

The Bible Says Commentary

1 Peter 5:5-7 Meaning

In 1 Peter 5:5-7, Peter shifts from addressing the church leaders and now addresses the church members. Presuming the elders and leaders will be older men, Peter now says: You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders (v. 5).

The use of likewise refers to a comparable manner of obedience to Christ through submission to earthly authorities Peter has covered throughout this letter:

- To governing authority (1 Peter 2:13).
- To employment authority (1 Peter 2:18).
- Wives to husbands, husbands to wives, and everyone to one another (1 Peter 3:1, 7-8).

Just as leaders are not to lead “under compulsion,” each believer is to voluntarily submit to these authorities in their service to Christ. Nowhere in this letter does Peter endow anyone with the authority to impose submission on others.

God invites His people to voluntarily follow His ways and promises them great blessing for doing so. This is a consistent pattern throughout scripture. It began in Eden, when God allowed Adam and Eve the choice of whether to follow His ways and made the consequences of their decision clear (Genesis 2:17). It continued when God allowed Israel to choose whether to keep His covenant, the Law, but made the consequences clear (Deuteronomy 30:15-19).

This pattern continues in the New Testament. Believers are made righteous in His sight through faith alone, just as Abraham was made righteous (John 3:14-15, Romans 4:3, Genesis 15:6). This is similar to God choosing Israel to be His people simply because He loved them (Deuteronomy 4:37, 7:7-8). Following the biblical pattern, New Testament believers are God’s people and have a choice whether to follow in God’s ways and receive the blessings of inheriting His promises (Colossians 3:23).

In the context of Chapter 5, just as the elders are to be obedient to Christ in leading the church “flock,” in a similar manner, you younger men, indicating the members under the care of the elders, are to be obedient to Christ by being subject to your elders. The words be subject is the same word used for “submission” used in 1 Peter 3:1, 7. The idea in 1 Peter 3:1, 7 is for each spouse to seek the best interest of the other.

By submitting to the elders in the church, the younger men are seeking the best for the church body. They are seeking unity which leads to greater potential for ministry impact. An exception would be the general admonition to all believers to resist false teachers (Titus 1:9, Jude 1:3-4). But this addresses the general rule.

Next, Peter makes an appeal, and all of you, referring to everyone in the church, including leaders. His appeal is specific, clothe yourselves with humility (v. 5). The idea of clothe yourselves means literally to tie around yourself like you would a tunic or robe. Just as people see your clothing rather than your skin, when people observe your life let them see humility.

What everyone in a local church is to clothe themselves with is humility, the attitude and action of putting others above yourself (Philippians 2:3). In this context, the attitude and action of humility is to be directed toward one another, meaning elders to members, members to elders, and members to members.

Why is humility so important? Peter explains, for, introducing a reason or explanation why believers are to be humble toward one another. The reason given is a quote from Proverbs 3:34, God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble (v. 5).

Humility is important because that is what God favors, He gives grace to the humble. We can observe that humility is the willingness to see and live in reality as it is. Scripture says Moses was the most humble man in all the earth (Numbers 12:3). We can see from his example that he consistently believed God and followed His instructions. We also see that God held Moses to a very high standard, not allowing him to enter the Promised Land as a consequence of a rare time Moses did not fully heed God's command; Moses had been commanded to speak to a rock to bring out water for the Israelites, but Moses instead struck the rock with his staff, disobeying God's command (Numbers 20:7, 11-12).

The opposite of being proud is to be humble. In Habakkuk 2:4 we can observe that faith is posed as an opposite to pride. Pride can be viewed as being faith in self, while biblical faith is believing what God says is true. Thus, humility must be rooted in faith.

To submit to God in following His commands is to believe that His ways are for our best. It is to believe that His promises are true, and He will actually reward those who are faithful in following Him (Hebrews 11:6). And it is believing that His blessings are superior to those promised by the world (unfading rather than temporal glory). God's word is truth (John 17:17).

Believing the truth of God's word roots us in reality, and living in reality cloaks us in humility. The principle that God is opposed to the proud is illustrated throughout God's Word. From Lucifer (Isaiah 14:13-15, Ezekiel 28:16-18) to the antichrist (Daniel 11:36), from Cain (Genesis 3:5-12) to the generation of the last days (2 Timothy 3:1-2), from the people of Babel (Genesis 11:4, 7-8) to the Babylonians in the Tribulation (Revelation 11:5-9), from King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:30-32) to King Herod (Acts 12:21-23).

The principle that God gives grace to the humble is also illustrated throughout the Bible. The Greek word "charis" is translated as grace. "Charis" refers to favor, as in Luke 2:51 which says Jesus grew in favor ("charis") with God and man. In this case we are speaking of God's favor. God grants His favor, rewarding those who follow Him.

God's favor is never earned in the sense of meeting a standard by which we can demand anything from God. This is because God is above all, so cannot be held to a standard. God's favor is always given, which is why this verse says God gives grace to those who humble themselves and follow His commands. He does not owe favor to anyone, but His promise is that He gives favor to those who humble themselves to follow His ways.

God makes clear what pleases Him. He is pleased when His people humble themselves under His authority and submit to Him. God does not compel submission in this life. There will come a time when all will submit to Him (Philippians 2:10). But in this life, submission is left to our choice. To voluntarily submit to God because we believe that His ways are true and right, that His ways are for our best, is how we will gain God's favor (grace). He promises to reward those who love Him to an extent that exceeds our capacity to comprehend (1 Corinthians 2:9).

There are many examples in scripture of people who humbled themselves, submitted to God, and were consequently rewarded. This includes Noah (Genesis 6:8), Abraham (Genesis 17:5), Moses (Exodus 3:6), Joseph (Genesis 50:20), King Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:5-6) and even the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:34-37).

Not only is the principle that God rewards the humble illustrated in the Bible, it is also directly revealed in other scriptures in addition to verses 5-6 (Proverbs 3:34, James 4:6). In this letter, Peter extends the principle of submitting to God by telling believers that they are submitting to God when they also submit to the order He established within government and marriage, as well as within the local church.

God's grace or favor also includes providing help for us when we are in need (Hebrews 4:16). By humbling ourselves and asking for His help, God promises to grant His favor that gives believers the power to do God's will (Hebrews 4:16).

Having stated the principle that God gives grace to the humble, Peter exhorts his readers, Therefore, and adds a promise of reward that should encourage believers to humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time (v.6). It is human nature to desire affirmation, to be exalted. For example, parents love to see their children receive rewards and children love being recognized. The world offers many promises of ways to be exalted; all are empty or temporary. But God's promise is that to those who trust Him and do not seek to be exalted in the ways of the world, God will exalt you at the proper time. Consistent with the context of the entire letter, believers are exhorted to voluntarily submit to God by following His ways. This submission is to acknowledge that God has a mighty hand. The hand here likely refers to the authority of God. We can see in Matthew 17:22 the same Greek word translated hand here in verse 6. There, when Jesus was arrested, it is said He was delivered "into the hands of men," meaning into their authority.

To acknowledge that God's authority is mighty is to recognize that He has the power to deliver on His promises. This means believing that His promised rewards are certain. To submit to God's mighty hand is to trust that enduring suffering for the sake of Christ will result in being exalted by God. This will occur at a time of His choosing, which means we are also to trust that God's time is the proper time.

God promises that He will exalt those who humble themselves at the proper time. That God will reward His people at the proper time means there is a definite time, but it will be a time and manner of God's choosing rather than of our own. We know from other passages that at least one of the proper times will include the time of resurrection and rewards (1 Corinthians 3:11-15, 4:5, 2 Corinthians 5:10).

But God might choose other times to reward His people as well. An example might be Mark 10:30, which indicates that believers who endure suffering together serve as a reward for one another. To suffer with a teammate for a shared goal creates a relational bond that is itself a reward.

As we saw earlier in this letter, when believers place themselves under God's power and authority and live according to His commands, they can expect to endure rejection and suffering from the world. In this way they will be walking in the same experience of rejection as Jesus (1 Peter 3:18). The Apostle Paul said the same, asserting that those who desire to live a godly life should expect to be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12).

Enduring persecution will naturally lead to distress. It is difficult to endure rejection and loss for simply doing what is right. We know that Peter was writing this letter to people experiencing such difficulty, as he mentions it in this letter (1 Peter 1:6-7, 3:14, 4:12). When such distress and difficulties come, Peter does not tell us to tough it out on our own. Although God wants us to patiently await His reward, He is here to help us through our difficulties. As believers endure difficulties in this life, we should be casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you (v. 7).

The word anxiety refers to the worries of this life (Matthew 6:25, 34, 13:32). In His teaching, Jesus used the same Greek word "merimna," translated in verse 7 as anxiety. "Merimna" is used in Jesus's parable of the seed to describe the "worries" of the world and of riches. These distract from the good things of God and cause unfruitfulness (Matthew 13:22, Mark 4:9, Luke 8:14). In Luke 21:34, Jesus used "merimna" to exhort believers to be ready for His return and not get distracted by "the worries" of life. We often engage in anxiety to create an illusion of control, as though we can control the future with our worry. But reality is that we cannot control the past with regret and we cannot control the future with anxiety.

Since humility is the willingness to see reality as it is, part of humbling ourselves under God's mighty hand is to trust a genuine reality, namely that God is in control of the future. That frees us to cast our anxiety about the future upon Him. We can do this because we know He cares for us. If we hold on to anxiety, it may distract and discourage us during our times of suffering. Instead of holding on to anxiety, we are instructed to be constantly casting our anxiety. The term casting is a continual action. The action is to throw from one place to another, as in Luke 19:35 where they "threw" (same word) their coats upon the donkey colt for Jesus to ride. In this case it means to transfer our concerns to God.

We are to transfer our worries to Him, referring to God, under whose mighty hand we have humbled ourselves because He cares for you. The word cares means to be concerned about (John 10:13, 12:6, Mark 4:38). We can give up our illusion of control and trust that God has the future in His hands and will exalt in due time those who follow His ways, because of His great care for us.

The specific concern and care from God reflects the same principle stated in Psalm 55:22, "Cast your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken." The providential care God provides those who humbly cast their anxiety upon Him is

the grace to endure whatever suffering they are experiencing (1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Corinthians 12:7-9).

Believers are to orient their lives to gain a good report in the day of judgment. It can be daunting to realize that all we say and do will be judged by Christ at His judgment. As Jesus said in Matthew 12:36, even every “idle word” spoken will be judged. 2 Corinthians 5:10-11 makes it clear that we ought to “fear” the day of judgment, meaning we should orient our current actions based on concern for consequences in the day of judgment.

1 John 4:18 affirms we should orient our lives based on fear of the judgment. It includes a standard for the fear receding: we can cease to worry about the judgment if we live as Jesus lived. Since none of us can live up to that standard, then what are we to do? We can rest in the reality that He cares for us.

The good news, the amazingly good news, is that He cares for you. God wants us to succeed and greatly desires to reward us. We can continually be casting our care upon Him and trust that any effort given to please Him will be met with an enthusiasm only God could give. As Jesus said, God is constantly caring about the sparrows, so we should be encouraged because He cares much more for us (Luke 12:6). Jesus went out of His way to indicate that even the smallest matters done in obedience to Him would be greatly rewarded (Matthew 10:42).