

FIRST PETER 5:1-4 "Be Shepherds Of God's Flock That Is Under Your Care"

Again, I would bring to your attention that the theme of this letter is how to serve and love God in the midst of suffering. Peter was aware of the suffering taking place in the lives of real people. This was not a hypothetical problem in the church at that time, nor is it hypothetical today.

But suffering is not something that will go away simply because we're Christians, and Peter understood this. In fact, he goes so far as to say that if we're faithfully loving and serving Christ the world will demonstrate its hatred for Christ as it shows its hatred toward God's people.

This is why Jesus approached Saul on the road to Damascus and said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" What is done to the people of God is essentially done to God Himself. And Peter is simply trying to put that into perspective for the church and encourage the church to go on, knowing that if we represent our Lord and Savior who has called us to Himself, then He will be with us when we're called upon to suffer for Him.

And if we understand that to represent Him in any situation, be it in good times or bad, it is still a privilege to stand firm for Christ in the power of God. That's why Peter could say in 1Pet.4:12-13.... "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation."

But Peter also understands that there is no way we can rejoice in any suffering, be it as a direct result of loving and serving Christ, or just in suffering in life in general, without having a proper biblical understanding of how God is working in us each day to will and to work for His good pleasure.

But simply having a biblical understanding that this is what He's doing is only a starting point because having a knowledge of His will and obeying His will are intrinsically tied together. And there is where faith and trust in God come into play.

We must be willing to walk where God leads, but we must be willing to depend on Him in the process of that walk. If He

happens to direct us through the valley of the shadow of death you can bank of Him being with you through that time. If He directs you to green pastures beside quiet streams He will be with you there as well.

We need to be willing to accept both and glorify God in both to show the world that God is faithful to His people no matter where we may happen to be and that's why Peter ends his thought in verse 19 of chapter 4 the way he does..... 19 "So then, those who *suffer according to God's will* should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good."

Now, who might be tempted not to commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good when the going gets tough? Peter assumes that any one of Christ's children might be weak at times, but those who must persevere, to stand firm and walk on that solid ground for the sake of the rest of the Body of Christ, are the leaders of the church.

What would happen if the leaders decided that it just wasn't worth continuing to trust and obey and glorify Christ because things weren't going their way? How would that effect the rest of the Body when they're looking to the leaders to lead and to be the example?

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Peter understands that Christ's sheep need a shepherd. His experience of this is most notably recorded in the last chapter of the gospel of John when Jesus said to him to Tend His lambs and shepherd His sheep and do that as he followed Jesus.

Jesus is the Great Shepherd, the Good Shepherd. But He has placed the care of His people into the hands of faithful men who would submit and bow to Christ as they take the responsibility of leading as they follow our Lord.

And so as Peter begins to close his letter he reminds the leaders of the importance of being there as shepherds to comfort and protect when times are hard, as well as when times are good, and to guide the flock in the direction of the Great Shepherd so that they may find the kind of spiritual refreshment they can only find in Christ.

And so we continue in our text as Peter addresses those leaders.

1PE 5:1-4 "To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the

glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers - not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away."

This is one of those portions of the word of God that is very dear to my heart because as an elder I see Christ's concern for His sheep and how He wants me and every other elder in His church to take proper care of what belongs to Him.

Charles Spurgeon, a 19th century man of God who has been described as the Prince of Preachers of his day, and who Pastored one of the largest Baptist churches in England, understood the privilege of being a shepherd of Christ's flock. But he also understood that it is a special calling from Christ that carries with it a great deal of responsibility.

He once commented on the last chapter of the gospel of John when Jesus charged Peter with the responsibility to shepherd His sheep: He said, "[Jesus] could not give to Peter a more affecting proof of His confidence than by committing to his care the dearest object of His love. It is only those who truly love Christ that are fitted to minister to His flock.....

.....The work is so laborious, the appreciation is often so small, the response so discouraging, the criticisms so harsh, the attacks of Satan so fierce, that only the love of Christ, His for us and ours for Him, can constrain to such work. The hirelings will feed the goats, but only those who love Christ can feed His sheep."

Spurgeon was a man who understood the spiritual aspects of playing a vital role in the lives of people who have been called to faithfully represent Christ, and how he was to feed the flock in such a way so as to encourage growth and vitality in the lives of Christ's sheep.

And he, like any other elder who has been called to Pastor, knew the problems that accompany this high calling. But he never turned back, he never regretted what he had to endure and he always gave God the glory no matter what was taking place in his life.

In fact he once made the comment that if the enemy wasn't trying to stir up trouble for him, he wasn't doing his job. Because he understood his "job" as coming against the kingdom of darkness with the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Only in that kind of environment will the enemy see any one person as a threat. That isn't limited to elders and Pastors. Every child of God is called to be Christ's witness and as we are all faithful to our calling the enemy will come against us in a variety of ways.

Persecution is certainly one way, but it's not the only way. He can try and create anxiety, fear, frustration, doubt and whatever else that would keep us from being effective in the Kingdom of God.

But for leaders, they must strive to be the example as they love and trust Christ so as to be the shepherds God wants them to be.

Let's take a look at verse one. 1PE 5:1 "To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed:..."

Peter was an apostle of Jesus Christ, a very special office in the church and yet he refers to himself as a fellow elder. The word elder in the Greek is *presbuteros* and it's where we get our English word presbyter which is simply defined as one who holds office in the church and exercises teaching, priestly and administrative functions.

It's also where the Presbyterian denomination gets its title which refers to its rule by eldership.

But though Peter understood his role as an apostle he also understood that he's on the same level with these others leaders who are elders. He identifies with them as one who has the same function of serving Christ's Sheep.

Paul also understood this and had the same attitude when he wrote to various groups including the Romans, Corinthians, Philippians and the Colossians. He said basically the same thing to all of these groups when he said in ROM 16:3 "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, *my fellow workers* in Christ Jesus."

Paul was a fellow worker of all the workers in the church as is Peter. That's why it's important for elders or deacons or any leader in the church not to take a haughty attitude as though they are above anyone. Their roles in the church may be different from

others but that doesn't mean they are superior to anyone, as people called out to represent Christ in this world.

The office of elder or deacon commands a special respect but only to the degree that Christ gives that office, that responsibility to lead, of special importance for the benefit of the church. If that office of elder is not used in a servant's role then it's being misused.

Some in the church would lead us to believe that the qualifications of being an elder are all of the qualifications the world tends to use for its leaders which include popularity, status, money and the ability to manipulate people. And because of this attitude much of the world's ways have infiltrated the church. And in many cases the church resembles more of a cold corporate entity rather than a living organism called the Body of Christ.

But I don't want to get too far from the direction of our text this morning which is not defining the qualifications of an elder, which you can find in Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus, but rather I want to look at the attitude an elder should have in regards to his role given him by Christ. This is where Peter is going in our text.

Notice too that Peter doesn't divorce the sufferings that these people were going through from the sufferings Christ went through to redeem them in the first place. He says in the first verse: "I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed:..."

Peter was a witness of Christ's sufferings in the sense that he experienced, first hand, what Jesus went through, leading up to His crucifixion. Peter was there when Jesus was grieving in the Garden of Gethsemene, he was there when our Lord was arrested and when he was dragged away to be tried unjustly before the Sanhedrin and Pilate.

It is true that it is not recorded that Peter was beneath the cross as was John when our Lord hang there for our sins, but keep in mind that he may very well have been nearby and have seen Jesus from afar. But one thing should strike us about this suffering of Jesus that Peter experienced that none of the others did in quite the same way.

Jesus had to suffer the pangs of rejection from one of his own who promised that he would even die for Jesus if it came to down that. That's what Peter said and yet he denied our Lord three times, and

he was there just a few yards from Jesus in the courtyard of the high priest, on the same night he was betrayed by Judas.

LUK 22:59-62 "About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean." 60 Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. 61 The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." 62 And he went outside and wept bitterly."

Yes, Peter was an eye-witness of the sufferings of Christ. But Peter's grief turned to joy when he realized that Christ's suffering was an essential part of his salvation and he knew that one day he would stand in the presence of this glory of the risen Christ when He would come back the same way in which He left.

The glory being referred to here is not simply the glory of being with Jesus at death, as glorious as that will be. Rather, Peter has something else in mind. The literal Greek translation of this portion reads: "being sharer of the glory about to be revealed." Peter was looking to the physical return of the King of glory to this earth.

This theme runs throughout this letter. Speaking of trials in chapter one Peter says, 1PE 1:7 "These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

1PE 4:13 "But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

1PE 5:4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away."

It's not as though we don't share in Christ's glory in a partial way even today, but the glory Peter refers to is a time when Jesus will actually appear for His people. And with that in mind he exhorts the elders to carry on their work as unto the Lord knowing that Christ will return on that final day. And so he continues.

1Pet. 5:2-3 "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers - not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock."

Every pastor is an elder and a shepherd, but not every elder is necessarily a pastor, and yet every elder is involved in the process of shepherding the flock as they teach and exhort and rule under the guidance and example of the shepherd who has been called to Pastor that particular flock.

Titus, for example, was a Shepherd or Pastor in Crete and yet Paul instructed him to appoint elders in every city as he had instructed. And when you go to the text in Titus you discover that the reason he wanted these elders in every city was for them to be in a shepherding role, to protect the saints from false teaching, though not necessarily in the role of Pastor of a particular church.

Timothy, also, was called upon by Paul to do the same thing. We read in 2TI 2:2 "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."

The teaching of God's word is essential in the Body of Christ. It's not to be taken lightly. And it's to be entrusted with the understanding that all who teach have a great responsibility to handle accurately the word of God because the spiritual lives of God's people are on the line, regarding their growth in their salvation.

That's why James could say in JAM 3:1 "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly."

This is not meant to deter someone from pursuing the ministry of teaching, it is simply meant to place teaching in its proper perspective as God sees it.

And so shepherding necessarily involves teaching the truth of God's word. But elders, which includes Pastors, should be overseeing the direction of the church as God gives them guidance.

That's what Peter has in mind when he says in our text: "1PE 5: 2 "serving as overseers" - Most of the older manuscripts include this statement whereas some Western texts do not. That's why the NAS doesn't have it. But most accept this as a legitimate rendering of the original.

The Greek word used for overseers is *Episkopeo*. And it means just that; oversight or overseeing what God has placed in your care. This is the Greek word that is often translated by the KJV as Bishop. This is also where we get our English word Episcopate.

And not surprisingly, this is where the Episcopalian denomination got its name as they adopted it to identify the type of rule in their churches. However, I believe here that the Episcopalian church has overstepped the bounds of proper understanding of the word *Episkopeo* because their use of the word, Bishop, is a distinct and higher office which oversees many churches, thus a hierarchy, which I don't believe the Scriptures teach.

But let's get to what Peter wants these elders, or shepherds or overseers (words describing the same office being utilized in different ways), to understand regarding their attitude as servants in the Body of Christ.

Peter tells these elders to serve, "not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve;"

Lots of guys get pushed into these types of leadership roles and unfortunately it becomes, not a labor of love, but plain laborious.

Peter tells us that this should be something that you are called to by God which will show itself in a willingness to serve, not under compulsion, as the NAS puts it. Evidently in Peter's day there were guys who felt this was simply a good career move and so they entered into service with motives that were not pure.

And so, he adds that you shouldn't be greedy for money. The idea here in the Greek is that one should not use the office of elder or Pastor to acquire dishonest gain. And it would be dishonest to use that office as anything other than serving Christ as you serve the Body with the idea of equipping the saints to grow in their salvation.

If your motivation is simply to become a professional Pastor, with all of the perks, you deem essential for furthering your career, then God is not pleased and the Body is not served.

Paul really hits the nail on the head when he defines this attitude in 1Tim.3:3 in describing the qualifications of an elder or overseer. He must be "free from the love of money."

Neither Peter or Paul deny that money isn't important to enable the elder, who is Pastoring a church, to continue to minister as he has needs, but the correct attitude is what both men are addressing when it comes to money. You can't serve two masters and as an elder or Pastor, you have only one Master who has placed you over His flock for one purpose; to shepherd, which involves leading,

feeding and protecting and it should be done with an eagerness to please Jesus.

And if one is following the lead of the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, then he will do it in a way that emulates the Master. And so Peter continues in verse 3 "not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock."

The idea of lording is to subjugate or to try and control, for your own purposes, and set up a little kingdom on earth to draw attention to yourself while using others in the process. Now, evidently Peter believed that there was a real danger of this type of thing happening.

In fact, we know that Paul had run into it on various occasions; people who want to feel important and puff themselves up with the idea of lording over others with the authority they feel they have.

Paul warned Timothy in 1TI 1:5-7 "The goal of this command (our instruction) is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. 6 Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk. 7 They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm."

There's often lots of talk going on in leadership circles which tends to sound lofty and godly and biblical, but when you take away the veneer it's meaningless and self-serving and full of fluff; no substance.

That can be a real danger. We've all heard the expression, "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely". Peter understood this and he was warning that if someone is assuming leadership and only doing it for the sake of power and authority then it's fleshly. And the flesh will always move in that direction of abusing power and authority.

Power and authority has been given to Pastors and elders by Christ Himself, but if it's being used to glorify Christ then it's being done in the Spirit and not in the flesh and with that attitude power and authority doesn't have to corrupt the vessel Christ is using.

And what actually happens is what Peter addresses, where the leader is actually an example to follow. Paul could actually say in 1CO 11:1 "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

Leaders should be able to be seen in a way where others can say that's how I want to live out my life to Christ's glory. But, leaders shouldn't limit their example only to when they're seen. They should also practice godliness when no one but God can see them. Of course this shouldn't be limited to leaders, but leaders must strive to live in a way where others will desire to follow as they follow Christ.

This is why you need to be praying for me. Pray that I may follow Christ whether I'm under trials or not. Pray that I may continue to rely on the power of the Spirit. Pray that I would be faithful to my call to shepherd the flock of Christ with eagerness. Pray that I may serve you with joy as we encourage each other to follow our Lord.

And pray that the Lord would add to our numbers so that we may be more effective in our community in bringing them the truth of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ, but pray also that He would raise up godly men who would want to serve in the capacity of elders and overseers in this church, to equip this body to grow and mature in their faith.

The Lord gives a little incentive in this area as we read in verse 4 of our text. "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away."

The Chief shepherd is coming back to take us to Himself and every leader who has served well will be able to stand before his King and be honored by Christ Himself as a faithful servant in the capacity to which he was called.

This promise is for every saint as we will all receive the prize set before us which is the very inheritance which Christ has secured for all who have embraced the Lord as Savior. The Lord wants all of us to be found faithful when He returns and He wants all of us to love His appearing as we look in anticipation for that blessed day.

Let me end with two passages that speak of our inheritance in Christ. And rejoice that you have this hope set before you as you live in that hope by faith each day.

2TI 4:8 "Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day - and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."

JAM 1:12 "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him."