

# The Grace And Resistance Of The Chief Shepherd

*1 Peter 5:1-7*

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## **I. The Disregarded Blessing**

**“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” (1 Peter 5:1).**

### **Leading Into Destruction**

Having just spoken of a destruction that would fall upon the apostate people of God, Peter now turns his attention to the spiritual leaders, the elders. He appeals to himself as a fellow elder but not merely a fellow elder but an eye-witness of the sufferings of Christ (perhaps an allusion to his apostolic authority demonstrated in Acts 1:21,22 but more likely an allusion to his failure in denying Jesus, since he mentions not the witnessing of the resurrection but the sufferings of Christ – perhaps he does this to show the need for spiritual leaders to be willing to repent when they fail). The blind guides of Israel had led their people into destruction<sup>1</sup>. Peter is exhorting elders of the church that they might not fall into the same error.

### **Neglecting True Church Growth**

There is something that has been radically downplayed in the midst of rugged western individualism and it's emphasis upon a personal relationship with Jesus<sup>2</sup>. It is that institution which Christ established, by the authority of His word, as the primary means of His grace on the earth and in the life of the Christian, namely the church. I don't wish to leap into an entire lesson on ecclesiology (the study of the church) at this point, suffice it to say it is probably the most neglected aspect of the modern Christian church. With all the books written about strengthening our Christian lives through disciplines and certain holy and psychological practices and church growth (both spiritually and physically) there seems to be lists of things that are conspicuously absent. Things that are a big deal to God and present in the scriptures from cover to cover but, for some reason, have been reduced to a level of insignificance among the modern Christian.

### **Commonly Neglected Holy Events**

Things like the sacraments. It seems to be of little consequence as to whether Christians get baptized or not. It was so downplayed in my life that I was a Christians six or seven years before I was baptized. Also communion. I get phone calls from Christians

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<sup>1</sup> I just recently attended a memorial service that was blatantly heretical. I spoke to the pastor as lovingly as I could and informed him that I believed him to be a heretic and encouraged future dialogue. Spiritual leaders like this man are ushering people into hell.

<sup>2</sup> In no way to suggest that there shouldn't be a personal relationship

whose lives are in disarray and I ask them when they last took communion. Often it's been months. Even now you may be thinking what a silly and unimportant thing that would be for me to ask. That is a testimony to how unchristian we have become. Church itself is all but optional. People switching from church to church the way we would change supermarkets and missing church for frivolous reasons. I realize that sometimes we, or our children, are sick or perhaps we're out of town. But even if Christians are sick for long periods of time it was the practice of the church to come to their home and administer a bedside extraordinary communion for their benefit. The idea that church membership is not necessarily biblical is something that has crept into the church; no doubt as a result of the sixties.

If I might make this simple to understand – if Christians aren't in a place where they (and hopefully this will never happen to you) can be excommunicated from a church, then they simply aren't in a place of obedience to God's call to their church involvement. Ecclesiological ignorance<sup>3</sup> and neglect is rampant and is of great destruction. I mention only a few items for our consideration. One of the most disregarded blessings of God among today's Christians, I believe, revolves around Peter's present subject, elders and the local church.

## **Eternity On The Mind**

Peter mentions being a **“partaker of the glory that will be revealed” (1 Peter 5:1b)**. Eternity should never be far from the mind of the Christian. It certainly wasn't far from the mind of Peter, who would suffer a crucifixion himself, that his true glory would be revealed on that last day. It was his ultimate hope and peace and should be ours as well. It is the goal of the church to bring glory to God and to function as a heavenly people. It is the job of the elders to make sure that that remains the goal of the church. Peter, therefore continues to write,

## **II. Shepherd The Flock**

**“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you” (1 Peter 5:2a).**

### **Doctrine**

First and foremost shepherding the flock means keeping the message of Christ unadulterated. In his pastoral epistle to Timothy Paul writes, **“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine” (1 Timothy 5:17)**. There is much rhetoric these days about having a pastor's heart or an elder's heart. And although the heart<sup>4</sup> of those in ministry should be a matter of scrutiny and examination, I have found that those who seek to examine a pastor's heart are generally in the habit of ordering their own criteria. If I might share my own personal testimony in this area:

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<sup>3</sup> I include myself in this ignorance to my great shame since I am a pastor and elder.

<sup>4</sup> This should be behavior and not heart since no one can examine the heart but God.

## **My Own Testimony**

There was a time when I believed myself to be pretty theologically sound but short on the gentle, loving and nurturing aspect of my Christian faith as a pastor. I sought to focus on being more loving and sensitive. This became the desire of my prayers and heart. It has been said that the small church member has only three questions: “Do you love me? Do you love me?” And “Do you love me?” As time went on however I began to realize that the greatest way I can love my congregation is to present the purity of God’s message to them in my preaching, teaching and counseling. As a shepherd I must continually be bringing the flock to the master shepherd. And although, in the past, I had been criticized for the amount of time I would spend in Bible study I came to realize that the weakest aspect of my pastoral life wasn’t my lack of love. It was my lack of the knowledge of God’s word. In my forties I am still learning things that, as a pastor, I should have known in my twenties. Finally one of our elders wrote me a note of great encouragement and proper direction. “We need theologians in the pulpit.”

The assumption, and I think proper assumption, is that the pure word of God is the greatest means by which all other desirable attributes and qualities will be established; for the pastor, elders and congregation. Of course sound doctrine is not the only requirement of the elder. Peter writes of certain necessary dispositions<sup>5</sup>.

### **III. A Sermon For Elders (And Potential Elders)**

**“serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;<sup>3</sup> nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:2b,3)**

I believe there is another reason why Peter writes of being a **“partaker of the glory that will be revealed.”** It is to help the elders to have a proper disposition in their jobs. They are to be future and heavenly minded. Hence come the warnings, encouragement and exhortations.

#### **Oversee**

Serve as overseers ‘episkopeo’. This means to look upon, inspect, look after, care for or to look carefully. The elders should know the names and have a pretty good idea of what is going on in the lives of the congregation. In our church we place a certain number of members under the care of each elder. Our church will only thrive to the extent that these elders are faithful to that calling. And frankly I wouldn’t want us to grow any further. If the elders aren’t faithful to Christ and to their congregation the church simply will not be what it should. It may be big but not a big church...just big.

#### **Not By Compulsion But Willingly**

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<sup>5</sup> These can be viewed alongside the specific requirements for elders written of in Timothy and Titus.

This should not be done by compulsion which means by force or constraint. In other words the elder should not do this out of mere obligation or because someone has to do it. The elder should do this job because he has freely and willingly chosen to carry out this valuable work. Paul writing to Timothy communicates, **“This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop (episkope), he desires a good work” (1 Timothy 3:1)**. We never pressure someone into becoming a deacon or an elder. This service must be done ungrudgingly. It is a valuable work in the eyes of God and is to be deemed a great honor in the eyes of men (1 Timothy 5:17). It should not be denigrated by a poor attitude.

### **Not For Dishonest Gain**

Since presently I am the only elder in our church who gets paid, this exhortation finds its arrow fixed straight for me. To avoid even the appearance of dishonest gain I remove myself completely from any decisions pertaining to my salary and I never handle the tithes and offerings in any way nor do I know who gives or how much they give.

Of course church finances are not the only means of obtaining shameful gain. To use the high visibility and assumed faithfulness of the office of elder to promote your own personal gain would be shameful as well. It would also be shameful to take advantage of members by having them do work entirely free of charge in order to ingratiate you as a spiritual leader.

### **Eagerly**

Shameful gain is set against doing things eagerly which means with a ready mind. To do things willingly, with alacrity or cheerful eagerness, speed and quickness. Elders should not be in it for what the congregation might supply for them. We are to do our jobs willingly, eagerly, cheerfully and speedily.

### **Not Lords**

Peter finishes by quashing the final temptation. He writes, **“nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”** The word ‘lords’ here means to forcefully rule over and carries the nuance of harsh or excessive use of authority. Ezekiel 34 records,

**“And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, <sup>2</sup> “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds: “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? <sup>3</sup> “You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, *but* you do not feed the flock. <sup>4</sup> “The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what**

was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them” (Ezekiel 34:1-4).

Wayne Grudem states that,

**“Elders should not govern by the use of threats, emotional intimidation, or flaunting of power, nor generally by the use of ‘political’ force within the church but rather by power of example.”**

### **But Examples**

The primary way elders instruct others how to be faithful, loving, caring, giving servants with a cheerful, eager, willing attitude is to provide an example.

### **The Chief Shepherd**

If you are an elder or desire to be an elder you must live a life worthy of imitation. And although it is nice to receive encouragement from those whom you oversee it is not where our solace, comfort or reward is primarily found (if it is found there at all). But elders do their work for a reward that is of a heavenly nature. Elders do your work willingly, eagerly, providing a good example,

**“and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” (1 Peter 5:4).**

I wouldn’t presume to talk too much about what that might be like but I am under the safe assumption that the eternal crown of glory given by the Chief Shepherd far outweighs any worldly compensation.

### **IV. Pride And Humility**

Peter goes onto discuss the general disposition of Christians within the body of Christ<sup>6</sup>. He writes,

**“Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to *your* elders. Yes, all of *you* be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5).**

### **Both Kinds Of Elders**

Whether we read this to mean elders in the official capacity or elder in the chronological capacity is not a matter of extreme importance. Suffice it to say that the

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<sup>6</sup> There is some disagreement about whether Peter is continuing to discuss church eldership or elders in general.

congregation should be in submission to the elders as a board (Hebrews 13:17) and the elders as the elderly, **“You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:32)**. There is a general attitude which must be had by all if there is any expectation of God’s grace – that is humility.

### **Pride And Self-Esteem**

Allow me to remind us all that pride is the grandfather of all evil and like the rushing water in a rusty pipe continually seeks to leak into the church. Self-esteem is often the goal of psycho-analysis and has become the rally cry for public education. It has done nothing but create a generation of young monsters whose estimation of themselves has overflowed into the destruction of their classmate and eventually our society. Let’s make no mistake about it, to be prideful means to have an overweening estimate of one’s means or merits. It means to think of oneself more highly than one ought. Something which is very easy for men to do. God resists, or literally arranges Himself against, such arrogance.

### **Humility...A Christian Approach**

Humility on the other hand means not rising far from the ground, lowly, of low degree brought low with grief, lowly in spirit. It is a general Christian approach to life not to seek the seat of honor but the lowly seat, not to seek to be first but last. To follow the example of Christ who humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross (Philippians 2:8). And in the similar fashion that God exalted Jesus, Peter writes,

**“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:6)**

### **Obedience In Humility = Trusting His Mighty Hand**

There is an old, unbiblical and foolish proverb which states, “We shall have to howl among the wolves. They are foolish who are like sheep, exposing themselves to wolves to be devoured.” We mistakenly think that by behaving in humility we are loosening the reigns of the ungodly in our lives. This comes from a lack of understanding of God’s providence. When Christians obey God in humility they are actually entrusting themselves to His mighty hand. We do this recognizing that in due time, God will bring forth His glory and exaltation in our lives.

I may think, for example, I need to strong arm people into becoming deacons and elders (or any other kind of servant in the church) in order to stimulate church growth. It works for the corporations, surely it will work for the church! In doing this I would not be trusting God’s mighty hand but my own power of persuasion. We finish with something we’re called to do and why.

### **He Cares For You**

**“casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).**

Paul can rightly tell Christians to be anxious for nothing because God cares for us. Peter tells us to cast all our anxieties upon God who lovingly and graciously cares for us with all wisdom, holiness and power. Our little lives are in His huge hands. And our very souls are the object of His devoted attention.

### **Man’s Greatest Anxiety**

And of course man’s greatest anxiety, that of inevitability of his own death requires the greatest act of humility which is to beg for mercy, repent and be baptized. This mercy is something which God freely and willingly grants according the working of His own mighty power. Praise His Holy Name.