

The Flock of God (2)

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now this evening to 1 Peter chapter 5, and we're going to look at verses 5 to 11, particularly, of the chapter. We saw this morning in verses 1 to 4 how Peter is here in closing out his letter to these Christians, to these people that had gone through so many sufferings, that he's closing out the letter by pointing out the importance of the relationship between those who are leaders and those who are under their leadership.

In other words, the elders and the people that they actually are elders over. And in the first four verses we saw how he addressed the elders particularly with regard to what they must carry on doing in regard to taking care of what he calls the other flock of God, to shepherd them, to be in a pastoral exercise of ministry over them and for them and towards them.

And we saw how important that is in regard to the eldership at any time, but when there are added burdens, such as at a time of vacancy, as you will have yourselves shortly, it is important that that relationship between elders and people is even more exercised in terms of the pastoral care that Peter here enjoins.

Now we're coming then to the second part of it, which is for those who are under their care, although much of that, of course, will apply in terms of the principles of conduct and personal life that elders and people together must actually follow.

Indeed, he's saying for them there, clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility towards one another. And it seems by that that he's not just talking to all of you who are under the leadership of these elders, but all of you elders and people alike.

[1 : 54] And many of the things that he goes on to mention are in fact applicable to the eldership as well. But it is important, as we've seen, that he talks here about the relationship between them and the importance of maintaining it in good order and good health.

It'll be obvious from the study, as we mentioned this morning too, but it'll be obvious from these verses that Peter really has recalled so accurately and so applicably the teachings of the Lord, what he saw in Jesus, what he heard from Jesus, because many of the terms that he uses, the words that he uses, the descriptions that he gives in this passage, really go back to his experience of being with Jesus as a disciple and seeing him at work and learning from him.

And that really is the most important thing for all of us too. Because he, as we saw this morning, is the chief shepherd. And it's to him particularly that we look individually and congregationally for his leadership to be discerned and prayed to and prayed about, that he will guide us throughout all the issues of life.

Well, what are the things then he mentions here? There are a number of them, five or so we're going to mention. First of all, he's saying here in verse 5, likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders.

So the first thing he's talking about there is submission. Now we mentioned this morning that elders have a particular authority that's given them by virtue of their office, not because of the kind of men they are themselves, or personalities, or status in society, anything like that.

[3 : 34] It's simply because the office that God gives to his people when he gives them an office carries with it a right authority. And he's maybe addressing here by the way he refers to the younger, he's possibly referring to those who are younger in the faith, or younger in years, or both.

But in any case, he's talking here about those who are under the care and under the pastoral shepherding of the leaders of the elders of the church. And he's taking this word here very importantly.

He's saying, be subject to the elders. Now that of course is qualified by verses 2 to 3. What he means is, be subject to the elders as you see them faithfully carrying out the duties of the

shepherding.

He's not saying to them, be subject to them even if they abuse you. Be subject to them even if they don't carry out the duties of eldership properly as they should. But where that is the case, be subject to them.

The New Testament, as well as the Old Testament, is very frequently emphasizing for us the respect that we owe to old and more experienced people.

[4 : 54] And that's something that's true in general. And it's something that needs to be recaptured for the generation that we belong to, for the days in which we live. Because that respect for those who are older, and that respect for those in authority, a proper designated authority, when it's carried out lawfully and properly, there ought to be a respect for that.

Whether it's teachers or in the medical profession, or policemen or judges or whatever in society, people are given an office or a status which carries a certain authority, and as they carry it out properly and diligently and faithfully, there ought to be, on our part, a due respect given.

And that follows into the church as well. A respect in its own place for the eldership of the church. Not being in fear of them.

Not the kind of thing that really would regard them as untouchables and unapproachable. What he's saying here is, give them the place that their office actually carries.

Regard them as indeed ruling in Christ's name. Be subject to those elders. Honor their office.

[6 : 15] Be respectful to what God has done in placing them as elders, in being elders in the church. Secondly, he then moves to humility.

Clothe yourselves, all of you with humility, towards one another. For God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Well, humility, of course, is such an important thing in terms of Christian character anyway.

It's one of the things that characterize the Lord himself. And the Lord himself is our prime example of what a Christian believing, faithful life, God-honoring life, is like.

In our nature, he lived that life. He never put a foot wrong, and therefore it's obviously, in that sense, somewhat formidable to think of following the example that Christ has set us.

But that is the example that we are to follow. And Peter himself, as we've seen in some previous studies, presents Christ to us as an example of how to endure suffering, for example.

[7 : 26] How to put up with these verbal assaults that were made upon him. But here he's talking about being in humility one towards another.

In other words, the humility is not just something about a personal character, something that is true of us as individuals, or to be true of us as individual believers or Christians. What he's talking about here is exercise humility towards one another.

It's a public humility, a humility that has to be displayed in relationships, a humility that has to be carried out as we interact with each other, as elders with people and people with elders.

Be, he says, humble. Clothe yourselves with humility towards one another. And that verb clothe, that imperative clothe yourselves is really a very significant and interesting word because it has a very close connection with a noun that was used in those days for the apron that a slave wore when he or she started to go about their work in any house or in any situation.

They had to actually take this apron and it was an apron specially named as an apron to be worn by slaves. And they had to take that as they went about their work.

[8 : 50] So every day they began their work they would actually take this apron, they would actually wear this apron, put it on with a deliberate act of clothing themselves with it.

And that's such an important spiritual illustration for us as well. Because it doesn't matter what gifts God has given us, it doesn't matter whether they're gifts of intellect, whether they're gifts of speaking, whether they're gifts to do with whatever other kinds of activities we may be involved with.

And all of us have different kinds of gifts. And some of us have very prominent gifts. Gifts of high intelligence, gifts of having ability in practical terms.

What Peter is saying is cover all your gifts with the apron of humility. And we could say that he also has in mind surely what he saw in Jesus when Jesus on that famous occasion as you have in John chapter 13 when he actually took off his outer garments, he put off the outer garments he was wearing and he took a towel and he put that towel around himself and then he began to do something quite incredible.

So incredible that this Peter said with an objection to it, Lord you shall never wash my feet. Are you going to wash my feet Lord?

[10:27] That's the emphasis in the passage because you see to Peter the man who wrote these words what was happening there in that room as he saw the Lord the Son of God as he saw this Savior that he was related to then and valued then and was in a saving relationship with then and knew him to be the Son of God he saw him taking the towel of a slave and beginning to wash the feet of the disciples and that itself was an outward symbolic action that even the Son of God did not think it beneath himself to wash the feet of his disciples.

and how much more then shall we in following his example have humility and clothe ourselves with humility one to another every time we're relating to one another let us always think of what did Christ do?

What did the Son of God do? What was important to the Son of God in the way that he lived his life? Was it proud? Was it pride? Was it arrogant? Was it looking down on people?

No it was humility. It was acting the part of a servant willingly and wholeheartedly and completely. And then Peter reinforces it with a quote from scripture itself for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

In other words if we're going to make progress in life we're not going to make progress in life without humility without clothing ourselves with humility without being willing to take this apron of humility and humbleness and serving the Lord as he himself gives us opportunity.

[12:25] And the words there God opposes the proud that word opposes is also very strong. Peter is very careful in his choice of words. Not only is he reflecting on what he saw in Jesus and heard from Jesus he knows his Old Testament scriptures and he's taking this word God opposes the proud it's a word that really means to oppose something with all your might as if you are indeed accompanied by a great army against your opponent.

And you know that tells us how utterly God resists the proud. How utterly God is against such things as pride in a person and especially pride in his people.

There is no place for pride. Why should we be proud except to be proud of Christ himself? What are we to be proud of?

Have we created ourselves? Can we save ourselves? Are we able to make ourselves like Christ without God's input?

No, he says clothe yourselves all of you. with humility one towards another. And you know, many of the problems of the church down through the years can be traced to this very factor that people refuse to clothe themselves with the apron of humility and insist instead in the pride of their own minds and hearts that they must have it their way.

[14:06] Well, Peter says, let not that be the case with you. And that's what you take with you into this impending vacancy too. As you come to wait upon the Lord, as you continue to serve the Lord, as you continue to relate one to another as a congregation, together as a people, and together as elders and people, clothe yourselves with humility.

Follow the example of Christ. For God vehemently opposes the proud, but you see, he gives grace to the humble. You expect God to come to you with his hands full of grace when you humble yourself before him.

When you stand in pride, the hands are clenched shut. There's nothing here for the proud, but there's all the grace you need for the humble.

That's the second thing. Thirdly, he talks about reliance upon God. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you.

Our tendency would be naturally to want to be exalted not by God's own method or timetable but all too quickly as we see things ourselves.

[15:45] Just like the child beginning to walk, once the first few steps are taken, the tendency is, I can do this. And of course they overreach themselves and they have to learn just to take it easy till they learn to walk properly.

And for the Christian, for the people of God's church, of God's flock, it is the same. Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.

There is an exalting, there is a lifting up by God, there is going to be by God's own hand an exalting of his people, but it's in the proper way and the method towards that begins with humility, with

humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God.

And all of these words are so important, we could really have a study almost of all these words in themselves, humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that at the proper time he may exalt you.

But we move on to see how it includes here, casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you. The care, the anxiety, rather there that he mentions casting all your anxieties, it's the word that's used frequently elsewhere in scripture for the word cares.

[17:07] Of course the word care appears there for God to God cares for you, but that's very different to the kind of care or anxiety that's mentioned in the early part of the verse, which is, again Peter is going back it seems to the Sermon on the Mount, and as you read through the likes of Matthew chapter 6, where Jesus addressing his disciples talks to them about not being anxious, not being over anxious about where they're going to get this or who's going to provide this for them, how shall we be clothed, what shall we eat, what shall we put on, your heavenly father knows that you have need of these things, you don't need to be anxious about it, but instead he says, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will then be added to you, you see how Jesus puts it, you don't begin by being anxious about these things, these material things, these financial things, these everyday things, you don't put them first and then want to tack the kingdom of

God on afterwards as a kind of adjunct or a kind of appendix to these material, worldly, everyday things, no he says put the kingdom of God first, and let God look after these other things, it's very difficult for us to get that into our heads, but that's the pattern that Jesus set for us, and as a congregation, I know that that's how you'll be proceeding in the days ahead, that you will be looking to God, that you will be looking to cast all your cares, your anxieties onto him, and again it's interesting the language Peter uses there is the sense of doing this completely, cast all your anxieties onto him, it doesn't just mean complete in the sense of all your anxieties, but also with a complete casting of all your anxieties onto him, leave it with him, don't take it back again and try and wrestle with it yourself, when you commit it to God, he looks after it, he will take care of it, all that's required of us is then to live by faith and trust in him, and as he does that he says, because he cares for you, our greatest incentive to cast all our cares, all our anxieties onto God is the knowledge and the fact that he cares for his people, remember this is a passage dealing with shepherding by these elders, and it mentions the chief shepherd when he appears, when Jesus returns, and now he's taking us into the depths of this relationship and he's saying to us, cast all your anxieties onto God because he is your shepherd, he cares for you, he is the one who will always look after you, and there's no greater reason for us casting all our cares upon God than the fact that he indeed is true to his promise, cast all your cares and your anxieties onto him, it's natural that you would have questions at this time and anxieties, where are we going to get a minister, what kind of minister will come to us, how long will we have to wait for another minister, what are we going to do meantime, cast all your anxieties onto him, the God who brought you this present ministry that's coming to an end, isn't he going to bring the next one, didn't he bring once before that, isn't he just as worthy of your trust and your confidence that he will actually provide to fill this vacancy as he filled it the last time you were vacant, you've come to know that that's the God we worship, that that's the

God we serve, and ministers come and go, but God remains, and God never leaves unless we make him leave, cast all your anxieties onto him because he cares for you, and you will not go wrong if you cast all your cares upon him, if your casting is complete, if you put your burden into the lap of God, you will not go wrong because he will guide you, he will care for you, he will take your anxieties and show you the way.

Third, fourthly, we need watchfulness, submission, humility, reliance on God, and then watchfulness. Be sober-minded, be watchful.

[22:28] Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

Now it's important that you take note of the two things he's putting together there, the beginning of verse 8. Be sober-minded, be watchful. Being sober-minded in a spiritual sense.

Yes, it involves keeping your mind free from being clogged with drink or something else like that, but in a spiritual terms, it means keep your mind alert. Keep your mind sharp, because you will not be watchful unless your mind is alert.

And the more your mind is alert, the more your mind is exercised to look out for the dangers, to look out for the temptations, to be aware of things that are placed before you, that seek to draw you away from the Lord, the more watchful you will be.

So he's saying be sober-minded and be watchful. The two things dovetail together, and you mustn't separate them out. You can't be watchful without being sober-minded. And when you're sober-minded, it leads to being watchful.

[23 : 44] And what is it especially that he mentions in terms of being watchful? Well, it's regarding Satan or the devil. Because he says, your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roding lion, seeking someone to devour.

Your adversary, the devil. He uses two terms. First of all, the word adversary, which to begin with was a legal term, something which even in Paul and Peter's time was used of an opponent that you faced in a legal case in court.

He is your adversary. And it came then into a spiritual use and was applied especially to Satan in the writings of the scriptures. An adversary who opposes you and presents his own case against you.

And that's really behind the likes of what you find in that great passage in Romans chapter 8, which we've looked at many times together, where he says there that as he comes to sum up in that chapter, what shall we then say to these things?

If God is for us, who can be against us? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies, who is to condemn Christ.

[25 : 04] Jesus is the one who died more than that, who was raised, who is at the right of hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. You see, he's got the background there of an adversary who wants to present a case against you, who wants even before God to accuse you, who's looking out for opportunities to do so.

And as you find from the book of Job, where the Bible there gives us an insight into something of the workings of Satan, he is an adversary of Job. He wants to get at Job.

He wants to spoil his life. He wants to oppose him in his godliness, in his obedience, and in his serving of God. And then he uses the word devil as well.

Your adversary, the devil. And devil, from the Greek word diabolos, means a slanderer. A person who brings false accusations.

And that is really the very essence of the devil. Because the word serpent in the Bible, as it's used of him, that really applies to his cunningness, his subtlety.

[26 : 12] And where you find here the word lion, that really applies to his fierceness, to his determination to have his way with you. And one thing, I know you know this already, one thing that you will be aware of as the next few months go by, is the attempt of your adversary, the devil, to get at you and to get in amongst you.

And what we said earlier with regard to submission and humility and reliance on God and all the unity that's involved in that, that is such an important aspect of resisting the devil, of closing ranks against him.

What he's looking for is a weakness. That's why he goes on to say that he is as a roaring lion prowling around seeking someone to devour.

lion. Interesting description, isn't it? A roaring lion, not the kind of lion that you find lying in a cage in a zoo or in an enclosure where he's become used to human beings and they throw in lumps of meat every now and again so that that lion knows he's going to get a meal every day, doesn't go out and hunt for it.

You look at a lion in the wild and this description of Peter means a ravening lion roaring because he's hungry and he's on the lookout for prey, something he can eat.

[27 : 39] He is looking to devour a victim. That's the kind of illustration, the kind of description he's giving to this adversary, this devil, this false slanderer.

He's prowling around like a roaring lion. He is hungry for success on his own terms. lions. And when he says here, prowling around like a roaring lion, you've seen film of lions and other predators like that in the plains of Africa.

When they see the herd of whether it's wildebeest or whatever kind of herd it is, as they come close to it, they are always looking at it. They're always just studying that herd.

They're just looking for a weakness, looking for an opportunity, looking for a weak calf or an animal that's ill, that's got some disease and they drop off from the rest of the herd and they can't keep up. And then they come and pounce. That's what he's up to. He's looking for you and he's looking for me to wander away from the flock, to let some weakness or other spiritually come into our lives.

[28 : 55] And then he'll pounce. He's looking out for it and he'll be looking out for it during this vacancy as he is at all times. But this is a new situation for many of you.

And you have to be aware that there's an adversary there, there's a devil, there's a roaring lion, spiritually looking down and looking in. And remember this too. If you become one of those weakened people spiritually and end up being his victim, it's not going to end with yourself. It's going to introduce havoc, disruption into the flock of God. Because that's what Peter is really warning against.

Be sober minded, be watchful. Why? Because your adversary, the devil, is prowling around like a roaring lion, seeking someone, seeking whom he may devour.

Don't give him the opportunity. Instead, resist him. Firm in your faith. That's in the exercise of your faith. Knowing that the same things, kind of sufferings are being experienced by your brotherhood, by your fellow Christians in the world.

[30 : 17] How do you resist him steadfast in your faith? Again, that word steadfast is a strong word that Peter uses. It has in it the idea of not just being strong, but being compact.

And remember, he's talking here to a group of people, to the flock of God. How do you resist the devil steadfast in your faith? By being compact.

By staying together unitedly. By having that strength of unity that an army closely formed has when the enemy appears on the horizon.

That's what Peter is taking and using here as an illustration. Firm in your faith. I don't know of any congregation that has a better attendance at prayer meetings than this one.

And that's just one of the ways where you will resist the devil firm in your faith. You believe in prayer. You exercise prayer. You get together for prayer.

[31 : 28] You have early morning prayer meetings, monthly prayer meetings, weekly meetings, times of prayer perhaps by yourselves and groups out with that and individually. That's all part of the package of the compactness with which you have to resist the devil.

Don't give up on your Bible reading. Don't slacken your Bible reading. Don't fall away from church attendance. please.

It's so important. It's not just important to those who are preaching. It's important to the eldership. It's important to the well-being, the health of any congregation.

Most of the work that God does in people's lives comes through the preaching of the gospel. That's why God has given it such an importance.

Faith comes by hearing and hearing the word of God. It's a great privilege to come together to worship God.

[32 : 32] To be together under the preaching of the word. And it's not about at the end of the day who preaches it. I know there are differences between preachers, between one preacher and another. And people always have their favorite preachers and there's nothing in a sense wrong with that.

But always remember that the main element in preaching is the Holy Spirit. And that our lives are not changed by human beings.

However gifted they may be or otherwise. The change that God brings about. Maintain your attendance at the gospel for these reasons.

Because that will make the congregation strong and keep it being strengthened against this adversary.

This roaring lion. And finally there's confidence that God will complete the work he has begun in him. In them.

[33 : 39] After you have suffered for a little while the God of all grace was called you to his eternal glory in Christ. Will himself restore, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. And we haven't got time to go into each of these four words in detail. Restore, confirm, strengthen and establish.

Restore means to mend something, to make it good again. It's used of the disciples before they were followers of Jesus.

Jesus found some of them mending their nets. That's the same word that's used here. And what God does in people's lives that he comes to take hold of by his grace and influence by his grace, he's mending that life.

He's restoring that life. And he's not just talking here of individuals, but together he says, God will keep on restoring you and mending you and making you complete till his work is finished.

[34 : 41] He's not going to give up on it. Just because ministers move away or are called to go somewhere else. Keep your eye upon God as the beginner and finisher of his work of grace.

And he will confirm you. Just like you find in Luke chapter 22 and verse 32.

And again, it's interesting there with Peter, Luke chapter 22, where Jesus revealed to him what would happen. That again, you see, the link is there that Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you all as wheat.

But I have prayed for you, Peter. And when you are recovered, strengthen your brethren. That's the word he's using here that's translated confirm.

God will confirm you. God will make you strong. And he adds to that, he will strengthen you, which means really fill you with strength as Ephesians 3.16.

[35 : 47] And then will establish you, which is a word really meaning to put you on a firm and sure foundation. All of that means God will complete the work that he begins.

It's not dependent on apostles, on ministers, on elders. It's all to do with God looking after his flock. And I trust in these days to come that this is what you will experience. That you will go from strength to strength as a congregation.

I'll say something more practically of that in the fellowship. But that as you go on, that you will do so in submission to those who are given office by God.

That you will indeed clothe yourselves with humility, one with another. That you will go on casting your care upon God, knowing that he cares for you.

[36 : 56] That you will be sober minded and watchful against this lethal adversary who's lying in wait to pass.

And that God will go on restoring, confirming, strengthening and establishing you. Because verse 11 really is the great summary of all things.

To him be the glory and the dominion. Now and evermore. Let's pray. Lord our God, we give thanks that our life is in your hands.

That we are in the safe control and custody and direction of your own grace. And we bless you for that as we place our trust in you.

That you assure us that we are indeed well founded in life. That you will continue to work your work of grace in your people. That you will continue to provide for them and to care for them.

[38 : 03] And that you will continue at last to make them complete in the day of Christ. We ask this for this people here. We pray again for each and every facet of this congregation and their well-being and work.

We commend them to you, O Lord. to the word of your grace. And we pray that you would do exceeding abundantly. Above all that we are able to ask or even think.

We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Thank you.