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The Undershepherd, 3

1 Peter 5:1-4

Most of you both know and love this verse: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.” (Proverbs 3:5-6)

This is a passage which I frequently pray on behalf of my family, children, and any who might be unsure as to what God would have them do. I want them to have a “straight path” not one which tries this for a little bit and then drifts to that. We all want the straight path — for we do NOT want to waste time NOR do we want to be ineffective. That having been said, that

does not mean that “the straight path” is the easy path. Let me share with you the words of a Psalm which encouraged and ministered to Jonah, Jeremiah, and our Lord — all of whom quoted from it in their lives!¹ David made this observation as he endeavored to serve the Lord:

Psalms 31:13, “For I have heard the slander of many, terror is on every side; while they took counsel together against me, they schemed to take away my life.”

David wrote this at a time when treachery and attacks straddled his path! It was no easy go! From this we conclude that “the straight path” is anything but easy! There will be many distractions along the way: discouragements, detractors, slander, and many critics. It will be so hard at times that even the most faithful servant of God will be tempted to compromise. Yet this we must not do!!

That no doubt is why Peter in his instruction to the elders of the church took the route that he did. After laying down four introductory considerations when it comes to the pastoral ministry and then issuing a strong call to the faithful pastoral care of the body, Peter ended this exhortation by giving a series of cautions punctuated with a glorious hope! Notice the first caution: Elders must serve with the right perspective.

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

When it comes to the work of an elder, they must all understand that we are dealing NOT with OUR ministry, BUT God’s! The focus and attention of their work has NOTHING to do with themselves. RATHER it has everything to do with God and so His people, His inheritance, and so His legacy, honor, and glory. Paul emphasized this when he told the Ephesian elders.

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.”

Now while the focus here is on the elder’s call, nevertheless this Caution easily could be issued to all in Christ as it relates to any and every part of the Christians life: our time, resources, money, relationships, health, and the like. When a person comes into the Kingdom of God, anything and everything they possess is forfeited and so given up to the Lord. But herein is the problem: The moment we are saved God gives it all back to us as a stewardship and so a ministry- such that we can easily forget that all that we have belongs to the Lord! Consider the call of Moses. During the exchange between Moses and God, Moses raised an important question:

Exodus 4:1-2, “Then Moses answered and said, ‘What if they will not believe me, or listen to what I say? For they may say, “The Lord has not appeared to you.”’ And the Lord said to him, ‘What is that in your hand?’ And he said, ‘A staff.’”

The “staff” Moses was holding in his hand was a shepherd’s staff which was far more than a walking stick. It was both a tool and symbol of what he had worked at for the previous forty years. As such, it represented nothing less than his livelihood, the means by which he cared for his family; it was how he served the Lord! Yet Ministry 101 begins when the servant takes that which is most precious and most important to himself, and does what?

Exodus 4:3a, “Then [God] said, ‘Throw it on the ground’ ...”

In other words, “*Give it up! Give it to Me!*” Had the Rod of Moses remained as Moses’ rod, the patriarch would have remained an insignificant shepherd in the land of Midian. But as Moses’ gave it up to the Lord, the rod of Moses became the Rod of God! A very important part of Pastoral ministry when it comes to elders is recognizing that they are dealing with God’s possession, not their own! As such, there must NOT be any sense of possessiveness by which we say, “MY bible study... MY worship... MY ministry!” In fact, the term rendered “flock” here is a diminutive,² which in the Greek is a term of endearment which stresses the preciousness of the church to God! R. C. H. Lenski put it this way:

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 (Psalms 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)

How we need to hear this! In the context of ministry, it is so easy to minister with hands clenched, feet entrenched, and an unwillingness to do it any other way than MY WAY!

Fellow elders, this is God’s church, His flock! Our names are NOT attached to this ministry, just Christ’s! As that is the case, we must strive NOT to do ministry our way, BUT God’s way with a freedom that comes from knowing that all we are is a steward, a second level galley slave, and so a servant of God and so His people! This will protect us NOT ONLY from being overbearing and possessive, BUT ALSO from being discouraged and depressed on account of a lack of fruit or response.

Secondly, elders must serve for the right reason.

1 Peter 4:2c, “Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily...”

The word for “compulsion”³ speaks of arm twisting. It means “to constrain either by threat, entreaty, or force”. For example:

- It was used of Saul of Tarsus who endeavored to “constrain” the saints — through threats and dire warnings- to blaspheme (Acts 26:11).
- It was used of Peter when he stood condemned because he was “constraining” Gentiles

to be circumcised (Galatians 2:14).

- It was used of Paul when he felt “constrained” to appeal to Caesar (Acts 28:19).

In each of these verses “to constrain/compel” speaks of forcing/compelling a person to do something. When it comes to the pastoral care of God’s people, the Lord does NOT want the ministry of His undershepherds to be out of obligation, manipulation, or fear. Rather, He wants it to be “voluntarily” given!

The word for “voluntarily”⁴ carries the idea of deliberate or intentional activity that becomes habitual. Accordingly, it is pastoral care that is deliberate and so planned, determined, and done with forethought. And when this occurs in the life of an elder long enough, it becomes habitual and so second nature! With that, notice the elements with this word. The first is that of choice.

- Choice- which Paul picked up on when he said, “...if any man aspires to the office of overseer...” (1 Timothy 3:1b)

Let me share with you something that may be shocking... Being a faithful shepherd is MORE about one’s choice RATHER than giftedness. Think of it! Shepherding/caring for others in the body is NOT a spiritual gift. It no doubt is enhanced by many spiritual gifts. Yet it begins with a choice and so a decision the Christian makes on a day-to-day basis! A second element to the word for “voluntary” in the Bible is volition.

- Volition- which Paul also picked up on when he said, “...if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.” (1 Timothy 3:1c)

If the choice has been made, then the will must be exerted to get the knowledge, understanding, and so training necessary to be an effective shepherd (that is the idea behind “desiring to do” something).

Here and again it does NOT depend upon one’s giftedness, BUT the determination and desire of the servant! Anyone can become a shepherd. It is that so few desire it! And lastly, the word used here denotes that the action is habituation and so something that can be captured or grown into.

Do you understand what this means? A person can grow as a shepherd! Like any vocation-sales, working on an assembly line, car repair, and the like- shepherding involves a set of skills which can be honed, enhanced, developed, and matured!

You say, “So, is shepherding really a calling on the part of God?” Most definitely! But based on how the Bible treats the calling/office, we conclude that if a man has the desire, he will make the choice to grow in his ability to shepherd. These are all signs that the Lord has called him!

What little I have of a Shepherd’s heart today was not always there! Quite naturally I lack

compassion. And early on this was one of my biggest struggles when it came to being an elder. Do I really love God's people? Yet, as I grew in my walk, I grew in my passion, desire, and ability to be an elder (as I began stretching during Sunday fellowship times by asking people about their walk). Honestly, I would NOT be an elder today had I not years ago stepped outside of the comfort zone by which I inquired about the souls of God's people.

What is it that makes a man want to want to be an elder in the first place? The biblical answer is godliness — which is the glorious marriage of love and reverence for the Lord! When this becomes that which compels us, we naturally will want to be a part of others growing in their love for the Lord as well as their reverence for Him. We see it in 2 Corinthians 5. there is no question Paul was a Shepherd, an Elder, and so a leader of God's people. Yet, what made this persecutor of the church into a pastor?

2 Corinthians 5:11, "Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men..."

As Paul grew in his understanding of God, the Lord's greatness, and so His glory, Paul's reverence for the Lord increased. That meant that more and more of his life was driven, dictated, and so determined by the character of God and so the commands of God in His word (which commands us to love the brethren, cf. 1 Peter 1:22). The bigger God became in his life, the more he endeavored to "persuade men." Yet there was a second reason Paul became a Shepherd is this:

2 Corinthians 5:13-14a, "For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you. FOR the love of Christ controls us..."

The second thing that grew Paul into a shepherd was his apprehension of God's infinite love for him which translated into a growing love for the Lord and His people (cf. also John 21:15-17)!

So, any here at all interested in taking up the call to help God's people grow in the Lord? Every elder/deacon should raise their hand on this one! But if they don't or they hesitate, that's O.K. For regardless of the intensity of the felt desire at this moment, the desire is fertilized, watered, and enhanced as we grow in our love and reverence for Christ! Think of it! How can we love the Lord and be driven by His glory and NOT want His people/church to be all that it can be? MacArthur wrote:

When the heart is fully Christ's and driven by love for Him and for souls, there is much internal compulsion that precludes any need for external motivational pressure. (MacArthur, 2004, p. 268)

Thirdly, elders must serve in the right way.

1 Peter 4:2d, "Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*..."

You may think this goes without saying, but you'd be amazed how many elders, deacons, and churches do God's work according to the wisdom of man. Take, for example, church discipline.

Matthew 18:15-17, "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer."

Do you know how many churches do NOT practice this simple command? All of them! The typical pattern when someone is sinned against is NOT to approach the sinning party and share concern, BUT to do one of three things:

1. Tell other people
2. Bury the offense and so become bitter
3. Ignore the sin altogether in the name of "loving" the sinner.⁵

Let me qualify the latter statement. If someone sins against you and in God's grace you are able to take it to the cross, lay the offense down, and walk away without anger, grief, regret, or remorse, praise God! In this instance, "Love covered a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8) But if you aren't able to leave it at the foot of the cross- or the sin is egregious and or habitual — then the ONLY option is the process outlined in Matthew 18.

Yet, Matthew 18 is NOT a pleasant process!⁶ That no doubt is why we as sinners have created a *spiritual* work-around in which we essentially say, "We won't do it 'according to the will of God' which calls for confrontation... rather we are going to opt for 'love'!" It is the last option I referenced above.

Christian, I got news for you! When we do this, we are NOT being loving, BUT arrogant- for we are saying, "We know better than God. God would have us respond in accordance with Matthew 18... BUT we are going to do it our way!" And yet, across the country, this mindset continues to be the choice of churches, elders, deacons, and God's people when it comes to God's ministry.

- Yes, God prescribes the worship we are to offer to Him, yet we know better!
- Yes, God would have us "rather be wronged" (1 Corinthians 6:7) than to destroy the peace Christ died to create. Yet, I will demand justice at all costs!
- Yes, God would have us preach the word to grow a church. But entertainment is so much more effective!

Peter is very clear here! God's work must be done in God's way. And that way is "according to the will of God" and so His word! While this isn't sexy and may even be viewed by many in the church as being dead, old fashioned, and the like. Nevertheless, it is how we as elders must

carry out pastoral ministry!

Toward this end, pray for your elders and deacons! What we want... what we must have as a church are elders and deacons who with zeal do God's work in God's way!

References

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End Note(s)

¹ "This psalm impressed itself on more than one biblical character deeply enough to come to mind at moments of supreme crisis. Jonah's prayer draws upon it (6); Jeremiah was haunted by a phrase from verse 13; verse 5 gave words to Jesus for his last utterance on the cross. And in old age the writer of Psalm 71, possibly David himself, opened his prayer with the substance of verses 1-3." (Kidner, 2009, pp. 147-149)

² A diminutive is a root word that has been modified to convey a slighter degree of its root meaning, to convey the smallness of the object or quality named, or to convey a sense of intimacy or endearment. In this case, the word went from the verb form ποιμαίνω (*poimainō*) to the noun form ποιμνιον (*poimnion*).

³ ἀναγκαστῶς (*anagkastōs*)

⁴ ἑκουσίως (*hekousiōs*)

⁵ This is why now in our membership interview, we ask the question: "WHEN you get hurt by someone here at BPC- and you will- what ought you to do?"

⁶ This no doubt is why Christ gives the assurance of His presence in this process, Matthew 18:20.