

1 Peter 5:1–5

Introduction

Three weeks ago, now, we saw that the fires of the final judgment are already burning in the church, purging away the dross and refining and purifying God’s people; so, then, what will be the outcome when that *same* fire spreads to those who have refused to obey the Gospel of God? (1 Pet. 4:17-18) The prophecy of Malachi is now being fulfilled: The Lord has come to His temple, and the fire of the final judgment is already burning there. The persecution and sufferings of God’s people are not ultimately the work of men, but the refining, eschatological (end-times) fire of God’s holy presence who lives now *here*, among *us*. It’s especially in this light—in the light of these persecutions and sufferings, and these testing, refining fires—that Peter turns now to the elders and exhorts them to be faithful shepherds.

I. 1 Peter 5:1a — THEREFORE, I exhort the elders among you...

What does this “therefore” tell us about the work of the elder? The work of the elder is to lead and to guide the church safely through the fires of testing. His work is to establish the saints in the true faith so they’ll be firm and steadfast, persevering through all persecutions and sufferings. The work of the elder is to be a tool that God uses to the end that the tested genuineness of the faith of His people might be found to result in praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. (cf. 1:6-7) This explains why Peter moves from exhorting the church concerning the fires that are burning in their midst to exhorting the elders who lead the church in the midst of these fires:

II. 1 Peter 5:1b — “Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow-elder...

Just when we’re expecting the exhortation, Peter pauses to say something about himself. Remember the very first words of this letter:

➤ **1 Peter 1:1** — Peter, **an apostle** of Jesus Christ...

It’s as an apostle chosen by Christ and appointed by Christ and sent out by Christ Himself that Peter exhorts us, and encourages us, and comforts us, and warns us, and commands us. And so the vast majority of 1 Peter is written in the second person (“you” and “your” 115 x’s in 64 verses [out of 105 verses]). As an apostle, Peter has been placed in a unique position of authority by Christ Himself. And yet no sooner has Peter identified himself as an apostle than he also identifies himself *with* the Christians he’s writing to (“our” and “us”).

➤ **1 Peter 1:3** — Blessed be the God and Father of *our Lord* Jesus Christ, who according to his abounding mercies, has **begotten us** anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...

Peter, **the apostle**, confesses the same Lord and has been begotten by the same God to the same living hope as all of us. He writes in chapter two:

- **1 Peter 2:24** — [Christ] himself **bore our sins** in his body on the tree, that **we might die to sin and live to righteousness**.

And then in chapter three:

- **1 Peter 3:18** — For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might **bring us to God**...

Peter, **the apostle**, experienced the same salvation and the same forgiveness of sins and the same reconciliation to God as all the Christians in all the churches. And finally, in chapter four:

- **1 Peter 4:17** — It is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and **if it begins with us**, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

Peter, **the apostle**, is subject to the same burning, refining fire of God’s judgment as are all of us. And now, here in chapter five, Peter identifies himself also as a “fellow-elder” along with the elders that he exhorts. “Fellow-elder” is a single word in the Greek (*sympresbyteros*) and Peter is the first person we know of to ever use this word. It’s possible he even coined it for this occasion. It’s important to Peter that the elders in the churches know that though he is an apostle, he’s also a “fellow-elder” with them.

Is Peter suddenly embarrassed of the authority that he has from Christ? Not at all! Peter still assumes his authority as an Apostle by the very act of exhorting (“I exhort the elders among you”), and this is what makes his self-identification with the elders (as a “fellow-elder”) such a powerful thing. (cf. Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9) Yes, Peter has been given authority by Christ, and yet he exercises this authority as one who is otherwise—in every way—the same as all of us – and now also the same as the elders that he exhorts. And so, in just these few words (“Therefore, **I exhort the elders... as a fellow-elder...**”), Peter begins to model the true heart of an under-shepherd – as one who knows he is also one of the sheep. Why does Peter pause, here, to identify himself just when he’s ready to exhort the elders? He wants to *model* for us the very thing that he’s about to call his “fellow-elders” to do themselves.

III. 1 Peter 5:1c — Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow-elder **and witness of the sufferings of Christ**...

“Fellow-elder” and “witness of the sufferings of Christ” go together.* “Therefore I exhort the elders among you, **as a fellow-elder and [fellow-]witness of the sufferings of Christ...**” In other words, Peter’s main point here is not that he, uniquely, witnessed the sufferings of Christ, but that he is a witness *to* those sufferings along *with* and together *with* all of his fellow-elders. (cf. the Greek genitive in Acts 1:21–22)

How does Peter—and how do his fellow-elders—witness to these sufferings? First of all, by faithfully speaking and proclaiming the sufferings of Christ and their saving, redeeming power. (cf. 1:11; 2:21-24; 3:18; 4:1) This is the only method for establishing the saints in the true faith so that they will be firm and steadfast to the end. The work of the elder is to preach Christ

* The two clauses are joined by a copulative *kai* and governed by a single article.

crucified and raised from the dead according to the Scriptures. The work of the elder is to testify and witness faithfully to these realities so that the church might always be more and more established in the true faith.

How does Peter—and how do his fellow-elders—witness to the sufferings of Christ? Not only by faithfully preaching these sufferings but also, *especially*, by sharing themselves in those sufferings. (cf. 1 Pet. 4:13) In the Bible, a witness isn't only one who speaks, but also (by extension) one who endures suffering as a result of his faithful testimony. This explains the meaning of our English word “martyr” which is taken from the Greek word for “witness” – *martys*.

- **Acts 22:20 (cf. Rev. 2:13)** — When the blood of Stephen your **witness** was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.
- **Revelation 17:6** — I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the **witnesses** of Jesus.

Is Peter's authority as an apostle and as a fellow-elder a privileged authority that sits comfortable and at ease, immune from all the sufferings that Peter's been discussing all throughout this letter? Peter says that the very nature of leadership and office in the church is to have the mindset of going “first” in suffering – and so to lead the church through that suffering as a community of sojourners and foreigners in this world. Can there be any room for pride in this mindset – which we know is the mind that was also in Christ Jesus? (cf. 4:1) Is there any room in this picture for ambition? Once again, in just these few words, Peter models for the elders the true heart of a true shepherd – one who is always ready to go first—always before the sheep—in *suffering*.

IV. 1 Peter 5:1d — Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, **as a fellow-elder and [fellow]witness** of the sufferings of Christ, **as also a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed...**

If Peter, the Apostle, is a fellow-witness to the sufferings of Christ, then according to his own testimony in this letter, he must also be a fellow-partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed. Not the glory that is now (now is the time of suffering)!—but the glory that *is going* to be revealed. The Spirit of glory and of God rests even now on those who suffer for Christ so that we taste of that glory and that joy even today (cf. 4:14), but we must never forget that the glory itself is still entirely future. And so what Peter's also confessing here is that there is no “glory” to be found for him—or for any of his fellow-elders—in the present. We can already hear Peter exhorting the elders: “The only true glory that will ever truly be yours is still completely and entirely future.”

No elder (and, in fact, no Christian) who has ever made this future glory his one and only ambition could ever be proud or haughty – not even in the deepest places of his heart. This is the only praise and honor and glory that doesn't puff a person up, but actually humbles him to the dust—and yet it's also the most exalted praise and honor and glory that any human being could ever know or experience. Think about that! Isn't this a glorious mystery? It's the longing for and the striving after the glory that is *going* to be revealed that safeguards the elders from ever

seeking any glory in the present and that enables the elders to faithfully oversee the church of God as they lead the way in sharing, themselves, in the sufferings of Christ.

Why does Peter pause to identify himself like this just when we're ready for his exhortation? He does this to prime us and prepare us for that exhortation. "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, **AS a fellow-elder AND fellow-witness to the sufferings of Christ, AS ALSO a fellow-partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed...**"

V. 1 Peter 5:2a — ...shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight...

Over the last two weeks, we've talked a lot about what this shepherding and oversight is. But one passage we haven't looked at yet is Acts chapter 20. Paul exhorts the elders of the church in Ephesus:

- **Acts 20:28–31** — Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

We see, again, that the work of the elders as shepherds is to guard against the false teachings and doctrines of wolves in sheep's clothing and to be constantly—in season and out of season—feeding the sheep on the true teachings and doctrines of the true Gospel. This is *how* the elders "**pay careful attention to [themselves] and to all the flock.**" Paul writes to Timothy:

- **1 Timothy 4:13–16** — Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching... **Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching.** Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

We live in a day when many pastors and elders are "apparently" preaching the Gospel and yet at the same time their preaching betrays a clear lack of "paying *careful attention*" and "keeping a *close watch*" on the true doctrine of Christ. The shepherds seem to have forgotten the fundamental task of "guarding." We live in a day when it's seemingly assumed that there are no counterfeit Gospels and that there are no wolves arising even from within the church, speaking twisted things and not sparing the flock, and that if there were they would be easy for all to see. And yet these are some of the very realities that call for elders within the church who will faithfully shepherd the flock of God – guarding and protecting it from counterfeit Gospels and strengthening and nourishing it in the true teachings and doctrines of Christ. (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2-3; Gal. 4:19)

Having said these things, we see that Paul exhorts the elders to "care for the church *of God*, which he obtained with his own blood." Peter, also, exhorts the elders to "shepherd the flock *of God*" which he said earlier was "ransomed not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." (1:18-19) The elders are to understand first of all—in all things and at all times—that the flock is not theirs but

God's. Therefore, the elders' oversight of God's flock is above all else a stewardship, a sacred trust from God Himself, and with this stewardship—as with all stewardship—comes accountability.[†] It's because of this stewardship that Peter goes on to exhort the elders: “Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight...

VI. 1 Peter 5:2b — ...not under compulsion, but willingly, according to God...

Elders are to shepherd the flock of God never because they have to or because they must, but always readily and freely. One commentator says, “In many societies... it would be unthinkable to refuse to serve the community if selected to lead, *even if that leadership was exercised at the cost of considerable personal loss.*” (Davids) At this point, I think especially of those who serve as elders in addition to their regular job. On the one hand, these elders deserve our thanks and honor. I, especially, am forever thankful. On the other hand, these elders have a stewardship, Peter says, which calls them to serve, and even to sacrifice, willingly and freely, “**according to God.**”

I think what Peter means is that for any of our service or any of our obedience to be truly pleasing to God, it must never be performed as a mere duty and obligation (because I “have to”), but rather as a willing expression of our love for Him. When God called His people to obey all of His laws and commandments, He summed up these laws and commandments with the greatest commandment of all:

➤ **Deuteronomy 6:5** — You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Sometimes our service *is* sacrifice (it's perfectly acceptable to call it that), but even our sacrifice is never to be just obligation, but always willing – always an expression of the fact that we are serving and sacrificing for the one we love. And so we see that no matter what the cost may be to themselves (even if it means going first in suffering), the elders are to shepherd the flock of God, exercising oversight never just because they have to—but always willingly, freely, according to their love for God – **and so also their love for His flock.** For every true child of God, to love God is to love His children – to love the Father is also to love His sons and daughters. And so for every true shepherd, to truly love God is to love His flock – to truly love the chief Shepherd is to love His sheep. Put the other way around, the key to loving the sheep is to truly love God.

“Shepherd the flock of God, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly...”

VII. 1 Peter 5:2c — ...not for shameful gain, but eagerly...

First, Peter warns against being motivated only by duty and obligation. We might even describe this as serving without any real motivation – without any real desire. Now Peter warns against

[†] “The elder has authority; he is called to exercise a shepherd's oversight. Christ the Chief Shepherd has called him to exercise a shepherd's care. But the undershepherd is not a stand-in for the Lord. He presents the word of the Lord, not his own decree; he enforces the revealed will of the Lord, not his own wishes. For that reason, any undermining of the authority of Scripture turns church government into spiritual tyranny. If church governors add to or subtract from the word of God, they make themselves lords over the consciences of others.” (Clowney)

being motivated by any desire for material gain. The Scriptures allow for those who have been appointed to proclaim the Gospel to get their living from the Gospel. (cf. 1 Cor. 9:3-14) But Peter warns that even when an elder is being legitimately paid, still, that money is never to be the motive for his work. (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2-3; Titus 1:7) In other words, any elder who is paid must not shepherd the flock simply or even primarily for the paycheck, because the moment he does this, even the otherwise legitimate paycheck is turned into nothing less than “shameful gain.” The man who serves as an elder primarily as a way to make a living is a “hireling” and guilty by default of greed – even where others in other job situations would *not* necessarily be guilty of greed! Once again, the point here is not to say that a man can’t make his living by the Gospel but that a man must never make this living his *motive* in preaching the Gospel. The point is not that a man can never make his living from shepherding God’s flock, but that in the feeding and the guarding and the caring for the flock this living must never be his primary motive. Being a hireling isn’t always a bad thing, but nothing could possibly be worse when it comes to those who are watching over the flock of God. Jesus said:

- **John 10:12–13** — He who is a hired hand... sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

How carefully and how diligently most those who get their living from the Gospel be to watch over and guard their hearts! On the one hand, the elders who labor in preaching and teaching may be considered especially worthy of double honor (cf. 1 Tim. 5:17), but on the other hand these same elders have been given a stewardship, and it’s this stewardship that calls them to do the work of the shepherd not for *any* amount of honor or payment, but always of their own sincere and eager desire. I think Peter means for the elders to hear again, in this place, the echo of what he said just a moment ago, “not under compulsion, but willingly, **according to God**; not for shameful gain, but eagerly... [**‘according to God’**]” – according to the will of God, and therefore *love* for Him – **and therefore also love for His flock**. To love God is to love His flock, and to be motivated in the work of shepherding never by material gain, but wholly and only by this love. Put the other way around, the key to truly loving the flock is to be those who truly love God.

What is it that’s at the heart of a true shepherd’s love for God and for His flock? It’s humility; or, to use Peter’s language, it’s “low-mindedness.” So Peter says, lastly, that the elders are to shepherd the flock of God, exercising oversight...

VIII. 1 Peter 5:3 — ...not domineering over those allotted[‡] to you, but being examples to the flock.

[‡] Gr. *kleros*

Matthew 27:35 — And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting *lots*.

Acts 1:17 — For he was numbered among us and was allotted his *share* in this ministry.”

Acts 1:26 — And they cast *lots* for them, and the *lot* fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Acts 8:21 — You have neither part nor *lot* in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.

The true shepherd knows nothing of compulsion, nothing of greed, and nothing of any lust for power and prestige. How can Peter not be remembering, here, the words of Jesus on that day when James and John requested to be seated at His right and left hand in His kingdom?

- **Matthew 20:24–28** — When the ten heard it [including Peter], they were indignant at the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

And now Peter, himself, exhorts his fellow-elders: “Not domineering over **those allotted [or ‘apportioned’] to you**, but being examples to the flock.” Here is yet another vivid reminder that the flock is not the elders’, but God’s, and that He has given to the elders a stewardship—an “allotment” of His own sheep—for which the elders will one day answer to Him. (cf. Heb. 13:17) When the elders truly see the flock as a portion allotted to them by God—a stewardship entrusted to them until the coming of Christ—how will they lead and shepherd? Certainly never, *ever*, by domineering, but rather by being examples to the flock.

For Peter “being examples to the flock” is the exact opposite of being “domineering.” For Peter, “being examples to the flock” is apparently his synonym for being a “servant” and a “slave.” (cf. Mat. 20:24–28) What Peter is thinking of here is the elders’ example not of a domineering attitude, but of humility and “low-mindedness” – a humility and “low-mindedness” to which all of the flock has also been called. What Peter has in mind here is the elders’ example in witnessing faithfully to the sufferings of Christ by a constant readiness to share first in those sufferings themselves.

So now Peter concludes with these wonderful words:

IX. 1 Peter 5:4 — And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Here again we have the theme of the elders’ **stewardship**. One commentator says: “In the hour of accounting [the *chief* Shepherd] will recognize those who actually worked for him and not for themselves.” (Goppelt)

Here again we have the joy and hope of a **future glory**. The unfading crown of glory that the faithful elders will receive is representative of that same glory that all faithful Christians will one day inherit when their chief Shepherd appears. In the case of the elders who shepherded God’s flock faithfully, here is a crown that they will be granted to wear for all eternity, and here is a hope that tends always and only to **real** humility.

And finally, here again we see that the elders who will be found faithful and rewarded with the crown of glory will be those who loved the chief Shepherd and his appearing, and therefore those who also loved the chief Shepherd’s sheep – feeding and tending *His* flock not under compulsion, but willingly...; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those

allotted to [them], but being examples to the flock.” Remember Jesus’ words to Peter on the shores of the Sea of Galilee:

- **John 21:15–17** — “Simon, son of John, **do you love me**...?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “**Feed my lambs.**” He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, **do you love me**?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “**Tend my sheep.**” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, **do you love me**?” ... He said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “**Feed my sheep.**”

Brothers and sisters, **pray** for your elders. **Heed** their teaching and their instruction from the word of God – knowing that they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. (Heb. 13:17)

This morning, Peter’s been exhorting the elders, but in exhorting the elders, he also exhorts all of us together. The humility and “low-mindedness” of the elders’ in their shepherding is the *same* humility and low-mindedness that’s required of the sheep who are called to be subject to their shepherds. So, in verse five Peter turns first of all to the young men (perhaps those under the age of thirty) as ultimately representative of all the sheep, and then, lastly, he turns to all the elders and all the young men and all the sheep together.

X. 1 Peter 5:5 (cf. Prov. 3:34; LXX) — Likewise, *young men*,[§] be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves,^{**} *all of you* [shepherds and sheep alike], with humility [with “low-mindedness”] toward one another, [and then this powerful warning and equally powerful promise:] for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the lowly.”

[§] Cf. The identical form of this adjective (masc. pl.) in Acts 5:6 (“the young men”) and Isa. 40:30 (“young men”). See also Clowney. The translation “younger” (comp. adj.) can strengthen the idea that “elder” is fundamentally and primarily a reference to age (at times perhaps unintentionally). In this case, Peter’s point would be that those who should be subject to the elders are all those who are younger (*comparatively speaking*) than the elders. But this seems highly unlikely. Peter’s point is not subjection to “the older,” but subjection to “the elders.” This is not a false dichotomy and it does not deny a potential conceptual overlap. “Older” and “the elders” must be clearly distinguished in *meaning*. It is evident that the *definition* of “elders” is not “leaders who are older than everyone.” It is also evident that the definition of “elders” cannot simply be “leaders who are older” because this is no definition at all (who qualifies as “older?”). Thus, there may actually be many cases of those who are *older* being subject to elders who are *younger*. In this case, though, Peter seems to be singling out the young men who are not formal elders (perhaps those under the age of thirty?), though we can assume that he sees them as ultimately representing *all* in the church—both younger and older—who are not “elders.” Note: The translation “young men” still allows for the comparative sense to be derived in contrast with “elders.” But this only seems to emphasize all the more how “elders” must then mean “old people” (“Likewise, young people, be subject to the old people [who are leaders]”). But again, Peter’s emphasis is not on old people who are leaders, but on leaders who may or may not be old.

^{**} The Greek word for “clothe yourselves” (*enkombomai*) emphasizes the idea of tying or buckling on a garment. It may refer uniquely to tying on a servant’s apron. If so, we could be easily reminded of the example of Jesus in John chapter 13: “He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, [tied/wrapped it (supplied in English translation)] around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.” (Jn. 13:4-5)