

Hope When Life is Hard...



A VERSE BY VERSE
EXPOSITION OF
THE EPISTLE OF
FIRST PETER

Standing Firm

1 Peter 5:12-14 (711)

Over the years some have suggested that 1 Peter is not a letter at all but a catechetical instruction to accompany the sacrament of baptism or even a liturgy for the baptismal service (3:18-22). Others have argued that 1 Peter is an early Christian hymn or confession of faith (2:21-24; 3:18-22). From the very first sermon we settled on the view that 1 Peter is a Christian letter - a letter of "578 different Greek words" (Hillyer, p. 5); a letter of 105 verses; a letter following the standard form of thousands of other letters of that era. And this standard form applies to the closing of this wonderful document.

1 Peter 5:12-14...*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! ¹³ She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark. ¹⁴ Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all who are in Christ.*

Let's look first at verse 13. It was customary in letters of that day to add greetings from those who were with the author at the time. We believe that Peter wrote this letter in Rome. *She who is in Babylon* is a reference to the church in

that city. In the Old Testament Babylon, of course, was the city into which Israel was exiled. With this name Peter continues the imagery of the church as the new people of God, the true Israel which he introduced in **1:1** (*dispersion*). So Peter is saying that the whole church at Rome, those saved by the electing grace of God (*chosen together with you*), *sends you greetings*. A man named *Mark* is also included in the greetings. This is probably the John Mark who went with Paul on his first missionary journey (**Acts 12:12; 13:5, 13; 15:37-40; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11**). It is noteworthy that both *Silvanus* and *Mark*, co-workers of the Apostle Paul, should be linked with Peter at this late stage in his career.

1 Peter was originally an encyclical letter intended to be read aloud in the various Christian assemblies scattered *throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia* (**1:1**). These five regions made up a significant portion of the area of present-day Turkey, northern Asia Minor. The Christian church had probably taken root in the tribal villages shortly after Pentecost. From **Acts 2:9** we know that people from *Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia* were in Jerusalem at that time. And it may be that the believers who were scattered on account of the persecution that arose after the stoning of Stephen preached the gospel in these regions. And according to **5:12** it may very well be that *Silvanus*, we also know him as Silas, the missionary companion of Paul, delivered this letter and that he had a part in its composition.

Indeed, Peter says he has written *through Silvanus, our faithful brother*. Silas was a Roman citizen (**Acts 16:37**) and a leading member of the church at Jerusalem (**Acts 15:22**). Apparently Silas was present at the Council in Jerusalem when the status of Gentile converts was debated (**Acts 15:2, 6-7a**). After the Council Silas (along with Paul, Barnabas, and Judas Barsabbas) was sent by the

church at Jerusalem to welcome into fellowship the Gentiles converted through the church of Antioch (**Acts 15:22-35**). From Antioch Silas accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey (**Acts 15:40; 16:25, 29; 17:10, 14-15; 18:5**) through Syria, Asia Minor, Macedonia and Thessalonica. When Paul left for Athens Silas stayed at Berea (**Acts 17:14**) and then rejoined Paul at Corinth (**Acts 18:5**). Silas was mentioned by Paul in the letters written from Corinth (**1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; see 2 Cor. 1:19 and Acts 15:32**). From Corinth they eventually made their way back to Antioch (**Acts 18:22**). Silas is not mentioned again until this reference to him in **1 Peter 5:12**. At the time of this writing Silas was with Peter in Rome.

Peter regarded Silas (*for so I regard him*) as a *faithful brother*. He was trusted and valued by the church in Jerusalem, by the Apostle Paul, and by Peter as well. Certainly he had preached the gospel faithfully. He had faithfully taught and encouraged the churches. He had endured beatings, hardship, and imprisonment for the sake of the gospel. I think it adds to the richness of this letter to know that such a man as Silas was with Peter, had a part in the composition of this letter to struggling Christians and, quite possibly, may have actually delivered it to them. What a challenge for us to be the same kind of faithful brothers to the end of our days. When Peter wrote, “*Stand firm*” he was in the company of a man who had, over his lifetime, done just that.

Why did Peter dispatch his faithful friend from Rome to make such a long and arduous journey? The fact is that the Christians in Asia Minor were suffering – struggling under the harassment, abuse, intimidation, social ostracism, and sporadic persecution of the unbelieving culture around them. Naturally the heart of the apostle went out to them.

Fred Craddock says, "Clearly 1 Peter was written to encourage the Christians of Asia Minor, to call them to confidence in the power of God, to renew hope, to help them find meaning in their sufferings, and to urge them to stay together in mutual support" (*First and Second Peter and Jude*, p. 14-15). John N. D. Kelly says, "This letter ... presents itself as a message of encouragement from the Apostle Peter to Christian communities in Asia Minor which are bewildered by the cruel treatment and persecution to which they are being subjected" (*The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, p. 1). 1 Peter is an extraordinary message of encouragement. It is to this end that Peter says, "*I have written to you briefly.*"

Let's look at spiritual encouragement in broad terms. The English word "encourage" has three basic meanings: (1) to cheer (gladden) or to inspire with courage or hope, (2) to stimulate or spur on, (3) to give help or aid. This is pretty consistent with what we see in the Bible.

In the New Testament we see the saints comforting one another. **1 Thessalonians 5:14**, *encourage the fainthearted*. Peter's aim is to comfort, to cheer the brokenhearted and the dispirited among us. In the New Testament we see the saints propping up or supporting one another in regard to their faith. **1 Thessalonians 3:2**, *and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to **strengthen** and encourage you **as to your faith***. Peter's hope is that each of us is established firmly in the faith - that each one is assured of his or her salvation; that each one is resting entirely upon the merits of Christ; that each one is utterly convinced of the truth of the gospel. In the New Testament we see the saints spurring one another on in living a distinctly Christian life. **Hebrews 10:24**, *and let us consider how to **stimulate** one another to love and good deeds*. Peter, of course, wants to stimulate us in doing what is proper for Christians.

In the New Testament we see the saints refreshing one another.

Romans 15:32, *so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find **refreshing rest in your company**.*

Peter's aim is to refresh us; to help lift our burdens; to give rest to our souls; to cause our hearts to rejoice. In the New Testament we see the saints urging one another forward in ministry initiatives.

Acts 18:27, *and when [Apollos] wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren **encouraged** him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he helped greatly those who had believed through grace.*

In the New Testament we also see the saints appealing to one another (**1 Tim. 5:1**), urging one another (**Acts 14:21-22**), and exhorting one another (**1 Thess. 4:10**) to love and godly conduct. Surely, Peter is hopeful that his letter contributes to all of these righteous ends in the lives of his readers.

But Peter states this purpose in a very specific way in verse 12 - ***exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!*** Peter is testifying or bearing witness. His letter in its entirety is a testimony to the *grace of God* in Jesus Christ and he urges us to *stand firm in it*. Peter is appointed as an apostle (**1 Pet. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1**). Apostles are appointed to testify or bear witness to the facts and truth (**2 Pet. 1:12**) of the gospel. This was certainly Paul's understanding. He says in **Romans 1:1**, *Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God*. This was Peter's understanding as well (**1 Peter 1:12; 2 Peter 1:16**). The gospel is the good news of the grace of God in Christ (see **1 Peter 1:10**

and 1:13) - that unmerited favor of God poured out on undeserving sinners in the person of Jesus Christ. Peter's exhortation is this. You have received the gospel of God's grace. Stand fast in it. **Romans 5:2** speaks of *this grace in which we stand*. Dr. Clowney says, we must "cling to the grace of God; not what we have done for God, but what God has done for us in Christ" (p. 223). Here's the point. **We cling to the gospel in any and all hardship**. According to **Hebrews 6:19** it is the hope of the gospel that anchors the soul.

In Peter's words we *stand firm in it*. Greek, like English, has synonyms - different words that mean much the same thing. Here in **1 Peter 5:12** we have the imperative *stand firm*. But words such as *hold fast*, *be steadfast*, and *continue* are used elsewhere in the New Testament to communicate the same idea. I want to bring this broader testimony to bear to flesh out all that Peter, Paul, and others had in mind when they encouraged the believers to *stand firm*. The word "continue" captures the spirit of what this is all about. And remember, we not only stand firm "**in**" grace, but we also stand firm "**by**" grace.

To *stand firm* in grace is to continue in apostolic doctrine (orthodoxy). The danger in hardship is to reject the historic faith on account of which you may be suffering in the first place.

2 Thessalonians 2:15 *So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.*

Jude 3 *Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.*

From 1 Peter alone we understand that this faith is Trinitarian (1:2). It speaks of a God who elects and calls sinners to Himself (1:1, 10). It speaks of the one living and true God who forgives sins (1:2), who grants an eternal inheritance (1:4), who mercifully preserves His people in faith (1:5). It speaks of a suffering Savior who died in the place of guilty sinners that we might have eternal life (2:24; 3:18).

Standing firm is more than a tenacious affirmation of orthodoxy. Standing firm is no passive thing. Standing firm is not merely taking a defensive position. Standing firm embraces not only our doctrine but the entire scope of our lives. Indeed ...

To *stand firm* in grace is to continue in fellowship and in corporate worship. The danger in time of hardship is to withdraw, to pull away from the community of faith.

Hebrews 10:24-25 *and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.*

To *stand firm* in grace is to continue in the Word and Sacrament. The danger in time of hardship is to neglect the means of grace.

2 Timothy 3:14-17 *You, however, **continue** in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; ¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the **sacred writings** which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All **Scripture** is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ that the*

*man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. Of the sacrament **1 Corinthians 11:26** says, for as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death **until He comes.***

To *stand firm* in grace is to continue in humility toward God and in submission to your brothers and sisters in the Lord. The danger in hardship is to harden your heart and to nurse a sour attitude toward both God and man.

1 Peter 5:5-6 *You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with **humility** toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. ⁶ **Humble yourselves**, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time.*

To *stand firm* in grace is to continue in ministry. The danger in hardship is to bail out, to simply walk away from one's responsibilities to and in the covenant community.

1 Peter 4:10 *as each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

Beloved, we are men under orders. How extraordinary that a man should exempt himself from the call of God and from stewardship of His grace gift to you.

1 Corinthians 15:57-58 *but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brethren, **be steadfast, immovable**, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.*

Acts 14:5-7 *And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone [Paul and Barnabas], ⁶ they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region; ⁷ and there they **continued** to preach the gospel.*

To *stand firm* in grace is to continue to do right according to the Scripture. The danger in hardship is to actually indulge and excuse (rationalize) sinful behavior. **1 Thessalonians 5:21-22** says, *hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.* Peter has hammered the fire out of this one. **1:15** *be holy in all your behavior.* **1:17** *conduct yourselves in fear.* **2:12** *keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles.* Six times in this letter he mentions *doing what is right* (**2:14, 15, 20; 3:6, 17; 4:19**). He speaks of *good deeds* (**2:12**), of *doing good* (**3:11, 13**), and of *good behavior in Christ* (**3:16**).

To *stand firm* in grace is to continue in brotherly affection. Hardship can put a strain on relationships. The danger in hardship is that self-interests are allowed to trump the larger issues of the reputation and advance of the gospel.

1 Peter 4:8a *above all, keep fervent in your love for one another.*

Philippians 1:27 *Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are **standing firm** in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.*

To *stand firm* in grace is to continue in watchfulness. The danger in temporal hardship is to forget who the real enemy is.

Ephesians 6:11, 13, 14 *Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to **stand firm** against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able **to resist** in the evil day, and having done everything, to **stand firm**. ¹⁴ **Stand firm** therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness.*

2 Peter 3:17-18 *You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, **be on your guard** lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own **steadfastness**, ¹⁸ but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

And so we conclude our study with the closing of the letter itself. *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! ¹³ She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark. ¹⁴ Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all who are in Christ.*

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She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark.

She who is in Babylon is a reference to the _____ in that city (Rome). Mark is probably the John Mark who went with Paul on his first missionary journey (Acts 12:12; 13:5, 13; 15:37-40; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11).

**through Silvanus [Silas], our faithful brother,
I have written to you briefly**

“This letter ... presents itself as **a message of encouragement** from the Apostle Peter to Christian communities in Asia Minor which are bewildered by the cruel treatment and persecution to which they are being subjected.”
(John N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*)

**Spiritual encouragement in broad terms
In the New Testament we see the saints ...**

_____ one another (**1 Thess. 5:14**)
_____ one another in regard to their faith (**1 Thess. 3:2**)
(that each one is assured of his or her salvation; that each one is resting entirely upon the merits of Christ; that each one is utterly convinced of the truth of the gospel)
_____ one another on in living a distinctly Christian life (**Heb. 10:24**)
_____ one another (**Rom. 15:32**)
urging one another forward in ministry initiatives (**Acts 18:27**)

appealing to one another (1 Tim. 5:1), urging one another (Acts 14:21-22), and exhorting one another to _____ and godly _____ (1 Thess. 4:10)

**exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God.
Stand firm in it!**

We must “cling to the grace of God; not what we have done for God,
but what God has done for us in Christ.”
(Edmund Clowney, 1 Peter).

Here's the point:

We cling to the _____ in any and all hardship.

Stand firm in it!

To *stand firm* in grace is to continue in _____ doctrine (orthodoxy) (2 Thess. 2:15; Jude 3). The danger in hardship is to _____ the historic faith on account of which you may be suffering in the first place.

To *stand firm* in grace is to continue in _____ and in corporate worship (Heb. 10:24-25). The danger in time of hardship is to _____ from the community of faith.

To *stand firm* in grace is to continue in the _____ and _____ (2 Tim. 3:14-17; 1 Cor. 11:26). The danger in time of hardship is to _____ the means of grace.

To *stand firm* in grace is to continue in _____ toward God and in submission to your brothers and sisters in the Lord (1 Pet. 5:5-6). The danger in hardship is to harden your heart and to nurse a _____ toward both God and man.

To *stand firm* in grace is to continue in _____ (1 Pet. 4:10; 1 Cor. 15:57-58; Acts 14:5-7). The danger in hardship is to bail out, to simply _____ from one's responsibilities to and in the covenant community.

To *stand firm* in grace is to continue to do _____ according to the Scripture (1 Thess. 5:21-22; 1 Pet. 1:15, 17; 2:12, 14, 15, 20; 3:6, 11, 13, 16, 17; 4:19). The danger in hardship is to actually indulge and _____ (rationalize) sinful behavior.

To *stand firm* in grace is to continue in brotherly _____ (1 Pet. 4:8a; Phil. 1:27). Hardship can put a strain on relationships. The danger in hardship is that self-interests are allowed to _____ the larger issues of the reputation and advance of the gospel.

To *stand firm* in grace is to continue in _____ (Eph. 6:11, 13, 14; 2 Pet. 3:17-18). The danger in temporal hardship is to _____ who the real enemy is.