

LEADING GOD'S FLOCK

1 Peter 5:1-4

INTRODUCTION

- It seems that in the past few years Satan has been particularly active in the world.
- His assault on marriage, the family and Biblical gender roles has been underway for many decades
- Under the guise of a “pandemic”, rulers have stripped us of our God-given liberties, fomented bitter divisions in our society and forced experimental therapies on us
- The churches particularly have suffered under this satanic assault over the last two years with lockdowns, limits on numbers of worshippers, QR codes, mask mandates and vaccine mandates
- For many people, when the lockdowns ended, they didn't bother going back to church in-person, but rather preferred to continue watching church online
- There are many reasons why these people would prefer “virtual church” to the real thing:
 - ✓ You don't feel pressure to put money in the offering plate
 - ✓ You are not accountable to others in the church
 - ✓ You can silence the preacher with a click of the mouse button
 - ✓ You can switch churches in a moment
 - ✓ You don't have to put up with annoying parishioners
 - ✓ You don't have to endure a hard pew
 - ✓ You can enjoy church in your PJs and Ugg boots
- Now there are legitimate reasons that some people are unable to physically attend church, such as sickness or some other providential hindrance, but it must be understood that watching a service online is no substitute for assembling with the body of Christ according to our Lord's commandment
- So the churches have become weakened, by a combination of satanic assault, cold-heartedness, and ignorance of the vital importance the church holds in Christ's plan for this age

- Peter in this epistle has used the metaphor of the temple, a “spiritual house” (2:5), the “house of God” (4:17) to describe the church, but here he uses another metaphor: the flock of God
- God used the same affectionate term to describe Israel (Isaiah 63:11; Jeremiah 13:17,20; Ezekiel 34:31; Zechariah 11:17) and the Lord Jesus called his church “little flock” (Luke 12:32)
- The church as the flock emphasises a *commonality* of the church members
 - ✓ They share a common location
 - ✓ They share a common Shepherd
 - ✓ They are of the same breed/family
- The church as the flock reminds us that we are like sheep in many ways
 - ✓ Sheep follow the rest of the flock
 - ✓ Sheep have a poor sense of direction and easily go astray
 - ✓ Sheep have no defences
 - ✓ Sheep cannot clean themselves
 - ✓ A sheep on its back (a “cast” sheep) cannot get up without help
 - ✓ Sheep recognise their shepherd’s voice and follow him
- Remember that Peter is not writing to a particular church, but to “strangers scattered” in the region we know today as Turkey, which is why this letter is called a “general epistle”
- Yet even though these believers had been scattered into various places because of the persecution they were suffering, they were careful to maintain a commitment to their brethren by assembling as churches in the various places they found themselves
- Here Peter gives specific instructions to a particular group of people (as he has previously to servants, wives, husbands), namely the elders of the church
- Strong spiritual leadership in the church is needed at all times, but especially so in time of satanic attack and persecution
- While this is addressed to pastors, there is truth here for all believers to apply
- Knowing what role God has given the shepherd of the flock to fulfil, the sheep of the flock may then know their role in relation to him

- If the pastor is to *oversee*, then those in his care should be in a position to be *overseen*
- If the pastor is to *feed* the flock, then those in his care should ensure they are *being fed* by him at every opportunity
- So it instructs the flock in how to relate to their pastor, support him, pray for him
- It informs the flock as to the proper Biblical expectations they should have for a pastor, rather than human devised expectations
- The problem is not *unrealistic* expectations people have of pastors, but *unbiblical* expectations

I. THE CALLING OF THE ELDERS (1)

A. An apostolic exhortation

1. “Exhort” (*parakalo*) is literally to “call near”, to warn, counsel, beseech, encourage
2. Peter does not take the position of an apostle commanding those beneath him, but of an elder encouraging his fellow-elders
3. Peter was not the “Pope”

B. The office of elder

1. This office of leader of the church is described by three different titles which are used interchangeably to describe the one office
 - a. Elder (*presbuterion*) refers to his spiritual maturity and his example to the flock (1 Timothy 5:19)
 - b. Bishop or overseer (*episkopos*) refers to his authority to rule the church (Philippians 1:1)
 - c. Pastor (*poimen*) refers to his role shepherd, teaching, nurturing and protecting the flock (Ephesians 4:11)
2. All three of these titles are found here in Peter’s exhortation
 - a. “Feed” (*poimante*) in v.2 is the verb form of the word for “pastor”

- b. "Oversight (*episkopountes*) in v.2 is the verb for of the word for "bishop"
- 3. "Elder" can obviously refer to advanced age, which ought to be accompanied by wisdom (Job 32:7), hence the young should submit to the elder (v.5)
- 4. But this is not merely to do with physical age, with spiritual maturity
 - a. A pastor should be "not a novice" (1 Timothy 3:6)
 - b. Timothy was a young man (1 Timothy 4:12) who was a pastor/elder of the church at Ephesus
- 5. The use of the plural "elders" would indicate a church having multiple pastors according to the size of the congregation (cf. Acts 20:17; 21:17-18), with one being the head pastor as James was in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13)
- 6. Note the elders are among the flock (1) and the flock is among the elders (2)
- C. Christ's suffering and glory as foundation and motivation for ministry
 - 1. Peter had a personal knowledge of Christ's suffering which motivated him to services
 - 2. He was also a partaker of that glory which would be revealed
 - 3. We are to look backward to a Christ crucified, and forward to a Christ glorified
 - 4. Christ becomes our example in suffering and glory
 - 5. In all things we are to be continually looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2)

II. THE CHARGE TO THE ELDERS (2-3)

- A. He has a duty to feed the flock of God
 - 1. It is not any man's flock, but it is God's flock
 - a. The pastor is an undershepherd to the "chief Shepherd"

2. Peter is repeating the exhortation that Christ gave to him at his restoration (John 21:15-17)
 3. It is the same exhortation Paul gave to the Ephesian elders to “feed the church of God” (Acts 20:28)
 4. The food that the elders must feed the flock with is the word of God
 - a. The food is the word of God, which is compared to milk (1 Peter 2:2) and meat (Hebrews 5:14) and bread (Luke 4:4) and honey (Psalm 119:103)
 - b. It is not merely certain portion of the word the church must feed upon, but the entire Bible (Matthew 28:20; Acts 20:27)
 - c. This is the means by which the church is built up (Acts 20:32), perfected and thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
 5. The chief duty of a pastor is to preach the word of God (Acts 6:1-4; 20:28; 2 Timothy 4:2)
 6. The pastor must be a serious student of the word (2 Timothy 2:15) and be “apt to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2)
 7. There is no substitute for preaching the word of God, though many in our day have replaced the word with man-made substitutes
 - a. Entertainment
 - b. Emotional manipulation
 - c. Social gospel
 8. There are serious warnings for pastors who fail to feed the sheep (Jeremiah 23:1-4; Ezekiel 34:1-31)
- B. He has a duty to oversee the flock of God
1. This refers to the pastor’s authority to supervise and manage the functions of the church
 2. The pastor is not to do all the work of the ministry, but to equip the saints for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:12)

3. Pastors are said to be “over you in the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 5:12) and have “the rule over you” (Hebrews 13:17)
4. Pastors are to guard and watch over the flock, protecting from the dangers of sin and error (Hebrews 13:17)
5. To “take” the oversight simply means to exercise it

C. The pastor must have the right motives in the ministry

1. Not by constraint – not as being forced to, grudgingly (cf. Jonah)
2. But willingly – cheerfully, voluntarily (cf. Isaiah)
3. Not for filthy lucre (money)
 - a. They which preach the gospel should live of the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:14)
 - b. While the labourer is worthy of his hire, he does not work for the money
4. But of a ready mind – wholeheartedly with the chief concern being the glory of God and the welfare of souls

C. The pastor must be an example to the flock

1. He is not to be a “lord” over God’s heritage
 - a. There is one Lord – Jesus Christ
 - b. The church is God’s heritage which God calls certain men to have stewardship over
 - c. Not lords but stewards, servants, ministers
 - d. Diotrephes is an example of one seeking to be a lord over the church (3 John 9)
2. Pastors are called to be an ensample (*tupos*), a pattern, type, example of how a Christian should live (1 Timothy 4:12)
3. Christ himself set an example to his disciples when he washed his disciples’ feet, showing that the true leader of God’s flock is a servant (John 13:15; cf. 1 Peter 2:21)

4. Godly leaders should be followed inasmuch as they are following Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1; Hebrews 13:7)

III. THE CROWN OF THE ELDERS (4)

A. The chief Shepherd shall appear

1. This is a reminder that the shepherds of the church must answer to the chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ
2. This should provoke in us a holy fear and careful self-examination, knowing that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ
3. Pastors particularly must give account and “shall receive the greater condemnation” (James 3:1)

B. The crown of glory

1. This is one of the five crowns listed in the New Testament that will be given at the judgment seat of Christ
2. The crown may also be figurative, in the sense that the glory itself will be the crown
3. This is an encouragement to the elders who were perhaps labouring under difficult circumstances
 - a. The labour of the ministry can be wearying
 - b. Often the work may not be appreciated, but rather despised by those he is trying to help
 - c. There may not be much visible results of that labour
 - d. There may be set-backs in the church, where sin and error comes in
 - e. Satan’s attacks are most fierce against the shepherds
 - f. There may be discouragement
4. This is a reminder, that it is not for the praise of men or for worldly results, but for the praise of Christ (2 Timothy 2:3-4; Hebrews 6:10)

5. There will be great reward on that day for “they that turn many to righteousness” (Daniel 12:2-3)

CONCLUSION

1. As the end of this age draws closer, as this wicked world grows darker, the role of the church as God’s instrument of light and truth becomes increasingly vital
2. What is your relationship to Christ’s flock, the church?
3. Are you joined to it and committed to it?
4. Do you recognise the importance of feeding upon the word of God, both privately and in the church, for your spiritual growth and are you making use of it at every opportunity?
5. Christ, the chief Shepherd must soon appear – are you preparing for that day by serving him faithfully in whatever role he has called you to?