

# Resist Satan in the Faith

1 Peter 5:5-14

Dub McClish

## Introduction

Bible students have long noticed that those who were truly inspired of God were able to express the most sublime concepts with the greatest economy of words. The first letter from the pen of Simon Peter, though brief by his own admission (5:12), is exceedingly full of rich spiritual truth, especially in the areas of exhortation and consolation. The combined brevity and richness of this document themselves therefore provide evidence of its inspiration, besides the many other proofs available.

This manuscript will deal with the closing section of 1 Peter (5:5-14) which is characterized by this great richness of thought, yet in few words, as mentioned above. Our method of study will be to first present an exposition of the text, followed by more detailed comments on certain selected thoughts and phrases within these verses.

## Exposition of 1 Peter 5:5-14

### *Submission and Humility Enjoined (vv. 5-6)*

**Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.**

*Likewise* connects verse 5 with the subject of the previous verses. Peter had specifically addressed elders (bishops/pastors) in the church (not merely “older men”) concerning their responsibilities to the respective flocks under their oversight and care. In this verse he emphasized that the congregation likewise had a responsibility to the elders (the Greek text uses a plural term), namely to be subject to them. Some contend that Peter abruptly moves from referring to “official” elders (vv. 1-4) to refer merely to older men in verse 5. However, I disagree for two reasons:

1. There is nothing in verse 5 to warrant a redefinition of *elder* and,
2. It is most natural to understand the term in the same sense throughout the entire context.

The very fact that *elder* is a term applied to those who oversee a congregation of the Lord’s people itself indicates that they would be men of sufficient age and experience to be mature in the faith, as described by the qualifications for elders discussed in 1 Timothy 3:2-7

and Titus 1:5-9. This fact further implies that they would be older than many (if not most) other men in the congregation. Such is still true, even though the average lifespan has been considerably lengthened since the first century. In effect, Peter was instructing the remainder of the church to be good followers of their elders, even as he had instructed the elders (in the preceding verses) to be good leaders of the church.

The next exhortation applied to all — elders and those not elders. They were to serve one another humbly. The word Peter employed for “clothing” (“girding,” ASV) themselves in regard to humility is graphic, referring to the girdle or belt which was the symbol of a slave. Peter may have even been reflecting on that occasion of more than 30 years before in the upper room in Jerusalem when the Lord girded himself with a towel and washed the disciples’ feet (John 13:4-6). Indeed, the whole point of that object lesson was to teach his apostles exactly what Peter wrote in this text that all saints were to do — to humbly serve one another.

The motivation of their humble service related to God’s attitude toward such unselfish behavior. Those who are proud (and thus can never serve but must always be served) are displeasing to God; He opposes, resists such, but those who are humble bask in the favor of God (Jam. 4:6). Since this is God’s attitude toward pride and humility, respectively, all are enjoined to humble themselves “under the mighty hand of God.” God here is depicted in the anthropomorphism of possessing a “hand” such as men possess. The hand is that member with which we most frequently act and accomplish our tasks, and it is simply transferred to God in a figure as the means by which He exercises his Divine power and strength to bless or curse. The mighty hand of God will cast down the proud, but the same mighty hand will exalt the humble.

Although we may see those who humbly serve others reap rich rewards of fame on this earth, there is no promise in this text of **immediate** exaltation for the humble. Neither does Peter hint that the exaltation relates to protection from physical suffering and persecution nor that it involves great wealth, fame, or authority. The exaltation promised is true exaltation in the home of the soul around the throne of God where He will bestow the “crown of glory that fadeth not away” (v. 4) and we shall inherit “eternal glory” (v. 10). We should not grow impatient, even under suffering (such as Peter’s readers were experiencing), for God will exalt us “in due time.” God always does things according to his calendar, and “...in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9).

### *God's Care Declared (v. 7)*

**Casting all your care upon him; for He careth for you.**

The “care” that **we** are to cast upon God refers to the things about which we worry, are unsettled, and undecided. The ASV reflects this by translating *anxiety* in place of *care*. Here we have words similar to Paul’s great exhortation, “In nothing be anxious...” (Phi. 4:6). The word used for **God’s** “care” in this phrase refers to His interest and concern and implies both the will and ability to meet our needs. If God cares for the sparrow and the raven and adorns the grass of the field, does He not much more care for those who are his children (Luke 12:6, 24, 28)? There is an echo here of Psalms 55:22: “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.”

### *Soberness and Vigilance Demanded (vv. 8–9)*

**Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.**

*Sober* is from a compound word which means “do not drink or swallow down.” It can literally refer to drunkenness from strong drink, but also metaphorically, to being influenced by anything that would prevent serious thinking or sober mindedness. Peter may include both the literal and the figurative application of the term in this exhortation. To be vigilant means to be alert and watchful for that which would endanger. Soberness and vigilance were required because of the behavior of the devil, their adversary. *Adversary* literally refers to a lawyer who argues the case against one in court. The word, *devil* means “slanderer” or “false accuser.” Thus Peter graphically pictures our arch enemy as an unethical lawyer who has built a case of false testimony against us. He appeared just so in his efforts to destroy Job (Job 1:6–12).

Peter further compares Satan to a lion, but not one stealthily stalking its prey in the shadows; the beast is rather giving forth the ferocious roar of one with a voracious appetite, walking about, seeking a victim to devour (literally, to “swallow down”). Since this last word of verse 8 (*devour*) comes from the same root as the first word of the verse (*sober*, “do not swallow down”), it appears that Peter is making a play on words, which his Greek readers would immediately understand.

The devil does work craftily at times by quietly introducing false doctrines and practices and thus “slipping up” on the gullible, ignorant, and immature (cf. Eph. 4:14). However, here Peter seems to refer particularly to the increasing persecution that was coming upon these

saints (i.e., the “fiery trial,” 4:12). They were being openly, publicly opposed, tried, and persecuted, and perhaps by this time some were already being thrown to literal lions for their faith. The devil was thus “walking about” seeking more victims. Again, he was doing this back in the ancient time of Job (Job 1:7) and doubtless still is.

What were they to do concerning their foe? They were to resist his attacks by the only means at their disposal – by being steadfast in the faith. They were not to compromise when they faced fiery trials, even death. Satan could not ultimately devour them by harming or even killing them physically. Satan could “swallow them down” only if they denied Christ in order to save their lives. As long as they remained faithful to Christ the devil’s plan would be thwarted, regardless of what he did to them. Peter sought to console those beleaguered brethren by reminding them that the faithful of God all over the world were likewise being made to suffer.

#### *Strength for Sufferings Promised (vv. 10–11)*

**But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.**

After having given them a special warning about the devil’s fierce opposition and having mentioned that it was the common thing for saints everywhere to suffer, he then wrote these words designed to give them courage to face the foe. They were to remember that their God was a gracious God and would therefore not ignore or abandon them. Further, they were to remember that God had called them (“through the gospel,” 2 The. 2:14) to receive His eternal glory, an additional assurance in itself that He would not forsake them. The calling of God was “by Christ,” according to the KJV. However, *in Christ*, in the ASV is the better rendering of the prepositional phrase. Only those who answered the Gospel call of God in obedience were “in Christ” (Rom. 6:3–4; Gal. 3:27), and only those remaining faithful “in Christ” under duress would receive the glory.

What would our gracious God do for them in light of their sufferings? He would make them “perfect,” a word meaning to put all parts right with one another or to equip or adjust. He would also “stablish” them, (i.e., make them firm as a foundation). Further, God would “strengthen” them or impart to them the spiritual strength they needed. Finally, God would “settle” them as if grounded firmly upon a rock (cf. Mat. 7:25). These blessings He would provide after they had suffered “a while” (“a little while,” ASV; the term simply means “a little”

and may refer either to time or extent, or both). Peter was apparently assuring them that they would not have suffered much until God would supply the strength they need for whatever may come—perhaps more extensive and prolonged trials. We should not miss the contrast between the “eternal glory” promised the victors with the “little while” of suffering endured (cf. 2 Cor. 4:17).

Upon consideration of the gracious provisions and care supplied by God for his people, Peter’s pen exploded in an outburst of praise.

### ***Purpose of the Letter Reviewed (v. 12)***

**By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand.**

*Silvanus* is the Latin spelling of *Silas*. It is generally assumed that he is the prophet who faithfully accompanied Paul in various travels (Acts 15:22,32, 40; 16:19; et al.). Peter acknowledged that he was counted a “faithful brother” by his addressees. He seems to add his own conviction of Silvanus’ faithfulness, after the manner of Paul (1 Cor. 4:17; Eph. 6:21, et al.). I say “seems,” because Peter’s phrase, “as I suppose,” (“account,” ASV) is connected with its following, instead of its preceding, phrase by some authorities. Thus, it may be that Peter was saying something like, “I have written briefly, as I account the matter, by Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you....” Silvanus may have been Peter’s amanuensis or the messenger who would bear the letter to its destination, or both.

Peter summarized his purposes for writing in three items:

1. He wrote to exhort them. The epistle is full of exhortations to live a pure life, both morally and doctrinally, even in the face of fiery trials.
2. He wrote to testify or bear witness to them, certifying to them that the Gospel they had heard and obeyed was indeed the eternal Truth, “the true grace of God.”
3. He wrote them to help and encourage them and to command them to stand firm in that true grace (*wherein stand* is in the imperative, rather than the indicative mood).

### ***Greetings from Others Conveyed (v. 13)***

**The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you; and so doth Marcus my son.**

Here Peter mentioned his location when he wrote the letter. *Babylon* has been variously understood. The two principal contentions are that Peter used it either cryptically for Rome or that it refers to the literal city on the Euphrates. While there are well-respected men who vigorously deny the possibility that Peter could have meant literal Babylon (and surely meant Rome), equally-respected men just as staunchly deny that Peter intended any reference to Rome

or any other place, but that Peter was in the Mesopotamian city when he wrote. The entire epistle is surely otherwise free of symbolism, being written in a straightforward, literal style. The most natural understanding of *Babylon* is the old Eastern city and there is no prevailing reason to understand it in any other sense. Where Peter simply said, literally rendered, “she who is...co-elect with you,” the KJV translators have interpreted (rather than translated) by inserting *the church* in its rendering: “The church that is...elected together with you.” The ASV is true to Peter’s words: “She that is... elect together with you.” However, it is generally conceded that Peter was sending greetings from the church in Babylon in these words, although some think he might have had reference to his wife. *Marcus* most likely refers to John Mark, to whom Peter was like a “father in the Gospel.”

#### ***Closing Exhortation and Blessing Stated (v. 14)***

**Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity. Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus. Amen.**

Peter’s final charge was that they use a kiss of love in their greetings to each other (cf. Rom. 16:16, etc.). Historians say that in time the kiss came to be used impurely and was thereupon first restricted to use between the same sexes, then altogether abandoned. The sincere handshake serves the same purpose with far less possibilities of corruption. The apostle pronounced one final benediction upon his readers. He desired that amid the trials and sufferings through which they were passing they might possess a calmness of soul and an inner confidence that is the privilege of all (and only) those “that are in Christ Jesus.” Such a blessed calm as this is needed by God’s people in this wicked world in every age.

### **Comments on Selected Passages**

#### ***Authority of Elders (v. 5)***

In verse 5 Peter charged the younger to “submit” (“be subject,” ASV) unto elders. The word for “submit” (*hupotagete*) is the same one Peter used in 1 Peter 2:13, where he earlier commanded the saints, “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake....” “Moreover, it is a different form of the same word used to instruct servants to be subject to their masters (v. 18) and wives to be in subjection to their own husbands (3:1).

A strong and apparently increasing element in the church denies that elders have any authority in a local congregation, except that which inheres in their example (which amounts to none at all). Often the advocates of this view seek Scriptural support in this very chapter (v. 3), which indeed warns about misuse of authority by elders and emphasizes the necessity of setting the proper example before the church. However, this verse does not deny elders the very

authority necessary to oversee and pastor a church – the responsibility to which Peter referred in the previous verse.

If members of the church are to “submit” to their elders even as men are to submit to their civil rulers or earthly masters, this submission necessarily implies the possession of authority by elders, even as it implies such by civil rulers and earthly masters. One may as well argue that civil rulers and earthly masters possess no God-given authority, “except by example,” as to argue that elders have none in the local church.

The authority “termites” who keep “eating” away at the authority of elders would leave the local congregation without effective leadership and protection, an easy prey to almost any spiritual “wolf” that might come along. Could it be that this is the aim of those who are so zealous to deny the Scriptural authority of elders in the local church? Verily, 1 Peter 5 is not a text in their favor. Rather, on either side of Peter’s warning of the abuse of authority (v. 3), he placed strong balancing statements which confirm their authority (vv. 2, 5). These exhortations of submission to elders envision the men thus serving are faithful guardians of the souls in their care. Whether in submission to men in the church or in the world, the enduring principle is that stated by the apostles before the Sanhedrin 2,000 years ago. When the directions of men conflict with those from Heaven, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

### *Serving in Humility (vv. 5–6)*

The spirit of humble service is one of the great themes of the Bible. It embraces our attitude and our service toward each other as we bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2) and count each other better than ourselves (Phi. 2:3). It also embraces our attitude and our service toward God and His Son as we strive to understand and obey His Word faithfully. The spirit of humble service, toward both men and God, is most perfectly exemplified in the life of our Lord, Who came not to be served, but to serve (Mat. 20:28) and Who emptied and humbled Himself in service for our sakes (Phi. 2:7–8).

Perhaps there has never been an age in history when this noble spirit was less evident than it now seems to be, especially in our nation. Our political freedoms have somehow been misinterpreted as license to seek our own “rights” at whatever expense to justice, honor, and truth may be necessary. Our system of free enterprise has given rise to a “dog-eat-dog” mentality that inspires men to run over anyone or any principle of integrity and decency that stands between them and their desired goals. The common goal is to be served by as many and as much as possible.

Inevitably, this ungodly attitude has fastened itself on the saints to an alarming degree. Congregations are sometimes torn asunder by petty grievances, selfish demands, or imagined slights which would never have been felt had there been the proper spirit of humble service among brethren. This attitude does not seek service **from** others, but rather seeks to provide it **for** others. Those with a serving spirit count it not a chore, but a sublime privilege to be busy for the Lord of glory.

Nor can the “me generation” tolerate the Gospel faithfully and plainly preached, which will always stir guilt in some, if not some guilt in all. Such introverted souls must be coddled, soothed, praised, and made to feel good about themselves (even when they should feel badly about themselves). Bowing to this crass selfishness has led some congregations to take on the responsibilities of the home, the school, the health club, the restaurant, the psychology clinic and such like. At the same time that millions of dollars are being raised to fund such programs and the buildings to house them, godly men and women are having to traverse the brotherhood seeking in vain for comparative pocket change to preach the Gospel in remote places. The incongruity of these things is both amazing and alarming. The spirit of humble service enjoined by Peter would cure it all.

### ***Resisting the Devil in the Faith (vv. 8-9)***

Note the necessary **features** of our resistance:

1. **Soberness** (being seriously conscious of Satan’s activity and his desire for our souls)
2. **Vigilance** (being not only wide awake, but particularly watchful, on guard, for Satan’s attacks)

Note the necessary **fact** of our resistance. That is, we are most certainly to resist him, for such resistance will cause him to flee (Jam. 4:7). Some saints think the devil (or his agents) is not such a bad fellow after all, and they thus approach him with compromise or even cooperation. To resist means to oppose and fight against. Those who scream against the exposure of the devil’s doctrines and practices and against those who dare expose them and their proponents, fly in the face of this plain injunction. Religious controversy is not only permissible, it is required when the Truth is under assault. We are traitors to the kingdom of Christ when we fail to oppose enemies, whether within or without its holy borders.

Note the **facility** of our resistance. We are to resist the devil “stedfast in the faith.” To be stedfast means to be solid as a rock, thus firmly positioned. Our firm position is to be “in the faith.” *The faith* refers to the Truth, the Gospel, the whole Christian system contained in the New



Testament. It embraces both the Gospel plan of salvation (Acts 6:7) as well as principles of Christian conduct (1 Tim. 4:1–3). We are to contend earnestly for it (Jude 3), which involves resisting the devil by use of it. One cannot steadfastly resist Satan apart from the faith. One must know the Truth before he can even recognize error and evil, much less successfully refute and oppose them.

It becomes immediately obvious why so many saints have fallen for the latest fads, gimmicks, gadgets, and tricks in doctrine and practice, instead of crying out against them. They know so little of what the faith does and does not authorize that they are incapable of discerning between things of the devil and things of the Lord. The great need of this hour in the kingdom is more men and women who are grounded like the rock of Gibraltar in the Word of God and who cannot be “carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph. 4:14). Such will not only be prepared to resist the devil and his emissaries; they will instinctively resist him.

### **Conclusion**

What more appropriate words could have been written to those upon whom fiery trials were already descending? The consolation, encouragement, and exhortations contained in this closing section of the epistle alone would have given great help to the weary, suffering saints. All of these helpful statements were enhanced by the reminder that God cared for them and would give them strength equal to their sufferings if they would but remain faithful. We need to and can profit from the strong and strength-giving words of this section of Scripture, even though we are not presently victims of bodily persecution.

[**Note:** I wrote this MS for and presented a digest of it orally at the Southwest Lectures, hosted by the Southwest Church of Christ, Austin, TX, April 12–15, 1987. It was published in the book of the lectures, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, ed. Bill Jackson (Austin, TX: Southwest Pub., 1987.)

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