess, money which would then be paid via the temple's treasury to the slave's owner with the

thought that the god or goddess was buying the slave (Deissmann 1927: 318–34). The former slave would then be free in the eyes of his former owner and society but would be considered a slave of the god or goddess. The sum of money paid for the redemption was referred to as the τιμή (*timē*, price), and the slave was considered to have been redeemed by the deity.<sup>1</sup>

Now Peter tells us that we needed to be bought out of not a slave market, but a way of life. He calls it your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers. The way of living that our cultures gave us, living for money, and pleasure, and fame, and influence. The way of life that was filled with aimless, fruitless, empty, useless pursuits. The hollow feeling after New Year's, the empty dullness after the parties were over, the wretchedness and self-loathing after the drunkenness and sexual exploits, and drugs and boasting and the revelling and carousing and competing. We didn't know any better; it was handed down to us by our family, by the wider culture, by the media. They all told us: this is the life! This is living! We were stuck in it, and someone needed to come and purchase us from slavery to empty, fruitless worldliness.

Peter says, our redemption was not with physical currency: the gold and silver coins they used in Rome. As valuable as they were, they were going to age, decay, go out of use. Same thing happens to our money. It's mostly now just digital numbers, but this thing called inflation means that those numbers are decaying every day.

The question is, how much would you have paid in perishing, decaying, corruptible currency to buy someone out of wasting their life? To rescue a girl now in a life of prostitution, what would you pay her 'employers' to release her forever?

Peter says, our redemption out of our unsaved life was not paid in any physical currency, it was paid in blood. In fact, the word Peter uses for precious is that same word that was used when a Roman slave was said to have been redeemed by a god: time. The bleeding death of Jesus on the cross was the price to buy us out of vanity and uselessness.

Jesus was just like the sacrificial lamb that was offered at Passover. The Lamb had to be without any defects, no outward blemishes, an animal ritually acceptable to be sacrificed to God. The first word Peter uses refers to the ritual perfection of the animals, but the second word is used only of humans: without moral defect, without sin. Jesus lived the only life without sin, without disobedience, without rebellion. His life was a Perfect life, and so a life of infinite value, untarnished by anything.

I think we all feel a greater grief when children are killed. People often speak of innocent children. And of course, theologically, no one is born without sin, no one is truly innocent. But we do sense some truth. The horror of children dying is their lives seem so new, so fresh, so unstained by sinful choices, yet unpolluted by chosen wickedness. And most adults would rather give up themselves than see their children die.

Well, picture a thirty-something-year-old man with all and more of the innocence of children. A completely unspotted life. That life which of all lives should be shielded, protected. A thousand sinners should rather die instead of Him. But it becomes the other way around. He dies for sinners. When He died on the cross, those drops of blood, dripping down from the cross, were worth more than if it had been molten gold dripping down. Because the life is in the blood, according to Leviticus 17:11, and as His life was being given up and over as a substitute for sinners, as His perfection could both absorb our evil, and its punishment, and then come out the other side three

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<sup>1</sup> Jobes, K. H. (2005). *1 Peter* (pp. 116–117). Baker Academic.

days later, vindicated, perfect, without sin.

The price of redeeming us was the infinite cost of the Son's life given up. Now some get this exactly wrong. They say, "I must be worth so much to God, I must be so valuable to God that this is what He paid for me." Ironically, instead of being humbled, they become proud, proud of supposed worth.

That's all wrong, Peter expect us to be humbled by the price of our redemption. It's not that I was worth that much. It's that that's what my sin cost. It's not that I was that valuable. It's that that's how deep my debt to God was.

And when we consider that God was willing to spend that price, it should fill us with awe. We should come off the slave-block, see a Master who just spent an infinite price to buy us and desire to conduct the time of our stay here in fear. Gratitude, dependence, brokenness over my sin, dependence, childlike awe, desire to please, these should well up in our heart as we consider the price of our redemption.

The position of our Father-Judge humbles us. The price of our redemption humbles us.

### **III. Be Humbled By The Plan of Your Salvation**

He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you <sup>21</sup> who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Now Peter is going to awe us by making us face the dizzying span of time that the plan of salvation takes in. He first faces us in the very deeps of eternity past, and then turning us to take in the whole sweep of history to this present day.

Jesus was foreordained before the foundation of the world. This is the same word used in 1:2, where we learned we were chosen according to God's foreknowledge. The two correspond. The foreknowledge of Christ's redeeming death (1:19–20) corresponds to God's electing foreknowledge of those who would be redeemed by it. God knew the complete program of redemption before the foundation of the world. It's a plan which Paul describes as a golden chain with each link connecting to the other.

<sup>29</sup> For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. <sup>30</sup> Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Romans 8:29–30)

So Peter says, in these last days, this eternal plan has come to pass. What occurred before Genesis 1:1 has been fleshed out here and now. And it is not fantasy, but historical fact as evidenced by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, by His ascension and glorification.

God knew, planned and chose His Son to be the redeeming Saviour of the world before He spoke the words, "Let there be light". That confuses many people. They see this plan and wonder why God seemingly planned a world where Satan fell, and tempted Adam and Eve to fall, bringing about sin and death, and then leading to the death of Christ to save sinners. Couldn't God have just prevented all of that from happening?

But that's precisely Peter's point. God was not just reacting to man's sin, as if salvation was a contingency plan for our unexpected sin. No, the whole plan was known and conceived before the

world began. That doesn't mean that God is the creator of evil. But it does mean He foresaw it in his creatures, and included it in the final plan.

But why? It seems the answer is this: A world in which sin and evil enters, in which God lovingly sends His Son, who is graciously manifest to us as a man (v20) who mercifully dies, rises again and ascends to glory (21), who then calls on sinners to believe, to place their faith and hope in God through His Son, that that is a world with more glory to God than a world where that didn't happen. The world that needed redemption is like a prism that splits the white light of God's glory into its various colours, that we can now see more clearly. Without the prism, we see white light, with it, we see red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. Without the plan of redemption we saw a holy, glorious God. But with the plan of redemption we see that that holy glory is love, mercy, grace, patience, meekness, gentleness, justice, kindness. We see more of God's beauty, so there is more joy, more pleasure, more delight for those creatures that choose God, than if He hadn't.

To think that an eternal plan, begun before the angels looked on the first galaxies, has now come into history, and we have been caught up in it and find ourselves believing in God, placing our faith and hope in God fills us with awe, with humility, with wonder. And again, these mysteries of election, of a plan that involved us before we were born, is it supposed to produce pride? The main verb again is, conduct yourselves in the time of your stay in fear. The scope of this plan fills us with childlike awe, gratitude, dependence, submission.

To think that the ancient faith of Israel, prophesied by prophets has now come manifest in our times, and through Jesus we are believing on the true and living God of Israel, should fill us with awe, humility, and wonder.

You can't be humbled by the mountain grandeur unless you climb that mountain. And you can only be humbled by the Father's position, redemption's price, and salvation's plan, if you often re-visit it, come back to it. Tonight is the Lord's Supper, a moment where we stop and stare at the price of redemption. You cannot make or fake humility, you have to be humbled by being dwarfed by these gigantic realities. You have to break with a world of distraction, and meditate deeply on them. Put away that little black mirror we call a cell-phone screen, look up and out, and stargaze at who your Father is, at what Christ paid for you, at how far back this plan goes. And then let that humility insulate you against the fire of trials and suffering. As Benedict said about going down on the ladder of humility “in obedience under difficult, unfavourable, or even unjust conditions, his heart quietly embraces suffering and endures it without weakening or seeking escape. For Scripture says: ‘Whoever perseveres to the end will be saved’ (Matt. 10:22).”