

I want to thank the folks who took the services while I was on holiday. We have been looking at 1 Peter which, although a short letter, is packed with good stuff. Peter is writing to scattered groups of believers, many of whom are young in the faith. He is writing to them to instruct them in the practical consequences of living out the faith and to warn them how to cope with persecution.

There is some deep theology in the letter, mainly in the first two chapters with the practical things towards the end:

Doctrine of God – The trinity; God is sovereign, therefore he can be trusted; He is holy, therefore we should copy him; He is our Father, therefore we should live up to the family name.

Doctrine of Christ – He was sinless, obedient and prepared to suffer for us; he died and rose again and we must die to sin and live in his risen power; his work is seen in terms of redemption, reconciliation, sin-offering and substitute.

Doctrine of the Holy Spirit – He is the agent of sanctification, the author of scripture and the one who enables preachers of the gospel to do their work.

Doctrine of the church – Peter talks of the corporate nature of the people of God that we enter into at new birth; the church is built by God on the foundation of Christ and, as such, is the inheritor of the blessings promised to Israel. Its functions are to offer worship to God and witness to people

Doctrine of eschatology – He talks about the return of Christ and reminds his readers that the unseen Jesus is never far away; he points them to the glories they will share when he returns; it will be the consummation of salvation and entry into their full inheritance, that moment when faith is fully honoured and the full extent of God's grace discovered; Expectancy of his return is a most compelling argument for holy living and careful stewardship now.

Chapter five starts with a word to the elders and young men but that is because it would only have been men who could go on to be leaders and elders in those days. In these infant churches people were chosen to take spiritual charge and it was a big responsibility. Being an elder is still a big responsibility and one that must not be taken lightly. The elder has two roles: first, to teach, exhort and discipline the members; second, to feed and nurture the flock and protect them from danger. In those days the danger would have been people who came with false teaching about Jesus or tried to make the gentile men be circumcised. Elders still have that role today – if someone at the front says something without giving a reference for it or it is obviously wrong then elders, and I would suggest anyone else as well, should

challenge it. This is not my personal platform for me to spout whatever new idea takes my fancy. This is a place from which God's word should be opened, revered and spoken. It is a tremendous privilege to preach but it is also a huge responsibility. The preacher is supposed to have prepared so that what is spoken are words given and used by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Good News of the gospel. Jesus should be proclaimed and honoured. Faith should be encouraged and lives should be changed. If that's not happening then it's up to the elders to find out why and takes steps to put it right.

Elders are to be people who take the responsibility of leadership after considering the cost and not because of any perceived benefit they might get from it. Elders have a degree of authority but that authority must be used in the right way.

The Message puts it like this: *I have a special concern for you church leaders. I know what it's like to be a leader, in on Christ's sufferings as well as the coming glory. Here's my concern: that you care for God's flock with all the diligence of a shepherd. Not because you have to, but because you want to please God. Not calculating what you can get out of it, but acting spontaneously. Not bossily telling others what to do, but tenderly showing them the way.*

As a consequence of his advice to elders Peter urges younger people to show them suitable respect and calls for a mutual attitude of humility. True humility comes from the inside. A humble person understands that they are unworthy in God's sight and as Isaiah writes, '*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.*' (64:6) Humility understands that we rely totally on the grace of God and that all we are and all we have is in Jesus.

It is hard to be humble though and I wonder if that's because pride was Satan's chief sin when he wanted to be equal with God and that's what happened in the Garden with Adam and Eve – they were disobedient because they wanted to be like God. Maybe you're sitting there saying but I don't want to be equal with God but pride is often about making ourselves look better, or going our way, doing what we want rather than what God wants. It's easy to fall into the trap. And that's why we must be self-controlled and alert.

Verse 8: Be self-controlled and alert. This is the third time Peter has urged self control: 1 Peter 1:13 In order to serve Christ we must be self-controlled and prepared for action; 1 Peter 4:7 In order that we can pray effectively we need to be self-controlled and clear minded. Here, in order to keep the devil from devouring us we need to remain alert and self-controlled.

The devil tries to devour or destroy us by leading us into sin and disobedience. The devil tries to destroy our fellowship by creating conflict among us. (Prom Day) He tries to destroy our faith by producing doubt and fear in our minds.

God is stronger than the devil and has already won the victory over him at the cross. He appears as a roaring lion but he can only create as much trouble as God allows – trials and temptations are allowed because they should make us grow. We are expected to turn to God in the trial rather than try to fix things ourselves.

We are expected to do our part in standing firm: being self-controlled and alert is the first thing. Mark 14:38 *Stay awake and pray that you won't be tested. You want to do what is right, but you are weak.* We need to pray that we won't fall into temptation, but if we do we will know how to respond and have the faith to do it. Ephesians 6:11-13 *Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.*

What is that armour? **The belt of truth** – Satan is known as the father of lies and they can only be defeated by the truth.

the breastplate of righteousness – believers are declared righteous by God through our faith in Christ. Satan will question our faith and try to make us question whether God is really for us. He will remind us that we are sinners and unrighteous but the breastplate of righteousness reminds us that is not how God sees us – we are God's holy and anointed people, a people set apart by him and for him and made right with him through faith in Christ.

Shoes of the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace – we need to be ready to share the gospel with others. Someone yesterday told me they don't think of it as 'sharing the gospel', 'outreach' or 'evangelism' but simply as sharing their story. Nobody can take your story of faith from you and as you share what God has done for you it is up to other people what they do with it.

The shield of faith – when we raise our shield we can have complete confidence in God's power. In Peter's day a soldier's shield was big enough to protect the entire body and our shield of faith will protect us from fear, discouragement, confusion and doubt.

The helmet of salvation – putting on the helmet is similar to availing yourself of all the Christ offers in his saving work. You are taking to yourself the power of the resurrected Jesus and trusting him for salvation.

The sword of the Spirit – where the first five pieces are defensive the sword of the Spirit is both defensive and offensive. As we read the word we are reminded of our place with God and his promises to us. In the wilderness Jesus resisted temptation by responding ‘it is written’. Knowing God’s word is so important. Hebrews 4: 12 *For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*

The sword of the Spirit is intended to enable us to defeat Satan and to enlarge the Kingdom of God where we are.

Having done all that we are then in a position to do what Peter commands in verse 9 – resist the devil. It is important to note that he continues with standing firm in the faith. We cannot defeat the devil on our own. We can only do it when we stand firm in Christ.

Last Sunday in Desert Hills Jim started his sermon with a couple of questions – are you the kind of person who when you wake up the devil says, “Oh, no he’s awake”? or the kind of person who enters a room and the devil says, “Oh no, she’s here. Time to go”? I sat there thinking to myself, “I’m not like that. I can’t imagine the devil being wary of me.” That’s what this chapter is about though. It’s a reminder that we are children of God – God who has already defeated the devil and when we stand in faith in him the devil has no choice but flee. James 4:7-8 *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.*