

State of the Church 2020, Part 1

Shepherding His Flock - 1 Peter 5:1-7

Introduction – As Paul left Ephesus on the way to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey, he gave a sober warning regarding the state of the church (Acts 20:28-30). Wolves from without and false teachers from within would bring great trouble. When John wrote his epistle (also to the Ephesians), he identified the antichrist in their midst and his false teaching (1 John 2:18-19, 4:3). Bad pastors, false teachers, and unqualified elders who are not able or will not protect the church may be the biggest problem facing the church at any time. If you do not have faithful rulers in the church, you won't be equipping God's people with the whole armor of God to defend against the world, the flesh and the devil, and you won't be moving out with a faithful offensive upon the culture of unbelief.

The world systems of unbelief are always attacking. Today, egalitarianism, feminism, theistic evolution and secular humanism, anti-Trinitarian doctrines and the social justice/neo-Marxism movement all contain the spirit of antichrist. They are wily and we need faithful elders to rule, lead, and guide us.

Shepherding His Flock (vv1-4) – Peter exhorts the elders among the churches to whom he writes to “shepherd the flock of God” (v2). Peter is one of them, a fellow-elder, not a pope. He was exhorted to do the same (John 21:15). Jesus is the Chief Shepherd and all elders are under-shepherds who must give an account to Him for the specific souls entrusted (Heb 13:17), which should cause sleepless nights for shepherds many a time.

The Shepherd Picture – Elders are described as *shepherds* who *oversee* the flock. The three words, *presbuteros*, *poimane*, and *episkopos*, are the words used to describe this office. These men are to be like Christ, the Chief Shepherd, in the way they rule. This motif of shepherds runs throughout the scriptures. Moses, a near-ruler alongside Pharaoh, becomes a shepherd. Joshua is appointed as a shepherd (Num 27:15-17). King David is a shepherd. Ezekiel bemoans the lack of faithful shepherds like David (Ezek 34) and Jesus is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11-16).

The Shepherd Purpose (Eph 4:11-16) – Shepherds feed, protect, rule, lead, and lay down their lives for the sheep. But just as Jesus shepherds us that we might shepherd, so pastors (along with all the elders) are to shepherd in such a way that the saints are equipped for ministry themselves. The saints are to be taught so that we all come to the mature unity of the faith (v13), are not tossed around by the false crafty and deceitful doctrines of unbelief and compromise (v14), and are knit together in a community of love (vv15-16).

A Shepherd's Temptations – Elders should serve willingly, not under compulsion (1 Pet 5:2), for they need to love the flock God loves. They must not serve for dishonest gain, for weak sheep are an easy prey. Rather, they are to rule “eagerly,” for they know they have been entrusted with God's sheep. Elders must not use their position as a place for tyranny (v3) but teach submission by being submissive examples to their Chief Shepherd (Heb 13:7). The result must be winsome and effective lives and teaching that instruct the flock in the Christian life.

A Shepherd's Crown (1 Pet 5:4) – An elder will give much of himself for the sake of the sheep, but he should do so with an eye to a future reward, just as Jesus did (Heb 12:2). There is nothing wrong with obedience and sacrifice motivated by future rewards.

Obedient Imitation (1 Pet 5:5-7) – The rest of us are to look to our shepherds, considering the outcome of their faith (Heb 13:7 again), and submit to their authority and teaching. Are they in the Word? Then we should be. Are they working out their salvation with fear and trembling? Then we should be. Are they sacrificially loving others while standing uncompromisingly upon the truth given to them by God? Then we should be. Do they submit to their authority? Then we should be.

“Younger People” – Just as “elder” does not necessarily mean a particular age, but rather an office, so “younger people” here in the Greek is probably referring to those who are “newer to the faith” or less mature in the faith.

“Casting All Your Care Upon Him” – Verses 6-7 are not changing the subject. While there is a general application for these verses, Peter is emphasizing that submitting yourselves to shepherds that God has appointed is a means by which He cares for you. Humbling yourselves under the mighty hand of God includes the practical application of turning to those who have your souls under their care. Doing so obediently and by faith in turn brings forth an exaltation from those difficulties, temptations and trials, granting wisdom, counsel, prayer, and attention we all need and God provides.

The Chief Shepherd Does Care for You (Matt 6:25-34) – These words of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, need to be repeated and lived out in the lives of your shepherds here. Elders, this is how you shepherd the flock. For the rest of us, pray for your elders and submit to them as they rule over us. Do so with glad-hearted humility, seeing God’s care over you and the church in it. We need more elders. The global church needs more elders – elders who are qualified according to the Word, who know how to handle the Word, and who can be followed as they live according to the Word.

Dave Hatcher – December 28, 2019

Notes for Little Saints

What are elders called to do in 1 Peter 5:2?

What title is given to Jesus in 1 Peter 5:4?

“Pastor” and “Shepherd” are the same word in Greek. A pastor is a shepherd.

What does Psalm 23 tell you about who the Lord is?

According to Psalm 23, what does a Good Shepherd do?