

"GOD...GIVETH GRACE TO THE HUMBLE"

BY B. G. ECHOLS

"Likewise, ye younger, be subject unto the elder. Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another: for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).

While this verse is exceedingly clear, it presents a problem. Does the word "elder" refer to the overseers of the flock or to all older people? If the elders are meant, why call the rest "younger"? If older people, how does it apply? Many commentators think the reference is to all members to be subject to the elders as overseers. Yet it is possible that Peter is speaking of the respect that is due to age (1 Timothy 5:1). Respect for age is graceful, becoming, and commanded in the Scripture. Youth is often tempted to be impatient with their seniors, and to regard their elders as antiquated if not obstructive. Thus they are exhorted to submissiveness (Titus 2:6).

There are limits to authority and to submission. In all things God must be first, but history tells us that submission to elders is usually wise and safe. One of the great problems of our society, and sometimes in the church, is resistance to submission of any kind and the obedience required. We must learn to be submissive to God and to those who are our spiritual guides and the seniors. In the hurry of modern life we are too much losing reverence for age and experience. A few years ago there was proclaimed the horrid doctrine of "Never trust anyone over thirty." No society can be safe or healthy with such an attitude.

"Gird yourselves" pictures one putting on the apron worn by slaves at work. Humility is the garment which must be fastened on us. It involves two things. First is recognizing one's place in life without thinking or pretending to be more than you are. That means realizing that all that is worthwhile is from God. Second is putting the interest of others first. Christians must be ready to submit to the humblest works of charity for each other. Christ is our example (Jn. 13:4,5). Christ wore the robe of humility. Humility is active, not passive. This is so

contrary to our usual attitude that it is a victory for unselfishness when we truly put on the robe of humility (Eph. 5:21). Such isn't pleasant to fleshly ideas.

If we are Christ's we gird ourselves with humility which is the uniform of His household. We must be humble enough to be ready to do anything and everything He requires. The church must never have the worldly attitude of "dog eat dog." Some services we may be willing to do without humility, but only the humbles will take on any service for another, especially in times of trial and difficulty. Some early Christians reportedly sold themselves into slavery to be able to preach to slaves. Satan has numerous claws out to snatch the dress of humility off us. We must buckle it tight. It must be an unmovable temper of lowly estimation of self. None are to be masters in the church of Christ. Humility is the preparation for service; service is the test of humility. If we do not feel ourselves to be needy and low, we will never be able or willing to help those who are needy and low. I am afraid we are often too scantily clad, if not naked, when we should be dressed in humility.

"Resisteth" is a strong word used to describe an army set against an enemy. This is God's stance toward the proud. Peter quotes the Greek Version of Proverbs 3:34. The Christian must guard against an overbearing and haughty spirit. Why does God resist the proud? Pride leads to rebellion and sin. Because God loves us, He resists the proud. Pride causes us to fail to treat the lowly and poor with the proper respect and consideration. Pride is shown whenever self is put first and refuses to submit to God or man. It is self-righteousness, self-glorification, self-reliance, and self-will. The proud must be brought down if they are to be saved. How can they stand against God? If not humbled now to be saved, they will be humbled later, but lost. The proud man thinks he can take care of himself. If man without

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God is sure to fall, what about the man God actively resists? He is doomed. Humility is the great preserver of peace in churches. Pride is the great disturber and cause of most dissension and divisions in the church.

The heart that is proud has no room for the grace of God. Grace is undeserved, but pride makes one think that all is deserved. Pride is too full of thoughts of self and there is no room for God. If we do not crucify self, self will crucify Christ. Only the lowly-hearted can obey God for they alone can come out of themselves. They recognize their need for forgiveness and Christ's provision of it. The way of self denial is the way to victory. We need to be humble in our actions and in our reactions.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you (1 Peter 5 :6, 7).

We need God's grace and will not have it unless we are humble. Instead of growing up we need to grow down. Self-suppression was not always Peter's characteristic. In the gospels he was always asserting himself; sometimes boasting himself. He learned. Peter, the aged, has grown in gentleness by growing downward. We must humble ourselves. It must be an exercise of faith. There is no blessing in being humbled by God at judgment. Then no grace is given.

We see the example of Jesus (Phil. 2:8). He will exalt those who take up their cross and follow Him. The exaltation will be in His time. The mighty hand of God reminds us of His power and ability. When in pride we resist God's way, we can expect to know His power against us in our rebellion. At the same time, His hand of might can take care of us in need. The hand of Nero, the persecutor, is mighty; but the hand of God is mightier and nearer. His hand can be used in deliver us while bringing judgment on His enemies.

While God is now helping us to bear anxiety, He will abundantly recompense in the end. We can believe He will do this. He will not leave us to a low and ever depressed condition. To prepare us for His ultimate purpose for us, we must now humble ourselves. Exaltation in heaven will only follow humility of earth (Luke 14:7-11). Part of humility is a willingness to wait patiently for things according to God's timetable. Abraham and Sarah tried to speed

things with Hagar and made things worse. God helps those who do not help themselves. When we humble ourselves we are only following the example of Jesus Who humbled Himself on earth and now has a name above every name (Phil. 2:5-11).

Peter quotes the Greek version of Psalm 55:22 which reads, "Cast thy burden upon Jehovah, and he will sustain thee: He will never suffer the righteous to be moved." How do we obey this? We must first confess our lack of faith which produces anxiety. The Lord has both commanded and promised us in this regard (Mt. 6:31-34). Here is one of the deepest secrets of wise and gracious living. True religion is not a burden, but a lift. God knows our needs. Therefore, we must not let our minds be distracted from prayer and service by anxiety over worldly things. Compared to what the early disciples faced, we have few problems. Still, they are real problems. King Hezekiah gives us a most provocative illustration (2 Kings 19:14).

Some naively expect that to be a Christian is to have no problems. Such is not true. To be a Christian is to have the solution to anxiety -- Jesus Christ. Many moderns live as if God is unconcerned about man. Thus if we do wrong it matters little, and if we are in trouble, we will have to solve it all ourselves. Such people might as well be atheists. In times of persecution some Christians may deny the Lord and betray their brethren (Mt. 24:10). God will still care. We do not have to make God care by schemes of our own. God already cares.

Worth Repeating

by W. W. Otey

"Successful preaching has in it three qualities: clearness, earnestness and force. Let a man strive to be so clear that even the dullest will understand, so earnest that even the coldest will feel and so forceful that even the most obstinate will be moved. But in striving to be clear do not confuse clearness with tedious repetitions; and in striving to be earnest do not mistake an assumed 'holy tone' piety for true emotions of the heart; and in seeking for forcefulness do not mistake noise for force."