

Submission in the Church

(1 Peter 5:5-7)

Expository Lessons from the First Letter of Peter

I. Background and Overview

- a. In this letter, Peter is primarily focused on teaching Christians to be prepared to face suffering in this life.
- b. They should expect, as followers of Christ, to follow the same pattern as He did:
 - i. Sufferings first, in this life; followed by
 - ii. Glory in the end (after this life).
- c. Therefore, we should not think it strange when we face trials of suffering, to test and purify our faith.
 - i. We must persevere in the face of suffering in this life.
 - ii. Also, we must make sure that we are suffering for righteousness' sake. There is nothing noble about suffering for doing something wrong!
- d. In the previous lesson, we considered Peter's message to the elders.
 - i. Peter appealed to them as one who was a fellow-elder.
 - ii. He called them to be shepherds who took care of the flock (rather than just taking care of themselves).
 - iii. He reminded them that in the end, they must give an account to the Chief Shepherd, when He returns.

II. To the Younger People in the Church

- a. Read **1 Peter 5:5-11**.
 - i. The text we will focus on in this lesson is **1 Peter 5:5-7**. However, since I am not sure how closely this material is connected to the verses that immediately follow, we will read through to the end of **verse 11**.
 - ii. One of the challenges in doing expository preaching/teaching is knowing when a new topic is being introduced; and therefore, where it is appropriate to break up the text for individual lessons.

1. Similarly, one's clothing can be made of clearly separated garments (like my shirt, sweater, pants, etc.), or it can be a seamless whole that all runs together (like the garment they took from Jesus when he was crucified).
 - iii. I am not sure if Peter is talking about two *separate* topics here (younger Christians submitting to their elders and resisting Satan) or one topic (younger people and submission) that flows seamlessly into the issue of being attacked by Satan.
- b. Summary
- i. Younger people are to submit to the elders.
 - ii. All of us are called to have a humble attitude (**Proverbs 3**)
 1. Our job is to humble ourselves. The Lord will take care of lifting us up.
 - iii. Beware of Satan, our adversary, who is prowling about like a roaring lion, seeking to devour us.
 1. Satan is attacking Christians in this manner, all over the world.
 2. After we have suffered for a while, God will bring us to an eternal glory.
- c. The challenge to submit to the leaders (elders) of the church.
- i. Recall that the journey of the Israelites through the Wilderness is a foreshadowing of the Christian life, as Paul points out in **1 Corinthians 10:1-15**. One of the things that got people into trouble on the Wilderness journey was *complaining about their leaders*.
 1. Complaining about lack of water and no food; or not the kind of food they wanted (**Exodus 17; Numbers 11, 20, 21**, etc.).
 2. Korah's rebellion, in which the Levites rebelled against the leadership of Moses and Aaron (**Numbers 16**).
 3. Complaining about the fact that Moses married a wife who was not Jewish (**Numbers 12**).
 4. Complaining about Moses' plan to lead them into Canaan the first time (**Numbers 13-14**).
 - ii. There is a human tendency to complain about leaders.
 1. Often it 'feels better' to complain and air your grievances to someone else, to 'get it off your chest'. However, the result can

be to spread discontent, as germs spread a disease through the community.

2. Paul warned the Corinthian Christians about the danger of complaining.
 - a. "But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted." (**1 Corinthians 10:5-6**, NKJV)
 - b. "...nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written *for our admonition*, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." (**1 Corinthians 10:10-11**, NKJV)
3. Jude points to the same example of the Jews who fell in the Wilderness, to make a similar point to the church.
 - a. "But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe." (**Jude v.5**, NKJV)
 - b. "Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and *perished in the rebellion of Korah*." (**Jude v.11**, NKJV)
 - i. Jude here is saying that there were people in the church guilty of the same sins of Korah and his followers (rebellious against authority).
- iii. The writer of Hebrews makes a similar point to what Peter says.
 1. "Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct." (**Hebrews 13:7**, NKJV)
 2. "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you." (**Hebrews 13:17**, NKJV)
- d. I realize that bad Christian leaders have used passages like these to justify mistreating others in the church. There certainly have been corrupt and unspiritual leaders in the kingdom of God over the centuries, in so many places!

- i. **Question:** What should you do if/when you are under *very imperfect leadership* in a church?
1. You will need to figure that out for yourself, with prayer and reflection, and an open Bible.
 2. However, being a complainer and/or an unrighteously divisive person *is not an option!* We must never compound one sin (that of unrighteous leaders) with another sin (being rebellious or complaining), and thereby *give Satan a second victory!*
 3. Perhaps we can find a principle in what Paul says to Christians who are under slavery.
 - a. “Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.)” (**1 Corinthians 7:21**, ESV)
 4. Other Biblical principles to consider:
 - a. Jesus’ teaching on and desire for unity of all Christians, which goes way beyond just staying unified within one congregation or denomination (**John 17:20-23**).
 - i. Jesus prays for all future believers here, all those who will believe through the work of the apostles.
 - ii. I believe Jesus knew that if Satan was unable to win by any other way, he would try to win through creating disunity among Christians in the future.
 - b. It is always good practice to follow “The Golden Rule” (**Matthew 7:12, Luke 6:31**). Treat others as we would want to be treated if the roles were reversed.
 - i. If you were in a leadership position in the church (for example, you were an elder) and someone had a problem with what you were doing, *how would you want them to handle it?*
 - c. Another fundamental principle: Jesus said his followers should be “...wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” (**Matthew 10:16**, ESV)
 - d. Pray for wisdom. The Holy Spirit is described, first of all the characteristics, as being *the Spirit of wisdom*. (**Isaiah 11:1-3**)

- e. We want to avoid the sin of sectarianism, creating factions in the body of Christ (**1 Corinthians 1:10-13**).
 - i. “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” (**1 Corinthians 1:10**, NKJV)
 - ii. On the other hand, let us not forget that in the same letter Paul also said:
 - 1. “For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.” (**1 Corinthians 11:18-19**, NKJV)
- f. We need fellowship with other believers. We are part of the body of Christ, and we all need each other (**1 Corinthians 12:12-27**).
- g. “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” (**Hebrews 10:24-25**, NKJV)
 - i. Although under some circumstances it may not be possible to have live fellowship with a body of believers, that should always be our first choice, what we are striving for in terms of a spiritual community.
 - ii. The church should be meeting together regularly, and we each need to be part of a living, local fellowship wherever possible.
- h. Also, as Peter reminded us, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (**Proverbs 3:34** in most Bibles; Peter’s quote follows the LXX, where the numbered designation of the verse may differ).
 - i. In all our interactions, we must have an attitude of genuine humility, *or the Lord will oppose us!*

- e. God can refine you under imperfect leadership, as He has done with many others in the past.
 - i. **Question:** Why does the Lord put *so many unspiritual people* into positions of leadership in churches? (Or, perhaps, 'Why does He *allow them* to occupy those positions?')
 - 1. That is a tough question to answer!
 - 2. This has caused many believers to struggle, even to the point of losing their faith in some cases.
 - 3. While I hesitate to claim that I can answer this question authoritatively, I believe we gain insight from examples (of men and women who suffered under bad leaders) that we find in the Scriptures.
 - ii. Consider what Paul said in his farewell address to the Ephesian elders, in **Acts 20**.
 - 1. On the one hand, Paul said that *the Holy Spirit had put them* into their positions of leadership to oversee the flock.
 - a. "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which *the Holy Spirit has made you overseers...*" (**Acts 20:28**, NKJV)
 - 2. On the other hand, Paul *also* says that some from among the same group of elders would rise up to draw people away!
 - a. "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also, *from among yourselves* men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves." (**Acts 20:29-30**, NKJV)
 - 3. Both of the above things are true!
 - iii. Consider the case of David under Saul.
 - 1. David had been told he would be king in the future. Yet, Saul was at that time still the anointed king over Israel, the undisputed ruler over God's people. Therefore, David was under Saul's leadership.
 - 2. Unfortunately, Saul had many shortcomings and failings in his character.
 - a. When Goliath challenged the army of Israel to select a champion to fight him one-on-one, Saul did not have the

courage and faith to accept the challenge personally. All he did was offer to loan his armor to David! (**1 Samuel 17**; designated **1 Kingdoms 17** in the LXX)

- b. After David defeated Goliath and became a hero renowned for his courage and triumphs in battle, Saul became jealous of David. (**1 Samuel 18**)
 - c. Saul was a compromiser who followed only certain parts of the instructions he received from Samuel and from the Lord. (**1 Samuel 13 & 15**)
 - d. Saul tried to turn his daughter Michal, his son Jonathan and others against David. (**1 Samuel 19-20**)
 - e. Saul even went back on his promise and took away David's wife Michal (Saul's daughter) *and gave her to another man* (**1 Samuel 18 & 25:44**).
 - f. Saul tried several times to murder David. (**1 Samuel 19**, etc.)
 - g. He persecuted and killed people who had been friendly to David. (**1 Samuel 22**, etc.)
 - h. Saul even got involved with the occult, consulting a spiritual medium at Endor, who called up the spirit of dead Samuel. (**1 Samuel 28**).
 - i. Can you imagine living under such terrible leadership?
3. In the face of struggling under a corrupt leader like King Saul, consider how David acted. He had an opportunity to get revenge and justice against Saul; but refused to do so.
- a. Read **1 Samuel 24:1-23**.
 - i. Consider the heart of David here.
 - ii. Despite the persecution he received at the hands of a very corrupt and sinful leader, Saul, David said he could not raise his hand against "the Lord's anointed".
 - iii. In fact, David is cut to the heart because he had cut off a piece of Saul's robe!
 - iv. Not only did David personally not retaliate against Saul; *he also* convinced his men to not retaliate.

- iv. **Questions:** Would you have done the same, if you were in David's position? Is this your attitude toward unrighteous leaders?
 - 1. David truly did submit himself to Saul, in humility. And the Lord refined him through those trials and later lifted him (and his whole line) to the throne.
 - a. Recall that of all the men of Israel, David was selected by the Lord to be king because he was a man "after God's own heart" (**1 Samuel 13:12-14, 16:7**).
 - b. Even a man "after God's own heart" had to be refined under a wicked leader.
- v. Others from the Old Testament who are examples of suffering righteously in the face of bad leadership:
 - 1. Consider Jacob serving for 20 years under his deceitful uncle Laban, who switched the daughters on David's wedding night and then repeatedly switched Jacob's wages (**Genesis 29-31**).
 - 2. Consider Joseph, who was innocent but imprisoned by Pharaoh in Egypt for over two years before he was raised up (**Genesis 39-41**).
 - 3. Consider Daniel and his three friends, who were submissive and respectful to the pagan governing authorities (**Daniel 3. 6**).
 - a. Although they were respectful to the ruler, they refused to compromise on matters of sin and righteousness.
- vi. Being under bad or imperfect spiritual leaders will test our hearts. While some people will be *refined and purified* through these trials, others will not make it.
 - 1. This is a true test of one's humility.

III. A Lesson on the Grace of God

- a. Peter tells the Christians that *what we do in our lives* will have a huge impact on how God treats us individually.
 - i. Whether we choose to live according to righteousness or wickedness.
 - 1. "For the eyes of the LORD are on *the righteous*, and *His ears are open to their prayers*;...
 - 2. "But the face of the LORD is *against those who do evil*."

3. (**1 Peter 3:12**, NKJV, where Peter is quoting from **Psalms 34**, designated **Psalms 33** in the LXX.)
- ii. Whether we choose to be *proud* or *humble*.
 1. "God *resists the proud*,
 2. But gives *grace to the humble*."
 3. (**1 Peter 5:5**, NKJV, where Peter is quoting from **Proverbs 3:34** following the LXX. Note that verse numbering may vary, based on translation.)
- iii. I was in a church that for many years placed very little emphasis on teaching about the grace of God. Unfortunately, when they finally tried to correct that problem, many turned to an Evangelical Protestant explanation of 'grace', which followed the perspective of men like Martin Luther.
 1. Protestants generally define 'grace' as "unmerited favor".
 2. They tend to turn to the writings of Paul first, to understand *grace*.
 3. The idea that grace is defined as "unmerited favor" comes from misunderstanding what Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:8-9**, essentially working backward from the text to try to come up with a definition for the word "grace" that appears there.
- iv. The word grace (Greek = charis / χάρις) is a common word whose meaning was quite familiar to readers of Paul's letters.
 1. For example, that word occurs in the Greek Old Testament popularly used by Jews, the apostles and Christians in the early church.
 2. The word means favor (*whether or not* that favor was given as a result of something the recipient did).
 - a. We can see that clearly from the way Peter uses it in **1 Peter 5:5** and how James does likewise in **James 4:6**. Both use the word 'grace / charis', quoting from **Proverbs 3:34** in the LXX.
 - b. The point that Peter, James and the writer of the proverb all are making:
 - i. Those who believe in the Lord have a choice: whether to be proud or humble people.

1. If we choose to be proud, then God will resist us. He will oppose us, and not extend His grace (= favor) to us.
2. On the other hand, if we choose to be humble, then God will extend His grace (= favor) to us.
- ii. Clearly, what we do (being humble vs. being proud) has an impact on whether or not we receive God's grace.
- c. Therefore, '*grace*' CANNOT be defined as 'unmerited favor', since it is in this case bestowed or withheld by God based on something we do.
3. The popular Protestant teaching that grace is *unmerited favor* that is given by God arbitrarily to certain people, having nothing to do with anything they have done, is *false teaching*.
 - a. We can see this clearly, based on what Peter says here in **1 Peter 5:5**.

IV. Humble Yourself and Resist the Devil

- a. "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." (**1 Peter 5:6-7**, NKJV)
 - i. Peter calls us to "cast all our cares" upon the Lord; He will lift us up "in due time".
- b. This statement is reminiscent of what Paul speaks of in Philippians.
 - i. Read **Philippians 2:1-11**.
 1. Jesus humbled Himself, after which God exalted Him. The same will hold true for us. That is the basis for Paul calling us to:
 - ii. Read **Philippians 2:12-15**.
 1. Follow *the life example of Jesus*, in addition to following His teachings.
 2. Paul calls us to treat other people better than we treat ourselves!
- c. In a recent conversation with a zealous young disciple, I explained the circumstances under which my wife and I left a large church group that we had been a part of for many years.

- i. The young zealot, upon hearing our story, insisted that I should have gone out (figuratively) ‘with guns blazing’, broadcasting e-mails to members of the church to explain what had happened, and how major Bible teachings were being ignored by the church leaders.
 - 1. (Background: We had left quietly and told the elders that while we thought what they were doing was wrong based on the Scriptures, we considered them to be brothers in Christ. We told them that we did not want to do anything to undermine their leadership nor to try to pull members away from their congregation.)
- ii. It is much easier to destroy (a church fellowship) than to *build*.
- iii. If I believed a father/husband was treating his wife or child badly, I would not correct the man in front of his wife or child. I would take him aside and speak directly, but behind closed doors.
 - 1. I have the same attitude toward addressing the sins and shortcomings of church leaders. I do not want to tear them down in the presence of those they are trying to lead!
- iv. On the night before Jesus was crucified, one thing that Jesus prayed for, for us (those who would believe through the testimony of the apostles) was for *unity*.
 - 1. Jesus prayed for us: “...that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they *may be made perfect in one*, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.” (**John 17:22-23**, NKJV)
- d. James makes many of the same points as Peter.
 - i. James also says something that reminds me of what Peter writes here. Consider all the parallels.
 - ii. Read **James 4: 1-11**.
 - iii. Parallels between what Peter says and what James is saying in the passage we just read include:
 - 1. Both are addressing strife in the church (real or potential), among believers.
 - 2. Both quote from **Proverbs 3**, “God opposes the proud...”, to make a similar point.
 - a. We are called to humble ourselves before God, and *HE will lift us up*.

3. Both call us to submit to God, but to resist the devil.
 - a. These parallels lead me to think that *Peter (like James) may be using the same reasoning to tie in resisting the devil with submission and unity in the church.*
 - b. Satan attacks us not only by tempting us with sins of the flesh. He also is always trying to create *strife and division* within the church, motivated by our pride. Let us not go there!
 - c. We will have much more to say about *Satan* in our next and final lesson on the letter **1 Peter**.