

THE HUMBLE BEHAVIOR OF THE BELIEVER

Summary and Historical Background

This chapter falls into four parts: (1) the duties of the elders - 5:1-4; (2) the conduct of the believers - 5:5-9; (3) the grace of God - 5:10-11; and (4) the conclusion of the letter - 5:12-14. It is interesting to note the prominence of elders throughout the Scriptures. Even though this office is different in the Old Testament period than in the New Testament, there seems to be a connection between the offices in the two periods. In the Old Testament, Moses was helped by 70 elders in the administration of justice and temporal matters (Num 11), and from that point on they were mentioned in connection with prophets, kings, cities, Sanhedrin, etc. They were leaders in the nation, though the vision of Revelation also included the mention of 24 elders around the throne. New Testament eldership refers to one of the functions of a pastor: he is the shepherd of the flock of God, an overseer of God's work in the church. There is given to him a four-fold charge: (1) to tend the flock (which is more than preaching two or three times a week to a congregation, but also supervising the spiritual welfare of the souls of his flock); (2) to accept the office willingly, not needing to be compelled to discharge its duties; (3) to accept the office without the motive of personal gain; and (4) to be an example to the flock without showing any signs of dictatorship in his ministry. Usually there were more elders in a church than one, but only one of them was recognized as the chief elder, the president of the assembly (cf. the prominence of James in the church at Jerusalem - Acts 15).

The conduct of believers begins with the younger Christians. They are exhorted to submit to their elders - 5:5. Then all believers are told to submit to one another and be humble - 5:5-6. They also are encouraged to cast all their anxieties upon the Lord - 5:7. Next, they are warned to be alert to the dangers of the devil - 5:8. As Cromwell warned his troops, "Trust God and keep your powder dry," so believers are to add watchful vigilance to their trust in the Lord. It is not enough for a believer to rest serenely on the Lord after he has cast all his troubles on Him. Resistance is also urged, because the devil will retreat only when he is gallantly opposed in the strength of the Lord Jesus Christ - 5:9; cf. James 4:7.

After the believer has suffered for a while, the God of all grace promises to bless him. He will bless him with restored fitness, making him strong and steadfast. God is worthy of praise forever for giving him this blessing - 5:10-11.

I. Charge to the Elders — 5:1-4

5:1 — "The elders" - Peter addresses the leaders of the churches. They are also called shepherds or pastors, which is suggested by the words, "Feed the flock of God" (5:2), and are called bishops or overseers (cf. 5:2 - "Taking the oversight thereof"). "Elders" is a term that most often referred to the older and wiser men who had been called to lead the churches of God, but it could also refer to young men who were more mature than the average in their Christian faith, and for that reason they were chosen to lead the churches. Paul ordained elders in every church that he founded - Acts 14:23. Elders had charge of monetary matters. The offering for the poor in Jerusalem was delivered into their hands - Acts 21:18ff. Paul bid farewell to the elders in Ephesus, calling them overseers and shepherds of the flock - Acts 20:28, 29. James mentions elders as having a ministry of prayer for the healing of sick members in the church - James 5:14. Elders were paid officials of the church - 1 Timothy 5:17. It was the most responsible position imaginable, watching for the souls of men with eternal consequences - Heb 13:17.

"Also an elder" — Peter was an apostle, but also an elder (cf. 1:1).

"A witness of the sufferings of Christ" — Peter observed the sufferings of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, in the judgment hall and on the cross, but he was more than a passive observer; he testified of the sufferings of Christ as an active witness through his bold preaching.

"A partaker of the glory" — Peter saw and experienced the glory of Christ, when he saw Him transfigured on the mount (Luke 9:32; cf. 2 Peter 1:16-18) and witnessed His ascension to Heaven (Acts 1:9). Believers, like Peter, shall partake of the glory of Christ.

"That shall be revealed" — Christ's glory shall be revealed to the Church believers at the Rapture before the Tribulation. His glory will be revealed to all other believers after the Tribulation.

5:2 — "Feed" - The elders are responsible to "shepherd" the flock of God. This involves feeding them, but it also involves leading, protecting and caring for them - cf. John 21:15-17.

"Flock of God" — The elders are not to look upon the members of their church as their own flock, but as the flock of God. The people belong to God and the elders are the under-shepherds who are responsible to take care of His people for Him.

"Taking the oversight" — Elders are to function as bishops (over-seers). They must be alert, keeping an eye on everything in the church. Three statements that govern this oversight are given next.

"Not by constraint, but willingly" — A man should not accept this solemn responsibility because some fellow brother presses him to do so. He must do it willingly under the leading of the Holy Spirit - Rom 12:1, 2. He must be prepared to minister in love - 1 Cor 13:13. This cannot be done without a humble willing spirit.

"Not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind" — A man should not accept this office with a corrupt motive to get rich, but with a ready and eager mind to serve the Lord, however great the sacrifices may be. An elder does not take this responsibility to see what gain he can possibly get, but what service he can possibly give. Paul went so far as to work with his hands to meet his own needs; he coveted no man's goods - 2 Cor 11:9; Acts 20:33.

5:3 — "Neither as being lords . . . but being examples to the flock" - An elder must not have a love for power over God's people, but he must seek to be a humble example to His people (Mark 10:42-44).

"God's heritage" — It literally means, "those allotted to" or "those entrusted to." Eldership is never earned; it is entrusted to men by God that He has chosen for this task. He entrusts His people to certain mature men (elders) so they might take care of them on His behalf. Notice three important aspects of an elder's ministry:

1. The importance of his influence — the elder's opinions often become the opinions of the people entrusted to him.

2. The importance of his example — the people will often do what their elder does.

3. The importance of his responsibility — the elder must give an account before God for the outcome of the people entrusted to him.

5:4 — "The chief Shepherd" - Jesus Christ is the chief and all other shepherds or elders are under Him.

"Shall appear" — This refers to the Rapture, Christ's return for His bride, the church.

"A crown of glory" — This crown will be glorious to receive. To work for the Lord is reward enough, a great privilege, but the Lord also will reward His servants for faithful service. The reward will be much greater than the service rendered. However, the reward is not for our glory, but for the glory of God. The reward will enable us to bring greater glory to God, so we should strive to earn these crowns. Notice the other crowns available to Christians:

1. Crown of life — for those who endure temptation - James 1:12.
2. Crown of righteousness — for those who love Christ's appearing - 1 Timothy 4:8.
3. Crown of rejoicing — for the soul-winner - 1 Thess 2:19.
4. Incorruptible crown — for those who run a good race - 1 Cor 9:25

II. Conduct of the Believers — 5:5-9

5:5 — "Likewise" - Indicates a new section - cf. 3:1, 7.

"You younger" — Seems to refer to young men in general.

"Submit yourselves unto the elder" — May refer to the honor due to older men - Lev 19:32; but more likely it refers to the respect that should be given to the pastor whose responsibilities and reward were discussed earlier in this chapter - cf. Heb 13:17.

"All . . . be subject one to another" — All believers are responsible to be submissive - Ephesians 5:21; Phil 2:3.

"Be clothed with humility" — This word for "clothed" is a rare word used of a slave who puts on his apron before serving. This reminds us of Jesus who put on a towel before He washed His disciples feet - John 13:5. Christians have Christ's example, and here they are commanded to be humble like He was.

"God resists the proud" — He opposes the proud - James 4:6. This is a military term in which God sets Himself in battle array against the proud person.

"Gives grace to the humble" — God gives special favor to those who are submissive and humble - Prov 3:34.

5:6 — "The mighty hand of God" - Christians are under God's powerful hand which can discipline them or deliver them depending on whether they are proud or humble.

"Exalt you" — God's grace lifts up the humble person with great honor.

"In due time" — In God's time the humble Christian will be honored. Many see this time as the time of Christ's return to earth. Others see it as the Rapture when He comes for His Bride, the Church, takes her to Heaven and marries her.

5:7 — "Casting all your care upon Him" - Christians are invited to place all their anxieties and worries on the shoulders of God. "Casting" is an aorist participle which indicates a definite act of the will. Christians must make a definite decision to place these burdens on the Lord. It is a clear-cut act of their will.

"He cares for you" — God cares for each believer. Satan wants Christians to think that they suffer because God is unconcerned. The disciples asked the question, "Do you not care that we perish?" - Mark 4:38. God does care and His care is the basis for casting their fears and burdens on Him - Matthew 11:28-30; Psalm 55:22.

5:8 — "Be sober, be vigilant" - Christians are warned about Satan. To be victorious over him, they will have to be clear-headed and alert. Peter had a first-hand experience of the danger

of not being alert when he was in the garden of Gethsemane - Mark 14:32ff. As a result of his carelessness, he denied the Lord three times.

"Your adversary the devil" — The devil is a slanderer, which is the meaning of this name. The Greek word for "adversary" in this passage refers to an opponent in a lawsuit - Matthew 5:25; Luke 12:58; 18:3; cf. Job 31:35. The devil is that kind of an opponent against the believer. He accuses the brethren before God in the court of Heaven, but he has no concern for the truth, because he is a ruthless liar - Rev 12:9-10; Job 1:9-10; 2:4-5; John 8:44.

"As a roaring lion" — Satan tries to strike terror in the hearts of believers by his "roaring" threats and accusations, but he is ineffectual against those who put their trust in God.

"Seeking who he may devour" — The devil stalks about seeking to destroy any believer he can find that is careless and not walking close to the Lord.

5:9 — "Whom resist" - The only effective defense against the attacks of Satan is a stiff resistance by the strength of the Lord - James 4:7; Eph 6:10-18.

"In the faith" — It may refer to the believer's personal faith - Heb 11:6; 1 John 5:4-5. However, "the" faith could refer to the teaching in Scripture. Jesus used the Scriptures to defeat Satan - Mt 4:1-11.

"Same afflictions" — There is comfort for the suffering Christian when he knows that he is not alone in his battle against Satan - 1 Cor 10:13. Other believers also are being attacked and are suffering. They must fight Satan together with the power of the Lord and then they will win the battle together - Eph 6:10-11.

III. Care of God — 5:10-11

5:10 — "God of all grace" - Satan's attacks attempt to curse believers with suffering, but God's grace uses suffering to bless them with His power to endure suffering - 2 Cor 12:7-10. God has sufficient grace, more than enough, to supply them with all the power that they need to endure suffering and defeat Satan's attacks.

"Has called us unto His eternal glory" — Eternal glory is the goal that God has for believers, not suffering - Romans 8:30. God carefully calculates the amount of suffering that is needed to bring believers to His eternal glory.

"After that you have suffered a while" — The believers' suffering is temporal, only for a little while, but God's glory is eternal, reserved in Heaven for them - 1 Pet 1:4.

Three things should encourage us when we suffer: God's grace for power to endure suffering, our suffering that brings us to God's eternal glory and our suffering is only for a little while.

"Make you perfect" — "Perfect," is a verb, not a noun, and was used for mending a fishing net, restoring it to usefulness - Mt 4:21. Suffering will perfect believers, restoring in their character what was lost through some sin, fashioning them into the image of Christ - Rom. 8:28-29.

"Establish" — God uses suffering to test believers and establish them in true faith so they are "no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine" - Eph 4:14.

"Strengthen" — Satan uses suffering to weaken the believers' faith in God, but God uses suffering to strengthen their faith in Him. This is what happened to Job. The end result of suffering is to make believers steadfast and immovable.

"Settle you" — This verb is related to a foundation, which suggests God will settle believers on the foundation of His Son and His Word so they are firm in times of persecution.

5:11 — A brief doxology is given to God for His strong encouragement to believers in times of persecution. "Glory" and "dominion" belong to Him - 4:11. Believers will reign with Christ in His glorious rule over all kingdoms on earth (Rev 3:21).

IV. Conclusion of the Letter — 5:12-14

5:12 — "By Silvanus" - No doubt this was Silas, Paul's companion on his second missionary journey. He helped Peter write this letter of exhortation and testimony.

5:13 — "Church" - "Church" is not in the Greek text; there is just a feminine article, which could refer to Peter's wife, but "church" seems to make the best sense.

"Babylon" — It could be a cryptic reference to Rome or to the actual city of Babylon where many Jews still lived.

5:14 — "Peace" - Peter introduced his letter with a greeting of peace and concluded it with a benediction of peace. This was fitting for believers that were being persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ, who said, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you" - Jn 14:27. Peace can only be given to believers.