

The Apron of Humility

One Another Duties

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Bible Text: 1 Peter 5:5; John 13:1-17
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Well, brethren, we are taking up in the preaching tonight prior to observing the Table, and if you have the outline from this morning, we're going to begin immediately at that third of four headings: what is it to be clothed with humility toward one another? And we are working from 1 Peter 5 at verse 5, and I want to begin tonight by going back in the chronology of when 1 Peter was written over 30 years to the eve of the crucifixion and the Lord's discourse in the Upper Room.

Please turn back to John 13.

1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. 2 During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, 4 rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself about. 5 Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. 6 So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you shall understand hereafter." 8 Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." 9 Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head." [And coming to verse 12] 12 So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? 13 You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. 14 If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. 16 Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, neither is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. 17 If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

Glancing back at verse 4 just read, the essence is Jesus took the part of a slave, of a servant, and performed the humble service of washing feet. He took a towel, he girded himself about as a house slave would, and he washed feet. What is now before us in 1 Peter 5:5, "clothe yourselves with humility," seems to strongly suggest that Peter's mind has gone back to that eve; that Peter is recalling that episode that he initially recoiled from, thinking it unfitting, and remembering that episode uses the unusual words he does here in 1 Peter 5:5 30-some years later.

"Clothe yourselves with humility." The imperative "clothe, egkombosathe," rare verb used only here in the New Testament. In the language of Dr. Vaughn, "The verb translated 'clothe yourselves' was built on the root of a word ?? that denoted the apron or the overall that the slave tied over his sleeveless vest to work. The wearing of such an apron set the slave apart from the free man. Some think that there is an allusion, that is here in Peter's language, to our Lord's girding himself with a towel in preparation for the washing of the disciples' feet on the night of his arrest. The verb rendered here 'clothe' signifies 'to tie; to fasten with a knot or a clasp,' was used of a slave who would tie on an apron and the picture is putting on humility as a slave's apron so as to do what the slave did, humble service for others."

To quote some other interpreters. A. T. Robertson writes, "It is quite probable that Peter here is thinking of what Jesus did, John 13:4 and following, when he girded himself with a towel and taught the disciples, Peter in particular, the lesson of humility." In the language of another, "In all probability the term 'clothe, clothe yourselves with humility,' reflects Peter's recollection of the act of Jesus in the Upper Room when he tied on an actual apron and washed the disciples' feet, performing this slave service to which none of them would stoop. The presence of humility as a working virtue is appropriate to all regardless of age." And then one last interpreter that I've used over the years in 1 Peter, "The unusual verb translated 'be clothed' describes putting on a garment which is tied on over others with a knot, that is, an apron. The sense is gird on humility as an apron. Such phraseology particularly when thus used by Peter vividly recalls the Upper Room where Peter saw Jesus gird himself in this way and stoop to wash his disciples' feet."

I read this morning several English renderings of this verse. Here's one I didn't read, the Moffatt translation, "Indeed you must all put on the apron of humility to serve one another," capturing the picturesque imagery behind this verb. The New English Bible, "Indeed all of you should wrap yourselves in the garment of humility towards one another." I did read J. B. Phillips, "wear the overall of humility in serving one another."

It does come to mind, maybe we could do a little research and see what those aprons looked like, and this is somewhat off the top of the head, have some of our ladies sew one and we could mount it somewhere around this building as a reminder of what our Lord did and what we're to do, to clothe humility, to clothe ourselves with humility as an apron, as an overall, and serve one another.

Note the term there in 1 Peter 5:5, "with humility." Again, humility being that pervasive conscious sense, not something put on, but that lowliness arising from an accurate self-assessment of one's self as creature on the one hand and sinner on the other. Again, humility is not a denial of what one has been given in terms of talent, opportunity, success, usefulness or blessing. Humility is not a hand-wringing sense, "I can't do this." Rather, humility is a sense of one's pauper state before one's gracious benefactor who has granted all.

I read this morning the New Testament text where humility as a noun occurs, most of them. I want to read a few tonight where the verb occurs beginning in the 18th chapter of Matthew at verse 4, "Whoever then humbles himself as this child," a child, a picture of dependence, of lowliness, "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." And in Matthew 23:12, "Whoever exalts," whoever lives to display himself in his superiority, his being above others, "shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted."

We have quite a picture of humility in its opposite in the account in Luke 18 of the Pharisee and the sinner. Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee. Now the Pharisee was the man who trusted in himself that he was righteous, viewed others with contempt, they're beneath him, they're below him. "The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself," no sense of dependence, no, a sense of independence and self-sufficiency, he's praying to himself, "I thank thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, even like this tax gatherer." There's the attitude of pride. "But the tax gatherer standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner! I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself," that's what the Pharisee was doing, "everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself," that's what the tax gatherer was doing, "shall be exalted." We read again as a verb one final place that I choose to read in Philippians 2 at verse 8, "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself."

Humility. Clothe yourselves with this pervasive sense of lowliness, lowliness of mind and heart over against self-display and self-promotion and self-exaltation and this attitude of being above and over and better than others. In the language of John Brown, "The humble man has just and therefore lowly views of his own nature as a creature infinitely inferior to, entirely dependent on God." That's reality. "As a sinner inexcusably guilty, thoroughly depraved, righteously doomed to destruction who if saved at all must owe his salvation to the riches of free grace, sovereign mercy." That's reality. He goes on to write what in my opinion is true of a humble man, he says, "His tendency is to notice the excellencies of others rather than their faults while he looks at his own faults rather than his excellencies, and in lowliness of mind esteems others better than himself." That sounds right. "He knows his own deficiencies and faults much more extensively and thoroughly than he can know those of other men, and the charity which always accompanies true humility leads him to attribute what seems to be good in other men to the best principle which can reasonably be supposed to have produced it while it leads him from his necessary ignorance of their motives, to make allowances for their defects

and failings which he cannot make for his own. Humility does not lead a man to overlook or disclaim what God has done in him or by him, but it leads him to give all the glory to Him to whom its due."

I thought back of the case of Nebuchadnezzar, we considered it a long time ago, 20 years ago, in Daniel 4. I turned back to that chapter because I believe it helps illustrate what this humility is we're to clothe ourselves with. In Daniel 4, taking up at verse 29, "Twelve months later he," Nebuchadnezzar, "was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon. The king 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?'" He's preening himself. "I've done this." "While the word was in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you,'" and he spends now seven years out of his mind as a beast in the field. Verse 34, "But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me," his sanity, and now his view of reality is quite different, "and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What has Thou done?' At that time my reason returned to me." He now has a theocentric view of life and himself and he's a sane man. Verse 37, "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride." Nebuchadnezzar knew that full well.

"Clothe yourselves with humility." It's not something that can be feigned or produced by some feigned effort. The humble come to grips with who they truly are, like Nebuchadnezzar, when they see their weakness and frailty before their Creator and their Redeemer. That's the disposition that we are to have towards one another.

Now our fourth heading: why? Why clothe yourselves with humility toward one another? Well, the reason that Peter reads here in the balance of our verse begins with "for," or because, and then he takes the Septuagint reading as James did in his letter, of Proverbs 3:34 and it begins this way, "God is opposed to the proud." That's a strong word, "opposed," sets himself against, sets himself against as an army in battle formation is set against an enemy. In the language of another, "The Almighty, as it were, declares war on the proud."

Note the term "proud." God is opposed, lined up against the proud as an army, the proud literally to show above, that's what the proud do. A proud man shows himself above others, displays himself as above and superior to. Again in the language of another, "Pride calls out God's armies. God sets himself in array against the proud person." What book in the Scripture makes that plain and repetitiously so? Any particular book in the canon? The Proverbs. I read from Proverbs 11 at verse 2, "When pride comes, then comes dishonor. It's just a matter of time. In Proverbs 15 at verse 25, "The LORD will tear down the house." In Proverbs 16 at verse 18, "Pride goes before destruction, And a

haughty spirit before stumbling." And Proverbs 18 at verse 12, "Before destruction the heart of man is haughty." And in Proverbs 29 at verse 23, "A man's pride will bring him low." There are six things which the Lord hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to him, and what's the first thing named that he hates? Haughty eyes. God hates it. He sets himself against the proud. He will bring them down.

So in Peter's rationale here in 1 Peter 5 as to why we are to clothe ourselves with the apron of humility, this working virtue that enables us to selflessly serve one another, he begins by saying, "God is opposed to the proud," but the other side of it is, "gives grace to the humble." The grace of acceptance before him. The grace of pardon. The grace of enabling help, of sustaining power in weakness. The grace of his support. The grace of his blessing upon their lives and their endeavors. The grace of peace because the humble man is not caught up in the strife that the proud man is. The grace of contentment; the humble man is not filled with ambition that the proud man is. The grace of power manifested again in his felt weakness.

John Brown writes, "The more deeply a man realizes his insignificance as a creature and his demerit as a sinner, his guilt and depravity and helplessness, the more readily does he embrace the Gospel of God's grace, the word of the truth of the Gospel, and in it obtain possession of all heavenly and spiritual blessings. It is the man who knows and believes that he is a fool that is made wise." You can teach that man, you can't teach the proud. Knowledge makes arrogant. You can teach the man who knows he doesn't know, but not the know-it-all. "The man who has no hope in himself then obtains good hope through grace. The man who sees and feels that he has nothing but sin is made the righteousness of God in Christ. The man who loathes himself, he's the man sanctified wholly in the whole man's soul, body and spirit. It is the man who most feels his own weakness that is most strengthened with all might in the inner man and experimentally understands the spiritual paradox, 'When I am weak, then I am strong.'" A humble man knows he's weak and receives the grace of the Spirit's power. Brown writes, "Oh, how happy the church where all the elders and all the members are habitually under the influence of Christian humility."

How happy the church. Just think about it, think about the freedom, the confidence in one another, the ability to honestly and transparently interact with one another. If all the pride and the arrogance and the touchiness, the defensiveness, all of it was gone and we were clothed with humility, just think what that would be like. Brown was right, how happy the church where all the elders and all the members are habitually under the influence of Christian humility. May that blessing through the grace of him who is exalted head over all things to his church, that blessing be increasingly ours, a church where all of us are clothed with humility toward one another which enables us to humbly, selflessly serve one another, to wash one another's feet, as it were, as the Lord did on the eve of the crucifixion and Peter apparently never got over it.

We're going tonight to observe the Table central to which is the Son of Man who did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. If we're going to follow in our Master's way, we've got to do this positionally what he did on the eve of the

crucifixion and we've got to take that slave's apron of humility, wrap it around ourselves that we might relate to one another not in the way of being served but serving. Happy the church where that's the climate and character of its members.

Let us pray.

Father, may we be that happy church to the glory of You, the Triune God. May we think more clearly of who we natively are. May we think about those penetrating questions, "Who maketh thee to differ? What do you have that you did not receive?" Father, may we be a people not disclaiming the gifts and talents you've given but humbly employing them in service to one another in the cause of Christ. May our disposition be pictured by that slave's apron, a heart of humility willing to do the house servant's work of washing feet, and Father, may we renew our war on every vestige of the dreadful heinous evil of pride remembering that You have set Yourself against the proud, You will tear down their house but You give grace to the humble. Amen.