

A STUDY OF 1 PETER

The Church Under Trial (1 Peter 5:1-7)

At first reading it seems that Peter has moved from suffering to a new topic in chapter 5, but instead he is connecting suffering with the life of the church and offering advice to help the church overcome trials. The elders as leaders within the church are necessary to provide stability and strength to the congregation.

Peter directly addresses the elders and identifies himself as a “*fellow elder*.” This exhortation is not to older men, but rather to those men within the church that hold the office of elder. (Elders are also called shepherds, pastors, overseers, and bishops in the New Testament.) Peter appeals to these men not just as a fellow elder, but also one who was a witness to the sufferings of Christ and one who is a “*partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed*.” Peter here has in mind the reward that Christians will receive.



Peter’s instruction to the elders is: “*Shepherd the flock of God...*” Scripture often uses the image of a shepherd in both the Old and New Testaments for one who cares for God’s people (Psalm 23; Ezekiel 34; John 10:1-18). A shepherd is one who watches over (oversees) a flock. These shepherds are not the owners of the flock, but rather the sheep belong to God.

The elders are to oversee the church NOT under compulsion, BUT willingly; NOT for shameful gain, BUT eagerly; NOT in a domineering manner, BUT as examples. The faithful elder has an “*unfading crown of glory*” waiting when Christ, the chief Shepherd returns.

1. Why might someone serve as an elder if he is not willing (i.e. what would compel him to serve)?
2. What “shameful gain” might an ungodly elder hope to achieve?
3. How does one oversee, correct problems, and lead the sheep without becoming domineering?

The instruction to the elders is to shepherd the flock of God and the instruction to others is to receive shepherding. Peter says to the young, “*be subject to the elders*.” We are sometimes tempted to believe that we can handle any problem or any suffering on our own. Perhaps we think, “We got ourselves into this mess. We can get ourselves out of it.” We are taught that we are to be responsible for ourselves. While there may be some truth to this, we understand that in the church we are community. We are a fellowship. We are a family. Living Godly does

not mean living alone. God in His infinite wisdom designed the Church to be structured with leaders who can help us as we live our lives for Christ.

It is accurate to say that the elders are mentors to the flock. Mentors pull up alongside of others in the church and model behaviour, values, and faith through a shared life. We need shepherds who will show us how to handle persecution, stress, temptation, sex, money, and burnout. We need mentors to show us how to share our faith, how to deal with anger, how to show compassion, how to live with disappointment and grief, and how to serve the Lord.



Those “*who are younger*” are told to be subject to the elders. This is coupled with the call for humility. It is a common trait of some people (and especially young men) to struggle with submission and humility. It is also true that other age groups can struggle to submit and to exhibit humility.

4. Do you agree that younger people sometimes find it more difficult to submit to authority than older people? Explain why you believe this is true.

5. How is submission related to humility?

6. In what ways has Peter previously addressed submission in this letter? (See 1 Peter 2:13, 18; 3:1)

7. How does a person “clothe” themselves with humility?

8. 1 Peter 5:5 comes from Proverbs 3:34 and is also quoted in James 4:6. How does God oppose the proud and give grace to the humble?

When faced with persecution suffering and problems, how do you respond to God? While some react with anger and bitterness, Peter says to “*Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God.*” Again, we have the call to submission. Peter tells Christians that at the point of suffering, they should consciously and deliberately depend on God.

Reference to the “*mighty hand of God*” first appeared in connection with the exodus of God’s people from Egypt. The nation of Israel was in bondage and slavery. They were oppressed by the Pharaohs. They could not save themselves and so they call out to God. In Exodus 6:1 God says, “*Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.*” Throughout the rest of the Old Testament this phrase was used to denote God’s deliverance of His people. It was an active intervention of God into the lives of people.

Peter says, *“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.”* When you go through trials, persecution, difficulties, struggles, and problems of all sorts, humble yourself before God and in due time, He will lift you up.

In verse 7, Peter instructs his readers to cast their anxieties onto Christ. This is a part of humbling oneself before God and is something we should do with the realisation that he cares for us.

The word translated as cast in verse 7 is one that is used for draping a piece of clothing over something or someone. The word can picture a person taking off a coat or outer garment and then laying that garment on the shoulders of another. What the scripture is saying then is this: Take your anxiety, remove it, place it on the shoulders of Christ and let Him bear it for you. Remove your apprehension, your worries, your doubts during times of persecution or difficulty and hand them to Him because He cares for you.

9. How is it an act of humility to cast your anxiety onto Christ?

10. Is casting your anxiety on Christ the same as giving up? Explain your answer.

11. Why should we cast our anxiety onto Christ? (verse 7)

12. How do we go about casting our anxiety onto Christ? (See also Philippians 4:6-7)