

BIBLE SERIES: "EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"

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1 PETER 4-5 – CHRISTIAN VALUES; PASTORAL INSTRUCTIONS

As Peter is finishing his epistle, he focuses on giving *practical advice* to the brethren. He reminds them: "But the end of all things is at hand; therefore, *be serious and watchful in your prayers.*" (1 Pet. 4:7). A modern translation puts it, "The end of everything is near. Therefore, *practice self-control, and keep your minds clear* so that you can pray" (GW). Barclay explains: "[Cultivate] your prayer life. When man's mind is unbalanced and his approach to life is frivolous and irresponsible, he cannot pray as he ought. We learn to pray only when we take life so wisely and so seriously that we begin to say in all things: 'Thy will be done.' The first necessity of prayer is the earnest desire to discover the will of God for ourselves."

Peter then adds: "And above all things have fervent love [Gk. *agape*] for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8). James mentions this same principle of loving and being merciful toward others so there will be mercy for us *before* and *during* God's judgment. "For judgment without mercy will be shown to the one who shows no mercy; and mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13). *Nelson's Commentary* adds, "By introducing Pr. 10:12, 'Love covers all sins,' Peter is reminding us that love *does not stir up* sins. We can demonstrate our love for our fellow believers by *truly forgiving them* and *not talking openly* about their past sins."

Peter also mentions a concrete way to show that *agape* love is by practicing *hospitality*. "Be hospitable to one another without grumbling" (1 Pet. 4:9). It is not easy, for it requires sacrifice and expense, yet it is part of our Christian duties--as we are able. Barclay explains: "Without hospitality the Early Church could not have existed. The travelling missionaries who spread *the good news of the gospel* had to find somewhere to stay and there was no place for them to stay except in the homes of Christians. Such inns were impossibly dear, impossibly filthy and notoriously immoral. Thus we find Peter lodging in one Simon a tanner (Acts 10:6), and Paul and his company were to lodge with one Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple (Acts 21:16). Not only did the missionaries need it; the local churches also did."

"For *two hundred years* there was no such thing as a church building. The Church was compelled to meet in the houses of those who had bigger rooms and were prepared to lend them for Church services. Thus we read of the Church which was in the house of Aquila and Priscilla (Rom. 16:5); 1Cor. 16:19), and of the Church at the house of Philemon (Philemon 1:2). Without those who were prepared to open their homes, the Early Church could not have met for worship at all."

So, Peter says hospitality is a way of expressing the gifts of love God has given us. He says, "Each one, as of good manager of God's different gifts, must use for the good of others the *special gift* he has received from God. Those who preach must preach God's messages; those who serve must serve with the strength that God gives them, so that in all things praise may be given to God through Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory and power forever and ever" (1 Pet. 4:10-11, GNB).

The term "stewards," from the Greek *oikonomos*, means a servant who administers his owner's goods. We should view ourselves as God's stewards who receive physical and spiritual gifts to serve God and others and will be held accountable. These gifts include showing love, being hospitable and generous, preaching God's Word, singing praises to God, praying for others, encouraging the discouraged, using our physical or intellectual abilities for God, and faithfully contributing to the advancement of God's work.

Peter now returns to the subject of persecution, which many of the brethren were facing. He says, "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a

Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter" (1 Peter 4:12-16).

The Gentile converts who had recently entered the church were not as accustomed to the persecutions as their fellow Jewish Christians. It has never been easy to be a true Christian. Peter knows that persecutions are inevitable since Christ said, "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also" (John 15:20). Peter knows that persecutions serve as tests to demonstrate our firmness of faith. In fact, faith can be measured by what one is willing to endure for God's sake.

As *Believer's Commentary* points out, "The natural attitude for a Christian is to look on persecution as strange and abnormal. We are surprised when we have to suffer. But Peter tells us that we should consider it as normal Christian experience. We have no right to expect better treatment from the world than our Savior received. All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Tim. 3:12). It is especially true that those who take a forthright stand for Christ become the object of savage attacks. Satan doesn't waste his ammunition on nominal Christians. He turns his big guns on those who are storming the gates of Hades."

Peter also mentions there is something of value in persecutions, for in this way one shares in the sufferings of Christ. As Paul says: "If we suffer with Him...we shall be glorified with Him" (Romans 8:17). We must remember that whatever we suffer for the name of Christ is a privilege and not a disaster. Peter says it shows that the glorious Spirit of God, called the Shekinah in the Old Testament, which was the presence of God in the Temple, is now working in us.

These sufferings remind Peter of the judgment and opportunity that those who are not being called will have in the Second Resurrection. He says, "For the time has come for judgment *to begin* at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of *those who do not obey the gospel of God*? Now 'If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly appear? Therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator' (1 Peter 4:17-19).

Peter mentions here three vital truths:

(1). God says spiritual judgment begins, not with the unbelieving world, but *with the Church*. Paul calls us "those who *first* hoped in Christ" (Eph. 1:13). James also calls the members of the Church "the *firstfruits* of His creatures" (James 1:18).

(2). The person called in this life is the one who can be part of *the First Resurrection* (Rev. 20:6). Those not called in this life will have to wait for *the next stage*, which will be a thousand years after Christ reigns here on earth (Rev. 20:5).

(3). If *members* barely enter the kingdom of God, what chance will there be for those who are resurrected in the Second Resurrection? We are the ones who must set the example for them by having persevered in faith despite the trials, by having suffered together with Christ, and by having succeeded in entering the kingdom of God.

Peter then focuses on the ministry, "The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away" (1 P. 5:1-4). He had not forgotten Christ's words to him many years ago, "Tend my sheep" (John 21:16). Robertson notes, "The Gk. verb 'to shepherd' *poimanein*, is used as in Luke 17:7. Jesus is used this very word to Peter in the interview by the Sea of Galilee (John 21:16) and Peter doubtless has this fact in mind here." Paul also used the same term with the elders at Miletus (Acts 20:28).

To explain the roles of shepherds over God's flock, Peter contrasts three different attitudes.

1. "Not by *compulsion* but *willingly*." Instead of a minister *grudgingly* serve, he should *gladly* serve. Barclay adds, "The elder should accept the office, not under pressure or upon being forced, but freely and willingly because he [truly] desires to serve God."

2. "Not for dishonest gain but eagerly." The motivation should be true service and not greed. Barclay notes, "Peter is making the point--and it is

ever valid--that no man dare accept office or render service for what he can get out of it. His desire must always be *to give* and not *to get*."

3. "Not as being *lords* over those entrusted to you, but being *examples* to the flock." Instead of receiving the position in order to "lord" it over others, he sets a personal example of selfless service. The term "lording it over" [Gk. *katakuriuein*] that Peter uses here is the same term that he heard Jesus use when He said, "But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, 'You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles *lord it over them*, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant" (Mk. 10:42-43).

Peter reminds the shepherds they will give an account before Christ for the way they cared for the Church and hopes it was good so, "when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away" (1 Peter 5:4).

Yet, humility and submission should not only be attributes of ministers, but also of everyone in the congregation. Peter points out: "Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:5-7).

When Peter says we should be "clothed" with humility, he uses the term of "the apron" used by servants to serve others, recalling how Jesus "girded Himself with a towel" to wash the feet of His disciples. This same attitude of service and humility should prevail in the Church.

Then Peter warns: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world" (1 Peter 5:8-9).

The analogy of Satan as a roaring lion was something Peter personally knew about, for lions still existed in Galilee and he probably saw them hunting their prey. Satan is as subtle as a lion, stalking the victim who is weak and careless. That

is why Peter urges us to resist him *firmly*, and not *weakly*, in the faith. He also mentions that no one is exempt from being attacked, for all around the world, members go through similar trials and temptations that they must overcome.

Peter then has very encouraging words, "But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen" (1 Pet. 5:10-11). He reminds us of Paul's words: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31) and those of John: "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Peter then adds a personal note, "By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand. She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you; and so does Mark my son." (1 Pet. 5:12-13). This Silvanus or Silas is probably who earlier accompanied Paul (Acts 15:40). Peter concludes: "The church which is at Babylon, elect together with you, and Mark my son, greet you. Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen." (1 Peter 5:13-14).

Historian William McBirnie notes, "Many have wondered if Babylon does not actually refer to Rome, since it was often called 'Babylon' by early Christians. However, the city of Babylon was still a major center of Jewish settlers and had great influence throughout the Jewish world when Peter ministered there or some time. To this day, the churches of the East trace their lineage to Babylon, and thus to Peter" (*The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, 1973, p. 57).

It is likely Peter was taken to Rome in chains at the end of his life because of the persecutions of Christians by Nero, and died there. But as historian Henry Chadwick says of Peter's career: "That Peter was *in Rome for twenty-five years is a third-century legend*" (*The Early Church*, p. 18).