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The Undershepherd 2

1 Peter 5:1-4

The fall of the Southern Kingdom of Judah involved three separate exiles! While all were punishments, yet all were different. The first two were about strengthening and building the power and grandeur of Babylon.

I call the exile of 605 BC “The Children’s Exile” as Babylon selected the best and brightest from amongst Jewish children to be trained in their schools that they might become the future lawyers, businessmen, builders, and engineers of Babylon. Recall, Daniel and his friends were part of this exile.

The exile of 597 BC I call “The Assistant’s Exile” for it involved the rich, powerful, capable, and strong who would be led by the now grown up Jewish children who had been taken roughly 10 years before. Ezekiel was part of this exile.

The third exile of 586 BC was quite different! This was an exile of decimation through which the nation of Judah was destroyed and almost all its inhabitants were either killed or captured/transported to Babylon.

That means that in 586 BC, the established, successful, and powerful Babylonian Jews were greeted by thousands upon thousands of Jewish Refugees who were dirty, stinky, diseased, sick, hungry, weak, and dying. These war-torn survivors would have had need for food, clothing, covering, medicine, work, and more important, pastoral care. They had just watched the destruction of their world!

As such, if there was any time for the Jewish elder to arise and use their calling and gifts unto the protection, growth, and health of God’s people, it was then! Yet what did they do? Shockingly, they neglected and, in many cases, rejected the people of God. And so, we read...

Ezekiel 34:2, 4-5, “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?... Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them. And they were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered.”’

Amazing! Year before — in the Children’s and Assistant’s Exiles — God brought these men into exile that they might care for His people... yet in their selfishness and rebellion, they missed it!

Well brothers and sisters, Peter was not going to allow this to happen again. As you know, 1 Peter was written during the Neronian persecution. And with the example of Ezekiel’s generation before him¹, Peter turned his focus to the elders of his day — to encourage them to stand up at this time when the Roman Empire turned against God’s people in which thousands upon thousands of Christians were arrested, tortured, and killed.

That God’s people might NOT be scattered, hungry, frightened, and so vulnerable to Rome or Satan’s ire, Peter turned in this last chapter to the Shepherds of God’s flock- the Elders...

1 Peter 5:1a, “Therefore, I exhort the elders among you...”

Peter’s introductory words in v. 1 gives us four important considerations when it comes to the office of elder. Then Peter turns to discuss the call of the elders.

1 Peter 4:1a, 2a, “Therefore, I exhort the elders among you... shepherd the flock² of God³...”-

The word used here for “shepherd” is ποιμαίνω (*poimainō*) can be translated as “shepherd’ or “pastor.”⁴ For example it is used in Ephesians.

Ephesians 4:11, “And He gave some... *as* pastors and teachers.”

This is the only place in the New Testament where the noun form⁵ is used of the elder. All other uses of this term are in the verbal form, ποιμαίνω (*poimainō*). The idea of “shepherding” God’s people as “God’s flock” is an Old Testament image with a rich background (e.g., Psalm 23).⁶ It understandably brought into the New Testament and served as a description of Christ’s role/work amongst God’s people. Christ put it this way:

John 10:11, “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.”

John speaking of the persecuted reveals this:

Revelations 7:17a, “For the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life...”

Truly, Christ is the Chief Shepherd and Head of His church whom He calls His “little flock” (Luke 12:32a). Accordingly, when it comes to its care the Lord entrusted it — after His resurrection — to men whom He charged with “shepherding/pastoring the flock of God”. It began with Peter.

John 21:15-17, “So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me more than these?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Tend My lambs.’ He said to him again a second time, ‘Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Shepherd My sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me?’ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ And he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Tend My sheep.’”

With this exchange, Christ imported into the NT NOT ONLY the rich background of OT pastoring/shepherding (as in Psalm 23), BUT ALSO the glorious example and work that Christ Himself accomplished with and amongst His people such that at the end of His life He could say to God, “Of those whom Thou hast given Me I lost not one” (John 18:9)! And thus, the call rests upon every church leader to be on guard.

Acts 20:28, “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.”

1 Peter 5:1a, 2a, “Therefore, I exhort the elders among you... shepherd the flock of God...”

The call of every elder in Christ’s church is to relate to the body of Christ as a pastor/shepherd.⁷ Now notice the important qualification, “among you.”

1 Peter 5:2b, “Shepherd the flock of God among you...”

This prepositional phrase is often passed over in books on pastoral leadership. Yet it is so important for it gives *the arena* in which pastoral care is expressed.

As Peter himself is going to address in v. 3, the propensity of leadership in a fallen world is that of “lording it over those allotted to your charge.” A large part of our sinful proclivity is to use our positions to exploit/dominate the weak unto our personal. Now this is made easier when the leader is exalted above his people, set apart, and so removed from those “entrusted by God for their care” — the latter is what leadership is all about: It is NOT ruling, BUT serving.

Mark 10:42-44, “And calling [the disciples] to Himself, Jesus said to them, ‘You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all.’”

And so, the expression “among you” brings the “throne” down to the level of the people such that the leader is NOT removed from those whom he leads, BUT lives, dwells, works, and walks among them! This is the pattern given to us by God’s/Christ such that when the Bible talks about leadership, it always involves “walking with” and so being “among the people of God”! It began in the Garden where we read of the Lord Himself.

Genesis 3:8b, “...walking in the garden in the cool of the day...”

“Walking” in Bible times was an expression which meant much more than simply going from point A to point B. It conveyed the idea of talking, sharing, supporting, directing, comforting, serving, and much more. In this regard what is the call of the parent?

Deuteronomy 6:6-7, “And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your sons [how?] and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.”

The concept of walking played a prominent role in Christ’s ministry.

Matthew 4:18, “And walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers...”

Matthew 14:25, “And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea.”

The expression here describes more than just movement, BUT an arena of communion/fellowship. That no doubt is why Peter asked Christ if he could join Him. When Christ gave him permission, what do we read?...

Matthew 14:29b, “...and Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus.”

When the disciples were on the road to Emmaus, we read this:

Luke 24:15-17a, “And it came about that while they were conversing and discussing, Jesus Himself approached, and *began* traveling with them [He is walking with them]. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. And He said to them, “What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?”

With this background, I hope the expression jumps out at you. The call of shepherding is carried out “among” God’s people, “Shepherd the flock of God among you...”

This you must see is NOT established or secured in a yearly pastoral visit. RATHER, this occurs as time is spent together with and amongst one another! That is why from the start of this church we have placed so much emphasis on enjoying and so utilizing the Sabbath day by being together; it is NOT a day for napping BUT investing in each other! As we are “together” — and there make it a point to inquire how others are doing — the shepherding care of God’s church takes place.

Thirdly, the elders are to exercise oversight.

1 Peter 2:2c, “Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight⁸...”

The word used here is ἐπισκοπέω (*episkopeō*). The noun form is ἐπίσκοπος (*episcopos*) where we get the word Episcopal. The Greek word means “guardian” and is used five times in the New Testament.

1 Peter 2:25, Christ is called, “...the Shepherd and Guardian [ἐπίσκοπος (*episcopos*)] of your souls.”

The other four uses of *episcopos* have reference to leaders in the Church where they are called to “oversee” and so guard the people of God (Acts 20:28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7).

Now ironically, as the church began to lose its Jewish flavor, due to the inclusion of Gentile

believers, the Greek culture's primary word for a leader, ἐπίσκοπος (*episcopos*), was used more frequently to describe those who functioned as elders. And that is why, Scripture is quick to remove from this term any notion of despotic rule. The work of an elder is NOT about the elder, BUT about the good, the benefit, and so the health of God's people!

When the Bible says that the "husband is the head of the wife" (Ephesians 5:23) the world hears degradation and humiliation. When the church reads this oft-times what comes to mind is the barking of orders and so dictating what must be done. Yet, in Ephesians 5, the language of "headship" is derived from THE institution governing all of Redemptive History: The Covenant Community.

The Covenant Community is a group of people whom God has called out of the world to Himself for a specific purpose to which He gives servants, guardians, protectors whose job it is ensure that God's purpose for that body is met. Moses was one such head; as was Samuel, the Judges, and the like. Accordingly, when we read of Christ being "the Head of the church" we understand that this references more than simply bare authority. It speaks of His role as guardian and protector of the church — which is the work of a Shepherd!

That is The Call of the Elder: Guardian of the flock of God!

Now ultimately, we know that Jesus is THE Guardian — only He can protect it, grow it, mature it, and govern it. As such, the elder must see himself as Under-Overseer who serves at Christ's bidding in the protection of His flock.

Because of this, a very important biblical concept became massively important during the time of the Reformation as it relates to the elder's oversight. The nature of the oversight of the pastor/elder is found because Christ is the Chief Overseer, Under-Overseers have but two and only two tools in their "oversight" of the body:

- They are directed and empowered by God to wash the feet of the disciples. After washing the disciples' feet Christ said this:

John 13:15, "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you."⁹

- They are directed and empowered by God to declare the Word of God and so hold God's people accountable to it.

Christ called upon Peter to "tend" God's sheep. The word for "tend" is βόσκω (*boskō*) which means to "feed". That is the task of the elders. Their call is NOT to tell people what they want to hear (2 Timothy 4:3–4) NOR is it to "rule OVER" God's people (1 Peter 5:3). RATHER their call is to "rule UNDER them" and so to edify and strengthen the people of God on the Word.¹⁰

Fourth, the elder is to be an example to the flock, they are not called to lord it over.

1 Peter 5:3b, "...over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples¹¹ to the flock."

This is the fourth element which Peter attributes to the elder's call. They are called to be "an example"- a *τύπος* (*typos*)- and so a type, a mold, a cast, or a form of what it means to be a faithful servant of Christ who at this time were in the crucible. The Greek name for "elder" gives emphasis to this. This text uses three terms in reference to the elder.

- *ἐπίσκοπος* (*episcopus*)/Overseer emphasizes the man's role in the congregation. He is a guardian or keeper of God's people.
- *ποιμήν* (*poimēn*)/Pastor emphasizes what ought to be the heart of the elder... that being a shepherd! He does NOT approach the congregation as a lord (who rules over), a cowboy (who drives the herd), BUT as a shepherd who endeavors to lead the flock of God to their home!
- *πρεσβύτερος* (*presbuteros*)/Elder lays emphasis on the man's character before the Lord. He is a man of God, a father in the faith, a spiritually mature person whose walk- if emulated- would lead any who might follow to a healthy, deep relationship with the Lord.

Because of this, the elder's life is intended by God to be "an example" for God's people to follow!¹²

In this regard, the emphasis is NOT on a perfect man who doesn't sin. RATHER, the emphasis is on an imperfect man who addresses his sin biblically! This is so important! Great leaders have problems in whatever organization they serve (this is a sinful world where problems rear their ugly head all the time). And what sets-apart a great leader is NOT the absence of problems, BUT how they handle the problems! Because that is the case, how does a godly man — an elder — deal with his own sin?

Proverbs 28:13, "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion."

A man of God does NOT hide, downplay, dismiss, or deny his sin. NO! what makes him a man of God is that he confesses his sin!¹³ Think of David, Psalms 32 and 51! Paul, not just as an Elder but as an Apostle, wrote this:

Romans 7:22-25, "For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin."

Another mark of a man of God is a daily struggle with sin! The immature Christian struggles to

be holy, yet most often it is naïve because they have NOT come to grips with the wretchedness of their sinfulness. And so, they tend to hide their foibles thinking *"I am the only one who struggles like this!"*

In contrast, the man of God knows the struggle, such that he does NOT trust himself. As such, he has the security to struggle openly with his sin (as Paul did here)! And if that disqualifies him in the eyes of some, so be it! That is of little concern, for the man of God is NOT concerned about image... he's concerned about Christ, His honor, and His glory!

2 Corinthians 5:14-15, "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."

So many in the church fight against sin because:

- That is what godly people do.
- They don't want to be disqualified.
- They don't want to be embarrassed.
- They want to feel good about themselves.

In contrast, the man of God fights against sin because he knows that sin, no matter the quantity, will inhibit their ability to love, know, and see the Lord. They know that "it is the pure in heart who see God" (Matthew 5:8). As such, they don't want to do anything that might inhibit their ability to behold the Lord in His glory and grace! Consider finally what Christ said when He described those who are to be envied in the Kingdom.

Matthew 5:3-4, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

The man of God is one who genuinely mourns over his sinfulness and spiritually impoverished condition. As such, he is one who does NOT look within when it comes to battling against sin. RATHER, He abounds in trust and reliance upon Christ and so is filled with joy! Recall the testimony of King David.

Psalm 32:1-2, 11, "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit!... Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous ones, and shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart."

This is the pattern/type/cast/mold/EXAMPLE that Men of God present to a congregation.¹⁴ And such is the calling of the elders in Christ's church:

- Their heart/mind is that of a shepherd.

- They are NOT aloof, BUT genuinely desire to be with God’s people.
- They work hard at guarding the flock of God from the devil, deceit, worldliness, rebellion, and sin.
- Their passion is NOT to be an example of a man of God, BUT to love Christ more than life- which makes them an example and so, an elder!

When men serve Christ’s church accordingly, they do NOT endeavor to play it safe (as the elders in Ezekiel’s day). Rather, they open themselves up to the will of God and so serve according to the opportunities given to them by the Lord!

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End Note(s)

¹ 1 Peter contains many references to Ezekiel, the most recent being 1 Peter 4:17... the reference to Ezekiel 9 that “Judgment begins with the household of God.”

² “‘Flock’ brings to mind all the shepherd imagery found in the Scriptures: the sheep gentle, defenseless, liable to stray, needing a shepherd, happy, peaceful under his care, pitiful when lost, scattered, etc. This is ‘God’s flock’ that was bought at a great price (Acts 20:28), that is exceedingly precious in his sight, a great trust placed into the hands of human shepherds who are to pattern after Yahweh, the Shepherd (Psalm 23:1), and Christ, the Archshepherd (v. 4). What shepherd could have the care of any part of God’s flock and treat it carelessly! Peter’s words are sparing but overflow with tender and serious meaning.” (Lenski, 1966, p. 218)

³ “There is a play on words, since the verb tend (poimainō, ‘serve as shepherd, serve as pastor’) and the noun flock (poimnion) come from the same root. We could translate, ‘Shepherd the sheep of God’.” (Grudem, 2009, p. 194)

⁴ “Peter makes two significant points in this initial charge: (1) by using the ingressive aorist he indicates that this is something that needs to be done with ever new vigor rather than as a routine undertaking, and (2) by noting that it is ‘the flock of God’ he shows that they have no proprietary rights.” (Davids, 1990, p. 178)

⁵ ποιμήν (poimēn)

⁶ cf. Psalm 23; Is. 40:11; Jeremiah 23:1–4; Ezekiel 34:1–31.

⁷ Based on the Biblical description of the shepherding activity, the primary activities involved in pastoring God's flock are protecting, guiding, nourishing, and leading. Paul put it this way, "And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:11-13)

One of my seminary professors put it this way, "What is shepherding? The answer could take pages, even books. In a few words it can be described as caring for God's people after the manner of Jesus. John 10:1-18 reminds us that Jesus himself is the Good Shepherd. He leads the sheep, He watches over them, He protects them from harm and He lays down His life for them. The elder is an undershepherd who follows the pattern of the Good Shepherd." (MacNair, 1980, p. 65)

⁸ "The combination of the term 'elder' with the verbs related to 'pastor' and 'bishop' ('overseer') in such close connection in verses 1 to 2 is good evidence that the terms 'pastor', and 'bishop, overseer' were interchangeable during the New Testament period." (Grudem, 2009, p. 194)

⁹ "Followers of Jesus are to use their authority to serve, and in that way they imitate the example of Jesus himself (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45)." (Schreiner, 2003, p. 235)

¹⁰ That is why one of the qualifications of an elder is NOT public speaking, BUT "teaching" the word of God (1 Timothy 3:2)!

¹¹ "Jesus often presented himself as an example (Matt. 10:24-25; Mark 10:42-45; Luke 6:40; John 13:16; 15:20). Paul could write, 'Walk according to the example you had in us' (Philippians 3:17) and 'We gave an example to you so that you might imitate us' (2 Thess. 3:9), or even 'Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ' (1 Corinthians 11:1; cf. Acts 20:35). Other leaders were also expected to be examples (1 Thess. 1:6-7; 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7; Jas. 3:1-2). In fact, one could well argue that, following the pattern of the ancient world and especially of Judaism, teaching and leading was for the NT basically a matter of example rather than of lecture or command." (Davids, 1990, p. 181)

¹² "Thus all in leadership positions in the church should realize that the requirement to live a life worthy of imitation is not optional- it is a major part of the job, challenging though such responsibility may be. Moreover, those who select church leaders should realize that academic excellence and administrative or financial skills do not automatically qualify one for leadership in the church (as they would for leadership in the university or business worlds)." (Grudem, 2009, pp. 196-197)

¹³ More than anything, that is what set King David apart. When we think of David, we typically do not think of his writings (a large part of the Psalter), his conquests, or even his wisdom. Rather, we think of his sin with Bathsheba and so the confronting of his sin by the prophet Nathan. Thus, what set David apart- in his ordeal with Bathsheba- was not his sin, but his repentance, specifically Psalm 32 and 51!!

¹⁴ This no doubt is why the Hebrew writer, also appealing to God's people during the Neronian persecution gave this exhortation, "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct [make sure they are elders and if they are...], imitate their faith." (Hebrews 13:7)