



1 Peter 5:1-4
The Godly Elder

NKJ 1 Peter 5:1 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:

2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;

3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;

4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

If you aren't familiar with John Piper, you really should be, he is a Baptist Pastor, and Reformed, and he has written some amazingly insightful books. He has quite an ability to draw out and write on the experiential or heart issues of the Christian faith. Normally he writes for Christian laypeople, but in 2002 he brought out a book intended specifically for Pastors that caused quite a stir, I wish it had caused more of a stir than it did, it was entitled – ***Brothers, We are Not Professionals.***

The reason why it caused such a stir was that Piper was going directly against the contemporary model for pastors and for churches, that is the business model. A model that sees the church as just another business peddling products and services, and the pastor as a professional, a manager and salesman in that organization.

Now the business model that makes the pastor into a professional is seen as successful because it “gets results,” but Piper pointed out in his work that the results it gets are not biblical. What are the marks of success in the business world? Well you grow in size and you produce a nice profit. Walmart or McDonalds for instance are modern examples of business success stories. So when you apply the business model to the church, you measure their success by nickels and noses. How big you are and how much capital you have. But Piper pointed out that the objectives of a ministry are **not** the same as those of the business world, and that because we have adopted them, we are actually killing the Church, and replacing it with a baptized version of the world:

He wrote: "The aims of our ministry are eternal and spiritual. They are not shared by any of the professions. It is precisely by the failure to see this that we are dying."

He came to the conclusion therefore that: ***"The more professional we long to be, the more spiritual death we will leave in our wake"***

Now while I am grateful to John Piper for writing his book, he is by no means the first person to recognize the profound impact the Shepherds or leaders of God's people could have on the church. How the wrong shepherds, following the wrong model instead of leading people to eternal life, could cause their spiritual death.

Throughout the Old Testament, we see positive impact that good shepherds and leaders like David had on God's people, and the baneful influence that bad shepherds like Ahab had. Paul and Peter in the New Testament era certainly recognized the profound importance that of having faithful undershepherds so Peter doesn't just address the people of the churches, he addresses their elders as well. Now when he uses the term "elders" or *presbuterous* in the Greek he doesn't mean the older people in the church, he means the office of elder or presbyter – that is incidentally were we get the term Presbyterian from. He says "***now I want to talk to you elders in the congregations of the dispersion.***" Now having said that, PLEASE do not for a moment think that this is just relevant to the few elders in the congregation. Everyone needs to hear what Scripture is saying here, because it is desperately important that you the members of the church understand what makes a good elder. So listen up because you need to know what elders are supposed to be doing, what they are *not* supposed to be doing. Those of you who might be considering pursuing the office of elder need to hear this, and you kids need to listen up as well, because someday Godwilling all of you will be called upon to nominate and vote upon elders, and it just might be that some of you young men might become the next generation of Ruling Elders and Pastors.

Now I hope you noticed that Peter does not call himself an Apostle, and Lord it over the men he is addressing, which if he really was the first Pope as the Roman Catholic Church claims, we would expect. It is not "I Peter, First Pontiff and Vicar of Christ on Earth do declare Ex Cathedra, etc." instead he stresses his fellowship and essential equality with the men he is talking to, he is a fellow elder. And he goes on to further establish his fellowship with them, he calls himself a "witness of the sufferings of Christ" now there he doesn't mean, "***I saw Christ as He was being crucified***" because of course he didn't he means witness in the sense of one who witnesses or proclaims the truth of the gospel to others. He uses witness in the sense in which these elders who were proclaiming the gospel of Christ crucified could participate. He then goes on to remind them that because of His and their union with Christ, he and they were already partakers of the glory that would be revealed when Jesus returns.

He then exhorts those Elders to three critical activities:

- 1) Shepherd Christ's Flock
- 2) Lead them by your Example
- 3) Look forward to your Final Reward in Heaven

1) Shepherd Christ flock: a) First **He reminds them whose Flock it is:** and we elders need to be reminded that this is not our congregation, that these are not our Lambs, they are Christ's.

Jesus is the Great Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd, the Good Shepherd, the elders are but undershepherds. This is the flock of God, and we have no proprietary rights, we serve at his pleasure.

b) **We are his overseers**, the word there is *Episkopoi*, we are his stewards that keep an eye on our Lord's property, the people he purchased with his own blood.

Acts 20:28 "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to 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.

Our job is to "oversee" not to "overlook" – Jesus said in John 10:27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" the undershepherd's must follow that example, they must KNOW the

Sheep. [read A'Brakel Quote] now that will be tough, because a lot of sheep do not want their shepherd to know what they are doing.

Those of you with children will be familiar with that experience. One of my children a little while ago, was up to no good, so after I had called out and chastened them, they immediately tried to move behind the building *where I wouldn't see*. Members of the church do that kind of thing all the time.

c) He tells them *what should be their reason for shepherding Christ's flock*

It shouldn't be a drudge, they are not to be timeservers, putting in their 40 hours and then escaping. Rather they should do it willingly, they should desire to have their lives poured out on the congregation as an act of service to Christ. Professionalism, is actually one of the ways that Pastors avoid this as well as the difficult duty of oversight. Programs, time regimentation, every to keep the flock at arms length, the become professional Mr. Timeservers. Ministry becomes one shortcut and professional gimmick after another. Paying for sermons for instance. Pastors.com, sermons.com. Why not simply hire an actor? Surely he can read someone else's sermon better than a mere pastor?

Also he should never serve for dishonest gain. No TBN ministers.

2) ***He is not to Lord it over the people, but to lead them by example.*** There must be humility in the elders - we are not just schoolmasters teaching something we know perfectly, the flock must see that we also sit underneath the authority of Christ, that we too are learning at his feet and following him and if we say to them come on, hurry up, they have to see that we are beckoning them [this way, calling to them] not pushing them THAT WAY [pushing them]. We must not drive them to do the things we will not do ourselves. Every member of the church should be able to see that their elders are men who have listened to Christ's admonition ***"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."*** (Luke 9:23) It should be possible for them to say what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:1 with a straight face: ***"Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ."***

Example of being worthy of imitation - Leaving the GA to tend to a family that had just lost a premature child. He was on a committee, doing important work. I saw that and I said, that is the kind of Pastor I need to be.

But by contrast with the Professional model, how in that case do you lead by example? "Let us say you are the Pastor of a 3,000 member church, how on earth would you even know that a family had a premature child, much less that they were gravely ill, and you certainly wouldn't leave an event to fly home to personally tend to the needs of that family." Be imitators of me, doesn't mean speak well, have great hair, a nice wardrobe, be charismatic. It means that people see Christ in things you do. So for a good elder, the people shouldn't say there's something there that reminds me of Zig Ziglar, but "There's something here that reminds me of Jesus."

And one other thing about that that is also very "unprofessional" our devotion worthy of emulation is not seen in how we spend our time with those who have it "all together" but how we spend ourselves on those who do not - Jesus specifically went to the misfits, the wounded, the sick and not the well.

4) He reminds them to look forward to their final reward, not here on earth but in heaven. That is very important

What is the *Reward* that the faithful Shepherd can expect to receive? Well certainly it cannot be financial remuneration that we work for. Our pay in a very real sense merely enables us to do our job.

1 Tim. 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

In fact one should never pursue the office of elder in expectation of any kind of this worldly reward. This is vitally important, because too many men enter the ministry expecting some sort of reward here on earth. If not money, then respect, success, acclaim, something temporal, here and now

For those of you who might be contemplating becoming an elder for that reason I would say think again. This is not a calling for the lazy, the unfeeling, for the thin-skinned. It is not for those who want a lot of leisure time, or the ability to spend much time with their family, for the kind of person who wants job completion or the ability to leave their work at the office (it is always with you). It is not a calling for those who seek worldly fame or riches. It is a calling also in which you can expect to suffer in proportion to the faithfulness with which you perform your duties and that sometimes at the hands of ones own flock. Both John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards fulfilled their callings with extraordinary faithfulness and never sought to please men, and both were rejected by their congregations and kicked out of their churches, precisely because they *were* so zealous for their king and for the spiritual good of their people.

I say that because the general level of holiness and spirituality amongst Christian men in our age has fallen to such low levels that any man who shows an interest in theology and the bible is generally immediately encouraged to either become a minister or an elder whether or not he genuinely has been called by God to that office and consequently gifted for it. We have a recruitment crisis, and it is causing us to make decisions that are hurting the flock, and hurting the men who seek the office without being qualified for it and who are therefore setting themselves up not only for failure but exposing themselves to a stricter judgment

James 3:1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

The reward the elder should be seeking is not here but hereafter, a reward given by his king Jesus in heaven, the reward of hearing: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord."

Athletes competed for crowns of leaves that perished, kings received crowns that likewise pass away. The pastor however, receives a reward that is unfading, imperishable. They may be despised on earth, but they will be honored in heaven.

Jesus told us Peter in Matt. 16:18 "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

19 "And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

As Derek Thomas put it: "Our lives as Pastors should be a series of footnotes on Matthew 16"