

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series:	Scripture Memory		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	46		Gary L.W. Johnson
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CAREFUL CONSIDERATION

J. I. Packer has correctly identified the three great lies that our culture has fostered upon people living at the start of the 21st century: “self-gratification is life’s true goal -- that it is very bad for you to thwart your own strong desires -- and that any behavior you feel comfortable with is all right.”¹ In addition to this, our culture encourages assertiveness, “Stand up for your rights!” *Pusillanimity* is an ugly-sounding word we rarely hear today. It means to be faint-hearted and extremely timid. It describes a person who lacks courage, someone who is destitute of strength, lacking assertiveness. No one wishes to be called *pusillanimous*! Unfortunately, this character flaw is often ascribed to people who possess the Christian virtue *humility*. Humbleness is not highly valued in our society. The Bible, however, places a great premium on humility. To begin with, humility is a proper attitude for a *created* being. Humility is becoming to us because we are *dependent* beings. Finally, we should be humble because we are *sinful* beings.² In the Biblical sense of the word, humility goes hand in hand with trust in God, because only from humility comes the ability to truly hand over all our care to God. But we must beware of the deceitfulness of *false humility* -- something that is very much in vogue in the church today. I have highlighted this in my assessment of what goes by the name, “The Emergent Church.” People like Brian McLaren, for example, appear to take great pride in being humble about the postmodern limits of knowing truth. This in turn creates uncertainty when it comes to any concept of propositional truth -- and it leads to what I call “soft” relativism, because when it’s all said and done, all you are left with in this dead-end alley is a vague personal preference when it comes to “truth.” But this is not the path to true humility at all. What is, and why is it found in the context of Peter’s exhortation to stand firm in faith?

- I. ***Humility Toward Others.*** Our text tells us to “Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another.” The Greek word *egkomboma* (out of which we trans. “clothe yourself”) actually referred to an apron of a slave. “It is quite probable that Peter here is thinking of what Jesus did (John 13:4ff.) when He girded Himself with a towel and taught the disciples, Peter in particular (John 13:9ff.), the lesson of humility (John 13:15).”³
 - A. *What is Humility?* Our Lord instructs us to learn humility from Him (Matt. 11:29). The Apostle Paul also says that humility comes to expression by imitating the incarnation (Phil. 2:3, 5). Humility is often grouped with other Christian virtues like compassion, kindness, gentleness and patience (Col. 2:18, 23). True humility seeks to serve.
- II. ***Humility Toward God.*** Peter cites Prov. 3:34 to underscore his point. The reason for displaying biblical humility is quite simple: God opposes the proud (the opposite of humble). To be even more direct, we learn from Prov. 6:16 that God hates pride, and in Prov. 8:13, God’s people are likewise told to hate pride. In Isaiah 66:2 we read, “To this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at my word.”

- III. ***Humble Ourselves Before the Lord.*** Peter’s language exhorts us to subject ourselves to God. The word *tapeinoo* means to make low, to be in submission. Similar language is used in James 4:6-10. “To submit to God means basically that we are conscious of our humble stature as his creatures.”⁴
- A. ***Under God’s Mighty Hand.*** This is a reference that in the OT refers to God’s omnipotence in delivering Israel out of Egypt (Ex. 3:19; Deut. 3:24; 9:26, 29; 26:8). One way or another the sovereignty of God will be recognized. “There is a passive humbling by His irresistible providence, and an active voluntary humbling, which implies a subjection to His law, and a submission to His providence: this is infinitely pleasing to Him, it is the right disposition that prepares us for mercy, and is the certain way of exaltation; for them God obtains His end.”⁵
- IV. ***Casting Our Care on God.*** This emphasis is found elsewhere in the Bible (Ps. 37:5; 55:22; Matt. 6:25, 32 and Phil. 4:6). The word cast, *epiripto*, signifies the act of exerting effort to fling something away from ourselves. Note how in this section humbling ourselves and casting our care on God are grouped. What we have here is the positive entrusting of ourselves and our troubles to God.⁶ Note how humility and grace are joined. It should be noted how Peter highlights the grace of God in this passage. *First*, there are the promises of v. 6 (God will lift you up), and v. 7 (He cares about you). *Second*, in v. 10 he declares that God is “the God of all grace” who in sovereign grace will enable and establish His people. Finally, in v. 12 the Apostle encourages his readers by testifying to the true grace of God.
- V. ***Our Adversary.*** He is called our “adversary.” The word *antidikos* was a legal term referring to an opponent in a lawsuit and underscores his malice: he is out to get you. His name is *diabolos*, the slanderer. In its New Testament usage, it always denotes lying and falsehood, done with intent to harm (compare 2 Tim. 3:3, 11 and Titus 2:3). Richard Gilpin, a masterful Puritan divine, wrote that this title, “particularly hints that when he hath in malice tempted a poor wretch to sin, he spares not to accuse him for it, and to load him with all things that may aggravate his guilt or misery, accusing him for more than he hath really done, and for a worse estate than he is really in.”⁷
- VI. ***Malice and Power.*** He is further described metaphorically as a “lion,” a beast of prey. The apparent source of Peter’s imagery is a Psalm in which Christians took considerable interest in connection with Jesus’ passion: i.e., Psalm 21:14 [22:13] where the Psalmist speaks of “fat bulls” who “opened their mouth against me, like a ravening and roaring lion” (cf. Ezekiel 22:25). The lion, which in some traditions stands for the Jewish Messiah (cf. Ezra 12:31-32) or even Jesus Christ (cf. Revelation 5:5), in this Psalm represents the enemies of God and of His people. In 2 Timothy 4:17, the Apostle Paul uses similar imagery: “I was delivered from the mouth of the lion.” The expression “whom he may devour,” *katapieim*, literally refers to drinking down or swallowing. In other words, like lions can easily dispatch a little calf, so humans are no match for Satan. One of the ways that Satan devours is through deception. When people are duped into believing a lie, they are swallowed up by the Prince of Darkness. Christians can be misled and deceived – as demonstrated by the Galatians (Galatians 5:7-8). “People instinctively but wrongly assume that only stupid highly gullible people would wind up believing and accepting false things, but nothing could be further from the truth! Our Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormon friends are highly intelligent people. Intelligence alone has nothing to do with deception! Look how many brilliant people have bought into what evolutionist Denton calls a ‘fairy tale for adults’ – evolution. How many evangelicals believed Mike Warnke in the 1970s when he claimed to have been a former highly-placed Satanist, without ever checking his story? How many good people of normal or above-

average intelligence believe that Benny Hinn truly heals people, or that the Holy Spirit has an interest in pinning people to the floor or throwing them into uncontrollable fits of laughter? The fact is that even Christians (of whatever intelligence) are not immune to deception, which is why the Bible warns us time and time again not to be deceived. If we could not be deceived, why the warnings (e.g., Matthew 24:4; Colossians 2:4, 8)?”⁸

VII. *His Cruelty.* His is a “roaring” lion, suggesting his fierceness and terrible disposition that manifests his malice and intent to harm. George Swinnock, another of the Puritan commentators, wrote, “The lions of the forest have no pity, ‘Lest he tear my soul like a lion, rending it in pieces,’ Psalms 7:2. The lions break the bones of Daniel’s accusers before they came to the bottom of the den, but the lion of hell has much less pity; his tender mercies are cruelties indeed.”⁹

VIII. *His Diligence.* This is depicted in the words “prowls around.” He actively goes about and seeks his prey. The absolute use of the verb *peripatein*, “to be on the move,” (literally, “to walk around,” then more gradually “to walk”) vividly portrays a pacing, hungry lion (cf. also Job 2:2, where Satan is said to have come “from going back and forth over the earth and walking up and down on it”).

IX. *The Admonition: Be On Guard!* This constitutes an apostolic call to spiritual alertness. The words “be sober” and “be watchful” are highly instructive. The first is *nepho*, literally “pay attention!” Peter used it as an imperative once before (4:7) in relation to prayer. He also used it in 1:13 in reference to being physically and mentally alert. The second term is *gergoreo*. It, too, is in the imperative and literally means, “wake up, be on the watch.” These two aorist imperatives are both ingressive and programmatic in setting out a new course of action once and for all.¹⁰ Thomas Manton comments, “What is sobriety? A holy moderation in the use of worldly things. Be sure not to leave any carnal affection unmortified. And then be watchful; take heed not to play about the temptation, not put yourselves upon occasion of sin, for then we lie open to the devil, and give him an advantage against us.”¹¹ Old Charles Simeon put it well, “Unwatchfulness, even in a victorious army, exposes it to defeat: much more must it subject us to the power of our subtle enemy. St. Peter had experienced its baneful effects. He had been warned of Satan’s intention to assault him. He had been commanded to pray lest he should fall by the temptation; but he slept when he should have been praying. He stands in this respect, like Lot’s wife, a monument to future generations; but vigilance on our part will counteract the designs of Satan. The armed Christian, watching unto prayer, must be victorious.”¹²

CONCLUSION: I close with the wisdom of one of the old puritans, Robert Leighton. “A man cannot fight upon a quagmire; there is no standing out without standing, some firm ground to tread on; and this Faith alone furnishes. It lifts the soul up to the firm advanced ground of the promises, and fastens it there; and there it is sure, even *as Mount Zion, that cannot be removed*. He says not, steadfast by your own resolutions and purposes, but *steadfast by faith*. The power of God, by faith becomes ours; for that is contained and engaged in the word of promise. Faith lays hold there, and there finds Almighty strength. *And this is our victory*, says the Apostle St. John, *whereby we overcome the world even our faith*. 1 John v. 4. So faith is our victory, whereby we overcome *the prince of this world*. *Whom resist, steadfast in faith*. And, universally all difficulties, and all enemies are overcome by *faith*. Faith sets the stronger *Lion of the tribe of Judah*, against this *roaring lion* of the bottomless pit; that delivering Lion against this devouring lion. When the soul is surrounded with enemies on all hands, so that there is no way of escape, Faith flies above them, and carries up the soul to take refuge in Christ, and is there safe. That is the power of Faith; it sets a soul in Christ, and there it looks down upon all temptations as at the bottom of the rock, breaking themselves into foam. When the floods of temptations rise and gather, so great and so many that the soul is even ready to be swallowed up,

then, by faith, it says, Lord Jesus, thou art my strength, I look to thee for deliverance; now appear for my help! And thus it overcomes. The guilt of sin is answered by his blood, the power of sin is conquered by his Spirit; and afflictions that arise are nothing to these; his love and gracious presence make them sweet and easy.”¹²

ENDNOTES

¹ J. I. Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness* (Vine Books, 1992), p. 254.

² In sharp contrast, humility would be unbefitting of God. “He who is independent, and does not owe his existence, or the continuance of it, to any other than himself is not called upon to be humble,” remarked W. G. T. Shedd, “He must of necessity possess the calm consciousness of independence and self-subsistence. And yet this is not pride. God cannot be proud, anymore than He can be humble. For pride supposes a comparison with another being of the same species, and a degree of rivalry with him. But with whom can God compare Himself; and towards what other being can He feel the least emotion of emulation? He dwells in the solitude of his own unapproachable excellence, and therefore He can neither be lifted up with haughtiness, nor bowed down in lowliness.” *Sermons to the Spiritual Man* (rpt. The Banner of Truth, 1972), p. 263.

³ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures In the New Testament VI* (Broadman, 1933), p. 132.

⁴ I. H. Marshall, *I Peter: The IVPNT Commentary Series* (IVP, 1991), p. 168.

⁵ *The Whole Works of the Rev. W. Bates II* (rpt. Sprinkle, 1980), p. 155.

⁶ Os Guinness makes this helpful observation on the importance of having our faith firmly grounded. “Living in faith’s reality test. Every moment and each new experience challenge faith for an interpretation. Can faith order the new experience, cope with it, handle it, and assimilate it? Or will the new experience undermine faith, proving too much for it to understand and assimilate? If faith is to continue supplying a person’s worldview, it must answer this challenge constantly and completely. Equally its answer must be practical, not theoretical, and it must be fresh and contemporary, not yesterday’s answer to today’s challenge. This constant challenge demands that faith be existential. Either it will rise to the occasion, and if so it will grow in the process, or else it will fall and retreat, losing authority, imperceptibly growing weaker and to that extent becoming unreal.” *Doubt* (Lion, 1976), p. 110.

⁷ Richard Gilpin, *A Treatise on Satan’s Temptations* (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 2000), p. 10.

⁸ D. Veinot & R. Henzel, *A Matter of Basic Principles: Bill Gothard & The Christian Life* (21st Century Press, 2003), p. 322.

⁹ *The Works of George Swinnock III* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1992), p. 115.

¹⁰ cf. J. R. Michaels, *I Peter: Word Biblical Commentary* (Word, 1988), p. 297.

¹¹ *The Works of Thomas Manton I* (rpt. Maranatha, 1976), p. 208.

¹² Charles Simeon, *Expository Outlines on The Whole Bible XX* (rpt. Zondervan, 1955), p. 280.

¹³ Robert Leighton, *Commentary on First Peter* (rpt. Kregel, 1992), p. 495.