

1 Peter 5 • How a Christian Acts

Introduction

One of the characteristics of man is to constantly redefine words and terms to conform to what they **WANT** them to mean rather than strictly adhering to their original, intended meaning. This is especially true when it comes to those things which the Bible says identify a person as “Christian”. We live in a time when more than 80% of any given group in America will raise their hand in the affirmative when asked, “Who’s a Christian?”, yet when they’re specifically polled we find only a tiny fraction who are visibly different from non-Christians in their actual lifestyle and beliefs. They say one thing, but act according to another. Peter closes his first letter clearly providing how a true Christian acts, how a true believer can be distinguished from the rest of the world.

¹Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ²shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. ⁴And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

[Read v.1-4]

Q: To whom does Peter primarily address these opening verses?

A: “The elders among you”. (v1) The words “pastor” (shepherd), “bishop” (overseer), and “elder” (mature leader) all refer to the same office in the New Testament. (See Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:5-7)

Q: What are the things which Peter reminds them about himself that are to serve as an example?

1. Peter himself is a “fellow elder” or pastor. He holds himself equally accountable like the rest, not attaching any exception to his being an apostle.
2. Peter was both a “witness of the sufferings of Christ” as well as “a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed”. In other words, he knew from experience that glory always follows suffering if we submit to the Lord. He lives what he teaches.
3. Peter’s really passing on the same commission he received from Christ to shepherd the flock. (John 21:15-17)

Q: What is supposed to be the primary ministry?

A: “Shepherd the flock”. (v.2)

Application: True, biblical pastors don’t assume an office in much the same way a modern-day CEO heads and runs a corporation, but rather as a shepherd who lives with the flock, feeding and caring for them in the course of leading them.

Q: What is supposed to be the primary motive of their ministry?

A: “Not under compulsion, but voluntarily”. (v.2)

Application: True, biblical pastors serve from the heart, not simply because they have a job to do. They never serve “for sordid gain” (v.2) whether it be money, prestige, power, or position.

Q: What is supposed to be the manner in which they carry out their ministry?

A: They are not overlords, but overseers. (v.3)

Application: True, biblical pastors lead by personal example. They don’t just “talk the talk” but visibly serve as an example of what it means to “walk the walk”. The biblical definition of “leadership” never equates to “dictatorship”.

Q: What is supposed to be the ultimate reward of their ministry?

A: Glory in heaven. (v.4)

Application: True, biblical pastors work for rewards they know are not guaranteed for this present life, but the one to come.

Q: In the context of this teaching, what is significant about Peter's identification of Christ as "the Chief Shepherd"?

A: It's a reminder that pastors are really just "under-shepherds" who must submit and be accountable to Christ the Chief Shepherd.

Application: True, biblical pastors are more concerned about pleasing and glorifying Christ than anyone else. And they know that this is accomplished by fulfilling His command to love and shepherd the flock to His glory, not their own.

Point: All that Peter is here admonishing us could be succinctly condensed to, "Be faithful". He's describing following through by putting what we know and have been given into practice.

⁵You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.

⁶Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, ⁷casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

[Read v.5-7]

Q: How might we succinctly condense Peter's admonition in these verses?

A: "Be humble".

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

Hebrews 13:17

Q: Previously Peter drew on Christ's commissioning of him as a shepherd to pass along the calling to all shepherds. What event in Peter's life might he be referring to here to pass on the calling to "be humble"?

A: That evening in the upper room when Jesus washed the disciples' feet.

Q: What does it mean to "clothe yourselves with humility"?

A: It means to be controlled by a humble spirit, the attitude of a servant. God resists arrogant, self-seeking people but gives grace to the humble.

*Though He scoffs at the scoffers,
Yet He gives grace to the afflicted.*
Proverbs 3:34

But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

James 4:6

Q: How does Peter suggest that one go about obtaining this kind of attitude?

A: "Under the mighty hand of God". (v.8)

Application: One of the things God is doing during times of trial and persecution is perfecting our faith and character. We should allow times of suffering to bring us low before Him so we will be properly exalted when He determines we're fit and ready.

Q: How does Peter know for certain that Jesus "cares for you" even in the midst of our greatest anxiety?

A: Peter draws upon the experience he had when Christ calmed the sea. The anxiety of the conditions around them threatening their very life caused them to ask Jesus, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (Mark 4:38) And, of course, Jesus rebuked the storm to show not only that He cared, but that they were never actually in any

permanent danger.

Q: How does v.7 address one of the primary methods Satan employs to deceive Christians?

A: Satan would have us believe that trials and persecutions are some kind of evidence of God's indifference, whereas Peter reminds us it's simply the opportunity to cast all our cares upon Christ because it's actually an issue of faith.

⁸Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. ¹⁰After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. ¹¹To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.

[Read v.8-11]

Q: How did Jesus explain, using the Parable of the Tares, how Satan is allowed to enter and work within the church?

A: It comes about when members of the church are "sleeping".

"But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away...and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels."

Matthew 13:25, 39

Q: How are the ways Satan prefers to work reflected in his names?

1. "Adversary" means "one who accuses at court. Satan accuses us before God. (See Job 1-2; Zech. 3:1-5; Rev. 12:10).
2. "Devil" means "a slanderer". Satan uses the lips of unsaved people to accuse us falsely. (See 1 Pe. 2:12; 3:16: 4:4, 14)

Point: Throughout Scripture Satan is portrayed as a serpent and a dragon. He comes first as a serpent to deceive (like Eve in the garden), but when deception fails he always resorts to coming as a dragon to openly persecute and destroy.

Q: So what can we glean from these verses that we can do to defeat Satan?

1. "Be of sober spirit". (v.9) This is in direct contrast to those who seek to be "drunk" or "slain" in the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is always "self-control". (Gal. 5:22-23)
2. "Be on the alert". (v.8) We're to keep our eyes spiritually open, never relaxing our guard, measuring all things against the standard of God's Word to ensure its authority and authenticity.
3. "Resist him". (v.9) It's the picture of an army which stands united in formation, ready to repel the enemy. If there's a break in the ranks, the enemy (Satan) has an opportunity to divide and conquer.
4. Believe – "firm in your faith". (v.9) Trusting in the victory of Christ, we resist Satan by faith. Remember the example of how Jesus resisted Satan's attack in the wilderness (Mat. 4), by counteracting Satan's attack by lies with sword of the truth of God's Word.
5. Remember – "the same experiences". (v.9) Satan loves for us to feel that we're alone and that God has singled us out. We need to remind ourselves of the fact that other Christians are going through the same kinds of trials and, like the disciples in the boat with Jesus during the storm, we are not alone!

Q: What does Peter remind us as being the greater work that is going on in spite of how the circumstances would appear?

A: It's actually a work of grace (v.10) intended to "perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you".

Application: One of the ways God's grace is provided to us is through the disciplines of life. When we suffer, we come to the end of ourselves and learn to lean on Him. First comes suffering, then equipping, confirmation, strength, and ultimately spiritual perfection.

Observation: The Greek words here translated "will Himself perfect" also convey the image of mending a net. Trials and suffering not only assist believers in their individual growth, but also equips them for service. Sometimes the best way God has of "mending our nets" is to put us through trials.

¹²Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it! ¹³She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark. ¹⁴Greet one another with a kiss of love.

Peace be to you all who are in Christ.

[Read v.12-14]

There are many subtle examples of Peter's teaching found within these closing lines:

- Silvanus (Silas) and Mark are found with Peter, the old disagreement involving Barnabas now forgiven and forgotten. Satan was not allowed to divide and conquer the potential "gap" in their ranks.
- Peter writes from Rome, spiritually referred to as "Babylon", the End Times representation of Satan's final move against the world. He was not successful then, nor will be again in the future when he tries it all over again.
- Peter has been asking them to stand firm, and provides a personal example that it's not just possible, but required from everyone, even apostles!

Overall Application

It's very interesting that at a time in history, when Nero is acting exactly as the Antichrist will act in these Last Days, to note what Peter's call to action is for all believers. It's actually to continue doing the same things each and every day, not changing just because tremendous persecution and trials are imminent:

- Be Faithful (v.1-4)
- Be Humble (v.5-7)
- Be Watchful (v.8-11)