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1 Peter 5:1-4

Many of you have heard the words of Martin Luther as it relates to the impact of faith on our service in God's Kingdom. Here is what he wrote:

Alas! Must I walk the baby, wash its diapers, make its bed, smell its stench, stay up nights with it, take care of it when it cries, heal its rashes and soars? And on top of that care for my spouse, provide, labor at my trade, take care of this, and take care of that?... ¶ What then does Christian faith say to this? It opens its eyes, looks upon all these insignificant, distasteful, and despised duties in the Spirit; and is aware that they are all adorned with

divine approval as with the costliest golden jewels. It says, 'O God! I confess today that I am not worthy to rock the little babe or wash its diapers or to be entrusted with the care of the child and its mother....' (Luther, 1962, p. The Estate of Marriage)

It truly is amazing the difference it makes to view one's responsibilities and callings through the eye of faith.

1 Peter 5 reflects the radical impact that faith can have on the calling and duties of the elder. There are a lot of things about the ministry of a pastor which really can make the calling a burden. First, there is the daunting knowledge that at the end of it all, there is going to be an accounting for the pastor's labors.

Hebrews 13:17a, "Obey your leaders, and submit *to them*; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account...."

Second, there is that "double-jeopardy" that accompanies those who would bring God's word to bear upon the lives of God's people.

James 3:1, "Let not many *of you* become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment."

Third, the ministry has sheep who bite and so purposely endeavor to cause grief to the elder. Paul had his share of biting sheep. Speaking of those in Rome, Paul said this:

Philippians 1:17, "The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment."

Fourth, the ministry at times involves a front row seat to the lives of God's people as they struggle, seriously struggle in their sanctification, and the elder is the one who bears that burden.

2 Corinthians 11:29-30, "Apart from *such* external things, there is the daily pressure upon me *of* concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?"

For these reasons and more, the call of leadership in Christ's Church can be a brutal task. It is easy to see how one might walk away from it or at times, do it under compulsion!

Yet at the writing of this epistle, the people of God needed much more from their leadership. Persecution had come upon all of God's people. In order for the church to survive, it would need godly shepherds who would stand in the gap and serve. Accordingly, Peter turned his focus to the call as well as the task of the elder wherein he gives five cautions to the elder that they might prove faithful! Each one of these caution-statements brings the Kingdom of God — the faith — to bear upon the church leader that they might see their work through new eyes

and so NOT shrink back, BUT willingly serve the Lord! Having considered the first three cautions, we examine the fourth caution, that elders must serve with a right motive.

1 Peter 5:2, “and not for sordid gain,¹ but with eagerness.”

We have here two words on the opposite end of a continuum. First there is “sordid gain” (αἰσχροκερδῶς [*aischrokerdōs*]). The word primarily refers to doing Kingdom work for money. For example, Paul wrote this to the Corinthian church.

2 Corinthians 2:17, “For we are not like many, peddling the word of God...”

In Paul’s/Christ’s day (just as in our own), there were many “pleaders with a cause” who went from town to town proclaiming a message in order to make money. We see it today.

- *Come to this real estate conference for free!*
- *Join my multi-level marketing company and earn a bundle!*
- *For \$9.99 I will give you my book which will teach you how you can be a millionaire!*

So, it was in Peter’s/Christ’s day. It was NOT long after the resurrection of Christ that charlatans began using the gospel to make money for themselves.² The Didache called them “Christ-Merchants” (χριστεμπορος). This no doubt is why Peter exhorted the elders NOT to do Kingdom work for the sake of money.³ And yet, the word “sordid gain” goes beyond financial benefit. It would encompass any kingdom work done for the advancement of self. And so, “sordid gain” can be these things:

- Doing religious things in order “to be noticed by man” (Matthew 23:5).
- Using one’s office to acquire a “place of honor” (Matthew 23:6a).
- Seeking “the chief seats in the synagogue” via the call of God (Matthew 23:6b).

Translated to today, it could be:

- Leading a bible study because it gives you a sense of purpose,
- Teaching because it is fun,
- Serving to be noticed by man,
- Etc.⁴

So, elders/deacons, guard your heart! Is ministry about you? Is it about your convenience?... your time? Is it done because in some way it makes you happy? Peter says when it comes to our motive, “It must not, nor ever be out of any desire for personal gain!” Well then, how ought it to be done?

1 Peter 5:2, “and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness.”

The word for “eagerness” (προθύμως [*prothumōs*]) carries the threefold idea of (1) zeal, (2) energy, and (3) enthusiasm for a job. It is NOT the opposite of “sordid gain,” but the attitude that arises as a result of the opposite. When it comes to ministry, this mindset/attitude is garnered when you behold the advancement of God’s Kingdom.

Remember that time in Paul’s ministry when, on account of persecution, he was run out of Thessalonica and he eventually came to Athens, but he was so burdened! Recall that in Thessalonica, a city situated at the base of Mount Olympus, the idol capital of the ancient world⁵ that when Paul went there and preached the gospel, the Lord gloriously, miraculously, and unthinkably opened up the hearts of many Gentiles! In fact, when word reached the brethren (1 Thessalonians 1:7), they were astounded at God’s grace. The Apostle Paul describes this:

1 Thessalonians 1:9, “For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God.”

It was this very young, immature congregation from which Paul was forcefully ripped such that by the time he came to Athens, he was beside himself! Paul wrote this:

1 Thessalonians 3:5, “For this reason, when I could endure *it* no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor should be in vain.”

The word for “endure” was a nautical term in the ancient world referencing a water-tight roof or ship. In other words, Paul’s emotions here are leaking, he is beside himself with concern, worrying for the people of God in Thessalonica such that he sent Timothy to go back *no doubt* to help in any way that he could *as well as* to bring word back to Paul!

Timothy did just that and what he found was astounding! NOT ONLY were there still Christians in Thessalonica, BUT they were thriving in the face of severe persecution! Notice the impact that this news had on Paul’s “eagerness.”

1 Thessalonians 3:7-10, “For this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; for now we *really* live, if you stand firm in the Lord. For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, AS WE NIGHT AND DAY keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?”

3 John 4, “I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.”

There is NO QUESTION that “eagerness” in ministry comes as we see the Lord do a work of grace. Accordingly, and not surprisingly, when it comes to pastoral care, “eagerness” arises in the heart of the shepherd when looking at a bad situation they realize that with their ministry, God could do an unimaginable work of grace. In 1 Timothy, Paul describes it this way:

2 Timothy 2:24-26, “And the Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition [this is quite the list... how possibly can an elder serve according to it? Notice the ‘bait’ Paul dangles in front of every ‘bondservant of the Lord’...], if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses *and escape* from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.”

Do you understand that which evokes eagerness when it comes to ministry? It is the prospect that our miracle-working God might use you and your efforts to bring about an eternal work!

Christian! Ministry most certainly is NOT about us! But what an incredible privilege it would be to be used by God to bring about His purpose!

In a music program showing how Alicia Keys wrote what now has become a massive hit in pop-music (“Three Hour Drive”) she talked about the glorious anticipation that rests in her every time she writes a song. She said:

I love the anxiety that you feel when you like, ‘There is a pretty likely chance that... I’m not going to find the right words; I’m not going to find the right melody.’ And then there is another chance that this might be the day that you write that thing you never knew you had in you.

That is what is before every elder/deacon in their work. What you do today as a minister of the gospel may be a flop, BUT it could very well be that which God uses to establish His kingdom. Talk about exciting!

This brings us to the last caution; an elder must serve with the right attitude.

1 Peter 5:3, “nor yet as lording it over those allotted⁶ to your charge.”

The word used here denotes the idea of ‘forcefully ruling over’ or ‘subduing.’ In Bible times, it carried the idea of the excessive use of authority. The focus of this word involves the idea of bringing something into subjection using force, whether physical, military, or political. In the text before us, Peter clearly is quoting from the statement he heard from Christ years before:

Matthew 20:25, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them⁷...”

The word Christ used at this time was the same word used by Peter in our text.⁸ This is what leadership was about in the ancient world: barking orders, receiving the adulation of the crowd, believing that authority was by divine right, and so viewing people as something to do with as one pleased. In fact, this is still the default perspective of most if not all of us when it comes to our leadership positions (whether that be as church officers, married, parents, older siblings, and the like). I want you to go back with me in your mind to the beginning.

Genesis 1:26, "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'"

There is no question the Lord made man to co-reign with God over His Kingdom which is this world.⁹ That tells us something about our purpose: we were created NOT to exist for ourselves BUT ultimately for the glory of God AND the benefit of creation (which would include our fellow-image bearers)! With that, we come to the Fall.

- God's goodness was first drawn into question, Genesis 3:1.
- Adam and Eve exalted themselves above God's word, making God's word subject to their approval, Genesis 3:2-3.
- And man's place and purpose in God's Kingdom was turned upside down.

Genesis 3:6, "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate."

With this sin, the entire world was plunged into an estate where now man believed themselves to be sovereign over God. This turned everything upside down such that now, rather than being servants of God and one another, man now viewed God and the world as something for them!

We tend to view the Fall of man exclusively in relation to God. Yet we must see that the Fall had a profound impact upon our relationship with one another. Now you exist for me! This is why leadership amongst fallen man always has the tendency to turn into despotic rule. By nature, I believe that you exist to make me happy and so to further my needs/agenda! Now, put me in leadership — whether in a church, a marriage, a family, a nation — and the result is almost always the same. We will "Lord it over those allotted to our charge"! Yet what does faith do to this supposition? It turns it on its head, for it restores us to our original purpose, the glory of God and the service of one another.

Matthew 20:25-28, "But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and *their* great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant [this is what 'greatness' is all about in the Kingdom of God... living to love and serve God and others] and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave [this is NOT a punishment, BUT a kingdom necessity and so reality]; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Jack Miller put it this way:

People tend to think of bold prayers as ones asking God for miracles, fire from heaven and

all that. But the real miracles today are shown in hearts that love others. The kingdom you're praying to see is the kingdom of love. It's not a wishy-washy kind of love; it's a love that has fire in it and righteousness in it. It is love that holds on and forgives. This kind of love will cost you something. It will cause you to suffer, just as it caused Christ to suffer. But this is the path of the gospel. (Quoted from a sermon on Mark 1:17)

It is this gospel-wrought attitude which must impel God's undershepherds in their work. As saved individuals, our best comes NOT as we get our way BUT as we fulfill our original purpose of serving God and each other by grace!

With these five cautions, Peter closes his treatment here with a final word of encouragement.

1 Peter 5:4, "and when the Chief Shepherd¹⁰ appears [this is referencing Christ's second coming], you will receive the unfading¹¹ crown^{12,13} of glory.¹⁴"

We have already seen from 1 Peter that following the Last Day, after this world is remade into a paradise, there is going to be a Wedding Feast of the Lamb (Revelations 19:7-9)! At this feast, Christ individually and personally is going to honor His bride. Recall Peter speaking of our future salvation/glorification:

1 Peter 1:6-7, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

This is the ultimate when it comes to the "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21, 23)! Yet, what does this mean?

- Praise- this is NOT worship, BUT verbal affirmation as in, "You did well!"
- Glory- likewise is NOT a reference to worship, BUT a description of what we shall assume on that day- the glorious image of Christ, "...we shall be like Him!" (1 John 3:2)
- Honor- carries the nuance of an "honorarium" and so the receiving of that which is given by way of appreciation. It is what Christ did to His disciples in the upper room. And it is what Christ is going to do again during the Marriage Feast of the Lamb...

Christ speaking of the importance of being "ready", "watchful", and so "spiritually vigilant", exhorted His disciples this way:

Luke 12:35-37, "Be dressed in readiness, and *keep* your lamps alight. And be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open *the door* to him when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master shall find on the alert when he comes [how are they 'blessed'?]; truly I say to you, that he [the Master] will gird himself *to serve*, and have them recline *at the table*, and will come up and wait on them."

Dr. MacArthur wrote of this way:

In an incredible reversal of roles to demonstrate the master's pleasure at such readiness, Jesus says he proceeded to gird himself to serve the ones who served him and had them recline at the table as his equals as he waited on them. That is what Jesus Himself did for His beloved disciples (John 13:1–5; cf. Matthew 20:28; Luke 22:27) and will again do at the marriage feast of the Lamb in heaven (Luke 13:28–30). (MacArthur, Luke 11-17 MacArthur New Testament Commentary, 2013, p. 160)

So, the question to every leader in Christ's church: Is ministry worth it? Is the stricter judgment, the added responsibility, and bearing the burdens of others worth it? Is maintaining your godliness and integrity in a difficult marriage worth it? Is living for the Lord with a debilitating disease worth it? After what we just saw, you tell me! One of my favorite Reformers, Samuel Rutherford, put it this way:

Howbeit you receive indignities for your Lord's sake, let it be so. When He shall put His holy hand up to your face in heaven, and dry your face, and wipe the tears from your eyes, judge if ye will not have cause then to rejoice. (Rutherford, 1997, p. Letter XV)

This is the confidence each of us can have as we endeavor to serve Him by grace!

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End Note(s)

¹ “The basic scriptural qualifications for an elder also make it clear that he is characterized as a selfless servant committed to sacrifice and not preoccupied with money and materialism (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7; cf. 2 Timothy 3:1–2). That is not to say, however, that shepherds should not be properly compensated. Paul taught that those who minister the Word have a right to live by that ministry (1 Corinthians 9:7–14). In fact, those elders who serve diligently, with greater commitment and excellence

in teaching the Word and leading the sheep, should receive greater acknowledgment and more generous remuneration from their congregations (1 Timothy 5:17–18; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13).” (MacArthur, 1 Peter MacArthur New Testament Commentary, 2004, p. 269)

² This no doubt is why in part one of the qualifications for an elder is that they must be “free from the love of money,” (1 Timothy 3:3e).

³ “Elders were often compensated for their services on the basis of Jesus’ teaching (Matthew 10:10), as the Pauline correspondence shows (1 Corinthians 9:3–14; 1 Timothy 5:17–18, ‘The elders who lead well are worthy of full pay’). They were also in charge of the charity funds of the church (Acts 5:1–5; 2 Corinthians 8:20), and of course exercised considerable influence over other church members. Therefore, just as there are encouragements to support elders and other ministers fully, so there are warnings that some (due to human fallenness and perhaps the model of some Greek philosophical teachers who profited handsomely from their teaching) would tend to turn ministry into a business (e.g., 2 Corinthians 11:7–21; 1 Timothy 6:5–6; Tit. 1:11).” (Davids, 1990, p. 179)

⁴ As I related the statistic previously: 80% of those graduating from seminary today will NOT be in ministry in 5 years! No doubt there is a significant percentage of those who wash out because for them Kingdom Ministry was about them- their happiness, fulfillment, and the like! Recall the words of Christ, “He who is a hireling [in other words, someone who does a task for money and so personal gain], and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, beholds the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees, and the wolf snatches them, and scatters *them*. *He flees* because he is a hireling, and is not concerned about the sheep.” (John 10:12-13)

⁵ Recall, there were over 20 different deities which were prominently worshipped in this city- such gods as Artemis, Apollo, Aphrodite, Zeus, Athena, Heracles, Demeter and Persephone, Poseidon, Hades, Dionysus, Bacchus, Pan, Minos, Serapis, Isis, Anubis, and a whole lot more!

⁶ “What they are not to domineer is their ‘portion’ or ‘lot.’ The term appears in Mark 15:24 (and parallels) and Acts 1:26 for ‘lot’ or ‘dice,’ and it could therefore mean ‘something assigned by lot,’ ‘portion,’ or ‘share,’ irrespective of the use of lots to select it (cf. Acts 1:17, 25, where the person was selected by lot; Acts 8:21; 26:18; Col. 1:12, where the use of lots is not implied). Here the term stands in parallel to ‘the flock’ and thus indicates that portion of God’s people over which an elder had the oversight (as in 5:2)- probably a house church, as each city church usually consisted of several house churches at this time.” (Davids, 1990, p. 180)

⁷ The three versions of Jesus’ words here are found in Matthew 20:20–28; Mark 10:35–45; Luke 22:24–27. Both Matthew and Mark use the same term (translated “domineer”) as Peter, κατακυριεύω.

⁸ κατακυριεύω (*katakurieuō*)

⁹ By way of note, the word for “rule” here is NOT a despotic rule which in the ancient world resulted in armies raping, pillaging, and burning (that word is מַשָּׁל [*mashal*] as in Is. 19:4; Jdgs. 14:4; 15:11). RATHER, the word here for “rule” is רָדָה (*rādā*) which speaks of the “gentle rule of stewardship” as in tending a delicate garden!

¹⁰ “Chief Shepherd is one of the most beautiful titles for the Savior in all of Scripture. The shepherd imagery for Messiah first appears in the Old Testament (Zechariah 13:7; cf. Psalms 23:1). The gospel of John calls Him the Good Shepherd (10:11; cf. vv. 2, 12, 16, 26–27). The writer of Hebrews calls Christ the Great Shepherd (13:20–21). Earlier in this letter, Peter calls Him the Shepherd and Guardian of souls (2:25).” (MacArthur, 1 Peter MacArthur New Testament Commentary, 2004, p. 270)

¹¹ The term unfading is from the same cognate as the name of the flower (*amaranth*) that supposedly never faded or lost its bloom.” (MacArthur, 1 Peter MacArthur New Testament Commentary, 2004, p. 271)

¹² “There are other passages of Scripture which suggest that some kind of ‘crown’ will be given to all believers (2 Timothy 4:8; Jas 1:12; Revelations 2:10; 3:11). Yet in these passages the ‘crown’ seems to be a metaphor for the heavenly life in general. The ‘crown of righteousness’ in 2 Timothy 4:8 which the Lord will give not only to Paul but ‘also to all who have loved his appearing’ (i.e. all believers) probably means ‘righteousness, which will be like a crown’. Similarly, the ‘crown of life’ in Jas 1:12; Revelations 2:10; cf. Revelations 3:11) is probably ‘eternal life in heaven, which is a reward like a crown received at the end of a race’, 1 Corinthians 9:25 implies that all believers should strive to obtain an ‘imperishable’ crown, but in the context it may also be viewed as a heavenly reward not for all believers but only for those who have continued through life faithful and obedient to God in a way worthy of special reward (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:24, and note degrees of reward in 1 Corinthians 3:12–15).” (Grudem, 2009, p. 198)

¹³ “This image is also well known in the NT (1 Corinthians 9:25, ‘an imperishable crown’; 2 Timothy 4:8;

James 1:12; Revelations 2:10; 3:11; 4:4). Nor does this crown consist of ivy, bay, or olive, like the crowns awarded distinguished citizens in Greek cities. These crowns would wither, and the honor bestowed would be forgotten. But the crown Jesus gives will never wither (cf. the related term in 1:4), and it consists of 'glory' or honor." (Davids, 1990, pp. 181-182)

¹⁴ Crown (*stephanos*) is used of a victor's crown or 'wreath' in athletic contests (1 Corinthians 9:25), or a golden crown given by a Roman general to soldiers most valiant in battle (Josephus, War 7.14), or a crown worn by a king (2 Sam. (LXX 2 Kgs) 12:30; cf. Revelations 6:2; 14:14). In every case it is a sign of special honour, given not to all but only to those worthy of particular public recognition, commonly as a reward for some kind of unusually meritorious activity. Such an idea would fit this verse, where Peter mentions this unfading crown of glory specifically when speaking to 'elders', and when speaking of a reward which is given in the age to come, following after a description of righteous conduct in the exercise of the office of elder during this life. Moreover, the term glory carries the nuance of an outwardly visible evidence of honour. Finally, the 'twenty-four elders' in Revelation have 'golden crowns' (Revelations 4:4) which they cast before God's throne (Revelations 4:10)—even though these are not identical to the elders in local churches to whom Peter is writing, the 'crowns' there are none the less marks of honour said to be possessed by particular individuals, not by all." (Grudem, 2009, pp. 197-198)