

"Vigilant"

1 Peter 5

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at Jesus Fellowship of Believers

Menomonie, WI

November 16, 2025

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1 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: 2 Shepherd the flock of God

which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock 4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. 5 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." 6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. 8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. 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. 11 To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 12 By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand. 13 She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you; and so does Mark my son. 14 Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen

VERSES 1-7

I wonder what we would say to the original recipients of this letter today, as they stood on the front lines of the battle holding Peter's letter and looking at us and how we live? Sadly we must acknowledge that had this early church to which Peter was writing practiced their faith the way the greater church today practices theirs, we would have to wonder, in the midst of trial and persecution, if there would be any church left whatsoever. But they apparently lived quite differently from us...even under fire, because the message lived on!

The greater church today is, in many cases, limping along under a rather poor reputation. Satan has corrupted vast segments of the Body of Christ, wherein it has attempted to compromise with the world and its ways. We read in the newspapers of various well-known pastors, church groups, and denominations that have succumbed to liberal, non-biblical doctrines. There are reports of abuse, mishandling of money, and wholesale abandonment of biblical principles for the sake of ecumenicalism, growth in numbers, public esteem, and personal power. There is weakness, strife, dissensions, church-splits over petty jealousies, and power struggles among members. We wonder why the average person then looks in from the outside and sees nothing that he wants to be a part of. He has enough problems already!

Something a cyclist must always learn as he begins to ride, is that a person in a car can literally look directly at you as you are coming at them, and yet still not see you. They can even make "eye-contact" and yet inexplicably pull out on you, sending you home to Jesus. In the same manner, I have learned that despite one's attendance here in church services...perhaps even their participation in service, activities and community at large, many folks still do not "see" me. They look at me as I stand here in this pulpit, and yet they truly do not see me or actually hear my words. No doubt it is the same in their relationship with Christ Himself. What the cyclist learns to do, is to ignore the fact that they are there in front of you and they are looking right at you... even making eye contact with you. No, we ignore that fact and pay attention to one thing and one thing only: Are their wheels moving? We give sole attention to whether they are *moving*. ARE they moving and which way are they moving? The reality is, only a few will ever truly see me and hear me.

Peter is coming to a close of this letter, and in doing so, he gives a "shout out" to those who are trying to shepherd all the flocks throughout time and history. It's been a lot of years I have stood here before you. I have "taught and preached" to no doubt thousands of sheep or *potential* sheep. (...who knows for sure?) In that time there has been literally countless individuals, who have spiritually and philosophically "pulled up to that corner and stopped" in a Sunday pew, and looked straight at me. They made eye contact with me, and it would seem that they clearly "saw me" ...that they heard my words and grasped the situation being presented, only to have them immediately pull out into chaos and death.



Our revised version of the gospel today that would be nearly unrecognizable to those who first read this letter! They were intently looking and listening to their shepherd because what was at stake...what was “on the table” ...was life and death. If they were dreaming...and not paying attention...and they pulled out...then it was going to go very bad. These folks apparently “got it.” They understood the dangers out there and that Satan was a roaring lion...prowling around “seeking whom he may devour.” They knew that God had divinely ordained the church as the vehicle to create a body of Christ for which to protect His sheep, nurture them in growth, and move the world.

We know that the body of Christ, the church, is God’s vehicle for evangelism, discipleship, accountability, and fellowship. We are the bride of Christ, although we are today, in mass, often a wayward wife. We are told that Christ gave us apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to the church “for the perfecting of the saints, (that’s us!) for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” (Eph 4:12). One can only gather therein that the problems in the church today lay both upon the failure of its leadership, and the prideful hearts of its sheep. The Bible has given specific qualifications and directions for deacons, elders, and pastors, and express guidelines of behavior from those they serve. When we fail to adhere to these, we are sure to reap the devastating consequences.

Peter begins herein by using the strong word “exhort” in his address to them. It is an uncommon word use in our generation, but a rather common one in scripture. It means to “direct and instruct with passion.” Peter is indeed zealous in his call upon the church to hear what he is saying...to have them really truly SEE him...HEAR him, and not to just dreamily look in his direction. There was too much at stake. The cost of failure here would be catastrophic and eternal!

He begins with the basics, the ‘root’ of our job as pastors and elders: Shepherd the flock! The KJV uses the word “feed” and such is really a good word because the original has in it the idea of actually caring for the flock, as a mission and a passion, not just a job! It means to rule, nourish, cherish, supply, and tend to the flock, not merely to preach the Word. And notice that Peter clearly denotes them as the “flock of God” not the flock of the pastor. The pastor is merely the under-shepherd, which means he is not the boss. The ‘chief shepherd’ is the boss and I am really just a sheep dog!

The church leaders are not to serve under any other compulsion than that of the Spirit’s call as well as His enabling. We cannot serve in such a capacity because of peer pressure, or power desire or for financial gain. If our motivations to lead are not pure, then they are corrupt and problems will follow for sure. I remember a man that wanted so badly to be an elder here and asked me often, but his heart was full of pride and he believed himself to be a leader, maybe even a pastor. He once told me “Come on Tim...being a pastor isn’t that hard!” When it finally became clear that he was not going to readily be placed in such a roll, he left the church, only proving our view of him was ‘spot on.’ ...that he did not love you, he only loved himself and power. His act vindicated us. He “looked at me” but his movement showed he did not “see” me. Our actions must only be out of love for the flock and for the shepherd!

Verse 4 says that "... when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away." Peter is not painting a rosy picture here for the leaders of the church any more than he is for the flock. Serving the church in such a capacity would be difficult and testing, just as it is for those who try to lead in the church today. He readily acknowledges that any reward that might be received for such service may not always come in this life, but awaits us only at His return. Certainly that is a great comfort and blessing, however it is also a stark truth that anyone who seeks to serve God in a high capacity needs to realize!

Peter goes on in his letter to make the call for the flock to in turn support their leaders and not make the job any more difficult than it already is. There is that dreaded word again that Peter has used before in this letter: *submit*. The submission herein is before the "elders" which can mean in respect to age, but in the context undoubtedly means before those who are leading in the church. Peter uses words like “submit”... “subject”... “humility.” Words that...for many of us, will cause us to bristle. So, we brazenly pull out into the traffic flow and chaos follows...

VERSES 8-14

Leonardo Da Vinci once remarked “It is easier to resist at the beginning than at the end.” Indeed it is an easy thing to start this Christian journey, but a very different thing to finish it. Over the past 35 plus years of our history here, many have “*departed from us, proving they were never part of us.*” (1 John 2:19) And not just from us, but from God and His greater church. This is much more than just looking into this Jesus thing and deciding against it. This speaks rather of those who have actually “*tasted the heavenly gift, and became partakers of the Holy Spirit*” ...those that have “*tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come*” ...and then ultimately fell away (Heb 6:4-6). Not just fell from this *church*, but fell from the hold on the Spirits leading...fell from the adherence to scripture...fell from loving Christ and others, and began to redesign the Christian life into their own image, a plethora of scripture passing judgment against them. I wonder how many Peter lost ‘round the time he was writing this letter?

The reality is that so many Christians, as Charles Stanley puts it, have a “commitment of convenience. They’ll stay faithful as long as it’s safe and doesn’t involve risk, rejection, or criticism. Instead of standing alone in the face of challenge or temptation, they check to see which way their friends are going.” We live in a “ME-centric” age... the most emotionally fragile generation in the history of man.

Our study in 1 Peter has focused intently on the premise that as true followers of Christ, we should expect to follow in His footsteps and experience some suffering ourselves prior to our departure from this planet. As Peter begins to head for the exit here, he leaves us with the call to be “sober.” To be “vigilant.” From start to the finish of this letter, Peter surrendered no ground. He yielded no directive. Despite all the difficulties, trials, and tests, Peter was... **unrelenting**.

Both then and now, the “ball was in play.” The fires of trials and persecutions have always separated the sheep from the goats, and the “tares”...the “weeds,” have grown and are still growing amongst the authentic crop. Those who *were* and *are* not serious about their faith and committed to the battle, are just bowing out. Oh, not out of the faith, for they never had it, but out of the church, out of the journey, out of the vision, out of the struggle. People are finally coming to realize that Christianity is not “fish” bumper stickers, hip t-shirts, praise music, and Sunday church. It’s a war. (2 Timothy 2:3-4, 2 Corinthians 10:3-4) And unless we get serious about the conflict before us, we will ultimately fail. Peter says, “Be sober...be vigilant.” Time to “get serious.” Yet most confessing believers are anything but serious! The fact is, most of us are, like toddlers, are ruled by our emotions: our fears, our passions, our wants and desires, even our anger and jealousy. And yes, most of all, our pride.

20 times in the NT, believers are reminded to be on the alert, to watch. Most of the time it was Jesus Himself who called us out. As we look over the battle field...littered with the bodies of those slain in battle...we are profoundly reminded that we can never let down our guard...we can never “check out”...we can never take a spiritual vacation. Satan is playing for keeps.

“...your adversary the devil.” Indeed, my own flesh and wicked heart is forever waiting to take me out, but **this** is where the buck stops. The world paints him as a naughty laughable creature with a red suit, horns, and a pointy tail. But scripture says he is beautiful to the eye, and sometimes appears as an “angel of light.” It also says he is the very embodiment of evil and is the “father of lies.” (John 8:44)

Our text calls him a “roaring lion.” He will sneak up on you when you are not watching. Some of Satan's favorite traps are moral temptation, to get believers fighting one another, to separate you from the group, and to lull you into apathy. If Satan cannot take your salvation, then he will attempt to take your witness, your peace, your battle gear, and your victory, and if he can, your very life. We often try to fend him off by *doing* instead of seeking to *be*. We exert our efforts into following rules and trying to be tough, instead of seeking to know Christ more and establish our love for Him as primary in our lives. For in the depths of our being we know that nothing plants you more unmovable than real and passionate love. It’s interesting to note that those words of condemnation are not “depart from me...you messed up and fell down a lot.” No, it is “depart from me (because) I never *knew* you.” I am not saying that self-discipline has no place in a Christian’s life or that things like effort and striving do not matter. But the bottom line is without a close loving walk with Christ, your efforts will never be enough. You will never finish the race...

That roaring lion loves to “lure us in” using attractive counterfeits to God's will and plan for our lives. If the “plan B” is free from suffering and discomfort, ***we’re in***. Whenever we go through the fires that are spoken of in this letter, we tend to think that this is not the way it is supposed to be...that we are alone in our position...everyone else is doing fine and getting theirs while we are always on the outside. And Satan lulls us away from the pack, away from the family, away from the flock, away from safety...

Yet many of the original readers of this letter...as well as some today in the greater church throughout the world, have suffered under those same trials, persecutions, and temptations, and have inexplicably survived to tell the story. They stood strong, and experienced victory. How did they win when so many have lost?

In Peter's closing remarks, he reminds us that it is God’s Spirit and grace that will keep us standing through the storms. It is and always has been the “free, unearned love and care” of Christ. What is our part then? It is to “*keep ourselves in the love of God....*” (*Jude 1:21*). That is our daily focus and discipline. That is our daily objective. Humble ourselves...cast our cares upon Him...be sober...be vigilant...resist the devil...stand steadfast. And God will “establish you.” “Establish” means to “fix firmly, strengthen, and render unmovable.” God will not and has not failed us, rather we are the ones that keep wandering away from Him... lured by some shiny object in the dirt. The trials, persecutions, and difficulties of this life will either break us or they will make us stronger. Through them all we experience God separating the “wheat from the chaff.” The “real thing” from the “imposter.” He wants to “settle” us. It means to “lay a foundation.” God has spoken often about His desire to see us unmovable.

However, we must be a willing participant in such a sovereign plan as He has presented in this letter. He will not force us. Certainly, few behaviors are more damnable and damaging to the kingdom pursuits than the individual who at one time walked with God and eventually tried to hide from Him like Adam and Eve in the garden, or the one who got caught up with who they thought they were, and in their pride, try to usurp God’s hand like Moses sister Miriam.

Revelation 12:11 says “...*they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.*” Satan's goal is to silence our testimony; to discourage us, to introduce doubts, to divert us into philosophy and psychology so that the power of the Word of God in our own experience will be snuffed out.

The fact is, most folks will never see this journey with such a serious commitment. But if we do not grow and mature we are apt to spend our lives in the "wilderness desert." Never knowing the battles of the "promised land" but never knowing the victories either. We are told in scripture that if you are proud, God opposes you; if you are humble and submit to God, He will be there for you. Nowhere is there room for self-pride. It is the humble man (not the self-confident and arrogant) who can overcome Satan's attacks. We are called to "pick up our cross daily"... count ourselves as dead to this world, and to fight that battle daily. For those who know such battles, as well as such victories in God, those who have experienced the grace that He has spoken of, Peter ends with both a salutation, as well as a promise: "Peace be with you..." .