

Living for God in difficult times
(Part 5)
1 Peter 5

Preface

This is the fifth and final volume in the *Sound Words* series on 1 Peter. The original radio programmes we recorded with the help of Howard Sayers, a pastor living and serving the Lord in the South of England, and it is his notes that have been the basis for the content of this book. The overall title of the series has been 'Living For God In Difficult Times' because the original recipients of Peter's letter knew from sometimes bitter personal experience the reality of persecution for the cause of Christ. It is clear from Peter's descriptions in this book that this hostility was sometimes very fierce. He writes of them as being refined by fire, of being on the receiving end of malicious slander and of enduring a painful trial.

The reality is that such descriptions of the suffering Christian believers have had to endure have applied in almost every generation since the days of the New Testament, and at the present time there is an increasing tide of hostility to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and his followers in many parts of our world. This makes Peter's first letter such a relevant and helpful book for all believers, wherever they live and at whatever period in history that has been or will be right until Christ returns again for his Church. Our prayer is that the Lord will use his Word and this explanation of it to strengthen the faith

and perseverance of all who read it. May he help us to endure to the end so that we will be saved.

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Chapter 1 - Encouragement For The Elders Of The Church, 1 Peter 5:1-4

Introduction

Peter has written his letter for a specific purpose, to help and encourage scattered, persecuted Christian believers who are facing trials and problems so that they can endure these in a way that glorifies their Lord and Saviour. He recognises that this has great implications for those who are leaders in the Church, the eldership, and also the relationship between the members. Consequently before closing his letter Peter addresses these issues. The elders are exhorted and encouraged (1 Peter 5:1-4), together with the Church members (1 Peter 5:5-11).

In this chapter we concentrate on Peter's words to the Church elders as he seeks to encourage them. The reason for Peter's exhortation to them is that they are going to have to support people who are facing challenges which at times will threaten their faith and trust in the Lord while they themselves face the same trials!

We may wonder why Peter addressed the elders of the church in an open or general letter to all the believers.

Why not send them a private letter? This can be answered in a number of ways. First, such public instruction would help stir up the elders to an awareness of their duties and their need to faithfully carry these out in the Lord's name. Secondly, it would stir up the Church members to pray for and recognise the work of those elders and support them in every way.

We come now to consider how Peter encouraged these men who led the Church.

1) Peter's authority to address them, v1

Peter's approach is very instructive. He could have addressed them as an apostle with all the authority of the Saviour coming with that office, but on this occasion does not do so. Instead, he approaches them as a fellow-elder in the church.

“To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow-elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed...”

Peter is not claiming any special rank or position of authority even though he is an apostle. Peter wanted these leaders to know he was one with them. He was speaking out of his personal experience. He was writing as one who had faced up to similar situations and therefore one who was deeply concerned for them. The book of Acts makes it clear that Peter was one with others. There was no

hierarchy amongst the apostles or the overseers of the churches. There were differences in ministry but not status. So it must be with us. Without recognition of this there cannot be real support for each other or exercise of ministry. Hierarchy breeds fear.

Peter shares with them that he was an eyewitness of Christ's sufferings. His references to the sufferings of Christ were not built on hearsay but on personal witness and knowledge. His commission, along with the other apostles, was to be a witness to Christ, to speak of what he had heard and seen (see Acts 1:8; 3:15; 4:20; 5:32; 1 John 1:1-3). Though some of the elders addressed, and that includes elders today, had not seen the sufferings of our Lord literally, yet by faith they had grasped and appreciated all that Christ has suffered for us. So Peter identifies with them. (As an aside, we need to remember that we are no less blessed because we have not literally seen the Lord Jesus in the flesh. John 20:29.)

Peter adds the encouragement that he, along with all true elders, because we have trusted in Christ and his sufferings, will assuredly be brought to share in the glory of Christ. Then our sufferings will be over forever. This is an immense encouragement for all elders to serve Christ and his church with diligence and consistency even when under the pressures of pastoral concerns and persecution. Therefore they need not be afraid of taking the initiative and carrying out their duties. They are in good company

and have just the same commission as all the servants of God over the years.

2) The task they have to fulfil, v2a

“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers...”

The prime task of a shepherd is to care for the sheep. This involves feeding and nourishing the flock. The eastern shepherd lived with his sheep and led them by example, directing and protecting them from danger of attack. Elders do this when they bring the Word of God to bear on themselves and the members of the Church as they apply the Scriptures to specific issues which the different members of the Church are facing. This work is not social but spiritual and the shepherd is to encourage the flock of God to be together often. This task is to be done when the Church gathers together and there is the public teaching of the Word of God. It is also to be done privately, such as when visiting believers in their homes.

The elders are to serve as overseers. This means to exercise discipline amongst the flock. This will be positive as well as negative discipline. Its purpose is to strengthen and establish godliness and purity of life amongst them. It includes guarding and watching over the Lord’s people in their care. It particularly means leading them by example as well as by precept. The elders are to foster and develop the gifts God has given to the sheep whatever those gifts might be.

This task is a very high calling. Elders must study the Scriptures and work at making their teaching from the Word of God relevant to the congregation, and they are to lead in a godly manner. They are to ensure there is no compromising of the teaching of the Bible and they are to lead the flock closer and closer to the Lord.

3) The motives that must drive them, vs2b-3

Like all good pastors, Peter gives a number of reasons why the elders of each church are to do as he has stated in the earlier part of verse 2. They are spiritual and godly reasons, and Peter is showing them and us that he has not given this instruction simply because he wanted to impose his own ideas. This is the way God wants church elders to behave.

“...not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”

An elder must serve the Lord and his people with a willing heart. He is not to be motivated by a desire for what he can get out of it; he is not to be greedy for money. This can be a real temptation for those in church leadership positions and therefore needs to be resisted strongly even before the person is appointed to eldership position. Instead he is to be motivated out of love and concern for the flock and the Chief Shepherd of the sheep. Only then will he willingly

serve the sheep and be able and ready to suffer if need be for them. An elder is not to act like the hired hands whom Jesus said desert the sheep when danger of attack comes to the flock. They are to be true shepherds (see John 10:12-13).

Peter uses the term *'eager'* to show that each elder is not to be reluctant to speak and act as may be needful for the good of the sheep, even when it may be costly for them to do so. There will be times when a Church member may need to be rebuked and corrected and sometimes even come under Church discipline. If there is reluctance then the flock will suffer and become weak. We need also to note that Peter adds a helpful balance by teaching that elders are not to 'lord it over' those whom the Lord has entrusted to their care. Elders are not to be domineering, again a very real temptation that must be resisted. Elders are stewards in the Lord's work.

All elders must have the glory of God uppermost in their hearts as they exercise their leadership gifts in the Church. A true godly elder will want both his own life and that of each believer to bring honour and praise to the Lord. Therefore the elder will show by the example of a holy, spiritual and close walk with God what each member of the Church should be like.

The principles of Hebrews 13:17 are applicable as a challenge to the shepherd and a warning to the sheep. *"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account.*

Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you."

4) The reward they can expect, v4

"And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away."

What an amazing promise is given to elders who are faithful to their high calling! A reward for their service awaits them. At the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd, they will receive a glorious and unfading crown. This is undoubtedly infinitely more valuable than the money that Peter warned about in v2 and which the unscrupulous would consider the reason for their position of leadership in the Church of God. This is something much higher and much greater. Peter carefully reminds the elders that Jesus Christ is *"the Chief Shepherd"* and the commentator Matthew Henry urges us to learn three lessons from that.

1. Jesus Christ is the Chief Shepherd of the whole flock and heritage of God. He bought them, and rules them; he defends and saves them forever. He is also the chief shepherd over all inferior shepherds; they derive their authority from him, act in his name and are accountable to him at last.
2. This chief shepherd will appear to judge all ministers and under-shepherds, to call them to account, whether

they have faithfully discharged their duty both publicly and privately according to the foregoing directions.

3. Those that are found to have done their duty shall have what is infinitely better than temporal gain; they shall receive from the grand shepherd a high degree of everlasting glory, *“a crown of glory that will never fade away.”*

At that great coronation day the faithful servants of the Lord will hear from his lips, *“Well done, good and faithful servant! ... Come and share your master’s happiness!”* (Matthew 25:21.)

Chapter 2 – Instruction For The Members Of The Church, 1 Peter 5:5-11

Introduction

Having addressed the elders of the Churches Peter goes on to give instruction for Church members. He makes the point that just as the leaders in the churches are to shepherd and care for the flock (v1-4), so the flock itself has duties within itself (v5-11). The shepherd is to encourage the flock to do its own part in the dangerous days in which it lives. Remember Peter is writing to those who are finding it very hard going as they are facing persecution for being Christian believers. There is a sense in which he is saying to them, “While your elders are to help and encourage you, you are also to help and encourage each other.” The elders have a hard task to fulfil and the flock should not be found

making that task harder than it already is! The sheep in the flock have a responsibility towards each other.

1) The flock of God is to be characterised by humility vs5-7

“Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility towards one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”

The word submission literally means to subject one’s self, to obey, to submit to another’s control, to yield to another’s admonition or advice. It was a Greek military term meaning ‘to arrange [troop divisions] in a military fashion under the command of a leader’. In non-military use, it was ‘a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden’.

The first who are addressed by Peter are the young (v5). Young people are to submit to their elders. The term ‘older’ may equally mean those in authority and those who are more experienced in both life and the faith. What Peter is pleading for is a proper and respectful relationship between the younger and older members of the church, between the younger people and the leaders of the church. There is a particular tendency for young people to assert

themselves over others. Peter says that should not be so in the Church of Christ. Indeed in all ages in the Church there should be submission to each other (v5). Philippians 2:3-4 is very relevant here where Paul writes *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”* Such an attitude should be prompted by the attitude of our Saviour (Philippians 2:5-8). We should not be asserting ourselves or our views over others. Basically we should ALL be subject to the Word of God in everything (Luke 11:28; 2 Corinthians 4:2). There is a great incentive to be like this; namely, God will bless us by giving his grace (see v5; Proverbs 3:34).

Supremely of course we are to show submission to God (v6-7). Note the *‘therefore’* and ask what it is there for. Because God gives grace to the humble we must humble ourselves before him pre-eminently. Indeed, we should acknowledge God’s hand and submit to it in all that befalls us, and in this context that means we are not to blame our elders for being too stringent in their ministry and application. We should receive their instructions, exhortations, warnings and encouragements as they teach and preach the Word of God to us.

In addition we can say we should not grumble when trouble comes for taking a stand for the Lord. We need to learn to trust God to exalt (*“lift us up”*) in due course. In the meantime, we should cast all our care upon him with

confidence. We are reminded of our Saviour in his trouble (see 1 Peter 2:23-24; Isaiah 53). It is in a humble walk with God and each other that we find grace to help in our time of need (see Hebrews 4:16).

2) The flock of God is to be characterised by vigilance v8

“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

Peter’s first readers were well aware of the activity of the devil, that great enemy of God and man. They had been suffering at his hand in the various trials and persecutions they had already experienced. Peter’s advice here is something they would have readily agreed with. They, and we must add we, are to be alert and watchful because of the variety of ways in which he can attack us. Peter described Satan in his destructive mode; he is like a roaring lion. The devil is a ferocious enemy and his intention is to do us harm and bring us to ruin. He would like to destroy the whole of God’s flock. He does so in various ways but perhaps most successfully when he can stimulate pride amongst the sheep. That has been his avenue of approach from the beginning. Our Lord told us to watch and pray (Mark 14:38; Luke 21:36) and Peter is simply underlining what Jesus has already taught us. Exercising such vigilance will keep us from falling into sin and dishonouring God’s name.

3) The Flock of God is to be characterised by steadfast resistance to Satan v9

“Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”

There is a danger of self-centredness which would cause us to cave in to the pressures. We need to remember that we are not the only ones under pressure. All our brothers and sisters in Christ are too. Are we going to let our Lord down? Are we going to let the cause of Christ down? Surely not!

We must take the whole armour of God and use it (Ephesians 6:12ff) and resist the devil and he will flee from us (James 4:7f).

4) Peter prays for them vs10-11

“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. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.”

Knowing just how hard this all is Peter calls on God to aid his people in the day of difficulty and pressure. In so doing he draws the attention of all Christians to a number of important points.

- Who God is; he is *“the God of all grace”*. To the flock God is gracious in his nature and activity

however much it may seem to be otherwise when facing persecution and difficulty. Bear in mind Rom 8:28.

- What God has done; he has called us *“to his eternal glory”*.
- Whom he has called *“you”*, frail, sinful people just like us.
- How God has done it: *“in Christ”*. All these blessings are ours because Christ our Lord suffered.
- What we must expect; to *“suffer a little while”*. Jesus told us to follow him. That must include an element of opposition and pressure.
- What God will do: he will restore and establish and strengthen and settle us. As we pass through these things we are being prepared for glory.
- What the end result will be; God will be glorified.

No wonder Peter says *“Amen”*, so let it be.

Chapter 3 - An Instructive Farewell, 1 Peter 5:12-14

Introduction

These last three verses on the surface may seem to have little to say to us. However, as Peter signs off his letter of encouragement, he gives us one further stimulus to live as we should in this world. He does so by giving us a glimpse of the way in which the early Christians lived and worked together. So these verses have something to say to us in the matter of Christian fellowship. We should find our fellowship in Christian things stirred up by them.

1) Fellowship between Church leaders vs12-13

“With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it. She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark.”

Peter, Silas and Mark are cooperating together in encouraging these struggling Christians. Indeed, this has happened before with other letters we find in the New Testament (see 2 Corinthians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:1).

Silas was probably the close associate of Paul and Timothy in Acts 15-16. He was considered by Peter and Paul and the Church in Jerusalem to be a faithful brother, trustworthy to deliver a letter and a message.

Mark is probably John Mark who was associated with Peter's deliverance from prison (Acts 12:12). He was the cousin of Barnabas (Col 4:10), Paul and Barnabas' assistant (Acts 12:25), a waverer to begin with (Acts 15:37-38) but faithful to Paul in the long term (2 Timothy 4:11; Colossians 4:10). He is thought to be the writer of Mark's Gospel. Ancient tradition has it that he was a constant companion of Peter. The Gospel of Mark is recognised as being the consequence of Peter's communication with Mark, so much so that ancient writers have called it the Gospel of Peter.

Their fellowship found its expression in their cooperating together to encourage and help struggling Christians in their battle with the world. Their common goal was the glory of God and the building up of the saints. We can say that Peter wrote the letter, Silas delivered it, and Mark sent his greetings.

2) Fellowship between local Churches v13

Peter uses the unusual phrase, *“She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings.”* Differences have arisen over this phrase which is not altogether clear. Is Babylon equivalent to Rome? Is Babylon literal Babylon in Assyria? Is Babylon a term for the world of spiritual wickedness as John uses the term in Revelation? Whatever the answer we can safely say that the church of Christ is showing her support for local communities of believers in trouble and under persecution. Local churches are not to be viewed in isolation. The Scriptures are clear that each local Church is an independent entity but is also interdependent on other Churches. The local Church is independent but always in fellowship with others (see Colossians 4:16 Colosse and Laodicea; Acts 15:6ff the Council at Jerusalem; the various greetings in Paul's letters Rom 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Corinthians 13:13; Galatians 1:2, and in Hebrews 13:24 Italian brethren are mentioned).

Their fellowship found its expression as greetings were sent via Silas. This was an expression of support and

concern for those to whom they are sent. Others who could not ignore them but shared together with them in their struggles knew the pressures on these scattered believers. Christian churches should always be found helping one another to proclaim the Gospel and mutually support, pray for and edify each other.

3) Fellowship between Individual Christians v14

“Greet one another with a kiss of love.”

Christians are not to live isolated and cloistered lives. They are to mix with other Christians (see also the exhortation and warning of Hebrews 10:24-25). They were to greet one another in a way that was appropriate and an expression of their Christian love for each other. This would indicate their support and concern for one another. Peter therefore urges them to express that love and support whenever they meet one another. Let each other know that you are concerned about each other.

Conclusion

Peter seeks peace to be on all those who are in Christ Jesus (v14). We must pray and work for peace amongst the people of God. Peter prayed for it in this verse and he worked for it in writing this letter. We must do the same. It is no use praying for peace and blessing if we do not actually contribute towards it by having meaningful fellowship and Biblical attitudes towards each other.

Finally, because the going is hard for Christians in every way, read this letter regularly and take its teaching to heart. Have fellowship with other believers in line with the principles Peter has laid before us and the way will be smoothed and made easier to bear.

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