
Humble Servants for our Growth

1 Peter 4:12 - 5:12

Because of Peter's formative experience of witnessing the transfiguration of Jesus, the glory of Jesus is a powerful motivation to him. Watch how it develops through the book.

1:7 - Tested faith results in glory to Jesus;

1:8 - Believing in Christ fills us with an inexpressible and glorious joy;

1:21 - Our faith and hope are in the God who raised and glorified Jesus;

1:24 - The glory of man is frail and passing in contrast the enduring finality of the gospel and the Word;

4:11 - Our purpose in ministry is praise to Jesus in ascribing to Him supremacy and glory;

4:13 - Rejoicing in present suffering increases our capacity for joy at the future glory of Jesus;

4:14 - There is a spirit of glory that rests on those who are blessed by being insulted for the name of Jesus;

5:1 - We will all share in the glory that is soon to be uncovered;

5:4 - The Chief Shepherd will give to His under-shepherds a crown of glory;

5:10 - We have been summoned (called) to God's eternal glory in Christ.

What are we to think of when we think of glory?

We are to think of a bright splendor. The essence of God is an unapproachable holiness represented by light.

We are to think of a heavy weight. The unimaginable greatness of God is to weigh heavily on us.

We are to think of magnifying God. The idea is not to make God larger, but to make Him great and supreme in our own view of Him.

We are to think of honoring God. Giving glory to God is to believe and express His great worth and value. It is to treasure Him.

The glory of Jesus is the objective and aim and purpose and passion of our lives. So Peter encourages us in the midst of the mess to stretch forward and upward and Godward towards the glory of Jesus.

In Christian Suffering

(4:12-19)

We must not think that a life that glorifies God excludes suffering. The closing paragraphs of this section are designed to give us a Biblical perspective on suffering.

¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And "If the righteous is scarcely saved,

what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" ¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

Sharing in Christ's Sufferings

(v.12-13)

Suffering should not surprise us as though it were something odd for Christians. Suffering should fuel joy. The overwhelming sense of inner joy comes when we identify our sufferings with Jesus'. Our present joy while suffering increases our capacity for future joy when glorified.

Glorifying God in Sufferings

(v.14-16)

What is at stake in these sufferings is the name of Jesus. The suffering that glorifies God comes when we declare and bear the Name of Christ. It is a blessed thing when God's people suffer because they are committed to the reputation and fame of Jesus.

Trusting God during Sufferings

(v.17-19)

Do we trust God when we suffer for what we believe? The judgment that God brings begins with the church so that she will be pure. If we think that is difficult, what will judgment on the lost be like?

Trust and obey is the heartbeat of suffering saints.

In Faithful Shepherding

(v.1-4)

This orientation must begin with the leadership of the church. There must be a constant passion for the glory of God in the elders of the church. Peter begins with this appeal to elders for Biblical shepherding.

¹ So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Its Shared Experience

(v.1)

Peter's appeal is based on common ground shared by the elders to whom he is writing.

Their plurality – Notice that this is addressed to a group of men: elders, shepherds and overseers. The New Testament requires that churches be led by elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17,28; Phil. 1:2). The idea of there being only one elder, shepherd (pastor) or overseer is not Biblical.

Their unity – Two connecting unities are mentioned: the elders *among* the people and the elders together as *fellow* elders.

Their testimony – Peter is not just someone who saw the sufferings of Jesus, but one who testified of it. At the center of Peter’s preaching was the gospel of the cross of Christ. Elders are to testify in their ministries to realities they have experienced. It is a great danger that we talk about all these things having never truly experienced them.

Their expectancy – Elders serving together in the gospel must have a passion for the glory of Jesus. It is not to be merely theoretical, but rather a deeply shaping expectancy. It is good for elders to ponder deeply that there is glory yet uncovered.

Its Required Analogies

(v.2a)

How are we to think of the eldership? What kinds of paradigms or models or analogies does the Bible use? What about extending them to contemporary models such as ranching, coaching or business management? The Bible gives us two analogies that establish the required categories for the eldership. We can think of church leadership in no less that these categories and no new model can be used to set aside these analogies.

The Analogy of Shepherding

This analogy is used primarily to speak of how elders are to take care of the people in the church. This analogy sees the leadership as shepherds and the people as sheep and the church as a flock. It would do us all well to reflect on the fact that you are sheep whom God has brought together as a flock and that the elders here are to be shepherds to you.

So what does that mean in real world terms?

Shepherds are to feed the flock.

Shepherds are to protect the flock.

Shepherds are to guide the flock.

Shepherds are to train the flock.

Shepherds are to heal the flock.

A Shepherd must keep in mind that this is God’s flock. Shepherds do not own the flock. God has given us this flock to tend. We must give our primary attention to their flock. Remember that in the Bible, the word “pastor” only occurs one time and it is a mistranslation of the word everywhere else translated shepherd (Ephesians 4:11). Train yourself when you use the word “pastor” to think “shepherd”. That is ALL Biblically the word means. The office that I hold is that of elder. What all of us who are elders do is to shepherd and to oversee. But we have chosen to use the word pastor as a title in order to remind ourselves of our primary role and to communicate practically with others who think differently.

The Analogy of Overseeing

The word here translated “overseer” was used to refer to those who were appointed by emperors and kings to govern newly established (or conquered) city-states. He was responsible to the king, but the king’s authority was delegated to him. He was to govern the colony or city.

Our translation picks up on the two primary aspects of this word.

Serving – The idea here is the elders are serving God. They are under the authority of God. They are not ruling as a king whose word was law, but as a governor accountable to the king. The word here is not meant to convey the idea of serving the church. That does come out in other texts, but not this one. The elders govern *under God’s authority*.

Overseeing – The elders do govern God’s community, the congregation. They are to teach, apply and implement God’s Word in an authoritative way. Elders do have authority – it is a delegated and mediated authority, but it is still to be submitted to.

This is why we refer to eldership *governance* and not to elder *rule*. Elder rule has come to stand for an oversight that is absolute and often, tyrannical. The rule of the church is the Word of God. The governing of the church is given to the elders under the Word.

Its Contrasted Problems

(v.2b-3)

Do you ever think that the church in Bible days was very different from our day? It was in many ways, but in many others, it is no different. The passion of the elders for the glory of God will require them to deal some real problem areas for leadership.

Reluctance

The wording is a bit difficult. Does it mean that elders are not to be compelled to serve, but must come forward voluntarily? Or, does it mean that the elder does not view ministry as something he has to do, but as something he wants to do because it is God’s will? Maybe both. This phrase is modifying the verb *be shepherds*. It generally can be said that if someone becomes an elder for wrong motivations they will find the difficulties of shepherding disheartening.

Materialism and Professionalism

Peter simply says what is to be true of Christians generally and certainly of its elders. We cannot serve money; we must be serving God. Simplicity and frugality ought to mark the life and ministry of all elders, but particularly vocational elders. There is one other possibility here. The word is one often used to refer to increasing one’s wealth sinfully or by evil means. It refers to fraud or cheating. This may be something of a warning against the sort of financial fraud too many “pastors” are caught out at.

Peter seems to have in mind here those elders whose living is supplied by the church. We call them vocational or staff elders. One must not become an elder just so that one has a way of making a living. Professionalism and materialism

among churches who ordain a clergy or have some kind of high-powered pastor is an abomination. Mark this, it is not possible to be serving God and money at the same time. There must be an eagerness of heart serving God that comes from having treasure in heaven.

Tyranny

The kind of tyranny in view here is that of a leadership that requires of the congregation what it itself does not do. It creates two classes, lords and servants. It is the self-view of leadership that is evident in most dictatorships. The lifestyles and levels of sacrifice are totally different. Godly leadership sets the example by requiring of itself what is required of the church.

The second aspect has to do with the manner in which the elders govern. There is to be a sense that the flock is entrusted to the elders and that there is an accountability to God in the manner and methods used. Jesus clearly told the disciples that the church is not to be governed like the world using its principles and methods. This means that the elders must not abuse or that the church must not ignore their authority.

Its Heavenward Motivations

(v.4)

A godly eldership with a passion for the glory of Christ will be driven by two great motivations.

The Supremacy of our Chief Shepherd

Elders who shepherd and govern well do so under Christ. We recognize Him as our Chief Shepherd, the pastor of the church. He is supreme and preeminent. We exist and minister for Him. We look to Him as our Divine pattern. And we bow to Him as our final authority. This is why I am not called "the pastor". I know that people mean well. But I am a shepherd of this church along with the other elders. Jesus Christ is the Chief Shepherd.

The Satisfaction of the Glorious Reward

Elders who shepherd and govern well do so for a heavenly crown. Earthly applause and recognition is short, feeble and fickle. But to have served well and bow before Christ so that my faithfulness brings Him honor and pleasure makes the struggle worth it all.

May God be pleased to strengthen the current elders in this kind of shepherding. May He raise up among us men who will love God and love His people through godly shepherding.

In Humble Submitting

(v.5-7)

In the light of the shepherding and governing of elders, Peter encourages the church in its submitting to one another and to its leadership.

⁵ Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward 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 at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

Commanded Expression

(v.5a)

In its context, this is a very interesting command. Is this talking to all the church or is it talking to the younger elders on the eldership or is it speaking specifically to younger men to be in submission either to the elders or to the older Christians? Frankly it is hard to know.

The command is introduced by the word *likewise*. In the same way that elders are submitting to God and the church submits to elders, then younger people (it is a comparative) are to be put under submission to (passive voice) elders (in the sense of older people). It may be that submission to older Christians is training for submission to elders that is itself training for submission to God.

Required Attitude

(v.5b)

He moves from the small group he has been addressing to the congregation as a whole. We are to be clothed in humility toward one another, not as a covering over our pride, but as attractive grace that supports relationships. Without humility to one another, younger Christians will not submit to older Christians, the church will not submit to elders and elders will not submit to God.

Peter argues this from Proverbs 3:34. We are to humble ourselves before God and in our relationships. Otherwise God will oppose us. Pride calls forth from God personal and powerful opposition. What happens when God is against us? Can we win? Or God will give us grace. Grace is needed to be humble. But if we are not humble, we will not be given grace for anything else. Do you long for the enabling and sustaining grace of God so much that you will humble yourself?

Expectant Purpose

(v.6)

Humbling myself requires that I believe in an obeying way two important truths.

The humility and submission of verse 5 flows out of understanding God’s power. You can humbly submit because you have bowed your will and heart to the power of God. The experience of my own heart has taught me that resisting God’s authorities in my life usually ends being in resistance against God’s authority over my life.

If I submit to God, then His power will work in His providence to bring honor when it is the proper time. All of this is a simple trust in God. Do you trust God enough to submit yourself under His mighty hand? Do you really think that He has the power to work out His purposes and fulfill His promises?

Relieved Worry

(v.7)

This is a much quoted and oft misused verse. After all, it does sit in a context. Though it can be used in more general settings of care and worry, we are then working with the implication, not the specifics.

In this context, the anxiety and worry are about all the possibilities if we humbly do submit. When we humbly submit to those who are older, to one another, to the elders and to God, we feel (and actually are) very vulnerable.

This worry is ended by a trusting commitment. There must be a decisive throwing of your anxiety and worry and care on Christ. And you must leave it there. Too many are taking our burdens to Jesus and then hauling them away with us.

This commitment is motivated by theological reflection. Big words to say something simple: "God cares for me." I will give all my anxieties and worries about what may happen if I humble myself and submit myself to God because I trust His character and His care for me. I will reflect and think and be transformed by the character of God.

Ah, how blessed we are to have these two paragraphs engrafted into our lives. Shepherds lovingly guiding and guarding the sheep through teaching. Sheep humbly and prayerfully submitting while trusting God.

In Careful Standing

(v.8-12)

It might appear that these two are in real tension: we are straining towards glory in humble submission and in careful standing. These are complementary. While we are to humbly submit to God's mighty hand and give Him all our cares, we are to stand firm against the great enemy of our soul. Wiersbe says the connection here is "we have cares because we have an enemy."

⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰ And 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. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

¹² By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it.

The Enemy We Are to Stand Against

(v.8-9)

Against suffering, serving, submitting Christians comes our adversary, the devil.

Our Required Attitudes

What two attitudes are required if we are to stand:

Self-control – This word comes from the idea of being sober. It is often used to speak of self-discipline. Standing firm is going to require a serious minded exercise of spiritual discipline.

Vigilance – We must be alert to the spiritual dangers around us. Many Christians fall into the traps set by Satan for self and sin simply because we are not vigilant over our souls.

Our Dangerous Adversary

Why are these attitudes necessary? Because we have a dangerous enemy. Wiersbe says that we must recognize him, respect him and resist him. The word “devil” here is *diabolos*, which means “false accuser”. Satan is at his most dangerous when we allow him opportunity to accuse us of sin. So, he sets out enticements to our sinful nature that draws us into sin. Then he accuses us before God until we confess it. Then, he accuses us in our consciences and in the turmoil of our hearts until we recognize it.

Our Commanded Action

What are we commanded to do? To resist or withstand or stand up against Satan. Think of what you ought to do to a bully.

How are we to resist Satan? We are to withstand Satan by standing firm in our faith. Now think about that for a moment. Standing on the promises is how we best can stand against the devil.

What encourages us in this? We are not alone in this battle and the sufferings that are a sure part of it. It is possible that Peter sees Satan as the power behind the persecuting hand in their suffering.

The Strength We Are to Stand By

(v.10-11)

Where does the strength to stand firm come from?

The God of all grace – Grace is God giving us the desire and ability to do His will. It flows from Him to us through the means of grace.

The God who calls to glory – Our present ability to stand firm, particularly in suffering, comes from being gripped by the promises of glory to come.

What is our motivation here? That it is only going to last a short time.

What is it that God is doing to make us able to stand? Perfect [restore (NIV)] – The word means “to equip, adjust, fit together” and was used of mending nets. So God is going to do all that is necessary.

How is this expressed? In three verbs.

To establish – means “to fix firmly, to set fast.” Christians must have their hearts established (1 Thessalonians 3:13; James 5:8) by truth (2 Peter 1:12).

To strengthen – to build up the inner resources and reserves of sustaining grace.

To lay the foundation – God will fit together by grace the foundation your life needs. Speaks of the particular design God has used.

The manifest object of all God’s working in us is God’s glory. His power in us to cause us to stand firm results in our praise to Him.

The Grace We Are to Stand In

(v.12)

What is the primary means to the grace of God? The Word of God. This is what Peter is alluding to. What he has written as encouragement and testimony is Scripture. This letter tells us by exhortation and attestation what God’s true grace is.

Reflect and Respond

¹³ She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. ¹⁴ Greet one another with the kiss of love.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

So, in exile, as strangers and pilgrims, the Word of God shapes:

The Glorious Joy of a Proven Faith

The Transforming Power of Faith's Expectations

The Growing Purity of Faith's Expressions

The Effective Witness of Submissive Peoples

The Godly Living of Suffering Saints

The Heavenly Reward of Humble Servants

Grace strengthens our hope when we stand fast in the Word.