

EXILES

LIVING IN HOPE

1 & 2 PETER

SERMON TITLE: Stand Firm in the Grace of God
SCRIPTURE: 1 Peter 5:8-14

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Identity is an ever-present buzzword. This should especially be true for Christians. We are chosen, loved, forgiven, and secure in Jesus. But Peter reminds us of another part of our Christian identity—we are exiles. The "world as it is" isn't our home. We are pilgrims on a journey, telling others along the way about the wonderful things God has done in calling us out of darkness and into his light. And just like Peter's personality, these two letters that share his name are bold invitations to cling to a living hope in the face of any suffering that may come our way.

Well, this is our final study in Peter's first letter. After Easter we will begin 2 Peter and continue to look at our theme of *Exiles: Living in Hope*. The question we've been asking throughout our study is this: *What does it look like to remain faithful to Jesus in a society that's becoming more and more hostile to our faith?* As Peter closes his letter, he gives us several important principles that we need to understand and apply to our lives in order for us to remain faithful and live in hope in tough times. Basically, he tells us that there are two things we need to know and two things we need to do. First, what we need to know.

(1) Your enemy is not the people who are making life harder for you. Your real enemy is an evil, supernatural personality the Bible calls the devil (5:8).

He begins in v.8 by saying that we need to be *sober-minded and watchful or self-controlled and alert*. In the Christian life when life gets hard for us if we are not "sober-minded"—if we are not clear-headed and self-controlled, then we open ourselves to attack. So where do we get out of control in our lives? Where do we get to a place where we're no longer controlled by the Spirit of God? All kinds of things, right? Alcohol, drugs, anger, pride, anxiety, lust—obsessing over work or money or physical attractiveness or politics. Peter says, "Keep a clear head. Stay alert. You have an enemy who is looking to devour you." —Now, let's state the obvious here—

There is a devil. There are demons—evil, demonic forces that tempt you to chuck your faith or to water it down so much that you easily blend into the dominant culture in order to lessen the attacks and the suffering. It's very clear that the Bible talks about the devil as a supernatural, personal force of great power and evil operating behind the scenes of history—behind corrupt governments—behind the pain and suffering and many of the trials in our lives. For modern people, the idea of a devil is ridiculous. But you can't make much sense of Christianity and the Bible, or the true nature and extent of the evil that's in the world today apart from a belief in the devil. Yes, of course, there is human evil in the world. People kill people. People oppress and harm people. People abuse people. But behind the evil that people do there are dark, spiritual forces at work (cf Ephesians 6:11-12). Paul tells us that behind flesh-and-blood evil there is something that is not flesh-and-blood. By the way, the devil is not God's evil equal. The devil has power, but it's limited power—he only has the power God allows him to have and he only has the power you allow him to have. What does that mean—he only has the power I allow him to have? Here's the second things we need to know.

(2) The devil primarily works through the sin in our own hearts (go back to 5:6-7; see also Eph 4:26; 1 Timothy 3:6-7; as well as Ephesians 6:11; 2Cor 2:11).

The devil uses *strategies* that he expertly and personally designs to *trap* us. He tempts us and accuses us in order to gain a foothold in our lives. With all his evil power, the devil can't make you do anything unless you give him a foothold. So the question is: Is there any foothold sin that you are not dealing with? If you belong to Jesus, you don't have to be afraid of the devil (1Jn 4:4) but you do need to be alert to where he might gain a foothold—an open door into your heart. Second—What we need to do.

(1) Resist the devil by refusing to believe his lies (9).

It is through his lies that he tempts us and accuses us. It's like a one-two punch. He tempts us to sin, and when we sin, he accuses us. He tempts in order to accuse. That's why he immediately goes on to say *stand firm in your faith*. Faith in Christ exposes the devil's lies of temptation and accusation. Then Peter adds to this idea of standing firm—this is the second thing we need to do—but it this really sums up everything he said in the entire letter.

(2) Stand firm in the true grace of God (11-14).

More than anything else, the devil wants to keep you from *understanding* the Gospel of grace.

So when you suffer at the hands of people who make life harder for you—when the devil tempts you to believe that God doesn't care—when the devil tells you lies to get you to turn your back on God. Resist him by refusing to listen to his lies and stand firm in your faith—stand firm in the all-sufficient grace of God—*by remembering this—*

Behind the opposition and hostility, we experience from people who don't know God—stands the devil seeking to devour us—and behind the devil stands God strengthening and perfecting us.

Discussion Starters

Have someone read 1 Peter 5:8-14

As we've been saying, we are living in a society that's becoming more and more hostile to our faith. The same was true when Peter wrote his two letters to his hurting friends in Turkey. As he closes his letter, he tells us two things we need to know and two things we need to do to live with hope in the midst of this increasing hostility.

1. When you look at your life and all the disconcerting things going on around you, do you consider yourself a "sober-minded and alert" believer? If so, what does that look like?
2. Can we get transparent here—are there areas of your life that you feel that are somewhat out of control?
3. What would you say to a co-worker who says that Christians are freaks because they not only believe in God, but they also believe in the devil?
4. What are the two "equal and opposite mistakes" people make when thinking about the devil?
5. Why is it so hard to accept that the people that are making life harder for us are not our true enemies?
6. Have someone read Ephesians 6: 11-12. Is Paul saying that there's no such thing as human evil? What is he saying here and why does it matter?
7. How does the devil primarily work through the sin in our own hearts?
8. Can we get transparent one more time—after hearing this message, what areas of your life are or could become "foothold sins" where the devil would have an opportunity to trap you?
9. Why does a believer not need to fear the devil?
10. How do we resist the devil (v.9)? What did you learn about how the devil tempts us and then accuses us? How does resisting the devil and standing firm connect?
11. What does it mean to stand in the true grace of God (v.12)?