

THIS WEEK...

Think about how the Covid experience has changed you in your relationship with God. As you think about the last three months are there things that you felt led to give attention to by Him that are unfinished? That is not an uncommon experience for Christians. We need to return to lessons learned, and learn them in still deeper ways. That is how habits are established. Think about God's unfinished business in you as you do some further reflection on Peter's words. And remember, these are the words he wants to leave you with. They have great significance!

Work through these questions 1 Peter 5:6-14 raises.

(Kyle's sermon and Pastor Bob's commentary below will help you.)

1. Humility is a way of thinking, thinking about ourselves rightly, in harmony with God. What are some ways of thinking about yourself that you fall into, that are not God's will?
2. What are some anxieties you have that get in the way of humbling yourself under God's rule?
3. Write down the things we are told to do with respect to the devil. Which one(s) did God seem to call your attention to as you listed them?
4. What are four things that verses ten and eleven say God will do for you and what is particularly significant about each of them?
5. To many people, grace means you don't have to do anything with respect to your walk with Jesus. In verse 12 Peter says that his letter is the "true grace of God." What have you learned from studying 1 Peter about what God by His grace wants to help you start thinking and doing? What are some things God has led you to do to "stand firm" in His grace?

A HIGH-YIELDING, BONUS ACTIVITY

Grace always has to do with God freely giving Himself for our benefit. His grace has a purpose, that we will experience more of His saving power. He wants to be our savior. He wants to help us lay hold of what He has for us rather than settling for however our own instincts might shape our lives. When Peter says his letter has laid out the true grace of God to us, this is what he means. Grace doesn't lead us to coast. It leads us to grow. We are to stand firm in that grace, not dabble in it.

Another great statement is made on the grace of God in this regard in Titus 2:11-14. It says that God's grace trains us. In other words, it aims at developing us as people of God. We should understand that God's grace is like a personal trainer! Trainers guide us to say "No!" to certain things, good tasting things! A trainer also tells us to pursue other things, good things that help us get to a better spot. God's own Spirit seeks to be this to us so that our lives are transformed in every way. He's present in us to help us experience real life!

Read these verses in Titus and process each of the things the verses say grace is training us to do. Does one of these seem particularly important in your life right now? Do you think you have made good spiritual and emotional progress in the time you have followed Christ? What do you think He is leading you to do to experience more of His grace/power?

1 PETER COMMENTARY

5:6—"Humble yourselves therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time."

Because receiving grace imparts the power for us to lay hold of that which is wealth indeed (Luke 16:11), we should humble ourselves. God gives grace to the humble. If we humble ourselves we receive this favor from Him. If we do not He will humble us. Either way, we will be humbled.

Now how does one humble themselves? It is an ongoing, repetitive activity. We must see ourselves as God sees us and we do this by listening to and accepting what His written revelation says is true of us and our deeds. There are times the truth commends us and there are times it condemns us. We must allow its voice to regulate our conscience and its testimony to be our view of who we are. We will find in the truth the continuous witness that we are deeply loved and also the continuous witness that we are deeply fallen.

We must recognize the might of God. It is a wonderful and comforting thing to those who do so, to the humble. It is a fearsome thing to those who do not. There is not a greater force in the universe than the power of God. Here it is pictured through this anthropomorphism of placing ourselves under the mighty hand of God. It is common in the Scripture to attribute such human characteristics as hands, arms, eyes and ears to God so that we might better understand Him. Here His hand becomes symbolic of His sovereign power, authority and protection. We find our meaning and place in life when we submit to that authority and allow Him to rule the detail of our lives. That is the ultimate fruit of humility.

We make our peace with God not just by believing in Christ, though that is certainly when we receive forgiveness. We arrive at peace with Him when we submit the detail of our lives to Him. Sometimes it takes us years to let go of a perspective we have of an event or a person in our lives and to see it from His perspective. We must come to know and accept it for what it was in His grand and complex plan (Genesis 45:5-8; 50:15-21).

It is as we do this with the various areas of our lives that His peace gradually settles in on us. In the proper time, which is always His time, we are exalted. By exalted, Peter is referring to some degree to that time when in this life we are entrusted with the thing He placed us here to do. The Amen, that is, the recognition of our worth may or may not be sounded by humans. It will be sounded in our spirits by His Spirit. But Peter is also thinking of and looking toward the day when the righteous judge affirms our actions and our worth for all to see. The true place of all things and all people in His plan will then be known.

5:7—“casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.”

Grammatically, this verse is tied to the previous one and is really an expression of the command in verse 6 to humble ourselves. Taking this action is what the previous command consists of. A great obstacle to our taking our proper place of submission to God is our anxiety. We have concern over self-preservation and we have ambition, desires to achieve and attain certain things. It is difficult to sacrifice control of either of these things. On the contrary, when we feel that we might be losing control, anxiety sets in. There is, of course, no logical reason for this anxiety. It is an illusion to think such things are under our control anyway. But our thoughts take us there. We must learn to trust Him with all our concerns for “glory.”

The word rendered “cast” means just that, to throw. It implies sudden and deliberate movement. Like any action God asks of us this demands right thinking. We must understand and our faith must convince us that God cares for us. This is the theological truth that makes this action possible and wise. The previous verse speaks of God’s might. He is powerful enough to provide whatever it is we need. This verse establishes that what His might enables Him to do, His love will drive Him to do. He cares for us. That is first and foremost a marvelous thought that the Almighty One cares for us.

It is so amazing that it is difficult for us to accept that God cares for us. Our faith waivers not so much at His might, but at His love. Once we come to believe in it, this fact is of great comfort. We can be confident that His greatness will be brought to bear on matters that effect our welfare (See Psalm 62:11-12).

That He cares for us also creates a great potential. It means we are really cared for in a way that is far beyond what we could possibly do for ourselves. His knowledge far exceeds our own and enables Him to bring His power to bear on both dangers and opportunities that we know nothing about. Obedience to this verse is part of humbling ourselves. We have not “humbled ourselves under the mighty hand of God” until we have entrusted Him with the things that we feel we must control in order to survive, or be happy, or be successful or any of the other things that drive us in this life.

5:8—“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

Yet another time in his letter Peter summons the readers to what he calls soberness (see 1:13; 4:7). It is a call to behave circumspectly, considering the consequences and things at stake in the matters around us. Similarly, he summons us to alertness. He wants us to be aware and in tune with the Spirit so that we are aware of our enemy's presence and the dangers he sends our way.

The devil is our adversary. He opposes us. His desire therefore is to harm us and orchestrate difficulty for us with regard to all that God is seeking to do in us and through us. The imagery of the lion is powerful. He is prowling, roaring, and aggressive. In that he is on the prowl, we can never think he does not notice or will overlook our movements. In that he is roaring, he is intimidating, feeling threatened and ready to attack. Some have interpreted this roaring as teaching that Satan is only capable of intimidation. But a lion who is roaring should not be viewed as somehow less dangerous. A lion roars when threatened and when cornered by that which he feels threatened by. It is true that Satan wins often by intimidating. But we must not imagine he cannot harm us.

Peter says that the devil seeks to devour. He is not in the business of just making life difficult for people. He is in the business of destroying them, taking away their lives and ministry if possible. We are vulnerable to him and create opportunity if we leave the boundaries of truth. This is illustrated well in the classic story Pilgrim's Progress. The enemy is pictured on a chain just short enough so that he cannot reach and harm those on the path. However if they leave the path they fall victim to him. It is a good picture of our needing to be alert to our own ways. In the final analysis this is all we can do. We cannot know his ways. If we walk in the pathway of truth we will be saved from his every scheme. Peter will speak next to how we can ensure our own safety.

5:9—“But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.”

The tactic that protects us from the devil is for us to resist (James 4:7). Much has been written over the centuries about renouncing Satan, rebuking him, binding him, and so on. We must remember that these are effective because they are a means of resisting him. Resistance was the tactic employed by Christ (Luke 4:1-13, Matthew 4:1-11). We stray from the path and become victims when our resistance creates superstition and superstitious routine about what we must do to keep ourselves and those dear to us safe. We can easily become unsettled in our faith and fall victims to Satan through such fear. Instead our routines are to be founded on truth and we are to be firm in our faith in that truth. Faith is always a matter of knowing and believing. It is knowing and believing against all the doubt that is a product of our own analysis and the analysis of evil people.

Peter cites one thing we are to know, the common experience our fellow-believers are having in this world. We are to know that trouble is simply a part of living this life as we are called to live it. What we experience in terms of trouble is common. Nothing has gone wrong and nothing has spun out of control. In fact, the expected and predictable has happened. Trouble is in its own way a confirmation of truth. We must remember this today, living in a pragmatic culture where what yields a desirable result is embraced as truth. We must embrace what revelation says is true. Truth, symbolically represented in Scripture as light, is our greatest asset in overcoming the obstacles placed in our path by the evil one.

We must avoid superstition in this matter. Among the heathen much attention is given and effort expended to cope with evil spirits. When we embrace ideas about Satan and demons that are beyond revelation we unknowingly give him greater power. Truth sets us free. Bacon wrote, “The master of superstition is the people, and in all superstition wise men follow fools.” That is a correct observation. We are mastered by what we believe to be true. We must be alert and circumspective so that we embrace as true only that which in fact is true. In this habit and practice we find protection.

5:10—“And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who calls you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.”

We are never told by Scripture that our protection against the evil one assures that we will not suffer harm. We are in a battle and we will be wounded. We will suffer pain. There are limits imposed on that suffering by God Himself.

Here He is called the God of all grace. He is the giver of favor as opposed to the author of trouble. When trouble comes into our lives it is governed by His grace. He only allows what He imparts grace to overcome. Our suffering is temporary, “for a little while.” Next to eternity it is nothing, though it unquestionably feels like it in the midst of it. In all trial and trouble, we must remember it is for a “little while.” That is one of the hardest things to do. Our days are limited. But we are destined for eternal glory. We have been summoned there by the king of the universe Himself. There is nothing and no one that can prevent our arrival there.

Peter speaks of four things God will do to make sure we get through the world we are in and get to that for which we are destined. He will perfect us. He will provide what is lacking in us, and help us to be all we need to be to answer the challenges of this life. He will confirm us. This means He will do what needs to be done to assure our status and privilege. He will not cast us off. He will at every turn embrace us as His own. He will strengthen us. He will impart to us what we need to rise to the challenge of each moment. We need not ever be concerned about power and adequacy. He will establish us. These things God will do. All of this implies safe arrival at a point where we are no longer threatened.

To this end we embrace what is referred to in theological terms as the “perseverance of the saints” and “the security of the believer,” and “eternal security.” We view these words spoken by Peter and the testimony of other Scripture as teaching that God has called certain individuals to His family and there is not a person or force that can thwart what He has sovereignly declared to be true of His adopted sons and daughters. They are His and cannot be taken from Him either by the act of their own will or that of another. They will come to faith in Him and to the point of embracing the gospel, by the work of His grace. He and his grace will never fall short of achieving what He Himself set about to do.

5:11—“To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

These are fitting words to follow what Peter has just stated. God’s goodness and grace are such that His rule is desired by any and all who begin to imagine the nature of things once His rule is actually established. His subjects have benefited so much already; what will be the outcome for them once opposition to Him is finally removed? Who would want such a rule to ever end: This then is a statement of the hope that Peter has continually reminded His readers of and it is a statement of worship and submission.

This is a statement that comes only from those taught by the Spirit. It is these who come to an understanding of the truth so that they desire for all time to take their places under the rule and authority of God.

The word “Amen,” meaning “so be it,” is an affirmation of this great desire. It is in us because “He is light,” the truth embodied. We have become convinced that “In Him there is no darkness,” none of the things that take the place of truth or truthfulness. We have the conviction that all that is bad, evil, painful, and sorrowful comes because of opposition to the truth. The light, truth, is what people unknowingly need, yet they love darkness. They suppress truth. Those who by God’s grace come to the light long for that light to burn brighter and to burn forever (see 1 John 1:5-7).

5:12—“Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!”

The concern of every writer in the New Testament was that among human beings a prescribed way of doing things seems always to be altered and changed along the way. This usually happens in the name of “wisdom,” but all of revelation from Genesis to Revelation, repeatedly reinforces the idea that this tendency always is disastrous. The line between willfulness and submission to God’s will is so easily crossed that we must draw the line rather far back. If men like Cain, Saul, Moses, and Solomon could address us they would likely tell us to do exactly what God says and not to settle for what is similar to what He says.

Peter’s purpose was to reinforce a pattern of life. It is the life of grace, experiencing the strengthening favor of God in every moment of every day. The life of grace does not mean a lifestyle where anything goes and no boundaries exist. It is a prescribed way of living, the basics of which have been re-stated by Peter.

We know little about Silvanus, who actually put Peter’s thoughts in writing, expressing the exact message Peter wished to communicate. We believe that this is the same individual who is called Silas in the book of Acts (chapters 15-18), and was referred to by Paul as Silvanus later on (2 Corinthians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1). The Greek used in this letter is high literary style. Sixty two words appear in the letter that do not occur elsewhere in the New Testament. We suspect that Silvanus was an educated man therefore, but here we are told simply that he was a faithful brother. That is a greater achievement than all the letters culture can bestow, to be found faithful. Peter notes that he himself regards Silvanus in this way. This may indicate that others did not and that Silvanus, like the other leaders of the day, was being discredited by some. It could simply be Peter’s personal endorsement of the words Silvanus had written, so that no doubt could be cast on them by anyone.

Peter makes known that the letter was written by he himself through Silvanus. They were his words meant to affirm what was true and command obedience to that truth.

5:13—“She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark.”

There has been considerable disagreement over how this verse is to be interpreted. Most believe that the “she” is actually a church congregation. A relative few presently believe that this refers to an individual. “She” is the rendering of the definite article in its feminine form, η. It could be rendered “the lady.” However, the Greek word for church, εκκλησια, is feminine, and so “the church” would be η εκκλησια. It would be appropriate for an abbreviated postscript in a letter such as this to be worded very concisely. To render it as meaning “the church” is an interpretation that makes sense.

The term Babylon has stirred debate as well. Some believe it is a reference to literal Babylon. There was a significant number of Jews there. It is not hard to envision Peter going there (again, seeking out and going to the Jews first), proclaiming the gospel and establishing a church. But there is strong tradition that places Peter in Rome and makes this term a symbolic term for Rome. This has been embraced by many.

There have been some who make this a symbolic term for Jerusalem. The location cannot be stated with absolute certainty, but most seem settled on Rome. Wherever they are Peter affirms their unity with those he is writing to.

All Christians have this common experience and heritage, that they were chosen together. There is no difference in their value and worth or in their experience of God's grace. Here we see that Peter had built into them an awareness of their fellow-believers in Asia Minor. We should never hold our faith in isolation from our larger family. It is bigger than us individually, and bigger than our particular local church. It is in fact bigger than the particular era we are living in.

Peter then sends greetings from "his son." In all likelihood this is the John Mark of Acts 12:12 and Acts 15:36-41. This was likely the same person who as a young man had fled naked at the arrest of Jesus (Mark 14:51-52). It was common for those who had been instrumental in the development of the faith of younger men to be viewed as their fathers. This reflects the closeness of the relationship between Mark and Peter. Just as Silvanus wrote this letter for Peter, we believe Mark wrote the Gospel of Mark from the accounting Peter gave him of the events, and so that gospel account came to have authority in the Church.

5:14—"Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all who are in Christ."

The normal method of greeting in that culture, the kiss, was to be specially meaningful to Christians. It was to be given with genuinely. It was to be supported and followed up with acts of love. Today our handshake in America, or our embrace, should be an expression of something inside us, not just a formality. That is the nature of Christian community and all of Christian living. We must go beyond expressing our faith and allow it to be authenticated by our deeds. Peter wants their greeting to be unpretentious.

Then Peter concludes with a blessing, a prayer for their peace. They were suffering. Their experience had been described by Peter as a "fiery trial." He has assured them that unjust suffering can be part of God's plan for us just as it was for Christ. We can be at peace in the midst of it, with God and with each other and with ourselves. His prayer for their peace likely includes a desire that their unjust suffering be brought to a close. But to be in Christ is to have the potential to be at peace regardless of circumstances. Yet it is not accurate to say that to be in Christ is to be at peace, for personal peace hinges on one's practice of the faith and one's strength in the faith. So this is Peter's prayer and his desire for them. It is his hope that they would rise to this experience of faith by the power of the Holy Spirit as they followed the counsel of his letter to them.