

Week 22 - A Word to the Elders - 1Peter 5:1-4

Scripture Reading: Titus 1:5-9

Introduction

As Peter nears the end of his letter he turns his attention to some final instructions for how Christ-followers should live as they sojourn on this earth

Since this section begins with the word “so” or “therefore” it seems that, in light of the suffering the churches were experiencing and the thought of judgment beginning with the house of God, Peter was prompted to focus on purity of heart before God and proper relationships in the church

And he begins with the “elders” which is to say, the spiritual leaders of the church before moving on to addressing the rest of the church’s members

Sound leadership is important to the spiritual health of local churches and where it is lacking the churches are lacking

God’s people need adequate leadership - even in the best of times but especially in times of difficulty

God’s people can always wander into sin

And while the immature need a godly example, the strong also need leadership just as the most gifted orchestra needs the strongest conductor in order to harmonize properly

And yet, leadership in a local church is something of a paradox

It can be a glory and a ruin, a pleasure and a torment, a privilege and a pain

Let’s face it it’s a whole lot easier to review a movie than it is to direct one and to criticize a book than it is to write one

And it’s so much easier to tear down a leader than it is to be one making every step up the ladder of leadership a simultaneous step down in many ways

Church leaders seem to hear good news only rarely as complaints and problems more often reach their ears

Therefore, very few bear the mantle of authority in the church with ease

Some leaders are too eager to dominate and get their way while others are too reluctant to lead or too thin-skinned to endure

Since it can be a thankless job one might well wonder what sane man would even want to lead a church

This helps to explain why Peter took the time to write a special message to the leaders of the churches that received his letter

He wanted to encourage them to endure and to faithfully tend to their role as God would have them do

Because when fiery trials come, the Christ-followers in the churches would naturally be looking to their leaders to guide and encourage them

And, while this section is written to the elders, it has serious application for the flock as it should inform them as to what manner of man God would have them recognize as an elder

Let me encourage you to open your Bible and join me in 1Peter 5 and follow along as I read verses 1-4 [1Peter 5:1-4]

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

As we begin, we will look first at the basis and content of Peter’s exhortation to the local church elders

I. Peter's exhortation to local church elders

Notice that Peter doesn't 'command' the elders - rather, he 'exhorts' them

To exhort means to ask for something earnestly and with politeness

Peter uses the same word Paul used in **Acts 28:20** where he relates his reason for having 'asked' to see the local leaders of the Jews in Rome - rather than command an audience, which he had no authority to do, Paul asked them to see him

And Peter likewise beseeches or solemnly asks the elders of the local church to do what he is about to reveal

He relies on the power of persuasion and the elders' sense of what is right rather than stressing his own authority

But before we look at the content of his exhortation, let's look at the basis from which he asks

A. Its basis

Notice first that Peter classifies himself as one of them - as a fellow elder

Of course, we know that Peter was an apostle who had apostolic authority over the church and her leaders

But here Peter places himself on the same level as the elders he is addressing

Now Peter didn't do this out of some kind of false humility but in order to make the elders aware of their commission and what exactly it meant

Peter was fulfilling the personal commission given to him by the Lord after his resurrection when he told Peter three times, "Feed" and "tend my sheep" in **John 21:16-17**

And elders of local churches now fulfill that part of the work of the apostles

Peter also refers to himself as "*a witness of the sufferings of Christ*"

The gospel accounts tell us that Peter was the first disciple Jesus called and Peter had stood beside Jesus during his three years of earthly ministry both watching the events and hearing Jesus explain their meaning

So Peter was a 'witness' who had first-hand knowledge to pass along or to testify to

However, Peter was not an eyewitness to all of the suffering that Jesus endured

After all, **Matthew 26:56** tells us that Peter fled before the crucifixion

Therefore, Peter shared the position of the elders he was addressing in that he was a witness in the secondary sense since he proclaimed that part of the work of Jesus by drawing on the eyewitness testimony of others

And, in that limited sense, all elders are witnesses alongside the apostles as they base their teaching on the teaching of the apostles

Lastly, Peter calls himself a 'partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed'

To be a partaker is to be on par with someone else and Peter is claiming to standing alongside the elders as a fellow partaker of the glory to be revealed

Remember, Peter is a man who has sinned, repented, and been restored

And he will share with Christ in glory so he can rightly encourage any elder because his own failures and even his contributions to the suffering of Christ weren't disqualifying

For sure, he would have been disqualified from church leadership had Jesus not reinstated him after his failures

But he did just that and Peter was therefore able to stand alongside the other elders as a fellow elder and exhort them

Peter issued his exhortation on the basis of his eldership, his witness, and being a fellow partaker of Christ's glory

Now let's consider the content of his exhortation that we find in verse 2 [1Peter 5:2a]

Shepherd the flock of God that is among you

B. Its content

To shepherd, of course, means to do the work of a shepherd

But what does the work of a shepherd involve?

Shepherding is taking care of a flock of sheep or goats and it includes tending, protecting, encouraging, guiding, guarding, and feeding the flock under one's care

We could sum up the duties of a shepherd as to graze, guard, and guide a flock

And Peter applies this agricultural term to church leaders who were called to exercise administrative and protective care over the local community of Christ-followers

It must be noted that the flock belongs to God - it's 'the flock of God' and the elders have a responsibility to it

The parallels between the people of God and sheep are amazing and more than a little humbling

Sheep are notoriously prone to wander without a shepherd to guide them

Sheep often struggle to find proper nourishment without a shepherd to point them to the food they need to thrive

Sheep are by and large defenseless creatures in need of a shepherd's protection

Still, sheep are quite useful animals that provide wool, milk, meat, and lambs therefore worthy of shepherding

And **Matthew 9:36** tells us what happens when the sheep are left without a shepherd

When he [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Then Peter adds that the elders were to exercise "oversight" over the flock they were shepherding

An overseer is someone who inspects carefully and superintends or watches over others

Being an elder then involves the combined duties of exercising the care of a shepherd and the authority of an overseer

And God is going to hold the elders accountable for understanding the conditions of the times and the state of the flock and acting in ways that benefit the flock

Not all shepherds of God's flock have behaved as they should and God calls self-centered shepherds of Israel to account in **Ezekiel 34: 4-6** where he speaks of shepherds who not only ignored the welfare of the flock but used the flock to serve their own selfish ends

So, in the account before us this morning, Peter next instructs the elders of the proper way to shepherd God's flock

II. The proper way to shepherd

In the latter half of verse 2 and verse 3 Peter lists three sins or vices which elders can be especially prone to and the antidote for each of them

First we see that an elder is to shepherd the flock of God:

A. Not obligatorily but willingly

No man should take on the role of an elder merely out of obligation or because 'someone has to do it'

A man must choose to undertake the valuable work of an elder freely and willingly and with good cheer

Does that mean that being an elder will always result in eagerness for every aspect of the role?

Hardly - we've already talked about how being an elder opens one up to criticism and second-guessing and elders often have to make decisions that cannot possibly please all the flock - every role in the church has its moments of drudgery

But the elder who is serving rightly will embrace God's will and make it his own as a position and task freely chosen

The elder's main motive must not be duty or the pressures of expectations, reputation, or social status

One must not even simply desire the office of elder

He must 'aspire to the task' of being an elder as we read in **1Timothy 3:1** which is not nearly the same thing as many a man has discovered to his dismay

Next, and elder must serve:

B. Not greedily but eagerly

Peter actually writes 'not for shameful gain' which has led some to determine that any pay an elder receives is shameful

But that cannot be the case as other New Testament passages show the propriety of paying vocational elders - that is to say those elders who make their eldership activities their full-time work

We see this in **1Timothy 5:17-18** where Paul writes:

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."

Also in **1Corinthians 9:7** -

Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?

And **Galatians 6:6** -

Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches.

Paying the one who engages in vocational ministry is the correct thing to do

However, the elder's desire for such earnings must also be correct

To serve the church for the sake of money rather than for the sake of Lord and his people is shameful

However, greed and selfish interest are very close to the surface in all human hearts and an elder must constantly be on guard lest the temptation to serve for monetary gain corrupts his motives

It's one thing to make money in ministry and another to serve it

The man who serves as an elder and whose motivation is money may well find that he will do things to get more money such as favoring the rich or adulterating the Word of God in his preaching so as to attract more people

We need to notice, though, that Peter doesn't contrast shameful gain with honest gain

Rather he contrasts shameful gain with eagerness - a profound desire to serve regardless of payment

No one should become an elder because it's a respectable and intellectually rewarding way to earn a living

The difference between a hireling and a true shepherd is that the hireling works because he is paid to do so but a shepherd who is serving rightly works because of his love for the Lord and his sheep and his desire to serve them

The third vice Peter warns against deals with power as he says an elder should shepherd the flock of God:

C. Not tyrannically but illustratively

Peter here switches his attention from inward motivation to outward behavior

However, inward motivation isn't completely absent because the elder who desires power and control over others will domineer and delight in using his authority and seek opportunities to increase, preserve, or brandish it

The Greek word Peter uses here speaks of a high-handed autocratic rule over the flock

It carries with it the nuance of harsh or excessive use of authority and the word always seems to involve bringing something into subjection by the use of force

And Peter forbids the use of arbitrary, arrogant, selfish, or excessively restrictive rule as did Jesus in passages like **Matthew 20:25-27**

By contrast the elder who seeks not his own status but the edification and improvement of others will strive continually to make his life an example to others - a pattern to imitate

The concept of imitation runs through the New Testament

Jesus taught in Matthew 10:24-25 that a disciple should expect to be like his teacher

And Paul writes in Romans 8:29 that Christ-followers are being conformed to the image of the Son

Of course someone might argue that those examples have to do with imitating Jesus but Paul also wrote to the believers in Philippi, "*Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.*" [**Philippians 3:17**]

He also tells the next generation of church leaders to set an example for their people

He told Timothy in **1Timothy 4:12** -

Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

And Titus in **Titus 2:7** -

Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works,

Those who are in leadership positions in the church need to realize that the requirement to lead a life worthy of imitation isn't optional - it's a big part of the job

Remember, Peter was an apostle who could have commanded these things but he chose to exhort the elders - to lead by the power of example and that should be the stance of an elder

The elder who is shepherding rightly will operate more by setting a good example and exhorting than by wielding power and ordering

However, that doesn't mean that the elders don't have governing authority in the church and that others should be subject to them

We will look at this more in-depth next week when we get to verse 5 but in the command for others to be subject to the elders, we come to understand that there are times when elders can give direction which the church ought to obey

Elders are basically under-shepherds who the Good Shepherd has made stewards over his various local flocks which he has put in their 'charge' and they must carry out their duties as the Chief Shepherd desires

All of this serves to make us wonder how any man could dare to call himself an elder and step up to lead God's flock

Actually, the church has elders because God appoints men to be elders

Paul writes in **Ephesians 4:11-12**

And he [God] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ

But no one, not even an apostle *deserves* to lead and no man is *worthy* to lead unless God places him in the position and empowers him to carry it out

Leaders should aim to be faithful stewards of the portion of the flock that God assigns them because it's a privilege to be God's agent

But the labor often seems unrewarding as leaders are maligned and attacked at least as often as they are appreciated and admired

A leader is aided by the right attitude and motivation that enable them to serve for the sake of the Lord and the flock God assigns them and not for pay or recognition, power or rewards

Nonetheless, God promises a reward to those who serve as leaders and Peter reveals that the reward is out of this world

III. The reward for shepherding

Look with me again at verse 4 [**1Peter 5:4**]

And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

The elder, as an under-shepherd, serves in light of the return of the Chief Shepherd

Notice that Peter doesn't say *if* the Chief Shepherd appears but *when* - Jesus' return is a foregone conclusion

The Chief Shepherd, also called "*the great Shepherd*" in **Hebrews 13:20**, cares for the entire flock, the church universal, while the elders, serve as under-shepherds of their local congregations

And when the chief Shepherd appears the work of the under-shepherds will be evaluated and rewarded by him

When Jesus appears in victory at his second coming, the elders will receive an "unfading crown of glory"

The word translated "receive" means to receive to oneself that which is owed by way of compensation or a prize

And it carries with it the idea of not just receiving but of carrying it away for use and enjoyment

Notice that the crown of glory is unfading which means that the reward received is eternal

Contrast that with the elders who serve greedily for money or power both of which will expire when they do

Greed seeks a reward in this life while Peter reveals God's promise of an unfading crown that lasts forever

There is no power or riches conferred by the reward of the unfading crown and not truly even individual glory to the extent that one is honored over another

Looking back to verse 1 [**1Peter 5:1**] we see that all Peter's fellow elders are going to partake of the glory to be revealed

All elders will receive from the Lord outward evidence of honor and that should be their motivation as they fulfill their duty to the flock of God

Conclusion

Jesus is also the example that the under-shepherds should follow as they serve

They should endeavor to serve as he did - willingly and not grudgingly; eagerly and not for personal gain; by setting a good example to follow and not by force

And they should bear the suffering that comes from leading the local church while looking ahead to his appearing when he will grant them the unfading crown of glory

It's a difficult job in the best of circumstances

But elders who are serving well will do all those things according to the strength the Holy Spirit supplies

Then, for a local church to fully function as God intends, the flock must also willingly follow the leaders God has given them

Therefore, they must be diligent in seeking to affirm only those men who demonstrate the qualities of an elder to be the shepherd leaders of their local church and then strive to support and follow their God-ordained leadership

We will turn our attention to what Peter has to say about the flock next Sunday

Let's pray

Titus 1:5-9 (page 998)

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.