

Message #16

Kurt Hedlund

1 Peter

11/3/2019

CHURCH LEADERSHIP

1 PETER 5:1-4

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

In this month's issue of *Christianity Today*, editor Mark Galli makes these observations about Christian leadership: **"One prominent megachurch seeking a senior pastor recently posted that the successful candidate would wear the 'dual hats' of pastor and CEO. Not much was said about what they mean by *pastor*. But regarding the CEO part: 'This leader will... fan the flames of [the church's] DNA of boldness, innovation, and creativity.' Such job descriptions have become ubiquitous. Whether at Christian universities, evangelical nonprofits, or local churches, we've fallen head over heels for the entrepreneurial leader. We talk the talk of servant leadership but walk the walk of 'Gentile rulers' who 'lord it over' others (Mk. 10:42). We're infatuated with men and women who can grow influence and finances. We want 'movers and shakers' who can 'make a difference.' We hire not for humility and service, but for boldness, innovation, and creativity. Big is beautiful."**

What should we be looking for in Christian leadership? Churches and other Christian organizations are always in need of good leaders. Our nominating committee has been considering this question as we have proposed a slate of officers and board members for this next calendar year.

Times of stress and challenge and difficulty always test Christian leadership. That is what the readers of Peter's first epistle were discovering. We have seen from our study of First Peter that the famous apostle was writing to Christians in the northern part of what we know today as Turkey. They were facing persecution for their new Christian faith. That persecution had not yet reached the point of organized government opposition and threats to the lives of these new followers of Jesus. But it would come to that in a few decades. It was somewhat more similar to the opposition that at least a few of us have faced when we have been opposed by family members and ostracized by former friends and perhaps criticized at school and in the workplace.

Having instructed the Asian Christians about how they should behave in the midst of these trials, Peter now addresses the need for godly leadership in trying times. In the midst of suffering from whatever source there is a critical need for leaders who will give hope and encouragement and practical help to fellow Christians.

The focus of the passage before us is upon the elders of a local church. There is a direct application then to those of us who serve in that capacity in this church. There are also applications to those among us who have the spiritual gift of pastor. Then there are general lessons that can be learned by all of us who are involved in any kind of Christian leadership, whether it is in the church or other Christian organizations or the workplace or school or even in the home.

Elders of local churches have a primary responsibility to the Lord, but they also have an accountability to God's people. So all of you have a certain obligation to keep us who hold the office of elder accountable to the standards of God's Word. Unfortunately there have been some spectacular failures involving the leaders of large churches in the last few years. At least part of the blame often lies with other elders and church people who have not kept these leaders accountable.

I.

Let's begin by looking at v. 1 of 1 Peter 5, p. 1016 in the black Bibles, as we consider THE MEANING OF "ELDER." (PROJECTOR ON--- THE MEANING OF ELDER) The apostle begins his remarks about church leaders with the statement, **"So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder..."**

The little word "so," in other translations "therefore," has significance for our understanding of the passage. It points us back to the preceding context. We have seen that the Christians to whom Peter was writing were faced with persecution. Last week in v 12 of #4 we saw reference made to "the fiery trial" that was going on among them. Verse 17 warned that judgment would begin with God's household. So--- therefore--- given this situation of stress upon the Christian community, the church needs godly leaders who will do the job, who will pastor the flock.

The term "elder" goes back to the early history of Israel. The leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel were sometimes called "elders." Later, during the Babylonian Captivity, when the Jews were forced out of their homeland into the Babylonian Empire, the institution of the synagogue developed. The leaders of the synagogue were also called "elders." So the early church, which was Jewish in its origin, carried over this terminology in its description of the leaders of local churches.

Many of the readers of Peter's letters came from Gentile backgrounds. This term also meant something to them. In Asia Minor the governing officials of many towns were called "elders." So it was a logical term to use for church leaders.

The word "elder" has about it the inherent idea of maturity. Nowhere does the Bible give a minimum age for one holding this office. It may be worth noting that Levites in the Old Testament could not begin to perform some duties in the Temple until they were thirty years old (Numbers 4). We are also told that Jesus was about thirty years old when He began His public ministry.

Elders in the New Testament are also called "bishops," or "overseers." The Greek word is *episkopos*. (EPISKOPOS) *Epi* means "over." *Skopos* means "to watch." Thus an *episkopos* is an overseer, or bishop, as it is sometimes translated. This is where the term "Episcopalian" originates.

In the New Testament the terms "elder" and "bishop," or "overseer," refer to the same office in the church. Acts #20 and Titus #1 contain passages where the terms are used interchangeably. "Elder" stresses the character and maturity involved in the position, while "bishop," or "overseer," stresses the function involved. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Peter identifies himself with the leaders of the Asian churches by referring to himself as a "fellow elder." He doesn't claim to be a pope or even a chief elder. In the first verse of this letter Peter identifies himself as an apostle, but these guys are not apostles. So they are not fellow apostles. They are fellow elders.

Peter also calls himself a "**witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed...**" Most commentators understand Peter to be saying that he saw the things that Christ suffered and proclaimed them to others. He may not personally have been at the crucifixion scene, but he saw some of the other events that led up to it. So all of this was part of his preaching.

There is some disagreement about what Peter meant by a partaker in the glory. Peter was present when the transfiguration of Jesus happened on the mountain and Elijah and Moses were present. He saw something of the glory of Jesus there. He also saw Jesus risen from the dead. That was certainly glorious.

But Peter seems to be primarily identifying with his audience. He calls himself a fellow elder and a partaker in the future glory. Back in v. 13 of #4 the apostle said that these Asian Christians were participating in the sufferings of Christ in the trials that they were enduring. Then in v. 14 of # 4 he said that **“the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”**

With that as background it seems to me that Peter in v. 1 is saying that he is a fellow elder and that he has also experienced the sufferings of Christ in that he has faced persecution like his readers have. In faithfully persevering in the midst of that suffering he has also displayed God’s glory--- a foretaste of that glory that will be revealed when Christ comes again, and which we will all enjoy together. “I am an elder like your elders are, and I have faced suffering like they have. Therefore, I am qualified to tell you something about spiritual leadership.”

II.

Another issue coming out of v. 1 which is worthy of comment is THE NUMBER OF ELDERS. (PROJECTOR ON--- THE NUMBER OF ELDERS) Peter is addressing elders in the plural. Whenever the human leadership of a local church in the New Testament is mentioned, the plural form of “elder” is used. The New Testament never refers to the leadership of a local church as consisting of only one elder.

God intended that local congregations be led by a group of men, not by one individual. What happens when one individual controls any Christian organization is that there is less accountability and a greater danger for the abuse of power.

(ACTS 14:23) Thus it is that the author of Acts makes reference to Paul and Barnabas in #14, saying, **“And when they had appointed elders for them in every church...”** In Acts 20:17 (ACTS 20:17) we are told that Paul **“sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church...”** The Epistle to the Philippians is addressed (PHILIPPIANS 1:1) to **“the overseers [or bishops] and deacons.”** In Titus #1 v. 5 (TITUS 1:5) Paul tells his friend Titus to **“appoint elders in every town...”** In James #5 v. 14 the half brother of Jesus (JAMES 5:14) says to his readers, **“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church...”**

The tradition in many Baptist churches has been to regard the pastor as the lone elder in a local church. Lay leaders can be deacons and trustees but not elders. More Baptist churches in recent years have done what this church did a couple of decades ago in appointing other men to serve with the pastor as elders.

First Timothy #5 v. 17 (1 TIMOTHY 5:17) does seem to recognize that there will be some elders who are especially good at preaching and teaching and leading. These, Paul says, are worthy of “double honor,” which seems in the context to refer to financial support from the church. So there is a Biblical basis for having a paid, full-time elder, which we commonly refer to as the “pastor.” But it is important to keep in mind that pastoring is the responsibility of all elders and of those who have the spiritual gift of being a pastor--- more about that in a moment. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Everyone here who is a member or a regular attender should have an elder or a deacon or a deaconess who is responsible to be a pastor to you to keep up with how you are doing and to pray for you regularly. If you don't know if you have a pastor assigned to you, or if you are newer in the church and would like one to be assigned to you, let us know and we would be happy to make sure that we have one appointed for you.

III.

Consider next v. 2 and THE DUTIES OF ELDERS. (III. THE DUTIES OF ELDERS) Peter writes, “...**shepherd the flock of God that is among you...**” It is perhaps helpful here to see the connection among these key terms in the original Greek language. (GREEK WORDS) The word for “shepherd” and “pastor” in the Greek of the New Testament is the same. It is *poimen*. To tend the flock, or to shepherd, is *poimaino*. The word for “flock” is *poimnion*. So the Biblical picture is that a pastor is to act like a shepherd.

In John #21 Jesus appeared to Peter and the other disciples at the Sea of Galilee after the resurrection. Jesus instructed Peter, saying, “**Feed my lambs. Shepherd my sheep. Feed my sheep.**”

So to pastor people in a local church is a responsibility that all elders have. It is also a spiritual gift that is given to some Christians. In Ephesians #4 vv. 11 & 12 (EPHESIANS 4:11-12) Paul says, “**And he [Christ] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds [or pastors] and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry...**” So all elders have the responsibility to act as pastors. But there may be other people in the congregation, women as well as men, who have the spiritual gift of being a pastor. That does not necessarily mean that they are all supposed to be elders.

The responsibility involved is compared to being a shepherd. (PROJECTOR OFF) A shepherd's first responsibility is to **feed the flock**. In the context of the local church that would seem to include providing spiritual nourishment to Christians. That means teaching them the Bible, or at least getting

them involved in Bible study. One of the prerequisites for an elder, according to 1 Timothy #3, is that a man must be “apt to teach.” That does not necessarily mean that he is good in a classroom setting. I have known some elders who are not good at public teaching but who do an exceptionally fine job one-on-one with other Christians. So teaching in some form is a primary duty of an elder, or a believer who has the gift of pastoring.

A second responsibility of a shepherd is to **protect the flock**. In John #10 Jesus was speaking to the disciples. Probably Peter was there among them. Christ claimed to be the Good Shepherd. He explains that shepherds have to deal with wolves and thieves and robbers. Some shepherds are only paid helpers and have a limited commitment to the flock. Good shepherds will lay down their lives in defense of the flock.

Paul explained what protecting the flock means in Acts #20 as he spoke to the elders of the church in Ephesus in southern Asia Minor. (ACTS 20:28) He told these elders, **“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. (ACTS 20:29-30) 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.**

So this responsibility of elders to protect the flock would appear to involve protection of Christians from false doctrine--- from cults and other groups that would lead us astray from Biblical truth. New Christians are especially susceptible to Bible-carrying cult groups who quote the Bible, show compassion, and sound believable. We need to guard the lambs from these wolves who would lead them astray.

A shepherd and an elder is obligated to feed and to protect and, thirdly, **to lead**. (JOHN 10:4) In John #10 v. 4, Christ, speaking about shepherds, says, **“When he [the shepherd] has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.”** Today shepherds commonly drive their sheep, at least in the West. But the shepherds of the ancient Near East led their sheep. (SHEPHERD PALESTINIAN) That is still the way that they do it in the Middle East.

The lesson for us who are elders and who have the gift of pastoring is that we need to be leaders, not drivers. We can't simply tell our flock how to live and how to serve. (PROJECTOR OFF) We have to make sure that we are out front doing it, serving and setting an example. We cannot tell people how to endure suffering if we are not handling trials well ourselves. We can't tell people to reach out to our

neighbors if we are not doing it ourselves. We cannot tell people to have regular devotions if we are not doing it ourselves.

Shepherds are to lead, not to drive. Suzy and I were in a church early in our ministry where some of the elders pressured church members to go to all of the church events. If you were not present, they wanted to know why. If you were gone from Sunday services a couple of times, they might ask you to sign the guest register. It seemed to us that they were trying to drive the sheep with guilt rather than to lead them with love.

The responsibilities of feeding, protecting, and leading the sheep all imply that we know our sheep. (PROJECTOR ON--- JOHN 10:27) In v. 27 of John #10 our Lord says, **“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”** The application to us is that we Christian leaders need to stay in touch with our people. We need to keep up with how they are doing. If we have sick and hurting sheep, we better not set too fast a pace. If they are really hungry, we better provide lots of opportunities for them to eat. If they are ready to move out, we better get going.

IV.

Verse 2 also deals with THE MOTIVATION OF ELDERS. (IV. THE MOTIVATION OF ELDERS) Peter says that elders are not to shepherd the flock **“under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you...”** The key is to keep our focus on God. We are not primarily working for people or for ourselves but rather for God. The flock ultimately belongs to Him. We take our directions from Him, and it is His judgment of our work that counts in the end.

A shepherd also ought to be motivated **“not for shameful gain, but eagerly...”** This may imply that some elders received financial payment for their work. Indeed in Matthew #10 v. 10 (MATTHEW 10:10) Jesus declared, **“...the worker is worthy of his support.”** Paul quoted that saying in 1 Timothy #5 when he spoke about elders who were paid. The real motivation, though, ought not to be financial reward but rather the joy of the work and commitment to the chief Shepherd. Indeed that is the motivation that most of us in vocational ministry have for doing what we do. (PROJECTOR OFF) But occasionally we church leaders can get messed up in our thinking. I told the sad story last week about the pastor whom I knew who stole from two of his elderly parishioners and then actually did them in. Horrible to imagine how that could happen!

Some shepherds in the first century that were hired to care for someone else's sheep worked simply in order to make a living. Good shepherds worked because of love for the job, love for the sheep, and, most importantly, love for the owner of the flock. That should describe the motivation for us elders as well.

V.

Verse 3 describes THE CHARACTER OF ELDERS. (PROJECTOR ON--- V. THE CHARACTER OF ELDERS) Peter says, "...**not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.**" An elder ought to be characterized by humility. Jesus used this same term for "domineering" in Mark #10 v. 42 (MARK 10:42) when He said, "**You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles domineer [or lord it over] them...**"

Peter had learned the importance of the quality of humility in leadership from Jesus Himself. (PROJECTOR OFF) On the night of the Lord's Supper he was present when an argument broke out among the disciples about which of them was the greatest. Peter may well have been one of the arguers.

Jesus was about to be arrested and to go to the cross, and His closest followers were arguing about which of them was the greatest. At that moment most of us, if we can picture ourselves somehow being in the shoes of Jesus, might have decided to pick new disciples. But instead, Jesus broke up the argument and rebuked them. He said that the greatest among them was the one who was the best servant. He followed that up by doing the humble job of washing the disciples' feet. None of the rest had been willing to humble themselves and do this menial job of hospitality. So Jesus did it.

When Jesus got to Peter, the apostle refused to let the Savior do it. But Jesus said that Peter could have no part with Him if he did not allow the Lord to do this. Peter did not forget the lesson that he learned about humility and Christian leadership.

Our world is accomplishment-oriented. We tend to evaluate people in terms of what they have done, how much education they have received, how much money they have made, and by the kind of job they hold down. The things that God is looking for in Christian leaders is much different.

First Timothy #3 and Titus #1 describe the qualifications for men who would become the elders of a church. The emphasis there is on character rather than accomplishment. The focus is not on what an

individual has done but rather upon what one has become. When we look down through these lists, the qualification that comes closest to being an accomplishment-oriented item is the good management of one's household.

I remember one fellow who was an elder in a church where I served as a youth pastor. He was a man in his 50's who managed a bank. He was good at what he did, and he worked hard at it. In fact, he worked 60 or 70 hours a week at it. He also made time for church. He seldom missed a midweek meeting or a Sunday morning or evening service or a board meeting.

But Bob didn't seem to make time for his kids. Both of them stopped going to church when they reached adulthood. They showed no spiritual interest. They did not want anything to do with the brand of Christianity that their father lived. That man did some things right. But his priorities seemed to me to be out of order. He did not invest enough in his children. He did not manage his household well.

Here in our verse Peter stresses the need for humility. In the face of suffering, which these Christians were experiencing, what is needed is not an elder or a pastor who yells at the sheep, telling them what to do. Instead what is needed is someone who will come alongside and give encouragement and hope and practical help.

This humility is to be directed toward **“those in your charge.”** Here Peter may be saying either that the group of Christians who make up a local church are the responsibility of the group of elders who lead that church, or that each elder was assigned certain people in the congregation to shepherd. In either case, humble leadership was necessary.

VI.

Finally, in v. 4 we come to THE REWARD FOR ELDERS. (PROJECTOR ON--- VI. THE REWARD FOR ELDERS) Peter writes, **“And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”** Peter in this letter has been encouraging Christians to persevere in the midst of suffering because Christ is coming back. He has told his listeners that the realization that a future glory and eternal rewards await them should motivate them to endure in the face of their trials. Now Peter promises elders that they can look forward to a future reward if they continue in faithful service.

Peter calls this future reward “the unfading crown of glory.” Crowns in the Bible were worn by royalty, they were used by bridegrooms at a wedding, and they were given as a prize for winning an athletic contest. In New Testament days crowns typically consisted of a wreath or garland of a plant or flower. Normally the flowers or leaves on the crowns would fade away. But there was a plant called the amaranth. (AMARANTH) It had, and has, flowers that are very slow to fade. The word that Peter uses here for “unfading” is based upon the name of this plant.

Exactly what this crown of glory will involve is uncertain. (PROJECTOR OFF) Perhaps it involves participation in God’s glory at the return of Christ. Back in #4 v. 13 Peter said, **“But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.”**

Participation in this glory may involve a position of leadership in the earthly kingdom that our Lord will establish. The reward would seem to at least involve honor and recognition and rejoicing that results from significant accomplishment. This reward is also unfading. But other Scriptures, including some we have examined in this letter, make it clear that there will be rewards for every believer who continues in his or her pursuit of God.

Shepherding the flock is a key responsibility. Good shepherds are especially necessary in times of suffering. Earl Palmer, pastor of University Presbyterian Church in Seattle, wrote in one of his books that flocks of sheep today often have only one shepherd. But typically in the West they have help from dogs who function as undershepherds. Some of these dogs are better at shepherding than others. The “not-so-good” dogs do a lot barking and run all over the place, making the sheep neurotic and nervous.

Good dogs keep their eyes on the shepherd, quickly taking their cues from him. They are purposeful in their movements. They realize that sheep can only give them problems, which they don’t need, and wool, which they can’t personally use. So they keep their eyes on the shepherd, realizing that only he can give them rewards of any lasting value. It is that kind of perspective that God wants us to have on the role of pastoring.

It is also worthy of note that the sheep that cause the most grief and difficulty for the undershepherds and the shepherd are those that stray away from the flock. It is those who decide not to follow the sheherd but rather to explore the world and see what it has to offer which cause work for the shepherd and the undershepherd. Those straying sheep put themselves in danger and sometimes cause risks for the shepherd and undershepherds who pursue them. What kind of sheep are you?

I would like to close our service today by asking you to pray for the undershepherds of this congregation. If the other elders present here today would stand, I would appreciate it if several of you would lead out in prayers for them. Pray briefly and loudly. Ask the Lord to give us strength and enthusiasm and endurance and growing maturity that reflects the qualities of life that we have discussed today and the duties outlined in our passage.