

The Kirk at Work

(kirk n. *Scot. & N. of Eng.* A church)

1 Peter 5:1-14

Series: **TRIED BY FIRE**

David H. Roper

Comedian Lenny Bruce, in one of his routines, told about a convention of Chrysler automobile dealers who held a raffle in which they gave away a 1958 Presbyterian church! I have always appreciated that, not because I have anything against Presbyterians Mr. Bruce could have selected any denomination or group of our brothers and sisters -- but because it indicates something of the way the world looks at the church today. Worldlings do not take the church seriously, and I cannot blame them. Yet this circumstance is in contrast to what the Scriptures say about the nature of the church, so there must be something radically wrong - we must be doing something wrong.

We saw in our last study that Christ intends the church to be the support structure for all of life. All of society rests upon the church -- not the institutional church but the church-at-large, the body of Christ. When God sets out to change the nature of society, he begins with the church. Judgment must take place first within the household of God. And as we saw in the paragraph preceding chapter 5, all of the unjust suffering experienced by the people to whom Peter wrote in Asia Minor was the hand of God in their life, to purge and refine the church, and to make it what God intends it to be. The section we will look at now, beginning with verse, 1 of chapter 5, is a conclusion to the preceding paragraph. Notice that it begins, "Therefore Peter's point is this: "In view of the judgment that is taking place within the household, the refining of the dross out of the church, certain things are to be true." He tells us what things ought to be true in verses 1 through 11. This is a picture of the church at work:

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow-elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. 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." Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you. [Or, as Phillips translates it, "it matters to him about you."] Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 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. And after you have suffered for a little, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.

It is obvious as you read through the passage that it is divided into two parts. The first section, verses 1 through 4, deals with elders. The section from 5 through 11 deals with all others in the church. Or, to use the metaphor suggested in the passage, 1 through 4 deals with shepherds, 5 through 11 deals with the sheep.

Peter first exhorts the elders to shepherd the flock of God. Notice that Peter begins with an expression of identification with them. He does not refer to himself in terms of primacy, but says that he is a "fellow-elder" and, actually, a "fellow witness" of the sufferings of Christ. He is not referring here to the fact that he was an eyewitness to the sufferings of Christ on the cross, although he was. But far more than that, he himself had experienced personally the same sort of suffering that Jesus had experienced -- that at the hands of unjust men. So it was nothing new to him to talk about suffering. He had been there, and he could identify perfectly with the people to whom he is writing. Then he describes himself also as a "sharer in common" of the glory that is to be

revealed. In other words, he comes in at their level.

This is where men and women ought always to be when they must rebuke or reprove or correct another brother or sister in Christ. We are never to condemn from a position of excellence, but are to correct from a position of identification with our brethren. Paul says in Galatians 6 that if you see a brother who is overtaken in a fault, "you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of meekness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted." It is our recognition that we all are prone to fall which enables us to speak to people and exhort and correct them in a way that is receivable.

It is very significant that the Scriptures make so much of circumcision - not circumcision in a physical sense but in a spiritual sense. All believers have been circumcised in heart, i.e., the flesh has been cut off. One implication we can infer from this is that God draws the knife on us before we draw the knife on anyone else. It is the sense of our own weakness, and our need constantly to deal with the flesh in our own life, which enables us to speak tenderly and comfortingly to people, yet at the same time to reprove and rebuke. That is what Peter is doing here. He is not speaking from a higher platform; he puts himself right on their level: "I'm with you. I've gone through the same experience through which you're going. And now I exhort you to shepherd the flock as I have shepherded the flock."

I am certain that Peter was recalling one of the last words Jesus ever directed toward him, as recorded in John 21. The incident occurred soon after Peter's denial of the Lord. Three times Peter had denied the Lord, and so the Lord, three times, affirmed the relationship he had with Peter, and told him to get about the business of shepherding the sheep. He said, "Peter, do you love me?" using the term which means, "Do you love me as God loves you, with the kind of love that requires nothing in return?" And Peter replied, "Lord, you know I love you," using the lesser term which means, "I'm fond of you." Because Peter knew by this time of his own weakness and inability to love the Lord as he should. So the Lord said, "Tend my lambs." Then he said again, "Peter, do you love me?" again using the highest term. Peter said, "No, I'm merely fond of you." Jesus said, "Shepherd my sheep." And the third time (because there had been a third denial), "Peter, are you fond of me?" That is, "If that is the best you feel you can produce at this point, I'll accept you on those terms." Peter said, "Lord, you know I'm fond of you." And Jesus said, "Then tend my sheep." Peter was restored.

I often go back to this passage, because so frequently I feel disqualified from the task of feeding the sheep. All of you have experienced that from time to time. You have been called upon to teach, or counsel, or witness, or help a brother or sister in need, and your immediate reaction is "I'm not qualified, because I've been such a failure this week. The Lord knows my heart, he knows that I love him, but I can't produce the quality of love I know I should." Jesus says, "That's all right. I see your heart, and I know you love me. You don't have to work your way back into my good graces. There is no such thing as six months' of probation which will reestablish your authority in my eyes and in the eyes of others. Go about the business of tending my sheep." This is what Peter passes on to the elders: "Despite your weakness and failure and inadequacy, keep on [a present-tense verb] being a shepherd to the sheep."

We do not have time to draw out all the implications of that term. (I would ask you to do that on your own - to think through all that shepherds do for their sheep: lead them, feed them, etc., and to find applications in our relationships as shepherds and sheep.) But that is the task Peter passes on to be shepherds (actually, "under shepherds") of the flock of God. And notice, it is God's flock, not ours. It saves us from much heartache to realize that God is ultimately responsible for the flock; we are not. When God brings some other shepherd into a sheep's life to minister to him, it saves us from jealousy and a proprietary attitude to realize that they are not our sheep. They are God's sheep, and he has the right to put them under someone else's discipline or teaching or love or encouragement. Our job is to keep our eye on the Chief Shepherd, and to tend whatever sheep become our responsibility.

Ron Ritchie mentioned in the Wednesday staff meeting that Earl Palmer, pastor at the First Presbyterian Church in Berkeley, in speaking to a group of pastors recently, observed that "under shepherds" are actually sheep dogs. That is what we are - sheep dogs. Some run around, jump up and down, yap at the sheep, and make them nervous and

excited. Others keep their eye on the shepherd and do precisely what the shepherd says to do. Those are the good ones, the kind we ought to be - keeping our eye on the Shepherd.

This is the point of what follows in the passage, because Peter gathers together a number of false motivations and contrasts them with the true motivations which ought to govern our life. The first is, ". . . not under compulsion . . ." - not doing it because we have to, neither because of some outer compulsion, i.e., someone expects nor demands it of us, nor of any inner compulsion, i.e., we feel guilty unless we do something - ". . . not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God . . ." or, literally, "according to God" - the way God does it. God is the freest personality in the world. Nothing oppresses or constrains him. He acts because he wants to.

Peter says, "Act this way, as God does, and, second, do it freely, eagerly" -- ". . . not for sordid gain Shepherds could conceivably be motivated by the monetary rewards that would come their way, but more likely it would be because of some other profit - the praise, the appreciation they might receive from the sheep. Peter says, "No, no; not for shameful gain, but with eagerness - simply because you want to give, freely, without cost - nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock."

That is the third false motivation. There is something in all of us which makes us want to dominate people. What better way to do it than to become a shepherd, so that you can dominate the sheep? Peter says, "No, no, no; leadership is not lordship, it is not tyrannizing people, it is not commanding. We have no right to command. It is being an example, literally, 'of the flock'." That is, "Be a sheep. Set the pace by showing the rest of the sheep what it is to be a sheep. Follow the Lord." That is where your authority comes from. Your authority as a leader or an elder does not reside in your office, nor your training, your experience, or your background; it grows out of your obedience to the truth, and the extent to which you teach the Word of God. So these false motivations must be set aside. We must maintain proper motivation.

And ultimately, the motivation to which Peter looks most of all is the appearance of the Chief Shepherd: "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory." Actions which spring out of false motivation always fades. It is hard to keep your steam up, if you are waiting for somebody to show a little appreciation. Most people will not. And that is all right; they should not, necessarily. Shepherds should not look for it. If that is what motivates you, you will be disappointed, and you will swerve from the task. You must keep your eye on the Chief Shepherd, and wait for his approval, his "Well done." That is what will carry you through. The payoff comes when we see the Lord. Shepherds never receive their payoff in this life.

If you want proof of this, look at the men who shepherded various flocks in the Old and New Testaments, and see how they were treated. Jeremiah's "reward" was to be stoned to death in Egypt by his fellow Israelites. Paul's payoff was to be rejected by all the churches in Asia Minor, churches he had labored for years to establish. When he writes his last letter to Timothy he says, "All who are in Asia turned away from me." Nero "rewarded" him by chopping off his head. But Paul said at the end of his life, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me That is what we labor for. If you labor for anything less than that, you will always be disappointed. Peter says to keep your eyes on the Chief Shepherd, do what he says, follow him. And when the day comes for reckoning, you shall receive his "Well done."

That is Peter's word to elders, the more mature Christians in the body of Christ, whom God raises up to provide leadership. It applies as well, I believe, to anyone who functions as a shepherd within the Body. If you are a Sunday school teacher, youth leader, or home Bible study leader -- any ministry in which you are responsible for a flock -- these words apply to you. And they apply to me. We must take them to heart.

Peter's second admonition, in verses 5 and following, is to the rest of the Body. His word is to be subject to one another, and to act in humility toward one another. This has been his recurring theme throughout the book. "In the midst of suffering, when you are oppressed and unjustly treated, submit to those who have authority over you, because that is the hand of God." He stresses it again in this section: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the

mighty hand of God . . . " "The hand which oppresses you is not that of Nero, nor of the folks in your flock who are rejecting the truth and resisting you. It is the hand of God on your life." Peter says, "Submit," because that is the course of action every believer must follow.

We do not come into this world, normally, submissive and humble; we come into the world proud and rebellious, resistant to authority. And when you become a Christian you do not suddenly become submissive. The Spirit of God comes to dwell in your life, and you *do* have a new character and a new life, and now there is at least a desire to begin to submit to authority -- God's authority first, and then the authority of others. But it does not come easily; it is a struggle. Sometimes we have to be humiliated - that is the only way we can learn to submit. But we have to learn it. Jesus said, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls." That is what we learn from the Lord - -meekness and lowliness. And it is something we all must learn.

Peter begins with the young men, because this is most difficult for them. In 2 Timothy, Paul exhorts Timothy to flee, or refrain, from youthful lusts. He is not referring specifically to sexual lust, but to all the lusts and passions young men have - the passion which makes them want to assert themselves, to have their own way and get what they want, to tear down authority they think is unjust. This is characteristic of all of us when we are young. So Peter starts with the young men, says, "*You* learn submission to your elders; and, in fact, all of you must learn submission to one another."

There must be a servant mentality toward one another. We have to be willing to submit ourselves to the other person's needs, whatever those needs are, to take a lower place, and not insist that "others minister to *me* and care for *me* and provide for *me* and teach *me* and counsel *me*," and thus be a drain on the other members of the Body. Because Christ did not come to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life as a ransom for many. That is true submission. Peter says that is what we must learn - to submit ourselves to the needs of others.

He describes it in verse 5 in terms of an article of clothing we are to put on: "...clothe yourselves with humility toward one another . . ." The Greek term refers to a servant's apron, the apron a household servant put over his outer garment to protect it, the sort of apron you ladies wear in the kitchen and you men wear in the back yard when you barbecue. I am sure that Peter was thinking back to the last supper before the crucifixion, when the Lord arose, girded himself with a towel, and began to wash the disciples' feet - a task which was normally assigned to the person of lowest social status. Since none of them would take that place, the Lord himself did, and began to wash their feet, thus signifying the need for all members of the Body to cleanse, purify, serve, and minister to one another. Peter says this is the action we ought to take as young people and as mature adults -- to clothe ourselves with humility.

The reason is that ". . . God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." It is pride which keeps us from humiliating ourselves. It was pride that caused the disciples to be offended when Jesus acted in humility, because they were all thinking, "We wouldn't do that!" And that is what keeps us from serving. We feel it is beneath us. Scripture says that God opposes the proud. The term means, "array all of one's forces". God stands athwart our path when we are proud. We love to apply that to other people. I do. There are people in my life who are so proud, and I think, "Aha! You're going to get your comeuppance some day; the Bible says so!" But that is not the point. The arrows are all directed toward me, toward old Dave Roper. God resists pride wherever he finds it, in whatever life it occurs.

But he exalts the lowly, verse 6: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time." Now, there is a sense of exaltation which usually follows service to others, a sense of well-being, of satisfaction. We feel that we are doing what God has called us to do. But I believe in this context he is referring to something beyond that. He is talking about the process which leads to greater and greater acceptance and leadership and ministry. If you want to be a leader in the household of God (And that is a worthy ambition; Scripture says so. It is a noble thing to aspire to be a leader.), the way to be a leader is not to assert your authority and insist that everybody follow you. Rather, it is to begin to serve. Serve the person next to you, your neighbor who is in need, whoever he or she may be. And in due time, God will exalt you. He will give you a place of

greater authority. He will put you in a position of leadership where your influence can extend to greater and greater dimensions. God exalts the humble.

At first glance, verse 7 does not seem to fit the context, but really it does: "...casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you." This fits logically in the series of commands which begins in verse 5: "be subject," "clothe yourselves with humility," and "humble yourselves," because the minute we start obeying these -- when we stop asserting our rights and insisting that everyone meet our needs - we immediately start worrying that our own rights will be taken away. "After all, I have to look out for myself. Who will care for me if I don't? If I don't insist that people have regard for me and give me my due, then my life will be ruined." Peter says, "No, cast all your anxiety upon God, because he cares for you." Let him take care of your needs. You just make yourself expendable, give yourself, serve others, minister to them. Do not try to defend yourself and your own rights. Let God do that for you. He knows, he sees, it matters to him about you, so cast your anxiety upon him.

My brother-in-law, Ed, was walking across a field one time with his little boy, David, who at that time was about three. The little guy was picking up great big rocks and struggling along with them for a while. He called them "piggies" because they looked to him like little pigs. It was a very warm day, and David was getting very tired, so Ed said, "David, why don't you let me carry the piggies." David said, "No, that's all right; I'll carry them," and he kept struggling along. They went a little further, and Ed said, "David, come on, let me carry the piggies." David's eyes widened, and he said, "I'll tell you what. You carry me, and I'll carry the piggies."

I have thought of that so frequently. That is precisely what we do. "Lord, I'll entrust my life to you, but I'm going to carry the piggies. I'll carry the burdens in my life, I'll support myself, I'll see to it that my rights are protected." No, fling them away. The only other place in the New Testament where this word translated "casting" is used is in the Gospels, referring to the people who were casting their clothes on the donkey that Jesus rode into Jerusalem. "Cast your care upon him, throw it away, because it matters to him. He will defend you, he will take care of you; he is trustworthy."

Peter moves on in verses 8 through 11 to describe our reaction to the enemy. If you noticed, verses 5 through 7 have to do with our relationship to our friends, verses 8 through 11 with our relationship to our enemy. "Be sober. Be alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." Do you know you have an adversary? There is as much evidence in the New Testament for the actuality of Satan as there is for the actuality of God. You cannot admit the reality of God on the basis of the New Testament, but deny the reality of Satan and demons. It is clear in Scripture that he is a real personage - not equal to God, but set against God.

And he is your adversary. He hates you. He is out to destroy you. Perhaps you have read C.S. Lewis' delightful little book, *The Screwtape Letters*. It consists of the correspondence between Screwtape, a chief demon, and Wormwood, a lesser demon, charged with the responsibility of causing a young Christian to stumble ("his man", he calls him). On one occasion Screwtape discovered that Wormwood's man had fallen in love with a fine, chaste, young Christian woman, a development he had been trying to thwart all along. Now it is too late, the relationship is flowering. So Screwtape writes to Wormwood,

So your man is in love, and in the worst kind he could possibly have fallen into, and with a girl who does not even appear in the report you sent me. I have looked up the girl's dossier, and am horrified at what I find. Not only a Christian, but what a Christian! A vile, sneaking, simpering, demure, monosyllabic, mouse like, watery, insignificant, virginal, bread-and-butter miss! She's a little brute! She makes me sick. She stinks and skulks through the very pages of the dossier. It drives me mad! The way the world has worsened! We'd have had her kind in the arena in the old days. That's what her sort is made for."

You have an adversary who hates you that viciously, who hates righteousness in you to that extent. It occurred to me as I read through this passage in 1 Peter that when we are proud, we have God as an adversary; and when we are humble, we have Satan as an adversary; and we must choose which adversary we want. But even when you choose to align yourself with God, you still are going to have an adversary - an adversary who hates you, and who

will do everything he can to destroy you. He is like a voracious lion, roaring in hunger, seeking those he can devour. So Peter says, "Resist him."

How can sheep resist a lion? Sheep are utterly defenseless. Ah, but their defense is in the good shepherd. Peter says, "Resist him in faith. Do not try to stand on your own. Your strength lies in a return to the truth, in believing and acting upon what is true. In one of my favorite TV commercials the gal has just cut her hair. She looks in the mirror and says, "My word, I look like a squirrel! Who am I anyway?" So often we look in the mirror and think something very similar. Satan is attacking us, and we think, "I'm such a squirrel!" When Satan attacks you with doubt or despair or discouragement or debased self-image that is the time to recall to your mind what God has said about how he values you, to reject the lie, and to rest upon the truth of the Word. Then believe it, act on it. Though you may be fearful, act upon the truth. Peter says, "Resist him, doggedly, in the faith."

Are you familiar with the story of Pilgrim's Progress? It is the account of "Christian's" journey from the Doomed City to the Celestial City. At one point, as he is making his way along, he meets two young men, "Timorous" and "Mistrust", who are running away from the Celestial City. He stops them and asks, "Where are you going?" They say, "Back to the Doomed City." He asks them why, and they reply, "Because up in the mountains there are lions that are crouching, ready to destroy you." Christian is frightened and is tempted to turn back. But then he remembers the scroll he carries. He reaches in his vest for it and discovers to his dismay that it is gone. So he goes back to the place where he lost it. He retrieves it, opens it, and reads these words: "Is your strength small? Fear not; for the lions are chained. Keep in the midst of the path, and no hurt shall come upon you." And so, though Christian's knees are knocking and his heart is pounding, he walks through the mountains in the middle of the path, accepting at face value what the scroll says, and he discovers that the lions are truly chained. They surge against the chains, but they cannot touch him because they are bound.

That is how you resist the devil. When there is doubt or fear or feelings of inadequacy, or whatever attack Satan makes upon your life, resist him, Peter says, strong in faith, with dogged determination to believe what God has said, and to act upon the truth. We are to do this, he says, with an awareness that "the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brothers who are in the world." We share this struggle in common. There is not one of us who has not felt this past week, or perhaps this very moment, the attack of the lion on our life. Peter is saying this is a shared experience, and we ought to entrust one another with our struggles, share with one another, pray with one another, encourage one another, because we all are going through the same experience.

No one is isolated. We have a tendency to think, "My trouble is unique. No one has gone through what I'm going through." But when we Christians are honest and open with one another, we find that there are many, many brothers and sisters experiencing exactly what we are experiencing - the very same attacks! We need to trust one another, entrust the truth to one another, comfort one another, and share in the struggle together.

There are some attacks of Satan which we cannot withstand alone and which God never intended that we should endure alone. There are some deep-seated habits -- fortresses in our life entrenched areas of evil which are so difficult to dislodge that we need help from other brothers and sisters. That is what is symbolized by the defeat of Jericho. Joshua could well have marched around the city by himself and the walls could have fallen down. It was not the mere fact of large numbers which accomplished that feat. But God wanted to show us that sometimes we have to labor in concert with other believers in order to bring down these deeply entrenched areas. So if you are struggling with some such habit, you need to ask God to give you someone who shares that same problem, or has shared it, and who can join together with you and support you in your struggle. Because we can stir one another up to faith. We can call to mind specific passages of Scripture which relate to the problem we are struggling with.

Peter says in verse 10, "And after you have suffered for a little (and he has reminded us repeatedly through this book that suffering is the name of the game), the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you." That is not wishful thinking; that is a promise! Though you may be struggling with some sin which now defeats you, the God of all grace will himself bring about stability in your life. Isaiah refers to an "oak of righteousness". That is always so meaningful to me. I would like to be an oak of righteousness planted squarely, immovable, stable, steadfast and yet I am not. It is what I

aspire to, but I have not attained it. But Peter says I will, and so will you. We will be stable, steadfast, because the God of all grace will make us so.

I sat at breakfast with a good friend recently, and he shared with me his continuing struggle with another man in his life. He determines before every encounter with him that he is going to do what is right. He prays and reads Scripture and gets fortified and is trusting. Then he walks into that man's presence and comes apart, gets angry, blows his stack, and walks out. It has happened over and over and over again. He said he is beginning to wonder if the life of faith works at all. And I remembered this passage: "The God of all grace, who called us to share his glory, after you have suffered for a little while, will himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you." You will break through.

When David at last delivered the final blow to the Philistines and destroyed them, he called the site "Baal-perazim". The Hebrew means, "the lord of those who break through". It had been a long, arduous, difficult struggle, but he finally destroyed their might. And that is what Peter is saying: we belong to the Lord who will break through. We can take comfort in that. That is a promise. God, who called you to his glory will, in time, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.

The concluding words of the letter are greetings from the church in Rome. We will not take time to look at them in detail:

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! She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark. Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all who are in Christ.

I have often thought that we ought to adopt again the kiss of love sounds like fun! Clement of Alexandria, one of the early church fathers, says that by the end of the first century, whenever the church gathered, it resounded with the smacks of their kissing. They must have had a great time!

Peter mentions Silvanus, another name for Silas, Paul's companion, who eventually became Peter's companion and scribe. Peter did not have much formal education, and probably was given to doing great violence to his native tongue. Someone mentioned that this was true of Dwight L. Moody. He began a series of lectures at Cambridge University by saying, "Young gentlemen, don't think that God don't love you, 'cause he do!" Perhaps that was the way Peter spoke. But Silas cleaned up Peter's grammar, under the supervision of the Holy Spirit, and was God's instrument for getting this letter to us in its present form. Scholars have long pondered the fact that this is such beautiful, almost classical Greek. They therefore doubted that Peter could have written it, since he was unlettered. But this is the explanation. Peter paced the floor and spoke his mind. Silas wrote the words down. And the Spirit of God superintended it all, so that it came out in this beautiful form which communicates so well. Silas was content to be nothing more than an appended name, yet he was the instrument God used to bring this letter to us.

Then Peter mentions his wife: "She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings Some feel that refers to a church, but I personally feel he is referring to his wife who was with him in Rome (he speaks of Rome metaphorically as Babylon). She was associated with him in his ministry, and was martyred just before the Apostle himself went to his death.

And he mentions a person he refers to as his son, Mark, who was probably the Mark who accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey, then became Barnabas' associate, rejoined Paul in Rome, then came to be with Peter, went on to Alexandria to be a leader of the church in North Africa, and wrote the Gospel of Mark we have today.

But the most important thing to notice in these closing words is Peter's statement in verse 12: "Through Silvanus I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!" What does "this" refer to? Back in verse 10 Peter has said, "And after you have suffered for a little, the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you." This is the God of all grace, who is intent upon perfecting and stabilizing you in your life. Peter's word throughout this letter

has been: There is a salvation which is secure. It is promised, certain; nothing can take it away. You are in the Ark, remember? And though all the fury of Hell itself may break upon the Ark, you are secure. Far from destroying you, God will use everything that comes into your life -- the most adverse circumstance -- to accomplish in you the good thing he is after. He will conform you to the image of Jesus Christ. That is the true grace of God. That is God, giving himself freely to us. That is what grace is -- God's resources poured out to us. Peter says, "If you want a thumbnail sketch of my book, that is it. Now, stand in that!"

Catalog No.3252

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Series: TRIED BY FIRE

Twelfth Message

August 18,1974

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Updated September 10, 2000.

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