

1 Peter 5

5:1-5 Peter takes the same approach to leadership as Christ Himself in this moment – he does not exercise his rightful authority as an apostle of God by forcing others to do what they ought to do, but rather chooses to encourage as a “fellow elder” (5:1). It is clear that Peter did not regard his apostleship as something that made him above anyone else; rather, he chooses cooperative leadership. He reminds the readers that he is not only a fellow leader, but also merely one among many who was “a witness of the sufferings of Christ” and “a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed” (5:1). In any case, it is this cooperative leadership which leads to the directives of the next verse.

The leadership of the Church is charged with “shepherd[ing] the flock of God” (5:2). The reason Peter seems to have written this letter has much to do with guiding the leadership in the Church in how they are to lead the larger Body of Christ. Peter gives three specific qualifications for our leadership in the Church:

1) “not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you.”

Those who serve in the Body are to do so not because they are forced into it, but because they genuinely desire to serve God. God does not make us as mindless automata, but as living, breathing beings with wills of our own. Even those who are called to serve Him are not forced to do so, but are given the choice to be faithful or to stray from their calling. God will continually reach out to His called servants and encourage them to follow. He will sometimes go so far as to force someone into obedience, as He did with Jonah. Yet those who serve God are not to do so because they feel forced. In Jonah’s case, for instance, once he finally did what God asked of him, he became resentful. We too will be resentful if we walk in obedience only because we are being made to do so. Our obedience to God should be as a result of our own choice.

2) “not for shameful gain, but eagerly.”

Our service to others is not so that we can get more out of them. Our service to others is simply because we love God and love others as a result of it. We should serve “eagerly.” There are far too many who “serve” simply because they desire to get something out of those they can deceive into giving them what they want (e.g. Kenneth Copeland). These false teachers have been condemned repeatedly by Scripture. We are to serve because of our calling, not because the people in our care can give us something.

3) “not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”

Again Peter practices what he preaches here. Our job is not to stand over the people and tell them what they are doing wrong; they know that full well. Our job is to model Christ to those in our care. We are those in whom Christ dwells, the ones He has chosen Himself to shepherd His people. To be clear, it does not seem that Peter is necessarily speaking only to pastoral figures here, but to all those who find themselves in positions of leadership. We are to carefully live our lives in such a way as to show others the love of Christ.

It is as a direct result of our care for the flock that we will receive glory from Christ Himself. The chief Shepherd, of course, is the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. When He arrives, He will grant us the reward of a portion of His own glory.

We must keep in mind that although there is equality among us in the sight of God, there is also a sense in which He has given us a very intentional hierarchy. God has given the Church elders, deacons, pastors, teachers, and, of course, many laity. Those who are in positions without authority are ultimately to submit to those who have been given it. This is predicated on the idea that these elders are actually walking in line with the commands of God. When leadership no longer walks in genuine obedience to God, we think back to Peter's earlier words regarding the spousal relationship: although wives may be considered lesser than their husbands at the time Peter writes, it is their submission and obedience to the commands of God which will ultimately lead their husbands to become faithful to Him as well. In the same way, laity who see that their leadership is not walking in obedience to God would likely do well to behave in like manner – demonstrate obedience to God, and watch leadership take notice. All of us are called to lead by example. All of this leads to Peter's command to humble ourselves. This humility is specifically "toward one another" (5:5). We conduct ourselves in humility in an effort to have the same mind as Christ Himself, who chose humility over what was rightfully His (Philippians 2). In choosing humility, we model Christ to others.

5:6-11 Our humility leads to exaltation. We are humble in this lifetime knowing that God will be faithful to raise us up in the resurrection to positions of glory and honor. It is interesting that Peter would specifically identify our humility as "under the mighty hand of God," implying that our humility is first and foremost obedience to the leading and guiding of God. One could think of this in terms of David's approach to sin in Psalm 51:4, where David tells God, "Against You, You only, have I sinned." David has committed numerous sins at this point which have affected many people, and yet David can still say that his sin is primarily against God. Likewise, although we may humbly submit to one another, our humility is still primarily a humility toward God. It may manifest as humility with others as well, but it is in reality us simply being humble before our Creator. This kind of humility is what leads to exaltation before God.

Part of our submission to God is sharing our burdens with Him. This is not just because He has commanded us to do this, but rather is borne of the fact that He genuinely desires deepened relationship with His people. We cast "all our anxieties on Him because He cares" for us! Many ask why we bother with prayer and petition when God already knows the desires of our hearts. The reason is clear: He desires the time with us!

Peter reminds his readers that they are to be "sober-minded" and "watchful" because of the work of the enemy. Letting our guard down leaves us vulnerable to attacks from the tempter. Our call is to stand against his attacks and keep him in his rightful place – defeated! We remember that God has already defeated the devil. The victory has been won! Temptation is merely the devil's way of trying to get a few more painful attacks in on God by making God's people sin and break His heart. When tempted, we remember the goodness and power of God over our weakness. But we also remember that others who are obedient to Christ suffer in like manner. We are not the only ones who suffer temptation and should not let ourselves be deluded into thinking so. In fact, when we confess our sins to one another, we find that God is

faithful to forgive and grants us freedom from our sins. They hold no power over us once they are brought to light! The end of our suffering under the burden of temptation is that Christ will “restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish” us as His people.

5:12-14 It is entirely possible that Silvanus here is to be identified with Silas, the same one who accompanied Paul on numerous missionary journeys. This likely indicates that Peter dictated the letter and Silvanus/Silas was the one who transcribed it.

5:13 is also likely referring to the very same Mark who wrote the Gospel, as we believe Peter passed his stories of Christ on to Mark because of their close relationship. This would explain why Peter refers to him as “my son.”