

Exhorting Elders

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[0 : 00] I want you to open your Bibles to 1 Peter chapter 5 this morning. We're going to look at the first five verses of this last chapter in this fairly short letter.

And for those of you who haven't been here, we've been walking through 1 Peter for several months now. And we're drawing near to the end. We should finish this letter in October. This will carry us almost to the end of October.

And then the last Sunday in October, we will spend celebrating God's work at a point in history that we call the Reformation. And so the last Sunday in October, we reserve every year to look at our theological foundations that trace back to Martin Luther and John Calvin and the other Reformers who did great and wonderful things in history.

Not perfect men by any means, but we want to celebrate what the Lord did through them. So we'll do that at the end of October. And between now and then, we will be finishing this letter and spending our time in chapter 5.

So I want you all, if you've turned there in your Bibles, I want you to stand with me as we read verses 1 through 5. The Apostle Peter writes, So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed.

[1 : 19] Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you. Not for shameful gain, but eagerly, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another.

Father, take your word now by your spirit.

We ask you to apply it to our hearts. In Jesus' name, amen. You guys take a seat. If you have been involved in church life for very long, if you have been, particularly if you have been active in church life, and involved in ministry, and involved in leadership in the church, and you've been around church for very long, then there's a pretty good chance that at one time or another, you found yourself at odds with one of your pastors.

You found yourselves disagreeing with maybe some of their decisions, or not liking their demeanor, or being offended or hurt by something that they said, or offended or hurt by something that they didn't say, when they should have perhaps said something to you.

[2 : 48] So there are all these opportunities for us to get upset with those that God puts in leadership positions over us. And that's not surprising because we pastors are sinful, fallen human beings, just like the rest of the church.

That's who we are. And so there are times when we say things that we should have held our tongue upon. There are times when we don't say things when we ought to speak up.

And so people rightly get upset with us at times. And sometimes we do things and we make decisions that we look back in hindsight and we think that wasn't the best decision to make.

And we can only hope as pastors that our people are gracious and merciful towards us and will let us make a few mistakes here and there, and will let us stumble, and we'll be okay with that.

It's going to happen. It's just a reality. And yet we also recognize that there are some boundaries that the Bible lays out for the leaders of God's church.

[3 : 51] There are things that we could do, things that we could say, mistakes that we could make, paths that we could take that would disqualify us from serving in the positions that we feel called to serve in.

There are things that we could do that would cause a church to have to remove a pastor. Or there are things that we could do that would cause a church to have to correct and rebuke a pastor short of removing them.

And we need, as a church, we need to pay very close attention to the handful of passages in the New Testament that lay out for us not only the qualifications for those who are in leadership in the church, but also set some parameters so that we can see the kinds of motives that should drive those who are in leadership and the goals that should be set up by those who are in leadership. And so we're coming now to a passage in 1 Peter that deals with just that. It's not so much a passage that deals strictly with qualifications of those in leadership.

You can find those in, for instance, 1 Timothy or the book of Titus. You can find some very clear moral qualifications laid out for those in leadership. But now we come to a passage that addresses the issue of how we lead, how a pastor ought to shepherd the people under his care, and what should motivate him, and what should drive him as he does that work.

[5 : 18] And so I want us this morning as a church to take a careful look so you will know what to expect of your pastors. Now before we do that, though, we need to just ask a very simple question, and that is, I'm assuming something all along here.

I'm assuming that Peter is, in fact, addressing pastors, but I want to ask the question so we can get to the point to where we're all on the same page and say, who exactly is it that Peter is talking to here?

Who exactly is he addressing these words to? Because he says in verse 1, I exhort the elders among you. Who are these elders?

In fact, it might be tempting, if you read through this passage quickly, it might be tempting to think that these elders are, in fact, not official appointed leaders in the church, but they're just the older people in the church.

Maybe Peter's just addressing people who are older, because after all, when you come down to verse 5, you notice that he directs his attention likewise to those who are younger.

[6 : 21] So could it be, perhaps, that Peter's not addressing church leaders at all, but in fact he's simply addressing people who are older within the congregation? I don't think that that's the case.

I don't think that that's the case for two reasons. Number one, because of some things that we're going to see in this context, within this paragraph. But I also don't think that that's the case because consistently throughout the New Testament, the majority of the time that we find the word elder, and particularly the plural elders, we find that it is a group of men who have been called to lead and serve God's people.

And in fact, when we look here in this passage, we see three terms that are used throughout the New Testament interchangeably to describe this group of leaders.

We see them not only here, but we see them elsewhere. Let me point them out to you very quickly, and then we'll turn to another passage where we can see these three terms used together so that we can see very clearly what we're talking about here.

First of all, I exhort the elders among you, there's the first term, as a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed. Here's the second term, verse 2.

[7 : 31] He says, shepherd the flock of God that is among you. Shepherd the flock. That's the second term. So these elders are also shepherds.

Now the word that we use oftentimes in English today for that is pastor. Pastor simply means shepherd. Shepherd. So this is very much a verb form of the noun pastor.

So it's like he's saying, elders, I want you to pastor the flock of God that is among you. So we have elder, and we have pastor or shepherd, and then we have a third term that we find here also in verse 2.

The next term says, exercising oversight. Exercising oversight. The noun form of that word would be the word overseer, which, strangely enough, in the King James Version of the Bible, the noun is often, in fact, almost always translated as bishop.

The noun is the word episkopos, where you get the name of the episcopal church because that's a church that's led by a hierarchy of bishops. Baptist churches, like us, are different.

[8 : 38] We don't have bishops that are over a group of churches. Each church has its own pastors who oversee that church, and that church is not called to be accountable to another group outside of them.

We call it local church autonomy. So we don't have a structure in which you have pastors in the local church, and then bishops above them, and archbishops above them, and all those sorts of things.

And the reason that we don't have that sort of structure is because you can see in this passage that an elder is a pastor is a bishop or an overseer. All three terms refer to the same group of leaders within the church.

So there's not that hierarchy. There's one group of leaders laid out here in the church called elders or pastors or overseers. Now let me show that to you in one other passage so that you can see that this is not unique to Peter, but this is something that we find throughout the New Testament.

I want you to hold your place there in 1 Peter, and I want you to turn over to the book of Acts in chapter 20 of the book of Acts. In chapter 20, we find ourselves in the middle of one of Paul's missionary journeys, and he's in a hurry.

[9 : 49] He's moving from place to place by boat, but he wants to meet with the leaders of the church in Ephesus as he's traveling along. And so we read in chapter 20, verse 1, it says that after the uproar ceased, there's been trouble, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia.

So he's in Macedonia. That's where he is. He's traveling along. And we're just going to skip over some of his records of his travels and move on down. Verse 17, he's now arrived in Miletus.

Now from Miletus, he's sent to Ephesus. So this is his continuing boat journey, traveling. From Miletus, he's sent to Ephesus. And we're told that he called for the elders of the church to come to him.

He called for the elders of the church. So the church in Ephesus had a group of leaders who were called elders. Now he gives them a number of instructions, but I want us to move down through those instructions, and I want us to come all the way down to verse 28.

He says this in verse 28, To the elders, pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flocks. We have this flock language again, just like verse Peter.

[11 : 08] Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. There's that term bishop again. Overseer. He has made you overseers.

And here's what the overseers or the elders are supposed to do. The ESV says to care for the church of God. But literally, it's the same exact word that we find in 1 Peter.

It is to shepherd or to pastor the flock of God. So elders have been set apart as overseers, whose task it is to pastor or shepherd God's church.

So we have one group of leaders mentioned here, known by three different terms in the New Testament. Elders, pastors, and overseers. These are the leaders that we find consistently in every church that we are able to see leadership in the New Testament.

And we see that because that was the pattern that the apostles themselves laid out for all of the churches that they started. So that in Acts chapter 14, if you want to turn there, you can, but you don't have to.

[12 : 14] In Acts chapter 14, verse 23, we're told that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in every church. In every church that Paul and Barnabas started, they appointed elders.

And note that word, appoint. This is not a status that is attained simply by growing older. That's not what's meant by the word elder. This is a status that you obtain by being appointed to that position within the church.

So turn all the way back. I want you to turn back now to 1 Peter chapter 5. And I want us to continue asking this question, who are these leaders? Who are they and what are they supposed to be doing before we can look at how they're supposed to do the things that they do?

And the key here, the clue, is to just look at these three terms that are used over and over to describe these leaders. They are first of all called elders, which I've told you doesn't simply mean that they are chronologically older.

Although most of the time, they probably will be chronologically older than a lot of the church. And the reason for that is simply because what Paul and Peter mean by the term elder is someone who is spiritually more mature than the rest of the flock.

[13 : 32] Someone who knows the word of God well. Someone who meets all the qualifications laid out for elders in 1 Timothy and Titus. Someone whose life serves as a good moral example to the people.

It is a spiritually mature. So spiritually they are aged people. They are older than most of the flock. That's something that we ought to expect out of this group of leaders.

They ought to know the word. In fact, they're required to be able to teach. They're required to be able to refute those who contradict the sound doctrine that they themselves are teaching the church.

So that if I'm not capable of accurately handling this word, and teaching it to you, and defending it against those who would challenge this word, then I'm not spiritually mature enough to serve as a pastor or an elder, and I ought to be removed from this position.

This should be the case for all pastors. This is a bar that is set for them, for us. We must be able to thoroughly teach God's word, to thoroughly defend God's word, and to model obedience to his word in our lives.

[14:46] That, I think, is what the apostles mean when they refer to these leaders as elders. That's what they're to be. But they're also called overseers or bishops.

In other words, they do have a kind of authority. There is authority granted to these leaders within the church. Now, this is the point at which we often sort of back away and say, I don't want any part of this sort of hierarchical structure that we've got going on here.

Because in our culture, it's very popular to look down on what people call the institutional church, and to laud and to hail anybody who's spiritually, without being bound by some sort of institutional, localized group of people with leadership.

But in point of fact, the New Testament is very clear that we must be plugged into a body of believers in a local place. And for that body of believers to function as a biblical New Testament church, they must have elders, pastors, overseers.

They must have those leaders in place. So this is not something that we can afford to reject. This is not something that we can afford to set aside. This is something that is intrinsic to the nature of the church.

[16:00] And all believers ought to want to be vitally connected to the church. So we shouldn't be afraid of saying, these men have authority within the church.

Now that is, of course, balanced by the fact that you notice in all of these passages, in Acts chapter 14, in Acts chapter 20, here in 1 Peter chapter 5, that you'll notice it's not ever the elder, or an elder, or the pastor, or a pastor in a church.

You'll notice in these passages, and we could, if we were just doing a study of church government this morning, we could look at several others. You'll notice over and over it's consistently elders, overseers, shepherds.

Because what you don't find in the churches of the New Testament are churches that have only one pastor who does what he wants to do with no system of accountability in place at all.

What you find are multiple pastors or multiple elders. We don't know how many. Two, three, twelve. We don't know that. But we know that there's more than one because it's always plural.

[17:06] They appointed in Acts 14 what we saw. They appointed elders, plural, in every church, singular. And so we ought not to be afraid when we see pastors as overseers.

We shouldn't immediately become afraid that there's going to be a dictator within the church.

Because if we are fully following the biblical model for church government, we won't have a dictator. We'll have a body, a group of men, who all meet the same qualifications and who all serve and lead and oversee the church together as a group.

And you say, that sounds great, but I read the bulletin this morning and I've been on the website and apparently you're the only pastor here, Chris. So are you going to practice what you preach? What's going on here?

What's happening here in Church of the Cross? Here's what's happening at our church. We're new, less than two years old. And while our constitution that we've approved requires us to have multiple elders, we have this leeway time in here for us to find men who are called and equipped to serve in this particular position in the church.

And so I'm actively engaged in thinking about and praying about and looking at the men that the Lord continues to bring to the church and seeing if God might bring men who could serve as elders, pastors in the church alongside of me.

[18:24] What we won't do is rush to appoint people as elders who aren't qualified and put ourselves in the position of disobeying one set of biblical commands in order to obey another.

We're going to be patient and wait for the Lord to bring those other men to us. They are not necessarily people who are paid to be on staff. In fact, what our constitution requires is that some of the elders not be paid at all.

Not paid at all. So that we'll have some pastors like myself, whose full-time employee it is to be active teaching, preparing to teach, studying, doing administrative stuff on behalf of the church, and other elders, other pastors who will not be full-time engaged in that.

They'll have other jobs that they do during the week, but they possess the same kind of authority that I possess. We gather together as a body of men. We make decisions together. There will be no dictator in place.

There will be no pastor who's over all the other pastors. There will be a team of men leading the church. All called to do that in unique ways. I'm the primary preacher, but there will be others doing other things.

[19 : 32] But when we gather, we'll be a body of elders, as the New Testament lays out. So they're elders. They are spiritually mature. They know the Word. They teach the Word.

They defend the Word. They model the Word. And they possess, through that Word, authority as a group over the church. There's a third term, though, that we need to consider that I think is equally important with the other two, and that is his term, shepherd.

In fact, that's the word that he chooses to use as his command. I exhort the elders among you to shepherd the flock of God. Shepherd the flock of God.

That means that these men who have been granted authority over the church also have a duty to serve and protect the church. What does a shepherd do if he does not attend to the well-being of his sheep?

That's what shepherds are supposed to do. They're supposed to protect their sheep from wolves. They're supposed to lead their sheep to fields that are good for grazing. They're supposed to lead them to water so that they can be nourished and survive in the wilderness.

[20 : 43] And so the task of a pastor, of a shepherd of a church, is not simply to sort of rule over the church and have everybody do and build up his own little kingdom. That's not what pastors are called to do.

Pastors are called to serve, protect, and lead you so that you can be brought to places in the word and in your life where you grow and flourish in Christ.

That's my job. That's my task. When we have other elders, that will be our primary focus. Your health, your well-being, making sure and seeing to it that you are grounded in the word and you are growing in the word and you are progressing in your faith.

That's the job, that's the task of an elder, an overseer, or a pastor. But of course this passage is not aimed at primarily defining what the task is.

Peter is concerned here that we pastors have right motives as we approach that task. You can see that in the commands that he gives, but you can also see it before he gets to those commands, you can see it in how he introduces himself.

[21 : 52] Pay close attention to what he says. Verse 1, I exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder. Now pause for just a moment right there and recall that this is the apostle Peter speaking.

He's already identified himself in verse 1 as an apostle. And the authority of an apostle far, far exceeds the authority of any elder. The apostles are the writers of the New Testament.

They possess a unique kind of authority, not repeated in church history. So Peter could have simply said, Listen, elders, I'm the apostle Peter and I'm telling you how to do things.

And yet for some reason he doesn't do that here. He begins by identifying and saying, Yes, I'm an apostle, but I'm also an elder in the local church where I serve. I exhort you as a fellow elder.

And the reason he identifies with us by title is because he wants to identify with us in Christ and in our ultimate goals. Notice what he says. As a fellow elder and how he describes himself as a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed.

[23 : 03] He is a witness of the sufferings of Christ. Now that may mean nothing more than I was there. I was there the day that Christ was crucified. I was in the garden of Gethsemane.

I saw him sweating those drops of blood. I followed him secretly into the courtyard. I saw them beat him. I was there. I saw the sufferings of Christ. That may be what Peter means.

I think he means something else though. Because he has encouraged us to be participants and witnesses of the sufferings of Christ throughout this letter.

And I think that what he's telling us here is not simply, I saw Christ suffer. But I think what he's saying is, I am now a witness. I testify to the sufferings of Christ on behalf of his people. Which is exactly what us elders are to be engaged in. It's what the whole church is to be engaged in. We are to be witnesses to the sufferings of Christ.

[24 : 06] Christ who suffered, he says in chapter 3 verse 18, once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order that he might bring us to God. Our job as elders and your job also as members of the church, our task is to be, like Peter, a witness to the gospel, to the sufferings of Christ, to his dying in our place, to his bearing our sins upon the cross.

We are witnesses to that. We are to be about the business of proclaiming that. I pray all the time that God will not let me preach a single sermon where the cross of Christ does not find a prominent place somehow in the midst of that sermon.

Whether the text is directly about it, or I come to a point of application in which I point you back to the cross, I always want in our sermons at some point to spend a moment reflecting upon the suffering Savior who died in our place.

Because we are witnesses. And as a pastor, I am called to witness before God's people, as Peter did, to the sufferings of Jesus. So Peter's identifying here.

We elders, we pastors, we are first witnesses, bearing witness, testifying to the sufferings of Christ. And also he says, a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed.

[25 : 29] This is a glory that Peter has spoken of throughout this letter. On occasion after occasion. We've seen it most frequently. We return to chapter 1 where we've seen him address this.

Where he says in chapter 1, verse 4, that we have been born again to an inheritance that is imperishable and undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you who God's power are being guarded for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Over and over, Peter's going to return to this theme of glory and salvation revealed in the last time. And so now he comes to say, as a pastor, as an elder, I am not only bearing witness in my life to the suffering of Christ, but I am hoping in and I am looking forward to the glory that is to be revealed in which all those who trust in Christ will one day participate.

The inheritance that has been promised to God's people. The task of a pastor is to bear witness to the sufferings of Christ, always looking forward with hope and expectation to the day when he will participate in the glory that is to be revealed.

And there is a reason, as we will see when we come to the motives, there is a reason because he says that those pastors who have been faithful to this, who have remained faithful to Christ, will receive an unfading, imperishable crown of glory.

[27 : 07] But we will come to that. Peter says here that elders, himself included, elders are to be people who bear testimony to Christ and whose eyes are focused and fixed on this future reward.

And then he begins to address the motives behind the work of a pastor. I want you to look carefully. He lists three things and he does it in a unique way.

He says, don't do this, but do this. So he says three things, he says it negatively and then he says it positively. There in verse 2, shepherd the flock of God that is among you exercising oversight.

Here's the first one. Not under compulsion, but willingly as God would have you. So the first thing that Peter tells us about the motive of a pastor is that he ought to shepherd God's people and he ought to exercise oversight over God's people willingly.

In other words, he ought not to exercise oversight because it's his job. He ought not to shepherd God's people because, well, this is what I signed up for and this is what I've got to do. Well, this is just the burden I bear as a minister of the gospel.

[28 : 14] I'm going to have to shepherd God's people and I'm going to have to help them through all of their problems and help them deal with all this stuff. Peter says that won't do. That will not do for a shepherd. That will not do for a leader of my people.

The leaders of my people will not do it because they have to. They won't do it because they feel that they're compelled to by their commitment. They will do it willingly. They will do it joyfully.

They will do it because they want to do it. In fact, when Paul lists the qualifications for an elder, he begins by saying if anyone desires the office of an overseer, there's got to be something you want.

You have to want to do this. You can't just stumble into the ministry or you can't get halfway into your ministry, halfway into your career of shepherding God's people and then grow tired and weary of it and simply continue to do it because that's what you do.

That's your job. That's your task. He says, don't do it under compulsion. Do it. Do it willingly and joyfully and you should have that expectation of me and every other elder that we will ever have. [29 : 21] You ought to have an expectation that we will do our jobs even though they may be at times, that job may be filled with pain and tears. Nevertheless, we will do it willingly and joyfully.

It is a delight to shepherd God's people and if it ceases to be a delight, we cease to be qualified for the tasks that God's called us to do.

So not under compulsion but willingly and then secondly, not for shameful gain but eagerly. That's not complicated. We shouldn't do the work of ministry.

We shouldn't be pastors. We shouldn't oversee the church so that we can earn a paycheck and we shouldn't make it our goal to earn an increasingly larger paycheck as we go along.

There's absolutely nothing wrong with a church paying a pastor who works at it full time. In fact, Paul says that some shepherds, some elders are worthy of double honor.

[30 : 22] In other words, that means some of the elders do need to be paid because they give themselves over in a full time way to preaching and teaching and preparing to teach and preach such that they cannot maintain a second job all the time.

So there's nothing wrong with paying a pastor for the job that they do but when a pastor begins to do the job simply for the pay or when they begin to do the things they do, try to grow a larger congregation, try to gain more people simply so that they can increase their own status and their own salary, Peter says that's shameful gain.

That should never be a motive that factors in to why a pastor does what he does. Every pastor, I can tell you we all, those of us who are called to do this full time, we want to make a living at it. We want to support our family. We want to be able to pay our bills. We want to be able to pay our mortgage. We don't want to live in a shack while the rest of the church is living in nice homes. We don't want that.

We want our children not to have holes in their clothes all the time. I can tell you we want to make a living at what God's called us to do and there's nothing wrong with wanting to supply your family with what they need but Peter says when that becomes the focus and when gaining more and earning more becomes the focus for a pastor, it's unacceptable.

[31 : 55] He says that on the other hand we should do things eagerly. In fact, that's a word that's difficult to translate. This word translated eagerly because it's a word that doesn't occur so far as we know anywhere else in Greek literature.

New Testament's written in Greek, ancient Greek and we cannot, scholars have not been able to find the word that Peter uses here anywhere else which makes it particularly difficult to translate. It's made up of two separate words that mean basically to or with passion or zeal.

And so we think, translators think the idea here is that rather than doing a task to gain money we ought to do a task because it's exciting to us because we have a passion for it.

We're eager to do the job regardless of the pay, regardless of the money that we receive. We're eager to do it no matter what. That ought to be the heart of a pastor.

That ought to be the heart of an elder, even those who are paid. Never to do the job simply so we can earn the paycheck. To do the job because we love to do the job. In the middle of the pain, in the middle of the tears, in the middle of experiencing heartache along with God's people, the shepherd who loves the sheep will do it all because he really loves the sheep.

[33 : 11] He loves the sheep. And then thirdly, third motive here is not domineering over those in your charge or not lording it over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

So here we come to address this issue of authority. Yes, there is genuine authentic authority that is possessed by the pastors of a church. No, that does not give them the right to lord over and to domineer over those who are under their charge.

The shepherd does not have the right to beat the sheep and force them to go where he wants them to go. The shepherd leads the sheep. The shepherd guides the sheep. The shepherd protects the sheep. And the shepherd goes before the sheep so that the sheep might follow him.

If there is a dark and dangerous path ahead of us as a church, I have to walk down that path before you. The other elders will have to walk down that path before you and lead you down that path.

We can't stand and say, church, go that way, but I am going to hang out here, keep an eye on you, make sure everything goes okay while you are headed down that road. We walk down that path.

We clear the wolves out of the way.

[34 : 21] We make sure it's as safe as we can make it. And then, when the hidden dangers come out of the shadows, we jump into action. We counsel. We sit at the bedside of.

We cry with. We pray with. We love upon the people of God. We do whatever we need to do in the midst of danger, in the midst of cancer and sickness and divorce and all these things that can happen in the course of the lives of God's people.

We walk beside, we walk in front of, and we protect. That's what a pastor is called to do and to be. To never look at our authority as an excuse to order you to go somewhere, but to look at the authority that God has given us to call you to follow us where God is moving the church to go. That's what a pastor, that's what an elder ought to be doing. And we as the church should never settle for anything less than that.

You are, of course, not expecting perfect pastors, perfect elders. You're not expecting that every decision that we make will always be the right decision. You're not expecting that every path that we lead you down will turn out to be the perfect path and just the right path that we should have gone down.

[35 : 42] You're not expecting that. It's not perfection and executing and perfection of making decisions that you ought to be looking for. What you ought to be looking for is the heart and the motive and the goals.

And if you can see and discern that those things are in the right place, then you'll see and you'll discern men that you can wholeheartedly follow.

That's the goal. That's the job of every shepherd, of every elder, every leader of God's people. And then beyond that, there's the ultimate goal.

There is in verse 5, verse 4, excuse me, when the chief shepherd appears, Jesus, you pastors who have followed and who have led in this way and who have had these motives, you pastors will receive the unfading crown of glory.

You see, the goal here is not to build a big church. It's not what it is. The crown of glory is not a large congregation. The crown of glory is not a big salary. The crown of glory is not having other people in other churches know your name and buy your books and go to your seminars and attend conferences where you're the highlighted speaker.

[37 : 04] It's wonderful that we have great pastors who've been elevated to those platforms and can teach other pastors. But if the goal of a pastor is to gain some sort of prominence, his goal is off.

If his goal is to build a large congregation, his goal is off. The goal, the ultimate goal of a pastor like all God's people is to receive on that day from the chief shepherd the unfading crown of glory.

That's what we should want. Now I know of course when you have to sit as a church and hear about hear a message about the messenger it can be at times a little bit difficult for you to see exactly how all of this applies to you.

Other than you can now take these things and you can look and you can scrutinize me you can scrutinize any other elders that we have in the future to see you have a more complete understanding of this you can see whether we meet those and that's helpful for you I think.

But Peter doesn't leave it at that. Peter does turn and address the rest of the church. He says in verse 5 he says now likewise you who are younger be subject to the elders.

[38 : 11] Notice those of you who are not elders the younger be subject to them be willing to let them lead submit to their God given authority over you and then not only that clothe yourselves all of you with humility toward one another for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Let me offer to you two reasons why I think that these instructions concerning pastors are really really important for you. The first is because your ability to submit to those in authority over you hangs upon whether or not you possess the kind of humility that Peter says you should be clothed with.

So that a good test of whether or not you are a humble person is whether or not you're able to submit to God's leaders over you. It does not matter if you always agree with those leaders.

There are going to be parameters. You're never going to do anything in disobedience to God's word no matter what I or another pastor might say to you. So there are parameters but there are going to be a lot of decisions made by pastors that you don't necessarily agree with.

You don't necessarily agree with some of the administrative changes and things that happen and the ways in which things are done and some of the decisions that don't affect the gospel, that don't

affect our core beliefs but you might not agree with all the decisions and whether or not you are humble enough to submit to those decisions reveals whether or not you're humble at all.

[39 : 45] Will you be able to live within the body of Christ deferring to others, loving others, showing your concern and care for others?

Will you be humble enough to put others first? Well here's a test. Are you humble enough to submit to the leaders that God has put over you? This matters because it's a test of whether or not you possess the kind of humility that God requires.

But there's another I think even bigger reason why this matters. And it's found in the first little word of this paragraph. So. So I exhort the elders among you.

Or we could translate that therefore. Therefore I exhort the elders among you. Now if you're reading the NIV for whatever reason they dropped that word they shouldn't have.

But if you're reading in the New American Standard or if you're reading in the King James or the ESV you'll see either so or then or therefore. It's a transitional word and it's very important because it connects everything that Peter is saying here about elders to everything that he just said in verses 12 through 19 about suffering that we considered last week.

[40 : 57] Because we know we've seen throughout this letter a great emphasis upon suffering. That we if we are faithful followers of Christ we are going to suffer whether that's in small ways like social ostracism and not receiving the advancement at work because of our stance for Christ or whether it's something big like actual real physical persecution that happens to believers all over the world.

We know we've seen this over and over going to suffer. And if you're going to remain faithful to Christ through suffering and if the church is going to remain together as a body we are going to need godly shepherds over us.

You understand that? Do you understand that God hasn't simply set up a leadership structure in the church because he likes things to be neat and orderly? He set up a leadership structure in the church because we need leaders?

Because sheep need shepherds? Because we're going to go through dark valleys and we're going to need shepherds to come alongside us and help us and pray for us and protect us and warn us against false teachers and warn us against spiritual dangers?

that you're going to need this? You need elders? One of the reasons that I'm so desiring to have other elders is because I need shepherds.

[42 : 21] I need elders. I need other pastors who can come alongside me because shepherds, shepherds, shepherds, shepherds, that's hard to say, because we lead one another and we guide one another and we help one another because we too are members of the church and we need the benefit of all of those other shepherds.

We need this as a church. We need leaders. You need this. You need spiritual leadership and protection in your life and to think otherwise is to set yourself up for failure in your walk with Christ because you're not attending to the means that he provides for you and it's to reveal the lack of humility that Peter commands.

You know, God has given us a lot of means, means to be used to further our walk with Christ. One of those is the word.

We need the word. We need to spend time in the word. If you don't spend time in the word of God, don't expect to grow. Don't expect to become spiritually mature. You need the Holy Spirit leading you and guiding you.

If you're not submitting to the spirit on a daily basis and being filled with the spirit continually and regularly and guided by him, then don't expect to grow in your walk with Christ. Don't expect to be much more mature five years from now than you are now in Christ.

[43 : 39] Don't expect that to happen. If you don't spend time in prayer, don't expect to grow spiritually. Don't expect to God to do great things in your lives and the lives of the people that you care about if you're not spending time in prayer.

God has provided us with a number of means by which he works within our lives to change us and to transform us and to perform the miraculous in us and among us.

One of the means that he has provided is the church. And one of the means that he's provided within the church are elders, shepherds, overseers.

And if you want to experience all the growth that God has laid out for you, if you want to experience all that he has for you, one of the means that you need to attend to is recognizing, giving thanks for, and submitting to the elders of your church.

Which means, of course, that you need to be in a church, really vitally connected to a body of believers. I said in October we're going to do this membership class.

[44 : 52] We don't do that because it's something that I just kind of like to do and it's kind of a neat way to get people connected in. It is those things, but that's not why we do a membership class. We do a membership class because I'm convinced from God's word that God's people need to be covenantally committed to other believers.

What I mean by that is we need more than just a passing acquaintance with other Christians if we want to grow in our walk with Christ. We need to be really connected to a group of believers. We need to be in contact with them. We need to be accountable to them and they accountable to us. We need that. That's what I mean by church membership. I don't mean your name on a roll. I don't mean your name on a piece of paper. I don't mean that you get the right to vote at meetings. All those things may be true. I don't put your name on paper anymore. I put it in a computer. All those things may be true, but that's not what we mean by church membership.

It's certainly not what I mean when I talk about covenant membership. What I mean is that you need to be connected to a local church. And a part of that need is it's only within the local church that you find the real kinds of spiritual leaders that God has appointed for your care and watching over you.

[46 : 08] You can find teachers on the radio and you can find teachers on the television and you can read books and some of those things will be great spiritual guidance. Some of them will be terrible. None of them appointed by God is one of the primary means that he uses ministries to sanctify his people.

There's no parachurch ministries in the New Testament. I'm not saying they're wrong. I'm not saying they're bad. They're just not the primary means that God provides. God doesn't say find a great teacher.

Nothing. He doesn't say that. He tells us to be connected to the church and submissive to the elders within that church. And when that happens and when you realize the value of that, you will have been provided with a powerful means to endure through suffering and to grow in Christ.

Let's pray. I'll confess that it is strange to preach a message in which I exhort the church to submit to the pastors when I'm the only pastor.

I'll confess, Lord, that that feels odd to me. But it also feels biblical. It feels right because it's in your word.

[47 : 33] I do pray, Father, that you would soon provide us with other pastors, with other elders. But in the meantime, we have commands from your word to obey, not to delay, not to wait, but to obey.

I pray that you would enable your people to recognize that it is a good thing to have leaders over them. And it is a sweet and precious thing to have shepherds who will walk with them.

Maybe, of course, Father, there are those among us who could not legitimately call themselves sheep. That is, they don't have the chief shepherd Jesus as their master and lord and leader and savior.

And so I pray that they would not move from this place. They would not move on in life until they've trusted in him and confessed their sins and begun to follow him.

help us, help us as your people to attend to all the means that you provided for our good and for your glory.

[48 : 55] I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.