

An Overview

# *On Leading and Living*

(5)

*“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, 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” (5:1-4).*

**T**HE DEMANDS of this age require great leadership and powerful living from God’s people. Peter addresses both of these needs. A simple outline for this chapter could be: pastors and their responsibility (vv. 1-4); the problem of pride (vv. 5-7); and a great peril and a great promise (vv. 8-10).

## **PASTORS AND THEIR RESPONSIBILITY (5:1-4)**

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, . . . (5:1, 2).

Peter looks at himself as a fellow-elder. The word for “elder,” *presbuteros*, as Peter uses it, refers to those who have been appointed to serve as overseers in the local church. This word is compounded with a word which means “with.” It is interesting that Peter designated himself as a fellow-elder. It has been claimed that he was the pontiff, the vicar of Christ, the primate, the universal bishop, the visible head of the church on earth. If Peter had desired to call attention to such a position, he would have had an excellent opportunity to do so in this verse or even in the beginning of the letter where he called himself

an apostle of Christ. He simply pictures himself as a “fellow-elder.”

He gives this exhortation as one who stands alongside of, as one who stands with. He is an elder among elders exhorting elders.

Peter says he was a witness to the sufferings of Christ. The night of Jesus’ arrest, all forsook Him and fled (Matthew 26:56; Mark 14:50). Peter was truly a witness of Jesus’ sufferings. He came into the court of the high priest, and, as predicted by our Lord, denied Him three times. Finally, Jesus looked at him (Luke 22:61). One writer has said that this reference to Jesus looking at Peter is the most tragic sentence in the New Testament. Luke says, “And Peter went outside and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:61).

Peter was “a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed.” I suspect that he knew more about “the glory that is to be revealed” than some of the others. Peter, James, and John witnessed the transfiguration. That experience was something Peter could never forget. In 2 Peter 1:16-18 he remembers the voice he heard in that majestic mount. When he speaks of being a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed, the expression looks forward to future glory, but in Peter’s case there must have been a backward look as well. The transfiguration predicted something of the glory that is to come. Peter could easily anticipate our ultimate glory.

Thus, he writes as a fellow-elder, as a witness to the sufferings of Christ, and as a partaker of the future glory.

### **Their Responsibility**

Peter admonishes elders to shepherd, to tend, to pastor “the flock of God among you.” An elder’s work is that of caring for the sheep. It is a work that puts people first and programs second.

Programs derive their significance from their relation to people. In the language of Hebrews 13:17, an elder is one who watches for souls. He is God's steward. A charge, God's heritage, has been allotted to him. He watches for the souls of the local church in which he serves.

A picture of this great work, painted in terms and tones that would represent the ultimate ideal, is found in John 10. Admittedly, in John 10, Jesus is describing Himself. He is not talking specifically about elders, but He uses the noun form ("shepherd") of the very word Peter used as a verb. Jesus referred to Himself as the Good Shepherd. He knows the sheep, leads the sheep, feeds the sheep, loves the sheep, and lays down His life for the sheep. Jesus illustrates that real love and leadership are seen in the unselfish and sacrificial giving of oneself—loving the sheep and laying down one's life for the sheep. This is the ideal concept of leadership that pervades the New Testament.

The KJV inserts "taking the oversight thereof," a phrase which does not appear in some manuscripts. *Episkopos*, the term from which we get "overseer," tells us something else about an elder's work. His work is that of a superintendent, that of overseeing.

Elders are not to shepherd out of constraint, but willingly. Paul makes an emphatic statement about the need to desire the work of an elder in 1 Timothy 3:1: "It is a trustworthy statement; if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do." The real emphasis in his statement may be upon the good work that is desired if one desires the office of a bishop, but Peter makes it clear that this work is to be taken willingly even as we are to give willingly (2 Corinthians 9:7). The work is to be accepted with a sense of heavy responsibility and an awareness of the awe-inspiring nature of the work.

Peter says, ". . . not for sordid gain, but with eagerness" (5:2). In his warning lies the implication that support for elders was not uncommon. First Timothy 5:17, 18 says, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, . . ." The word *timas* means respect, but it can also mean honorarium, remuneration, or support of a monetary nature. The passage does not teach that every elder must be so supported, but it does teach that the elder who labors in the Word and doctrine may be so supported. An elder's

work is a demanding and time-consuming responsibility.

Verse 3 says, "Nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, . . ." The KJV has "over God's heritage." The idea is clear that the charge given to elders is God's heritage. *Kleros* is the word in the New Testament for "charge" or "heritage." God's heritage is the souls redeemed by the blood of Christ. Elders are to take the oversight of, to shepherd, to tend God's heritage, the church.

Leadership is to be exercised, but that leadership is not to be the dictatorial kind of leadership that would be exercised by lords over God's heritage. The arbitrary, autocratic, dictatorial type of leadership is prohibited. The timid and tentative leadership that fails to challenge and reach out is also prohibited. Both extremes are to be avoided.

New Testament passages defined "leadership" in terms of self-giving love. It is seen in John 10 and also in Ephesians 5: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself up for her." Christ is the head of the church, and the church is to be subject to Him, but how does Christ exercise that headship? He does so primarily in self-giving love.

Peter says, ". . . but proving to be examples" (5:3). "Examples" is from *tupas*, which means a mold or a pattern. A form of this word appears in Romans 6:17 where Paul says one obeys from the heart "that *form* of teaching." One of the vital ingredients of effective leadership is the example that is set by the leader. Much of leadership involves the force of one's own good example.

### **Their Reward**

"And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory" (5:4). A crown is held up as an incentive for this difficult and demanding work. The work of an elder is richly rewarding both here and hereafter.

### **THE PROBLEM OF PRIDE (5:5-7)**

Peter now turns to admonitions that are broadly applicable to all Christians, not just to elders. He enjoins humility upon God's people. The principle of Christian humility *before* God is seen in verses 5 and 6, while the principle of Christian serenity *in* God is seen in verse 7. Verse 10 pictures God strengthening, enabling, upholding, and keeping to the ultimate glory.

## Humility Before God

Verse 5 says, "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder" (KJV). The NASB has the following: "You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders." A question arises with this verse which is difficult to completely resolve. The preceding context with its reference to elders seems to indicate that the word "elder" is used here in the limited sense of church leaders (as seen in the NASB), but the word "younger" in the sentence seems to indicate that "elder" is used in the broad sense of those who are older. Paul urged Timothy, "Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father; . . ." (1 Timothy 5:1; KJV). In this context, it is apparent that Paul is using "elder" to refer to an older man, not a church official. In 5:5, however, it could mean either.

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*We are strong when we are  
aware of our weaknesses,  
and we are weak when we  
trust in our strengths.*

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Even if it is the more general usage, certainly it would include deference and respect for one who serves as an overseer. It may well be the general idea of respect for age.

In relation to one another, all of us are to be clothed with humility. Verse 5 says, ". . . and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, . . ." Proverbs 3:34 is reflected in this admonition: "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." James 4:6 contains the same admonition.

Peter next says, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, . . ." (5:6). The expression "the mighty hand of God" is found frequently in the Old Testament. "The mighty hand of God" often appears in connection with the deliverance of God's people out of Egypt. It is one of those expressions which describes God with the description of a man. In the face of His great power, our part is to humble ourselves before God.

"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time." He abases the haughty but gives grace to the humble.

## Serenity in God

Verse 7 says, "Casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you." This latter phrase might be rendered, "He cares about you."

Be like the bird  
that pausing in its flight  
on boughs too slight  
feels them give way  
and yet sings,  
knowing that he has wings.

Sometimes in life we find ourselves pausing on boughs too slight and feel them giving way, but then the Christian can sing. With backs beaten and bruised in Philippi, Paul and Silas were singing. From a human standpoint, the boughs appeared to be too slight. The Christian sings in the night because he has learned not only the principle of humility *before* God but serenity *in* God. You and I will sometimes try to carry all the load of life's burdens ourselves. God has been bearing us all along; He can carry us and our loads.

How can we cast all our anxiety upon the Lord? Paul says,

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6, 7).

## A GREAT PERIL AND A GREAT PROMISE (5:8-10)

### A Great Peril

We have a great peril in the Christian life. Verse 8 says, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." Peter urges Christian vigilance. Along with the trust and dependence upon God, an emphasis is given to the necessity of human resistance. Vigilance, resistance, and effort are needed on our part regarding the evil one and his wiles. This is not incompatible with a childlike trust in our Lord which casts all our cares upon Him. Vigilance is the price of our spiritual liberty. We are strong when we are aware of our weaknesses, and we are weak when we trust in our strengths. A good way to be beaten in anything is to underestimate the strength of your opponent.

This description of the devil is somewhat a puzzle because Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:14, "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." Are these contradictory figures? In terms of his deceit and trickery, the devil may come as an angel of light; in terms of power, ravenous appetite, and desire to destroy and devour, he is a roaring lion. God's children need to be sober and vigilant. We are to remember: "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Resistance is enjoined in verse 9: "But resist him, firm in your faith, . . ." James says, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

Peter concludes with, ". . . knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world." The fiery trials that they were suffering were not strange or alien, to their calling. In fact suffering is a common denominator between all brethren throughout history and the world: "And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12).

### A Great Promise

Peter closes this book with a promise that is inexpressibly beautiful:

And after you have suffered for a little, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you (5:10).

"After you have suffered for a little" reminds us of 2 Corinthians 4:16, 17 where Paul said, "*For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory.*" (Emphasis mine.) Peter's word "perfect" means to restore. This word can describe the setting of broken limbs, the mending of that which has been shattered, a careful putting back together of that which has been broken. God is able to mend us. The psalmist said in the beautiful Shepherd's Psalm, "He restores my soul," or "He renews life in me."

### CONCLUSION

"After you have suffered" is the main theme of 1 Peter, for Nero's persecution was about to erupt in full force. Some of those Christians would feel the brunt of that eruption, but God is sovereign, and all will be well: "To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen" (5:11).

—Avon Malone

## Evil

*... your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."*

"Satan is like a dethroned king who keeps on giving orders to his subjects; he is like a thief who has stolen virtually everything he owns and who tries to persuade you that it was always his. He is like a warrior without authority who keeps recruiting mercenaries to fight a battle he has already lost!"

Erwin W. Lutzer,  
*How to Say No to a Stubborn Habit*

*... your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."*

"Like a roaring lion" suggests the twofold idea of power and great cruelty. "Prowls about. . ." Satan is not omnipotent, neither is he omnipresent; but he probably has larger agencies under his control than we suppose. . . Every circumstance may conceal our deadly foe. Are you weak? or are you a leader? Be sure his eye is fixed on you; he thirsts to destroy your faith, your purity, your peace, your good name.

H. D. M. Spence and Joseph Exell, eds.,  
*The Pulpit Commentary*  
(Vol. 22, 230)

*... your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."*

"The great tempter of men has two lies with which he plies us at two different stages. Before we have fallen, he tells us that one fall does not matter; it is a trifle; we can easily recover ourselves again. After we have fallen, he tells us that it is hopeless; we are given over to sin, and need not attempt to rise."

James Stalker

"Evil unchecked grows; evil tolerated poisons the whole system."

Jawaharial Nehru

"There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root."

Henry David Thoreau