

The Chief Shepherd, Under-Shepherds, and Sheep

1 Peter 5:1 ESV (Pg. 590) 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: **2** 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; **3** not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. **4** And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. **5** Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

- I. Last week we saw that Jesus is the Head of his Body, the Church, and that there is no one who is inherently “qualified” or “called” to replace him or speak in his stead, as though they had his authority. Christ rules the church in reality, not pretend.
 - A. We don’t mean that no human beings can represent Christ in order to help us understand his will, or bring order to the church; just that they do so as people who are under the authority of another: Jesus Christ, the sovereign King.
 1. What I’m saying is that kingdom leadership doesn’t originate with any human being. Every bit of authority anyone exercises in the church has been **granted**, never earned or deserved. It is a task assigned by the Master.
 - a) Therefore, no man is allowed to be a dictator in the kingdom! There is only one sovereign King! Human leaders in the church are ambassadorial representatives of their King. He rules, and they follow and obey orders.
 - b) **Psalm 75:6 CSB** Exaltation does not come from the east, the west, or the desert, **7** for **God is the Judge**. He **brings down one and exalts another**.
 2. Furthermore, no one is authorized to lead in an unaccountable manner. Leadership in the church is always in community. After Jesus ascended, there were 12 human apostles. In Galatians 2 we see they sometimes had to hold each other accountable for drifting from the truth of the gospel.
 - B. Today we’ll focus our attention on one group of human agents that Jesus has given to the church in order to lead and provide care; that is the Elders.
 1. Eldership is one of the oldest kingdom-governing institutions in the Bible. Every tribe of Israel in the Old Testament had elders, and they were responsible for the faithful care of their tribe, and the clans within them¹.
 2. When the church became the new Spiritual Israel as God’s chosen people, eldership was adopted by the church, and was vital to its proper functioning.
 - C. The book of Titus tells us a lot about Biblical eldership (Titus was often-mentioned ministry partner of Paul’s). **Titus 1:5 ESV** 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— Paul’s direction to Titus to install elders in the towns and villages on the island of Crete tells us a lot about their importance.
 1. The proper functioning of the church **required** that elders be in place to provide care (“I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into

- order*”). They were not a luxury, but rather they were a critical necessity to the health of the church. There would not be order if there were no elders.
2. More than that, we see that elders were to be installed everywhere (“*in every town*”). This was so that there would be **local** shepherds to care for every member of God’s global flock. They wouldn’t have to travel to a central place, like Jerusalem or Rome, to get the instruction and correction they required.
 - a) It’s very true that the church in Tuscaloosa, Alabama is just as important and valuable to the Body as North Ridge Life Church, and that we are united to them in a very real way through Christ, and by the Spirit of God.
 - b) But the elders of a church in Alabama will not give account to God for the members of NRLC; nor will our elders give account to God for their church. God has given every church **local** oversight and accountability.
- D. Next, in verses 6-9, Paul lists the qualifications of a biblical elder, telling him:
1. They must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, and able to manage their households well (without out-of-control children). They must not be arrogant, quick-tempered, a drunkard, violent or greedy. They must be hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. They must not only believe the Bible and cling to it, but they must be able to confidently teach it, and willingly rebuke anyone who dares to contradict it².
 2. In a similar list found in 1st Timothy, Paul adds that they must be sober-minded and respectable. They must not be a recent convert, and they must be well thought of by those outside the church³.
 3. Whenever we install a new elder at NRLC, we ask the congregation to help us determine the presence of these qualities. This is another way that the congregation contributes to the community leadership of the church.
- E. So in his letter to Titus (and in 1 Timothy) , Paul teaches us that (1) elders facilitate the biblical ordering of the church, (2) that there should be local, as opposed to centralized, governance of local churches, (3) and that prospective elder candidates’ lives should be marked by great integrity and high character.
- II. We discover more about the intention of God pertaining to elders by examining more closely the text we read at the beginning, found in 1 Peter 5. You can’t fully understand the message of the text we read without knowing the context of 1 Peter.
- A. Peter is writing to Christians who are suffering increased persecution in the provinces north of the Taurus mountains in modern day Turkey.
1. In chapter 1, he tells them that they are to “rejoice, though now for a little while (they) have been grieved by various trials”⁴.
 2. In chapter 2, he reminds them that “this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly”⁵.
 3. In chapter 3, he encourages them, telling them, “But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed”⁶
 4. Chapter 4, he tells them to “rejoice insofar as (they) share Christ’s sufferings, that (they) may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed”⁷.
- B. And this brings us to where we began in our text. pay close attention to the context, in the light of Peter’s encouragement’s on suffering.
1. Having addressed the church, he now turns his attention to the elders in the congregations he’s addressing: “So I exhort the elders among you...” The

- word “so” is a substitute for “therefore” or “thus”; meaning “in the light of everything I said before, I now say this”. His encouragement to the church to endure suffering is incomplete until he addresses their leaders.
- a) It is the elders who are tasked with helping the people navigate the suffering they are experiencing; showing them how to faithfully endure.
 - b) They are to be in the midst of their congregations suffering. They are not guru’s on mountaintops belching out sage philosophies. Though they are leaders, they must first be fellow sufferers in order to be credible.
2. On what basis does he address these men? On the basis of three things:
- a) “**as a fellow elder**” Peter is not a foreigner to the task of pastoring people. Christ had once said to him, “Feed my sheep”, and he had been doing so for almost 30 years at the time he wrote this letter to the churches.
 - b) as “**a witness of the sufferings of Christ**”. He is not simply saying here that he had once observed a historical event, but that he has dedicated his life to being a witness of the glorious victory of Christ over suffering, as well as the victory he purchased for the entirety of believing humanity.
 - c) as “**a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed**” He has heard with his own ears promises from the Son of God concerning the vindication that awaits the saints who patiently endure suffering. He is equipping these elders with spiritual food for their hungry churches. He is telling them that when all is said and done, ***it will have been worth it!***
- C. So what is he telling the elders to do faithfully? “**shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight**” He is telling them to join him, their “fellow elder” in his task of feeding the flock of Jesus Christ.
1. We pointed this out last week from John 21, but notice here again: the flock they are to shepherd is the flock ***of God***. He is not talking to them about their flock, but about the one belonging to God. Again, it is a ***stewardship*** issue.
 2. How do they shepherd God’s flock? By exercising oversight. That means providing care, comfort, compassion, correction, spiritual food, instruction, encouragement, prayer, assistance of various kinds, etc.
 3. This also means that they are not to be intimidated to walk in the authority that God has entrusted to them, but with humility. **2 Timothy 4:2 ESV preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.**
- D. Peter gives us three principles for the exercise of our oversight and authority:
1. “**not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you**” No one should ever be pushed into Church leadership, no matter how seemingly qualified.
 - a) **1 Timothy 3:1b ESV If anyone *aspires* (“desire”-KJV) to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.** The first qualification for leadership is ***personal desire***. Eldership is a “get to” proposition, not a “got to” one.
 - b) I have known many people who pursued ministry and leadership because mama or daddy thought it was a good idea, not because that had any calling or interest in it. Sometimes the church has pressured people to take on leadership because of a particular skill set they had, though they had no desire to lead whatsoever. This usually ends in disaster.
 2. Next Peter says we should lead “**not for shameful gain, but eagerly**”.

- a) If you hope to gain money, influence, or power by church leadership, you might get it, but your “ministry” will amount to nothing of eternal consequence, and you will most assuredly fall into the hands of a vengeance-taking God⁸.
 - b) We must not have a “what’s in it for me” attitude towards ministry. We must willingly and eagerly serve, confidently trusting God for the provision of all of our needs.
3. Thirdly, Peter says “**not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock**”.
- a) Some people not only forget that the people in the church are God’s sheep, but they begin to think that they are their own personal cattle! Do you understand the difference between cattle and sheep? Sheep follow as they are lead, but cattle must be driven with whips, prods and shouts!
 - b) Peter instructs leaders to lead by example, not by dominance, bullying, or beating people over the head with a law they can’t keep either!
 - c) **Matthew 23:3b ESV they preach, but do not practice. 4 They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.**
- E. Peter says that for those who lead and serve faithfully, there is a great promise of reward to come: “**when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory**”.
- 1. Of course, there are rewards promised in the Bible to non-elders as well, but what this scripture points out is that God is pleased when his people help others enter into and thrive in the kingdom, and promises not to forget them.
 - 2. But notice **one more time** who’s in charge! Jesus is the “chief shepherd”; everyone else who is serving him is only an “under-shepherd”.
- III. Peter ends our text today with a few encouragements for those in the church who are not elders.
- A. First he says: “**Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders.**”
- 1. The Bible commentators Matthew Poole⁹ and Charles Ellicott¹⁰ say this probably isn’t talking about chronological age when it says “younger”; it’s talking about all people being in deference to the eldership of the church.
 - 2. **Hebrews 13:17 ESV Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.**
 - 3. As the elders are to resist dominance and be examples, the people of the church are told to submit to the leadership God has established. This isn’t to be regarded primarily a submission to man’s leadership, but rather to God’s sovereignty. He has set up whom he has chosen as leaders.
- B. Next Peter commands: “**Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’**”
- 1. Notice that this commandment is directed at everyone (“all of you”). That means that the church can only function properly if we commit to live in humility towards each other, with tremendous patience, tender-heartedness and forgiveness. This means elders give these things in abundance to the

- flock, and the flock lavishes humility, patience and mercy on the elders! And as I've said before, who wouldn't want to go to a church like that?
2. And don't ignore the attached promise! It has a negative and a positive side:
 - a) First, the negative...**"God opposes the proud..."**
 - (1) Can you imagine what it feels like to be opposed by God? He has the perfect defensive line! You're not getting through! But some of you **are** being opposed by God, and you think it's just bad luck! No, you fool! Pride has prompted God to literally stand against you!
 - (2) Can you just admit that you're stiff-necked, stubborn and proud, not living in service or sacrifice for anyone; especially not God? Humble yourself, sinner! Stop trusting in yourself and your righteousness! Stop insisting that no one can tell you what to do! Do you want God to oppose you to the grave? He won't relent. You can't win that fight!
 - b) But what a wonderful positive! **"God gives grace to the humble..."**
 - (1) What you need, what we all need, is grace! Jesus is full of grace¹¹! We are justified by grace¹²! All of God's promises rest on grace¹³! We stand in grace¹⁴! Grace frees us from the law¹⁵! Grace builds¹⁶! Grace gives¹⁷! Grace abounds¹⁸! Grace is sufficient¹⁹! Grace calls²⁰! Grace saves²¹! Grace communicates²²! Grace gives us eternal comfort and good hope²³! Grace overflows²⁴! Grace strengthens²⁵! Grace trains us to renounce ungodliness²⁶!
 - (2) What more could you need? What more could you possibly strive for?
- C. The way we acquire grace is by humility. It's a humility that admits we are powerless before a God who is all powerful; humility that confesses we could never be enough, but that he is more than enough; a humility that acknowledges that we are the sheep of his pasture, and that he is the only Chief Shepherd; more than that, he is the only good Shepherd²⁷.
- D. **Psalm 23:1 ESV** The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. **2** He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. **3** He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. **4** Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. **5** You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. **6** Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
1. Today, he has prepared a table before us and we shall not want. Let's come to the table of our Good Shepherd today. May he make us lie down. May he lead us to still water and restore our souls. May he lead us in paths us righteousness for the sake of his great name! May he free us from the fear of evil and harm and comfort us! May he anoint us with the sweet Holy Spirit! May our cup overflow! We can rest assured that his goodness and mercy will never depart from us all the days of our lives.
 2. And may the leadership of NRLC always shepherd the Lord's people in a close reflection of the way the Lord so wonderfully shepherds us.
- IV. **1 Corinthians 11:23 ESV** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he

had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

- A. Today let us gather at the table and proclaim the Lord's death as one Body until that glorious day when the Chief Shepherd appears.
- B. As you come, ask God to highlight areas of pride that might be in you; things that might have God opposing you. I repeat, you'll never get God to say uncle!
 - 1. But don't stop there! Thank him for the abundant grace that is freely available in the Lord Jesus, represented by bread and the cup, reminding us of the broken body and of the Savior's shed blood, available for everyone who asks.
 - 2. Some of you might want to really put your trust in Jesus for the first time. Stop running! You have no idea what you're missing. I'd love to talk to you!
 - 3. Then, for all of us, let us, by faith, humble ourselves before God in joyful repentance so that he can lavish the riches of his abundant grace on us in Jesus!

¹ See Exodus 3:16, 19:7; Leviticus 4:15, Joshua 7:6; Ruth 4:11; 1 Samuel 8:4 and many others

² Titus 1:6-9

³ 1 Timothy 3:2-7

⁴ 1 Peter 1:6

⁵ 1 Peter 2:19

⁶ 1 Peter 3:14

⁷ 1 Peter 4:13

⁸ Hebrews 10:29-31

⁹ https://biblehub.com/commentaries/poole/1_peter/5.htm

¹⁰ https://biblehub.com/commentaries/ellicott/1_peter/5.htm

¹¹ John 1:14

¹² Romans 3:24

¹³ Romans 4:16

¹⁴ Romans 5:2

¹⁵ Romans 6:14

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 3:10

¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 8:6-7

¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 9:8

¹⁹ 2 Corinthians 12:9

²⁰ Galatians 1:15

²¹ Ephesians 2:5, 8

²² Ephesians 4:29

²³ 2 Thessalonians 2:16

²⁴ 1 Timothy 1:14

²⁵ 2 Timothy 2:1

²⁶ Titus 2:12

²⁷ John 10:11-18