

A SHEPHERDED PEOPLE (2)

1 Peter 5:2b-4

April 5, 2009 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church

Last week we noted the nature of the work of the elder particularly as it relates to their calling as a “**shepherd**” and Peter’s exhortation to these elders, “**Shepherd the flock of God among you.**” This shepherding requires oversight in leading the flock, providing direction and managing wisely; in feeding the flock a steady diet of God’s Word; of protecting the flock from false teaching and false living; and in caring for the flock, demonstrating a sincere love for the flock that God has given to him. From this we gather that it is important for the flock to be shepherded. What Peter sets forth in our text is that while it is important that the body of Christ be shepherded, *how* they are shepherded is crucial for spiritual health, individually as well as corporately. The elders have an enormous responsibility at all times, especially in times of testing. So Peter here directly addresses the importance of godly shepherds for the church. Given that they are to lead, feed, protect and care for the flock, how is the shepherd to lead?

They are to lead first by recognizing some dangers to be avoided.

I. Dangers to Be Avoided by Elders (5:2b-3)

Having given them the single exhortation of shepherding, Peter now suggests three dangers, three potential pitfalls to the elder’s work. This serves as a reminder that the elder must recognize his own propensity to sin. The pastor is not outside of what Jeremiah 17:9 teaches concerning the heart of man. *All* men have hearts that are deceitful and desperately wicked. If not kept in check by constant prayer and examination, these areas of particular temptation given the nature of the position can cause great turmoil, both to the pastor and consequently to the body. Further, these warnings from Peter, though given specifically to elders, are areas that every believer should heed. In other words, while the elder is called to a higher standard in his walk, he is nevertheless a sinner in need of Christ’s grace and because of his position the temptations from the enemy will be greater. With that in mind, Peter suggests these dangers, not an exhaustive list, but certainly these present the clearest threat to the work of the shepherd.

The first danger to be avoided...

1. Laziness (v. 2b)

In the context of opposition and persecution that these elders would have to endure as the first line of defense in the household of God (4:17), it would be easy for them to suffer from what in modern terms is called “burnout.” That is why Peter reminds them of their calling. They must have a proper attitude toward their responsibilities. They were not to serve because they had to, but because they wanted to, “**not under compulsion, but voluntarily.**” The pastor should not occupy the office because he feels pressured by others. He must not have the attitude that he must do it or no one else will. Those who serve because they think they have to will lose their joy and the church will suffer. That pastor will begin to serve half-heartedly and begrudgingly and will eventually simply go through the motions of his duties. The long hours that were once considered to be an opportunity from God to shepherd His flock are now looked upon as burdensome, so the long hours once given to serving the flock are turned into hours spent frivolously.

Peter says, “**not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God,**” literally, “according to God.” Peter balances the negative with the positive. “**But voluntarily**” shows the willingness that the elder has in serving the flock because he can do nothing else. To do anything else would rob him of his joy. They would consider the role of king or president to be a lesser calling than that of leading the flock. That is why Spurgeon told his bible college students that if they thought they could do anything else than preach, then do it.

This shows that Peter did not disagree with Paul, who wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:16, “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.” Paul considered preaching to be God’s will for his life and he willingly and wholeheartedly accepted it. That is exactly what Peter is saying. He does not deny Paul’s compulsion, but clarifies it. The only positive compulsion is from God, “**according to God,**” and should be accepted joyfully. Then, and only then, will the pastor serve with vigor and have longevity in his ministry.

The sheep need a shepherd like this, one who will follow Christ’s example and be willing to suffer for the sake of the flock. Hear how the Good Shepherd is contrasted with one who serves unwillingly in John 10:10-13:

John 10:10-13 – ¹⁰ “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. ¹² He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters *them*. ¹³ *He flees* because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep.”

The Good Shepherd was not under compulsion but acted willingly and voluntarily for the sheep, whatever the cost, John 10:17-18, ¹⁷ “I lay down My life so that I may take it again. ¹⁸ No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.” That is the attitude that Peter says should be present in the undershepherds of God’s flock. They should not be driven by a have-to mentality in an effort to meet some job description, but from a willingness before God and by God to serve His sheep. Otherwise, when “burnout” comes and laziness and withdrawal from the flock sets in, they will prove that maybe they were not His shepherds at all.

The second danger to be avoided...

2. Greed (v. 2c) (Ez. 34:1-10)

Second, Peter warns the elders against greed—the lust for things. “**Shepherd the flock . . . not for sordid gain, but with eagerness.**” This would apply especially to those who make their living in the ministry. Don’t look on your eldership *merely* as a means of making a living. Paul addressed this temptation as one particular to elders in his list of qualifications—twice. The elder is to be “free from the love of money” (1 Tim. 3:3) and “not fond of sordid gain” (Titus 1:7). Paul further warned Timothy about the temptation to make “godliness a means of gain,” (1 Tim. 6:5). In the New Testament the false teacher is often exposed by their love of money, who often “peddled the Word of God” (2 Cor. 2:17). Both Peter and Paul agree that the elder should not be motivated by financial matters. Such a mindset could lead one to focus on what they receive or don’t receive rather than on what the flock requires.

Rather, the elder is to do their ministry with “**eagerness.**” That is, for the love of the work itself, not the compensation for the work. Their joy is in their work. A couple of things to note

concerning this joy. First, as we saw last week in Hebrews 13:17, the sheep should let the elders minister “with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.” Selfish sheep can zap the elder’s eagerness. And if the elder is burdened, if there is something that is robbing him of the joy of his calling, then the sheep will suffer. Secondly, neither Paul nor Peter suggests that the elder should not be compensated or that he should forego any compensation for the sake of the body. Some hold up Paul’s tentmaking as the rule for all elders. However, Paul never says to look at his life as the rule and even writes in his epistles of the importance of financial support for leaders in both 2 Corinthians 8 & 9 and 1 Timothy 5:17. Paul also stressed singleness, but I don’t see too many looking to Paul as the rule. For Paul tentmaking and singleness were better for him, but he never makes these matters of conscience the rule for everyone.

Peter says, “**Shepherd the flock of God among you... not for sordid gain, but with eagerness.**” The undershepherds in Ezekiel 34 are an example of greedy shepherds. We are reminded in narratives such as this of the truthfulness of God’s Word. The Scriptures contain the good and the bad, the faithful alongside the wicked.

Ezekiel 34:1-3 – ¹ Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, ² “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? ³ You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat *sheep* without feeding the flock.’””

That describes sordid gain, the shepherd who looks to make himself comfortable at the expense of the flock. So where the first danger is to work under compulsion, to do the work according to the whims of others, here the elder is warned against doing the work for himself. He must guard both against pleasing others as well as against simply pleasing himself.

The third danger to be avoided...

3. Pride (v. 3)

Peter recognized how easy it would be for those given authority within the flock to abuse the power they had been given, so he exhorts, “**nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.**” The elder is not to go around demanding respect from everyone or thumbing his status in the nose of the sheep. They are wrong to expect unquestioning obedience to their commands as if their leadership is not to be tested. They should be men who *command* respect rather than demand it, who by their example have sheep that willingly and joyfully submit because they see their shepherd’s sincere care for them. The elder is not a little dictator. Again, the shepherd is to lead the flock, not drive the flock. They are not to be like the Gentiles, who used their authority to rule over others and advance their own interests (Mark 10:42).

We have the forthrightness of God’s Word in Ezekiel 34 again to remind us of the shepherd who is given over to pride.

Ezekiel 34:4-5 – ⁴ “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.* ⁵ They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered.”

We have all heard or seen how devastating it is when a pastor rules the flock with a heavy hand. He ends up leading them in the wrong direction, feeding them the wrong things if he feeds them at all, allowing the sheep to be scattered if not devoured. Church after church crashes and burns because of a shepherd who leads with force and severity and who dominates the flock. We do not need proud shepherds who drive the flock to fear and to cower. We need humble shepherds who lead and a flock that respects and follows their shepherds.

This is accomplished as shepherds do this according to the example found in 1 Timothy 4:12, “Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but *rather* in speech, conduct, love, faith *and* purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.” The elder, as followers of Christ, are to use their authority to serve, and in that way imitate the Chief Shepherd. Mark 10:45, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” Elders are not to boss others around or have a “because I said so” attitude, but they are to exemplify the character of Christ to those under their charge and lead them to reflect the love of Christ in their own lives. “Christ crucified” is not only to be proclaimed by word but demonstrated in the actions and lives of elders, so that the flock both hears and sees the gospel. In all of this, the Chief Shepherd’s example is to be paramount. Just as He is “the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls” (1 Pet. 2:25), so too are the undershepherds as they carry out their calling in functioning under the Chief Shepherd.

So we have these dangers to be avoided: laziness, greed, and pride. The pastor is a good elder as he leads, feeds, protects and cares for the flock while recognizing these dangers. They will also lead more effectively, especially in times of suffering, as they keep their focus on the finish line.

II. Motives to Be Embraced by Elders (5:4)

Having given the nature of the elders’ duties as well as the dangers associated with the calling, Peter concludes with some motives for the undershepherds’ faithfulness. The elders to whom Peter wrote, or for that matter any believer in that day, faced great dangers. But these elders especially had to have courage and be willing to accept the difficult task. They had to willingly take upon themselves that first line of defense as the fiery ordeal of God’s judgment came upon the household of God. They had to joyfully accept the onslaughts of the evil one and the sufferings both from without the body as well as from within. They had to be ready and eager to handle the criticism leveled against them. For these elders, severe troubles awaited. Therefore, Peter gives these motives to encourage these elders.

1. The Chief Shepherd’s return

There are a couple of things to note concerning Peter’s use of the title “**Chief Shepherd**” which is one word in the Greek. First, the word “**Chief,**” emphasizing the fact that Christ is in charge of the entire flock and elders are His undershepherds who will be judged according to their faithfulness in serving under Him. He is “**Chief.**” The same sort of analogy is seen in Paul’s description of the body with Christ as the Head (Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18). Elders, then, are undershepherds; Jesus is the “**Chief Shepherd.**” He is the one who cares for His flock in a way that is absolutely perfect, and one day He is coming again for His flock and to punish those who are not of the flock:

Ezekiel 34:11-16 – ¹¹ “Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. ¹²

As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I

will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day. ¹³ I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land. ¹⁴ I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest," declares the Lord GOD. ¹⁶ I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment."

Second, Peter calls Christ "**the Chief Shepherd.**" This is the only place this title is found in Scripture. As we have seen in relation to His past work, Jesus is called the Good Shepherd in John 10, the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep. Peter opened this letter referring to His first appearing as a lamb (1:19, 20, 2:22). But at His final appearing He will come not as a lamb or as the Good Shepherd in John 10, but as the "**Chief Shepherd**" to gather in His Church together with these undershepherds. The title Peter uses here sets Jesus apart from His undershepherds in a way that should encourage them if they are truly serving Him. And they are to willingly serve Him until His return. There are those today that teach that God's Church does not need godly men in this capacity. The leadership structure with a plurality of leadership was need in the early church, but not today. They would say there is no biblical warrant for having these undershepherds today. But here Peter is explicit: there will be undershepherds, elders, pastors, specially called by God and granted the authority that comes with it, until the Lord returns.

2. Their reward at His return

On that day, elders will receive a "**crown of glory**" that will never fade away. The victor in Bible times was crowned with a garland of flowers. But those eventually shriveled up and faded away. But this "**crown of glory**" is everlasting. While all believers will receive honor and glory (1:7), there is included here the special encouragement for elders that their labor has not been in vain. It is the Lord's special gift for faithful service, and it is a gift that lies beyond this life.

Peter's encouragement towards the reward is twofold. First, when times get tough, and they will, and you get discouraged, remember the remedy. Flee to Christ! Remember what awaits you at the finish line. Second, the focus of the elder is to be on his future reward, not earthly rewards. If his focus is on the things of this earth, then he will be unable to avoid the potential pitfalls, particularly that of pride.

Conclusion

- 1. Shepherds have sheep that willingly follow**
- 2. Pray for your elders**
- 3. Make your elders calling joyful**

4. Hold your elders accountable

1 John 4:1 – Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

HOWEVER...

1 Timothy 5:19 – Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses.

5. To elders – are you focused on what is of most importance?

Numbers, size, buildings, ... not the flock of God!

6. To the flock – are you focused on what is of most importance?