

Sunday, January 1, 2023 pm

STUDIES IN 1 PETER (27)

Shepherds of the Flock

1 Peter 5:1-4

As we have systematically gone through the book of 1 Peter we have seen his encouragement to remain faithful even in the face of trials, including persecutions. He has dealt with suffering and how to prepare for it and to face it. As we concluded our last study from this book, Peter admonished his audience to “commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.” We will endure and overcome trials if we are not committed to Him. We also noted that in this text, the word “commit” means “to entrust to”, that is we put our fate in our Lord or God’s hands (e.g. 2 Timothy 1:12 – noun form). AND among the things we must consider as we deal with various trials is how much WE NEED EACH OTHER. This has been a point of emphasis throughout our study of this letter. NOW, we turn to the leadership of the church, specifically a local church. In our text today, we find Peter giving instructions to the elders. In this lesson we are going to notice: 1) The office of the elder based on this text, 2) The message of the text.

I. The office of elder in our text

- a. The term “elder” can have reference to one who is older (e.g. poss. 1 Peter 5:5, 1 Timothy 5:1-2 – note: Older women is the feminine form of the word), or an office (Acts 20:17, 14:23, 1 Timothy 5:17, 19, Titus 1:5, etc.). Our context clearly is about an office.
- b. The “elder” is also a bishop and shepherd (pastor – so translated in Ephesians 4:11).
 - i. All 3 words are found here and in Acts 20:17ff - vs. 17 – elders, vs. 28 – overseers, and shepherd. And contextually, they all apply to the same person. It is worthwhile to briefly consider each of these words.
 - ii. Elder – (presbuteros), also presbytery. obviously a term associated with age. The idea being that to serve as an elder, one needs to be experienced as a Christian and have proven wisdom in dealing with life – both physically and spiritually. Specifically noted in 1 Timothy 3:6 where he cannot be a novice, lest he fall into the condemnation of the devil. What is the age? It is not specified, but typically we will know when one reaches that age by his life. Among the qualities he has a family that has matured to the point of his children being faithful (Titus 1:6).
 - iii. Shepherd – (poimen), or “pastor” describes a shepherd. The Bible has much to say about shepherds. They lead their flock with care, working to keep them safe, leading and feeding them. WE can appreciate the concept of a shepherd by considering David as a shepherd, which prepared him to lead as king; and Jesus describes Himself as the Good Shepherd – John 10:11, 14. Psalm 23 finds David appealing to YHWH as “my Shepherd”.
 - iv. Overseer – (episkopos) “bishop.” This term describes a superintendent or guardian. The term is found 4x in NKJV and always in reference to this office (Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:1-2, Titus 1:7).
 - v. NOTE: These terms are not about a title, but rather descriptive of their work.
- c. Elders in a congregation were always a plurality – every NT passage that addresses elders in a congregation finds them as a plurality – Titus 1:5, Philippians 1:1, Acts 14:23, 20:17, 15:6, etc.
- d. The limitations of their authority – the local flock. Peter said to “*shepherd the flock of God which is among you.*” (5:2) As you study the authority and work of elders in the New Testament, it is clear that their work is limited to their local flock. Consider: Acts 14:23 – “elders in every church” Acts 20:28 speaks of “the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.” Philippians 1:1, Paul is writing to brethren in Philippi referring to them as “the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with

the bishops and deacons.” Hebrews 13:7, 17 – remember and obey those who rule over you (implying limitation).

II. Our text

- a. This is a powerful text to describe how elders are to do their work as they lead a congregation
- b. Peter begins by exhorting **“the elders among you.”** We have already addressed this. Consider that Peter is writing this letter to multiple congregations and Christians (1 Peter 1:1). With that in mind, Peter SPECIFIES the responsibilities of elders in a given location. Take care of your own flock!
- c. **Peter is a fellow elder** –
 - i. Note: Peter was married – Jesus healed his mother-in-law, (Matthew 8:14-15, cf. 1 Corinthians 9:5). One of the qualifications of elders is that they must be married (1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:6).
 - ii. Clearly, as an apostle, in all other aspects He was qualified. He would have had the qualities described in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9.
 - iii. AND while we are not told where, as an elder, he must have served that role in a given congregation (perhaps in Jerusalem, or some other place).
 - iv. NOTE: Paul never described himself as an elder. He was an apostle, and as far as character goes, he was qualified. BUT he was not married.
 - v. Peter was “a witness of the sufferings of Christ” – both by being there – he was with Jesus (a qualification of being an apostle), but also a partaker in His sufferings. We have addressed this in our studies of this letter (cf. 1 Peter 4:12-16).
 - vi. A partaker of the glory that is to be revealed – Peter has hope of eternal life.
- d. **Shepherd the flock of God among you** – lead them as a shepherd leads his sheep.
 - i. As I understand, sheep are relatively defenseless without a leader. They are vulnerable which is why they need a shepherd watching over them CONSTANTLY. The shepherd looks for places to feed and water the flock, protects them from the elements and dangers (leading them away), and looks for predators and takes action when he sees them. In a flock of sheep, you would typically have a variety of ages from newborn to older. The shepherd watches out for them all together.
 - ii. Spiritually, a congregation needs leaders who genuinely care about them – physically and spiritually. **Hebrews 13:17** calls for us to obey those who rule over us (which would at least include elders), *“For they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.”*
 - iii. Elders seeks to “feed the flock” spiritually with God’s word, ensuring they are taught what they need to lead them in the right direction, educate them against false doctrine and teachers, and how to live godly lives and overcome worldliness.
 - iv. Shepherds need to be able to spot the “wolf in sheep’s clothing” and expose him to protect the flock – Matthew 7:15-16, Acts 20:28-31, Titus 1:9-11, etc. NOTE: If one is a false teacher, do NOT let him into the flock.
 - v. Shepherds may have to discipline those who are out of line – the purpose is to bring them back to where they need to be. Such must be done with love.
 - vi. NOTE again that it is **“among you”**. Elders are limited as to the scope of their authority. An elder has NO authority to oversee the work of another congregation or those not members of the local body.
- e. **Serving as overseers** –
 - i. Do the necessary work to keep the church going and ensuring its purity.
 - ii. NOTE: More than one source reminds us that the Biblical concept of leadership is different from the corporate model with a “board of directors” making decisions and enforcing them. Shepherds MUST make decisions, sometimes unpleasant, BUT we must never forget we are guiding the flock. It is not the job of an eldership to micromanage one’s life, but we do what

we can to lead them in the right direction. The REST of Peter's instructions here further develop this.

- iii. ALSO, be reminded that we are overseeing "the flock of God". It is NOT our flock. It belongs to God. That means whatever decisions we make must be in compliance with His will and pattern. We are protecting the flock FOR HIM!
- f. **Willingly, not by compulsion** – the desire and willingness must be there. Cf. 1 Timothy 3:1. NOTE: This does not necessarily mean without any hesitation or regrets (if so, one would have to resign the first time they were frustrated, or perhaps never step up to serve), but it is about an understanding that you are needed, capable and qualified to do the work. One serves as an elder, because he understands what it means to serve others and that is what God desires of us. He is concerned about the well-being of the body of Christ and willing to do all he can to make it thrive.
- g. **Not for dishonest gain, but with eagerness.**
 - i. Again, there is a concern for the welfare of the church to be what it ought to be.
 - ii. 1 Timothy 3:3 says an elder must be "not greedy for money".
 - iii. An elder should NOT see his work as an opportunity to materially prosper. He must be one who understands the evils of the love of money (1 Timothy 6:9-10). The elders must make their decisions based upon truth and spiritual expedience, and not based on financial windfall (E.g. An eldership that will not take corrective action because of how it would affect the treasury).
 - iv. The "eagerness" points toward his desire to please the Lord and ensure that the church remains the church of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23).
- h. **As examples, not as lords over those entrusted to you** –
 - i. He leads by being an example. He serves, even as our Lord served. The word for examples here is τύπος (typos) a word from which get our English word "type". It is translated "type" or "pattern" at times, e.g. Hebrews 8:5 – make things according to the pattern; Philippians 3:17, "You have us for a pattern", etc.
 - ii. Hebrews 13:7, *Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.*
 - iii. NOTE: This does NOT mean elders have no authority to take action. Some today would have you believe elders are nothing more than figureheads worthy of imitation, but they have no real authority. That is CONTRARY to what scripture teaches. But, the decisions they make are based upon their being Christians first and stepping out in front of a situation and SHOWING the flock how to deal with whatever it is.
 - iv. BUT, they are not to be "as lords over" the flock – they are not dictators, tyrants or bullies (bullying or threatening the flock into submission).
 - v. The best way to lead others is by being willing to do what you ask of others and showing them how it is to be done. You let them know you really care about them. That is the task of the elder.
 - vi. AND WHEN elders lead in this way, the godly will GLADLY follow after them. It is the ungodly and rebellious who reject their example.
- i. **When the "Chief Shepherd" appears, you will receive your crown.**
 - i. As is typical with our lives here. Often our rewards are not material, but will come later when we stand before God to face our eternal reward.
 - ii. The "**Chief Shepherd**" of course is Jesus (e.g., John 10:14, 17) who gave us the TYPE to follow. If we conform to His ways (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:1, Ephesians 5:1, 3 John 11, etc.) He will reward us accordingly.
 - iii. He is going to **appear** – there is a day of judgment coming. On that day, we will be judged by our lives and decisions – John 5:24-29, 2 Corinthians 5:10, cf. Revelation 20:11-15, etc.

- iv. ***You will receive the crown of glory*** – the crown mentioned here is the *stephanos*, a “crown” awarded to the winner of “games” (similar to our Olympics). It was usually a wreath made from local foliage and placed upon the head of the winner. Materially it was not of great value AND it would not last that long. IF we are faithful to the end and do our work (whether leaders or followers), we will receive a victor’s crown – 2 Timothy 4:7-8, 1 Corinthians 9:24-25, James 1:12, etc.
- v. IT is an eternal reward – your “crown” will not fade away. The word for “crown” here is a reference to the victor’s crown (as opposed to the crown of a king). Cf. 1 Peter 1:3-4 – we look for that inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled that does not fade away and is reserved in heaven for us.

When we face trials and troubles, we need each other. You can see the great value of the church – part of God’s eternal plan (Ephesians 3:10-11). And as we have noted, His plan included the local church and its pattern. The truth is we need each other! And a sound (healthy) church is one whose leaders lead as God has directed us to do. May God be pleased with all that we do as His church. Are you a part of His church? Think about it!