

Teaching about Elders, and the Closing of the Letter

1 Peter 5:1-14

1 Peter 5:1-14: *“The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: ² Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; ³ nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; ⁴ and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. ⁵ Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ ⁶ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, ⁷ casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. ⁸ Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. ⁹ Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. ¹⁰ But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. ¹¹ To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. ¹² By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand. ¹³ She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you; and so does Mark my son. ¹⁴ Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen.”*

Background Notes

In the final greetings of this letter, the “Silvanus” mentioned in verse 12 is probably Silas, who accompanied the apostle Paul on his second missionary journey. Silas and Paul both sang praises to God in the prison at Philippi more than ten years before this letter was written. Now we see that Silas was helping the apostle Peter.

Silas served as Peter’s secretary, or amanuensis (v12). Peter dictated, and Silas wrote his dictation. And Silas may have delivered the letter to the scattered Christian churches to whom this letter was addressed: *“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.”*

In verse 12 Peter said, *“I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand.”* Peter knew that when Christians first face persecution, there is a tendency to waver and question what you believe. Maybe some of you have questioned the Christian faith. Listen! This Christian faith is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it! Don’t waiver! And don’t throw in the towel!

Was the “she” of verse 13 Peter’s wife? We know that Peter was married, because the Lord healed Peter’s mother-in-law (Matthew 8). And in 1 Corinthians 9:5 the apostle Paul wrote, *“Don’t we have a right to take along a believing wife, as do*

also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?” So the apostle Peter (whom some people call the first Pope) was definitely a married man. But most likely the “she” of verse 13 was not a reference to Peter’s wife. “She” probably refers to the local church. In the Greek language, “church” is a feminine noun, and Peter was sending greetings from the local church to Christians in scattered churches.

“Babylon” (v13) may be the literal Babylon on the Euphrates River (in present-day Iraq), or it may possibly be a disguised symbolic reference to Rome. Remember, this was during a time of increasing persecution. Furthermore, we know that Peter spent the final years of his life in Rome, not in Babylon.

What about the phrase “my son Mark” (v13)? We believe this was not a biological son named Mark, but rather it was John Mark, a spiritual son of Peter. Peter and John Mark spent some time together after the death and resurrection of Christ, and Peter disciplined John Mark. This is the same “Mark” who wrote the Gospel of Mark.

Doctrinal Points

1. Elders should “shepherd the flock” that is under them, or among them.

Elders are the spiritual leaders in the local church. The term “elder” is always used in the plural in the New Testament, in reference to any church. In other words, the idea of one minister, or one pastor for a church, is unknown in the New Testament. For an example, look at Philippians 1:1, *“Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers [elders] and deacons.”*

1 Peter 5:2-3 says that elders are to shepherd the sheep that are under them, or among them. A good shepherd does not push his sheep or drive his sheep. He *leads* his sheep. Good elders will not lord it over the flock – they will lead by example.

And notice that being an elder is a volunteer job. This does not mean that an elder can’t receive financial remuneration for the work he is doing, but an elder should not be doing his work to make a lot of money! Elders are to do their work voluntarily and eagerly. I wonder how many church leaders today would be disqualified by these verses?

Good elders don’t always receive the recognition they deserve, but they will receive an **eternal reward** when the Lord returns! *“And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.”* All the hard work will be worthwhile when the Lord returns! Elders should shepherd the flock that is among them.

2. Younger believers should submit to their elders.

Verse 5: *“Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders.”* The term “*younger men*” that is used in some translations should more properly be translated *“those who are younger.”* That would include both male and female.

Generally speaking, elders are older in years and spiritual maturity, and younger members in the church should respect their wisdom and experience. The **cumulative wisdom** of the elders is extremely important for the smooth running of any church.

But there's more here than that. Elders are the spiritual authorities of the church. Members of the congregation are to submit to the elders. Their authority is **God-given authority**. It's real. We're not playing games - we are dealing with the authority of God Himself, channeled down through the church leaders.

So whether you are a teenager or an older member at your local church, you are responsible before God to submit to your elders. And the elders are responsible before God to exercise discipline for those who refuse to submit to their authority. I know exactly what you're thinking at this point: "Suppose my elders are no good?" 1 Timothy 5 covers the subject of the discipline of elders who are not doing their job properly. And God Himself has ways of removing elders who are involved in sin. But the point in 1 Peter 5 is that younger believers should submit to their elders.

3. All believers should be humble and alert.

Verses 5-7: *"Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' ⁶ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, ⁷ casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."*

Be clothed with humility.

The command *"humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God"* could also be translated *"allow yourselves to be humbled under the mighty hand of God."* God hates pride, and He allows situations to come into our lives that will humble us.

People falling asleep while you're preaching a sermon is a humbling experience! And as a Bible college teacher, one of my most humbling experiences was when a student raised his hand in class to ask me a question - and then fell asleep during my answer! (God has His unique ways of keeping us humble!)

Notice three blessings for those who are humble:

a. God gives grace to the humble.

Verse 5: *"...be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'"* If you're humble, God will give you the grace to handle whatever He allows to happen in your life.

b. God will exalt you.

Verse 6: *"Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time."* If you allow God to make you humble, just wait. God will vindicate you and exalt you before others. Remember the story of Joseph!

c. God cares for you.

Verse 7: *“Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”* As you’re going through experiences that humble you, you can turn over all your anxieties and questions and cares to the Lord - because He loves you, and He knows what’s going on in your life, and He really does care for you! He knows and He cares. You can let Him work the situation out, because you can be sure that God will work it all out for your eventual good.

Be alert and vigilant!

Besides being humble, all believers should be alert. Verse 8: *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”* Folks, we’d better be alert and on guard, because **we’re involved in spiritual warfare!** Satan is crafty, and he will use all kinds of schemes and tactics to trip us up and devour us. Satan cannot take away our salvation, but he can ruin our lives and our usefulness for the Lord, and devour the joy of our salvation.

Sometimes Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, to quietly and skillfully deceive us – perhaps with false teaching (2 Corinthians 11:14). At other times his approach is like the sudden charge of a roaring lion. In either case, we are to resist him by standing firm in the faith (v9).

If we are going to be able to stand firm in the faith, we must be prepared for spiritual battle. We must put on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18). Resist the devil in this way, and he will flee from you (James 4:7). All believers should be humble and alert.

Practical Application

Remember, you are not the only one!

Verse 9: *“Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.”*

Some Christians seem to think that they’re the only ones who are suffering in this world. Are you in that category? This passage will remind you that you’re not the only one - so don’t proudly think your load of suffering is unique. And don’t be discouraged by your suffering, wondering why God has allowed you to suffer. Remember - some Christians are undergoing **far** more suffering than you are.

Let God use the suffering He allows in your life to make you more mature - to establish you and settle you and strengthen you in your faith (v10).

So remember, you are not the only one!