

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, 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; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

The Spirit makes a fairly quick transition to instruct those who are given charge over God's people; and, although this is very specific instruction to "elders," I believe the principles espoused are to be applied to each and every person who takes some sort of spiritual leadership and responsibility over another person's life. Sometimes that leadership and responsibility is a result of formal structures within the church, as in the role of an elder or a deacon, but often it comes in the relationships which the Spirit brings together; for example, through the discipleship relationships we have in this body. And pretty much every one of you who has been disciplined is now engaged in discipling others; so I believe these principles apply to you as well.

Let's start with the "therefore." We have learned through **1 Peter** that God's main tool for "saving" the righteous is suffering, persecution is an expectation for all who desire to live godly in Jesus Christ, judgment begins with the household of God, the Spirit desires to bury a believer's flesh under the waters of judgment, and

the **beloved** are tested by fire and are necessarily distressed by various trials. Therefore, there is a level of sensitivity and heightened responsibility that a leader needs to consider in dealing with those assigned to their care. The process of “salvation” (deliverance from our *Old Sinful Nature*) is hard enough as it is that you are not to make this process more difficult and burdensome by being an overbearing and controlling ruler. Knowing all too well the pathway of salvation, this is a big “therefore.” The difficulty of this journey must always be kept fresh in your mind so you can have compassion and be appropriately sensitive to those who are now on this very narrow pathway to life.

On a side note, we get this comment that Peter is a fellow elder; and I think the Spirit put it there for a very important reason. The Spirit was jumping ahead and proactively preempting the manner in which people would pervert the relationship between Peter and the church. Peter is not saying that He is the head of the church and on this God given authority you are to pay attention and heed his most solemn words under the threat of communal disenfranchisement. He is not claiming to be the Vicar of Christ; and He is also not claiming to be the one upon whom the church was built. No, he merely says that he is a fellow elder just like all others whom the Spirit has assigned the responsibility of leading others. Peter does not even draw on his apostolic authority; rather, he makes an appeal from the place of mutuality. He knows quite personally the difficulty of both the salvation journey as well as the difficulty of overseeing people who are on that journey. He understands it; and wants you to know he is expressing himself from actual personal experience. He learned to be sensitive in how he has led others and he wants you to follow.

It is interesting that the only authority which Peter draws on is the fact that he

is a *witness* of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, or literally is even now being revealed (“revealed” is in the *present active participle*). I was thinking about this “witness” in two ways. First, Peter is saying that he was given an example to follow and it is that example, of which he was a witness, which establishes the authority of what he says. This is important. Peter is not claiming any inherent personal authority; rather, he claims the living authority of the Word of God (Jesus). Throughout the 3-years he spent with Jesus, he saw Jesus suffer great persecution. He saw Jesus deal with the pain brought by the very people He came to serve. And despite their rejection of Jesus, Jesus humbly served them. Peter even saw Jesus beaten and flogged and saw the way Jesus refused to use strength and power to limit or shorten His travail and control the people who opposed Him. Remember, Jesus told Pilot, “Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels” (**Matthew 26:53-54**)? So Jesus had the resources available to Him to forcefully prevail over those who opposed Him, but He did not draw on it. Rather, Jesus humbly endured and gave up His life for those He loved. This is the authority which Peter brings to the table. He is saying: I have seen it work, I am a witness; Jesus did it, I have done it, and I know you can do it too.

Second, and even more contextually, I think Peter is letting us know that He has personally endured the sufferings of Christ; thus, he is a living authoritative witness. In **4:13**, Peter spoke of the sufferings of Christ which we must all endure and he encouraged us to keep on rejoicing. The point however is that Peter could speak of these sufferings because he had walked the path of death and had passed through the fire and the flood and was now experiencing both life and God’s divine agape

love. He now bears the mark, thus he could speak authoritatively. This was the only authority he claimed: *having prevailed through suffering*. I am sure that **Isaiah 43** was circling around in his mind the entire time the Spirit was causing him to write this letter.

Isaiah 43:1-3

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior ...

Peter walked through the fire of purification and he was buried under the waters of judgment; yet, he was not burned and he did not drown. Rather he was saved and had come to know the power of his salvation. Thus, he could speak authoritatively to the pain and the distress that he endured as he put to death his fleshly lusts of self-pity and self-love. And it is from the witness of his own life that he claims authority and gives this exhortation.

As another claim of authority, Peter states that he is a partaker of the glory that is to be revealed. As I mentioned, that is not the best translation because the *future* tense is not used. Unfortunately, the way it is translated makes us think this is talking about our time in heaven. However, in the Greek “is to be” is in the *present active participle*—it’s ongoing in the now—and “revealed” is in the *present*

passive—God is now revealing it. In other words, the glory Peter is talking about is not the glory to be experienced in heaven, but it is the glory we experience in our now as God is revealing it and continuing to reveal it. And I believe this goes to the design point. As Jesus lives in and through Peter, he is, by definition, a partaker of the glory which belongs to Jesus. He has shared both in Jesus’s suffering and in the power of new life, which is the miracle of a **New Creation**. This is a glory that cannot be denied; a glory that is itself a witness and is authoritative. This glory, like God’s agape love, is part of the mark of new life and the tangible evidence that God lives in and through your body.

Therefore, based on these grounds for authority, Peter exhorts—actually he commands you (it is an *imperative*)—to 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; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

Shepherd the flock of God among you. First of all, this makes it clear that the people God gives you to lead are God’s people. They are not yours; so don’t act as if they are yours. You don’t get to exercise ownership over them; rather, you have been given a stewardship and stewardship engenders an entirely different attitude than does ownership. Stewardship is an ethic that embodies the reasonable planning and management of resources to safeguard the valuables of another. In this instance, we know that the people of God are His precious possession (**2:9**), and those in leadership (Stewards) have been entrusted to safeguard this most precious possession through the reasonable planning and management of resources which God gives. It is a serious assignment and a serious job and it is to

be taken seriously; the owner—the Chief Shepherd—expects it.

Second, you must understand it is a flock. This means that the people God gives you will operate and move as a group—that is what a flock does. Technically, a flock is not a bunch of individuals who come together on Sundays and do their religious deeds and go back to their lives doing their own things. True flocks live, travel, and feed together; that is the significance of the imagery engendered by the use of the word “flocks.” With that said, don’t be fooled. As a leader, very little of what you do will impact just one or two people; in one way, shape, or form, it impacts the entire flock of people. That is the nature of leadership and the nature of flocks, and it is a very hard lesson to learn. If you have not had to learn it, please allow yourself to be instructed and take heed; it is far easier. God used this imagery to communicate a powerful picture that we must not be so foolish as to miss.

Third, the word translated “shepherding” is rooted in the idea of properly feeding the flock. It is the word Jesus used, in **John 21:16**, when He told Peter, “feed my sheep.” If you remember, after Peter betrayed Christ, three times Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him and then followed up by saying “feed my sheep.” The first and the last time Jesus said this phrase, He used a different Greek word which means to pasture or to graze the sheep (which would include finding the right location to lead your sheep to feed). But the second time He told Peter to “feed my sheep,” He used this word we have translated in this text as “shepherd.”

With that understanding, leaders are to feed the flock of God among you. Thus, this command is about the responsibility of a leader to bring the Word of God into the lives and hearts of the flock over which they have been given stewardship. That is the job of a leader, an elder, and in my opinion, a deacon, or anyone who is

exercising authority over another in a discipling relationship. Providing the right environment for spiritual development or service is not at issue in this passage; rather, this is straight-up placing the responsibility for teaching people the Word of God on the backs of the leaders. But to teach the Word of God you must know the Word of God or else you will be giving mixed grain to your sheep: a little bit of God's food and a little bit of your food. And, well let me just say, that will not bode well for anyone. You must know the Word, you must know how to accurately use the Word, and you must courageously speak the Word even when the Word itself will be disruptive. It is your job and you must be continually busy at this assignment.

Fourth, leaders are commanded to shepherd the flock of God *among you* not among others. If God raises you up as a leader, He will provide the flock that you are to care for. You don't need to be trying to care for others that He has not provided. Sometimes, in the pursuit of power and fame or even just our eagerness to be fruitful and productive (the sordid gain which the Spirit mentions), people try to set themselves up as a grand shepherd over the flocks for which others are responsible. Don't do it; stick to those who are among you. That is your assignment and that is your responsibility.

Feed the flock of God among you exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God. The role of a steward over God's people is not to be done grudgingly or with angst as if God is forcing you to serve Him and you are just stuck having to put up with a bunch of unruly sheep. He is not forcing you; but He does require you to continually serve Him with your heart, mind, soul and strength. And, if that does not describe you and you are engaged in leading for some other reason, like for some sort of sordid or twisted gain (some ignoble

reason), you need to stop and leave the leading to someone else. This verb translated as “sordid gain” appears only in this one time in the New Testament and it picks up the idea of anyone who is involved in feeding the flock for what they can get out of it: be it money, an ego boost, a position, a title, control, or whatever fleshly lust they feed that does not derive from the Spirit.

Thus, your leadership of God’s people is to flow from a willing heart and an alert mind. Technically, in the Greek, “according to the will of God” is not in the text. That is a transliteration or a rendering and not a direct translation, at least not from the majority of manuscripts. And where it says “but with eagerness” it literally says, with an alert mind. This is also the only time this Greek word is used in the New Testament. Why do you think we are given this command to feed the flock willingly with an alert mind? I think the answer is found in **5:8** which speaks of the fact that the devil is prowling around the flock seeking someone to devour. Usually a predator searches for the sick and the weak in a flock; those who end up lagging behind. Knowing the enemy’s strategy, a good leader ensures that the flock is well fed and strengthened in the Word of God so there are no danglers out there who are weak and vulnerable because he or she did not do their job. If the sheep do not want to eat, that is another issue entirely; but a leader is responsible to ensure that he or she has provided the best food available for the flock because the devil is lurking and seeking someone to devour.

A leader is also to exercise oversight continually (“exercising oversight” is a *present active participle*). This is to be what they do. I know for you it might get annoying from time to time to have me and others in your business over and over again. But a willing leader who cares about the health, vitality, and safety of the

sheep will continually be about the job. Being a leader of God's people is not just a job that you clock in and the clock out when your time is up. No, it is a burden and a responsibility that is ongoing. After all, Satan prowls and continually seeks someone to devour; he does not stop. Likewise, a godly leader will never stop; they take their assignment from the Lord as a privilege and not something that is trivial and annoying. Real lives are at stake and it is a leader's job to continually exercise oversight and lead the flock.

The word translated "exercise oversight" in the Greek is a combination of two words. The first merely being the preposition "over" or "upon." And the second comes from a word meaning to "take aim" or "to spy." So please understand that this kind of leadership is very intrusive. This is a level of responsibility of which so few are comfortable. Most leaders are comfortable with the instruction to teach the Word of God, but to have this level of detailed oversight over the lives of others is scary. Truly taking oversight as a leader must by definition involve deep intimate personal relationships where all is put at risk. A leader must be engaged at that level of personal privacy or else he or she won't be able to effectively do the job that is assigned to them.

With that said, a godly leader is also not to lord their leadership over those allotted to their charge. They are not to use the information they know to power people to do what they want. We have all known people who do this and usually they are those who are in leadership for sordid gain—for some ego boosting reason. They love their authority and structural power and they tend to wield it like a club to do what they want and to get their way. They get people to do things not out of their own love and service for the flock, but out of their power and position.

This is wrong; flat out wrong. And if you ever see this going on you need to find your voice and say “no.”

In contrast to the type of leader who likes to play king, a true shepherd is to continually prove to be an example to the flock. And, by the way, “proving” is in the *present middle participle*, so it is a decision you need to dig down deep in your soul and now make and then continually make. But what are you to be an example of, what decision do you need to make? Given what we have learned in **1 Peter**, I believe the example is that of an alien and stranger—one who has died so they might live so they might love. The mark is the example.

And leaders, if this is the path you walk—a path clearly marked for others to follow—when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Once again this makes the point that we are just the under-shepherds, the stewards of the Chief Shepherd’s people. Jesus is it and all leaders are to be submitted to His rule. And if we are faithful to the task for which we have been called and gifted, we will be rewarded.

This “*stephanos*,” this crown of victory, speaks of the way in which God will honor our faithfulness and His honor will be our glory. This crown of glory is unfading. In Greek tradition, the “*stephanos*” was used as a way of crowing victorious athletes or heroes; but these crowns were traditionally made of garland and would quickly fade. But not so with our crowns of victory. The delight and magnificence of the Lord’s honor over the faithfulness of our lives will never wane. In other words, what we do in this life will echo throughout all eternity. God will never get tired talking about our faithfulness to His people. Talk about eternal affirmation and validation; this is quite a lofty promise. And by the way, the word

translated “unfading” is also the only time this word is used in the New Testament. It is very similar to the word used in **1:4** when it says our inheritance “will not fade away” but still it is a different word. (Peter is clearly showing us his stuff; he is no linguistic slacker. That is the third unique word he pulled out on us. Perhaps the fisherman was trying to show Paul he was not so uneducated after all).

Next we get to the responsibility of those being shepherded. This is a mutual deal; it goes both ways. You don’t get to just be unruly sheep; rather, you are to make the job of shepherd far easier than you would otherwise naturally do.

1 Peter 5:5

You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.

Now taking into consideration the cultural norms of the day, I think we would be very ok translating this to say, “You younger men and women, likewise be subject.” In those days the men would be expected to submit to their leaders and the women (whether wife or daughter) would be expected to submit to the man who oversees her. So the implication is the same. All of you should be subject to the leaders which God has placed over your lives. You may not want to, but that is just your flesh roaring up. In order for you to ever truly live as an alien and stranger, as one who has died to their flesh, you are commanded to live in a submitted relationship with your leaders.

The verb “be subject” or to be submitted is in the *aorist passive imperative*. Thus it is a command. This is a matter of your obedience to the Lord and it is to be your way of life from beginning to end (reflected in the use of the *aorist* tense). But notice that is in the *passive* voice. Thus, as with all forms of submission, you are to let God cause you to be submitted. It is His desire, it is His will, and it is the work the Spirit will do if you let Him. God will not force you to live in a submitted way with His appointed leaders; that is something you are going to have to let Him do in you and it will be a natural byproduct of the design point. If you allow yourself to be crucified in Christ, then that fight and resistance of your flesh will be put under the waters of judgment. But if you are one who fights and resists your leaders or tries and stays clear of them to avoid dealing with what they might have to say to you, then you have a serious problem and you have put your life at risk.

God has appointed these leaders to care for you and to ensure you are well fed and safe from the enemy. But if you won't eat, then you put yourself at great danger and that is not very smart. You may think you are ok, you may think you have it covered, but you are dealing with spiritual matters and spiritual powers that you simply do not understand or fully comprehend. This is not something to play with; you have an unseen enemy that is continually seeking to devour you. Therefore; this is a command to obey because it is for your own good. This is a command that comes from the heart of God and from His love for you. So let the Spirit cause you to be submitted to your leaders.

Did you notice this verse starts by saying “likewise”? In other words, in the same way that the leaders God has appointed over you are to be submitted to the command of their Chief Shepherd to feed you willingly and with an alert mind, you

are to be submitted to their leadership over your life. And it is likewise to be willingly and not under compulsion or for some twisted gain that you can get from a leader. It is also to be with an alert mind so you will be able to learn and receive as you are taught the Word of God. Everyone must be submitted; that is God's way: the Son to the Father, the church to Jesus, the shepherds to the Chief Shepherd, and the flock to the appointed shepherds. It is His perfect design of leadership and authority and it is a beautiful expression of His love for our lives.

All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. We are going to stop here for tonight, but I wanted you to get a glimpse of where this is going. Our submission to our leaders and to God is to develop within us an attitude of humility that is practically expressed in our relationships with one another. This is a very intense and extreme statement. But it is how aliens and strangers live; it is the life of the **beloved**. I want you to spend some time this week meditating on this passage and preparing your hearts for this powerful word of instruction as next week we should, Lord willing, wrap up **1 Peter**.

Let's pray.