

1 Peter 4 (cont.) and 5

BACKGROUND

“Peter’s directive to everyone counters the possibility of blind submission to authority just as it sabotages all attempts to exercise authority on the basis of status: ‘Clothe yourselves with humility.’ In antiquity, what one wore was an index of one’s social position... That Peter would instruct *everyone* to wear the same garment, irrespective of its color or quality or texture, is itself already a startling negation of the social distinctions that among people in Roman antiquity would have been worn like uniforms in a parade. But Peter goes much further, identifying the one garment to be worn by all as ‘humility...’”¹

QUESTIONS

1. As discussed previously, two passages in 1 Peter take the form of a *household code*, a traditional form used in ancient Rome and Greece to describe ideal relationships in the community and household. Using the handout *Household Codes of Peter, Paul and Aristotle*, what similarities and differences do you find between the code of 1 Peter (and Paul) and the more traditional code of Aristotle?
2. Joel Green writes about the radical nature of Peter’s rewriting of the social code:

Peter thus concerns himself... with a frame of mind or pattern of thinking that belongs to persons who have done with positioning themselves in the world’s social hierarchy in order to ensure that they are treated with appropriate esteem by their social underlings. When so much of life is directed by the compass of social stratification, with honor and shame the north and south poles, the consequences of this metamorphosis are practically infinite. The form of one’s greeting, such gestures as the averting of the eyes and the raising of the chin, the range of one’s information sharing, the material and color of one’s clothing, the nature of economic exchange with others, the obligation to truth-telling, assumptions about seating arrangements, who can speak to whom and under what conditions—the list of affected expectations and interactions is practically endless. All these forms of behavior are set aside in favor of a single disposition within the family of believers: to comport oneself in ways that esteem others [Green, 170].

1 Peter is not alone in this:

- *James 2:1-4*: “My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, ‘Have a seat here, please’, while to the one who is poor you say, ‘Stand there’, or, ‘Sit at my feet’, have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?”
- *Eph 5:21*: “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

¹ Joel Green, *1 Peter* (Two Horizons New Testament Commentary, 2007), p. 170.

- *Gal 3:28*: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”
 - *Luke 8:19-21*: “Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. And he was told, ‘Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.’ But he said to them, ‘My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.’”
- a. First-century Roman and Palestinian cultures were both heavily honor-shame oriented. As such, a high priority was set on one’s status and that of one’s group or family. This may seem foreign to us. However, years of PBS have trained many of us to appreciate the status consciousness of early 20th-century England. How could the NT understanding of community and status be implemented in that context? (Think *Downton Abbey*, *Upstairs Downstairs*, *Howard’s End*, even *Pride & Prejudice*, etc.)
 - b. What interactions have you experienced where status plays a role?
 - c. For each of these, consider whether the hierarchy in question should
 - i. Remain intact as-is in the Body of Christ
 - ii. Be re-interpreted in light of mercy and love
 - iii. Be removed or ignored altogether
 - iv. Be turned on its head (a la James 2:5, “Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom...?”)
 - d. What hierarchies and status-based interactions occur in our church: who defers to whom, and when? Do these follow the pattern set by the NT, or the world, or both? That is, would an atheist visiting our church find the hierarchy normal or abnormal, and why?

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Fun fact #1: In 1 Peter 5:2, elders are exhorted to *tend* their flock. The verb used, *poimaino*, is the same used by Jesus, in John 21:16, when he tells Peter to “tend his sheep.”

Fun fact #2: In 1 Peter 5:6 the reader is told, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time.” The phrase “mighty hand” is also used in Deut 26:5-9, which describes God’s bringing his people out of Egypt with “a mighty hand.”