

Wednesday Home Study, 20th May 2020

Read 1 Peter 5:1-14

1 Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you 2 to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it — not for sordid gain but eagerly. 3 Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. 4 And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away. 5 In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with 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 he may exalt you in due time. 7 Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. 8 Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. 10 And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. 11 To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

12 Through Silvanus, whom I consider a faithful brother, I have written this short letter to encourage you and to testify that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it. 13 Your sister church in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you 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.

NRSV

In the final chapter of his first letter, Peter addresses the leaders of the church, ‘the elders’, encouraging them to be humble in the way they care for the people. Younger leaders are exhorted to be prepared to learn from those with more experience.

Then, in his final greetings and benediction, Peter returns, in verse 12, to the main theme of his letter, i.e. encouraging the scattered early Christians to stand firm in the gospel of God’s grace that they have received and be good witnesses for Christ through the struggles and suffering that they will, as ‘aliens’ and ‘exiles’ (1 Pet 1:1) undoubtedly come to experience.

In the first four verses, Peter makes a number of references to the analogy of shepherding a flock of sheep. In John 21:15-17, Jesus commissioned Peter to “*Feed my sheep*”.

1. How would you describe the food that the sheep are getting from Peter in this chapter?

Peter indicates that pastoral oversight by those given authority in the church should not be a dictatorial rule but be characterised by humble obedience. In this characteristic, they must be examples for those whom they lead.



2. In your own words, how would you summarize the guidelines for church leadership given in verses 1-3?
3. Do you think that these leadership guidelines also apply to those who are not ‘elders’, i.e. ‘the flock’? If so, why?

Peter indicates that those who faithfully lead in this way will be rewarded.

4. Explain the reward for faithful leadership in your own words? (see v.4) When is this reward received?

Peter then quotes from Proverbs 3:34 to indicate that ‘*God opposes the proud*’ and rewards the humble.

5. Why would God oppose the proud – what is the problem with being proud of one’s leadership?
6. As well as his call for ‘humility’, Peter calls for a second attitude for Christian living found in vv.8-9. Can you identify it?

There is a close parallel in Peter’s verses 5-7 with James 4:6-10. Read James 4:6-10:

6 But he (God) gives all the more grace; therefore it says,
"God opposes the proud,
but gives grace to the humble."

7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. NRSV

In v.7, Peter urges us to, ‘Cast all your anxiety on him (God), because he cares for you.’ This often-quoted verse is derived from Psalm 55:22.

7. How does this relate to an exhortation to be humble in the face of persecution and suffering?
8. Can you recall an occasion when v.7 gave you support? Do you think that this might be a good verse to recite each morning, or post on your refrigerator door, during the COVID-19 pandemic?



Using the vivid imagery of a roaring lion, Peter then warns the church of fatal danger. This image would have resonated with the early Christians who would have encountered lions used to kill people in the Roman Colosseum. But Peter is not thinking about Christian martyrdom. The lion represents Satan (v.8).

9. How might Satan be a danger to the Christian if we imagine him as a roaring lion?

In the book *The Pilgrim's Progress*, written by John Bunyan, the pilgrim on the journey representing the Christian life hears a roaring lion ahead around the corner of the path that he is following. Perhaps you might like to obtain a copy and read the pilgrim's response. The author's lesson is in the discovery that he made that the lion was chained and could not reach to the traveller on the path.

You might also like to research and read the true story of Marie Durand, a Huguenot woman, who in the 18th Century was imprisoned in the Tower of Constance in southern France for decades because of her refusal to renounce her Protestant faith.

10. If you were to put together a handbook called *Resisting the Devil*, and wanted to base it on verses 1 Peter 5:5-7 and James 4:6-10 . . . what would your chapter titles be?

Finally, Peter returns to rejoice in the grace of God and lists the reasons why we can '*cast all your anxiety on him.*' (v.10). God will complete his work in us: restore us, support us, strengthen us, and establish us. Peter had personally experienced this work of grace in his life after having denied Jesus after the crucifixion.

Peter ends with a greeting from the, '*sister church in Babylon*' from where he apparently is writing this letter – possibly a symbolic reference to a church in Rome.