

Explore the Bible Series for April 29: Humbly clothe yourself in the power of God

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Humbly clothe yourself in the power of God

- 1 Peter 5:1-14

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A few weeks ago, we talked about the need to don our super suits. Today, in the closing chapter of 1 Peter, we need to focus on our alter-egos.

Peter ends his first letter with a reminder to clothe ourselves with humility. But humility is easier to talk about than it is to put on. Sure, if we could reduce it to a set of principles or behaviors, humility would be easier to grasp. But it isn't just about our external behavior. As with everything else in Christianity, it's about a whole new way of thinking and being.

Humility is a pretty confusing subject. On the one hand, we are called to realize our greatness. On the other, we are called to remember our nothingness. In the beginning of his letter, Peter tells us to be holy as God is holy (1:16) while at its end, he tells us to humble ourselves "under God's

mighty hand” (v. 6).

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Somehow we must sort out this paradox because, as Peter says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (v. 5). Once again, we can compare ourselves to comic book superheroes to better understand the point.

Superheroes

Every superhero story tells of an ordinary person who begins to realize he is extraordinary in some way. Initially his discovery is exciting, and he eagerly experiments with his new gifts.

As the story progresses, however, the superhero begins to realize his giftedness has its dark side. Loved ones are endangered or innocent people can be harmed. The superhero begins to realize superness doesn’t belong in ordinary society. Although he is obliged to use his giftedness for the good of mankind, he must hide it behind an alter-ego to keep evil forces from attacking.

A superhero must be so confident in his superness that he can live a life of complete humility. By hiding his identity, he actually turns his ordinariness into a protective covering. No one would suspect meek Clark Kent and mild Peter Parker are super in any way. They appear to be dull men leading

uneventful lives. Meanwhile, under the cover of their ordinariness, they remain vigilant against the dangers that continually arise.

Super Christians

The dangers that arise in our own lives may not be as exotic as those in the comic books, but they are no less real. Peter tells us our “enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (v. 8).

Just as in the comics, the enemy becomes alert when he sees superheroes at work. It is his greatest desire to destroy us, and if we let ourselves become vulnerable, we become easy prey. What we must understand is that humility, our alter ego, is our protection. Our strength lies, not in flaunting our greatness, but in embracing our anonymity.

Jesus not only teaches this principle but demonstrates it. The king of the universe is born in a barn. He works as a lowly carpenter and consorts with uneducated fishermen and socially rejected tax collectors. After entering Jerusalem as a king, he swaddles himself as a servant and washes his disciples’ feet. The greatest man on earth, the God-man, lives his life as a humble servant. His alter-ego is so effective, generations of people have failed to realize his true identity.

The dangers of superness

When we try to live as supers among ordinary people, we end up exposing them to danger. Showing the world our greatness smacks suspiciously of pride. It also communicates that our God is unattainable to ordinary people. These miscommunications can lead people to reject God forever.

Flaunting our superness also tends to make us forget where our greatness

comes from and causes us to become prideful. When this happens, rather than using our gifts for God's purposes, we revert to using our powers for selfish ends. Instead of superheroes, we become villains. Consumed by our own greatness, we wreak havoc everywhere we go.

On the other hand, if we will follow Jesus' lead, living a life of humility, we reveal the true nature of God. We must cling to the lesson Jesus' teaches while washing his disciples' dirty feet: "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him (John 13:13-16).

Finding our alter-ego

Knowing we are super is important. It gives us confidence. It's the evidence of our relationship with God and confirms our faith. But superness is not the be-all, end-all in our Christian walk. Awareness that we are endowed with the power of God is merely the beginning. At some point, we also must grow in our understanding of what it means to be a super Christian. We must realize there is danger in acting fully super at all times.

Like the superhero, we must learn to control our giftedness. It must be exercised with caution and used only when needed. At all other times, we must control it, disguising it with our alter-ego.

Our true strength comes from the realization that greatness is on loan. While we possess it, it isn't really ours. Because of this, we must never take it upon ourselves to decide how our powers should be used. Instead, we must rely on God, allowing him to use us as he sees fit.

Living in our alter-ego does not by any means negate our superness. But it does keep it in its place. By not allowing the idea of greatness to overshadow the reality of our dependence on God, we remain humble. We stay usable. We actually increase our superness.

Christianity is the greatest paradox known to man. We are called to be children of God and yet to serve one another in humility. Deep in our hearts, we can cherish our call to greatness, but we must never let it show. In order to receive the fullness of God's grace, we must never let our right hand know what our left hand is doing. We must hide our supersuits beneath the alter-ego of ordinariness.

Discussion questions

- We tend to live in extremes, swinging from pride to self-abasement. A healthy identity is somewhere in the middle, aware of its strengths but equally aware of its weaknesses. Where are you on the scale, with humility at one end and pride on the other?
- What are some ways you can use your greatness while keeping it hidden beneath the alter-ego of humility?

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