

Do Not Be Surprised at the Fiery Ordeal Among You

An Expositional Journey Through **1Peter**

1Peter 5:1-4

51 The Weight and Reward of Shepherd/Elders, Part 4

May 12, 2019

1 Peter 5:1-4

1 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,

2 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;

3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

To the Glory of God

Now, probably, no issue has occupied more of the Elders' time over the past several years than the issue of how to "shepherd the flock of God" at the Covenant of Peace Church, and how to provide "godly Oversight". Verse 4 says that someday the "Chief Shepherd" is going to appear and there will be a reckoning with the "Under-Shepherds", the Elders. And that is a sobering and frightening thought to those of us in leadership. The other three Elders and myself have become *increasingly* convicted by texts like **Hebrews 13:17**, which says to the Church:

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

... and **The Acts 20:28**, where Paul says to the Elders of the Church in

Ephesus:

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

You can hear the *earnestness* and the *seriousness* in those words of Peter:

[you Elders] **“shepherd the Church of God”...**

... in other words, don't take this Work *lightly*. Don't be *casual* and *cavalier* and *breezy* about this Responsibility.

The fruit of all our Study and Prayer and Work is an emerging vision of Eldership, teamed up with the Deacons, who, *together*, will *shepherd* the flock of God called “Covenant of Peace”, and give an account of each member before the Lord.

Our Goal is to build a people, through the Word of God and Prayer, and all kinds of practical caring Ministries, who, at their core, have a vision of a great, glorious, sovereign, gracious, wise, all-sufficient, all-satisfying God, and who *savor* that Vision of God in Worship, *strengthen* that Vision of God in mutual encouragement and care, and *spread* that Vision of God in Works of Love, Local Evangelism, and World Missions.

So, what I want to do this morning is put this Vision in a Biblical context from **1 Peter 5**, that proved to be far more relevant to our situation when I began to study it, than I thought it was going to be. Peter begins by saying:

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you ...

... and my Question is, “*Why did Peter feel the need to exhort the Elders here at the end of his Letter?*” Now the word “Exhort” comes from a Greek word¹ that means: *a call to action; an earnest plea; to strongly admonish*. And the Answer as to *why* Peter is exhorting the Elders lies in a single word that Peter used at the very beginning of this Chapter, the word **“Therefore”**. And that tells us that *something* is going on with

¹ Gr. *parakaleo*

the scattered aliens of Peter's day that he wants to draw the attention of the Elders toward. And so, he begins this new thought by saying, "Therefore".

Now this is a perfect example of why I chose to use the *New American Standard Bible* here at Covenant. Because those of you who use the NIV don't see the word "Therefore", because the editors of the NIV took it upon themselves to *exclude* that word from the Bible, even though it is in the original autographs!

And this is *not* a small problem. Because unless you understand that what Peter is talking about here in **Chapter 5:1-4** is tied in with what he just finished preaching in **1 Peter 4**, then you will miss the entire *context* of what Peter is saying! And, in Biblical Interpretation, context is EVERYTHING!

We have to remember that Peter wasn't talking to 21st Century American Christians who are sitting in Church on Sunday morning listening to this. Peter was talking to a vast sea of people who had been made "aliens" by God Almighty choosing them for Salvation, but who had been made "scattered" by the evil Emperor, Nero, at the latter third of the 1st Century over in the Middle East.

And back in Chapter 4, the aged Apostle spent a considerable amount of time warning the early Church about something that was coming to them at some point in the future:

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; (1 Peter 4:12)

... and then, in the very next verse, Peter was "moved along" by God the Holy Spirit to say:

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.

... and this is what Peter is referring to in 5:1 when he calls himself:

***your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed,**

This alerts us that the "**fiery ordeal**" of 4:12 probably has something to do with the Elders in Chapter 5. And this gets even clearer in 4:17 when Peter explains *why* this "fiery trial" is coming on the church. He says:

For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? **AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER? Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.**

These verses have to do with the *whole* Church. The "**fiery ordeal**" that comes as "*punishing* Condemnation" on unbelievers hits the Church *first* as a "*Fire of Purification and Refining*"

But, what about the Elders? Is there anything special for them in this? Absolutely! We have to understand that Peter was *not* speaking in a vacuum. He wasn't saying things that had no connection to *other* things that God had *already* spoken to His people. So, we need to try to find out what was in Peter's mind when he began this Passage by *exhorting* the Elders. And there are two Old Testament background Passages that help. One is **Ezekiel 9**.

Then He cried out in my hearing with a loud voice saying, "Draw near, O executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand." Behold, six men came from the direction of the upper gate which faces north, each with his shattering weapon in his hand; and among them was a certain man clothed in linen with a writing case at his loins. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar. Then the glory of the God of Israel went up from the cherub on which it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case. The Lord said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, *even* through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst." But to the others He said in my hearing, "Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity and do not spare. Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark; and you shall start from My sanctuary." So they started with the elders who *were* before the temple. And He said to them, "Defile the temple and fill the

courts with the slain. Go out!" Thus they went out and struck down *the people* in the city. As they were striking *the people* and I *alone* was left, I fell on my face and cried out saying, "Alas, Lord God! Are You destroying the whole remnant of Israel by pouring out Your wrath on Jerusalem?" Then He said to me, "The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is very, very great, and the land is filled with blood and the city is full of perversion; for they say, 'The Lord has forsaken the land, and the Lord does not see!' "But as for Me, My eye will have no pity nor will I spare, but I will bring their conduct upon their heads." Then behold, the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case reported, saying, "I have done just as You have commanded me."

Now, like all Old Testament Passages, there is a lot here. But the gist of this Passage is that God's own people have committed horrible abominations before the Lord, and God is now determined to judge His own City (Jerusalem). And, in verse 4, God says to His angel:

Go through the midst of the city, *even* through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst.

So, here God is telling the angel to go through the City of Jerusalem and put a "mark" on all the people who hate sin and who are faithfully serving God to identify them as those who love the Lord and who are saved. And God is doing this because He is going to utterly destroy the rest of the people.

Now this is very similar to what God told Moses to do back in **Exodus 12** when He told Moses to put lamb's blood over the doorposts of the houses of the faithful so that the death angel would "Pass Over" them and not kill them. And it is also similar to what God told the angel in **The Revelation 9** when He told him to put a "seal" on the people of God so they would not be destroyed.

But, back in **Ezekiel 9**, once the faithful people received the mark to *preserve* them, God told the angel:

But to the others He said in my hearing, "Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity and do not spare. Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark..."

... but now look at where God told the angel to *begin* this Divine Judgment:

... you shall start from My sanctuary. So, they started with the elders who were before the temple.

... so Divine Judgment fell on the Sanctuary *first*. And, in particular, it fell on the Elders! And this is a Principal that goes throughout the entire Bible:

... From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more. Luke 12:48b

We must understand that we are over 20 Centuries *away* from the Resurrection. Another way of understanding this is that we are over 2,000 years *closer* to the Coming of the Lord. And so, we are the *beneficiaries* of the all labor and all the prayers of hundreds of millions of believers who have gone before us, who studied God's Word, who wrote down amazing Truths, and who engaged in fantastic exploits in the earth! So, from *any* perspective, we have been given "much", and "much" has been entrusted to us. For example:

- ✓ We have 66 inspired and inerrant Books in our own language.
- ✓ We have 6,000 year of Human History at our disposal.
- ✓ We have centuries of Common Grace.
- ✓ We have 2,000 years of Church History to learn from.
- ✓ We have God the Holy Spirit abiding continually in us.
- ✓ We have God the Son interceding for us at the Right Hand of the Majesty on High.

... not to mention that here, in America, we live in the *freest* and the most *prosperous* nation in the history of the world, with untold benefits and opportunities that Solomon, in all his glory, could only dream about.

For example, last year alone, the Christians of the United States sent more money and more supplies and more help to more countries in need than all the other nations of the world combined. We also supported Global Evangelism more than all the other countries put

together. And we thank God for that. And yet, we spent more money on dog food than all of that combined. And we should be ashamed of that.

Now I can understand the Old Testament Prophets getting discouraged to the point where they prayed to die. I can even understand the Apostles acting the way they did before Jesus rose from the dead. But notice the great change in those men after the Resurrection, and after they were endued with Power from on High! Look at what Paul said about himself in **2 Corinthians 11:23-12:5**:

in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. *I have been* on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from *my* countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; *I have been* in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from *such* external things, there is the daily pressure on me *of* concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and *so* escaped his hands. Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago — whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows — such a man was caught up to the third heaven. And I know how such a man — whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows — was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak. On behalf of such a man I will boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to *my* weaknesses.

So, the Principal holds true:

From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.

... or, in the words of the Prophet Ezekiel ...

... you shall start from My sanctuary." So, they started with the elders who *were* before the temple.

... or, in the words of Peter...

For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? **AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER?**

So, if Peter has in his mind the Way God once began His Judgment from the House of God, *especially* from the Elders, he may well see a special need to exhort the Elders now in view of the "fiery ordeal" that is coming.

Now the other Passage that is at the back of Peter's mind was **Malachi 3:1-7a**, that says:

Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years. Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me," says the Lord of hosts. For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept *them*. Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the Lord of hosts...

Now the “**sons of Levi**” are the priests. But we have to remember that, under the infinitely superior New Covenant, there is no *hierarchical system* of Priests.² What the New Covenant brings in is the “Priesthood of all believers”. So, in Jesus, all (both men and women) who are genuinely saved are priests unto God.

But the Prophet was “moved along” to say that this purifying Fire was coming to God’s people. Malachi cried out:

Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the Lord of hosts.

Now, normally, it would be real Good News to say that the Lord is coming. But here, Malachi issues a dire warning:

But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver...

But, *why?* *Why* is God going to “**refine them [His leaders] like gold and silver**”?

... so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness.

... so, evidently, the “**sons of Levi**” [who now represent the whole believing Church], had become worldly and sinful, and God was going to *refine* them so that they would, once again, pursue Holiness. And what would be God’s Blessings once the people were purified and refined?

Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years. Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me," says the Lord of hosts.

² Part of what makes the visible Roman religious system so utterly unbiblical- is that they maintain an earthly priesthood.

So, *one reason* why we see Society becoming more and more corrupt is because the Church and the Leaders of the Church have grown cold and apathetic about God and the things of God. And so, in His great Mercy, God brings Divine Correction to His Own people, FIRST! Or, in the words of the Apostle Peter:

For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER?

But look at what the catalyst is for God doing all this. Look at what this Old Testament Prophet said was the Reason behind *why* God moved with Mercy to purify and refine His people:

For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.

In other words, because God is "Immutable". So, the fact that the one, true, and living God of the Bible never changes means that He also does not change His Mind or change His Purposes toward His people. Look what Malachi said next:

From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept *them*.

Here the Prophet says that Israel had never been faithful to Him. So, why didn't God simply destroy the sinful and rebellious Jews like He did the other nations who had sinned against Him? Malachi doesn't tell us, but Isaiah did:

Isaiah 48:9-11

For the sake of My name I delay My wrath, And *for* My praise I restrain *it* for you, In order not to cut you off. Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can *My name* be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.

Isaiah says here that because God had chosen to set His Love [Name] upon the Jew and call them as His people, that is the *only reason* why God moved on them in Mercy to purify and refine them, rather than destroy them! And this is why I tell you that it is because God does NOT love us more than He loves Himself, that is the Reason why we are all safe and secure in Jesus.

So, it should be real easy for any genuine Elder to read this and come to the conclusion that the refining Fire of Divine Judgment has a special reference to them. Because this Fire purifies the Leaders *first!*

So, when Peter says in 4:17:

it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God

... it is real easy now to see why he would then begin 5:1 with:

THEREFORE, I exhort the elders among you...

So, my Answer to the Question, "*Why does Peter feel the need to exhort the Elders?*", is that this "**fiery ordeal**" in 4:12 is a *refining and purifying* Fire from God that begins with the House of God. But once God is through cleansing His Temple, He will move without Pity or Compassion toward the sinner out in the world in Damnation. But God doesn't change. And so, His eternal Disposition toward His elect is one of Mercy and Compassion. So, the Fire that will utterly *consume* the ungodly and the sinner will *purify* and *refine* the chosen. And in the House of God, that means this purifying and refining begins with the Elders, the Leaders.

And that means that it is both a fearful and wonderful thing to be an Elder in the House of God. Because if the Elders lead the Church into Strength and Glory, they will also lead the Church into the Refiner's Fire of God's purifying Judgment. Elders will not stand *above* the Church or *outside* the Church giving suggestions for how to cope with the Fire. No, they will lead the Church right into the Fire.

Now when Peter calls himself in verse 1 a "fellow elder," it's not that he is laying claim to some exalted title (remember, Peter *could* have called himself an Apostle!). Rather, he's expressing a willingness to suffer in the Refiner's Fire along with the rest of the Elders. In fact, I think this is what he means when he calls himself, in v. 1b, a "**witness of**

the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed."

Now the word "**witness**", here, means more than, "*I was there and I saw Jesus brutalized.*" What Peter means is, "*I bear witness to Christ's Sufferings by my words and by my life. I am with you in the struggle that we face together. I am with you in this Fire that purifies and refines the Elders of God's people.*"

In other words, Peter is practicing what he preaches in verse 3, that Elders should lead "by example" and not "by lording it over the flock."

So, Peter believes that the Elders need a *special* Exhortation here at the end of his Letter. Fire is painful, and Judgment is serious. And it is coming on the House of God, and on the Elders *first*. So, in that situation, Elders need two things:

- Warning
- Hope

... and Peter gives both.

The Apostle gives the other Elders three Warnings. And these are Warnings against three very typical failures in Eldership:

1. A Warning against Laziness/Fear
2. A Warning against Greed
3. A Warning against Pride

And this "Laziness" is simply a manifestation of the fallen, human lust for Ease and Comfort in this life. The "Greed" is the lust for Money and/or material Possessions. And "Pride" is the lust for Power and Prestige. So, let's look at all three.

1. A Warning Against Laziness/Fear

1 Peter 5:2a

shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*...

Here, the Apostle warns the Elders against drifting into a *lazy* or *distracted* "Pattern of Ministry" that requires some kind of *external* "compulsion" to overcome. So, Peter tells the Elders, "*Don't be sluggish and unconcerned. Don't be like the mule that has to have a bit and bridle. Be willing.*"

But it might be that it's "fear" that he is warning against here and *not* laziness. It might be "fear" that makes an Elder *unwilling* to serve. So, Peter is saying, "*Don't be fearful of doing what you are called to do. Do it voluntarily.*"

This is why we never want to *pressure* anyone into the Eldership at Covenant of Peace. God wants men who *desire* this Ministry, who are *called* to this Ministry, *not* those who act out of "external compulsion".

And this illustrates a very important Principal about *any* area of Ministry. A person has to be "called by God" to a Ministry. Another way of saying this is that *this* person, being in *this* Ministry, at *this* time, must be the Will of God. And, if it is, if a person has been called by God to a particular Ministry, the "burden" of that Ministry, the "requirements" of that Ministry, the "responsibilities" that come with that Ministry, will *not* destroy him. Rather, he will *thrive* in what God has called him to do.

Now I'm not saying it won't be hard, at times. And I'm not even saying that the Call of God may not require a man's life. It might. Many godly Elders have been required to die for the Cause of Jesus Christ. So, yes, it is, many times, a very hard and lonely road. But what I am saying is that if God has called a Man to be an Elder, if it is the Will of God for a Man to be an Elder, then God will be faithful to *equip* that Man to do what God has called him to do. Now, it is true that the Elder may have to struggle to *receive* that equipping. But God is Good. And God will never call someone to do something, and then not *equip* him with whatever he needs to faithfully *carry out* that Calling. You see, when a Man is doing what God created him to do, he is "in his element". And he is happy and content to live *within* that Calling, *regardless* of the Cost. But a Man, who *assumes* a Ministry when God has *not* "called" him is "a square peg in a round hole". He doesn't fit in. He is out of place. And the way he conducts his Ministry will show that.

For example, a Man who *assumes* to be an Elder, absent the Call of God, will *not* love the sheep, and he will *not* enjoy the Ministry. He

will see the people as a problem, and he will carry out his responsibilities with anger and frustration. And the result is that God will *not* be honored, and the people will sigh by reason of their pain.

Also, in the case where a Man must have his family in order to “be” or “do” what God has *called* him to “be” or “do”, such as an Elder, then God is also faithful to *equip* both the Wife and the Children as well. Operating in a Ministry that God has called a Man into will *not* result in that Man having to get a divorce or see his family destroyed.

I think one of the greatest reproaches of the Gospel of Jesus I have ever heard was given by the grown Children and the ex-wife of an Elder (who is now deceased). These people are horribly bitter and offended that their Husband or Father was ever called into the Ministry. And I was in a meeting where they just spewed out their anger and bitterness in front of several thousand people. And from the way they were talking, you would think that God was *punishing* people to call them into a Ministry.

But we need to know that being either the Wife or the Children of an Elder is hard. And, many times, the way that others, in the Church, treat the Wife and Children of Elders is patently unfair and destructive. They hold both the Wife and Children to a much higher Standard than they do for their own families. And that is why it is common with many in the modern Church to suggest that the children of the Elders are the “worst Children in the Church”. We need to remember that a six year-old is going to act like a six year-old, even if he is the Child of an Elder. This is what the writer of **Hebrews** was thinking about when he wrote,

Hebrews 13:17

Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

Now I’m going to get into this verse much more deeply in a future Message, but suffice it to say that being an Elder is hard enough without expecting them to have to measure up with *arbitrary* and *man-made* requirements that have nothing to do with the Bible or with Christianity. The smartest people on earth are those who function underneath happy and godly Elders.

2. A Warning Against Greed

1 Peter 5:2

shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight... not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;

Now this part *especially* applies to those of us who actually “make our living” in the Ministry. We must never look on our “Eldership” as merely the “means” of putting food on the table. Peter instructs us here to watch out for the temptation to make “godliness a means of gain,” as Paul said in **1 Timothy 6:5**.

Instead of Covetous and Materialism and Greed governing our thoughts and dictating how we conduct our Ministry, Peter says that we are to engage in being an Elder:

with eagerness.

In other words, we are to *love* our Ministry. We are to *enjoy* our labor. But the Reality is that an Elder *will not* and he *cannot* love being an Elder unless he *genuinely* loves *the people* he is to shepherd. Because a real, godly Elder doesn’t see the people of God as being “obstacles” who are “in the way” to him “building his Ministry”. No, he sees the people *as* his Ministry! In fact, the people are his *only* Ministry.

Everything an Elder does, he does, to God’s Glory on behalf of the people of God. And so, in every sense of the word, an Elder is a *servant* of the people. And so, an Elder doesn’t talk *down* to the people, he talks *to* them. He doesn’t set himself up as being too important (or too busy) for the lowliest person. So, instead of an Elder being a “prima donna”, and having to be “catered to” by the people, a *real* Elder “washes the feet” of the people he serves.

We have to remember that problems and tragedies and sufferings don’t keep banker’s hours. People hurt at 11:00 at night, and at 3:00 in the morning. So, when they “call for the Elders”, *that* is when they need them.

3. A Warning Against Pride

1 Peter 5:3

nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

Pride is the failure to realize deeply that without Jesus, we can do nothing. Not *something*, but absolutely *nothing*! And so, the proud heart trusts in his own "self-confidence" and "self-reliance". And so, Pride and Arrogance and Self-Righteousness cause us to become "self-centered", "selfish", and "narcissistic". And narcissism in Ministry results in the wayward Elder feeling that he is *indispensable*. And anytime that happens, the Elder begins to act that way and he exalts *himself*, so that he will receive the praise of men. And, at that point, there is no way that God receives any Glory at all. The Elder has successfully *robbed* God of all the Glory, and given that Glory to himself. So, the Elder is now at war with God over Glory! What a horrible place for a Church to be in to have its Leaders actively robbing God of the Glory that only belongs to God.

Peter seeks to circumvent that horror by telling the Elders, "*Don't exalt yourselves. Don't desire the praise of men. Don't consider yourself to be indispensable. Lead the people with 'Servant Lowliness', with the Humility of a 'bought and paid for' Slave of Jesus Christ.*"

And this is not only true as it pertains to Teaching and Preaching, but also concerning Suffering. When the "fiery ordeal" comes to you first, the Elder leads by example. So, the godly Elder doesn't try to *escape* the Suffering or run from it. He doesn't seek the easy way out. The godly Elder walk through Suffering as a living, breathing Example for the people. In other words, an Elder should seek to learn how to "Suffer well", to the Glory of God.

And those are the Warnings we need. A Warning against living for ease and comfort, a Warning against living for money and possessions, and a Warning against living for power and prestige and the praise of men.

But Peter knows that, in this fiery situation, Elders also need Hope. And this is what Peter gives them in verse 4:

1 Peter 5:4

And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Now over the last 150 years or so, there has been a radical *transformation* as to the Reason behind why we do what we do. Today, it is common to hear people say that the reason they do this or that is, “Because I’m supposed to”, or “Because it is the ‘right thing to do.’” And I understand what they mean when they say this.

But what are they really talking about when they say things like that? Now certainly, it is true that we are *supposed* to do what the Bible tells us to do. And, manifestly, obeying God is *always* the “right thing to do”. But, if we’re not careful when we say things like this, we are drawing attention to *ourselves*.

You see, when I struggle to obey God for no other reason other than because I’m *supposed to*, that makes me look “noble” and “honorable”, and, yes, it makes me look “good”. It testifies to the fact that I am so *unselfish* and so *altruistic* that I am willing to struggle against the lusts of my flesh to obey God for no other reason other than it is the “right thing to do”. I am witnessing to the supposed notion that I have such control over my faculties, and that I am so disciplined that I can muster enough “will-power” and “inner strength” to accomplish things, even against the inclinations of my own flesh. And I would suggest that this makes me appear to be an amazing person.

But I would also suggest that it would then be real hard for me to live this way, and then be in conformity with what a *fundamental* Principal from cover to cover in the Bible: That God does everything He does for His Own Glory, and so that no human being can Boast.

So, I would like us to accept the fact that this is NOT the way that God set things up. Now He certainly *could* have set it up that we do what we do for no other reason than because we are supposed to, but He didn’t. So, it is NOT being “Biblical” to live like this. And that means that we need the Holy Bible not only to tell us “what” to do, but to tells us “why”.

Now, right out of the gate, it is a lie to say this because no one is *that* disciplined, and no one has *that much* control over his own carnal inclinations. Human beings have been made in such a way that we need *motivation* to do things, *especially* if the things we are doing are hard or things that will cost us something. And God has been Good to give us such motivation. And that motivation has both a negative and a positive frame.

For example, when Peter teaches that Elders are to **shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight**, he didn't say, "*Because you are supposed to*", nor did he say, "*Because it is the right thing to do*", nor did he instruct the Elders to, "*Muster up your own will-power to do so*". No, along with the Apostolic Commandment to shepherd the Church, Peter said:

1 Peter 5:4

And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Now many within the modern church say, "*I'm not doing what I do so I can receive Rewards.*" But I would ask, "*Then why did God give us these incentives?*" To simply take up space? Because He *doesn't* want us to believe them? No. That is disingenuous, at best, and hypocritical, at worst. The only reason these Promises are in the Bible is because God wants us to believe in them and trust in them.

So, when shepherding the Church becomes hard, and when the Elders are discouraged because they don't see the results in the people that they would like to see, or when they feel like giving up, Elders are to return to the Promise of God that Peter gives in verse 4, and they are to *pray* about this Promise, and they are to *press on* in the hard and sometimes thankless job of shepherding the people of God so that,

... when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Receiving the unfading crown of Glory is the *motivation* that God the Holy Spirit gave to us, and it is ridiculous for us to ignore that. Now can this type of "service" descend into nothing but self-centeredness? Sure. Because we are fallen, *everything* we do, *for any reason*, has the ability to do that. But simply because it has the ability to do that is not a reason we are to ignore the Promises that we clearly find in God's Word.

So, where is love in all of that? Where is serving God with delight for no other reason than we love Jesus and desire to see Him magnified? It is right there, if we allow it to be. And yet God the Spirit put these

Promises in the Word. And all I'm trying to do is believe that the Bible is the Word of God.

So, if that is true, do we have many examples of this in the Bible? Are there any examples of people doing things so that they can receive a Reward from God? I'm glad you asked. Because we have the very *best* Example of all, Jesus Christ. Now most of us would agree that Jesus hung on the Cross, and bled and died and screamed in agony, because He loved His Father and because He loved us. And yet when the writer of **Hebrews** gave us the Revelation about this moment he wrote:

Hebrews 12:1&2

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Here, the unknown writer says that even though Jesus despised the Shame associated with the Cross, He endured it, for what reason?

... for the joy set before Him

So, Yes, Jesus loved His Father. And, yes, Jesus loved us. And, of course, all that Jesus did was so that God would look magnificent. And yet, God the Father gave God the Son the Promise of the "fullness of Joy" for obeying Him. And the Holy Bible says that this Promise *motivated* Jesus to endure the Cross.

But then, in the very next verse, the writer tells us that we are to consider Jesus and to analyze Him and *what* He did and *why* He did it, so that we would not be discouraged:

For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

... so, it is being both Biblical and honoring to God for us to latch onto the Promises that God gave us in the Bible and to believe them, and allow them to help us through the dark and difficult times when

Obedience costs us something. And trusting in the Promises that God gave us in the Bible will produce godly Humility.

So, for example, one of the ways that the Bible teaches all believers (including Elders) to strive to be Humble is found in **Luke 14**. There, Jesus said when we give a feast, we are to invite the poor, and the crippled, and the lame, and the blind, people who have no way to pay us back and people who have nothing to offer us in the way of political or monetary means.

Now we can choose to do this because we are nice people, or because we want to look noble to other people, or because we want others to think that we are very spiritual people, which will accomplish nothing but BUILD up our Pride and Self-righteousness. Or we can believe the Bible and trust the Promise that Jesus Himself gave us in **Luke 14:14b**:

... you will be blessed, since they do not have *the means* to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

In other words, there are various Ministries we should engage in that may be thankless in this world. And if we are the kind of people who *need* to be thanked or praised every time we do something, we probably shouldn't even try to do what Jesus calls us to do. It's just too hard, and there's not enough Reward down here or right now.

But if we really believe that we will be "repaid at the Resurrection of the Righteous", if we Elders *really* believe that:

... when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

... then we will have the motivation and strength to do what God calls us to do.

There may be times when Elders feel like the Refining and Purifying Fire of God is just too hot. We may feel that, if it takes this much Fire to burn away our sloth and our greed and our pride, then it's just not worth it. It is at those times that we need to review *why* we're doing what we're doing. What is our *motivation*? What are we trusting in? And I will tell you from first-hand experience, that the Fire can get so hot that no amount of "self-discipline" or doing things "because we are *supposed to*" will cut the mustard.

At those moments, we need a sure and steadfast Promise from a God, Who cannot lie. We need something so wonderful, so great, so enticing, so beautiful, so re-assuring, so comforting, so soothing, so powerful, that it makes the Fire of Purification look like a Spring Day in the park.

Because the only reason we are struggling like this is because we have *already* taken our eyes off Eternity, we have *already* grown weary of “well-doing”. Our face has been turned toward the world and our eyes are beholding the pleasures of this life and we have forgotten Who Jesus is and we are blind to the all-satisfying Chief-Shepherd, our Lord Jesus.

And it is at that moment when we need to remember what God has said, and what God has promised to those who *don't* take their hands off the plow. And as we reach out to that Promise that is both sure and certain, we find that it isn't a carrot on a stick always just out of reach. But it is as near and as real and as certain as God Himself. Which is exactly *why* God gave us those Promises to begin with.

So, yes, the Weight of Elders is enormous. And yes, the Battle is hot and fierce. But the Reward is truly sweet indeed.

Amen. Let's pray

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The Covenant of Peace Church 13600 John Clark Road Gulfport, Mississippi 39503 228.832.7729
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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.