

# RELIGION

Scripture of the Week

Matthew, Chapter 7

## Insight on the Word: Humility and Victory in Christian Living

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The Bible text for next week's Sunday School lesson is 1 Peter 5:1-11. I encourage you to read and meditate on this text during the week, even if you're not a Sunday School teacher; the mystery of humility can only be revealed through meditation on the Word.

Peter's First Epistle has been largely directed toward the needs of newer believers. He has taught them the wonder of their inheritance in the Lord Jesus Christ, and also the reality of suffering for the sake of the Lord in this life. These two contrasting truths are not really opposed to each other, for both are natural parts of the believers' unity with Christ.

In the last chapter of this Epistle, Peter turned his attention to the church at large, and reminded them of the virtue of humility. It is one of the great mysteries of the gospel, that humility is the key to true greatness, and leadership. In ancient Greek culture, the quality of "humility" was reckoned a weakness, a lack of self-confidence, a poor self image. Undoubtedly it was Jesus himself who made that word a virtue, a sign of realistic self-appraisal and submission to others in love. He taught us that "whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matt 20:25-28).

Peter sets a good example of godly humility. In our text he first appealed to the leaders of the local churches, but he did not appeal to them as their superior, an "apostle," or even a presiding bishop. His basis for appeal (verse 1) was as a fellow elder, as a witness of Christ's sufferings, and as a hopeful saint, looking for Christ's return along with all God's people.

Peter used three different terms to describe the leaders of the churches, terms which are used today in different ways by various churches, though they

originally referred to the same leaders of all the churches. As "elders" (presbyteroi) these leaders held a position of honor and trust, based on their wisdom and leadership qualities.

These same elders were also "pastors" (poimenes), literally "shepherds," who looked after the spiritual feeding of the Christian flock (verse 2), through preaching, admonishing, praying and counseling the believers in their care (see Eph 4:11). These were also called the "bishops" (episkopoi), literally "overseers," who directed the work of ministry within each local body (see 1 Tim 3:1-7). In the course of time these titles have become associated with distinct offices of the church, and there is really nothing in the Bible to preclude such a natural development as the situation of the church changes.

What hasn't changed is the vital importance of godly character in leadership. The churches naturally entrust a lot of authority in their elders; they need that authority in order to fulfill their God-given role. But that authority itself can become a snare of the devil, lifting up the elder in pride, causing him to expect to "be served" rather than "serve," and sometimes leading him to neglect his own godly walk with the Lord and fall into sin.

How then should elders lead? Peter gave us three guidelines (verses 2-3). The elders' oversight is "not by constraint, but willingly," that is, he should lead with a clear conscience before God, not simply playing politics by doing what other powerful people in the church dictate. He must spend much time in prayer with the Lord, to discern his will for the congregation as a whole. Then he can lead with confidence, despite the forces pushing him in various directions.

Most definitely elders should rule, "not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind." When money becomes the

motivation for an elder, the money does become "filthy," or defiling. It blurs the vision, upsets the priorities, and leads into all kinds of sins (see the warning in 1 Tim 6:10). Instead, the right motivation comes from a "eagerness to serve" (verse 2, NIV) for the glory of God, meeting the needs of our fellow human beings.

Elders also need to be good managers of God's people, but not acting like kings. Peter warned elders not to rule "as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples [examples] to the flock." We've all heard that you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar, that persuasion is better than force. But somehow church leaders can become so enamored with their God-given authority that they behave as lords themselves. Some of the traditions and rituals in our churches reinforce this mistaken image of leadership.

Peter told the elders to lead by example, not to drive God's special, chosen people with a stick. Think about the godly pastors you have known, the ones you have most respected and loved. Did they continually yell at their people, or condemn them, or order them around? Or did they model a godly life, with genuine humility, and encourage people to follow their lead? I know the latter kind of Christian leader has often been a great encouragement to me, and has brought me along to a deeper walk with my God.

Now I don't want to be guilty of picking on elders this week; what's good for the leaders is also good for their people. Peter told the church at large "Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (verse 5; Prov 3:34; James 4:6).

Sometimes we "saints" stress our leaders to the breaking point, and don't

even realize it. The best way to be an encouragement to our pastors is to live in harmony with each other. Peter said a lot about submission and harmony in this letter (1 Pet 2:13,18; 3:1,7,8; 4:7-9). Because of the great persecutions of his day, the way of submission was particularly important. Persecution often fosters arguments and divisions within a group, and leads to a feeling of total defeat.

But even if the persecution is more subtle, it can still turn Christians against each other. I think this is what Peter meant when he said "your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (verse 8). If Satan can cause Christians to slander each other, or bicker and quarrel, or undermine their leaders, then he can ruin their testimony, discourage the weak-hearted, and lead some astray.

The solution: "resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world" (verse 9). Let me share some suggestions for developing a winning attitude—through humility!

- (1) Think about how much God loves the people around you, even the ones who don't seem very lovable.
- (2) Recognize the wonderful gifts God has given to others, and be thankful for them.
- (3) Count up all the people who have gone out of their way to do special things for you, over the years or recently.
- (4) Take stock of your own God-given abilities. Look for ways to serve someone today, and do it in a spirit of love and equality.
- (5) Finally, recognize the plan God has for your life (verse 10), and remember that everything he allows you to go through is leading you toward the goal of Christlike character. Go for it!

We're building a community Bible School in North Portland!

### DEDICATION DAY

at the  
North Portland Bible College  
Building Site

North Vancouver Avenue,  
between Alberta and Humboldt

Sunday, May 17, at 3 p.m.

Brief Remarks:

Rev. Nathan Barnett, NPBC Board Chair  
Rev. Fred Wilson, Development Chair, NPBC  
John Rogers, Assistant to the Mayor  
Representatives from the A.M.A.  
Multnomah School of the Bible

Praise and Prayer, Special Music  
Tour, Refreshments

This event will be paced  
so that participants  
will be able to attend the  
Crusade Praise Gathering  
at the Coliseum

North Portland Bible College  
For information, call 288-2919, or 287-0885

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## Allen Temple CME Church

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Mallory Avenue Christian Church, 126 N.E. Alberta, Portland Good things are happening in North/Northeast Portland. "Together we can get make it happen" continues to be an ongoing goal for the Mallory Avenue Christian Church, who is proud to host The Community Fair on Saturday, May 23, 1992, from 10:30 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. admission is free!

The public is invited to come and ask questions. We promise a good mix of representation of community resources to help you and answer questions...child and toddler care will be available.

Participants include The Black United Fund, Police Department, Reading Tree, A.M.A., American Red Cross, N.E. Coalition, Youth Gang Task Force, HIV/Aids, Legal Aid, Urban League, Job Corps., N.E. Community Development corp., Habitat for Humanity, One Church/One Child, Main Stream Youth, Project Linkage, Foster Grandparents, Albina Youth Opportunity School, YWCA, and The Work Force Center the list continues to grow.

Come share your concerns and your joy in our community.

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SATURDAY, MAY 23, 1992

10:30 to 2 p.m.

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126 N.E. ALBERTA  
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### SUNDAY SCHEDULE

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9:30 am.

Morning Worship

10:45 am.

Men's Training Leadership

Women's Bible Class

5:00 pm.

Evening Worship

6:00 pm.

Attended nursery for all services

Wednesday prayer meeting

and bible study

7:30 pm.

## Mallory Avenue Christian Church

Disciples of Christ

God's Presence promises  
Power through Jesus Christ in  
Good Times and Bad Times

Matthew 11:28

"Come to me all you who are  
weary and heavy laden and I  
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9:45am Sunday School  
11:00am Morning Worship  
7:30pm Tuesday Bible  
Study and Prayer

Inter-racial Congregation



Denise A. Bell, Pastor

126 N.E. Alberta + Portland, OR 97211 + (503) 288-5173

## St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church

8101 N. Fiske Avenue  
Portland, Oregon 97203

Church Phone: 289-0147

Study Phone: 289-1911

Sunday Service

10:45

Sunday School

9:30

Bible Study

6:00

Evening Service

7:00 P.M.



Pastor, Rev. James C.E. Faulkner

Theme: Whatever you're going to do  
for the Lord, do it now

I Peter 4:11

## MT OLIVET BAPTIST CHURCH

Has moved Sunday services to  
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Worship Services 8:00 a.m. & 11:00 a.m.  
Church School 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.  
Bible Study, Wednesdays, 116 N.E. Schuyler  
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