

**The First Letter of Peter
Today's Lesson: 4:7-5:14**

- I. Introduction, 1:1-2
- II. The Possessions of the Believer in Christ, 1:3-12
- III. The Personal Conduct of Believers Together, 1:13-2:10
- IV. The Personal Conduct of Believers in Society, 2:11-5:11
 - A. In summary, 2:11-12
 - B. In submission, 2:13-3:12
 - C. In suffering, 3:13-4:19
 - 1. Maintain a good conscience, 3:13-22
 - 2. Walk in the will of God, 4:1-6
 - 3. Live soberly in view of immanent judgment, 4:7-11
 - 4. Realize trials are normal, 4:12-19

The data available to us in the Acts, as well as several letters, suggest that Christians experienced opposition for their religious commitments from the beginning of the church. While difficulties come in a variety of forms, and at various times and circumstances, they are to be expected. We are not told to rejoice in suffering, but in the fruit, it produces ("fire" purifies).

- a. Suffering, a reality for all His children, v. 12

"Fiery ordeal" is a metaphor for discomfoting trials; such experiences of suffering for one's religious attachments are neither rare nor purposeless. We are not to be shocked by them living in a world hostile to Christ. Further, pain for Christ demonstrates our values (as expressed in 1:7).

- b. Suffering, a proof of genuine profession, vv. 13-14

- 1) The fact, v. 13

To share in suffering with Christ today is to share in the glories of Christ "tomorrow." We are not told to rejoice in suffering, but it what it tells us. That is, to suffer for Christ is the witness that we belong to Him. It also tells us that someday we will reign with Him.

- 2) The reason, v. 14

The disclosure that the kind of suffering that these believers are enduring ("reviling") is confirmed elsewhere in the book (e.g., 4:4). The term suggests verbal abuse, slander, and reproach.

- a) The reality of God's blessing, 14a

While not one should find pain pleasant, welcomed, or enjoyable, suffering for Christ is not without a cause for joy. The joy is in knowing that we belong to Him, the good part of it all is assurance that we are His!

- b) The cause of God's blessing, v. 14b

The reason for rejoicing in difficulties is that it shows that we are the children of God, indwelt by the Spirit of God.

c. Suffering, the right attitude, vv. 15-16

While we should suffer for doing wrong things, we should not feel shame if we suffer in doing what is right. An illustration of this is the events surrounding Acts 5:29.

The designation of Christ-followers as Christians occurs only two other times in the Bible (Acts 11:26 [in Antioch where the term is initially coined] and 26:28 [a reference by Herod Agrippa]).

d. Suffering, the correct perspective, vv. 17-18

a) Stated, v. 17

The word translated “judgment” does not necessarily convey a negative connotation, depending on the intent or purpose in it (positive or negative). The point seems to be that if God brings suffering to His own people, how much surer is it for those who despise Him. Luther said it his way, “If God treats His friends this way, how will He treat His enemies.” Of course, God brings difficulties to us for our maturing, the extension of His witness through us, and for His glory.

b) Confirmed, v. 18

The citation is from Proverbs 11:31. Peter’s reference to an OT passage should remind us that the OT was the Bible of the early church. The point is that if the righteous have a sin problem, how much more will the wicked (who have no redeemer or compassionate judge).

e. Suffering, the conclusion, v. 19

This single verse summarizes the message of the entire letter! What a wonderful verse to comfort our souls in troublesome times. To trust or entrust means to turn over our cares and our need to be cared for to another. It is wise to do so because God is faithful in keeping His promises.

D. In service, 5:1-11

The shift in topic to duties within the local churches is likely a springboard from 4:17. If judgment does not escape the household of God, it would be logical to think of obligations

1. Elders: Shepherd the flock, vv. 1-4

The earliest churches were led by a plurality of leaders called elders and bishops; there is little evidence that churches at that time were under the leadership of a single pastor (Acts 20:28; Titus 1:5. 7). “Elder” suggests the spiritual; qualifications for the office; bishop or overseer the function.

a. The instructions for serving the flock, vv. 1-3

1) Peter’s qualification, v. 1

It is important to note that Peter recognizes that the local churches are to be governed by elders and that it functions in plurality with parity.

Peter mentions several interesting things: first, that he is an equal among others, not superior, in a leadership position in the churches. Second, that he witnessed Christ's sufferings that instanced one of his greatest failures (his three denials in the courtyard on the night of Jesus' arrest). And third, that he will share in the glorious victory of Christ. Peter is an example of a man who sinned seriously but was restored not only to leadership but to share in Christ's triumph when He returns (here is a message of grace for all of us!)

2) Peter's instructions, vv. 2-3

a) Stated, v. 2a

There is a marvelous example of a play-on-words here; the noun and verb are from the same root. A "shepherd (overseer, bishop, pastor)" is to "shepherd (care)" for the flock (the assembly of saints). It is the word that Jesus used in Peter's restoration (John 21:16).

b) Explained, vv. 2b-3

Peter lists three sins that authority-figures may be prone to with an antidote in each case.

Sloth (half-hearted service)... devoted enthusiasm

Greed..... devoted selflessness

Power (authority)..... devoted examples

c. The reward in serving the flock, v. 4

Overseers are to be shepherds, but they are under the authority of another, the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ. The concept behind "crown" is recognition and honor. The selfless labor of church leaders will not go unheralded! The "crown" that they will receive will be eternal life. Since heaven is life in the presence of God and righteousness is a state and not subject to degrees, there will be not distinction of worth or position. The elder will receive what all of us will receive but will be great even beyond compare.

2. Young men: Be subject, v. 5a

The term "likewise" indicates that the young men are under authority as the elders. It is interesting that Peter uses a word that does not look at the duties of the office as it does the prerequisite maturity required to assume the office (elder). The younger males are to be subject to the older, more mature male leadership.

3. All, vv. 5b-11

a. Be humble, vv. 5b-7

1) The fact stated, v. 5b

The term “humility” means the putting of other first; it is the opposite of being haughty or arrogant in demeanor. The concept of “clothe” is identity.

2) The reason stated, v. 6

The citation by Peter is from Proverbs 3:34.

3) The means stated, v. 7a

The way to humble ourselves is to cast our cares on God; it is to recognize our own insufficiency to manage life and call or express our needs to Him (prayer expresses dependence). “Cares” means your anxieties.

4) The cause explained, v. 7b

What a wonderful declaration; the Lord of heaven and earth cares for us! Human concerns are legitimate, but the solution is not to turn into ourselves for help, but to state our needs to God.

b. Be vigilant, v. 8

The opposite of sober watchfulness is spiritual lethargy and sloth. As the prowling lion stalks silently and attacks without warning, so does the devil. The allusion is from Psalm 22:13.

The Bible is clear that the devil with his agents, demons, is real and the enemy of the saint. His work is evident in irrational and bizarre behavior, malicious speech, self-destructive habits, unexplained emotional extremes (depression, hatred, anger, fear), and false teachings.

c. Be resistant, vv. 9-11

1) The command, v. 9a

Instead of fearing the devil though formidable, we are to reject his ways and resist his influences.

2) The means, v. 9b

Since the devil is characterized by lies and distortion, the way to resist him is to become an increasingly knowledgeable and confident Christian. The way to detect counterfeit money is to know the character of authentic currency; the way to resist the devil is to know God well

3) The promise, v. 10

The word “and” is better translated as “but,” introducing a contrastive statement. Suffering for Christ is normal yet it is not forever.

Someday it will be in the past and we will experience our final, ultimate redemption! In the great day when all peoples are either vindicated or condemned, God’s blessing will be ours!

4) The source, v. 11

God alone can accomplish this, and He will do so in the great day. God rules over this world; He alone is all-powerful. Further He is such without the threat of diminution forever!

V. Conclusion, 5:12–14

A. The reason for writing, v. 12

Silvanus (Silas) accompanied Paul on the second and third missionary journeys. Here he seems to be the bearer of the letter. He is described as a faithful man, a devoted missionary. He was in the church in Antioch originally.

The purpose for writing is made clear: to encourage steadfastness in the faith considering hostilities

B. The greetings, vv. 13-14a

“Babylon” is a designation for Rome. The previously prosperous city was uninhabited in Peter’s day and there is no tradition that Peter visited the city. John later connects Babylon with Rome (Rev. 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21).

The reference to Mark is interesting since he traveled at one time with Barnabas, following his failure on the first missionary journey with Paul. It suggests, as does the reference to Silvanus, that we have sparse accounts of the work of the early missionaries.

B. The benediction, v. 14b

Thoughts:

1. We tend to think in our culture that pain, disappointment, and social discomfort are abnormalities. This seems to indicate more of unrealistic perceptions and a willingness to live in “never-never land.” We live in a fallen world, fallen ourselves, and among people without exception just like us. It is simply naïve to think that it is possible to live in ease, and we journey through this life. Are you willing to see this in a practical sense of your day-to-day experience?
2. This a fractured world and fractured lives a reality, but it is not beyond the control of God who works all things after the counsels of His good pleasure. In ways you and I may never grasp, God is bringing His purposes to fruition though my small mind cannot fathom it. Are you seeing your pains and disappointments through the lens of verse nineteen (“Let those who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right”)? Are you willing to trust God or are you willing to think that He does not like you particularly or wants you to be miserable or is punishing you for reasons that you are not aware of, having done nothing wrong that you know?
3. The instruction to those who lead us is certainly applicable to all of us since the teaching has to do with how one is to serve the Lord; though it is aimed at a particular audience, its principles are helpful for all Christians. Caring for others is not a choice for us even though some have been given the office as well as the duty. We are to lead others without thought of personal gain, without thinking we are better and more privileged than those we help, or without a demanding, dictatorial spirit. Shepherds lead sheep; they do not herd them. Is that how you treat you sisters and brothers in Christ? Are you a good shepherd? What ways can you improve in this duty?
4. There is a wonderful promise in our passage today repeated several times. You and I have a wonderful future; we have a hope that transcends the toils and snares of

this life. God's children are saved, but not without difficulties in this life (3:18). We are those who have a secure hope that is not a dream; it is promised by the great promise-keeper in heaven, the one who has never proven unfaithful! Further, you and I are promised an "unfading crown of glory (4:4) that God will give us. What is it? It is eternal life, an existence forever in the presence of God where there will be no no more pain or sorrow! Does this not excite you filling you with delight and hope? Peter states the promise in 5:1: "We will be partakers also of the glory that is to be revealed." Wow! Is this not reason for rejoicing everyday and in every circumstance? Look at 5:10. What a promise from God! Pain will end someday and God will "perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you." Is there any reason for you to be overwhelmed if you look to God?

5. We are commanded of God in our daily lives to be characterized by humbleness and humility. He is not describing a mere facade of appearances, but an attitude that springs from the heart into observable behavior. How are we to do this? The answer is wonderful. We should not internalize our stresses and "put on a happy face;" we should take our burdens and pains to God and cast them into His lap knowing that He cares for us (5:7). Here is God's remedy for the aching heart. Pains are real and there is no need to hide them; we should reveal them to God and through His strength, trust in His care for us and His power to comfort. We should share our burdens with those whom we love and trust, but we must go to God and talk to Him.
6. We do not only live in a fallen world among fallen people and are fallen ourselves, but we also have an enemy of our souls. He does not dress in a red suit having a long tail and pointed ears; yet he is seeking to devourer us. His ways are clever because he is a master observer and a profound psychologist. Did you take him into account as the origin at times of troubles and pain? He has a single purpose and that is to destroy the work of God and torment God's children. He is not omnipotent, but he has a long string of operational allowances. His minions are everywhere; some of them at times can be our loved ones and friends. Have you ever been the cause of perpetrating the devil's work in the lives of others? Sober to think about, is it not?
7. At two points in chapter five we have instances of people that experienced notable moral failure in their lives. Peter, of course, failed miserably through fear that led to denial and cursing of the Lord he loved. Mark feared and left Paul and Barnabas in difficult circumstances in southern Turkey causing Paul to distrust him and resulting in a division in the mission endeavor (Paul taking Silas [Silvanus] and Barnabas taking his cousin, John Mark). This tells me that momentary failures are not life determinative. Both men repented apparently and became very trustworthy servants of God, both men writing what we recognize as canonical scripture. Peter found John Mark a wonderful servant of God (as did Paul later). Momentary regrets do not prevent service for any of us. Are you allowing a past event, or even events, to be an excuse for the expression of your abilities, talents, and circumstances in the service of your Savior? We have all made regrettable mistakes, but that gives us no right to be quitters or despondent groping in self-pity and self-denunciation. There is great power in forgiveness. Look up, not inward, and find a merciful and forgiving redeemer!!