

FIRST PETER

Lesson 22

Exhortations to the Flock

1 Peter 5:5-14

We saw in our last lesson that the first four verses of 1 Peter 5 is an exhortation to elders in a local congregation to shepherd the flock over which God has made them overseers. The primary duty of elders is to shepherd the flock, and they do this by teaching, ruling, admonishing, laboring, leading, protecting and managing the flock. Elders have a big responsibility, and they must do their ministry not to please men but to please the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who will give a special crown to faithful shepherds of His sheep.

Verses 5-14 of First Peter 5 will give exhortations to the flock. Shepherds have certain responsibilities and the sheep have certain responsibilities, and when both are doing these unto God there will be great blessing to the local congregation. These exhortations to the flock seem simple enough, but they are extremely difficult to carry out in a practical way. The reason Peter gives these exhortations is that the Christians to whom he was writing appeared to be having difficulty putting their Christianity into practical living.

THE FLOCK IS TO SUBMIT TO THEIR ELDERS (5:5a)

“likewise”

The “likewise” (in the same manner) goes back to the first part of the chapter. Just as Peter had dealt with the position and duties of shepherds he will now deal with the duties of the flock to leadership, each other, God, the devil and suffering.

“You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders”

This is not an exhortation for younger people to be respectful to the elderly in a local congregation, but for the congregation to be in submission to the elders who are officers in the local church. The “young men” may refer to young people in chronological age. If so, it is understandable, because younger people have a hard time with submission. Youth, who are generally idealistic, get impatient with leadership and want to rebel against authority. The local church never moves fast enough for young people, and there is a constant tension for something new, exciting and perhaps better. Youths want to assert themselves, to have their own way and get what they want, and to tear down authority they think is unfair. The younger generation needs to learn submission to their elders who are wiser and more mature spiritually.

However, the more likely interpretation of “younger men” is to make it refer to the rest of the church other than the presiding elders. The “younger men” being younger in spiritual maturity are the disciples of the elders. If this is the correct interpretation, the flock is to give due respect and reverence to the elders, yielding to their admonitions, reproofs

and authority because they have been put into this position by God and their position has been recognized by the elders and the congregation.

Submission is one of the key words in 1 Peter and is also one of the key words in all Christian living, and until we learn submission, we will never be the effective Christians we could be or should be. Lack of submission is always an unhealthy self-assertion whereby a person or group wants its own way. We do not come into this world naturally submissive; we come naturally rebellious and resistant to authority.

When we become Christians we do not suddenly become submissive. Salvation brings the Christian new desires to submit, but there is still much rebellion to all kinds of authority in his life. There is a new desire to submit to God and to others, but the submission itself must be learned. It does not come easily; it is often a real struggle, but by God's grace it can come, and with it comes great spiritual blessing. In submission there is real spiritual freedom that gives a whole new dimension to the Christian life.

We must deal with this exhortation to submission in the context of 1 Peter. These Christians were suffering. Things were not going well for them. They were a hurting people, and they were losing patience and were undoubtedly taking it out on the elders in the various local churches. It is characteristic for all of us to rebel against leadership when times get tough, but God says that is the time we need to really submit. Submission is not agreeing with someone. It is placing oneself under authority when there is disagreement. When we learn to do this, then we will begin to grow in our spiritual lives by leaps and bounds.

THE FLOCK IS TO DISPLAY HUMILITY TOWARDS ONE ANOTHER (5:5b)

“and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another”

Submission is not just towards elders but towards all Christians. Even elders must show a general submission to each member of the flock, for we must all submit ourselves to meet the needs of other brothers and sisters, to take a low place. I must not insist that others minister to me, teach me, care for me, provide for me, and counsel me. We are all to have humility and submission towards one another in that we genuinely desire to serve one another. *“and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ” (Eph. 5:21).*

The command “clothe yourself with humility” goes back to when Jesus washed the feet of the disciples. This refers to a servant's garment and reminds us of when Christ girded Himself with a towel at the Last Supper and began to wash the disciples' feet, a task that was usually given to a slave. In this act, Jesus showed His disciples that Christians are to humble themselves and serve one another. By example, He taught that Christians are not to lord it over others and are not to make themselves better than others, but are to benefit and serve others. We are to think of others as better than ourselves.

“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3-4).

Each of us is to have a servant's mentality toward others.

“for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.”

The word “proud” means “to show above” and therefore a prideful person is one who shows or thinks himself better than someone else. The word “humble” means “lowly,” and refers to the person who thinks others better than himself. God opposes the proud; He stands against pride like an army drawn up for battle. Pride was the first sin in the universe and was done by Satan who wanted to be like God. Pride is resisting God. If Christians resist God by pride, then God will resist them.

The humble are those who are constantly putting their trust in God, and He exalts them and gives them grace and more grace to be more effective in service toward others. Humility is a wonderful preserver of peace among Christians, and pride is the great disturber of Christians. It is the cause of most dissensions in the local church. Do you want grace in your life? Then be humble. A humble person is one who knows his place in the plan of God and is operating according to the Word of God.

THE FLOCK IS TO BE HUMBLE BEFORE GOD (5:6-7)

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time”

The “mighty hand of God” refers to God’s sovereignty and His controlling providence with the view of delivering His people. Christians are “to allow themselves to be humbled” (passive voice in the Greek). The humbling process God was using was the persecution and suffering through which these Christians were passing. Whatever suffering they were experiencing was under the mighty hand of God. It was under His providential control. God permitted and allowed all these circumstances so that through them His children would be humbled and have a submissive attitude in all things.

The quickest way up for a Christian is down. As someone has said, “He must take a low place before God, who would take a high place before men.”

Those who learn from their circumstances and are humbled before God will also be exalted. Whenever God exalts the Christian, it will be in His timing—“the proper time.” We do not know when the proper time is. We would like to think it is right now, but the proper time for removal of suffering is when we have been sufficiently humbled and softened so we can truly be effective in service to God and to others. Some suffering may never be taken from us until Jesus returns in glory to deliver us. Exaltation will come, not in our fancied time, but in His own wisely appointed time.

“Casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.”

The Christians to whom Peter was writing were undergoing severe persecution and the suffering was intense. This gave occasion to all kinds of fears, worry and anxiety. The Apostle exhorts them that while this humbling process is going on they should cast all their care, whatever it might be, on God, for God is truly a caring God. When circumstances cause suffering and suffering causes anxiety, Christians are to cast or throw their worries, which wound the soul and disturb the mind, on the wise and gracious providence of God. There is to be a decisive committal of this anxiety to God, for worry is always sin. “*Cast*

your burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken” (Psalm 55:22).

It should be noted that the Christian is not to throw off the affliction; that is, bolt out from the circumstances. God has placed the person in the circumstances for a definite purpose—to humble him, to make him more Christ-like, and to make him have a servant’s heart. The Christian is not to throw off the affliction, but the anxiety caused by the affliction. He is to refuse to be burdened by worry which will get him down, disturb his peace, and distract his mind.

The word “anxiety” means “to divide.” Worry tends to divide the mind so the person cannot give wholehearted devotion to God. We throw the anxiety on God who has promised to give us peace of mind which is freedom from anxiety or alarm, not freedom from difficult circumstances. *“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee” (Isa. 26:3 KJV).*

Freedom from worry comes when, by an act of faith, a person commits the situation to God and confesses that worry is sin. If we tend to worry a lot, we will have to commit this worry to God a lot. We must learn to turn our anxiety over to God and relax. *“Cease striving (let go, relax) and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10, NASB margin).* Why can we relax? Because we have a God who really cares for us, who will either remove the suffering from us in His timing or give us grace to cope with it.

Remember, the anxiety He will remove, but the circumstances and suffering He may not remove, and if He does remove them it will be only when we have learned the lessons of humility, trust and submission He wants us to learn.

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt. 6:33-34).

THE FLOCK IS TO RESIST THE DEVIL (5:8-9)

“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

Now Peter warns us to be awake, watchful, alert and dead serious about the devil who is our constant adversary. Christians are to relax in God with their anxieties, but they are not to relax about the schemes of the devil. Satan is a real person, and there is abundance of evidence in the Bible to prove his existence. One of Satan’s great tricks is to get people to believe that he does not exist, or if he does, he is not a foe to be taken seriously.

The Apostle Peter most certainly disagrees. In this context, he is addressing Christians; it is Christians that Satan is seeking to devour. As the god of this world, he already controls the world system and every unbeliever in it. *“We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19).* Satan does not have to work on unbelievers, for they are already his captives and slaves. He does work night and day through his own direct attacks or the attacks of his demons to destroy the lives, souls and testimonies of Christians, local churches, and Christian organizations.

The name “devil” means “slanderer” or “accuser.” He is constantly attempting to strike malignity into our natures and poison into our souls. His aim is to sow discord, to

break fellowship by malicious suggestion. He accuses God to men, men to God, and men to each other. His goal is to undermine confidence and to get Christians to stop believing. He works on the saints to get them dissatisfied with life, complaining against things in general, doubting the sovereignty of God, slurring the brethren with gossip, half-truths and lies.

Satan is also "your adversary." He hates Christians and is out to destroy all of them, for he is the great destroyer. If we are not sober and alert, he will destroy us, our marriages, our families, and our local church. He is like a hungry, voracious lion, seeking to reduce some innocent Christian to nothing. He does this by putting before us temptations so great that only the grace of a sovereign God could give the power to turn from them.

Satan is a fierce, cruel, strong pursuer of souls, but praise God, he is not as strong as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Christ Jesus the Lord.

How well Peter knew about the attacks of the devil, for he himself became a victim of the great destroyer in his denial of Jesus Christ. It was only Christ's prayer that kept him from apostatizing. When he repented, he was to strengthen the brethren, and part of this strengthening was to warn them of the schemes of the devil.

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. And he said to Him, 'Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!' And He said, 'I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me'" (Luke 22:31-34).

"But resist him, firm in your faith"

Christians are to resist Satan in that they are to stand firm against him. James taught this same truth. *"Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).* How can sheep resist a lion? They are utterly defenseless, but they can defeat a lion because their defense is in the Good Shepherd, Christ, for they are to resist by being "firm in faith". That faith is in the living Christ and the living Word of God.

We cannot stand alone against the devil, but we must be living and acting upon the truth. When Satan attacks with doubt, discouragement, despair, fear, a low self-image or whatever, that is the time to recall that God cares for us, reject the lie of Satan, and rest on the truth of the Word of God. Then we must believe it and act upon it. Though we may be fearful, act upon the truth. If we do not, then Satan will devour us, but greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world.

"knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world."

One of the reasons we can resist the devil is because we know we are not alone in our struggle against him. Christians in the universal church have the same kinds of struggles because they belong to Christ. Quite often when we are suffering we become very self-centered and think that no one has ever gone through this experience before, certainly not with the same intensity. But they have. No one is isolated. Our problems are not unique. Many brothers and sisters are experiencing the very same attacks.

"No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

This is why we need to bear one another's burdens, trust one another, comfort one another, exhort one another and pray for one another, for we are all in this together.

The devil constantly causes us to go on guilt trips because of our sin. There are some deep-seated habits and attitudes which are so entrenched in our lives and so difficult to dislodge that we need help from our brothers and sisters in Christ. If we are struggling with some habit or attitude, we need to ask God to give us someone who shares the same problem or has shared it and who can help us in our struggle. We need to stir one another to faith and good works so as to defeat the evil one.

THE FLOCK IS TO REST IN GOD'S PROMISE (5: 10-11)

"And after you have suffered for a little"

Notice that Peter does not in any way suggest a removal of the circumstances or the suffering. He says that whatever suffering we must undergo in God's providence is only for a short time compared to our eternal exaltation with Christ in heaven. *"For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."* (2 Cor. 4:17). Whatever we are suffering, we must learn as the Apostle Paul did, *"My grace is sufficient for you"* (2 Cor. 12:9).

"The God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ"

In their suffering, Peter reminds these Christians that it was the God of all grace who called them to salvation and ultimately will call them to eternal glory. God will supply all the grace we need to cope with suffering if we will but trust Him. We need to be reminded over and over that His grace is sufficient. It is only the God of grace who can give grace to the Christian to persevere in the midst of suffering, and He does this when we turn to Him in simple faith.

Notice also that Peter reminds these Christians that it was God who sovereignly, efficaciously and irresistibly called them to salvation. It was God who chose them and ordained that they should suffer in order to glorify Him and to mature in the Christian life. The God of grace will most certainly carry out what He has begun. *"He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 1:6).

"will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you."

This is not a prayer, or a wish or a hope; it is a fact. This is a promise that the God of grace will use suffering to make us stronger Christians and will deliver us in His timing, whether that be in this life or the next. It is the Lord Himself who is actively at work in the Christian using the suffering to make him stronger.

The word "perfect" means "to restore" in the sense of mending a torn net. After suffering, we need time for healing so as to be fully restored to spiritual health. "Confirm"

means “to fix firmly” or “render immovable” so as to establish the restored saint clearly on the Rock of Salvation and the Word of God. “Strengthen” means to be given strength to continue in active service. “Establish” means “to set on a firm foundation.”

There seems to be a sequence, a progression which comes after suffering: First, a restoration of vital faith. Second, a renewed immovable confidence. Third, an empowerment for active service. Fourth, a renewed commitment to the foundation of Christ and the infallible Word of God.

We can rejoice in suffering since we know the end result will be that the God of grace will perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish us. *“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance” (James 1:2-3).*

“To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

The thought that God uses suffering to make us stronger in Christ causes Peter to give a short doxology. Only a sovereign God can take suffering and use it for His own glory and for the good of His elect.

THE FLOCK RECEIVES FINAL WORDS (5: 12-14)

“Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him)”

Silvanus is another name for Silas who was Paul’s companion on his second missionary journey. Silvanus was Peter’s scribe, recorder or amanuensis. Peter, a brilliant man but with little formal education, had Silas write this letter as he dictated. Silvanus probably corrected Peter’s grammar and was God’s instrument in getting us this letter in its present form.

Some liberal scholars have tried to prove that Peter was not the writer of this book because the grammar is too good for a poorly educated man, but this is the explanation. Peter dictated, and Silas put it into acceptable *Koine* Greek. The final product was the inspired letter of First Peter.

Silvanus was a “faithful brother.” This is a beautiful way of expressing a man’s commitment to Christ and to His body, the church.

“I have written to you”

Peter had many other things to say to these Christians, but he tried to keep this letter short. It consists of only five chapters, but it has taken us 22 lessons to go through this book verse by verse. Praise God for this dynamic, brief letter!

“exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm on it!”

Peter’s purpose in this epistle was to testify to God’s great salvation in Christ and to exhort the recipients to continue in it. What is meant by “this is the true grace of God”? The “this” goes back to verse 10. The God of all grace saved the Christian and is determined to perfect and stabilize him. Salvation is sure. It cannot be taken away, but with salvation

comes suffering. Yet this suffering is used by God to strengthen and get the Christian ready for eternity. This is the true grace of God and all Christians are to stand in it.

“She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings.”

When writing this epistle, Peter was in Babylon on the Euphrates. Some scholars have tried to make Babylon refer to Rome, but there is little evidence for this. “She who is in Babylon” may refer to the Christians in this church in Babylon who were sovereignly chosen to salvation by God as were the Christians in Asia Minor, or it may refer to Peter’s wife who was with him in Babylon.

“and so does my son, Mark.”

This is a reference to John Mark who was led to Christ by Peter himself and who later wrote the Gospel of Mark.

Christian, how many spiritual sons and daughters do you have? Every Christian should be reproducing spiritual children. What a joy it is to lead others to the Savior.

“Greet one another with a kiss of love.”

In the first century Christians greeted one another with a holy kiss (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26). It was a custom for the men to kiss men and the women to kiss women. This was a cultural thing and would be equivalent to our handshake, but there is something more intimate about a kiss of love. In my opinion this is a practice that should be restored in the American church. When my wife and I were in Romania, the Christians there greeted us with a holy kiss, and for the first time I saw that this was not just a first century cultural practice.

“Peace be to you all who are in Christ.”

Peter prays that these Christians individually and the local churches collectively should experience peace. When we were in Romania, the Christians shook our hands as we parted and said “*Pache*” or “peace.” Again, I think this is a custom that should be revived in the American church.

CONCLUSION

What are we to learn from First Peter? The Christian’s suffering brings glory to God. Whatever causes suffering—circumstances, evil people, the devil—it is all somehow in the plan of God and allowed for the purpose of testing us and maturing us.

The book is connected with the teaching in the Old Testament about God’s people, Israel, who were tested for forty years in the wilderness for a definite purpose.

“And you shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. And He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not

know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord” (Deut. 8:2-3).

The church of Jesus Christ, the spiritual Israel of God, the genuineness of our faith and to mature us in Christ. A hymn writer put it this way,

I asked the Lord that I might grow
 In faith, and love, and every grace;
 Might more of His salvation know,
 And seek more earnestly His face.

Twas He who taught me thus to pray
 And He, I trust, has answered prayer
 But it has been in such a way,
 As almost drove me to despair.

I hoped that in some favored hour,
 At once, He'd answer my request,
 And by His love's constraining power
 Subdue my sins and give me rest.

Instead of this He made me feel
 The hidden evils of my heart;
 And let the angry powers of hell
 Assault my soul in every part

Yea, more, with His own hand He seemed
 Intent to aggravate my woe;
 Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
 Blasted my hopes and laid me low.

“Lord, why is this?” I trembling cried;
 “Wilt thou pursue thy worm to death?”
 “Tis in this way,” the Lord replied,
 “I answer prayer for grace and faith.”

“These inward trials I employ,
 From self and pride to set thee free;
 And break thy schemes of earthly joy,
 That thou may'st seek thy all in me.”

Are you still a rejector of Christ? If you are, the Bible says that you lie in the lap of the wicked one, and Satan has blinded your eyes to the truth of Christ. *“And if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the*

glory of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:3-4). You have believed the devil’s lie that Jesus Christ is not the only way to heaven.

Yet Christ says He is the only way. *“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father, but through Me’”(John 14:6). If you persist in your rejection of Christ, you will end up in an eternal hell which was originally prepared for the devil and his angels. “Then He (Christ) will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels’”(Matt. 25:41). Receive Christ as your Savior. Bow to Him as your Lord, for Christ alone can deliver you from the grip of Satan and take you to heaven.*