

Standing Fast in the Grace of God

“Feed the Flock of God”

Shepherding Under the Chief Shepherd

1 Peter 5:1-4

As we saw with the last part of chapter 4, Peter spoke of “the fiery trials” that the believer will face — he spoke of suffering, reproach, judgment beginning at the house of God, and the call to commit our souls to God in faithful obedience.

That brings up an important question: when the people of God are under pressure, how are they to be led? If the flock is suffering, what does Christ require of the shepherds?

That is what Peter turns to in chapter 5. He does not begin this section by telling the flock what to do for the shepherds; he begins by telling the shepherds what Christ requires of them for the good of the flock.

Before he tells the church about humility and submission (in the next few verses of this chapter), he first tells the elders how they must care for the people of God.

What is given here is one of the clearest pictures in the New Testament of biblical pastoral ministry — shepherding under the Chief Shepherd.

I. THE CALLING OF THE SHEPHERD (v. 1)

A. The people addressed — *“The elders which are among you”*

1. *“The elders”*

- a) This identifies the men under charge by Peter. Given the context of verse 2, there are not

necessarily older men by age, but those entrusted with the oversight of the “flock of God.”

b) When we studied Hebrews 13 (vv. 7, 17, 24), I brought out the three New Testament terms that speak of the office of the pastor.

(1) “Elder(s)” (πρεσβύτερος, πρεσβυτέρους) — emphasizes maturity (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

(2) “Bishop” (ἐπισκοπή, ἐπίσκοπος – 1 Tim. 3:1-2; Titus 1:7) — this focuses on the function of oversight, not the title. The word is translated as “overseer” in Acts 20:28.

(3) “Pastor” (ποιμήν, ποιμαίνω – translated as “shepherd” or “shepherds” in all but this one place in the New Testament). This is what he does — emphasizes care and feeding.

c) As stated in that study, all three of these Greek terms are found in 1 Peter 5:1-2: “elders” (πρεσβύτερος, πρεσβυτέρους), “feed” (ποιμαίνω – “pastor”), and “taking the oversight” (ἐπισκοπέω).

d) Peter is addressing those men in the church who bear responsibility for the care of the flock.

2. “Which are among you” — these are not distant officials that stand above the flock as untouchable rulers, but among the flock as accountable servants of Christ.

B. The spirit of the appeal — “I exhort” (παρακαλέω)

1. Peter doesn’t begin with a command, but an exhortation — an encouragement. The word is one that means to call alongside of for the purpose of aid, help, comfort, or encouragement.

2. That does not remove authority, but it does show the tone. Peter speaks with weight, but not with harshness.
3. That fits the whole passage, especially since he will soon forbid lording over God's heritage.
4. The very way Peter addresses the elders models the kind of spirit he will require from them.

C. The humility of the speaker — *“who am also an elder”*

1. Peter was an apostle and he could have emphasized that here, but instead he comes alongside them as a fellow elder.
2. He speaks with apostolic authority, but he identifies with them in pastoral humility.
3. As I stated in our Hebrews study: church leadership is not about building a personal kingdom, but about Christ caring for His church through under-shepherds.

D. The weight of the ministry — *“and a witness of the sufferings of Christ”*

1. This gives pastoral ministry its solemnity. A true shepherd ministers in the shadow of the cross.
2. The pastor's calling cannot be separated from Christ's suffering.

E. The hope of the ministry — *“also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed”*

- “The faithful shepherd ministers with one eye on Calvary and the other on Christ's coming glory”

(source unknown).

II. THE CHARGE OF THE SHEPHERD (v. 2A)

If verse 1 tells us who the shepherd is, verse 2 tells us what the shepherd is to do.

A. The central duty — *"Feed"*

1. *"Feed"* — this hearkens back to what Jesus said to Peter when He restored him to service (John 21:15-17). Jesus told Peter to "feed" His sheep three times.
 - a) To *"feed"* (ποιμαίνω) means more than preaching. It carries the idea of tending, caring for, and guiding.
 - b) Shepherding begins with feeding, and feeding begins with the faithful ministry of the Word.
 - (1) Heb. 13:7 — *"who have spoken unto you the Word of God"*
 - (2) 1 Tim. 5:17 — laboring *"in the word and doctrine"*
 - (3) Acts 20:28 — *"feed the church of God"*
2. The shepherd is called first of all to care for souls, not just to manage church activity, although that is part of being a shepherd.

B. The precious object — *"the flock of God"*

1. The flock is not the shepherd's possession. It is "the flock of God."
2. That means the church belongs to God; the shepherd is a steward not an owner; and the

pastor's authority is delegated by the Owner, not absolute.

C. The local sphere — “*which is among you*”

1. Shepherds are responsible for the flock God has actually placed near them.
2. This means that it's not the shepherd's responsibility to feed every flock, nor somebody else's flock, nor some imagined broader platform (think internet church), but the flock they are with.
3. The application for the pastor and the church:
 - a) For the pastor: faithfulness begins with the people God has actually entrusted to us.
 - b) For the church: the shepherd's concern is not theoretical; it is personal, local, and present.

D. The necessary function — “*taking the oversight thereof*”

1. If “*feed*” emphasizes nurture and care, “*taking the oversight*” emphasizes watchfulness, leadership, and responsibility.
 - a) The phrase shows that oversight is not something extra added later to pastoral work. It is part of what shepherding entails.
 - b) The active voice of the participle used shows that the pastors are not passive figures in the life of the church. They are to be actively engaged in oversight. Oversight, then, is not optional or occasional; it is an active and ongoing part of shepherding.

2. Christ has defined the shepherd's work more fully than many realize.
3. A shepherd did not merely stand in a field and deliver food. He led, watched, guarded, sought, corrected, and guided the flock in its daily life. A literal shepherd had to:
 - a) Lead them to pasture
 - b) Lead them to water
 - c) Keep them from danger
 - d) Watch for predators
 - e) Deal with wandering sheep
 - f) Make judgments for the good of the flock
 - g) Keep order within the flock's movement and safety

A shepherd does more than speak to sheep; he leads them, watches over them, and answers for their welfare.

4. The pastor's authority is not confined to his preaching time, because his responsibility to shepherd is not confined to the pulpit. But neither is his authority independent of Scripture or free from accountability to Christ.

III. THE CHARACTER OF THE SHEPHERD (VV. 2B-3)

This point is especially important because Peter does not only tell the elders what to do, but how to do it.

A. He must serve willingly — *"not by constraint, but*

willingly"

1. *"Not by constraint"* (ἀναγκαστῶς – only time this word is used in the NT) — Peter is saying the work is not to be done grudgingly, reluctantly, because one feels trapped by duty ("I have to do this"), nor because the office requires outward performance.
2. *"But willingly"* (ἔκουσίως) — freely, with a heart engaged in the work.
 - a) A shepherd may at times be weary, be wounded, or be pressed, but he is still to minister with a willing heart before God.
 - b) The work of shepherding must not be dragged out of a man by pressure from the outside; it must flow from the inside; from a heart made willing by God.
 - c) There's a consideration to be seen here that we might miss. When you pray for your pastor, no matter who that might be, pray not only for his strength, but for his spirit that it stays true to the ministry of God.

B. He must serve readily — *"not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind"*

1. *"Not for filthy lucre"* (ἀίσχροκερδῶς) — this addresses motive.
 - a) The point is not that a pastor should never be supported materially — Scripture plainly teaches otherwise. The point is that money must never become the driving motive of ministry.
 - b) This principle is found twice in the Pastoral

Epistles in the qualification of the pastor/overseer. It's also found through the Old Testament for the spiritual leaders of Israel.

(1) 1 Timothy 3:3 — *"not greedy of filthy lucre"*

(2) Titus 1:7 — *"not given to filthy lucre"*

(3) Isaiah 56:11 — speaking of the "watchman" of Israel (the pastors today fit that application) — *"they are greedy dogs..."*

(4) 1 Samuel 8:3 — Samuel's sons *"turned aside after lucre..."*

2. *"But of a ready mind"* (προθύμως – only time in the New Testament) — eager for the work itself because it is the Lord's work.

- The true shepherd is not in the ministry for what he can get from the flock, but for what he may give to the flock in service to Christ.

C. He must serve exemplarily — *"neither as lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock"*

1. *"Neither as lords over God's heritage"*

- a) This means not lording over, not domineering, not ruling by self-will, and not treating the people of God as personal property.
- b) Peter isn't saying that the shepherd has no authority. He says the shepherd must never exercise that authority as a lord over God's heritage. The church is His — it doesn't belong to the pastor, nor to any family, board, or personality.

2. *"But being ensamples to the flock"*

- a) The word for “*ensamples*” (τύπος) is where the English word “type” is derived. It primarily means a print left as an impression after a blow has been struck; a pattern or model of something else.
- b) The under-shepherd should be a living pattern or model of the Chief Shepherd, the Lord Jesus (Wuest).

IV. THE CROWN OF THE SHEPHERD (v. 4)

A. The shepherd’s Master” — “*And when the chief Shepherd shall appear*”

1. This points to what we studied from Heb. 13:17 and the phrase, “*as they that must give account...*” One day the shepherd/pastor will answer to the Chief Shepherd for how he fed, oversaw, and treated the flock.
2. This truth places every pastor in the right position. He is not supreme; he is not the ultimate authority; he is an under-shepherd beneath the Chief Shepherd.

B. The shepherd’s motivation — “*ye shall receive...*”

1. This may not be the highest motive for ministry (love for Christ and bring glory to Him is), but it is a real encouragement appointed by God. Faithfulness in shepherding will not be ignored.
2. The reward doesn’t come from people — it comes from Christ.
 - The faithful shepherd may not always be understood on earth, but he will never be overlooked by Christ (source unknown).

C. The shepherd's reward — *"a crown of glory that fadeth not away"*

It's not for the applause of men that the shepherd serve — it's for the glory of our Savior.

Conclusion:

Peter's burden in this passage is clear. Christ has not left His flock without care, and He has not left His shepherds without direction. The elder is called to feed the flock of God, to take the oversight thereof, and to do so with the right spirit — not grudgingly, not selfishly, not domineeringly, but willingly, readily, and as an example to the flock.

And all of it is governed by one great truth: the flock belongs to God, and the shepherd answers to the Chief Shepherd. That means the pastor must be faithful in how he leads, and the church must learn to value leadership as Christ designed it — not as lordship over God's people, and not as mere hired service, but as shepherding stewardship under Christ.

One day the Chief Shepherd shall appear. On that day every under-shepherd will answer to Him. So, the call of this passage is plain: let shepherds shepherd faithfully, let the church receive Christ's order humbly, and let all of us keep our eyes on the Chief Shepherd, who alone is perfect, unailing, and worthy of all trust.