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1 Peter 4:12 - 5:14



1 Peter - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses 1 Peter 4:12-5:14, emphasizing the idea that Christians will inevitably suffer as they fight back against ruling political spheres. Gregg also notes that suffering is a crucial aspect of Christianity, as Christ suffered to save others. He points out that judgment will begin with the house of God and urges Christians to commit their souls to God and not be ashamed of suffering. Finally, Gregg stresses the importance of selecting church leaders for their genuine eagerness to serve, rather than their desire for dishonest gain.

Transcript

Alright, let's turn to 1 Peter chapter 4. We've gotten through most of this chapter. There's a little bit at the end, beginning at verse 12. I've already mentioned a couple of times that some who have studied this book have felt like this was sort of an addendum, verse 12 to the end of the book.

Partly, this judgment is based on, well I think there's about three things it's based on. One, is that back in chapter 3 verse 8, Peter said, finally, as if he was about to wind it down. But, it actually goes on much longer.

A second point is that verse 11 of chapter 4 ends in a way that sounds like it could have been intended to be the end of his major communication. Ending with a doxology and an amen, as if that would have been the natural ending. And the third reason is because some have felt, and this is rather a subjective call of course, as you read it, that chapter 4 verse 12 is written in a milieu of some increased amount of suffering.

That there seems to be more of an urgency about the suffering that readers are facing from chapter 4 verse 12 on than in the passages before. I said this is a very subjective call and I don't know that I could affirm it because there's been plenty of reference to suffering previous to this. It's, in some respects, teaching in the abstract about the value of suffering and the need to endure suffering.

But, some of it's been very practical. You are suffering because you've ceased from sin. Your friends think it's strange.

They speak evil of you. There's already persecution of sorts going on. Although, at chapter 4 verse 12 he speaks specifically of the fiery trials.

And it's not certain whether simply having your friends speak evil of you is a severe enough kind of suffering as to be referred to as fiery trials. As if you're really in the furnace. On the other hand, rejection from your friends is difficult.

It's a serious trial. It has challenged many people to go back from the faith. The writer of Hebrews seems to be addressing people like that who, because of persecution from their friends and ostracism from their families, they're going back to Judaism in the book of Hebrews.

So, I mean, this could be called a test. Any kind of ostracism, any kind of persecution could be a test. Like a fiery ordeal such as would test gold.

And Peter has already referred to, in 1 Peter 1 chapter 7, the trials are like gold being refined in fire. So, it's not necessary to assume that something has changed at this particular point in the circumstances of the readers. Or that he's writing an unexpected addendum.

Though, I just leave it with you to know that some scholars feel like there's reason to think of it this way. He says, Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you as though some strange thing happened to you. It's not strange.

It seems strange when it hasn't happened in the past and it happens. It's just different. Different than what you're used to.

But it's not really strange in the sense of somehow out of place or out of sync with the way things are supposed to be. Suffering for righteousness is simply the result of turning your back on the world's ways and values and them not liking it. And the fact that the majority of the people in the world are followers of Satan and sin, not of God, means that those who do take this position are taking a minority position.

And are outnumbered, not only by probably their neighbors, but also by the powers that be. Those who are ruling in political spheres are very rarely the godliest people. In many cases, those who rise to the top have fought their way to the top because they're power hungry.

And that being so, they're not the type of people who are humble and submissive to God and so forth in general. So those who persecuted the Christians often were their neighbors, but also those who had power, who controlled armies and police forces and jails and had people to torture. Political prisoners who are often, in many times in history, the political prisoners were really just Christians whose loyalty to Jesus as king posed what was viewed as a political threat to the powers in their nation that wanted total loyalty and submission to themselves instead of to God.

That is what we find to be the original scene of suffering for the early Christians in Acts chapter 3 and 4 and 5. The problem here is that the disciples were following another king, one Jesus, and that threatened the Sanhedrin's hegemony of power in the country. And that's often the case. Jesus demands total allegiance.

He's the king. He's the Lord. To a Christian who takes that seriously, they realize that though they are, as Peter said, to be subject to the institutions of man and to be subject to the king, that is only in measure.

Our subjection to earthly governments is provisional because we recognize that they have a limited sphere and we will submit to them within that sphere, but not outside of it. But Christ's authority is universal, absolute. All authority in heaven and earth is given to him.

And therefore, a Christian who takes Christ seriously is going to sometimes be championing Christ's agenda, which will be contrary to the agenda of whoever else is in their life, whether it's family members or maybe the government itself. And so this isn't strange that there's a conflict. It's not strange that they're suffering here.

They would suffer less if they took up arms to fight against their persecutors, but the early Christians never did that because Jesus said, if someone strikes you on one cheek, turn the other cheek and love your enemies and bless those who curse you and do good to those who persecute you. So if you are being persecuted by hostile and violent people and you're not fighting back, then you're going to take some blows. If you fought back, you might win and not suffer.

But if you're not fighting back, then suffering is fairly inevitable. And so it's not a strange thing. Don't think of it strange like it doesn't fit with the worldview you have.

Your worldview should include the idea of suffering. As he said in verse one of chapter four, arm yourselves with this mind. Christ suffered in the flesh.

Expect it. It's not a strange thing as if some strange thing happened to you, but rather rejoice to the extent that you partake in Christ's sufferings, that when his glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. You are the body of Christ.

Whatever is done to his body is done to him. And as much as you do it to the least of my brethren, you've done it to me, Jesus said, because why? Well, you touch my body, you touch me. You step on my toe, my head feels the pain.

It's one body. Christ suffers through his body suffering. When Saul was on the road to Damascus and Christ appeared to him, Jesus said, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? He didn't say, why are you persecuting my people or my followers or even my body? He says, why are you persecuting me? Paul had never laid eyes on Jesus before this moment.

How could he be persecuting Jesus? He was persecuting Christ's body. You touch me, you touch my children, you touch me. It says in Zechariah, he that touches you is touching the apple of God's eye, poking him in the eye, as it were.

The apple of the eye is a Hebraism that means the pupil. He says, whoever touches you touches the apple of my eye. It's like someone's poking God in the eye if they touch you.

And so Christ continues to suffer through the suffering of his people. And Peter says, you are partaking in the sufferings of Christ. Christ is still suffering and you're absorbing your share of that.

There's a certain amount of suffering that Christ ultimately will suffer before all things are done. He suffered on the cross, he ascended to heaven, but he continues to suffer as his body suffers. And in Colossians, Paul makes this very strange statement that many people are plexed by.

In Colossians 1, verse 24, Paul says, I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and I fill up in my flesh, or in my body, what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ for the sake of his body, which is the church. Paul said, I see my sufferings as filling up a deficit in Christ's own sufferings. Now he's not saying that Jesus, when he was here, didn't suffer enough.

He's saying Christ is still suffering and will continue to suffer until the battle is over. Until the world is won. Until he comes back and the church is no longer persecuted.

As long as Christians suffer, Christ suffers. And therefore, Paul says, there must be a certain limited, finite amount of suffering in history that Christ must endure. I'm glad to take my share on me.

If Christ has to suffer a certain total amount in history, and some of that's going to come on me, I'm glad to take my part of it. It's an interesting way of looking at things. Christ suffers still, but for what? When he was on earth, he suffered for our salvation.

He died for our propitiation. But he still suffers for what? For propagation of the gospel. For the gospel to penetrate the areas still occupied by the enemy of Christ.

And to seize that territory. There's conflict. There's confrontation.

There is animosity and hostility and violence against the church. Jesus said, from the time of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of God suffers violence. And violent men take it by force.

So that Christ suffered in his own flesh for our propitiation. He suffers now through us for the propagation or the spreading of his kingdom. And the kingdom is still being spread in an environment that is essentially hostile to Christ.

That's where the problems come. That's where the suffering comes in. Christ is still

suffering in his people.

Paul said, I'm glad to take my part. He says, I rejoice in my sufferings for you. Colossians 1.24 And I fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ for the church's sake.

It's for the spreading of the church, for the kingdom of God, that this suffering takes place. It's for propagation of the gospel and the kingdom to new territory, which is still being occupied by the enemy. That the Christians face suffering for Christ's sake.

And so Peter says, you are partaking of the sufferings of Christ himself. You're not suffering alone. You're suffering as a part of Christ, part of his body.

He's suffering in your suffering. That's what Peter is saying. And he says, rejoice to the extent you participate in Christ's sufferings.

That's what Paul said, I rejoice in my sufferings as I fill up the measure of the afflictions of Christ. Peter has the same thought. Rejoice about your sufferings because you're playing your role.

You're absorbing your share of Christ's sufferings in this long campaign where Christ must suffer a great deal over the centuries. If there is, in fact, a finite amount of suffering, and I'm not saying that Peter is saying this, this is just a thought that I'm having. If there is a finite amount of suffering that Christ must suffer from the beginning to the end of history, and then it comes to an end, then the more of that suffering comes on me, the less there is left to come on other people.

There's a sense in which if there's a finite amount total, then the more I suffer, the less someone else would have to suffer. If I escape it, someone else has to, Christ has to suffer a certain amount, apparently. I don't know if that's a correct way of looking at it or not, but it sounds like Paul is talking that way in Colossians 1.24, and Peter has a very similar thing he's saying here, maybe the same thing.

Rejoice to the extent that you participate or you partake of Christ's sufferings so that when his glory is revealed, and that's when he's going to stop suffering, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you. Of course, that's the attitude Jesus said, blessed are those who are persecuted, and blessed are you when you suffer for my name's sake.

He said if you're reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part he's blasphemed, but on your part he's glorified. When you suffer persecution in a godly manner, it glorifies God.

It's as if the spirit of glory is seen upon you, the spirit of God. Now what is the spirit of glory? It is Christ's own image. Remember Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 3.18, he

mentions the glory, he mentions the spirit of God there too.

He says we all with unveiled faces beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are changed from glory to glory into that same image even as by the spirit of God. The spirit of God imparts to us glory upon glory as we are being changed into the image of Christ. The glory of God is the image of Christ.

The Holy Spirit is there to impart Christ's likeness to us, and as we suffer as he suffered and respond to suffering as he did, he is seen upon us, his image, his character is revealed in us. The spirit of glory is actually resting upon us, he says. And he says, but let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters.

Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God in this matter. Now he's saying suffering is not always good. If you're just suffering because you're a criminal and you go to jail, don't feel so puffed up about that.

Don't glory in suffering for misdeeds, but if you suffer for being a Christian, don't be ashamed of that. That glorifies God. Glorify God in this matter by suffering for his sake.

For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God. And if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now, the house of God here, that judgment begins at the house of God, is an idea that originated back in Ezekiel chapter 9, when the temple in Jerusalem was going to be the first place where the judgment would come upon the apostate nation. Ezekiel was predicting the coming of the Babylonians to wipe out Jerusalem and the temple.

And in the vision in Ezekiel 9, he saw six men with slaughter weapons, no doubt angels, warriors anyway, and he saw another man with an ink horn, and God told the man with the ink horn to go through Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who sigh and cry over the abominations done in the city. That is, over those who have the heart for the things of God. They were marked with his ink horn.

And then, after that was done, he said to the six men with the weapons, he said, go through the city and wipe out everyone who doesn't have the mark on their forehead, beginning at my house, meaning the temple. Start with the priests. Start with the ones who are supposed to be upholding loyalty to my covenant and who are not doing so.

Let them be the first to go. Judgment begins at the house of God. Now, the temple, of course, is in mind there in Ezekiel 9. But here, Peter seems to say we're the house of God, because he says it is time for judgment to begin at the house of God, and if it begins with us first, obviously house of God, he means us.

It begins with us, the house of God, first. What I think he's saying is that before God can really judge the world, he's got to make sure his church has got a clean nose, as it were.

If we're living in the same sins and compromises as the world, how could God justly judge them and not us? When God judges us, it is disciplinary so that we don't have to be condemned when he judges the world.

Look what it says in 1 Corinthians 11. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul's talking about how the church there had abused the Lord's Supper to the extent that some were drinking so much wine they're getting drunk at the Lord's table, and others were not getting enough food and they're going away hungry. He said in verse 29 that those who do this are unworthily taking this meal, and they're not discerning the Lord's body, and therefore they're abusing the Lord's body, the church, in this way.

In verse 30, he says, for this reason, that is because of this abuse, many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep, or his euphemism for died. Many have died. Some people in the church were dead, some had gotten sick, and some were weak.

Paul says there's a reason for this. This isn't just the natural course of attrition in the human race. This is because you're abusing the body of Christ and the Lord's table.

For this reason, these things are happening. The church is under judgment. It's taking the form of sickness and even death of its church members.

He says then in verse 31, for if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. Because if we just look at our own behavior and say, oh, that's not good, I'm going to stop doing that. If we just repent, God wouldn't have to step in and do this kind of thing.

We should be self-correcting so God doesn't have to correct us. But he says, but when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord so that we may not be condemned with the world. So Paul is saying there's three possibilities.

If we're sinning, we could just be condemned with the world. Or God, who doesn't want us to be condemned with the world, can step in and judge us now, chasten us, correct us, so that when the judgment of the world happens, we will no longer be doing those things that deserve judgment. He brings corrective judgment in our lives, corrective discipline, so that we'll change and not have to be condemned when he judges the rest of the world.

And he said there's even a third option. We could just judge ourselves and God won't have to come in and discipline us. If we just change our own behavior, there's no reason for God to come in and chasten us.

So he's saying that we have to be judged. All people have to be judged. Preferably, we'll judge ourselves, and it ends there.

If we don't, God is committed to us in such a way that he will chasten us and turn us around so that we won't be condemned with the world. If that doesn't happen, then

there is apparently being condemned with the world is the only other option. But before God brings judgment on the rest of the world, he brings it in his church.

But it's a corrective judgment. It's a disciplinary judgment. Look at what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10.

Part of what I want to read is no doubt very familiar. The other part is not often read along with it. But in 2 Corinthians 10, verse 4 and following, Paul says, Now, we usually use this Scripture about the armor of God to speak of our own personal warfare against demons and things like that and this business about bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

We think of it, I need to bring my thoughts into obedience to the captivity of Christ. Well, we should, but that's not what he's saying. He's saying that he, Paul, and the other apostles with him, our warfare is to bring all other people's thoughts into obedience to Christ.

We are out there to win people over for Christ, to change their thinking, to win their thoughts over to submit to Christ, to the lordship of Christ. We have mighty weapons for this in our mission to go out against the powers of darkness. There are strongholds resisting us.

We can tear down those strongholds with our weapons. There are philosophies and thought forms and false religions that are like walls holding people captive in ignorance of God. But we're here to bring down every stronghold and everything that exalts itself against the knowledge of God and to bring every man's thoughts into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

This is Paul's aggressive mission to convert people, to bring their thoughts under the submission of Christ through the gospel. And he says, and I'm also ready, or maybe he means God is ready. I'm not sure exactly how he's implying this.

But he says, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled or is complete. I don't know exactly how Paul intends to punish the disobedience of those in the church who don't belong there. But he's saying that I can't punish the disobedient people until the true Christians have got their act together.

How can I make a distinction between the true and the false if the true Christians are behaving as badly as the people who need to be judged? And this is the same predicament I think God finds himself in. If the church is compromised, how can God judge the world without also judging the church? Well, judgment will begin at the house of God, Peter says. And it begins with us.

But of course with us it's chastening judgment. God judges our behavior to chasten us so we'll not be condemned with the world, Paul said. Peter says, judgment begins with us.

But he says if it begins with us, what will the end be for those who are disobedient? That is, if God deals with us severely as necessary to fix us, how bad will it be for those that are not us, that are not his friends, not his children? He's not committed to fixing them first. He's going to just lower the boom on them. Much worse for them than for us.

But it's hard enough for us as the first recipients of God's judgments. And in verse 18 he says, now if the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear? This is Proverbs 11, 31. Again, the righteous one is scarcely saved or with difficulty saved.

We are saved, of course, by faith. But holding on to that faith is sometimes difficult in the face of persecution and hardship and just having to be patient through a long life of opposition to us. It's hard to be saved.

That is, it's hard to hold your ground, to not depart from the faith under pressure. That's difficult for those who are saved, even though they're righteous. But how much harder for those who are not godly? In verse 19, and this is a very powerful and important verse.

Therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to him in doing good as to a faithful creator. Now, notice this, like a previous verse we considered, speaks of suffering in the will of God. We found this in chapter 3, verse 17, where it said, it's better if it is the will of God to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

It may be the will of God for you to suffer for doing good. And better that than that he has to lower the boom on you because you're doing evil. In the will of God, all the sufferings are for your benefit ultimately and for the benefit of the kingdom of God.

It can be the will of God for his people to suffer. This is something that the word of faith teaching simply lacks in its perception of God and his purposes and his character. They say a good God would never want his children to suffer.

A good God will never want them to be sick or poor or in any sense, deprived of the best things that the world has to offer. That we're king's kids. Shouldn't king's kids live with king's privileges? Forgetting, of course, that the king is at war and that the king's kids are in the trenches.

There will be a time the war ends and the king's kids will go to the palace and they'll live like kings, but not now. This is the warfare time. This is the time where you live on K rations.

This is the time where you sleep in the mud, in the trenches. This is the time where the battle is raging and the bullets are flying and where you might get wounded or even shot, killed. This is the war.

Yeah, we're king's kids, but the king is at war and we're fighting his battles for him and it's not easy. Paul said to Timothy, look at this. 2 Timothy 2 and verse 3. Paul says, you therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

If you're going to be a soldier, you got to be tough. You got to be prepared to go through hard times. That's what soldiers go through.

War is hell and you have to go through something like hell in this war. For many Christians have been tortured in horrible ways in China and Russia and other communist countries. There are Christians suffering in many countries right now and tortured every day.

It's like hell. They have to endure hardship as good soldiers. You are a soldier.

Whether you're going to be a good soldier or not is another question. If you are prepared to endure hardship for Christ, then you're a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Peter said, you may suffer in the will of God, but in 1 Peter 4, 19 says, if you are one of those people who suffer according to the will of God, here's what you are to do about it.

He says, commit the keeping of their souls to him by doing good. As to a faithful creator. If you took in doing good and put it at the end of the sentence instead of where it is, which is equally legitimate, it would say, commit the keeping of your souls to him as to a faithful creator.

In doing good. In doing good speaks of how you commit yourself into God's hands. You are doing good and because you're doing good, suffering has come.

If you stop doing good, the suffering may be alleviated because it is your doing good that is bringing the suffering. If you didn't follow Christ, the persecution would end. And therefore the temptation is to stop doing the good that is causing you the pain.

He says, no, keep doing the good. And in doing so, you're leaving your case in God's hands. You run away.

You're taking your safety into your own hands. You keep doing what God wants you to do. You keep doing the will of God.

Even if you keep suffering in the will of God, you will then be leaving the outcome into God's hands, not your own. You're not going AWOL. You're not retreating when it's time to move forward just because you're in pain.

You do good. You keep doing the good. And that way you're just leaving the outcome to God.

You're committing your soul into God's hands. Now, you're doing it to God because you see him as a faithful creator. You don't want to commit any job to someone who isn't

reliable.

You don't want to commit the fixing of your car to a mechanic who's not reliable. You don't want to commit your legal case to a lawyer who's not competent or reliable. You don't want to commit anything to someone who can't be trusted with it.

But if you commit your keeping of your soul to Christ or to God as unto a faithful creator, that means you can be confident that it's in good hands. You don't have to worry that he'll mismanage it. Paul said something to Timothy about this very thing in 2 Timothy 1. In 2 Timothy 1, verse 12, Paul said, Now, notice that Paul says, I'm suffering, but I'm not ashamed.

Peter has said back in 1 Peter chapter, was it three? No, it's in chapter four. He said in 1 Peter 4, 16, says, Paul says, I'm suffering, but I'm not ashamed. Why? Because I know God is faithful.

I know God is able. I know that God is one in whom it is safe to trust. I know whom I've believed, and I'm persuaded that he's able to keep what I've committed to him until, well, as long as it needs to be committed, until that day, until the day that the struggle ends and the foes are all defeated and the suffering is over.

So Peter says you need to commit your soul to Christ by just continuing to do what's good and suffering for it. Maybe just endure hardship as a good soldier. Now, in telling the Christians to do this in 1 Peter 4, 19, he's only repeating what he has already said that Jesus did back in 1 Peter 2. 1 Peter 2, 23 says Christ, when he was reviled, he did not revile in return.

When he suffered, he did not threaten, but he committed himself to him who judges righteously. He left his case in God's hands. What does that mean? It means he went to the cross and died.

He said, you know, I could call 12 legions of angels and get me out of this deal, but I'm going to leave it in God's hands. I'm going to drink the cup that he has given me. I'll just accept his plan for me.

And that, in fact, meant being flogged and crucified. But in case it seems like God was kind of unfair to him, there's a sequel to that. He was raised from the dead and glorified and given the rulership over the whole universe.

Actually, being flogged and crucified might seem like a rather small price to pay for such a reward. And if it does, it's true of us also. We, too, are going to reign with Christ.

If we endure, we will reign with him, Paul said in 2 Timothy 2. And so the idea here is that expect to suffer. And as you expect to suffer, expect to continue doing those good things that are bringing the suffering on you. And by not backing down, by not taking

your well-being into your own hands, by changing your course and compromising, your uncompromising continuance in doing good is what commits the matter into God's hands.

You don't avenge yourself, you leave the vengeance to God. You don't rescue yourself, you leave the rescuing business to God. That's what he's saying.

Just commit it to God, and you don't know exactly what he'll do. You might be crucified next. Or he might get you out of this one.

You never know. But the point is, it's his to do. It's his choice to make, not mine.

He's the Lord, I'm not. Now, chapter 5 then addresses the elders initially, which were the regular leaders in every congregation, at least normal. Most congregations had elders.

Not all of them. There are some that didn't have them, and that Paul had to send Titus to Crete to appoint some there. And he had to... As far as we know, there were no elders in the church of Corinth when Paul wrote his letters to them.

There's no indication of any leadership being present. And the whole congregation is to exercise church discipline as the congregation comes together as a whole. And there's no mention anywhere of leaders in the church of Corinth, except that the household of Stephanus, he said, was addicted to the service of the church, and he said, submit to people like that.

Obviously, there were no officers in the church to submit to, so here's a family, the household of Stephanus. They're older Christians. They're the first fruits of Achaia.

They're addicted to the work of ministry. Submit to people like that, Paul said. So they didn't always have appointed leaders in the churches.

Fortunately, they had some good examples, though. Now, in most churches, we read Paul and Barnabas and the apostles would appoint elders. The word elder is presbuteros.

It's the ordinary Greek word for an old man. And it is used in the New Testament often when it's not speaking of church officers. It's not speaking about church leaders.

It's just talking about old men in contrast to young men or old women. Presbuteros is the Greek word for an old man. In fact, that's what the word elder means in English.

But it also has come to mean somebody who is recognized as providing some kind of leadership for the church. The assumption was that those who have been older in the faith have more experience, more character, more knowledge, more to teach. Certainly not every old man in the church was an elder in that sense of recognized as a church leader.

In fact, Paul gave very strict qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3 and in Titus 1. These are the same persons who are also called overseers. In the King James and the New King James, they're translated bishops. That's not a good translation.

That's just an ecclesiastical definition the King James translators gave because their Anglican church had bishops. So they used the word bishops. But the Greek word is episkopos, which means overseers.

Most modern translations will render episkopos as overseers because that's a literal translation. The older translations use the word bishops. But when the Bible speaks about bishops or overseers, it's talking about the same thing as elders.

Every church had, well, not every single church, but most churches had a group within them of elder men who provided teaching and shepherding service to the congregation. We read in Acts chapter 20 of Paul gathering the elders of the church of Ephesus together when he was at Miletus or not at Miletus. Was it Miletus? I guess it was.

He called them to him and he told them to serve the church as shepherds and overseers, episkopoi. In other words, the elders were called the same thing as bishops, episkopos. Here also, Peter's just like Paul in that he says, The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed.

I'm an older Christian, too, and I'm putting myself at your level. We're all servants of Christ. We're all witnesses to the gospel.

And I'm addressing you as not a top-down kind of a commander to you, but just as one of yourself to exhort you and encourage you. The word exhort means encourage. Shepherd the flock of God.

Now, the word shepherd is the verb form of the word pastor, poimen in the Greek. Poimen means a shepherd or a pastor, someone who tends sheep. This word is the verb form of that.

So the elders are told to be the pastors or to pastor the flock of God. We don't really find in the Bible a church anywhere that has a pastor leading it. It was always the elders or the overseers, and they were the ones who collectively pastored the church.

Even the church we attend, although they call them pastors, they appointed another one just last Sunday, and they read the qualifications for elders, and they recognize that elders and pastors are the same thing. A lot of churches don't recognize that. They have a senior pastor who is like the CEO, and then they have a board of elders that's like something else, like a board of directors or something like that.

I was in churches when I was younger where the pastor was considered to be one of the

elders, but he was said to be first among equals. That's kind of a term you hear in some churches. The senior pastor is the first among equals among the elders.

They go, well, how can there be first among equals? Does it mean he was born first? He's older? Or is he first in priority? If he's first in priority, he's not equal. First in priority is different than being equal. I never understood, but I think it was a way of trying to maintain a senior pastor and eldership model at the same time.

The pastor is an elder, but he's the first among equals. In the New Testament, we don't read of any firsts among equals among the elders. There's just elders.

Peter writes to the elders and says to them collectively, shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers. That's episkopoi, the word that's translated bishops in some passages. Do not by constraint, that is not because someone is forcing you to take the office, but willingly.

This suggests that being an elder may not be as desirable in the first century as it is. I mean, lots of people want to be elders now. Lots of people want to be pastors.

It's a good job to be a pastor if you have a big church. Decent job. In those days, the elders were the ones that were being hunted down and fed to the lions.

In times of persecution, most of the persecuting emperors and so forth didn't look for the rank and file of the church. They looked for their leaders, their elders. Are you an elder? Serve in that role, not because someone is forcing you.

Don't take the role dragging your feet and tearing at the walls trying to keep from being dragged in there. Do it willingly, not for dishonest gain, but eagerly. I'm not sure we call it dishonest gain.

There's not many pastors that are paid out of money that's robbed from banks. What would dishonest gain be? It may be that he's saying any monetary motivation for a minister would be inappropriate. It would be like dishonest gain.

If he's serving God for free and the church reimburses him just out of the goodness of their heart, then he's supported by his ministry. If he's demanding money, then it's not really appropriate for him to demand money. Jesus said to the disciples, freely you've received, freely give.

If he's demanding money, it's kind of like he's robbing the church. It's like dishonest gain, perhaps. Maybe that's why Peter sticks in the word dishonest here.

But do it eagerly. Don't do it because you're paid to. Do it because you're eager to.

Don't do it because someone's got a gun to your head saying you need to serve. But do it because you're willing to serve, even if it's going to cost you your life somewhere down

the line, maybe even a martyr. Nor as being lords over those entrusted to you.

Crud, he takes away all the benefits. You don't get to do it for money, and you don't get to have lord over the people. But this is, of course, what many pastors think of their job as being, is to lord it over.

They wouldn't call it that because lord it over sounds very oppressive. But actually, Jesus said to the disciples in the Gospel of Matthew, the rulers of the Gentiles exert authority over them. He says, it shall not be so among you.

Among you, the church. He said, the one who would be chief would be the servant of all. The position of a church leader in the true church of Jesus Christ is not a position of privilege.

It's not a position of power over other people. It is a service performed. When Paul listed the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Romans 12, one of them was the gift of leadership.

No doubt he had the elders in mind. They're providing leadership to the church if they're gifted in it. But leadership is presented as one of the services provided.

There's a gift of leadership just like there's a gift of giving and of serving and of other things that are done for the benefit of the church. It's not for the benefit of the man. In most corporations, if they're not the church, the man who has the most responsible position also has the biggest salary and the most authority, and he can boss people around.

He's the boss. It's a political structure in a corporation. He's the highest ranking.

People defer to him. The church is the opposite. It's like Christ's kingdom is such that those who are deferring to others, those that are serving others, those that are not looking out for themselves, not ordering others around, but seeing how they can serve the interests of others.

Those are the great ones. Those are the ones who are the chief, Jesus said, the ones who are the slaves of all. And so if you happen to be a church leader and start to lord over people, you've started to misunderstand what the position means.

I don't believe that the Bible really endorses the appointment of women to eldership. Paul seemed to indicate that in his teaching on the subject in 1 Timothy 2, verse 12 and following. He said, I don't permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man.

And then he goes on to give a description of the qualifications of elders. And a lot of people today think, well, that's holding women down. That's keeping women from the highest positions in the church.

But you see, that whole statement means that we've corrupted the idea of what a church

is. We see the church like a corporation. How come a woman can't be the CEO of the corporation? How come you're depriving her? No, the church isn't a corporation.

The church is a family where the ones who bear the most weight of service are the ones who are recognized as leaders. It's not a great privilege necessarily to be an elder. It's a great responsibility and a great burden.

Now, I'm not saying that women wouldn't be able to carry that burden as well as some men do. But the point is that by Paul saying, I don't put women in that role, he's not holding them down. He's making sure that they don't take the lowest rung and bear the greatest weight on their shoulders.

It's not some privileged position he's withholding from them. Church leadership, when it's viewed as a privileged position, that only happens when you're thinking of church differently than the Bible teaches it. When you think that the church is like a corporation where you rise to the top because of your qualifications, and the top is where the privileges are.

The top is where the authority is, where you can give top-down instructions, lording it over people, exercising authority over them. That's not how Jesus set things up. Jesus is the head of every man in the church.

Every person in the church is subject to Christ. We don't need any other heads in the church. We got one already.

Now what we need is better servants. And the best servants are the ones that Jesus says are the ones who really qualify to be viewed as the ones to follow. A leader teaches others by his words and by his life how to be a better Christian.

But that life that teaches is a life of service and of humility. And it's not a position, as I said, a privilege. So it says, they should not be lords over those entrusted to you, but be an example to the flock, leading by example.

And when the chief shepherd appears, and there is only one of those, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. So those that bear those burdens and make themselves vulnerable to be the targets, to the persecutors, and who don't, they're not remunerated, they're not privileged, they're not given great authority over others, they just are the servants, and they're usually the first ones to be captured by the persecuting powers and martyred. There'll be a crown in it for you later, when the chief shepherd appears.

If you've done this right, you'll get the reward that's appropriate, a crown that will not fade away. Then he says in verse 5, likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Now here the word elders seems to be used simply of older men, because it's contrasted with younger people.

Elders in verse 1 was those men who were the elders of the church. Here it's just older men in general, apparently. Younger people, submit to older people.

Yes, all of you be submissive to one another. All Christians should be submissive in their attitude to all other Christians. And be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

This statement, God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble, is actually from Proverbs chapter 3 and verse 34. It's also quoted in James. You don't want God resisting you, so be humble.

Humility results in you being submissive or a servant to others. God will give you grace if you're humble. If you're proud and you try not to submit to others properly and serve others, then God's going to be against you.

He'll resist you. Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time. That he may means that he can't if you don't.

If you're exalting yourself, he can't exalt you. You're not the right stuff. He can't give you a position of visibility in his kingdom if you're not seeking the lowest spot for yourself.

If you humble yourself, God will be able to trust you with a little bit of glory. If you're already seeking glory, you're not the right stuff for him to entrust with that kind of thing. And that's why I think when I find people saying, how come I can't be a pastor here? I think because you just said that.

That's why. You know, I'm a woman. I should be able to be a pastor too.

Well, if you are a man, I wouldn't want you to be a pastor with that attitude. You're trying to exalt yourself. You see being a pastor as a position of accomplishment and of prestige, and you're upset that you're being withheld from it.

Well, your very complaint shows that you're trying to exalt yourself. And I don't care if you're a man or a woman. If you're looking for a position for yourself, I don't want to be in the church you're leading.

You want to have leaders who aren't seeking position, who humble themselves, and God can raise them up. The pastor of the church I'm attending, Jim, he was just a servant to the previous pastor. He served for free full time.

I think he's retired, if I'm not mistaken. I didn't know him back then, but he served the existing pastor, who was a lot younger man than he was. And he wasn't seeking anything for himself.

He wasn't seeking any glory. He was just being a servant. And the younger pastor died of cancer.

And then Jim was asked to fill in and become the pastor. And he didn't exalt himself. I don't even think he particularly probably wanted to be the pastor necessarily.

He just is willing to serve. He's a very humble man. I like to boast on him because he's one of the humblest pastors I've ever known.

Very exciting to see that because so many churches are run like political organizations where the pastor sees himself as in some kind of a political position of control over people. That's not what the church is. It says in verse 7, That is, let him worry about things for you.

Humble yourself. Don't look out for your own good. And let God take those cares that you would normally care about your own circumstance upon himself.

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and let God worry about the rest. These things will be added to you. You don't have to worry if you've got him doing the worrying for you.

It's like the story about the man, a guy named Bob, who was known by all his friends to be a chronic worrier. He worried about everything, even small things. It was annoying to be around him because he was always fretting and anxious about everything, even things that were not realistic to be worried about.

And then one day after someone hadn't seen him for a while, they saw one of his friends on the street, and he had a spring in his step and a smile on his face, and he had a totally different disposition. And the man said, Well, Bob, is that you? And he said, Yeah, it's me. He said, I hardly recognize you.

You just don't look like yourself. And Bob said, Oh, yeah, I'm a changed man. I used to worry all the time, but I don't worry about anything anymore.

And his friend said, Well, it really has made a difference in your life. So how is it that you don't worry about anything? He says, I hired a guy who worries for everything for me. If I ever have a worry, it's just I hire him, and he just worries for me instead of me.

And his friend said, Well, how much does he charge for that service? I never heard of that particular service. What's that cost? And Bob said, Well, it costs about \$10,000 a month. And his friend said, Well, how in the world are you going to pay for that? He said, Well, that's his worry.

I don't have any worries. All my worries are his. And, you know, that story, no doubt, that story may have been inspired by this verse.

Cast all your cares, that is your worries, on Christ. He cares for you. He worries for you.

That's his problem. Then he says in verse 8, Be sober, be vigilant, because your

adversary, the devil, walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

You're not the only one going through this. All over the world, the devil is sending his troops against the church. Don't feel like the Lone Ranger.

You know, sometimes one of the hardest things about going through suffering is thinking, being isolated, thinking we're going through worse things than other people are going through. You know, how come this has to happen to me? Why me? Why me suggests I'm going through something that other people don't have to go through. How come I'm the guy? And Peter says you can resist Satan better by remembering you're not the Lone Ranger.

It's not just you. This is going on to all your brothers around the world. Everyone faces suffering.

All who live godly in Christ Jesus shall face persecution, Paul said. And Peter said this is the devil is hostile to you. He wants to destroy you.

And he attacks you. And it hurts. But don't think that you're the only one this is happening to.

Take strength in the knowledge that you've got brothers all over the world facing the very same things. And, of course, in our case, when we're going through trials, many brothers around the world are going through far worse things than we can even imagine. Don't think suffering is strange.

It's universal for the brethren. Resist the devil, he says in verse 9. James said that too in James 4, 7. Resist the devil and he'll flee from you. Here there's no reference to him fleeing.

Just resist him. That is don't allow him to, don't cave in. Don't succumb to the pressure he's bringing upon you.

He wants to devour you. What happens when the devil devours a Christian? I don't know, but it doesn't sound good. It can't be something you want to happen.

And, therefore, resist him. Don't cave in. Verse 10.

But may the God of all grace who called us to his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Now, this statement in verse 10 has got quite a lot of information that we can't go into in depth. But, first of all, God is called the God of all grace. Now, he is the God of all grace,

but there's got to be a reason for calling him that here.

After all, God is spoken of many times in the scripture and not ever elsewhere than here called the God of all grace. There's reasons for using this particular title for God in this particular connection. He's saying you're going through suffering.

But the God that you serve is the God of grace. He'll give you the grace for it so that after you've suffered a while, you will benefit from it. You'll be perfected, strengthened, settled, established more than before.

Now, it says also of the God of all grace that he has called us to his eternal glory by Christ Jesus. We've already talked on other occasions about what glory means. Glory means becoming like Jesus.

That is our hope. In Colossians, Paul said Christ in you is the hope of glory, that we are being changed from glory to glory. The glory of Christ is what we are called to and promised.

But this comes through suffering. When Jesus met the two men on the road to Emmaus after he rose from the dead, he said to them, Oh, foolish and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Should not the Christ have suffered and entered into his glory? In 2 Corinthians 4, Paul says, Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

The suffering works for us glory. As God gives us grace in our sufferings to suffer them in a Christlike way, we are being brought closer to that glory that he's called us to, that Christlikeness. And through our sufferings, we are made more established and perfected and strengthened and settled.

And to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. In other words, may Christ's glory be the final chapter and the final word, the final concern.

All that we care about is not that we would escape suffering, but that Christ would be glorified and his dominion expanded forever and ever. The last few verses we've said something about in our introduction. They're just closing up.

They say something about where it was written from and things like that. By Silvanus, our faithful brother, as I consider him, I have written to you briefly. Which means that Silvanus probably was his amanuensis that he dictated the letter to.

Or possible that Silvanus carried the letter. But he says, by Silvanus, I've written to you. So I think Silvanus had a literary function here.

Exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand. You stand through the grace of God given to you that enables you to stand rather than succumb to

the pressures of tribulation and so forth. She who is in Babylon, which must be the church that he's writing from, elect together with you, greets you.

So he sends greetings from those in the church where he is in Babylon. I said that's probably a reference to Rome, a code name for Rome. Though it could be Babylon or even Jerusalem, there's different ways this has been understood.

And so does Mark, my son. Mark is, of course, the one who wrote the gospel of Mark. According to Papias, the church father, Mark is the writer of Peter's gospel.

Peter preached it, Mark wrote it. Apparently, in the latter years of Peter's life, Mark was with him like a son. Not his literal son, but more like Timothy as Paul's son.

Paul speaks about Timothy, my son. Peter speaks of Mark, my son. Just a son in the faith and an assistant.

Greet one another with a kiss of love, very similar to Paul's endings. Greet one another with a holy kiss. Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus.

Amen. And thus he ends this brief letter, as he calls it, in verse 12. And it is brief, but it's packed full.

And that's why the treatment of it could not be very brief. Amen.