

An Exhortation to the Church: Stand Firm

1 Peter 5:5-14

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We complete our journey through 1 Peter this morning. The next two Sundays, Pastor Eric will walk you through Jude. Then on September 27, we begin 2 Peter. Lord willing, that will wrap up at Thanksgiving, where we will begin Advent, and that will take us through Christmas and the end of the year.

St. Augustine once said, *“The way to Christ is first through humility, second through humility, and third through humility.”* What a beautiful reminder of what the heart of the Christian should be. Christianity is not a religion of the proud. It is for the humble.

The Apostle Peter closed his letter with a strong exhortation for God’s people to be a humble people. Humility is one of the main themes that has run through his letter. Let’s trace humility through 1 Peter. Peter opened the letter with a detailed explanation of the gospel, which humbles us because we learn that we did nothing to save ourselves. It was all Jesus.

Then, in 1 Peter 2:13, he exhorted God’s exiled people to be a humble church by submitting to our government and human institutions as far as they do not lead us into sin. Remember, Peter exhorted God’s people to honor the Roman Emperor. Really Peter? Honor the evil Roman Emperor? There is no one in our current national, state, and local governments as anti-Christ as the Roman Emperors were in Peter’s day.

After submitting to the government, Peter called servants to submit to their masters, and we applied it as employees submitting to their employers. How we submit to those in authority over us is a display of our faith in Christ. It is a witness to our trust in the providential governing of God.

Next in 1 Peter 3, Peter called wives to submit to their husbands and husbands to humbly live with their wives in an understanding way. In other words, humility was to be the air that is breathed in the husband-wife relationship. Believe me that what Peter said was as strange then as it sounds today in our modern culture. Finally, in 1 Peter 5, he called the church to have elders that are humble shepherds of God’s flock.

Peter wrapped up his letter to the churches by giving us three exhortations: be humble with one another, be humble before God, and stand firm in the true grace of the gospel.

I. Humility with One Another (v. 5)

“Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders.”

Peter begins with an exhortation for the younger to be subject to the elders. Why does he call out *those who are younger*? The New American Standard and the NIV translate the Greek word *young* as young men. However, I think the ESV is right when it translates as simply *young*. The Greek word means *young people*.

Who exactly Peter is addressing is debated. However, I agree with Dr. Tom Schreiner, the outstanding New Testament scholar at The Southern Seminary. He says, *“A decision [about who Peter is addressing] is difficult, but we probably should understand Peter to refer to those who are literally younger, perhaps because younger people would be more apt to act rebelliously.”*¹

The fact is young people tend to struggle with pride. They take pride in their *physical strength*. And, most of them believe they have *superior intelligence and wisdom due to all of their amazing life experiences*.

In all seriousness, young people are tempted to be more independent and rebellious. That is why Proverbs is filled with exhortations and warnings to young people not to forsake the wisdom of older people. So, Peter singles them out with an exhortation to submit to the humble shepherding of their elders.

Peter makes this exhortation not simply to protect the young people and establish elder leadership but primarily because he wanted to protect unity of the churches. Remember, he was writing to suffering churches. A divided church cannot survive great suffering. So, when suffering comes, young people need to submit to their elders who are humbly trying to shepherd them.

Obviously, Peter is not counseling young people to follow immoral leaders. Leaders that are leading in violation of God’s word and the gospel should not be followed.

Peter then moves to exhort the whole church to humility toward one another.

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: 1, 2 Peter, Jude, Vol. 37, 237.*

“Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’”

One of the beautiful things that God does for us as His children is clothe us. When we came to Jesus broken by sin, naked before Him in our unrighteousness, He gave us faith and clothed us in His righteousness.

Now Peter exhorts us to be clothed in humility toward one another. Our entire being is to be covered with the virtue of humility. In everything we do and say, true Christian humility is the glue that holds it together.

Here is my point, our Savior is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and yet, he humbled Himself and took on the form of a servant. He lived a perfect life and never sinned, not even once. Yet, it was His submission to His Father’s will that led Him to the cross to die as a substitute for sinners. To show the world that Jesus was the Savior God had promised to send, He exalted Jesus by raising Him from the dead on the third day.

Brothers and sisters, it was a wicked, evil, sinful Roman Government that sent Jesus to the cross on trumped-up charges and a wrongful conviction. He had the power and authority to overrule them, but He did not. It was God’s plan to send Jesus to the cross, and God used the governing of a wicked Roman government and the corrupt Jewish establishment to do it. Jesus could have very easily stopped it all, but He did not. By submitting, He was accomplishing God’s will.

I know no one here wants to be wearing a mask, and everyone has COVID fatigue. I know our local government is in conflict with the state of Iowa’s mandate on masks. However, our local government is not preventing us from meeting in order to worship Jesus to teach and preach the gospel.

The time for civil disobedience may come, but it is not yet. I am asking you to trust the leaders of your church and let’s submit to our local government together. Let’s allow this ordinance time to work itself out. Let’s love our city well and comply.

In John 17:23, Jesus prayed that we would become perfectly one in Him and with one another. Then He went on to say, *“So that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”* Our unity as we submit to our local government is a corporate witness of our love for Jesus and our love for one another to an unbelieving world.

Brothers and sisters, if we DO NOT clothe ourselves with humility during this time, we will rip our church apart. This is the danger that is before us. This is real spiritual warfare, and the lines have been drawn in our hearts. The question is: *Will we pull together and clothe ourselves in humility, or will we remove our clothing of humility and be devoured?* We only have two options. There is no middle ground.

II. Humility Before God (vv. 6-11)

Peter follows the calls to be clothed in humility toward one another with the exhortation to humble yourself under God’s mighty hand so that at the proper time, He may exalt you. Listen to vv. 6-7:

*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.*

We need to remember that Peter was writing to suffering Christians who gathered as persecuted churches. He wanted them to understand that God was sovereignly in control of all of the situations that were causing their suffering.

Their humility displayed the fact that they humbled themselves under God’s mighty hand. It showed they trusted Him and His sovereign control.

Let me ask you a question: Do you think God is in charge of all of the COVID stuff? Do you? Do you live like He is sovereign over it all? Do you believe that God is over this city ordinance?

God is over COVID, and He is over the Ames Mask Ordinance. He has allowed it. God is using it to test you? *He is using it to perfect you.* He is putting you through trials and grief to see if you will humble yourself under His mighty hand and cast all your anxieties and cares on Him.

Angry, anxious, and hurting brothers and sisters of Grand Avenue—God cares for you. He is waiting for you to cast your anxiety on Him.

In this text is another wonderful metaphor. Remember, in v. 5; Peter called us to *clothe ourselves in humility.* Now he exhorts us to *cast our cares* on Him.

The Greek word *cast* is a fishing term. It does not mean to cast a rod and reel but to cast nets like commercial first-century fishermen. Those fishermen would take large, heavy nets that were weighted and throw them into the sea where they would quickly sink over schools of fish. Then they would draw the rope and catch the fish.

Peter exhorts us to take our anxieties that are large and heavy and cast them on to God. Why? Because God cares for you.

How do you know God cares for you? Just look at the cross where your Savior died and sees the nails in His hands and feet. See the blood that He spilled for you. Jesus took your cares and your anxiety to the cross with Him and crucified them. He cares for you.

You have probably heard the story of Horatio Spafford. He is the man who wrote the amazing hymn: *It Is Well With My Soul*. Let me briefly tell you his story. He and his family lived in Chicago. His wife and four of his children had been to England on vacation. He was unable to go because they had lost everything in the great Chicago fire. On November 22, 1873, the family was coming back to him across the Atlantic on an ocean liner. The ocean liner hit an iceberg and began to sink. His wife got the four children around her, and they sat down and began to pray, and they asked God to protect them.

Unfortunately, all of the children were drowned. The wife survived. She was picked up unconscious and taken to New York City. She wired Horatio in Chicago. All she said in the telegram was “*Saved alone.*”

When they got together, they sat down and processed their pain before God. As a result, he wrote the hymn, “*It Is Well With My Soul.*” Listen to some of the lyrics, and perhaps they will help you:

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say
It is well, it is well, with my soul
Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul
My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, o my soul*

Horatio Spafford and his wife processed his pain, grief, loss, and anxiety with what Jesus Christ had done on the cross. They looked at the cross, and Jesus atonement for them. Will you humble yourself under God’s mighty hand and process your anxieties, pain, grief, and COVID fatigue in light of the cross?

Next, in v. 8, Peter calls us to be sober-minded and resist the devil. Peter says:

⁸Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Peter uses another metaphor in v. 8. He calls the devil a roaring lion who prowls around seeking someone to devour.

The devil is a real enemy of God and His people. Brothers and sisters, there are two ditches we can fall into when it comes to the devil. One ditch is to not believe he exists, and the other ditch is to have an unhealthy obsession with the devil and believe there is a demon under every rock. The devil does not care which ditch we fall into, only that we are stuck in one or the other. The fact is the devil is a defeated foe. He is a defeated lion that is tethered and obeys God’s commands.

Yet, make no mistake, the devil can wreak havoc in our lives and destroy our witness to a lost world. Therefore, we must stand firm and resist the devil.

Peter exhorts us to be *sober-minded and watchful*. This means we must have our minds clear and grounded in God’s word. Only the renewed mind is a clear mind, and the only way to have a clear, renewed mind is when the Spirit of God takes the word of God and does that work.

A *sober-minded, watchful* Christian is one who can step back and see the temptation and not give in to it. The sober-minded, watchful Christian is clothed in the righteousness of Christ, clothed in humility, and also clothed in the armor of God.

Brothers and sisters, life is war! It is a spiritual battle every day. Our enemy is on the attack, so we must be clothed in the armor of God.

Next, v. 9 exhorts us to resist the devil:

⁹Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

James teaches us in James 4:7 that if we resist the devil, he will flee. It is hard to resist the temptations of the devil. Sometimes it seems like the longer we resist, the more difficult it becomes.

Yet, do not overlook this key point Peter states. *The way to resist the devil is to be firm in your faith.* You must be grounded in the word of God. The way to make your *faith firm* is through Bible reading, Bible study, Bible memorization, and meditation. Also, our faith grows firmer by gathering with the saints of God to worship Jesus.

How does a settled faith resist the devil? For example, if you are on the internet and you see something you shouldn't, and you are tempted to read or click on a link that you know will lead to sin, a battle begins in your heart and mind. You tell yourself that you will just linger a little longer or make up some other excuse, but the temptation does not go away; it only grows stronger.

What do you do? Scripture teaches us to flee! We flee sexual sin, we flee from idolatry, we flee from the love of money, we flee from the evil desires of youth, and then we pursue righteousness.

Then Peter says something that seems out of sync. He reminds us that we have brothers and sister in Christ that are undergoing the same temptation and suffering throughout the world.

How does this help us? When we realize we have brothers and sisters around the world resisting the devil and enduring suffering, we are reminded we are united in Christ with other struggling Christians. We are reminded that suffering is part of our journey as exiles in this world. God has a plan for our suffering, and that is to make known the sufferings of Christ. When we hear the stories of how our suffering brothers and sisters in Christ endured, it gives us hope to endure.

Finally, in vv. 10-11, Peter shows what God will do for His suffering church:

¹⁰And 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. ¹¹To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

These two verses are absolutely amazing! Notice what he says, "*After you have suffered a little while.*"

Friends, there is no such thing as Christianity without suffering. The plain and simple fact is that suffering is built into the Christian life. The good news is that suffering is only for "*a little while.*"

Peter closes the letter by showing us what God does for His people who suffer well. Look back at 1 Peter 1:6-7:

⁶In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been [notice what he says] grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

At the close of the letter, Peter circles back to the fact that our suffering is for *a little while*. He uses three words to describe our suffering: *grieved, trials, and tested*.

Now at the close of his letter, he turns our suffering inside out. Notice what *the God of all grace* does with our griefs, trials, and testing. *He says after we have suffered a little while, the God of all grace will: restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you in your faith at the revelation of Jesus Christ. The God of all grace takes our grief, trials, and testing, and through them, He restores, confirms, strengthens, and establishes us in our faith.* God works them together for our good.

Brothers and sisters, the good news is that Jesus holds us fast, and because He does, we worship. Our response to what the God of All Grace does is: Verse 11, "*To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*" The application here is to trust God when you are suffering and obey His word.

III. Stand Firm in the True Grace of the Gospel! (vv. 12-14)

Verses 12-14 is the doxological closing to the letter. In these verses, we learn that Sylvanus penned the letter for Peter. Most likely, Peter spoke the words, and Sylvanus wrote them down.

At the end of v. 12, we hear the main point of this whole letter. Peter is exhorting God's people to *stand firm in the true grace of the doctrine that is in this letter*. This is the true grace of God, and we are to hear it, learn it, and stand firm in it without wavering. This is the main goal of his letter. He wants Christians who read it to stand firm in the true grace of God.

Finally, in v. 13, is another reason I believe Peter was meditating on Ezekiel as he wrote this letter. "*She who is in Babylon*" is the church who is exiled in the world. If you remember, Babylon was where Judah was exiled after Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. It was a wicked city filled with false gods, and the people were persecuted and suffering. The church is no different today. We are in exile, and we are sojourning through this world on the way to our eternal home.

Conclusion

Peter's final words were the words he began opened the with: *Peace to all of you who are in Christ*. This is the blessing Peter wants God's people to realize they have been given. Only Christians can have peace in the crazy, messed up, broken world. If you do not have that peace, then you need Jesus. Do not leave here today without knowing the peace of Christ in your life.