

The Christian in a Hostile World

The Need for Leadership in Suffering

Intro: Peter's does not appear to write in a time when Christians were facing imperial persecutions; however the people of the provinces were not exempt from the contempt and malignity of the unbelieving world around them. They were slandered for not doing what their unbelieving neighbors did. Consequently it was a time of difficulty for the people of God; and it was a time that called for strong and wise leadership.

We should not be surprised by Peter's remarks in 1 Pet. 5. As God's people live together in a hostile world, they need the strength and encouragement of the effective working of the leadership God designed for the church and in the mutual relationship of love and respect for one another.

What kind of leaders do churches need? What is their work? What motivates them? And what should our attitude be toward them? These are the questions Peter answers in this section:

EXHORTATIONS TO THE ELDERS (v. 1-4)

"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, 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; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory." (1 Pet. 5:1-4)

Peter's remarks to the elders are prefaced with three thoughts:

He was an elder!

Peter writes from the experience of one who has given God's people leadership.

Roman Catholicism maintains that Peter was the first pope; and that he was bishop of the church at Rome. It is interesting that the only time that Peter ever referred to himself as an overseer he did so as a part of a group of men. "a fellow-elder." There were other men who occupied the same role as Peter where he served as an elder!

Witness of the sufferings of Christ.

Calls attention to his apostleship and one who had known the Lord personally.

He was qualified to speak to them about suffering, since he had seen the Lord's suffering.

Partaker of the glory to be revealed

...conveys Peter's own confidence of a right relationship with the Lord that made him have the hope of heaven,

It affirms the common goal that Peter shared with his hearers of God's heavenly reward.

The tasks of the elder's leadership

Shepherd the flock of God among you...

"Feed" (KJV) means to do the work of a shepherd. It describes the loving care and concern that elders have for the flock! (Cf. Ps. 23)

Attends their spiritual needs

Provides their spiritual food

Restores the fallen

Guides their paths

Protects them from danger

Provides assurance in times of fear

The flock of God is the local congregation where they live.

And elders shepherd or feed the flock among them.

The extent of their oversight and work is the local church.

This text along with the one in Ac. 20:28 and others points to a principle that suggests that elders exercise leadership and oversight within congregations and not over other churches.

Taking the oversight

From episcopo, "to watch over", the noun form is the word "overseer" or "bishop".

From this we learn that a bishop was not a separate class of men from elders, but the term was used to describe what elders do! They oversee the flock of God. This word suggests the elder's role as a watcher of souls, protecting them from danger.

The nature of the elder's leadership

In short, he must not have a grasping hand, or a swelling head, a dragging foot!

Not under compulsion

Not forced, pressed upon one No one who must have service to others pressed upon them has a servant's heart.

A servant by nature wants to help others because he loves them.

But voluntarily

that is growing out of a desire to do God's will and to serve others.

It complements the former phrase indicating willingness to serve.

Not for sordid gain

not motivated by monetary gain.

The right of the church to financially support elders who teach is established in 1 Tim. 5:17. Yet, the elder like the preacher who teaches should never be motivated to do this work for

monetary motives! Nor should he think of the eldership as a position of influence from which to gain advantage in some other way.

But with eagerness

Inner devotion

Again the elder is motivated by an inward desire to please God.

Not lording it over

It would appear that Peter is thinking of the statement Jesus once made to his disciples about their relationship with one another (Mt. 20). He pointed out that Gentile rulers “*lord it over*” their subjects.

They exist as autocratic rulers who have authority over others, commanding and expecting to be obeyed.

And they may even do so with benevolent purposes.

(They wanted to be called “Benefactors”, that is, rulers who did good things for others.)

Yet they are still “lords.”

Oberst quotes Barnes who comments on this concept:

“It refers to that kind of jurisdiction which civil rulers or magistrates exercise. This is an exercise of authority, as contra-distinguished from the influence of reason, persuasion, and example”.

But Jesus says, this whole spirit is contrary to kingdom principles. The kingdom of God is not founded on such concepts of hierarchal control even when it is well-intended. It is not founded on the right to tell others what to do; but is founded instead on a servant’s outlook, where the leader himself shares with the people in the work, showing them the way.

But proving to be examples to the flock

“The boss says “go”; the leader says, “let’s go!”. And so Peter’s contrasting remark reflects this concept.

Examples means “a print left as an impression after a blow as been struck”.

Elders are shepherds, not cowboys. A single shepherd can lead his sheep anywhere; dozens cannot drive them!

The elders job is to set the pace, to show the way, to hold up his own life as an example for others to follow. The church will rise to the level of its leadership.

A real leader says, “Follow me and the people follow; because they know he cares about them and wants only what is best for them and he is willing to do what he asks them to do”. These are the kind of men that get God’s people through hard times.

The Reward of the elder's leadership

What motivates such a man? It is not the feeling of having been “honored or recognized” by the church for years of service.

It is not the quest for power or control over others.
It is simply the reward of the chief shepherd who will bless each of us
for our care for His flock with a reward far greater than any man can
bestow—the crown of life.

“Stephanos” refers to the wreath or prize given those who
successfully competed and won in the games.

EXHORTATIONS TO THE YOUNG (v. 5)

“You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; (1 Pet. 5:5)

Some have thought on the basis of the mention of younger men here
that the "elders" of v. 1-4 are merely the older men of the
congregation. However, the exhortations to elders are compatible with
other texts that instruct men who must meet certain qualifications and
have been appointed by the church to be elders.

Perhaps the younger are singled out here because of the typical
inclination of youth at times to fail to appreciate the wisdom and
experience of age.

"Be subject" translates a common NT verse for arranging yourself
under the leadership of another. Used already by Peter to describe
respect for government, masters, husbands.

Younger people are urged to appreciate the experience and wisdom
and advice of those who in devotion to the Lord have been appointed
as elders.

All of us need to cultivate the attitude to respect the thinking and
suggestions of those spiritually more mature! This is not an arbitrary,
age 50 has preference over age 30; or 70 over 50. Some people may
have 40 years of experience in serving the Lord; some have one year
of experience repeated 40 times.

All of us need to develop good "fellowship"--an ability to see the
wisdom and value in the suggestions of those with experience.

EXHORTATION TO ALL (v. 5)

*and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS
OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. ”*

"Clothe" comes from a word that might refer to tying on one's robe.

Thus clothe yourselves with humility.

Peter's exhortation may recall the Lord's own actions at the last supper
in which he was so very much involved, when Jesus arose and laid
aside his garments, in order to wash the feet of his disciples.

Peter protested. But the Lord insisted that only through learning that
lesson of humility could Peter ever have any fellowship with him. He
urged them to do as he had done. Now Peter passes along the
exhortation.

And once more Peter grounds his exhortation in the teaching of
Scripture. *God actively opposes arrogance; but gives His favor to the
humble.*

Conclusion: Peter's message is an important one. As we face a hostile world, we need to learn to work together in harmony and mutual concern. There must arise among the people of God leaders who care for the flock in times of suffering. Peter here gives us a beautiful picture of their character and work. There must also be a willingness to learn from the experience of others. And lest God's arrangement be thought to encourage feelings of superiority, we must all be humble in our spiritual walk before others.