

1 & 2 Peter: Faith Under Fire

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the
resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and
unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith
for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
(1 Peter 1:3-5 ESV)*

Stand Firm in the Grace of God

January 20th, 2019

1 Peter 5:1-14

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Introduction:

Good morning. Please turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter, chapter 5. You'll find that right near the end of your New Testament.

I think we can summarize Peter's argument in chapter 4 with one word: Perspective.

Peter has just finished telling his church that their thinking needs to change. Stop fearing the world! Fear God who made the world and to whom we will all give an account. Stop looking at the coming storm and look instead to the God who is Lord over the storm! He is in control. And He loves us! He is holding onto our treasure and He will see us through to the end.

In order to live faithfully, we need right perspective.

Now, with our eyes fixed on Jesus and our minds prepared for action Peter gives one final word of direction to us in preparation for the days ahead. We're going to break our text into two sections this morning. Our first section consists of verses 1-4. Look there with me now.

¹ So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed:² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Peter 5:1-4 ESV)

In the close of chapter 4, Peter has been warning us that the coming judgement will begin with the household of God. Now, in the first four verses of today's text, Peter speaks specifically to the leadership of the church. I imagine him putting both hands on the shoulders of an elder and looking him square in the eyes. Being a leader means setting the example of faithfulness in the midst of the storm. Being a leader means standing before God one day and giving an account for

how you shepherded the flock. Naturally, these leaders needed some counsel! Our text begins today with a word to the elders.

A Word to the Elders

Judgement begins at the top. It's one thing to lead when the sun is shining, but it's another thing to lead in a time of persecution. Peter writes now to warn and to encourage the shepherds of the flock.

He tells these elders first of all:

1. Do your job

Shepherd the flock and exercise oversight. Know the people, love the people and minister to the people with the word of God. That's the job. Set apart men for the task who live for that calling.

When the storm comes, you will need leaders who WANT TO LEAD. There are probably some churches out there which are led by men who are saying: "I guess I'll lead... If I HAVE to. I'll take one for the team." If your leaders are only serving out of a sense of duty now, then WOW! Your church will be in for a rude awakening when that leadership becomes costly.

As you pray for the leadership team over this congregation, pray that God will continue to raise up elders who want to take on the task. It's not always an easy job, but it's a glorious responsibility. Elders have the privilege of walking with God's people through the ups and downs of life. They have the privilege of opening the Word of God with God's people and applying it to all of the crises that life brings.

We will always need men who are ready and willing to accept that responsibility and calling. God, raise up more leaders like that in Your church!

Second, Peter tells the elders:

2. Manage your motivations

Unfortunately, thanks to sin and our fallen nature there are still men in the ministry who are in it for the money. The early church consisted of both bi-vocational ministers who worked a full-time job while also serving the church and also full-time ministers who gave all of their time to the needs of the congregation and who were supported by the offering. Paul prescribes this model in his letter to Timothy where he writes:

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages." (1 Timothy 5:17-18 ESV)

As you can imagine, it was and is a big decision to invest financially in an elder to free him up for full-time service for the church. At first glance, you might come away from this text thinking: "I guess it's wrong to pay the pastor." But (all bias aside) that's not what Peter is saying here. Commentator Edmund Clowney, for instance, notes:

The pay that an elder receives is not shameful. Jesus taught that a workman is worth his wages (Matt. 10:10).¹

What's wrong, however, is the elder who is motivated by money. Hold me to that. Because the Lord is going to hold me to that! If one day I appear to be "in it for the money" then show me to the door and replace me with a godly man who leads from a love for God and a love for God's people. Mercenary ministers – guys who are just looking for the best place to stamp their time card and line their pockets – will be of no use when the storm comes.

Finally, Peter says to the elders:

3. Set a good example

Is there anything worse than a leader who operates with the "Do as I say not as I do" mentality? Peter addresses this in verse 3 where he writes:

not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:3 ESV)

When the dog days come, the church will need leaders who are standing at the front of the flock, setting the example in faithfulness and suffering the same blows as the rest of the congregation. This is a fundamental aspect of Christian leadership, and it's the model that Jesus set before us. Elders should be the most committed tithers, the most faithful volunteers, the most persistent evangelists. Christian leaders who lead like that – who march on the front lines and who model the holiness that they call for from the church – those leaders will be a gift when persecution comes.

And I think it's worth noting that Peter modeled this kind of leadership even here in his letter. Look at verse 1 where he introduces this section. He writes:

So I exhort the elders among you, **as a fellow elder** and a witness of the sufferings of Christ (1 Peter 5:1a ESV)

Peter could have said: "Now listen here you cowards! I, Peter, a CAPITAL "A" Apostle hereby COMMAND you to listen to me!" He had every right to say that. But instead he stooped down to their level and said: "Hey elders, let me give you some encouragement from one elder to another – here's how we need to approach this."

That's the kind of leadership I can get behind.

Now, in verse 5 Peter begins turning his attention away from the elders and he speaks to the church in its entirety. He has been leaning a little harder on the leaders, because the leaders were going to be the ones setting the example when persecution finally arrived, but now he pulls back to address the congregation at large. Look with me now at the text, beginning in verse 5:

¹ Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*. (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 205.

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.”

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

¹² 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. ¹³ She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. ¹⁴ Greet one another with the kiss of love.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ. (1 Peter 5:5b-14 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

With this, Peter concludes his letter to the church in Asia Minor. He leaves them with a series of encouragements that culminate in verse 12:

I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. **Stand firm in it.** (1 Peter 5:12b ESV)

Stand firm in the grace of God. The wind is about to start blowing. The enemy is about to start roaring. You’re going to be tempted to run and hide. Stand firm.

So as we conclude our time in Peter’s letter, let’s learn this final lesson from the text:

How to Stand Firm in the Grace of God

So, how do we stand firm in the grace of God? First, Peter tells us to:

1. **Submit yourself to the leaders God provides**

Peter calls on the young men to submit to the elders. Commentators debate whether the term “young men” here refers to literal “young men” or if it is simply a term to reflect all of those not serving as elders. Whether it’s the former or the latter, this idea of submission is a common theme in the New Testament. The author to the Hebrews, for example, writes:

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. (Hebrews 13:17 ESV)

You are called to submit to your elders, and your elders are reminded that they will give an account for how they exercised leadership over you. I will give an account for my service. Did I serve selflessly? Did I teach faithfully? Did I put the needs of others before my own? I confess, I spend many restless nights asking myself whether I am getting this right. The Bible tells me how

much God loves and values you, and we as a leadership team will be held accountable for the way that we care for you.

But the Bible also tells us that we are to submit ourselves to the leadership of the church. Hear that! I can't tell you how many Christians I've talked to who are roaming around, refusing to stay long at any church lest they be held accountable. But Peter is telling us that we NEED someone to hold us accountable – especially in the coming days. We NEED leaders who lead like Jesus and we need a congregation that is willing to be led.

When persecution comes, it will be easy to argue about how we each feel we should respond. Personally, I think that's why Peter addresses the young men in particular in this text. The age gap isn't novel to our generation. I think Peter knew that the elders were going to come down with a decision about how to proceed and that some young whippersnappers were going to rise up and try to rally the flock.

But we need to united. We need to hold onto Christ and we need to hold onto one another. Pray, discern and appoint leaders over the flock. Then let the leaders that you have appointed pray, discern and lead. That's what the New Testament church looked like, and that's the kind of church that will weather the storm.

Second, Peter says:

2. Humble yourself under God's mighty hand

Verse 5 says:

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (1 Peter 5:5 ESV)

See, this leadership and submission thing we've been discussing only works if all of us – the leadership team right on down to the brand-new believer – clothe ourselves with humility. Humble leaders are easy to follow. Humble congregations are willing to follow. Humble leaders are willing to listen. Humble congregations are able to voice their concerns without usurping the leadership above them.

True humility comes when each of us remembers who is really in charge of the church. Peter reminds the elders that they are shepherds of "the flock of God." That's an important distinction.

This is not my church. Neither is it Keith's or Harry's or Paul's church. It's not your church either, for that matter. This local congregation is God's church. He is leading us. He has distributed His gifts throughout our congregation. He has assigned each of us with responsibilities and assignments. And He knows exactly what we need.

In verses 6-7, Peter goes on to describe humility in a profound way:

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ **casting all your anxieties on him**, because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5:6-7 ESV)

One of the marks of the truly humble person is their persistence in bringing all of their anxieties to God. Said another way: An anxious Christian is a *prideful* Christian. Have you ever thought of that? I love how Thom Schreiner puts this:

Worry is a form of pride because when believers are filled with anxiety, they are convinced that they must solve all the problems in their lives in their own strength.²

Isn't that the truth? In our worrying, we're really saying: "I have to handle this burden all by myself." But the cry of the Christian heart is supposed to be: "I cast all of my burdens on God and I operate in His strength!"

And here's the truly remarkable piece: Not only is God powerful enough to meet our needs but He is also gracious enough to *care* about our needs. One commentator rightly remarks:

This conception of God's concern for human affliction is one of the peculiar treasures of the Judeo-Christian faith; though Greek philosophy at its highest could formulate a doctrine of God's perfect goodness, it could not even imagine his active concern for mankind.³

Neither Plato nor Aristotle in all of their dreaming could bring themselves to imagine a God who actually cares about His creation. And yet, that is who God describes Himself to be! He has numbered every hair on your head. He knows your requests even before you voice them.

We've been banging the prayer drum consistently over the last few weeks, and this is why. Not only does prayerlessness rob us of our power for ministry – but prayerlessness is also undeniable evidence of pride.

God gives grace to the humble. So, let's humble ourselves under His mighty hand. Amen?

Third, if we are going to stand firm in the grace of God then we will need to:

3. Resist the devil in God's strength

We read in verses 8-9:

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. (1 Peter 5:8-9 ESV)

After reading a text like that, I think it's appropriate to ask the question: How do we resist the devil? We find an answer in the book of Revelation:

² Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude, The New American Commentary*, vol. 37, 38 vols. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 241.

³ Edwin A. Blum, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Hebrews – Revelation)*, ed. Frank A. Gaebelin, vol. 12, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 251.

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. ¹¹ And **they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony**, for they loved not their lives even unto death. (Revelation 12:10-11 ESV)

Do you want to resist the devil? Here’s the secret: He has already been defeated! One of the primary weapons he wields against believers is the fear of death. He points at our sin, and he points at God’s law and then he tells us that we are hopeless. That’s why he is referred to in Revelation as “the accuser.”

So, how do you silence the accuser? You preach the gospel to him. And you preach the gospel to yourself. Yes, you’re a sinner, but if you have turned from your sin and placed your trust in Jesus Christ then you are forgiven and loved! Jesus took all of our guilt and shame upon the cross so that we wouldn’t have to carry it anymore.

The devil whispers: “Well, he didn’t take *all* of your sin. What about those thoughts you entertained last night? What about that thing you did this week? You’re a hopeless sinner.”

But the devil is a filthy liar. Look again to the cross. Look at the perfect, sinless, Son of God, pierced for our transgressions and wounded for our iniquity. Listen again as he looks to heaven and says: “It is finished.” Do you really think that your shortcomings this past week have somehow foiled the plan that God put into motion before the foundation of the world? God didn’t save you because of your impeccable behaviour – He saved you because of His impeccable mercy! That’s how Peter began this letter:

According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3b-5 ESV)

God has already won this battle. The lion is roaring, but Jesus knocked his teeth out at the cross.

That being said, he is still prowling about, and he will use the weapon of accusation to try to lure you away from the grace that we have been called to stand on. Resist him. Hold tight to the gospel of Jesus Christ and don’t let go, even when Satan tempts you to despair. Edmund Clowney writes:

The danger to the Christian is that he will fail to resist, that he will not watch and pray, that he will not put on the whole armour of God and take the sword of the Spirit. That sword, the word of God, was the weapon Jesus used in his ordeal in the desert; it is ours to use in his name.⁴

So I’ll say it again: Prepare your mind. Fix your hope on Jesus Christ. And in God’s strength, resist the devil.

⁴ Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*. (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 215.

Finally, if we are going to stand firm in the grace of God then we will need to:

4. Trust in God's timing

We read in verses 10-11:

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. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 5:10-11 ESV)

Look closely with me at verse 10. Peter is writing as if suffering is all but certain. He doesn't say: "After you *potentially* suffer for a little while – hypothetically speaking that is." No, suffering is inevitable in this life. But suffering doesn't have the final word.

We may face persecution from our culture, but our culture will not have the final word.

We may face rejection from our friends and co-workers, but our friends and co-workers will not have the final word.

We will certainly face accusations from the devil but the devil will certainly not have the final word!

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. (1 Peter 5:10 ESV)

The world might mock you now, but you will reign with Him in glory forever. He will confirm you in the presence of all of the scoffers. He will strengthen you when you feel as if you have no strength left. He will establish you to your rightful place. You are a child of the King of Kings!

He has promised to do it, and He is faithful and powerful to keep His promises.

Stand firm. Not in your own strength – there will be days when you sense within yourself that you don't have a drop of strength left to muster. That's good. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. We were never meant to be standing in our own strength.

Stand firm in the grace of God. Place all of your trust – all of your hope – in the gospel of Jesus Christ and you will not fall. Hold tight to the Saviour, and you will find that his grip is perfectly secure. He will hold you fast.

No matter how hard the wind blows – no matter how fierce the storm rages out there – it will not ever uproot the cross. So, plant your feet, prepare your mind and stand firm.

Thus, concludes Peter's first letter to the churches in Asia Minor.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.