

Hope When Life is Hard...



A VERSE BY VERSE
EXPOSITION OF
THE EPISTLE OF
FIRST PETER

Shepherds of a Suffering Church

1 Peter 5:1-4 (707)

It is bad enough for a combat unit to be enduring the physical and psychological hardships of war, taking casualties, fighting an enemy that is seeking to utterly destroy them even when the bonds of brotherhood are strong. If that combat unit happens to be experiencing internal dissension and conflict it makes them all the more vulnerable and places their very survival in greater jeopardy.

The same is true of the church in times of struggle and external persecution. Indeed, solidarity is required in the face of persecution. We must not forget that the situation of these churches in Asia Minor was precarious. They were being assaulted by the unbelieving society around them. Such pressure on the covenant community can cause it to disintegrate, and the leadership is the focus of the pressure both from the outside and from inside the church (see Davids, pp. 174-175).

“Effective pastoral leadership is indispensable if the community is to survive. Leaders must function pastorally, not dictatorially, if those wounded by external social pressures are to remain within the community. There must also be mutual trust within the community, especially between those with

leadership responsibilities and the other members. Only with good leadership and mutual respect will the community and its individual members survive to bear a courageous and compelling witness to the grace of God in the gospel” (Achte-meier, p. 322).

In **1 Peter 5:1-4** Peter focuses his attention upon the leadership of the church. This leadership is vested in the elders. Follow as I read **1 Peter 5:1-4**: *Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ² shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³ nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*

Although it is not clear as to how sophisticated the organization was in the churches of Asia Minor at this time, as Presbyterians we believe that elder rule was and is the Biblical norm for church government. We obviously find influential individuals in the New Testament churches (**Acts 18**, *Aquila and Priscilla*). We obviously find congregational involvement in the decisions of the local churches (**Acts 6:1-6**). But we do not find churches actually ruled by majority vote or by a single pastor. Rule in the New Testament church was exercised by a plurality of ordained elders (see **Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5; James 5:14**).

Generally speaking the elders provide oversight (see **1 Tim. 3:1-2**, *overseer*) There are three predominate aspects of the “overseeing” work of an elder. First, there is the administrative aspect. This has to do with the *management* of the church as

an organization. Approving congregational actions, adjudicating disputes within the congregation, maintaining records, managing financial and legal affairs, and so on are all part of this administrative work. Second, there is the educational aspect. **1 Thessalonians 5:12** speaks of elders as those who *give you instruction* (see **Heb. 13:7**). **1 Timothy 3:2** says that an elder must be *able to teach*. We are talking about the ability to teach and uphold doctrinal integrity in the congregation. **Titus 1:9** says, *holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict*. So, elders are “**Word men.**” Elders provide for the ministry of the Word among the people. Elders promote the personal study of the Word among the people. Elders participate directly in the public ministry of the Word of God. Third, there is the pastoral aspect of the work of elders. Peter emphasizes this particular aspect here in Chapter 5. He is not listing qualifications as Paul does in I Timothy 3. Peter’s emphasis is on the *manner* of their ministry. Indeed, here is the big idea for the sermon: **pastoral oversight is to be exercised in a manner that is pleasing to God.** This opposed to a ministry that is self-serving.

Behind these four verses in 1 Peter 5 is the image of a *shepherd* (**5:2, 4**) and his *flock* (**5:2, 3**). This particular image is not very familiar to most of us here today. We are more familiar with a cowboy *driving* a herd of cattle than we are with a shepherd walking ahead of and *leading* a flock of sheep. The imagery of the shepherd is one of the richest and most tender in all of Scripture - the *flock* being a picture of the people of God and the *shepherd* being used primarily as a picture of God Himself. Listen to these precious words: **Psalm 23:1**, *The Lord is my shepherd*; **Isaiah 40:11**, *Like a shepherd He will tend His flock*; **Ezekiel 34:15**, *“I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest.”*

The shepherd imagery is carried over and applied to those men who care for God's people. This was true of the Old Testament people of God. **Ezekiel 34:2** says, *Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?* This is also true of the New Testament people of God. **Acts 20:17, 28**, *And from Miletus [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. ... "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."* And then, of course, here in **1 Peter 5:2**, *shepherd the flock of God among you.*

Pastoral oversight is to be exercised in a manner that is pleasing to God; in a manner that seeks and promotes the glory of God. Remember, we're talking about God's flock. The sheep belong to *Him* and *He* is the shepherd. Elders are not "stand ins" doing our own thing in God's absence. Indeed, elders minister in His stead. Their ministry is an extension, a continuation of His own. **Ezekiel 34:8**, *the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock.* If God says anything He soundly condemns self-interest on the part of those who would care for His people. What kind of shepherding ministry really pleases God?

First, God is pleased when the elders protect His people (see **Ezek. 34:5-6**). In **Acts 20:28-30** the Ephesian elders are instructed by Paul to *"be on guard for all the flock."* **Hebrews 13:17** says of elders, *they keep watch over your souls.* In the Word this applies particularly to protection from false teaching, protection from all that would disrupt the unity of the body, and protection from all that would bring reproach upon the gospel (See **Titus 1:9**).

Second, God is pleased when the elders provide for His people (**Ezek. 34:3-4**). Of

God the Psalmist says, *He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters (Ps. 23:2)*. Elders are to supply that which is needful for spiritual and physical sustenance. This means they must provide for the ministry of the Word and Sacraments. This means they must provide godly counsel (**Prov. 11:14**). The elders provide corporate direction in terms of philosophy of ministry, the general orientation of the ministry, and the vision for ministry.

Third, God is pleased when the elders tenderly care for His people (see **Ezek. 34:4, 12**). Like the needle of a compass is drawn to the north, the heart of an elder is drawn to the needs of the people of God. In the elder we should see embodied the command of **Colossians 3:12** - *put on a heart of compassion*. In the elder we should see embodied the command of **Ephesians 4:32** - *be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you*. The attention of the elders is turned particularly to those with special needs. They are called to visit the sick and pray for them (**James 5:14**). They are called to give special attention to widows and orphans (**James 1:27**), the elderly, those who are bereaved, indeed, all who are in a particularly vulnerable situation (see **Ezek. 34:4**). The elder is to have a heart for the lost that manifests itself in a personal zeal for evangelism.

Now with all of this as background we come to our text. Remember the big idea: **Pastoral oversight is to be exercised in a manner that is pleasing to God.**

1 Peter 5:1 *Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed. Therefore* signals that what follows is somehow connected to or is a conclusion based upon what preceded it. What is the connection? Peter could be

addressing the elders in light of the fact that the congregation was suffering. Such suffering would naturally call for an extra load for the elders to bear. But Peter could also be addressing the elders in light of the judgment mentioned in **4:17**. “It is likely that the thought of judgment *beginning from the house of God* (**4:17**) prompted Peter to focus on the need for purity of heart before God in relationships among those *in* the church, beginning with the leaders of the church. This pattern may even have been suggested by **Ezekiel 9:6**, from which Peter borrowed the language about judgment beginning *with the household of God*. Of the judgment visited upon Jerusalem, God says in **Ezekiel 9:6**, “*you shall start from My sanctuary.*” *So they started with the elders who were before the temple.* Here’s the connection: “since purifying judgment is beginning with God’s house, and especially with the leaders of God’s house, *therefore I exhort the elders among you*” (Grudem, pp. 185-186). **Hebrews 13:17** reminds us that elders are to serve *as those who will give account*. So these words of God through Peter ought to be, for us, words for sober reflection.

Peter makes his appeal to these brothers not as a coach might instruct a player but as one player might encourage and exhort his teammates. There is no doubt that Peter was in a position of authority *over* these men. He established that in **1:1** – *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ*. But here Peter is emphasizing his empathy *with* the elders in their calling and labors. Indeed, Peter is their *fellow elder* (**5:1**). He joins them as one who has been charged with the care of God’s flock (see **John 21:15-17**). Peter is also a *witness of the sufferings of Christ* (**5:1**). He is among those elders who proclaim the true gospel of Christ’s sufferings for sinners and who endure the result of that witness. Peter also identifies himself as *a partaker of the glory that is to be revealed* (**5:1**). Just like these elders Peter has suffered for his witness of the sufferings of Christ. Just like these elders he is

convinced that he will share in the glory and joy when Christ returns in triumph. We have heard these words from a person anticipating going to his or her favorite vacation spot: "I'm already there man." So sure is Peter of this glorious end and so intensely does he anticipate this joy that he can say that he is already partaking of it. He is, in a sense, already entering into the joys of heaven.

I want to break down **verses 2 and 3** structurally so what Peter is doing will be easier for you to see. "The [following] three pairs of contrasting phrases describe how the tending and oversight of the church are to be exercised: not under pressure but willingly, not because of any stipend but eagerly, not by harsh command but by example" (Achte-meier, p. 326).

1 Peter 5:2-3 *shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;*³ *nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.*

Positively, an elder is to serve *voluntarily* (5:2). He must possess willingness, indeed, a desire to minister as a shepherd of the flock (see **I Tim. 3:1**, *aspires*). Negatively, an elder is to serve *not under compulsion*. Ministry engaged in out of obligation can very quickly become drudgery. The stress, the relentlessness of pastoral care is too great. Eventually, slothfulness borne of reluctance will set in like gangrene. What is the antidote? Notice the phrase *according to God*. I believe the difference lies in a sense of call. The elder who can joyfully, willingly continue in the work is the elder moved along by the call of God.

Positively, an elder is to serve *with eagerness* (5:2). The same word is used in

Romans 1:15 where Paul declares to the Romans, *I am eager to preach the gospel*. An elder must demonstrate a measure of zeal and energy and enthusiasm for the work of shepherding. **I Thessalonians 5:12** speaks of elders as those who *diligently labor among you*. Negatively, an elder is to serve *not for sordid gain* (5:2). In other words, not with a “calculating spirit” (Davids, p. 180) that is concerned with how the position might benefit him especially financially. According to **I Timothy 5:17** some elders have a right to financial support. Certainly the prospect of such support could compromise a man’s motives. Just recently I read where the pastor of a large influential church in the mid-cities resigned in the wake of charges of financial improprieties. The elders also had charge of the church funds. Their authority could be used to misappropriate these funds or even to extract money from God’s people.

Positively, an elder is to serve as an *example to the flock* (5:3). Behind the word “example” lies the idea of an impression or seal, a stamp, or a mould. I think we could justly translate the term *“becoming patterns for the flock*. An elder is not perfect but he should and must be a viable pattern for the saints, manifesting the graces and manner that should mark all Christians. Negatively, an elder is to serve *not lording it over those in his charge*. *Lording it over* means exercising their ministry to their own advantage and contrary to the interests and well being of the people. It implies a measure of harshness; a demanding and overbearing attitude. “The disciples of Christ are to be servants, not bosses; ministers, not executives” (Davids, p. 180).

No man, elder or layman, can read and reflect upon these verses and not feel a measure of despair. The responsibility is simply too great. The standard is too high. The work is too important. The price is too steep. The results of failure are too catastrophic. It’s just all too much. Two facts serve to ease our fears. The

first is that the flock does not belong to us. Remember? In **John 21** Jesus said to Peter, “*Shepherd My sheep*” (**21:16**) ... “*Tend My lambs*” (**21:15**). The second is that we are but undershepherds. Indeed, Jesus is the Shepherd. In **Ezekiel 34:23** God says, “*I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd.*” Jesus said of Himself in **John 10:11**, “*I am the good shepherd.*” In **Hebrews 13:20** Jesus is called *the great Shepherd of the sheep*.

Brother elders ... Beloved congregation, Jesus is the Shepherd who oversees the flock *voluntarily not under compulsion*. He said, “*I lay down My life for the sheep ... I lay it down on My own initiative*” (**John 10:15, 18**). Jesus is the Shepherd who serves *eagerly* and not for personal gain. He said, “*I came that **they** might have life ... I am the good shepherd*” (**John 10:10, 11**). Jesus does not drive us by the whip. Indeed, Jesus is the shepherd who leads by *example*. Of the good shepherd Jesus said, “*he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. When he puts forth all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice*” (**John 10:3-4**).

Indeed, Jesus *protects* His sheep. In **John 10:27-28** Jesus assures us, “*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand.*” Jesus provides for the sheep. He says, “*I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture*” (**John 10:9**). Jesus *cares* for His sheep. **Matthew 9:36**, *and seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd.*

Take courage, brothers. We serve under the One who is *the Good Shepherd, the*

Great Shepherd, the Shepherd whose flock shall be kept until that day when He presents them, every one to the Father. And at that time *when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory* (1 Peter 5:4). The term *receive* is often used for receiving pay or wages. Here the common image is used to indicate the eternal honor or reputation that elders who serve well will receive from Christ at his return (Davids, p. 182). “When the Chief Shepherd appears, he will naturally pay his undershepherds who have served, not perfectly, but pleasingly. **Pastoral oversight is to be exercised in a manner that is pleasing to God;** to the King, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, to whom belongs honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction (Hebrews 13:20-21, 25)

²⁰ Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, *even* Jesus our Lord,

²¹ equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen.

²⁵ Grace be with you all.

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EXPOSITION OF
THE EPISTLE OF
FIRST PETER

Shepherds of a Suffering Church

1 Peter 5:1-4 (707)

In **1 Peter 5:1-4** Peter focuses his attention upon the _____ of the church.
This leadership is vested in the _____.

1 Peter 5:1-4: *Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ² shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³ nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*

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of ordained elders (see **Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5; James 5:14**).

Generally speaking the elders provide _____ (see **1 Tim. 3:1-2, overseer**).

There are three predominate aspects of the “overseeing” work of an elder:

There is the _____ aspect.

There is the _____ aspect

(**1 Thess. 5:12; Heb. 13:7; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9**).

There is the _____ aspect.

Pastoral oversight is to be exercised in a manner that is pleasing to God.

The imagery of the shepherd is one of the richest and most tender in all of
Scripture - the *flock* being a picture of the _____ of God and the *shepherd*
being used primarily as a picture of _____

(**Ps. 23:1; Is. 40:11; Ezek. 34:15**).

The shepherd imagery is carried over and applied to those _____
who care for God's people (Ezek. 34:2; Acts 20:17, 28).

God is pleased when the elders _____ His people
(see Ezek. 34:5-6; Acts 20:28-30; Heb. 13:17).

God is pleased when the elders _____ for His people (Ezek. 34:3-4).

God is pleased when the elders tenderly _____ for His people
(see Ezek. 34:4, 12; Col. 3:12; Eph. 4:32).

Like the needle of a compass is drawn to the north, the heart of an elder is drawn to the needs of the people of God.
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No man, elder or layman, can read and reflect upon these verses and not feel a
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One ...

Two ...

*1 Peter 5:4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading
crown of glory.*