

1 PETER 5

This last chapter of 1 Peter is, as Peter declared in the opening words, an exhortation to apply the suggested methods for receiving “a crown of glory that fadeth not away.” He offered a list that though directed partially to certain members of the congregation, is excellent guidance for all his readers throughout all ages. To the elders Peter says, Feed the flock of God which is among you, “not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.” To the younger people he says, “Submit yourselves unto the elder.” To all faithful followers of Christ he says, Be subject one to another. Be clothed with humility. Humble yourselves. Cast all your care upon Him, “for He careth for you.” Be sober. Be vigilant and avoid the devil. Resist the devil by being steadfast in the faith.

Much like the President of the Church today does in a closing a general conference or leadership meeting, Peter addresses the leaders of the Church, reminding them to focus on taking care of their local congregations. Jesus had shared these teachings with Peter after the Resurrection and before the Ascension (see John 21:15–17). Now, a couple decades later, Peter essentially repeats to the leaders of the local congregations, “Lovest thou the Lord? Feed His sheep.” God’s people being characterized as a flock is found in Psalm 23, Isaiah 40:11, Jeremiah 23:1–4, and Ezekiel 34:1–10, and the Savior used this imagery frequently (see the parable of the sheep in Luke 15:3–7).

1 Peter 5:1

I call upon the elders. Daniel Keating wrote, “The term ‘elder’ (*presbyteros*) has a long history in the people of Israel. In Moses’ day the leaders of the tribes of Israel were designated as “elders” (Exod. 24:1; Num. 11:16–25), and they continued to have a leadership role alongside prophets, priests, and kings all through the history of Israel (e.g., 1 Kings 12:6; Ezra 6:7–8; Ezek. 8:1).”¹ The Protestant denomination

of Presbyterians takes its name from this Greek word. Howard W. Hunter taught, “The term elder is also used in the New Testament in a general way and refers to any ecclesiastical function such as apostles, pastors, bishops, or other church officers. In his exhortation to the elders of the Church, the Apostle Peter refers to himself as a fellow elder (1 Pet. 5:1).”²

A witness of the sufferings of Christ. The Greek word *martus* literally means “a witness.” From this we get the English word *martyr*, which is a particular kind of witness. This meaning would apply to Peter later as he died for his faith, but in this passage, it means refers just to a witness. Peter was a witness to all events of the Atonement. From a Jewish perspective, a witness must bear truthful testimony or suffer punishment.³

1 Peter 5:2

Peter explained the core system: “Watching over them not by compulsion, but voluntarily, as God has instructed; and not for shameful money, but eagerly” (BYU New Rendition). This text undergirds the Latter-day Saint system of an unpaid voluntary clergy.

Feed the flock of God. Take care of your local fellowship, the congregation around you. Peter’s words here reflect the words that Jesus said to Peter after the Resurrection and before the Ascension. John 21:15–17 reports,

So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

Now, thirty years later, Peter repeats to the leaders of the local congregations, “Lovest thou the Lord? Feed His sheep.”

“Among you” or “In your midst.” The phrase *en hymin*, “which is among you,” makes reference to those “in your care,” so it evokes a stronger shepherding metaphor “in your midst.”⁴ In this way, the responsibility of the elders of the Church has been expanded—not just feeding the body of the Church, either spiritually or physically, but tending to all of their needs individually and continually.

1 Peter 5:3–4

Peter approached the how as well as the how not. “Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.” He clearly teaches here the principle of avoiding unrighteous dominion. That priesthood principle was restored in Doctrine and Covenants 121:41. Leading by example is also known

as a core competency that is taught nowadays in business management and leadership training. Peter recommended it as the means for righteous leadership. Using this text in 1 Peter, David O. McKay taught:

That testimony began, was borne in that home, because of the example of a man who lived the priesthood and a wife who sustained him and lived it in the home. I do not know that Peter had that in mind, particularly, when he mentioned “being ensamples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:3), but I do know that each home is a part of that flock. The influence you spread in your home will go throughout the ward, the stake, and then will go throughout the city, the state, the country, and the world.⁵

The crown that fadeth not away. The occurrences of the phrase “fadeth not away” in Peter and Helaman 5:8 refer to the gift awaiting us in the next life. The terms “inheritance,” “treasure,” “crown of glory,” and “precious gift” are all used to describe that which “fadeth not away.” They are different metaphors to teach the same gospel principle. Edward Selwyn wrote, “The victor’s crowns, as well as the garlands worn on festal occasions were usually of leaves and flowers, such as myrtle, rose oak, and ivy . . . [Pindar, *Olympian* 8.99]. In contrast to these crowns, that of the victor in the Christian ministry was one that did not fade.”⁶ Ironically, Pindar had written, “Welcome this victory-procession and the *garland* we bring to the victor; the man who is attended by your splendid prize of honor has *great glory forever*.”⁷ In contrast, in this dispensation the Lord has emphasized the reward for enduring to the end: “Continue in these things even unto the end, and you shall have a crown of eternal life at the right hand of my Father, who is full of grace and truth” (Doctrine and Covenants 66:12). Simon J. Kistemaker wrote, “Touching is the contrast between the crown of thorns Jesus wore (Mark 15:17; John 19:2, 5) and the unfading crown of glory He gives his people. Jesus bore the crown of humiliation so that we may wear the garland of glory. Conclusively, the victim became the victor who shares his victory with his followers.”⁸

1 Peter 5:5

Having admonished the elders of the Church to “feed the flock of God,” Peter turns to guiding the younger. Whether young in age, length of time in the Church, or seniority in responsibility, all can benefit from this guidance. As Elder Bruce R. McConkie noted, “the divine Plan calls for the young and rising generation to take counsel from their elders, to submit to parental guidance, to conform to the revealed pattern.”⁹ To sustain a leader or older person is to act and support rather than to simply approve.

1 Peter 5:6–7. Key text

After Peter addressed the elders and the younger people, his exhortations in these verses are addressed to all. Peter recommended that they and we humble ourselves “under the hand of God.” And why? Peter comes straight to the main point: “That He may exalt you in due time.”

The phrase at the end of this verse, *en kairō* (“in due time” [King James Version]) says that the Resurrection and exaltation will come at their appropriate and designated times. There will be a judgment made by the Lord to determine when each person will be resurrected, and later a more formal judgment will grant the righteous the blessings of exaltation.

A more literal translation for the end of verse 6 is, “God is arranged in battle to stand against the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Peter uses here a quotation from Proverbs 3:34 in the Septuagint (LXX), which says, “The Lord resists the proud; but he gives grace to the humble.” Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught, “All progress in spiritual things is conditioned upon the prior attainment of humility. Pride, conceit, haughtiness, and vainglory are of the world and stand as a bar to the receipt of spiritual gifts.”¹⁰

Modern revelation teaches the same principle. The Doctrine and Covenants has seventeen references to humility, including in the first section, which was given as a reciprocal gift: “And inasmuch as they were humble, they might be made strong, and blessed from on high, and receive knowledge from time to time” (Doctrine and Covenants 1:28). Another is the well-quoted, “Be thou humble; and the Lord thy God shall lead thee by the hand, and give thee answer to thy prayers” (Doctrine and Covenants 112:10).

First Peter is often called the “letter of hope.”¹¹ In these verses Peter assures his readers that they can cast all their worries and cares upon God. The Greek term *merimnan* refers to both worries and cares. This text is a quotation from Psalm 54:22–23 LXX.

His compassionate ending for this thought, “for He cares for you,” bespeaks a sincere prophet sharing his testimony of the love of God. Several other biblical passages also encourage us to bring our cares to the Lord, including Psalms 37:5; 55:22; Matthew 6:25, 32; and Philippians 4:6.

As Richard Holzapfel states, “This letter expresses the basis of our continued hope upon the promises of the Lord and is one of the most profound summaries of the apostolic proclamation from the first century. . . . It is a living hope, . . . because it is connected to and grounded in the suffering, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus Christ, . . . who is coming again to create a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1).”¹²

Humble yourselves. The verb *hypsōsē* means “to exalt” and “to raise up.” This phrase places more emphasis on the final result of exaltation. Those who have kept their covenants will be raised up in the First Resurrection and will overcome spiritual death and therefore be exalted. Exaltation means that one will live with God and share all that He has.

1 Peter 5:8–11

Peter, who was equivalent to our prophet and Church president advised that we resist the devil through our faithfulness. He portrayed Satan vibrantly as a roaring lion who “walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” The adversary wishes to devour everyone and is able to devour those who yield to temptation. The adversary tempts us individually, but the Lord always prepares a way for us to overcome these temptations.

Joseph B. Wirthlin taught:

In his first epistle, Peter described our “adversary the devil, as a roaring lion [that] walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). The Lord told the Prophet Joseph Smith that “enemies prowl around thee like wolves for the blood of the lamb” (Doctrine and Covenants 122:6). We are all vulnerable to attack. However, we can fortify ourselves with the protection provided by a burning testimony that, like a bonfire, has been built adequately and maintained carefully.¹³

Peter, as well as Doctrine and Covenants 66:2 and 133:57, used the phrase “partaker of the glory,” followed by “[which/that] shall be revealed.” This indicates that the full nature and extent of eternal glory is not yet known but rather lies in the future and is yet to come. This extends a specific promise to all faithful leaders and members of the Church.

Peter’s final restatement of the eternal promise summarizes, “May the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.”

Be alert and watchful, and resist the devil. The two imperatives *nēpsate* and *grēgorēsate* are a doublet that emphasizes the importance of being alert and watchful (see also 1 Thessalonians 5:6). Potential apostasy on both a personal and a broader scale for early Christians was looming, and this is likewise a notable admonition for modern Saints to always be alert and watchful.

A roaring lion. While “roaring lion” appears in the Bible only in this verse, the figure of a lion is used in the Old Testament to describe the opponents of Israel.¹⁴

The text of 1 Peter 5:9 can be rendered, “Resist him, being firm in the covenant, knowing that the same sufferings are being foisted upon all your brothers *and sisters* throughout the world.”

But the God of all grace. “Of all grace” is the King James translation of the Greek words *pasēs charitos*, but this more literally means “of every gift.” The word *charis* was usually used in Peter’s day to refer to reciprocal gifts. The phrase *tēn aiōnion autou doxan* means “your eternal glory,” which according to modern revelation describes the celestial glory mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15.

Who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus. The preposition “by” (used in the King James Version) may indicate position (as in “nearby”) rather than authorship. The Greek phrase *en Christō Iēsou* usually means “in Christ,” with the function of association.¹⁵ It implies that by associating with Christ in His glory, we shall be like Him, but it is not as if we become a part of His glory because our portion of that glory then becomes ours.

In our day, Neal A. Maxwell taught, “Let us all take extra care to avoid both giving and taking offense. Let us be loving, kind, and forgiving—helping these friends to become, as Peter and Paul said, grounded, rooted, established, and settled!”¹⁶

Because of His Atonement, Christ is always able to spiritually strengthen and bless His followers. This is an important meaning of the word *restore* because His grace or gift enables humankind to trust Him,

change, make covenants, and receive more reciprocal gifts such as the gift of the Holy Ghost, which empowers and sanctifies everyone. The prepositional phrase *eis tous aiōnas*, rendered “for ever and ever” in the King James Version, might seem overly grandiose. But the simpler expression “into the eternities,” as in the Greek, is perhaps a more contemplative expression of the eternal round of God’s eternal plan.

In sum, as Monte Nyman has written of 1 Peter overall, “the theme of this epistle is that through the sanctification of the spirit and faith in the grace of the atonement of Jesus Christ, members can endure their trials and temptations and attain salvation. This is another way of bringing about the perfection of the saints.”¹⁷

1 Peter 5:12–15

By Sylvanus. The Greek text (*dia Silouanou*) expresses the immediate agency of the person (Sylvanus) assisting Peter.¹⁸ Ancient couriers often had many duties including those of translators, readers, and scribes, especially in classical historical narratives. Perhaps only ten percent of the population of the Mediterranean in the first century AD was able to read and write, so it was important for couriers to sometimes perform these duties. Therefore, it is likely that Sylvanus was trained as a scribe. Certainly, scribes were important in the gospel and its restoration following periods of apostasy. Many scribes assisted Joseph Smith as he translated and received by revelation the scriptures of the Restoration. The talents of scribes and secretaries deserve to be appreciated in their efforts to build the Lord’s kingdom.

Paul, Sylvanus, and Timothy also worked together in the ministry to the Gentiles, as the Joseph Smith Translation informs us, as they are “servants of God” (Joseph Smith Translation, 1 Thessalonians 1:1). If the same Sylvanus is referred to in this verse, Sylvanus was probably not a simple letter carrier but was someone who worked only at times as a secretary. It seems that Sylvanus also preached the gospel with Paul and Timothy.

The fellow elect one. Paul Achtemeier speculated that the “fellow elect one,” which is feminine in gender, “could refer to a woman,” which because of the later mention of “my son,” could in turn refer to the author’s wife. See also Matthew 8:14, showing that Peter was married, and also 1 Corinthians 9:5, referring to Peter’s “sister wife.” Later tradition reported that Peter’s wife was martyred before Peter was put to death.¹⁹

At Babylon. S. Kent Brown pointed out:

Peter wrote his first New Testament epistle “at Babylon” (1 Pet. 5:13) in AD 63 or 64, near the time of the persecution of Christians under Nero. Babylon was a name that Christian writers often used for Rome, so Peter’s phrase likely refers to that city. We know from 1 Peter 1:1 that the document was written to Church members in central and northern Asia Minor. Peter mentions no serious defections or schisms in that area, but clearly the Christians there were enduring local persecution, which Peter encourages them to bear. (See 1 Pet. 1:6–7; 1 Pet. 3:14; 1 Pet. 4:12–14.)²⁰

In addition, Andrew Skinner wrote: “Toward the end of his life, Peter ended up in Rome. In one of his personal letters addressed to the Saints in the five major provinces of Asia Minor, he sends greetings from ‘Babylon,’ which is probably none other than the great capital city of the Roman Empire (see 1 Peter 5:13). The early Church historian Eusebius tells us that 1 Peter was written in Rome.”²¹

Mark, my son. In ending this letter, Peter sends greetings from *Markos ho huios mou*, “My son Mark.” Strong’s dictionary points out that the term *huios* was used “very widely of immediate, remote or figurative kinship.” Andrew Skinner adds,

Even more interesting is the statement telling us of those who were with Peter at that time in his life, particularly Marcus (see 1 Peter 5:13), likely the same who was the author of the Gospel of Mark and scribe for the chief Apostle. One can imagine the younger John Mark recording the teachings and reminiscences of Peter, copying down the eyewitness testimony of all the Lord said and did including the foundational doctrines learned. Surely it was from these experiences with Peter that Mark gleaned the necessary information for his Gospel record as well as the content for the two surviving letters sent by the chief Apostle.²²

The Biblical scholar Martin Hengel noted that the addition of “my son” referring to Mark alludes “to a close teacher-student relationship.”²³ A few early sources say that this Mark, who was the evangelist, was taught and trained by Peter. If these early Christian sources are to be believed, it is interesting how much Peter, who presided over the Church, molded the early Synoptic testimonies about the Savior’s ministry.

A kiss of charity. The phrase “greet ye one another with a kiss of charity” indicates a common social custom in Peter’s time. Even today people in the Mediterranean, Latin America, and other areas of the world whose cultures are partly derived from the Mediterranean give a kiss or two of friendship on the cheek when they meet and depart. This custom is generally foreign to English-speaking Latter-day Saints. In order for Peter to be understood by English-speaking Latter-day Saints, we have rendered this phrase as “an expression of sincere Christian affection.”

Closing. Peter summarized his letter as follows: “I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand,” leaving a clear indication of what he intended. In a gentle manner, he closed with “Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus.” What more could we desire than such an apostolic blessing from the first apostolic leader of the early Church of Jesus Christ?

Notes

- 1 Daniel Keating, *First and Second Peter, Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 114
- 2 Howard W. Hunter, in Conference Report, October 1965, 111–115.
- 3 Deuteronomy 19:15–19: “If the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother; Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you.”

- 4 The new rendition will be incorporated in the BYU Studies Commentary on 1 Peter and 2 Peter and available online at scripturecentral.org.
- 5 David O. McKay, in Conference Report, October 1964, 91–93.
- 6 Edward Gordon Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (London, UK: Macmillan, 1961), 233.
- 7 Pindar, *Olympian* 8.10.
- 8 Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of James, Epistles of John, Peter, and Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 194.
- 9 Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1965–1973), 3:321.
- 10 McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3:320.
- 11 Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, *A Lively Hope: The Suffering, Death, Resurrection, and Exaltation of Jesus Christ* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1999), 204–206.
- 12 Holzapfel, *Lively Hope*, 204–206
- 13 Joseph B. Wirthlin, “Spiritual Bonfires of Testimony,” October 1992 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.
- 14 LXX Jeremiah 27:17; 28:34–38; Psalm 21:14; Ezekiel 22:25; Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 341.
- 15 Mark Dubis, *1 Peter—A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 171.
- 16 Neal A. Maxwell, “A Brother Offended,” April 1982 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.
- 17 Monte S. Nyman, “The Sublime Epistles of Peter (1, 2 Peter),” in *Studies in Scripture*, vol. 6, *Acts to Revelation*, ed. Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1987), 227.
- 18 Dubis, *1 Peter*, 173.
- 19 Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 7.11.63.3; Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 353.
- 20 S. Kent Brown, “Whither the Early Church?,” *Ensign*, October 1988.
- 21 Andrew C. Skinner, “Peter—The Chief Apostle,” in *Go Ye Into All the World: Messages of the New Testament Apostles*, ed. Ray L. Huntington, Patty Smith, Thomas A. Wayment, and Jerome M. Perkins (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2002), 215–216.
- 22 Skinner, “Peter—The Chief Apostle,” 215–216.
- 23 Martin Hengel, *Saint Peter—The Underestimated Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 98. Hengel noted on page 103, “According to Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia about 130, according to Irenaeus of Lyon about 180, and according to Clement of Alexandria about 200, the evangelist Mark was the interpreter and student of Peter.” See Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 2.15 and 3.39.15 and Irenaeus *Haer.* 3.1.1.

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