

Shepherding Notes

1 Peter

By Caleb Bunch

Today, we begin working our way through the two letters of Peter. To get our grounding, in our notes today, we are going to consider three main points to help us understand the point of this first letter.

Chief Apostle

Peter starts this book by describing himself as "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ." Although many often see Paul as "the great apostle" because of his extensive writings in the New Testament, Peter was the leader among the apostles. We see him progressively becoming more prominent in the gospels as the disciple who was often the first to respond to Jesus. Peter sometimes gets a bad reputation for being wrong or putting his foot in his mouth, but he was likely expressing what others were also thinking — he just happened to be the one willing to speak.

The word "apostle" literally means someone who has been set apart and sent by God for His mission. It carries with it immense authority. In Hebrews 3:1, Jesus is called an apostle — He is the chief apostle of our faith. The Roman Catholic tradition falsely claims that Peter was the first pope. There are myriad reasons why that is blatantly false:

- Peter was married: Matthew 8:14, Mark 1:30, Luke 4:38
- Peter was a sinner who made errors, even many years after the resurrection of Christ. He was rightly rebuked for his sin by Paul: Galatians 2:11–14
- Peter refers to himself simply as a "fellow elder": 1 Peter 5:1
- At the first church council in Jerusalem, it was the apostle James, not Peter, who seems to be leading the group and making the final call: Acts 15:1–21
- "Pope" is not a biblical office. It is a political invention of the RC church. You won't find anything like it in the pages of Scripture.

Audience

Peter is writing these words to "the elect exiles." He is writing to the church during a time of intense persecution. It is widely believed that this letter was written around 62 AD. Nero was the emperor, and he hated and persecuted the Christians. Peter is calling on

the suffering believers to persevere in their faith and, in doing so, they obtain "the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." (vs. 9)

Promises

Peter will address a variety of trials that these beleaguered Christians were experiencing. But his remedy is not to focus on what they have lost by following Christ, but what they have gained. Just think how the opening verses are designed to remove our focus from earthly, material wealth and to salvation and its effects. Let's consider verses 3–5 in eight parts.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy:"

People who are suffering hardships and persecutions can sometimes have difficulty seeing that God has been merciful to them. Peter is seeking to remind them that God is not out to get them and that He has not forgotten them. Even now, even under the persecution of Nero, they are to bless God for His great mercy.

"He has caused us to be born again:"

As Jonah says, "salvation is of the Lord." If you were born physically, you were not born of your own will or volition — you were passive in your origins. God uses that metaphor because you likewise do not choose to be born again. He, God the Father, causes the new birth.

"To a living hope:"

Our new birth brings us into assured blessings. Hope in the Bible does not mean a wish for a particular outcome. It is a settled confidence of a specific future blessing. And this hope is not dead — it is alive.

"Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead:"

Our hope is alive because Jesus is alive. Our new birth has come to us as a gift of the Father, but only because of the resurrection of Jesus. The reason you can have hope today is that Jesus is alive.

"To an inheritance:"

Peter is seeking to remind these suffering saints that even though they have lost much in terms of earthly wealth, they have been given a greater treasure. An inheritance's value is determined by the wealth of the one who gave it. By declaring that we are to receive an

inheritance, God claims us as His family and promises us a share in heaven, the greater promised land.

"That is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you."

Earthly things can be destroyed or defiled by ourselves or others. Our wealth can fade. The promised outcome of our faith is safe and secure under lock and key in heaven. Nobody can mess with that.

"Who, by God's power, are being guarded through faith:"

Your faith is not only a gift from God at its origin point. Your ongoing faith is a tool God provides to keep you from stumbling.

"For a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

Peter's focus is what is often called "final salvation" — when those who have been saved by grace through faith finally come to the end of this life and experience the full blessing of their salvation.

"Our hope is alive because Jesus is alive. The reason you can have hope today is that Jesus is alive — and your inheritance is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you."

1 Peter 2 speaks about four "stones" — each revealing a different aspect of who Jesus is and what it means to build our lives upon Him.

The Cornerstone — Orient Your Life Around Jesus

vs. 6

"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

Jesus is the foundational rock upon which the church is built. This cornerstone is the stone that would be placed first in a building — all other subsequent stones were placed in accordance to its location. This metaphor illustrates that every true believer's life should align with Jesus. Take stock of your life. Are there any obvious areas where your life doesn't align with the cornerstone? What about your actions when you're alone? What about your thoughts? Align your life to reflect the dimensions of Jesus' life.

The Keystone — Honor the Lord Jesus

vs. 7

"So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone...'"

Although most translations render this word as "cornerstone," your Bible probably includes a note that this is a different Greek word, better translated as "capstone" or "keystone." This is not speaking about the rock that was laid first, but instead speaking about the one that was placed at the top of an arch, or the top of a pyramid, or above the city gate. They were elaborate stones designed to receive all of the attention and glory.

The point of Jesus being the Keystone is that He is worthy of the honor and glory. I think that all of us would probably say that we honor God and desire to glorify Christ. But what does that actually look like in your life? Look to Him. Seek His face. Behold Him. It is in beholding Christ that we are transformed into His image. "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

The Stumbling Block — Tell Others About Jesus

vs. 8

"A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." A stumbling stone was like an ancient form of speed bump. You cannot simply drive over one without the wheels of your cart or chariot being shattered. It forced attention.

What do you expect will happen when you tell people about Jesus? There is no option for indecision. There is no middle ground. There is no gray area. Jesus is a stumbling stone, and anyone who hears the gospel will either come to love Him or be shattered by Him.

The imagery of Jesus as a stumbling block is not designed to discourage you from proclaiming the gospel. Rather, it highlights the need to preach the good news. Telling them that there is a speed bump ahead is the only thing that could save them from being destroyed by it.

The Living Stone — Meditate on the Life We Receive Through Jesus

vs. 4

"As you come to him, a living stone..."

Peter's chief goal at the outset of this book has been to instill hope and peace into a persecuted people. How did He do that? By reminding them that they have been born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and that He has made them living stones to be built up into a spiritual house of worship.

The authors of the New Testament are appropriately obsessed with the idea that Jesus is not only alive, but is also our life. Unlike other stones, Jesus lives. He is able to be our life because He is alive. He is able to make us into living stones because He is a living stone.

"Look to Him. Seek His face. Behold Him. It is in beholding Christ that we are transformed into His image — from one degree of glory to another."

Wives

Every marriage is a shadow pointing to the substance of the gospel. Your marriage is a dim, imperfect reflection of the relationship between Christ and the church. Depending on how you carry out your calling, you will either highlight the glorious gospel or distort its image.

Command 1 — Portray the Gospel Visually, Not Just Audibly. Submission is always voluntary. It is a willful following of leadership. It does not mean that you are never permitted to share your perspective or opinion. God has given wisdom to both wives and husbands. Ladies, don't underestimate this role. Your voice could be a source of great discouragement as your husband seeks to lead — or it could be a source of extreme help as you talk through things together with him, pray with him, and remind him of what the Word teaches.

Submission is not the same as agreement. Submission happens when you don't agree on something — it occurs when you're not fully on board with a direction, but you still willingly follow your husband's leadership. Submission does not mean that you are less than your husband in the eyes of God. The best evidence of this is that Jesus Himself was submissive to the Father. Moreover, He was also submissive to His earthly parents, even though He is the very one who created and formed every molecule in their bodies. Jesus submitted to His earthly parents because they were put over Him for a particular time. It did not mean that His value was diminished.

Notice the effect that Peter has in view. He argues that unbelieving husbands "may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct." Peter is not suggesting that anyone will ever come to saving faith apart from hearing the gospel. His point is, you won't have to pester him with words.

Command 2 — Pursue Genuine Beauty, Not Temporal Adornment. The point Peter is getting at is simple: whose eye are you trying to catch? Who are you trying to impress? The goal should be to do that which is precious in God's sight. He is not looking at the outward appearance — He is looking at the heart. What God deems of imperishable beauty is the gentle and quiet spirit. Adorn the hidden person of the heart.

Command 3 — Pattern Godly Examples, Not Worldly Agendas. The words Peter uses to describe a godly wife are: submissive, respectful, pure, gentle, quiet, and modest — essentially the polar opposite of the modern-day feminist movement. Peter was speaking into a culture that was filled with many of the very same philosophical perversions that marriages face today.

He holds up Sarah as the example. Notice something so incredibly easy to overlook. Sarah is not talking to anyone but herself, and she is talking about how old she is and how decrepit her husband is. But she doesn't mock him or belittle him. Instead, even in mumbling these words to herself, she says, "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?" We often talk about being sons of Abraham. But Peter tells us that daughters of Sarah is an exclusive group of those women who imitate her faith through honoring their own husbands.

Husbands

Command 1 — Live in an Understanding Way, Not Insensitive Neglect. Husbands, we are not called to lead just by making decisions. We are called to live with our wives by seeking to understand them. Like a scientist who is captivated by the reactions he is seeing in a microscope, make it your mission to understand what is going on in your wife's heart and mind. Tom Schreiner puts it like this in his commentary: "The phrase 'in an understanding way' calls husbands to live with their wives with insight and sensitivity, recognizing their needs and their equal standing as heirs of God's grace. This involves treating her with kindness, respect, and attentiveness, acknowledging her as a partner in the journey of faith."

Command 2 — Lead by Honoring, Not Dominating. "Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life." (vs. 7) Many religions and cultures teach husbands to rule their homes with an iron fist. This is nothing like Christian marriage. Since the wife is the weaker vessel, it is the husband's responsibility to show honor to her. The Bible consistently holds the stronger accountable to protect and provide for the weaker.

Jesus is infinitely stronger than everything else in the universe combined. Yet, He is gentle and lowly and tells us to take His yoke upon us so that we might find rest for our souls. His desire is not to use His strength to harm us or even burden us — it is His delight to use His strength to remove the burden from us and free us. Husbands, you will never

be able to lead your wife well if you are leading out of intimidation, or yelling, or demanding, or scowling. Lead with meekness by letting your strength be completely subsumed with gentleness.

Command 3 — Let Your Prayers Be Consistent, Not Hindered. Husbands, your loving leadership of your wife is somehow intricately interlaced with how effective you will be in prayer. Your physical strength will never accomplish anything lasting, but God does work in lasting ways through prayer. If the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much, it seems to track that the ineffective prayer of an unrighteous man avails little at best. Don't let your prayers be hindered by selfishness and a domineering heart. Husbands, reflect the love of Christ toward your wife.

"Every marriage is a shadow pointing to the substance of the gospel. Depending on how you carry out your calling, you will either highlight the glorious gospel or distort its image."

Today, we will focus on three quick points. In the first six verses, Peter talks about the Christian life in negative terms, meaning he tells us what not to do. Starting in verse 7, he shifts to speaking positively about what we should do.

For the Sake of Your Prayers

vs. 7

"The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers." Notice something interesting here. Prayer is usually the verb in Scripture — we are told to "pray so that..." But here, the commands for self-control and sober-mindedness are grounded in a particular action. This is the kind of self-control that leads you to say "no" to less valuable things and "yes" to prayer. It is also a sober-mindedness that causes us to see our inability, frailty, and finitude, and to turn to Christ, who alone can help. As my friend Peter Nicotra once told me, "Prayer is war." It is hard because our flesh wants us to find any other pathway to solve our problems rather than turning to the Lord. The first positive command in 1 Peter 4 is to cultivate these qualities that lead to fervent prayer.

Love Earnestly

vs. 8

"Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins." Love is not something that happens to you. "Earnestly" indicates that loving one another sincerely and fervently requires intentionality and effort. This is the same word used to describe the way Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane — likely the most intense prayer ever uttered. (Luke 22:44) You will never love someone earnestly by accident. There must be a purposeful course of action that you pursue to provide practical care for them.

The fact that Peter writes "since love covers a multitude of sins" indicates that the people to whom you are to show this love are the same people who have sinned against you. To be clear, this does not mean that your love for an individual erases their sin debt before God — "God alone can forgive sins." (Mark 2:7) So, what does it mean that "love covers a multitude of sins?" Simply put, it means that if you love someone, you will find it possible to forgive them.

Show Hospitality

vs. 9

"Show hospitality to one another without grumbling." Hospitality is a specific way to express love to others. It involves generously sharing what God has given you with another person. Hospitality can take many forms, such as inviting a church visitor to lunch after service, welcoming someone into your home for dinner, hosting a missionary for a week during their visit, or housing an intern for the summer. Hospitality doesn't need to be complicated, but it is often inconvenient by design. Essentially, hospitality means committing to meet the needs of someone for whom you have no obligation.

Sometimes giving of ourselves can come from a grudging sense of obligation, which leads to grumbling. Instead, reflect on the hospitality Christ has shown you and let the gospel motivate you to joyfully and generously practice hospitality.

"Prayer is war. It is hard because our flesh wants us to find any other pathway to solve our problems rather than turning to the Lord."

Today we close out our time in 1 Peter. As the chief apostle closes out his first letter, he first gives a brief exhortation to the elders of these dispersed churches, that they would shepherd the flock of God among them.

Shepherds

Peter speaks directly to the elders, referring to them as "fellow elders." This displays his humility. He does not abuse his apostolic authority, but acknowledges that each elder is called to shepherd the flock of God that is "among you." It is helpful to know that the words elder, bishop, and pastor all speak about the same office, just different aspects of it.

- Elder = Presbuteros — Speaking to the maturity of a leader.
- Pastor/Shepherd = Poimen — Speaking to the care and nurture of the flock.
- Bishop/Overseer = Episkopos — Speaking to the administration of oversight of ministry.

Watch how Peter uses all of these terms interchangeably in 1 Peter 5:1-2: "So I exhort the elders (Presbuteros) among you, as a fellow elder... shepherd (Poimante) the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight (Episkopountes) not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly..."

Elders/Pastors/Overseers are called to lead with a servant's heart, reflecting Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd, who laid down His life for the sheep (John 10:11). This voluntary oversight emphasizes caring eagerly and setting an example — focused on protecting, feeding, and guiding the vulnerable flock through trials, rather than seeking power or profit. When Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, returns, faithful leaders will receive "the unfading crown of glory."

Humility

Let's spend just a few minutes tracing out what Peter is getting at when he speaks about humility in chapter 5. Remember the context of this book — these words are being written to Christians who are experiencing severe persecution. It is not coincidental that after telling these believers to humble themselves, Peter immediately speaks about their cares (vs. 7), the lion-like exploits of the devil (vs. 8), the global suffering of the

brotherhood of Christ (vs. 9), and the temporary but genuine nature of suffering (vs. 10). How do these various trials relate to humility?

Consider this: have you ever gone through some kind of challenge and thought to yourself, "I don't deserve this!" Questions like these, even when they are non-verbal attitudes, are evidence of pride. There is only one person who never deserved to suffer, and He suffered much more greatly than we ever will — and He did it voluntarily. Peter is trying to help these persecuted believers understand that suffering for the sake of the name of Jesus Christ is a form of humility. It is an acknowledgment that Jesus is worthy of your fealty, even at the risk of your life.

The great news is that the Lord has not left you alone in the fight. As we humble ourselves, we are promised that the Lord will raise us up in due time (vs. 8). When we cast even these massive cares onto the Lord, He cares for us (vs. 9). When we resist the devil and endure trials, we will receive eternal blessings (vs. 10). And, even if we lose something here in this life, we are promised that Jesus Himself will "restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you." There is never a sacrifice that you will make for Jesus that you will ultimately regret. It will all be proven worth it.

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