

There are Elders & then there are Elders!

I Peter 5: 1-11

¹ To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed:² Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve;³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.⁵ In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.¹¹ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

As in any organization, there are those who ascend to the top due to the natural order of things, and those who climb to the top - on their own strength, due to perseverance and determination. In other words, those who simply raise to the top due to the course of life, relationships, recommendations by those who see them and work with them, and, then there are those who seem to get there by finding their way through the mess. Most of the time, it is by working hard, long and keeping our heads down that we find the top. However, being the top dog is not always the easiest thing, nor is it the right place for everyone.

In the church, position and authority should be determined by ***"the call of God,"*** and not by man alone. I said should be, because, many have gotten to the place of authority by their own design - by simply saying "Yes" I'll serve at the right moment in time, and not necessarily because they are the best fit for that roll. Why does this happen at times, God's Word says, "The Harvest is plentiful but the workers are few," so when someone stands up to accept, sometimes they get it for simply standing up, not because they are the best person for that position.

When this happens, in almost every situation that organization suffers from the lack of the Lord's anointing on these leadership roles. On the other hand, there is also a group of people who seek nothing, when in fact the Lord has equipped them, called them, and needs them, to step up and serve for His glory and purpose.

These are the people which know they should serve, know they have been gifted and called to serve, yet, for whatever reason, often lack the desire or willingness to accept, so they simply say, "No," to any and all leadership roles. Perhaps they are correct in not serving. That is for the Lord and them to decide.

The latter reasons are more common than the first, in my opinion, however, both, having people who accept without the Lord's leading and not accepting when we should, can have a very destructive impact on God's church. In this church, ***we do not have Elders, perse***. Our leaders are men and women whom the Lord has called to lead in the various leadership positions. They do not have the "title" of Elder, but they have similar responsibilities to that of the Elder.

So, what does Peter say to the Elders, God's leaders within the church, that we should pay attention to? Is this information just for a selected group of people, those in a position of leadership, or is this for all who serve the Lord and are called by God? How does this affect you and me? These are fair questions to consider, and I want us to try and answer them, somewhat, by Peter's thoughts and words.

*Before we get into the passage, I want to note that Peter considers himself as an Elder, alone with many who have read this passage. In my opinion, an Elder, within the church, is one who has a position of responsibility by **virtue of age, experience, relationship and the call of God**, to help advance the kingdom work through a particular ministry, regardless if they are in an official position or not. This could apply to a lot more people than many think, who sit in the sanctuary during worship services feeling the Lord's call upon their lives.*

Those within God's church- in general, are those He has called to have a significant influence or impact upon the life of others, in matters of spiritual life. That applies to all who accept Jesus as Lord and seek to grow in Christ. We will and do have influence upon people around us.

Let's look at what Peter says today...

First - Elder's be shepherds of God's flock...

May I start by saying that in every definition I found, for the word "Elder," it started with being of a mature age. I also found words like, ***experience, rank or office***. Some even used the word "***ordained***" to serve. When speaking of those who are Ordained, words like, ***invest, established, appointment, or perhaps to issue an order.***" God has ordained, or, God has given an orders, direction for some to do certain work within the kingdom.

Peter says:

*"⁵ To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will **share in the glory to be revealed:**² **Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them**—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; **not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve;***

It appears that this is a mandate from God, not a request. If we seek to fulfill this role, then we are accepting the Lord's mandate.

Many of us are familiar with Peter, and the experiences he had with Jesus, when Jesus was arrested. How he denied knowing Jesus, three times. Then later, we read about Peter being reinstated, as one of God's chosen, and placed at the position of Elder (***Shepherd***) over the church. Establishing and building the church for God's glory. Most of us know the story.

“When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?” “Yes Lord,” he said, “You know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed My Lambs.” Again, Jesus said, “Simon, son of John, do you truly love me?” Peter answered, “Yes Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of My sheep.” The third time He said to him, “Simon, son of John, do you truly love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus had asked him three times, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things, you know I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed My sheep.” (John 21: 15-17)

Jesus’ intent, was to have His **Elders** care for His church, the sheep, or flock... Peter knew this well, for the Lord Himself had instructed him to do so, and now, as now Peter is instructing others to do the same. As we read go ***“Feed My Sheep.” Who might be the Peter’s of today?*** Peter accepted the role the Lord gave him, and when he did, he didn’t have as much of a choice as to what he was called to do. Jesus simply told Peter, ***“Care for My sheep.”*** ***Does this command apply to us today?*** I would say it does.

Our Lord was telling Peter, and those how hear His words today, be leaders whom others will look up to and follow, in action, word, and lifestyle. Be leaders, in administering God’s love as you direct them to Him. I heard someone say, ***“Love is the one commodity which the more of we give it away, the more we receive.”*** One of my goals in life, is to learn how to give love away in an abundance, as we care for His sheep. I pray you are with me? I believe that is being ***“Shepherds of His Flock.”***

Second - Serve as Overseers, willingly...

“Be 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:” (v.2)

That stood out to me right away, ***“Not because you must, but because you are willing.”*** That is what our God wants from us, a willingness to serve Him as we help others.

What did Peter mean by ***“Overseer?”*** Why did he mention ***“being willingly?”*** It is obvious that not too many were anxious to stand up back then, due to the prosecution, and coming under attack for following Jesus. Christianity was growing rapidly, yet, many more were shying away from Christ, for fear of being persecuted or killed.

Fast forward to today. Looking at our world today, I feel that this applicable now. It can apply equally, to all leaders who wishes to serve the Lord within any given body or organization. Many are frightened to stand up, or become to bold, for fear of critical comments. Afraid of the actions or reactions of those who don’t’ know Jesus as Lord, or do not want to know Him.

Yet, the Lord is looking for individuals who are ***“willing”*** to stand for the kingdom, and do the work, no matter what the world says or does.

He is seeking for individuals who are willing to take on responsibility within the church, to watch over and care for those who are weaker, perhaps lost or confused, who may or may not participate in the local community we call a church.

After all, this is where the Lord calls everyone to come, His house, so they can meet Him and get to know Him. At some point in time, to serve Him, and those whom we have contact with outside of these walls.

Illustration:

Timothy Stackpole was a New York Firefighter, who was severely burned in a 1998 fire. After he recovered, he returned to the force despite the advice of some friends and family, and the fact that he could retire comfortably, if he so desired. He was a great fire fighter, and passionate about his work, and was soon promoted to captain.

It turns out, that Timothy was one of the fire fighters that ran into the second tower during 9-11, trying to save some people. When he did, it collapsed and took his life. He knew his calling—was to save people. The Holy Spirit has called us to a life of service. To help save people lives. We are called to follow Him no matter the cost. It is my prayer that we can live for the Lord just as convincingly, as Timothy Stackpole did for the Fire Department.

Serve the Lord as an overseer, someone who cares for others, willingly, and completely. Not because you have to, because you want to. Because you are willing.

Third - The Crown of Glory!

“And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the Crown of Glory that will never fade away.” (v.4) If it wasn't for the reward, many would never do what they do. We are often motivated by the reward we find in life. I used candy bars to get youth to do things, all the time. Or, here I use to use MacDonalds gift certificates. People love a reward.

For all of the Lord's called leaders in this world, a reward is waiting for all who faithfully fulfill their duty as the Lord is calling them to. It is called the – ***“The Crown of Glory.”*** Peter is speaking about when Jesus returns, ***and He will return***, for all who are found living, acting and serving as He has asked them to, there is a ***“Crown of Glory”*** waiting for them.

This includes all ministers, lay leaders, under-shepherds, all who are called to serve Him, to see if we have faithfully discharged our duties, our calling, both publicly and privately. Those who have, shall receive from the Good Shepherd, ***a Crown of Glory***, meaning - ***a high degree of everlasting glory which will never fade. Yes, given unto ministers and dedicated leaders of Christ, whose unselfish love, lead people to Christ, as best as they could while living upon this earth.”***

Everyone will see and know, that we have done our best, as our Lord rewarded us for our faithfulness. That may not mean much to some, but when we get to heaven, it will mean plenty.

The Good Shepherd laid down His life for us, and those who understand this, those who accept this gift, and those who commit themselves to follow in His steps, they shall receive this reward.

In ancient days of wars and battles, the victors were often given a laurel wreath to wear which signified they won, they were the best.

Illustration:

A gentleman went into a fried chicken place in Long Beach, California and bought a couple of chicken dinners for himself and his date late one afternoon. The young woman at the counter inadvertently gave him the proceeds from the day -- a whole bag of money instead of fried chicken. After driving to their picnic sight, the two of them sat down to open the bag and enjoy some chicken together.

They discovered a whole lot more than chicken--\$800! But he was unusual. He quickly put the money back in the bag. They got back into the car and drove all the way back. Mr. Clean got out, walked in to the chicken place, and became an instant hero.

By then the manager was frantic. The guy with the money looked the manager in the eye and said, "I want you to know I came by to get a couple chicken dinners and wound up with all this money. So, here." Well, the manager was so thrilled that He said, "Oh, great, let me call the newspaper. I'm gonna have your picture put in the local newspaper. You're the most honest man I've ever heard of."

To which the guy quickly responded, "Oh, no, no, no, don't do that!" Then he leaned closer and whispered, "You see, the woman I'm with is not my wife... she's uh, somebody else's wife."

Being partial truthful, partially honest or clean, partially right, that is not what the Lord seeks of his leader in His church. **The Crown of Glory** goes to the those who seek to be all they can be in His army. Right with the Lord, every day, every step.

He is calling us to be as Peter was, sold out for Christ. Just as Peter was told three times to care for His sheep, because Peter had betrayed His Savior, the Lord wanted him to be totally dedicated to serve and follow Him. The Lord wanted to make certain He understood his responsibility to lead, to care for them, and love them.

My question today? Do, we understand what the Lord is seeking from us?

- **Shepherd His flock** - not our flock, His flock, care for and serve them...
- **Be willing overseers** - do it because we truly love Him and seek to be committed to Him...
- **When we are**, there is a reward waiting for all of us – **"A Crown of Glory"** to the victors...

I want that Crown, how about you?

There are ELDERS, and there are ELDERS!

Those who are appointed and those called to lead the way.