

Study 6: 1st Peter Chapter 5

Introduction

The scattered tribes were facing trials and persecution. Peter gives them encouragement to face them with boldness. In this chapter he also gives direction to the local elders that they must guide and nurture the brethren.

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Homework and preparation for next week:

Read the notes as a review of the study

Peter describes some of the role of elders in this passage. What are the key things that you think should go into a job description for elders? (ie –What are the key functions of the role?)

Peter points out three areas of influence in our lives: God, Satan, and our fellow christians. What reaction should we have to each of these?

Notes for study 6: 1st Peter Chapter 5

The scattered tribes were facing trials and persecution. Peter gives them encouragement to face them with boldness. In this chapter he also gives direction to the local elders that they must guide and nurture the brethren.

Shepherding the Flock

Peter has instructed the brethren concerning their behaviour (1:4:7-19). It is one thing to have the instruction, but we need to have examples to follow. It's like trying to read a textbook and trying to figure out how a complicated item works when you have never seen one. It makes a lot more sense if we can actually see one. Even in our universities that teach through distance education, there is personal follow-up – mentoring and coaching – to help the students understand the subject. Peter strongly instructs the elders to guide the flock “...*The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder...*” (1:5:1 NJKV). Peter led by example, and also wants the elder in the remote northern regions to also lead by example. An important “therefore” is omitted by some translations in which Peter links his previous instruction on christian behaviour to the role of the elders in leading the flock. One translation reads “...*I, therefore, a fellow elder ... entreat the elders among you...*” (1:5:1 McCord).

Peter presents his credentials to be a leader, and consequently to instruct the elders. He is not instructing them without having similar experiences – *he has walked the talk* – and knows full well what is required to be an example to others. He has already established his authority as an apostle (1:1:1), and so the things that he says must be taken as authoritative. But his credibility is shown when he says “...*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...*” (1:5:1 NJKV). Peter was not only an elder – and hence in the same position as those to whom he was instructing, but he was also a partaker – a joint heir – with those who were suffering. He could feel what they were feeling. But Peter was an eyewitness of Christ's suffering. He knew what Jesus went through, and he knew how Jesus reacted to the trials and sufferings.

A more detailed study of the role, the function of elders, and the form of the eldership can be found in the study of the Pastoral Epistles (2 Timothy). Only a brief study is given here.

The instructions to the elders are explicit “...*Shepherd the flock of God which is among you...*” (1:5:2 NJKV). Three Greek words describe the elders, and each one of these is translated into at least two English words. Consequently we have seven English words that describe the same group of people. In this passage (1 Peter 5:1-4), and also in Acts 20:17-31, all three Greek words are used to describe the same group of men. The first is *presbuteros* “to the elders who are among you”. The second is *poimain* “shepherd the flock ... among you”. The third is *episkopos* “serving as overseers...”. The role of the elders is to guide and take care of the brethren as a shepherd guides, feeds, protects, and takes care of a flock of sheep. Jesus instructed Peter to do exactly that (Jn 21:15-19).

The way in which the shepherding is to be carried out is also given explicitly “...*Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but willingly...*” (1:5:2 NJKV). The role is one of service – it is not the congregation serving the elders, but the elders serving the congregation. It requires the same kind of humility that a servant would offer to the King. However, in that case the servant might be constrained (as a slave perhaps), but in the case of the elders in the church they are to serve voluntarily “...*not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly...*” (1:5:2 NJKV). Men who act in the role of elders only because they have to are not the men that God wants there. Jesus used the example of the good shepherd (Himself) in comparison to hirelings (Jn 10:11-14). When the problems arise, the hirelings will flee. Such may very well occur amongst the brethren in Northern Asia Minor when the persecutions come, if the elders are not fully committed, or if they have improper motives (they are only there for the rewards of status and money).

A further example of the elders is that whilst they are in a position of authority over the congregation they are not to rule as the Pharisees did (Lk 11:39-52) by binding things on the congregation that they would not do themselves. "...nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock..." (1:5:3 NJKV). Peter was able to say this because he himself was also an elder. What is important is that the elders feel the same things as the brethren – that they suffer together with them – as Peter did (1:5:1).

The final test and reward will come at Christ's return "...and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away..." (1:5:4 NJKV).

Responsibility to the Leaders

Just as the elders (the leaders of the congregation) have responsibility to the people, so the congregation also has responsibility to the elders. "...Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders..." (1:5:5 NJKV). The passage follows directly from the discussion on the role of elders, and Peter uses the word *presbuteros* to describe them here also. However, the description of *younger people* contrasted with *elders* suggests that it might not be those who are appointed elders in the church that he has in mind, but rather young people respecting older people. It is rendered this way in the NIV "...Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older..." (1:5:5 NIV).

There are many places in the Old Testament where the people revolted against God, and caused great frustration to their leaders. Perhaps the greatest example is Moses (Dt 1:37; Nu 20:9-13; Nu 27:12-14). The people rebelled against God, and caused Moses to be angry. As a result he struck the rock (which Paul tells us was Christ 1 Cor 10:4) at Meribah, when God had only told him to wave his rod over it. As a result, Moses was deprived of his inheritance from entering into the Promised Land. Likewise, we need to ensure that our actions do not cause our leaders to be deprived of missing out on their eternal reward in heaven.

Submission and Humility

The idea of submission has permeated the letter (1:2:13; 1:2:18; 1:3:1; 1:3:5; 1:5:5), with several uses of "compassion" that also needed to be applied. But we have seen that there were problems that needed to be corrected (1:2:1; 1:4:2) and importantly, they needed to bond with one another. Without care for each other, their egos would almost certainly get in each other's way and cause them a great deal of grief. As well as the younger submitting to the elders, they all needed to be submissive "...Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility..." (1:5:5 NJKV). He has already shown the example of Christ's behaviour, which we need to follow and emulate.

In support for this behaviour, Peter quotes from Pr 3:34 (as does James 4:6) "...God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble..." (1:5:5 NIV).

The conclusion is "...Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you..." (1:5:6 NIV). Humility is a trait that we can control – God expects us to control it, and Peter here commands us to do it. It might not come naturally, and it might be hard for us to achieve, but we need to grow towards it and into it. Humility comes from submission – by submitting ourselves to God first, and to our fellow brethren. The reward of our humble attitude and manner of life comes from God, who will bring justice at the final judgement.

Once more Peter ties his exhortation to humility to the end times. The "due time" is the time God has set for Christ's appearing. Thus the whole destiny of Christians--whether it is suffering or glory--is God-ordained. (NIVBC)

In the midst of the coming sufferings and persecution, Peter admonishes the brethren to *cast all your anxiety on Him*. With the difficulties that lay ahead, the brethren did not need to be concerned and anxious. Whilst the physical safety of Christians is not assured (Lk 12:4-5), our spiritual assurance can never be taken away (which is not to say that we cannot give it up).

Therefore, Watch

Like the other warnings and calls to action, Peter exhorts the brethren to be active in their defense. We are assured of our spiritual inheritance, but we must be watchful and alert “...*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour...*” (1:5:8 NJKV). The spiritual nature of the attack is clearly in Peter’s mind. Whilst we may be attacked physically, what we need to be most concerned about are the spiritual attacks. The description of Satan is strong! *He is walking around like a roaring lion.* I’ve never been to Africa, but the idea of sleeping in a compound at night (the ones I’ve seen on TV have flimsy looking fences!) to keep the lions out, sends shivers up my spine. Especially the thought that there is a lion just outside the fence who is hungry and walking around looking for his dinner – and I’m just sleeping in a tent! That whole idea is enough to keep me right away from that area – and that is exactly the idea that Peter brings out. “...*Resist him, steadfast in the faith...*” (1:5:9 NJKV).

The Christian response to satanic opposition is not panic or flight but firm resistance in faith (v. 9). "Resist" (GK G468) is the same word as that found in Eph 6:11-13 and Jas 4:7 in contexts of struggle against hostile spiritual forces. This implies a common "resist-the-devil" formula in the early church. "In the faith" is not so much "the Christian faith" or "your faithfulness" but rather "your positive faith and trust in God." (NIVBC)

Peter gives the brethren an assurance that we are not on our own in the struggle, and it is faced by every christian everywhere “...*knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world...*” (1:5:9 NJKV). Australia (beautiful as it is) is somewhat on the backblocks of the world. Whilst we hear a lot about the goings on in the rest of the world, when we get out of Australia (to the USA, or Europe) you then realise just how little the rest of the world really knows about us – and how little of what happens here gets to be “news” in other country’s news media. The church in Australia is small, and we can often feel isolated. That is just how the christians in Northern Asia Minor were feeling. But knowing that we have multitudes of brethren in churches on the other side of the world gives us a great sense of comfort that *we are not alone*. Especially when we know that they are facing the same struggles that we are facing.

Final Exhortation

Peter concludes the main part of the letter (other than the greeting which is to follow) with a contrast between the destructive work of Satan inflicted on the christians through suffering and persecution, with the reconciling work of Jesus. “...*And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen...*” (1:5:10-11 NIV).

Whilst the persecutions will take place, we can be assured that through Jesus we will reap the victory. Peter concludes with a short benediction *To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen*

Final Greetings

The letter was dictated by Peter, but was penned by Silas / Silvanus (Silas is the shorter form of his name). Peter spells out clearly that the authorship of the letter lay with him (Peter), and not with Silas “...*By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly...*” (1:5:12 NJKV). Peter’s purpose in writing the letter (see introductory study) was to encourage the brethren to be faithful in the face of the trials that were before them “...*encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it...*” (1:5:12 NIV).

“...*She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. ¹⁴ Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ...*” (1:5:13-14 NIV). See comments on the introduction. The letter was almost certainly written from Rome.