**1 Peter 5:1-4** July 3, 2022

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*1 Peter 5:1To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 4And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**“Shepherds, shepherd!”**

Do you know what the word “pastor” means? People who go to church, even most people who don’t, know what a pastor is. But what does the word mean? Like most English words, it’s borrowed from another language. Pastor is the Latin word for shepherd. It isn’t *from* the word for shepherd. It is exactly the same word. Pastor = Shepherd. I guess that’s because the Bible often pictures spiritual guides as shepherds. Didn’t Jesus call himself the Good Shepherd? And remember the shepherd who went looking for the one lost sheep of a hundred and rejoiced when he found it, and in the same way the angels in heaven rejoice over every repenting sinner. If a pastor is a shepherd, the question is: Do you know what a shepherd is? Most of us have rarely seen sheep other than from a car window at 55mph. I have certainly never taken care of sheep. “Pastor/Shepherd” is a word full of the smell of sheep, the touch of living woolen coats, an extensive knowledge of sheep affections and quirks that you only get with taking care. We really don’t get the earthy essence of being a shepherd. All of this was common knowledge to the Christians who first looked at their spiritual leaders and said, “Pastor! Shepherd!”

To make the idea real, maybe we should think about something we *do* know. This past week I saw a Facebook post that might help. Looking at the picture in the post, you see a man leaning over a chest high fence. He is leaning so far over the fence that his feet are off the ground, way off the ground. You are sure he is going to lose his balance and crash face-first on the other side! What could possibly be on the other side to make him do that? Dogs, a mama dog and six playful puppies. This guy sees them and just can’t help himself. Above the picture the post says, “This is me when I see dogs!” We get that!

That is shepherds—at least good shepherds—when they see sheep. They love sheep. They know sheep. They understand sheep, maybe even better than they understand themselves!

That is the picture God puts out there when he calls spiritual leaders shepherds, pastors. In some similar way, as that fence-leaning dog-lover loved dogs, as shepherds care for sheep, so spiritual leaders when they see Christians. They can’t help themselves! They have a deep spiritual concern for them.

So what about those shepherds, those pastors—and by extension, all leaders within Christian congregations? Well, these four verses of 1 Peter have much to say of the God-ordained symbiotic relationship between people and pastor.

**I.** **Shepherds Exercise Authority** When the Apostle Peter writes to these church leaders, he takes it as a given that they have authority. They serve, but they are not merely servants. They do not have mere opinions; they have authority. ***“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers.”*** Peter calls them shepherds and overseers. He says God’s people are under their care.

Properly called pastors, and those elected in good order to congregational leadership, have authority. Their authority is not authority earned, but authority conferred on them by God through his Church. Note that. Neither public opinion nor the flavor of the day is their guiding principle. They are there for the good of God’s people, but not always the will of the people. God’s will determines the course.

Given authority, these leaders ought to be respected. Pastors and church leaders, by God’s grace, do not spout their opinions, but God’s guidance. Their words should be listened to, because they are God’s watchmen devoted to keeping watch over your souls.

This is not to say that any pastor’s or leader’s sins should be glossed over. Never! More than anybody else’s, their sins need correction. And no false teaching can be winked at just because it came from the mouth of a pastor. To the opposite, it must be immediately addressed.

On the other hand, every single person that God has ever called into public ministry has been a sinful human being. Therefore things that are less than ideal, yet not sin, ought to be borne with patience. If they need to be addressed, they should be addressed respectfully.

**II. Shepherds Exhibit Care** While it is expected that the flock respect the shepherd, much more is expected of the shepherds. While Peter does say that these ***elders*** or ***overseers*** have authority, he urges them to use that authority in God-pleasing ways. The shepherds are there for the sheep, not the other way around.

Trying to imagine how God views wrong use of spiritual authority, think of how upset parents of young children in our country—think schoolboard meetings here—have recently become because of all the hateful and immoral things forced upon their little kids by, of all people, teachers! If what they suspect is true, they surely are justified! As parents, they have a job to keep that stuff out of their kids’ minds. Yet the very ones they have trusted to be partners, are working against them! Well, how do you think God looks on shepherds who mislead or neglect his flock?

So the Apostle Peter puts down for us expectations of these shepherds. While assuming innocence and the best of his fellow church leaders, he makes God’s expectations clear in three directives.

**A.** First, while every young Christian man with the gifts to be a pastor should consider the calling of a pastor, the final decision is not to be coerced or guilted. ***“Serve as overseers,”*** Peter says, ***“not because you must, but because you are willing.”***

Don’t be a pastor or office holder on the church council just because you somebody made you feel guilty. Well, then, how are you going to get anyone to do the work? How? Set before them their Savior. Look at Christ Jesus who gave more of himself than anyone else, for more people than anyone else, for a greater good than anyone else could accomplish. Let people take a good look at the forgiving love of Jesus, and you will be surprised at how many are willing to at least consider doing the work for Jesus. Let such service be willing.

**B.** Second, Peter addresses one of the most scandalous and yet common motives for becoming a Christian leader. ***“Serve as overseers… not greedy for money, but eager to serve.”*** Every single list of pastor qualifications in the Bible repeats this—Matthew 10, Luke 10, 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1—they all condemn those who enter the ministry for money.

For good reason. It started early in Acts 8 when Simon of Samaria offered money to the Apostle Peter for apostolic gifts. The medieval European church was rife with it. For centuries, people of high birth, who couldn’t inherit the family land, had two options: the military or the church. Due to the influence of their powerful family, more than a few aristocratic scoundrels found themselves wearing bishop’s robes. Many such bishops went years without even visiting their parish. While the golden age of fleecing the flock may have passed, we need not mention television examples that prove this still happens. To the contrary, leaders of God’s people must be ***“eager to serve,”*** to put other people’s salvation in the fore.

**C.** Third, ***“Serve as overseers… not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”*** Greed and immorality are scandalous. Far more saddening is a spiritual leader who is aggressive, manipulative or domineering. But here is the problem. Leadership in this world often lies with people who have one or more of these traits. Maybe those are just the unpleasant realities of leadership in this world? Jesus said, *“Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant”* (Mt 20:26). Spiritual leaders lead. Don’t forget that. They direct, even command. They contend, even fight. But they serve, in humility. Remember that Old Testament leader of God’s people of whom the Scriptures say, *“Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth”* (Num 12:3). Remember Jesus, so mighty, yet who invites people, *“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”* (Mt 11:29). Servant leadership is God’s desire.

Why these three warnings: lead, neither from compulsion, nor from greed, nor on a power trip? Think about any of these same three abuses in another relationship, marriage. Think of someone who marries under compulsion; or for money; or because one sees a weak will to be dominated in the other. Without serious repentance, are not all of those poisoned marriages? Doomed either to failure or a life-time of misery? So, too, in the church, these abuses must be guarded against in church leaders. They will drive people away and cause misery for the rest.

God’s desire is that his people, his flock, redeemed with the blood of Christ, have the best that can be given to them by the one called to lead them. God gives shepherds, pastors, that Christ’s Church might be a refuge and place of encouragement, a place of forgiveness in Christ and reconciliation, as well as a place of Spirit-given energy and service to others. That’s why God has paired sheep and shepherd.

God says to those under authority: do not dismiss what the pastor says as, “Well, I agree with a lot, but I can’t agree with that” unless you can point it out from Scripture. Do not look down on one called who is but flesh and blood, and expect more than God has given him.

And if you are thinking, “Hey, Pastor, maybe you should think about the other half of your sermon that talked about you.” You’re right. God forgive me. That’s the problem of having to preach on this subject. Who can’t be accused of hypocrisy?

None in this building can look at their God-given assignment in life and look God in the eye and say, “Mission accomplished.” We are too weak for that; we love ourselves too much. Just because we all have to say that, we cannot say, “Well, we’re all in the same boat, so it’s okay.” No, it means we stand condemned before a holy God. It doesn’t matter whether the place we have been given is pastor or councilman or husband or wife or son or daughter or self-employed or employee or retiree. We fail and daily. That’s why we need to be here regularly: to realize the truth, and then to hear God say, “I forgive you anyway, because of all Jesus did that you can’t.” And then, to add blessing to blessing, our reading says, ***“And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade.”***

One last thought. There is a beautiful paradox in that crown of glory that will never fade. The crown referred to in this verse was the crown placed on the victor in an athletic competition. It was the crown of victory, not royal power. This prize crowned the moment of an athlete’s prime. It was a wreath woven of green branches or vines—so, of course, that crown quickly withered, soon dried out, and finally was discarded. But not so with the victor’s crown that Jesus, our Savior promises. ***“And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”*** In the health and joy of a victory moment we shall live in Christ’s presence forever. Amen.