

*So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 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. Be sober-minded; be watchful. 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. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has 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. By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ. 1 Peter 5:1-14*

Two weeks ago Nancy and I had the blessing to spend four days away on Quadra Island. We’ve been there before numerous times, and every time we go we try to stay at different place on the Island. This time we were really blessed to find an Airbnb right on the bay side of Rebecca Spit – and we spent much of our time just sitting on the porch overlooking the bay - soaking up the view of the Discovery Islands with the snow-capped mountains in the background. What Nancy and I have noticed about going to Quadra Island is that whenever we mention Quadra Island, the first thing people talk about is usually Rebecca Spit. Now there are a lot more places to see on Quadra Island than just Rebecca Spit. But it seems when most people hear “Quadra Island” they think “Rebecca Spirit.” We see this in other places on Vancouver Island. Take Victoria. While we know our capital city is known for a number of things, but with a perfect growing climate, Victoria is known internationally as the City of Gardens – and so for most people around the world, when they hear “Victoria” they think “Butchart Gardens.” What about Port Alberni? What are we known for? Rain. LOTS of rain. Some years ago, as a major mill town, we were known to have highest wages in Canada. We are *known* as the home of the world's largest fire-fighting aircraft, the Martin Mars waterbombers. We are *known* to be the Salmon Capital of the World as being designated the World Fishing Network's Ultimate Fishing Town.

What are we, as body of Christ at Arrowsmith Baptist church, known for? Depends on who you ask. And that would be the same for all the churches in Port Alberni. The spiritual footprint of our Lord Jesus Christ is not very deep in this community. And we see one of the effects of that, in that Port Alberni is becoming to be known as a town with a high crime rate. And that’s not going to get any better with all of the marijuana markets that are being planted in our community. It’s hard to plant and water the gospel in the shallow ground of humanistic rights and immoral entitlements. And we are not alone. Behind the façade of what we see lies the dark truth - that the world we live in is desperately lost. Not only is Victoria known to be the City of Gardens, Victoria also the “witch capital of Canada.” Port Alberni is known for its endless rain but it’s been pretty dry the last few years. Now we fear fires.

Throughout the first four chapters of Peter’s letter to the churches who were suffering persecution in Asia Minor, the apostle has been telling us that Jesus Christ intends his body, the church, to be the spiritual support structure for all of life. All of culture/society rests upon the church. When God sets out to change the nature of culture/society, he begins with the church. At the end of chapter 4, Peter told the people in the church that all of the unjust suffering they were experiencing was being done by the hand of God - to purge and refine the church, and to make the church what God intends it to be.

The purpose of the church is glorify God by bearing witness to the grace of God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ unto a broken and fallen world. That witness for Christ is seen most clearly from those in the church through times of suffering. And because suffering is the refining process by which God removes the impurities out of those in the church, in 1 Peter 4:17 Peter said: *“For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?”* In our text for today Peter tells us how we can remove the things in our lives that keep us from bearing witness to the grace of God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ unto a broken and fallen world. He speaks first to the leaders of the church and then to everyone else within the congregation. Metaphorically verses 1-4 are for the shepherds and verses 5-14 are for all the sheep.

*So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. 1 Peter 5:1-4*

Peter first exhorts the elders *“to shepherd the flock of God.”* Note that Peter begins with an expression of identification with the elders as *“a fellow elder.”* Note also that while was Peter an apostle, he does not refer to himself in terms of superiority, but says that he is *“a fellow elder”* as *“witness of the sufferings of Christ.”* Now Peter is not referring here to the fact that he was an eyewitness to the sufferings of Jesus on the cross – but rather he had personally experienced the same sort of suffering that Jesus had experienced at the hands of unjust men. So it was nothing new to him to talk about suffering. Peter had been there. He could identify with the suffering of those to whom he is writing.

This is where born-again Christians always ought to be when they must rebuke or reprove or condemn another brother or sister in Christ. We are never to correct from a position of superiority, but rather from a position of identification as children of God. Paul says in Galatians 6:1 that if you see a brother or sister who *“is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”* It is our recognition that we all are prone to fall, which enables us to speak to people and exhort and correct them in a way that is receivable. This is what Peter is doing here. He is not speaking from a higher platform. He puts himself right on their level and says: *“I'm with you. I've gone through the same experience. So, shepherd the flock like me!”*

It's most likely, in writing these words, Peter was recalling one of the last conversations Jesus ever directed toward him, as recorded in John 21. The incident occurred soon after Peter's denial of Jesus. Three times Peter had denied Jesus - and so Jesus, after his resurrection, three times asked Peter if he loved Him, affirming the relationship Jesus had with Peter, and then telling him to shepherd the sheep. I understand Peter's heart here, as I often feel I am not qualified to feed his sheep. At the times when our hearts are truly right with God, we will feel unqualified – *because we are!* The truth is God uses all of us in spite of our faults, weaknesses, failures, brokenness and inadequacies. And praise God that's true, especially for those of us called to be shepherds for Jesus. Peter call the church God's flock, not ours. A shepherd's job is to keep our eye on the Chief Shepherd, and tend to the sheep He sends us.

A word to the sheep of the church about a shepherd's responsibility to not put himself above the sheep: That does not remove the calling and the role and the authority of the shepherd of the church. Sheep are also not to put themselves above shepherds. Romans 13:1-2 says, *“there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.”* Hebrews 13:17-18 also says: *“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things.”*

After Peter exhorts the elders *“to shepherd the flock of God”* he tells us what kind of character God expects from those who are called to be shepherds for Jesus Christ, by putting together a number of self-motivations and contrasts them with the godly-motivations, which ought to govern the heart of a shepherd. The first is, - *“not under compulsion”* - not shepherding because we have to, or because of some outer compulsion of someone expecting or demanding it of us, or of any inner compulsion, like feeling guilty unless we do something - *“but willingly, as God would have you”* or, literally, *“according to God”* - the way God does it. We are to joyfully shepherd for God, the way He wants us to do it.

The second motivation Peter speaks of is: *“not for shameful gain.”* Shepherds could be conceivably be motivated by the position or monetary rewards that would come their way. But more likely it would be because of some other profit - the praise, the appreciation they might receive from the sheep. Peter says, *“No. We are to shepherd God’s flock “eagerly” because we want to - freely, without gain.*

The third motivation Peter speaks of is: *“not domineering over those in your charge.”* There is something in all of us which makes us want to dominate people. And there are some who say to themselves: *“Is there any better authority to be than to have authority over God’s people! Peter says, “No! Leadership is not lordship, it is not intimidating people, it is not commanding others. We have no right to command because God is the one who commands. Instead, shepherds are to be an “examples to the flock literally, “of the flock.” That is, “Be a sheep! Follow Jesus. Set the pace by showing the rest of the sheep what it is to be a sheep.” This is where a shepherd’s authority comes from. Our authority as a leaders or elders or deacons or deaconesses and trustees does not reside in our office, nor our training, nor our experience, nor our background – but rather out of our obedience to the truth of God’s Word.*

Peter then declares the ultimate motivation to which Peter looks most of all - the appearance of the Chief Shepherd: *“And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory”* (1 Peter 5:4). Actions which spring out of self-motivations always fade. It is hard to keep your steam up, if you are waiting for somebody to show a little appreciation. Most people will not. And that’s all right; they should not, necessarily. Shepherds should not look for appreciation. If that is what motivates us, we will be disappointed, and we will swerve from the task. We must keep our eye on the Chief Shepherd, and wait for his approval. Shepherds never receive their due reward in this life. We see this throughout in the Old and New Testaments, in how those who shepherded various flocks were treated. The apostle Paul's reward was to be rejected by all the churches in Asia Minor, churches he had labored for years to establish. Nero "rewarded" him by chopping off his head. But Paul said at the end of his life, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing”* (2 Timothy 4:7-8). That should be the motivation for every person who serves as a leader in the church. If you labor for anything less than that, you will always be disappointed. Peter says to keep your eyes on the Chief Shepherd, follow him and do what he says. And when the day comes for reward, you shall receive Jesus’ *“Well done!”*

*Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 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. Be sober-minded; be watchful. 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. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has 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. 1 Peter 5:5-11*

These words are Peter's second exhortation in our text for today, and now his speaking to everyone in the body of Christ - regarding how we can remove the things in our lives that keep us from bearing witness to the grace of God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ unto a broken and fallen world. He tells us that in the midst of suffering, when we are oppressed and unjustly treated, we are to submit to those who have authority over us - because the hand which oppresses you is not the hand of your enemies or the hand of culture/society or the hands of the people of the church. It is rather the hand of God for His purpose. The key word for us when we are resisted or attacked? Peter says, "Submit!"

Now we don't come into this world, naturally submissive and humble. We come into the world proud and rebellious, resistant to authority. And when we become Christians we do not suddenly become submissive either. The Spirit comes to dwell in our lives, and we get a new heart and a new character and a new life, and new desire to begin to submit to authority -- God's authority first, and then the authority of others. But it doesn't come easily; it's a struggle. Sometimes we have to be embarrassed or humiliated before we can truly learn to submit. But we have to learn how to submit because Jesus submitted to God's will and authority and as followers of Jesus we should do the same. Jesus said, "*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*" (Matthew 11:28-29). Jesus calls us to be witnesses of his gentleness and lowliness. This is something we all must learn.

"*Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders.*" Peter begins here with the young men, because they will be the next leaders/elders. In 2 Timothy, Paul exhorts Timothy to flee, or refrain, from youthful lusts. He is not referring specifically to sexual lust, but to all the lusts and passions young men have - the passion which makes them want to assert themselves, to have their own way and get what they want, to reject authority they think is unjust. This is characteristic of all of us when we are young. And some of us even continue to live out that characteristic long into our old age. All of us need to learn how to submit to one another because followers of Jesus Christ have to be willing to submit themselves to another person's needs - whatever those needs are, and not insist that others serve to us. We are to follow Jesus' example of his submission to God when he said: "*The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*" (Matthew 20:28). True submission to God is humbly submitting ourselves to serving the needs of others.

"*Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* It is pride which keeps us from humbly submitting ourselves to serving the needs of others. The Bible says "*God opposes the proud.*" The term means, "the array of all of one's forces." God stands in our way when we are proud. We love to apply that to other people. There are people in my life and people who I know who are so proud. The greatest one being - me! Praise God for his "*grace*" because God himself opposes me every time I proudly judge others for their pride. Praise God also that God exalts when we "*humble ourselves, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he will exalt us.* There is a sense of exaltation which usually follows humble service to others, a sense of well-being, of satisfaction, a peace we feel that we are doing what God has called us to do.

"*Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.*" When we clothe ourselves with humility and humble ourselves and stop asserting our rights and insisting that everyone meet our needs - we need not worry about our rights or our needs - because God will provide when we cast all our anxiety upon Him, because He cares for us. We are to let God take care of our needs. We are called to make ourselves expendable, give of ourselves, and serve others. We need not defend ourselves or our rights. God can do that for us. He knows, we matter to him, and so we can cast our struggles upon him. But know that when we do these all of these things, we will experience opposition, resistance and suffering.

*“Be sober-minded; be watchful. 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.”* Followers of Jesus Christ have an enemy. The devil is our adversary. He is an adversary who viciously hates us. He hates us and he hates the righteousness of Jesus in us. Satan will do everything he can to destroy us. He is like a voracious lion, roaring in hunger, seeking those he can devour. So Peter says, *“Resist him.”* How can sheep resist a lion? Sheep are utterly defenseless. Well, we don’t have to defend ourselves. Our defense is in our Good Shepherd. Peter says, *“Resist him, firm in your faith.”* Do not try to stand on your own. Your strength is in your faith in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ – the son of God, who came to earth, to die on a cross, in our place, paying the penalty for our sin, and then rising from the dead - defeating sin, satan and death - so we might be forgiven, redeemed and restored back to God - when we surrender our hearts and lives to Jesus as our Lord and Savior, so we might know a new life here on earth and an eternal life in heaven.

When Satan attacks us with doubt or despair or discouragement or a debased self-image that is the time to recall to your mind who God is and what God has said and what God has done and how God values us – so we can reject Satan’s lie, and stand upon the truth with the Sword of the Spirit of God’s Word. John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* is the account of a young man named Christian who is on a journey from the Doomed City to the Celestial City. At one point, as he is making his way along, he meets two young men, “Timorous” and “Mistrust”, who are running away from the Celestial City. He stops them and asks, “Where are you going?” They say, “Back to the Doomed City.” He asks them why, and they reply, “Because up in the mountains there are lions that are crouching, ready to destroy you.” Christian is frightened and is tempted to turn back. But then he remembers the scroll he carries! He reaches in his vest for it and discovers to his dismay that it is gone. So he goes back to the place where he lost it. He retrieves it, opens it, and reads these words: “Is your strength small? Fear not; for the lions are chained. Keep in the midst of the path, and no hurt shall come upon you.” And so, though Christian’s knees were knocking and his heart was pounding, he walked through the mountains in the middle of the path, accepting at face value what the scroll of truth said, and he discovers that the lions are truly chained. They surge against the chains, but they cannot touch him because they are bound.

That is how we are to resist the devil. When there is doubt or fear or feelings of inadequacy, or whatever attack Satan puts upon our life, we are resist him, Peter says, strong in faith - with dogged determination to believe what God says in His Word and to act upon God’ Word. This is what Jesus did when the Satan tried to tempt him. We are to do this, Peter says, with an awareness *“knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.”* This is our common struggle. There is not one of us, this past week or perhaps at this very moment, who has not been attacked by the enemy of our souls. Some of us have a tendency to blame their struggles on themselves or others, but none of us is isolated from him. There are also some attacks of Satan which we cannot withstand alone and which God never intended that we should endure alone. There are some deep-seated habits -- fortresses in our life entrenched areas of evil which are so difficult to dislodge that we need help from other brothers and sisters. But when we Christians are honest and open with one another, we find that there are many, many brothers and sisters experiencing exactly what we are experiencing - the very same attacks! We need to trust one another, entrust the truth to one another, comfort one another, and share in the struggle together. This is the witness of community.

*“And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has 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.”* These words are not wishful thinking; they are God’s rock-solid promise in times of suffering! When we suffer for our faith in Jesus Christ the God of all grace will himself bring about stability in our lives. Isaiah refers to an “oak of righteousness.” Jesus Christ is our oak of righteousness planted squarely, immovable, stable, steadfast in the midst of whatever struggle we face in life. The Word of God promises that God himself will restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish us forever and ever!

*By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ*" (1 Peter 5:12-14) The concluding words of the Peter's first letter are greetings from the church in Rome. We will not take time to look at them in detail – but it is important to look at Peter's closing statement in verse 12: "*By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God.* What does "*this*" refer to? Back in verse 10 where Peter said, "*After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.*" This is the God of all grace, whose intent is to restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish the church to glorify God by bearing witness to God's grace through the Gospel of Jesus Christ unto a broken and fallen world.

This should be the witness of the community of followers of Jesus Christ. This is what God wants us to be known for. This is what God wants all churches to be known for. Jesus Christ intends his body, the church, to be the spiritual support structure for all of life. All of culture/society rests upon the church. When God sets out to change the nature of culture/society, he begins by allowing the church to experience suffering under the hand of God to purge and refine the church, and to make it what God intends it to be - because the witness of community for Christ is seen most clearly from those in the church through times of suffering. The witness of community for Christ is seen in *humble shepherdleaders* who faithfully keep their eyes on the Chief Shepherd as they sacrificially feed and guide the sheep of Jesus.

The witness of community for Christ is *followers of Jesus in the church* submitting to the authority of Jesus and to those whom he gives authority, even when they are oppressed and unjustly treated for their faith in Christ – *and followers of Jesus in the church* submitting themselves to God by submitting themselves to serve the needs of others – *and followers of Jesus in the church* bonding together to resist the devil, the enemy of our souls by trusting one another, entrusting the truth to one another, comforting one another, and sharing in the struggle together – *and followers of Jesus in the church* coming together to celebrate the reality of God's promise that after we have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called us to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish us. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen."

2019-07-07

Pastor Leland Botzet

Arrowsmith Baptist Church