

EXPOSITION OF I PETER

Message #19

I Peter 5:1-4

I read an interesting statistic this week - one out of eight ministers are thinking about resigning. If that were to happen this week, it would leave over 40,000 churches without a pastor. When a pastor resigns, the church can find some evangelist to preach the gospel, it can find a teacher to fill the pulpit or a missionary to hype the mission need, but that does not mean the church found its shepherd. For finding a real shepherd who has been called by God is not easy.

Peter has just told the believers of the first century that they should not be surprised if they go through some fiery ordeal. When things begin to hit, you need solid leaders who can take the flock through the storm. You need a shepherd who can maneuver through the dangers.

When you are under fire, you need a strong leader who knows what to believe, how to behave and how to stand. You need someone who knows what to do and how to react. Leaders who run away when things get hot only prove they were not real leaders, but they were just hirelings who were in it for a job (John 10:12-14). Real shepherds are just that, real shepherds.

In these verses Peter admonishes the elders to shepherd the flock of God among you. Obviously, Peter never forgot Christ's admonition to him to "shepherd" the sheep and tend the lambs (John 21:15-17). The verb "shepherd" (ποιμανατε) refers to one who tends, cares for and governs a flock (Smith, p. 370). A flock needs tending. It needs shepherding. Jesus specifically taught Peter that and Peter is specifically teaching the church that here.

The shepherding metaphor is used to refer to leaders who have the responsibility of leading and caring for the church. The primary responsibility of the shepherd is to see to it that the flock is well-fed and well-watered. At the same time, it is his job to protect the flock from any dangerous enemy and to lead the flock in a good safe direction. It is a big job to shepherd a flock but it is the job God has given to leaders.

GOD WANTS LEADERS TO SHEPHERD HIS FLOCK IN AN AWARD-WINNING WAY WITH THEIR SIGHTS FIXED ON THE FACT THAT THE CHIEF SHEPHERD WILL SOON APPEAR AND REWARD THEM FOR THEIR FAITHFULNESS.

Now the first century religious world was used to seeing dominant religious authority. The chief priests, scribes and Pharisees did not act like caring shepherds but controlling sovereigns. This was all the people knew when it came to religious leadership, so Peter says there is another way. There are three key topics that he addresses:

TOPIC #1 – The apostolic basis for the elder/shepherding admonishment. **5:1**

Elder Connection #1 - Peter is a fellow elder. **5:1a**

We may recall that in the opening verse of this epistle, Peter identifies himself as an apostle. Being an apostle was a gift, the highest ranked gift one could have (I Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11).

By the time Peter writes this epistle, the Church Age was well underway and the importance of elders was clearly established. The word “elder” (πρεσβυτερος) is one that particularly has to do the office and the rank in the church and with maturity and age.

Actually, there are two office terms used for the leader in this context and one ministry term: **1)** Elder (πρεσβυτερος) (5:1); **2)** Overseer (επισκοπος) (5:2) and **3)** Shepherd. Elder refers to his maturity in office and overseer refers to his management responsibility in the office and shepherd refers to ministry responsibility, to tend the flock.

Peter is putting himself in the same category as the other leaders of the church. He is saying - I am a fellow-elder. I hold the same rank, I have the same office and I am mature in the things of God.

Elder Connection #2 - Peter is a witness of the sufferings of Christ. **5:1b**

Peter literally had been an eyewitness of the sufferings of Jesus Christ (Acts 3:12, 15; 10:34, 39). The word “witness” is one that means to give a testimony and proof and evidence of something. Peter says, I am charging you to shepherd the flock of God as one who actually saw the sufferings of Jesus Christ. Now why would he bring this up? Because Peter had been there and actually saw all of the terrible things that happened to Jesus Christ, but that did not prevent him from serving Jesus Christ. He had witnessed all of the persecution and the sufferings. In fact, he initially was so afraid that he had denied the Lord three times. But he got that resolved and now he was a rock solid witness for Jesus Christ. One of the responsibilities an elder has is to be a witness for Jesus Christ. God expects that of His leaders.

Elders aren’t perfect men. Peter wasn’t. He denied the Lord and got that straightened out and he was rebuked by Paul for his doctrinal inconsistency and got that straightened out (Gal. 2:11-21). But Peter faced things and dealt with things and matured and He was rock solid. That is the way it is for every leader.

No leader is perfect. They fail and they face it and they deal with it and they keep going and they become rock solid in their faith and rock solid as a leader. Furthermore, no matter what anyone suffers as an elder, it won’t come close to what Christ suffered.

Elder Connection #3 - Peter is a partaker of the glory that will be revealed. **5:1c**

Peter saw the glory of Jesus Christ at His transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-5; II Peter 1:16-18) and also in the aftermath of His suffering (John 21; Acts 1). Peter knew he would partake of that glory in the aftermath of his suffering. When you are an elder and suffer, you need to realize that there will be glory to follow. The glory for being a faithful elder is not revealed here and now, it will be revealed in the future. There is a cross to be born, but there is also a glory to be shared.

Being a leader in the church is often a thankless job. You don’t get much credit; in fact, you seem to get a lot of criticism. Peter wanted these elders to realize that there would be a wonderful future payday. What is so important to see is that Peter already considered himself to be a partaker of the glory of Jesus Christ that would one day be revealed.

TOPIC #2 – The pastoral manner for an award -winning elder/shepherd. 5:2-3

Now comparing people to sheep is a metaphorical image often used in the Bible. All of us like sheep have gone astray from the righteous paths of God and that is why we need a Savior/Shepherd (Isaiah 53:6). Sheep are relatively clean animals, not like dogs and pigs, who delight in wallowing in mire (II Peter 2:20-22). Sheep tend to flock together. One reason for this is that they are somewhat defenseless. They need a good, strong shepherd, who will watch out for them. One who will make sure that they are fed healthy things and will protect them from enemy attacks.

Peter wanted the shepherd-elders to function in an award-winning way. What makes this tricky is that the flock is not the shepherd's flock, it is God's flock, literally "the flock of God" (v. 2). It isn't your church or my church, it isn't your flock or my flock, it is God's. What we have here are a series of three pairs of negative and positive couplets that teach a shepherd how to shepherd over God's flock.

Negative Charge #1 - Do not shepherd under compulsion. 5:2a

Ministry is tough business. There is a weight and burden to it like no other. If you are a leader in ministry and you really try to shepherd a flock you will soon learn what Peter is talking about right here. People can hurt you, drain you and put terrible demands on you. You can get to the point where you are just going through motions. You can get to the point where you are "under compulsion." The word "compulsion" is one that means you simply do something because it is necessary. You do something and your heart isn't in it (Smith, p. 28). You can get to the point where you are just going through the motions.

One famous minister observed that when he went to Pastor's conferences, he did not see too many smiling faces. Two of the most famous ministers who went through extreme bouts of depression were Charles Spurgeon and G. Campbell Morgan.

It is so critical that the leader keep before God and keep his heart right with God. The motive for leadership must always be a love for the Lord. Anything else will leave you under compulsion.

Positive Charge #2 - Do shepherd voluntarily. 5:2b

The particular bent of this word means you choose to do something willingly, not because you are forced to do it (Smith, p. 140). Again, Peter knows this is a threat to a leader. In my opinion, this is a key to ministry burnout. You get so bogged down with weighty stuff that it diminishes your will to serve. People expect a leader to be able to be like a doctor when they are sick, like a lawyer when they have issues, like a social worker when they have needs, like a scholar with all the answers and like an entertainer who can keep them interested, like a referee to solve problems. They expect him to visit, study, counsel, administrate and conduct services. They expect him to console, admonish, marry the living and bury the dead. They expect him to bring in people and fill offering plates. They also expect him to do all of this willingly and cheerfully and if he isn't some jovial personality all the way through this, he will be chided and verbally attacked for not doing his job.

Peter knew one of the dangers to all of this was you lose your will to serve. So he says a key to this is to shepherd the flock voluntarily, not according to your will but according to the will of God. A key to ministry survival is to keep your focus on the Word and will of God.

Negative Charge #3 - Do not shepherd for sordid gain. **5:2c**

When Peter writes this text, he is not writing to teach that those in ministry should never be paid money. Most of the apostles, including Peter and his wife, received financial remuneration for their ministry and work (I Corinthians 9:5). In fact, when Paul brought this up, he did so in a context of teaching the church that “those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel” (I Corinthians 9:14).

The Greek used here indicates that the motive that a man has for being a leader should never be for “sordid” gain. What this literally means in Greek is that the leader should never be motivated by an eager, shameful greed (Smith, p. 14). In other words the leader must not do shameful and disgraceful things for money.

The fact is doing something for just money, will never make you happy. When you drive home this week from work, I want you to remember that most of the people driving on the road next to you are also driving home from work. These are people who just like you go to work to earn a paycheck, to make money so they may live. Take a look at how many people are smiling as they drive home. The percentages are low. You don’t find happiness just working for money, it is found in one’s relationship with God. There is nothing better to work and enjoy your work and to make a good living at what you do. But as Solomon said in Ecclesiastes, the key to this is not how much you make, it is how much you fear the Lord. Don’t do anything just for greedy gain. There is no happiness or future in it.

Positive Charge #4 - Do shepherd with eagerness . **5:2d**

This is a great Greek word which means to do something with a passion and willingness that was stimulated beforehand (Smith, p. 381). The word has to do with a burning passion that exists before you do something. This is how we are to shepherd God’s people, with a burning passion to do it. If we are going to do something, we ought to do it with zeal, energy and enthusiasm. If leaders in a church don’t demonstrate this for God, who will?

Negative Charge #5 - Do not shepherd by lording it over your people. **5:3a**

There is a huge difference between humble leadership and dominant dictatorship. There are some leaders who crave power. The Pharisees, scribes and chief priests were like that. They wanted it; they loved it; and they pushed people around with it. There are leaders who love the limelight. There are some leaders who love to be up in front of people and they love to push people, they love to drive them, not lead them.

Never should we shepherd people by lording it over them or by some master dominant mindset. In fact, the word literally means to exercise dominance over people, in which the people are put down (Smith, p. 235). We must always remember we are “servants, not sovereigns.”

Positive Charge #6 - Do shepherd by being an example to your flock. **5:3b**

Rather than being a dominant leader, the elder is to be an example leader. The word “example” is the Greek word “tupos” (τυπος) which refers to being a type. The elder has a responsibility to be a good shepherd-type to the flock. Every leader should be able to say, I am after Christ-likeness in my doctrine, faith, and behavior and you can follow me in that direction.

I read of a church that was always having problems with finances and no one could figure out why. When the pastor finally left the church, it was discovered that he had not contributed to the work himself, but was preaching sermons for others to contribute. He was telling people that they should consistently give, but he wasn’t consistently giving himself. He wasn’t a good example to his flock; he was a religious lecturer.

Someone has wisely said, “We cannot lead people where we have not been ourselves.”

TOPIC #3 – The reward for elder/shepherding properly. **5:4**

This is such a critical point to learn and I am learning it as I write this sermon. I have learned and am learning this lesson, **ministry is not about pleasing me and it is not about pleasing you; it is about pleasing Jesus Christ**. If you minister trying to please yourself you’ll be depressed and if you minister trying to please the people you’ll be depressed, but if you minister with the sole purpose of pleasing Jesus Christ, you’ll survive and be blessed and one day rewarded. No matter what ministry you have, it will ultimately force you to face the fact - you are doing this for God.

Warren Wiersbe said one time a person came up to him when he was pastoring and said, “It must be hard to keep all of these people happy.” Dr. Wiersbe said, “I don’t even try to keep them happy. I try to please the Lord, and I let Him take care of the rest” (*Be Hopeful*, p. 131).

Strive to keep the Lord happy and when the Chief Shepherd appears you will receive an unfading crown of glory.

I believe when all is said and done for eternity, many ministers are going to be shocked as to who actually earns crowns and rewards for their shepherding ministry.

There are ministers of huge mega churches who do not carefully protect their flocks nor do they work hard to carefully feed their flock. Dr. Wiersbe said he knew of a minister who spent almost all of his time on the golf course during the week and on Saturday night, he would listen to some messages of other men and preach to his flock on Sunday and seemed to be getting away with it. Dr. Wiersbe said that is until he meets the “Chief Shepherd.” Then things will be dramatically turned around (*Ibid.*, p. 129).

You may think that a good shepherd is one who just lets the sheep do what they want or go where they want. Let them think what they want and believe what they want. You may think a good shepherd is one who isn’t really concerned about Bible exposition and doctrine. You may think a good shepherd will let any music into the church that makes the people happy and feel good. But one day we shall see, because when some shepherds get before the “Chief Shepherd” many will not prove to have been good shepherds.