

Week 23 - A Word to the Flock - 1Peter 5:5-14

Scripture Reading: Philippians 2:3-8

Introduction

This morning, after six months of study, we are going to conclude our look at Peter's first letter

I trust that you have found the words of this letter that was written almost 2,000 years ago still have relevance to us today

Last week, as we looked at verses 1-4 of the fifth chapter of the letter, we saw Peter exhort the elders of the local churches he was writing to shepherd and oversee the flock of God that God had entrusted to their stewardship

And he listed three characteristics of a proper shepherd of God's flock:

First, he said they must be willing to serve and not merely serving as a matter of duty or necessity or compulsion

Second, he said they must serve eagerly not being focused on personal gain - that is, not being motivated by money

And third, he said they must lead by example and not by dominance or force

Now, in what remains of his letter, Peter turns to the flock as he spells out what is expected of them

And it's only logical that he would likewise exhort those who are not elders on their corresponding duties

As we have seen all along, we are going to find that these final words remain as relevant to us today as they were to Peter's original audience

So let's not waste any time in getting started

Please join me in 1Peter 5 and follow along as I read verses 5-14 [**1Peter 5:5-14**]

Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. Greet one another with the kiss of love.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

I have chosen to break down this final section of the letter into three subjects represented by the three Roman numerals on your note sheets

First, we will look at how Peter calls the flock to **humility** and **obedience**

Then we will consider how to handle the **devil**

And, lastly, we will take a look at Peter's **final words** as he concludes his letter with some formal details and a few final commands

So let's get started by looking at Peter's call for humility and obedience that he issues as a result of his instructions to the elders

I. The call to humility and obedience

Peter's call to humility has never been more necessary than it is today

Pride is one of those maladies that resist treatment and like some physical diseases that are chronic and never quite removed even if they are controlled, pride is never truly defeated only managed

Unlike flaws that we readily recognize as sin such as an explosive temper that are played out in public view, pride is one of those sins that can easily remain hidden in one's heart

I looked up the word 'pride' in my trusty Webster's 1913 Dictionary and found that Webster defined it as "an unreasonable conceit of one's own superiority" and "a sense of one's own worth, and abhorrence of what is beneath or unworthy of one"

Those who are proud examine themselves and declare, "Very good"

Again and again, the Scriptures tell us that God opposes the proud and brings them low even as he exalts the humble as Peter does here in verse 5

In doing so, Peter is quoting from Proverbs 3:34 just as James does in **James 4:6**

But we also see this truth in **Psalms 138:6** where King David writes:

For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar.

And in **Isaiah 2:11** where we read:

The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.

And with minor variations, Jesus says the same thing on three separate occasions in **Luke 14:11**; Luke 18:14; and in Matthew 23:12

For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Clearly, the call to humility pervades the Bible and in 1Peter, it is Peter's last word on leadership and the first in his series of closing exhortations for the church

Peter begins this section with the word 'likewise' as he shifts his attention to a different group of people but continues on with the same subject he has already begun to address - the relations between church leaders and the flock

And he addresses his remarks first of all to 'you who are younger'

Some English translations, like the New American Standard Bible, add the word 'men' as in 'you younger men' but there is no word for 'men' in the original Greek

However, 'the younger' might seem to be an odd term for addressing the whole church and we might well wonder why Peter would choose to single out the young with this exhortation if he means for the whole church to be submissive

His reason becomes clearer when we consider who it is that is generally more prone to impatience and eagerness and who are more likely to chafe at a more conservative pace adopted by the elders

And it's typically the young who are more likely to engage in resistance and even rebellion against authority and therefore most in need of the reminder to be submissive to the authority established by God in his church

Still, the fact that Peter addressed this exhortation to the young doesn't imply that the rest of the church is free to go against the elders

Actually it indicates quite the opposite because, if those who are most likely to be the most independent-minded are commanded to be subject, then it follows that everyone else must be subject to the elders as well

It's human nature to judge our leaders and pick and choose what we like and don't like and decide what we will and won't heed

But, and I want you to think about this, if we do that, can we actually claim that we are following their God-ordained leadership?

Good leaders are committed to serving the whole church, even the people, personalities, and opinions they dislike

Likewise, wise and godly followers yield to the church and its leaders as a whole and exhibit a general willingness to support and follow the direction of the elders, even if certain decisions seem flawed

Of course, that obedience is tempered by the usual caveat that assumes the leadership is biblical and not directing the flock into sin

Peter then cements the idea that he is speaking to the whole church as he shifts his focus in the last half of verse 5

And it's well that the ESV begins a new sentence here because Peter moves on from the subject of the relationship between elders and those in the church to general interpersonal relationships within the church

As an aside, we often find these, what I call 'unfortunate' occurrences, in our English Bibles where the verses, paragraphs, and even chapters don't exactly line up with what we understand of the author's original intent

But we have to recognize that there is nothing sacred or inspired about the divisions we find in our Bible

The verse divisions we take so for granted were introduced by the publisher Stephanus in 1551 and the paragraph divisions we see that denote changes in topic are even more recent

They are determined by each modern translator as they think best and will, therefore, vary between translations

Anyway, Peter switches his focus to directly address the entire church and he begins by telling the whole flock to wear humility like a garment

No one is excluded as we see in the phrase 'all of you' from the necessity of putting others first, from regarding the desires, needs, and ideas of others as more worthy of attention than their own as we saw in our Scripture reading earlier

By definition, a church is a gathering of the humble

Don't be misled though - Christ-followers are confident of their worth

They know God created them in his image and that God valued us enough to send his Son for us

They know that God has promised to preserve them for their heavenly reward

They know all of that but every Christ-follower is also aware of his or her sin and desperate need

Every Christ-follower, by definition, has repented which means confessing particular sins and admitting that we are rebellious to our core and incapable of self-reform

Therefore, we humble ourselves and trust in Christ to forgive and restore us - that is the conviction of every true follower of Christ

As we've already seen, pride is part of our fallen human nature and, left to ourselves, we would be the center of our own universe and our own chief concern

When we succeed we are prone to crow, "Look at what I've done" but when we fail we tend to wail, "It's not my fault"

But God opposes the proud - think of what that phrase means - to have God stand in opposition to you should be a very frightful proposition

But God also gives grace to the humble and so Peter moves from exhibiting humility toward each other to being humble before God - and in light of God's opposition to the proud that seems to be the wise move

So we bow before God's will and wisdom and we accept the twists and turns of his providence confident that he will at some future point exalt us

Living humbly before God and our fellow man can put us at an extreme disadvantage in this life

And what manner of exaltation or when it might be given is left unspecified by Peter making it best to understand that it could take most any form and happen in this life or the next - but the thing is, it will happen the humble will be exalted when God determines the time is right

Therefore, we can cast all our anxieties on God

In fact, to be properly humble we are required to give up on trying to handle our anxieties on our own and in humility give them over to the One who can handle them

Next, in verses 8-9, Peter turns his attention to:

II. How to handle the devil

God isn't the only spiritual being who takes an interest in Christ-followers and we have an unseen enemy so Peter gives an admonition to spiritual watchfulness

People tend to make two crucial mistakes when it comes to Satan

One, we take him too seriously as we assign to him the omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence that belong to God alone

Satan is a created being - an angel, and like other creatures he is limited and can only be in one place at any given time, has gaps in his knowledge, and has finite power

However, we can also fail to take him seriously enough and reduce him to a kind of cartoon villain

The Greek word Peter uses that is translated for us as 'devil' means accuser or slanderer and he is dangerous

Hungry and wounded lions attack and Satan whose name means 'adversary' is both of those

While his power is limited, he still walks around looking for victims and because he aims to deceive and then destroy, Peter warns 'Be sober-minded; be watchful' [**1Peter 5:8**]

The opposite of this sober watchfulness would be spiritual lethargy or drowsiness that causes one to see and respond to situations no differently than unbelievers who don't know any better

Far too many self-proclaimed Christians see and react to the events of the world the same as those who are of the world and God's perspective on each event seldom if ever crosses their mind

We must be alert because there is a genuine danger of attack by the enemy who entices people to sin, incites idolatry, tempts us to doubt our standing with God, and confuses or blinds people so they miss the truth

Only a fool would walk down the middle of a busy road while inebriated or blindfolded but many do just that when it comes to spiritual matters

But Peter isn't saying that we need to fear Satan - far from it

He actually says in verse 9 [1Peter 5:9] that we are to 'resist him' and we are to do so while being 'firm in [our] faith'

It would be just as wrong for us to cower before the devil as it is to ignore his existence

And the fact that Peter says his readers are to resist the devil gives us encouragement because it implies our resistance can be successful

We can resist with the confidence that God will intervene and give us victory

James says in **James 4:7** that we should submit ourselves to God and resist the devil because he will flee from us when we do

What Peter and James are advocating is active, determined opposition that often involves confrontation

Still, neither Peter nor James tell us how precisely to resist the devil

However, Paul's description of spiritual armor in Ephesians 6:10-18 gives us the idea that warfare is going to be involved and we may well take some licks in the battle but that God has provided us with the protection we need

Defeat is therefore not inevitable even though the devil is stronger than we are

So we must resist, expecting that the devil will flee, God's kingdom will advance, we will grow in faith and holiness through the conflict, and God will turn Satan's plans for evil into good for us

Then Peter gives a couple of words of encouragement

First, he says that spiritual attacks are not unusual but are being experienced by our spiritual brothers and sister all over the world - we should expect them, watch for them, and resist them when they come

It always helps to know one isn't alone and that others are going through similar or even worse and not merely surviving but actually thriving

Then, in verse 10 [**1Peter 5:10**] he writes that the suffering experienced will only last 'a little while'

No matter how difficult the attacks we face are, they won't last long and afterward God will restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish us

To restore is to return a person to proper fitness and adequacy, to mend them or perfect them

To confirm is to firmly establish a person's belief or attitude

To strengthen is to correct any weakness that has likewise been endured, to restore one's capability

And to establish is to lay a foundation, to put someone on solid footing

But, again, Peter is sufficiently vague in his expression that we can't know the amount of time he reckons to be 'a little while'

And he therefore leaves the door open for the restoration to be in this present life or later in the next life

However, it is guaranteed that the 'God of all grace who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ' will indeed make you whole in the end and all loss will be made right for all eternity

The outcome of our lives rests more on God's power and grace than all our labors

So Peter closes out the body of his letter with a word of praise to God with a brief doxology in verse 11 [**1Peter 5:11**]

The One who has called and planned and provided is also the One who has the power to fulfill

The letter is finished so Peter follows the convention of his day and winds it up with the appropriate conclusion and greetings and slips in a couple of quick exhortations and a blessing

III. Final words

It was normal practice to have someone act as a secretary and actually write down the words of a letter's author as he spoke the letter aloud

And that appears to be the case here as Peter identifies a fellow Christ-follower; Peter calls him 'a faithful brother' by the name of Sylvanus

Sylvanus is the long version of the name Silas and, if this is the same Silas, he was the one chosen by Paul to replace Barnabas which would lend credence to his qualities as he served faithfully with Paul on his second missionary journey

It was also common for the true author of a letter to take the stylus from the secretary to add a personal note at the close of the letter

We see Paul appear to do this in his second letter to the Thessalonians where we read [**2Thess. 3:17**] -

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of the genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write.

And Paul takes pains to note to Philemon that he himself wrote the brief note he sent to him regarding Onesimus

Of course, Peter may have instead meant that Sylvanus was the one carrying the letter that Peter himself had written. In that case the letter would have come to the churches by Sylvanus' hand and that would also give Peter's description as a 'faithful brother' a new importance.

I'm not sure it matters all that much which is the case but it seems those are our options and both are plausible.

Peter also describes the letter itself first calling it brief which shows his interest in securing a good reception for it because brevity was considered to be good form and length a burden in Peter's day.

At 105 verses we would have to say that it isn't a long letter as New Testament letters go, but it certainly isn't short and the author of the letter of Hebrews makes the same claim in **Hebrews 13:22**.

So it appears to be more a formal statement of politeness rather than a statement of descriptive fact.

Then Peter goes on to give his purpose for writing - to encourage them and to declare or witness that this is the true grace of God.

What Peter most likely means by "this" is the entire plan of God as he has framed it in the letter as a whole which gives an end-times perspective to the suffering his audience was experiencing.

The clause reminds his readers that God is not absent from their suffering, but values and rewards it as part of his eternal plan.

And this word of encouragement naturally leads to a simple exhortation: 'Stand firm in it'.

Now is not the time to buckle but to stand firm in the faith holding on to what they already have - God's grace.

This is the major reason and purpose behind the letter.

Having thus summarized the letter, Peter turns to the customary greetings that were an expected part of any letter of the day [**1Peter 5:13**] and he mentions first 'she who is at Babylon'.

Most likely he was referring to the church at Rome because Rome was commonly called 'Babylon' in the Christian tradition.

Then he mentions 'Mark, my son' of course referring to John Mark.

And the 'my son' designation simply illustrates the familial relationship between two generations of Christ-followers.

And with the greetings from Rome out of the way, Peter exhorted his original readers to affection for one another in the custom of the day and ends the letter with a brief word of blessing.

His final wish expressed was that his readers would experience peace.

Considering their troubled circumstances, the wish for tranquility and untroubled spirits seems to be a perfect blessing to confer upon them.

Conclusion

One of the greatest atrocities that has been proclaimed from some pulpits is the idea that suffering ends when one accepts Christ and it has led countless people to question God's goodness and their faith when they need them most. Whether it is mild or severe, suffering is to be expected as we sojourn here because we are strangers in a strange land.

The secret to facing suffering successfully then is to humble oneself before God and our fellow man;

To follow the leadership in the church that God has ordained;

To be aware of Satan and his schemes and resist him firmly in the faith;

To maintain an eternal perspective;

And to stand firm, shoulder to shoulder with our fellow Christ-followers as we rely on God's grace.

We cannot allow opposition from without to cause separation within.

Suffering is never easy but it is only for 'a little while' when compared to eternity and God has promised to guard us until we receive the imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance that is ours through his Son.

Let's pray.

Philippians 2:3-8 (page 980)

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.