

HoliMess **Final Instructions, Final Promise**

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Digging Deeper (Questions are on the last page)

HoliMess: Final Instructions, Final Promise

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Background Notes

Key Scripture Texts: 1 Peter 5

Introduction

The suffering church needs solid *leadership*. Persons with courage and wisdom, filled by the Holy Spirit, led the early church in the days of Peter. Throughout the next roughly three hundred years, the “Fathers” of the church wrote, preached, suffered and died for their faith. Their names ought to be familiar: Polycarp, Tertullian, Clement, Irenaeus, Origen, and scores of others. Many of their writings survive and serve to remind us that the age of Spirit-filled Christianity did not die with the last of the Apostles. As apologists, polemicists, pastors, and bishops, they lent to the church not only their erudition, but also their skills as shepherds of the flock when it was threatened by the wolves of the Empire. Some of the finest commentaries on the Scriptures came from their pens, but the Gospel was written even more boldly in their lives of sacrifice and devotion. Augustine, bishop of Hippo (354-430), made the following observations about leadership and suffering:

When they hear of the trials that are coming, some men arm themselves more and, so to speak, are eager to drain the cup. The ordinary medicine of the faithful seems to them but a small thing; for their part they seek the glorious death of the martyrs."

Those words evoke the poetry of Isaac Watts (1674-1748):

Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas?

The “I” of this hymn is often those in leadership. Pope John Paul II gave voice to this in the aftermath of the failed assassination attempt on his life. Years later he said:

I understand that I have to lead Christ's Church into this third millennium by prayer, by various programs, but I saw that this is not enough: She must be led by suffering, by the attack 13 years ago and by this new sacrifice. ... The Pope has to be attacked, the Pope has to suffer, so that every family may see that here is, I would say, a higher Gospel: the Gospel of suffering by which the future is prepared.... Again I have to meet the powerful of the world and I must speak. With what arguments? I am left with the subject of suffering. And I want to tell them 'understand it, think it over!'... I meditated on all this and thought it over again during my hospital stay... (*Sunday Angelus Message*, May 1994).

Whatever our private views on the papacy, we ought to hear the words of a man, as well as a pope, in what John Paul said — a man who accepted suffering even in his high office as the shepherd of the Roman branch of the Christian church.

As we complete the *HoliMess* series this week, Peter, in chapter 5 of his letter, draws us to the serious matter of leading Christ's church. The apostle approached his final instructions and final promise with care. No doubt as the ink ran off his quill onto the parchment, tears welled-up in his eyes as he remembered the words which passed between himself and Jesus in John 21. You may recall the setting. At last Peter met the risen Jesus on the shore of the sea after the remarkable catch of fish. Along with his fellow disciples, Peter shared a meal prepared by Jesus himself. “Do you love me more than these?” The words strafed his soul. They felt like a low level attack, dredging up the pitiful performance of a man who once promised Jesus he would follow him all the way to the cross if need be, but then left him alone with his accusers while he warmed himself by the fire and denied ever knowing Jesus (Mark 14:66ff). Three times Peter denied him (Mark 14:30, 72); three times

Jesus asked the question; three times Peter stumbled over actually saying the words precisely as Jesus spoke them. Three times Jesus didn't blink but commissioned his failed apostle for a new work just on the horizon: "Feed my sheep, he said.

Feeding sheep sounds like grunt work. It is grunt work. What Jesus had in mind, however, was the enormous task of bringing the fresh food of the Gospel to the lost and scattered sheep of Israel. After all, that was the original commission Jesus gave to his apostles (see Matthew 10:6; 15:24; also, Luke 15:4, 6; compare Jeremiah 50:6). Now in the context of John 21, Peter learns that the leadership required to "feed my sheep" would include suffering:

18 Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." 19 (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me" (John 21:18-19).

"When you are old, you will..." Those words point forward to a time when Peter would face the ultimate form of suffering — death by crucifixion. He would follow Jesus in graphically literal ways. Tradition records that sometime during the mid 60's Peter met destiny at the hands of Emperor Nero, accepting crucifixion as his Lord had done, but asked to be executed upside down. In so doing, he sought to honor his Lord while accepting the suffering of Christ.

Assuming leadership, feeding the sheep, and "glorifying God" would mean accepting the life of suffering. Peter would need to "let go" so that "another" might dress and carry him. Knowing what we do about Peter that would be no easy destiny. Self-assured and impatient, Peter needed the Holy Spirit not only at Pentecost but throughout his life to refine his leadership skills and develop in him the heart of a servant (see Acts 2; 10-11; Galatians 2 for other instances).

By the time he wrote *1 Peter*, Peter had become "old," and so in his closing chapter he appropriately addresses himself to persons like himself, while at the same time keeping in mind the rising new generation of Christian shepherds. In Peter's day, the church faced generational change. The deaths of all the apostles approached, and a fresh team of leaders was about to emerge — persons like Timothy and Titus to whom Paul addressed some of his letters. Their situation looks to us a bit like the generation after the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's. The old guard remembers the marches, the sit-ins, the boycotts, and the martyrs of that decisive period in American history. Real change happened all across the country because faithful, courageous, and committed leaders were willing to pay the price for freedom and justice. What about the next generation? Would they catch the fire, take up the torch, run the race, and claim the prize as did their elders?

Holiness isn't just for old folks, but old folks lead the way. Holiness isn't the provenance of a passing generation, but belongs to the present one as well. Holiness doesn't die with the elders, but lives on in fresh ways through young people who are willing to accept the torch. The old and young alike grapple with messy worlds. At times one generation may accuse the other of making the mess, and intergenerational conflict results. Peter writes his final instructions in light of generational change, offering sage advice which honors the elders and helps the young. Graduates hold a special place in the generational dynamic: they belong to the *commencement*, the new beginning. Peter invites old and young to embody the values and virtues of the holy life as he concludes his letter.

A Word about Structure

In 1 Peter 5, the writer gives his final *paranesis* (ethical instructions) and then closes with a traditional *letter-closing*. Within that two-part structure, finer points fill in the details. Briefly, our approach will follow this outline:

Final Instructions (5:1-9)

1. Elders (5:1-4)
2. Youth (5:5a)

3. Everyone (5:5b-9)

Final Promise (5:9-14)

Final Instructions (5:1-9)

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: 2 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; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. 5 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." 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, 7 casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. 8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9 Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

Humility surrounds the writer's approach to his readers in this section. How does he see himself as he gives his final words to the suffering church in Asia Minor? He calls himself "a fellow elder" (*sumpresbuteros*) and "a witness" (*martus*). His letter opened with the more formal *apostolos* ("apostle") which connected him with the other leaders Christ directly appointed. Here, he connects himself to those who, like himself, are senior leaders in his audience. He calls these persons *presbuteroi en humin*: "elders among you." The idea of a fellow-elder nurtures a sense of community, fellowship, collegiality, equality, and partnership. Later generations of Christians would struggle with more hierarchical forms of leadership, largely in an effort to stem the tide of heresy and maintain unity in the church. Some scholars think that terms like *presbuteroi* ("elders") must mean the formal offices in the church which developed much later. However, "elders" were recognized within the history of the Jewish community in ancient times as far back as the time of Moses (see Exodus 3:16, 18; 4:29; and elsewhere), as recently as the time of the Maccabees (1 Maccabees 14:20), and in the days of Jesus (Mark 15:1). Those who led the church were called by this name in Acts 14:23 and 15:2). R.A. Campbell has made a rich contribution to this topic.¹

Holiness, not hierarchy, directs Peter's understanding of his relationship to other leaders in the early church. *Age* certainly factors into the use of the word *presbuteros*. Having the maturity born out of experience kept the church grounded in its original roots. After all, Peter and persons like him traced their spiritual lineage all the way back to the earthly Jesus and to the risen Lord. They were "older," with special emphasis on the *comparative* form of the adjective in Greek.

Which brings us to the idea of Peter as *witness* (*martur*). The Greek word lends its meaning to our term "martyr," although this is a further development of its meaning. Because many of Christ's followers bore faithful *witness* to Jesus Christ, they became *martyrs* in the sense of giving their very lives in suffering and death — just as Jesus had done. Indeed, Jesus himself is called "the faithful witness" in Revelation 1:5 and 3:14, but so is one of his followers, Antipas, in Revelation 2:13. In those contexts, a witness is truly one who gives his life for the cause. Peter is quick to make the connection between bearing witness and *suffering for it* when he writes about being "a witness of the sufferings of Christ." His role as witness is not limited to the literal *seeing of Jesus on the cross*, but extends to the whole span of Christ's earthly work and beyond. For Peter to be a witness of Christ's sufferings meant that he himself *shared in those sufferings*. The role of witness is not merely that of a by-stander but of an active participant.

These sufferings are not the "woe is me" kind of misery. Instead, Peter immediately calls himself a "partaker in the glory about to be revealed." The Greek word for "partaker" is *koinōnos*, the root term from which *koinonia*, "fellowship," is derived. This perspective matches Paul's in Philippians 3:10 and Peter's own teaching in 1 Peter 4:13. Moral authority for the Christian leader grows out of a willingness to share in Christ's suffering for his people and then share in the character formation which follows (see 2 Corinthians 3). Glory for the

¹ R.A. Campbell, *The Elders: Seniority within Earliest Christianity* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1994).

Christian is always something “about to be revealed,” that is, it is a progressive experience which accompanies the fellowship of suffering. When a church sees its leaders living between suffering and glory, its faith in Jesus Christ grows by leaps and bounds.

Peter addresses “the elders” in the form of “exhortation.” Our text uses the Greek word *parakaleō* with the following range of meanings: “beg, urge; encourage, speak words of encouragement; request, ask, appeal to; console, comfort, cheer up; invite, and summon.” Earnestness, excitement, and need shade these meanings. What’s absent here is a heavy-handed *demanding* as if Peter is speaking to his audience from a place of political authority (which he is not). Encouragement and comfort, aid and help, cheer and summons are more important than command or orders. Had Peter wanted to “give orders” he could have used other Greek words. Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the *paraklētos* — one who is called alongside of to teach, encourage and help. Some translations prefer the noun “Counselor,” though that sounds a bit too formal. Exhortation in this sense means coming to the aid of someone for the purpose of meeting a need. Peter sees real needs among the Asiatic Christians, and he is grateful that “elders” exist within their communities whose experience and wisdom can strengthen the weak, teach the ignorant, correct the wayward, guide the aimless, and lead to maturity those who need to grow.

What is the role of the *presubteros* in the life of the church? Why does the church need solid, mature, reliable, and faithful leaders? The image which works best for Peter (recall John 21) is that of the “shepherd.” Rather than using the noun at first, Peter picks the verb form: *poimainō*. It occurs here in the aorist imperative form, perhaps with an emphasis on “beginning” the action. The aorist tense sometimes functions as an “inceptive” — in this case asking that the action of shepherding *start happening*. In any case, the force of the tense is on the decisive nature of the action. Vigilance is required of shepherds: the flock needs them.

Notice the parallelism between 5:1 and 5:2. Addressing the Christians *in general*, Peter reminds them about “the elders *among you*.” Addressing the elders in *particular*, he reminds them about “the flock of God *among you*.” Just as Peter treats the leaders of the churches as “fellows,” so he encourages the elders and their flocks to see each other in this partnership relationship. The flock is not below the shepherd, nor is the shepherd above the flock. Instead, they are both “among each other.” Sheep cannot be led by shepherds *at a distance*. A careful reading of John 10 in conjunction with the familiar Psalm 23 will reveal the personal interaction between shepherd and sheep.

1. “He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out” (John 10:3).
2. “His sheep follow him because they know his voice” (John 10:4).
3. “I have come that they might have abundant life” (John 10:10).
4. “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me” (John 10:14).
5. “I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:15).

Combine this portrait of Jesus as Shepherd with the role of the Lord as “my shepherd” (Psalm 23), and we have a clear example for those who would “shepherd the flock of God.” When Jesus told Peter “feed my sheep” (John 21), the apostle knew what that should look like, and it’s no wonder he chose the shepherd metaphor in his letter.

Through a series of contrasts Peter gives his fellow shepherds their job descriptions. He places these pairs of contrasts under a single controlling idea: “Exercising oversight,” *episkopountes*. This Greek term is from *episkopeō* which has the following range of meanings: “look on or at, inspect, observe, examine, regard, watch over, visit, review, consider, reflect, examine, or meditate.”² Implied in the present context is the idea of “continuous responsibility” for the flock. Shepherding cannot be a part-time job, suggesting that the work must

² Our English words “Episcopal” and “episcopacy” derive from the root word in Greek. They refer to forms of government in the church which recognize levels of leadership, including the role of the bishop in securing the unity of the church. Nazarenes trace their spiritual lineage to the work of John Wesley whose efforts led to the Methodist Episcopal Church — a name preserving its origins in the Anglican/Episcopal Church.

be undertaken by more than one person as is the case in 5:1: “the elders.” The New Testament recognized this regular role of pastors and laypersons charged with the care of God’s flock.

1. Citing the *Psalms*, Peter, in Acts 1:20, refers to the work of the apostles by using the Greek word *episkopē*.
2. Peter’s care for the sick is described with the metaphor of his *shadow overseeing* them (Acts 5:15).
3. The choice of the first deacons grew out of this *oversight* ministry (Acts 6:3).
4. Stephen describes Moses’ concern for his fellow Israelites in Egypt as an *overseeing* function (Acts 7:23).
5. Paul refers to the *follow-up* of previously planted churches using this term (Acts 15:36).
6. Paul ordains elders in Ephesus and then tells them that the Holy Spirit has made them *overseers* to care for the church of God (Acts 20:28).
7. Leaders in church are called “*overseers and deacons*” by Paul. (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-2; Titus 1:7).
8. Peter in this letter (*1 Peter*) refers to Jesus as “The Shepherd and *Overseer* of your souls” (2:25).

Leaders *are responsible for those under their care. It matters to them what happens to their flock.* This is the meaning of authentic oversight. Of special importance to the early church was the maintenance of unity, both in doctrine and in community. The *elders* (later called “bishops”) made this significance contribution in the history of the church. The writings of Ignatius of Antioch, church father of the early 2nd century, are rich with references to the role of the elder-bishop. This is especially evident in his *Letter to the Magnesians* (6:1; 2:1; 7:1; 13:2) and *Letter to the Smyrnans* (8:1; 9:1). Further confirmation appears in the writings of Clement of Alexandria and Hippolytus of Rome.

Now we come to the contrasts. Why does Peter arrange his material into contrasting pairs? He wants to show the positive and the negative tendencies involved in any form of leadership. From Jesus, Peter learned that he and the apostles were to be leaders in a way wholly different from their Gentile counterparts. Consider this text:
 But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ²⁶ It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, ²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:25-28).

Power accompanies leadership; that is unavoidable. What is avoidable is the abuse of power. In his 1862 annual address to Congress, Lincoln said “We hold the power and bear the responsibility.” Great good can come from the wise application of power. Great evil results from its self-interested use. The table below shows Peter’s analysis of this in terms of contrasting pairs:

Negative	Positive
Not under compulsion	Willingly by God’s will
Not for shameful gain	Eagerly
Not domineering over those in your charge	Examples to the flock

1. Under compulsion (an adverb): *anagkastōs*. The writer has constructed a linguistic opposite to *hekousiōs* which means “willingly.” The LXX version of the Old Testament often refers to “free-will offerings” using the root form of this word (see Numbers 29:39; Deuteronomy 12:6; Ezra 8:28; Psalm 118:108). By placing *ana* in front of this root, Peter conveys the idea of doing something which a person doesn’t freely choose. Doing something *freely* looks like grace. What lies behind *unwilling* actions? We would say “my heart’s just not in it.” Or, “Somebody’s got to do it, so it might as well be I.” When the elders don’t see their work as an expression of the grace of God, leadership seems like a necessary evil. Recall 4:10 where we are to use our gifts as “faithful administrators of God’s *grace*.” Such faithful administrators lead *out of* grace and *in the interest of* grace. Peter adds the prepositional phrase *kata theou*, indicating where the willingness to lead originates: “from God.”
2. Shameful gain: *aischrokerdōs*. We have a compound word: the *aisch-* root means something that is a source of shame; the *kerdōs* root has to do with “gain.” Shame and honor were dominant conditions in the Asiatic culture. Persons who offended customs, the family, the state, their profession, and their religion

experienced shame. Recovering the loss of honor was an often difficult task. In this case, Peter is shaming elders who use their role as leaders as a means for materialistic gain: they are in it for the money, not because they want to do it for the Lord (see also 1 Timothy 6). Thus, Peter uses the opposite term, “eagerly,” taken from the Greek *prothumōs* which has this range of meanings: “soul, breath, life, heart, mind, temper, will, spirit, courage, seat of anger.” Probably, the closest meaning in English is the idea of “passion,” as in, “Doing the work of an elder is my *passion*.” Though monetary compensation might be absent, the person still desires deeply to serve God and the church, and this passion becomes its own reward.

3. Domineering: *katakurieuō*. This refers to the desire to have or acquire dominion. This desire is more than the ordinary passion to lead or to serve. Control is the key element: making others do something whether or not it is in their best interest. The root idea comes from the Greek word *kurios*: Lord. Elders are not lords of their own manor but shepherds caring for the flock. Peter calls them “examples to the flock.” In this case, the word “examples” is *tupoi*: “pattern, example, model, standard, or image.” Our English word “type” derives from it. If an elder leads by lordship, he thereby excludes the free will of those in his care. If he leads by example, he invites the free will participation of his flock in the efforts he is advancing.

Peter summarizes his instructions to the elders by reminding them from whence their true reward will come: the “Chief Shepherd” (Greek: *archipoimēnos*). Referring to Jesus Christ in this way, Peter looks forward to the future gathering of the flock when Jesus “appears” (*phanerōthentos*). What God does in the future should affect what we do in the present. This is a reference to the Second Coming which, elsewhere in Scripture, is referred to as a “gathering together.” Paul uses this language in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 when he writes about “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him” (see also Mark 13:27; Matthew 25:32). In John 10, Jesus looks forward to the day when “one sheepfold and one shepherd” will at last take shape (10:16), no doubt referring to the union of Jew and Gentile gathered in a single community.

By using the image of the “Chief Shepherd” who appears in the future, Peter strengthens the idea of *hope* which he introduced in the first chapter of his letter (1:3) and emphasized throughout (1:13, 21; 3:15). The Elder shepherds are being reminded that whatever meager earthly rewards might be theirs in their sometimes challenging roles as overseers of the flock, Christ himself will one day give them “the crown of glory” (*tēs doxēs stephenon*). When Peter mentions *glory* in his letter, he usually has in mind the positive counterpart to *suffering* (1 Peter 4:13; 5:10; compare also Luke 24:26; Romans 8:18; Hebrews 2:9). Recall that in that culture *suffering*=*shame*, and so the promise of *glory* is paramount to saying that human shame will be replaced with God’s *honor*. Christ in the future will honor his faithful shepherds who in this life experience suffering and shame in the course of their work. “Glory” means the estimation of character or value in the Greek language. Behind the noun *doxa* lies the verb form *dokeō*, usually translated “it seems,” or “is thought to be.” Put simply, whatever others might *think* about the Elder shepherds or their work, Christ will give them his final estimation in the form of “the glory crown.”

Why does Peter interject the imagery of the “crown” in the midst of his shepherd metaphor? Two distinct Greek terms are translated “crown” in the New Testament, each with a unique emphasis.

1. *diadēma*: Literally, a band or fillet surrounding the tiara of a ruler or sovereign; origins are from Persia where blue and white colors are woven together in the band. The emphasis is on “highest ruling power” of the sort found in kings, clearly a symbol of power worn on the head. New Testament references are from *Revelation* where secular or demonic power is in view (12:3; 13:1), or the supreme reign of Christ replaces all other powers (19:12).
2. *stephanos*. A chaplet or wreath constructed from natural or golden leaves. Used to honor persons, either on special occasions (weddings, births, etc.) or as a result of personal achievement, notably, the Olympic games or victories in war. Jesus was given a “crown of thorns” in mockery of his anti-achievement in the eyes of his enemies (Matthew 27:29; Mark 15:17; John 19:2, 5). Positive meanings build on the symbol of achievement and honor. We read about wreath-crowned victors honored for their earnest endeavors. We also see the persistent, faithful Christian at the end of his hard-won race wearing the symbolic *stephanos* of rejoicing (1 Thessalonians 2:19), of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8), of glory (1 Peter 5:4, here), and of life

(James 1:12; Revelation 2:10). Paul's fellow Christians were his joy and *stephanos* (Philippians 4:1). The Greek Old Testament (LXX) talks about a wreath of glory (Proverbs 4:9), of a good wife, children's children, riches, and a peaceful old age (Proverbs 12:4; 14:24; 16:31; 17:6).

Peter uses the *stephanos* term when telling the elders that they will receive the *unfading crown of glory*. He has in mind the difference between wreaths made from natural leaves which can fade and the golden ones which last indefinitely. The sort of wreath given by the Chief Shepherd corresponds to the golden one which is described with the Greek term, *amarantinos*, meaning “unfading.” This word comes from a Greek noun *amaranth*, referring to an unfading flower. Among the Greeks the *amaranth* became a type of immortality. Even Aesop had a fable contrasting the rose and the amaranth. Classified as an herb, it exists in more than fifty species of various colors and viewed widely as a weed, vegetable, cereal or decoration.³ As a weed, it is hard to kill. As a vegetable, it is a popular leafy species in Southeast Asia and, in Africa it grows ruggedly as a “drought crop.” As a grain cereal, it has the reputation as “the crop of the future.”⁴ Sustainable, permanent, reliable, and substantive are all adjectives applicable to the amaranth.

Peter, amid the impermanence of troubled times for the Christians in Asia Minor, offers a powerful metaphor in describing the wreath-crown as amaranthine. He has in mind his readers' resurrection life when he connects this wreath with the word “glory,” a term often applied to the resurrection body of believers (see Philippians 3:21; Romans 8:18ff; 1 Corinthians 15:40-41, 43). Elsewhere Paul writes, “Christ your life appears” and “you will appear with him in glory” (Colossians 3:4). Christ's own resurrection is referred to as his being “taken up in glory” (1 Timothy 3:16), his being “crowned with glory and honor” (Hebrews 2:7, 9), and his bringing “many sons to glory” (Hebrews 2:10). Peter uses the language of glory to talk about the resurrection in 1 Peter 1:21. We can safely infer, then, that the unfading “*stephanos* of glory” given the elders when Christ appears is none other than their resurrection body.

You Who Are Younger (5:5a)

Two different groups are identified in 5:5: “younger” (*neōteroi*) and “all” (*pantes*). The scant attention devoted to the *neōteroi* seems unusual. However, the single responsibility to “submit” (*huptagēte*) to the elders outweighs the brevity of the instructions. As in other contexts, “to submit” means “to arrange” oneself in a proper relationship to others. The verb *hupotassō* doesn't imply blind obedience or personal servitude. Instead it has to do with a well-ordered society in which individuals mutually submit to one another in appropriate ways. In Peter's day no one would question the propriety of immature persons making way for wiser more experienced members of the community. In this case, those charged with the care of God's flock earn the respect of the less experienced (neophytes) through their wisdom and compassionate care.

The Pauline churches who had leaders like Timothy or Titus often faced the challenge of a younger “elder” needing to lead older but less mature Christ followers. Consider this text:

1 Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father. Treat younger men like brothers, 2 older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity (1 Timothy 5:1-2).

Or this lengthier passage to Titus:

2 Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. 3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, 4 and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, 5 to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. 6 Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. 7 Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, 8 and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us (Titus 2:2-8).

Notice how the younger Titus is admonished to wield his influence through good works and competent teaching, woven with a solid character and proper speech.

³ M & D. DeMason Costea, “Stem morphology and anatomy in *Amaranthus L. (Amaranthaceae)*- Taxonomic significance.” *Journal of the Torrey Botanical Society* 128(3) (2001): 254-281.

⁴ J.L. Marx. “Speaking of Science: Amaranth: A Comeback for the Food of the Aztecs?” *Science* 198(4312) (1977): 40.

Finally, we have the well-rounded treatment of different levels of Christian experience in 1 John:

12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. 14 I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one (1 John 2:12-14)

We can therefore conclude that Peter's use of words like "elder" and "younger" has to do with more than chronological age. Rather, the intention is to challenge persons of differing maturity levels in the church. Ultimately the "younger" will one day become "elders" themselves, charged with the sacred task of leading a fresh generation of Christian neophytes. Age *per se* is no guarantee of maturity, nor is it the mark of well-heeled experienced. The church can have its own versions of Archie Bunker: stuck at a level of maturity well below what we would want from wise leaders, though they might be chronologically older.

All of You (5:5b-9)

Wearing the garments of humility is the duty of every Christian, whether elder or younger. Adopting an attitude directed "toward one another," requires an adjustment of social priorities. Asiatic society sought ways to honor the achiever and the famous. Roman society was not especially interested in humility which it saw as a mark of weakness. Peter, in a rapid-fire explanation, uses three different forms of the root form *tapein-*:

1. *tapeinophrosunē* (5:5b): (noun) Literally, "lowly mindedness," usually translated by the noun "humility."
2. *tapeinos* (5:5c): (adjective) "Lying low, live in low regions, brought down, humbled, submissive, of low rank, lowly, mean, small, poor, weak, dejected, base, abject, low."
3. *tapeinoō* (5:6): (verb) "To lower, lessen, humble, abase, make lowly, disparage."

Saturating the text with these three parts of speech, all based on the same root, lends emphasis to the subject matter — a common practice of rhetoricians wishing to drive home a point through repetition.

The Greek noun, *tapeinophrosune*, is unique to the New Testament, but the adjectival form is found in ancient Greek texts where means "the mentality of a slave" along with all sorts of very negative connotations: "base, unfit, shabby, mean, of no account." Pagans would not have seen "humility" as a virtue, and so it remained only a negative adjective for them! A compound word, its first part is *tapein* and simply refers to a state of lowliness, unimportance, being small, being humble. The Greek version of the Old Testament (LXX) used this word to indicate how God's people should relate to God, and how God honored attitudes of being "humble" (see Isaiah 57:15). God gives grace to the humble (Isaiah 2:11; Ezekiel 17:24). The Bible, contrary to pagan culture, sees lowliness and humility as virtues.

Paul, in Philippians 2:3b-4 explains the meaning of this "invented noun", *tapeinphronsune*, with the words "considering each other better than yourselves". Ironically, in Asiatic society, as we have already seen, people were assessed based on their status. There was no "considering" involved! You *were* a slave or poor or a non-citizen, regardless of how you *considered* yourself! And so, Paul is introducing a new way of "thinking" a new "attitude" about the all-important marker of "status" as it existed in the wider culture. He is saying to the Philippians, "Stop thinking about your position based on your own status (or as Paul puts it "interests"), but look outward to the people around you, and honor them with a status that is higher than your own." Pagans would do the opposite. They would want to see others as "lower" than themselves in order to maintain their own "status". But Christians, shaped by the God of encouragement, love, fellowship, tenderness and compassion, have a whole different "attitude". Voluntarily place yourself lower than others, Paul is saying. In Graeco-Roman culture that would have been seen as wholly counter-cultural, and contrary to the honor given to existing "status". It certainly flew in the face of all the norms surrounding "citizenship."

Peter, aware of these same realities enjoins humility of all Christians, regardless of age, maturity or rank. Since clothing often marked a person's rank in society, Peter purposely employs this metaphor but applies it, not to clothes, but to character! Not to vestments but to humility! Curiously, after the rite of Christian baptism, the

newly initiated were given a simple white garment — the clothing of a servant, prepared to serve others and the world. In some Christian traditions, the priest or pastor, as well as his assistants, wear simple white robes known as albs. They are the oldest liturgical vestments, worn by clergy and laypersons alike. The purpose of such vestments was not to set the priests above the people but to symbolize their role as the servants of Christ, wearing a humble garment in service to the church.

Humility is worn confidently by those who place their trust in the grace of God. In support of this claim, Peter cites Proverbs 3:34, from the ancient Hebrew book of Wisdom. Fittingly, Proverbs 3 begins with instructions not to lean on one's own understanding, but to trust in Yahweh with all one's heart, acknowledging Him in all one's ways. In Proverbs 3:4, the Wisdom writer promises honor to those who live this way. This is, of course, Peter's point when he tells his readers in 5:6 that "the might hand of God will exalt you at the proper time." Whereas the function of honoring its society's members belonged to the citizens of Asiatic society, in this case it is God who rewards humility by honoring those who practice it. The reference to "exalt" reminds us of Jesus' own exaltation to the right hand of God (see Acts 2:33; Acts 5:31). Just as God exalted Jesus, so He will exalt those who follow his example through a life of humility.

Living a life of humility is risky and a potential source of insecurity (5:6). In a world where the opinions of others figured prominently in persons' assessment of themselves (the so-called *dyadic personality*), Christians who bucked the tide and lived humble lives faced frequent ridicule. Peter anticipates how Christians might react: with "anxiety." He uses the Greek phrase *pasan tēn merimnan humōn* to describe this feeling. The word *merimna* has to do with the "cares" of this life (see Luke 8:14; 21:34) which literally draw one's attention in several directions at once. The verb form *merimnaō*, "be anxious," appears in texts like Philippians 4:6, Matthew 6:25 and Luke 12:22 which pertain to such things as worrying about the future. Such overt "care" pays close attention to minute details, scanning them with solicitude. The emphasis is on the distraction this causes where the myriad of little pieces swirling around fragment a person's attention and dilute their energy for otherwise worthwhile efforts. Jesus warned his followers about allowing the "cares of this life" and "anxiety toward the future" to rob them of their steady trust in the love of their heavenly Father.

Adopting a more settled attitude involves, in Peter's words, a "sober and watchful mind" (5:8). The Greek expressions used here are the verbs *nēphō* and *grēgoreō* in the imperative mood: these are *commands* 1) to avoid anything which confuses, handicaps, or otherwise dulls the mind; 2) to show alertness in the face of potential danger or threat to spiritual well-being. Coming hard on the heels of instructions to the elders to be good shepherds, these twin instructions make sense: care for the flock requires due diligence in the face of potential predators. While anxiety is to be avoided, alertness is to be embraced. There is a difference. The former splits the mind into a million directions without benefit; the latter summons courage and wisdom in dealing with real issues and challenges.

What are the dangers of highest concern? The term *adversary* combined with *the devil* identifies the personal agent of evil: evil with a real face. This is not evil in the abstract but in the concrete. Sometimes evil wears a human face, energized by deeper dark powers at work in the world. Paul calls them "principalities, powers, rulers of darkness, spiritual wickedness in high places" (see Ephesians 6:10ff). In the last book of the Bible, *Revelation*, evil not only troubles human existence but also wages war against God's agent of salvation. Numerous symbols are invested with the different dimensions of evil: great red dragon, devil, serpent, and Satan (Revelation 12). Peter chooses the Greek word *antidikos*, translated here as "adversary," and which literally means an opponent *at law* — "an accuser" (compare Matthew 5:25; Luke 12:58; 18:3). The Greek Old Testament (LXX) uses the word for "enemies of Yahweh" (1 Samuel 2:10), enemies of God's people (Esther 8:11), and the opposing side in a law court (Proverbs 18:17). The second Greek word used by Peter is *diabolos*, a word which in classical Greek referred to a "slanderer." Further, this personification of evil is depicted as a prowling roaring lion looking for prey. Whereas the first pair of words point to a legal context where evil puts on the mask of justice seeking remedy in the courtroom, these latter terms unmask the true intentions of evil: to hunt down God's people and eat them alive.

No doubt all of this imagery resonated with Peter's audience. They faced the superficial slandering and more serious litigation at the hands of their Asiatic neighbors. Such was the common lot of strangers and aliens in a foreign land. Marked by suspicion, they had to defend themselves against false charges, rumor and libel. But behind the human agents there operated a more sinister force within the deeper darkness of human life. While the agent of evil pretends he is out for justice, his real motives are personal destruction and death. We are reminded of what Jesus said to his disciples about the perils to his flock in John 10:10,

¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Ancient Israel often heard their prophets speak of evil in the form of wild beasts (lion, bear, leopard, etc.) devouring the earth (see Daniel 7) until the Son of Man appears before Yahweh to receive the kingdom on the behalf of God's people. The lion was seen as the uncontested predator of the flock. Shepherds needed to be always vigilant lest this beast attack and carry off their lambs. Recall the story of David defending his father's flock against the lion and the bear (see I Samuel 17:34, 37). Of special note is the reference to a "ravening and roaring lion" intent on attacking the Messiah in Psalm 22:13. Wicked rulers exploiting poor people are compared to a roaring lion (Proverbs 28:15). The deadly actions of lions portray the enemies of Israel who carry off their prey without remedy (Isaiah 5:29). More subtle is the role of the "false prophet" in the midst of God's people "like a roaring lion tearing the prey, devouring human lives..." (Ezekiel 22:25). But, as if to thwart the arrogance of the evil roaring lion, God's messenger speaks with a loud voice "like a lion roaring" (Revelation 10:3). The roar of the satanic lion is overcome by the voice of God's word.

Peter, therefore, alerts his readers to their true enemy. It is not their human neighbor but a more beastly one. Their attention should not be diverted to human enemies — they belong to the mission field for which God has placed His church in the world. Tempting though it was to attack their hostile neighbors, the followers of Christ were not to be deceived by the deeper darker evil. Satan, the adversary, would find great pleasure in seeing human beings devour each other for the sake of justice (Galatians 5:15). Every war involving flesh and blood only distracts human beings from the real struggle: with the enemy of the human soul.

In response to his attacks, the Christian is urged to resist the adversarial devil (5:9). Using the Greek word *antihistēmi*, meaning "oppose, withstand, hold one's ground," Peter frames up the spiritual battle of Christians against their common foe, the prowling lion. This is plainly military language, reminiscent of Paul's call for the church to "put on the whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:10ff). In that context, he instructs the church to "stand" in much the same way Peter tells his audience to "resist." His portrayal of the battle has a world-wide scope to it, one involving "suffering to the brotherhood throughout the world." The net effect of this characterization is the portrayal of a world-wide conflict, not just in Asia Minor. The Latin Vulgate (Jerome) uses the word *fraternitas* — "fraternity" to speak about the universal suffering people of God. The church is the Fraternity of Jesus found throughout the whole world, engaged in battle against a common foe. This is the classic picture of the *church militant*.

How should the battle be undertaken? The phrase "firm in your faith" summarizes the proper battle stance. The Greek phrase is *stereoi tē pistei*. Our English word "stereophonic" comes from the term *stereos* — literally, "solid sound," a more faithful representation of how live sound is heard.⁵ The range of meaning for *stereos* includes: "stiff, stark, firm, and solid." When applied to mathematics, the Greeks used *stereos arithmos* when referring to a number cubed (a^3) — a numeric representation of three-dimensional reality. What is Peter trying to say by calling faith (*pistis*) "solid"? Minimally, he means faith which has real substance and which captures life in the fullest sense. This is faith on the line, lived on the frontier, and at the battlefield. Here is faith immersed in the harsh conditions of life at the crest of the flood and in the midst of the battle. There is no wavering under these circumstances, no giving ground to the enemy, and no phony heroics. Peter calls for

⁵ Initially, technology gave us "left and right channels" in order to capture in reproduced sound the reality of actual sound. As things progressed, this two-dimensional improvement was followed by "surround sound" which adds further dimensions of near, far, in front of and behind. The point of *stereos* when applied to sound is to create a faithful rendering.

stereophonic faith: faith on steroids. As examples of this kind of faith, we turn to the portrait in *Hebrews*, where the writer describes persons...

³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. ³⁶ Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two,¹ they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated - ³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy - wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth (Hebrews 11:33-38).

Underlying such actions is the Hebrew idea of *'emûnah* — the act leaning on one's walking stick, placing one's full weight on the faithfulness of God, and holding back nothing in the process.

These are heady words placing enormous demands on the scattered, alien and displaced people of God who live in a pagan world hostile to their lifestyle and their message. What assurance does Peter give his audience that such instructions can be obeyed or that following them is even possible? In response, we move from the Final Instructions to *Final Promise*.

Final Promise (5:10-14)

10 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. 11 To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 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. Stand firm in it. 13 She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. 14 Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

How long can a human being suffer or endure suffering before dying? A few simple facts remind us of the frailty of human life along the boundaries of water, food and air. The human body needs oxygen to sustain itself. The decrease of oxygen to at least one body part is known as *hypoxia*. The total lack of oxygen is known as *anoxia*. Brain cells are destroyed after 4 to 6 minutes without oxygen. When the flow of oxygen to the brain is completely cut off, a person will lose consciousness within 10 seconds. Extended hypoxia leads to brain damage and ultimately death.⁶ How long without water? Two to ten days. Food? Four to six weeks. None of these boundary conditions leaves its victim unharmed. The classic cry of the person in distress is simply, "I don't know how much longer I can take this!"

Human frailty, especially under suffering, is everywhere affirmed in Scripture:

1. Life is like a vapor which appears and then vanishes (James 4:14).
2. God knows our "frame," and that we are but "dust" (Psalm 103:14).
3. Like the fragile grass and flowering plants in the wilderness, human beings quickly fade (Isaiah 40:6; 1 Peter 1:24).

Suffering cannot be sustained indefinitely. Peter, knowing this, tells his readers, "after you have suffered a little while..." (5:10). He uses the Greek word *oligos* to set limits on the suffering of the Christian. Paul does the same thing in Romans 8:18 where he refers to "the sufferings of this present time..." Jesus told his followers that, in God's purposes, human tribulation has its days "cut short" (Matthew 24:22; Mark 13:20) else no one would survive. In matters of testing and temptation, Paul encourages his churches by saying that God "will not allow temptation beyond what we are able to bear..." (1 Corinthians 10:13). The God who shares with us in our suffering is the God of mercy and grace. That is how Peter sustains his readers, by an appeal to "the God of all grace." The little phrase "all grace" (*pasēs charitos*) also appears in 2 Corinthians 9:8 where we also learn

⁶ W. Bradley, et al (eds). *Neurology in Clinical Practice: Principles of Diagnosis and Management*, Vol. II (Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1991), 1343-1349.

that this grace “abounds.” Our suffering is never far from God’s grace, and, in fact, in our suffering we discover that God’s grace is more than sufficient to sustain us (see also 2 Corinthians 12:9).

Suffering is not pointless, but belongs to God’s bigger picture. He is calling us “to his eternal glory in Christ.” Peter never loses sight of the connection between suffering and glory (review: 1 Peter 1:11; 4:13, 15; 5:1, and here). This is rooted, of course, in the Gospel: Christ suffered and rose in a glorious new body into the life of God. What was true for Christ will become true for us. That is the overwhelming promise of the Gospel. *Suffering is the rugged riverbank through which floods the amazing grace of God carrying us downstream to the place of everlasting glory.* Again, recall how the idea of *glory* comes from the basic verb form (*dokeō*) which has to do with the estimation of something’s value. Glory is what God thinks of us as we reach the fulfillment of His promise in our lives. The *doxa* (glory) is based on the *dokeō* (estimation) of God.

Very specific promises flow from Peter’s pen as he pronounces his *benediction* on the readers of his letter. In Christian worship, the benediction consists of a prayer of blessing (“well-wishing”) spoken for the benefit of the congregation that now goes out into the world, bearing the name of Christ. It is no small thing for Christians to leave the safety and protection of the gathered community. While at worship, they confirm and express the shared values of the Christian faith, and they do so with the reinforcement of other Christians who surround them. Worship unites the hearts of God’s people before the awesome God, telling His story again, re-living His great deeds in history, announcing the Good News that Jesus is Lord, and celebrating the mercy of His love which flows down the cross and into the world. Here is solace, comfort, joy, and confidence. Here is faith, hope and love embodied in the lives of redeemed human beings. To leave the environment of worship and to make one’s way into the world where so much of this redemptive experience is absent — this can be either a source of fear or an opportunity for witness.

God is faithful to the worshipping community, but He is also faithful to the witnessing community. Peter states that clearly with his words of benediction — of Christian well-wishing. The God of all grace will do four things:

1. **Restore.** From the Greek word *katartizō* meaning “to mend, restore, set right, make complete, make prepare, supply.” Peter had once been an ordinary fisherman who, when Jesus called him, was “mending his nets” (Matthew 4:21; Mark 1:19). He then became a “fisher of men” and learned that the nets of ministry also become torn and are in need of mending. The God of all grace is the mender of torn nets. Suffering for the name of Christ tears our nets, and sometimes, tears apart the serving community. The work of restoration is an ongoing work, just as mending nets is an ongoing task for the fisherman as long as he wants to keep catching fish. The only untorn nets are idle ones. The New Testament speaks often about the ministry of restoring — of net mending (see other uses of *katartizō*: 1 Corinthians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Galatians 6:1; 1 Thessalonians 3:10). God promises to mend our torn nets.
2. **Confirm.** From the Greek word *stērizō* meaning “to set fast in the ground (like a stone), to confirm, establish, fix, settle, determine, be settled, be steadfast, make firm, be constant.” Peter is praying that God would firmly fix the Asiatic Christians so that they would not be easily moved out of their place. Though strangers, aliens, and foreigners in the lands where they lived, Peter does not want their unsettled physical situation to become their permanent spiritual condition. Persons without roots often remain rootless. In his benediction, the writer invokes God’s promise to make His people like the house built firmly on a rock (see Matthew 7:24-25; Luke 6:48). The Greek Old Testament also has the nuance of “sustain,” as through food and drink (see Genesis 27:37). The ladder in Jacob’s vision which connected heaven and earth was firmly anchored in the ground (Genesis 28:12). Aaron and Hur made steady the hands of Moses as he lifted them upward to God (Exodus 17:12). Paul’s benediction in Romans 16:25 and 2 Thessalonians 3:3 also use this term.
3. **Strengthen.** From the Greek word *sthenōō* meaning “to make strong, make steadfast.” A rare term in the New Testament, although connected to the idea of “to stand” (*stēnai*). Emphasis falls on maintaining bodily vigor and endurance.

4. **Establish.** From the Greek word *themeloō* meaning “to lay the foundation of, found firmly, to have foundations laid.” The noun, *themelios*, refers to the foundation itself. Once again, Peter uses an appropriate image for persons who do not feel settled or established in a permanent residence. Peter casts the vision of a better future for his readers: they are already laying the foundation for the house of God. This echoes his comments in chapter 2 about the “spiritual house” founded on Jesus Christ where the “sojourners and exiles” at last find a home. Paul uses similar language in Ephesians 3:17, combining the metaphors of plant and building with his phrase “rooted and grounded.” Having a foundation prevents “shifting away from the hope of the Gospel” (Colossians 1:23). The writer to the Hebrews celebrates the God who “lays the foundation of the earth in the beginning” (Hebrews 1:10). Much Old Testament material lies in the background of these “foundation” texts (see Psalm 8:4; 24:2; 48:8; 78:69; 87:5; Proverbs 3:19; Isaiah 14:32; 44:28; 48:13; 51:13, 16).

“God’s kingdom is forever and ever. Amen.” With this affirmation, Peter concludes his benediction over the Asiatic Christians. Peter has already declared that the suffering “family of God” is found throughout the world (5:9). In 5:11 he speaks of this kingdom as a permanent *dominion*. Elsewhere Scripture declares that God rules “forever and ever” (Isaiah 9:7; Luke 1:33; Revelation 11:15; 22:5). There is a connection between the permanent kingdom and the promise in 5:10 that the God of grace will “...establish...” His people — that is, build them on a firm foundation. In the person of Jesus Christ, God has made his presence and power within the world into a permanent kingdom. As the *Our Father* concludes: “...For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever, Amen!”

Closing Personal Promises

Typically, a letter of this type ends with a personalized greeting to the readers. Helping Peter in his letter-writing efforts is a man named “Silvanus.” This personal name appears in Paul’s letters (2 Corinthians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1) where it is a longer version of “Silas,” a form likely derived from the Aramaic “Seila.”⁷ Readers of the *Acts* are familiar with Silas as the companion of Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 15:22, 27, 32, 40; 16:19, 25, 29; 17:4, 10, 14, 15; 18:5). The phrase “by Silvanus” suggests his role as an *amanuensis* — the secretary serving Peter. Since both Paul and Peter appear to have used the same person as their amanuensis, some scholars suggest this may explain the similarity in wording between their respective letters. We have noted a high degree of comparable content throughout our study of *1 Peter*.⁸ The actually writing of *1 Peter* was done through this “faithful brother,” who presumably listened to the oral speech of both apostles and then set down “faithfully” Peter’s thoughts in the text of the letter.

Peter characterizes his work as “exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God.” Grace is a persistent theme in this letter (1:2, 10, 13; 3:7; 4:10; 5:5, 10, 12) and also appears in the second letter (1:2; 3:18). From these instances we learn that grace is multiplied abundantly, was prophesied by the Old Testament, belongs to our future hope, gives life, empowers spiritual gifts, lifts up the humble, and belongs to the character of God. In 5:12, the writer refers to “true grace” (*alēthē charin*). The Greek word for “true” is *alēthēs*, and has to do with the honest, real and genuine nature of this grace (*charis*). Can there be a *false* grace? Clearly writers like Paul warn against those who advocate “continuing in sin so that grace might abound” (Romans 6:1), and that would plainly be a false understanding of grace. Persons can presume on the grace of God, acting as if grace means that God is a “light touch” or a push-over when it comes to responsibility for sin. Another sort of false grace would actually be a *loss of grace* evidenced by relying on good works plus faith for salvation (Galatians 5:4). Peter might have in mind another aspect of grace which proves *true* through *what it achieves*. This is *reliable grace* and we can count on it.

⁷ See a fuller discussion in Joseph J. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*. Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 564.

⁸ Carlton L. Winbery, "Introduction to the First Letter of Peter," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 25 no. 1 Fall (1982): 3-16. For a contrary view, see E. Randolph Richards, "Silvanus was not Peter's Secretary," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43 no. 3 September (2000): 417-423.

Within the Roman Empire, there was another kind of grace: the *favor (charis)* of the Emperor. He promised *pax* (peace) and order within his realm and protection from foreign invasion. The skill and victory of Rome's military was a *charis* to the State. In return, Rome's citizens were to express thanksgiving and gratitude. That is, *charis* is a two-way street.⁹

True grace, then, involves a *powerful* grace on the part of God which achieves its purposes in the life of His people. But it also involves reciprocation back to God. When grace runs the full circuit from God to us and from us to God, we can speak confidently about *true grace: completed* grace which reflects both the faithfulness of God and the faithfulness of the Christian disciple.

The twin nouns, "exhorting" and "declaring," complement each other and reveal the two-fold nature of Christian instruction.

1. "Declaring," from the Greek *epimartureō*, has to do with "bearing witness or testimony" to the grace of God. Its function is focused on content and meaning. Part of Peter's purpose in his letter is *to make the case* for the all-powerful and prevailing grace of God, showing how this grace is the basis for everything Christians believe. Truth matters: the claims made about Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, are not idle beliefs or fanciful ideas, but are grounded firmly in eye-witness testimony. The writer of the second letter bearing Peter's name also makes this crystal clear:

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty (2 Peter 1:16).

2. "Exhorting," from the Greek *parakaleō*, is an ethical term having to do with a change in conduct — what we have previously called the *paranesis* of the letter, namely, instructions guiding human conduct. Not only is the writer concerned about what his readers *believe*, he is also committed to helping them *live* rightly, and this is the goal of exhorting. He does this by *coming alongside* of his readers, identifying himself with them in their suffering, and addressing them as their shepherd.

In broad terms, therefore, *1 Peter* is the combination of *declaration* and *exhortation*; of teaching and training. To underscore this twin emphasis, Peter concludes with the command: "Stand firm in it." He is referring, of course, to *grace* as he has explained it to his readers. He is also calling for his readers to *take action* with reference to this grace. We must *know what grace is*, and then we must *put grace into practice in our lives*. Grace is the ground on which we stand. Using similar language, Paul wrote to the Romans:

Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Romans 5:2).

Where is Peter when he writes his letter? We have left this question until the very end, and rely on clues he leaves us in 5:13. Those who belong to the Christian community where Peter lives are called "she who is at Babylon, likewise chosen..." (5:13). The word "Babylon" is clearly symbolic, but to what does it refer? Since the Christian community experienced suffering at the hands of both the Jewish leadership and Rome, either group (or both) might be in view. Babylon was the nation taking the Southern kingdom of Israel (Judah) into exile (6th century B.C.E.). The last book of the Bible uses the image of "Babylon the Great" (Revelation 17) to refer to the oppressive powers opposed to God's people. Depicted as a harlot, Babylon holds them as her captives, persecuting them, and killing them. If we interpret this imagery broadly, it refers to the social, political, and religious elements hostile to God's kingdom. Some construe this reference in 5:13 to mean the city of Rome from which Peter wrote his letter, along with the Christian community found there. Paul, in Romans 16, gives the names of persons who belong to what are likely "house churches" in the city of Rome. Tradition supports the idea that Peter served as bishop of Rome, exercising pastoral care over these various Christian communities. He speaks on their behalf ("sends you greetings") in a flourish of catholic warmth and world-wide fellowship. The Asiatic Christians were exiles, strangers and aliens in a hostile foreign society. In solidarity with them are the Roman Christians who lived under the shadow of the Empire, meeting informally in

⁹ See Boers' helpful study of *charis* in Paul's thought: Hendrikus Boers, "Agape and Charis in Paul's Thought," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59 no. 4 October (1997): 693-713.

homes scattered across the great metropolis of Rome. The two groups have much in common, and Peter uses his letter to forge tight bonds between the churches: east and west.

Concerning Mark, we have bits of Scriptural and historical information. He is, no doubt, *John Mark* who initially accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (see Acts 13-14), but later deserted them (Acts 15:38) and became a source of conflict between these pioneering church planters (Acts 15:37-40). Interestingly, it is Silas (Silvanus of our text) who replaced Barnabas (Mark's relative, see Colossians 4:10) on the second journey with Paul. From traditional sources we learn that Mark was the writer of the second Gospel and that much of his information about the historical Jesus came from Peter's own testimony.¹⁰ Both Peter and Paul testify to a close personal relationship with Mark: Peter calls him affectionately, "my son"; Paul, in spite of his earlier disaffection with Mark, comes to the end of his life with words of approval: "He is useful to me in the ministry" and asks that Timothy send Mark (2 Timothy 4:11).

"Passing the peace" ("kiss of love," 5:14) has a longstanding role in the two thousand year history of the church universal. Several biblical texts confirm its early practice (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26). In the worship of the early church this took on a specific function in the liturgy. Usually it occurred after the sermon or just before the distribution of communion. Its function was to visibly demonstrate that all who were present were one in the faith and that no sin stood in the way of their unity. Of course, over time the actual "kiss of peace" has given way to either a handshake or an embrace. The purpose, however, is the same: a visible demonstration that we are members of the one body of Christ. The passing of the peace is also a sign of obedience to Jesus' words that we make peace with one another before offering our gifts at the altar (Matt. 5:23-24). One form of invitation to this exchange says:

Leader: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

People: And also with you.

Leader: Please share the peace with one another.

While *passing the peace* takes place in a local Christian church, Peter extends the greeting to the whole community of Christ: "Peace to all of you who are in Christ."

Whenever we encounter the word *peace* in the New Testament, a world of familiar meanings opens up. Maintaining the *Pax Romana* ("Peace of Rome") was the goal of Empire, and it was entrusted to Emperor, Senate, and provincial governors, supported militarily by twenty eight legions.¹¹ This was a power-based maintenance of law and order with little room for dissent. To Jewish people, peace means *shalom*, the divinely given condition of well-being promised to Yahweh's obedience people, flowing from His covenant-love (*hesed*) for them. When one Jew wished another "Peace!" this included health, paid bills, good relationships within the family and with one's neighbors. Above all it meant "peace with God." Jesus addressed his followers with the familiar "Peace to you!" — especially after his resurrection (Luke 24:36; John 20:19, 21, 26). These were words of comfort, but also words of *commission*. The followers of Jesus were to carry *the peace* throughout the world, and in this way bring the holiness of God to a broken and fractured world — a messy world. True, Rome thought it had solved the problem of justice and peace by imposing order. But simmering under the surface was a society-wide discontent which sought resolution in the faddish mystery religions and in more dangerous revolutionary activity against the Empire. Jesus offered a "peace" that "the world does not and cannot give" (John 14:27). Indeed, in giving his kind of peace, Jesus promises "to overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Concluding Thoughts

With this week's study our series, *HoliMess*, comes to an end. The familiar themes of "strangers in a foreign land" and "suffering as Christ suffered" reach their goal in Peter's consideration of *final instruction* and *final promise*. Wrapped around a series of powerful images, crafted as literary metaphors, is the focus of holiness: God's response to a messy world. Such holiness originates in the grace of God, freely given as the source of

¹⁰ See the church father, Papias in his *Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord*, VI. Also, refer to (Eusebius, *Church History* III.39).

¹¹ For details, see Lawrence Keppie. *The Making of the Roman Army*, (London: Routledge Limited, 1984), 205-215.

salvation and hope. What began as a letter addressed to the Christians of Asia Minor swelled to a mighty current stretching all the way to Rome and back. Rootless, homeless, and alienated, these Christians learn from Peter's solid witness that the Christ of the cross, through suffering and death, becomes for them the *typos* and example of how things will one day turn. To them, the Christian community offers social cohesion and genuine relationship. The tattered edges of family relationships find mending through a new identity "in Christ."

Holiness is about bearing once more the image of God through surrender of heart and life into hands of the "faithful Creator" who makes things new again. Peter knew a great deal about starting over. Had he not heard the restorative words of Jesus after those painful hours of betrayal? If Jesus could reconcile Peter to the community of disciples and to himself, could he not also produce in the world a whole new society, grounded on the values of love and grace, faithfulness and love, peace and hope? Peter evidently didn't think that the Empire had done this very well. Nor had Judaism recovered for itself the kind of *shalom* anticipated by the ancient kingdoms of David and Solomon. In the wild and hysteric culture of Asiatic towns and cities, nestled between the Black Sea, the Caucasus, the Aegean and the Mediterranean, an alien seed had taken root. The product of the Gospel, it flourished under the gracious ministry of Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and countless unnamed co-workers. With its promise of new community, the forgiveness of sins, changed conduct, and holy lives, the Gospel declared that Jesus was Lord. It did so within a world that had been told in no uncertain terms that only Caesar was Lord. It did so courageously and in the center of flaming hostility. To these, Peter sends his letter of edifying hope. Telling his readers that they really do, after all, have a home built on a solid foundation with Christ himself as the keystone, Peter determines to lift his suffering readers to that place where hope reigns and anxiety casts its cares on the One who cares for them.

Holiness is God's answer to the sort of homelessness experienced by Peter's readers. Holiness means wholeness and hope. It brings order without domination, and peace without coercion. It dares to invite human beings "to be holy as God is holy." It announces God's commitment to ground His church on the solid rock no matter how chaotic the world around might be. Less than perfect relationships discover a new way of being in relationship. Hostile political powers encounter a strange wonderful way of being human — one with which they cannot quite reckon with nor understand. The peace which arises from this Good News draws east and west together, and offers promise of the same in our time.

Glory to God! Amen.

Resources: Brief Bibliography

A number of fine commentaries provide more in-depth discussions of the topics we will discuss in these studies of *1 Peter*. The following list is selective. When referenced throughout these *Notes*, the author's name will appear in the footnotes. Consult this bibliography for full information on the sources.

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Digger Deeper: *HoliMess: Final Instructions, Final Promise*
(Bob Brown)

To gain a deeper understanding of *HoliMess: Final Instructions, Final Promise* carefully read the selected passages below. To aid you in your study, we invite you to visit the website <http://notes.chicagofirstnaz.org>, or pick up a copy of the *Background Notes* at the **Information** desk, or from your ABF leader. Now consider the following questions, as you ask the Lord to teach you.

1. This week's study is based on 1 Peter 5 which has two main sections: 5:1-9 and 5:10-14. Read the passage carefully, and suggest titles for each section.
2. Who are the main groups of people addressed in the first section? Why does Peter specifically identify them? What relationship does he have with each one?
3. How does Peter refer to himself in 5:1-9, and why? In what sense is humility something Peter models as well as teaches?
4. Why is the imagery of "the shepherd" appropriate for Peter to use in his letter? Compare John 21:15-23. What was Peter's original profession (see Mark 1:16-18)? How are the two professions different?
5. What is the significance of "elder" in this passage? Is this about age, experience or maturity? Explain.
6. According to this first section, what is the real enemy of the flock? How does he threaten the church? What should be our response to him?
7. How does Peter envision the church in 5:9? What does this tell us about the connection between the local church and the church universal?
8. What sort of literary form does Peter use in 5:11-12 as he begins the second section? What four promises does God give to His suffering church in 5:10? Define each idea and suggest a practical example of how they operate in our lives.
9. What role does Silas have in 5:12? What else does the New Testament tell us about this man? (see 2 Corinthians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; Acts 15:22, 27, 32, 40; 16:19, 25, 29; 17:4, 10, 14, 15; 18:5).
10. What two broad purposes does Peter give for writing his letter in 5:12? Define each key word. In what ways should these purposes guide the activity of the church today?
11. Why does Peter refer to the church as in "Babylon"? If this is a metaphor, to what does it refer?
12. Explain the significance of "the kiss of love." In what ways does it find expression in "passing the peace" during worship? (5:14).
13. Identify five key ideas you learned from the *HoliMess* series? Which one especially helped you in living the holy life in a messy world? Why?