

SHEPHERDING THE CHURCH – 1 Peter 5:1-4 - May 9, 2021

We've been going through 1 Peter, and there's a lot in this epistle about suffering. It was relevant for the people Peter was writing to, for many of them were suffering. And it's relevant to us today, not that we're presently going through a lot of suffering as Christians in this country, but I believe we can all see that it is coming.

In the first four vss. of 1 Peter 5, Paul is addressing the elders of the church, and it relates to this subject of suffering. The Christians were suffering, were being persecuted, and the elders needed to care for those who were suffering. And in these four vss., there's important instructions for elders, their role, their character, and their rewards.

1 Peter 5:1. Now Peter was exhorting the elders, and "*exhort*" literally means to "*call alongside,*" and so it came to mean to "*encourage or compel someone in a general direction.*" To exhort then means to encourage, to persuade, to motivate. Now this word "*elder*" historically referred to a person who was physically older, and who was mature. But in this context, it came to mean ones who were spiritually mature, and ones then who were leading the church.

The fact that elders is plural means that God wants there to be more than one elder in a church. That's because it improves the leadership and the shepherding in a church:

- you can spread the responsibility, and therefore spread the work-load;
- there's more counsel, wisdom, and insight when there's more than one elder;
- there can be accountability - the leaders can spiritually guard and protect one another;
- different kinds of tasks can be done, for the leaders have different gifts and abilities;
- there can be more protection of the church from error and false teaching.

And so having a plurality of leaders is very advantageous to the church.

And Peter was a fellow elder. Yes, he was an apostle, and yes, he was well-known, for he had been with Jesus, he had been the lead apostle. But bottom line, he was an elder, a very mature Christian who helped lead the church. And he was a humble man, he was not exalting himself, acting high and mighty, like he was someone important.

Peter was a witness. Now a witness would observe, would see or hear something, and then tell others, would testify to the truthfulness of what he had seen or heard. And Peter was a witness of the sufferings of Christ - he knew first-hand how Jesus suffered during His ministry years, and during that last week when He was abused, mocked, and beaten by the Jews and Romans, and finally when He suffered and died on the cross. Then Peter goes from how Jesus suffers to how he will share in His glory, this future glory that will be revealed at the end of this church age. And the fact that he is a sharer in this glory means that we too will share in this glory.

And Peter is giving the big picture, that Christ suffered and believers too will suffer, but it's worth it, for after this life is over, we'll be glorified and experience God's glory. We should be excited and encouraged about this glory that we'll experience in the future. And as a Christian, you need to know that the cross comes before the crown, that suffering comes before the glory. Rom. 8:23, Col. 3:4

1 Peter 5:2. Peter now talks about the role, the job description of the elder. He says elders are to shepherd the flock of God. And the elder is to see that the church is God's church, God's flock, or as 1 Tim. 3:15 says, "*the household of God.*" And the elder should never think the church he is leading is his church, but rather, that he's just a servant and he is to help lead God's church, God's flock.

And he is to shepherd the flock of God. And so we have this imagery of a shepherd with his flock, with his sheep. And this is appropriate, because Christians are like sheep, and sheep are very needy animals. Or we could also say that Christians are like little children; and we all know little children need help – physically, spiritually, mentally, emotionally - and so too, Christians, both young and old, need help, need to be cared for. And so the elder then is to shepherd the flock.

And what does a shepherd do?

- First and foremost, he feeds the sheep, he makes sure that the sheep are spiritually fed, that they get good spiritual food. Psalm 23:2
- Second, he leads the sheep, for sheep would be lost without a shepherd. And so he leads them and specifically he leads them to food sources. Ps. 23:2-5, Jn. 21:15-17
- Third, he protects the sheep from spiritual enemies, from those who are false teachers, from wolves in sheep's clothing, from those who are trying to lead people astray.

Acts 20:17, 20, 25-31. And so elders are to shepherd - they're to feed the sheep, to teach them the truth, and they are to protect them from their enemies. You also see that the church, the flock of God, is valuable, and that's because Christ purchased the church with His own blood. Acts 20:28, 1 Cor. 6:19-20

Then it says that the elders are to exercise oversight, and this word oversight means "*to look over,*" "*to watch over.*" And the elder is to be looking, to be watching over the church, and making sure everything is going all right, that the members are being fed and cared for, and if there are major problems, they are to help solve them. Phil. 4:2-3

You think of a shepherd watching over his sheep in a physical sense, and this is what the elders are to do in a spiritual sense. Now the shepherd may not be involved in every person's life, but he knows what is going on, and he will step in and help in a particular situation if he has to. Store manager. Bishop, Episcopalians

There are three phrases that talk about the mindset, the spiritual attitude the elders need to have, and this is very important, for what an elder does relates directly to his heart, his motivations, his attitudes, and these need to be godly and righteous.

1. The elder is not to shepherd the flock under compulsion, but voluntarily.

The elder should not feel like he has to, like he's forced to, like he is compelled to lead the Christians, but rather, he wants to, he desires to – he's doing it willingly and excitedly, he is passionate about it. Ezekiel 34

- John 10 talks about Jesus, the good shepherd, and the hired hand. And for the hired hand, it's a job, and he's making money, and vs. 13 says he's not concerned about the sheep, he doesn't really care for them, he doesn't really love them.

But the elder, like the good shepherd, loves and cares for the people in the church.

Now the Greek doesn't say according to the will of God, but according to God,

But both these phrases convey the same point, that the elder is doing the work of shepherding because he knows God wants him to. He is first and foremost being led and directed by God, being strengthened by God and His grace. Phil. 2:12-13

- Good pastors have a close relationship with God - they love God and they love His word, and these are the keys in their work of shepherding and leading a church.

2. The elders are not doing it for sordid gain. The NIV says, "*not greedy for money,*"

the ESV says, "*not for shameful gain,*" the KJ says "*not for filthy lucre.*" And what this means is that the elders are not to be greedy, they are not to serve the church

because they want the money, because they think this is a good way to make money.

Now the Greek word here goes beyond just having a wrong desire for money, of seeking wealth - it has the idea of doing it in a shameful way, in a way that's wrong or illegal.

In 2 Peter 2:13, in speaking of false teachers, says, "*From the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for gain, and from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely.*" 1 Tim. 3:3 says one of the qualifications of an elder, an overseer, is that he is "*free from the love of money.*"

And Titus 1:7, in another list of qualifications for elders, uses the same word as in 1 Pet. 5, saying he is "*not fond of sordid gain.*"

- I'm sure you've heard of religious leaders who get rich, who even become millionaires because of the money they receive from the church. And they have very nice homes, expensive cars, and some, their own personal jet. And this is the saddest, most evil thing there is, a so-called Christian leader making money off of the church for his own personal gain, and his own personal use. Jesus and Paul sure weren't like this.

3. The elder is not to lord it over others. He is not to be dominating, autocratic,

oppressive, intimidating, or forceful. And elders who are like this are fleshly, are not being led by the Lord, are not filled with and controlled by the Spirit,

and are not humble, loving, patient, kind, forgiving, forbearing, etc.

But rather, the elder is to be an example to the flock. By his life, by his character, by his example, he is to lead – and it's not by strong and forceful speech. Indeed, a person's example is more powerful than his speech. Phil. 3:17; 1 Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:3, 2:7; Acts 20:17-18; 2 Cor 1:12-14; 1 Thess. 2:1-10; 2 Thess. 3:7-9; 2 Tim. 1:13-14

We also note that it says, "*those allotted to your charge.*" This is also translated as, "*that which is given to another's care.*" The idea is that the people who are in an elder's church, a pastor's church, are the ones God has given to him.

- Again, when talking about the "*flock of God,*" an elder needs to know that the people in a church are not his people - they are God's. And God has given them to him to watch over, to care for. Every pastor is but a servant of God, a steward of God, and he is on earth for a very short time - to carry out the work God wants him to do. And God wants this elder to be one who is loving, diligent, faithful, and passionate about the work God has given him to do.

1 Peter 4:4. Now there is the reward for elders, for pastors who are serving the Lord. All Christians will be rewarded for their service, their work, but this specifically talks about church leaders being blessed for their work for the Lord.

- In these vss. we're talking about elders, about ones who could be called shepherds, and we read about the chief shepherd, the lead shepherd, the shepherd overseeing the entire universal church. John 10:11 says Jesus is the good shepherd, and Heb. 13:21 says Jesus is the great shepherd, and here we see that he's the Chief Shepherd. 1 Pet. 2:25

This tells us that Jesus will appear, that is, be visibly seen on this earth, and everyone will know who He is. 1 Peter 1:13. And when Jesus appears, when He is revealed, everyone will know who He is, and this will happen at His coming, in the near future.

- Matt. 24:27, 30-31. And Jesus will appear in the sky, and this is when the rapture takes place and all believers from all time will be gathered to Christ. And then we read that these elders will receive this crown of glory.

Now you have to understand that back in the Greco-Roman games, the awards handed out to the winners weren't ribbons or trophies - they were crowns or wreaths that were placed on a person's head. And this crown talked about here relates to the rewards the elders would get for serving, eternal rewards that God Himself would give them.

- And it says "*unfading*", and this word came from a flower that didn't fade, that kept its color and shape, symbolizing the eternal nature of this crown, of these rewards.

- James 1:12, 2 Tim. 4:8, Col. 3:23-24