

Sermon: Relationships and Responsibilities Within the Church

Text: I Peter 5:1-14

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Introduction: I was baptized at eight years old (probably a little young) and have been a member of Christ's kingdom for over 50 years. I have watched elders from the perspective of a member and of a minister. I have seen wonderful godly men and I have seen men who were not qualified to hold the office of elder in Christ's Church. Peter knew that good leaders make all the difference in a positive way, but bad leaders can destroy what Jesus died for.

There was a reason we sang about being spiritual soldiers and being at war this morning. I especially remember two elders from my past: Harold Edminson and Lawrence Kepler. Both these men served in WWII; both were wounded while serving our country. In Church both men stood up for the truth and gave their lives in service to a more important cause - the cause of Christ and His Church.

As a young man, Harold made a very profound impression on me and I am certain he played a role in my going into the ministry. I met Mr. Kepler in 2002 and I saw him and another elder by the name of Henry Johnson stand with me against evil men and women during a very difficult time. Lawrence Kepler and his wife Ida Mae gave Teresa and I a check for \$1000.00 to help with our move up to Beaver back in 2004. Lawrence is now in his mid-80's and still fighting the good fight. Mr. Kepler has never forgotten who his commander is.

I. A Good Elder Will Have Healthy Relationships (vv. 1-4).

I Peter 5:1-4 (NIV) ¹To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ²Be 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; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; ³not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

You might remember in John's gospel the risen Christ asking Peter a probing question:

John 21:15 (NIV) ¹⁵When 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."

Peter's denial had been part of Jesus' suffering! Whenever we act as if we do not know Jesus, it affects our relationship with the Father. And Peter is saying he is a fellow-elder like those he is addressing and knows both the pain of denial and the joy of reconciliation. There really is no room for talk like "head or chief elder in a New Testament-patterned church. Peter does want, however, for these fellow-elders to evaluate their ministries as he had had to do.

If a person is going to be a good elder, he must have a healthy relationship:

A. With God

An elder must be *willing* to serve and desire of the office. Paul had even told Timothy this (I Timothy 3:1**). We all know service that is compelled is never as good as that which is offered freely in love.**

Money should never be a motivator to do ministry for God even though some elders are paid and full-time vocational ministers. If one is truly called by God to do ministry, there is energy and a pursuit of excellence. If it is only a "job," well, then you know how that is, too. An elder should sense God's call on his life.

John Calvin points out three possible traps here for those wishing to lead the flock of God: sloth, i.e., laziness; desire for gain, and lust for power. -(Grudem, I Peter, p. 188)

Before a man becomes an elder he needs to check his relationship with God. This will help him develop a healthy relationship:

B. With those in the Church

An elder should be very transparent. He should be willing to have people see him living for Christ. An elder, though, never should take the attitude that he is superior to others or better than those for whom he has been given responsibility.

**If a man is right with God, he can love others because he has felt loved.
If he has grown to appreciate the grace of God, he can extend grace to others.
If he knows he has been forgiven, he can show mercy to others.**

And people will pick up on genuine faith and commitment to God that is shown in the care of His people.

Do you think Peter's attitude changed after Jesus was raised from the dead and Peter was restored to leadership? It was Peter who gave the first sermon on Pentecost, not the beloved and faithful disciple, John. That's grace!

II. A Good Elder Will Carry Out His Responsibilities (vv. 5-9).

I Peter 5:5-9 (NIV) ⁵Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” ⁶Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. ⁸Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

In the culture of the New Testament a young man was, in most circles, anyone under 40. The Greek word (*geron*) was someone over 40. In the Jewish mind, anyone under 40 was really not worth listening to. There *can be* great wisdom with age, if we learn from God and his discipline.

I believe Peter had learned some lessons along the way, and he was simply trying to save others who were younger the pain that comes from failure and sin. Young people do not always want or accept the counsel of the aged, but Peter cares enough to share his life with others.

A person does not need to wait until he/she is older, though, to:

A. Be an example for others

Here is Peter’s advice:

Be submissive to those older (wiser) that have been given responsibility for you by God. One of the reasons our world is in such a mess is there is little respect today for anyone or anything that is old. And be submissive....wives to husbands (Ephesians 5:21-22), citizenry to government leaders (Romans 13:1); and here members in churches to elders.

Today, it seems everyone is out for themselves. The financial community and banking entities are in trouble because of greed, everyone out for themselves. And I know that respect needs to be earned, but Peter says if someone loves you and cares for you like Jesus does the church, that person is worth listening to and obeying.

Be humble, not proud. God can humble you if you are not willing to take on that attitude for yourself. Only Proverbs 3:34 is quoted in the I Peter 5 text, but listen to the adjoining verses.

Proverbs 3:33-35 (NIV) ³³The LORD’S curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous. ³⁴He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble. ³⁵The wise inherit honor, but fools he holds up to shame.

I want you to know God will take care of you in everything! Don't worry about the future, that is also in God's hands.

In the meantime, before Jesus comes again for His Church we need to:

be self-controlled. The KJV reads "sober." Peter had used this word in chapter 4 and it is in the context of the end of time.

I Peter 4:7 (NIV) ⁷The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.

In the "last days" there will be trouble. We need to remain faithful so as not to lose our reward. And in this meantime we need to:

be alert. Why? **I Peter 5:8b** - Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. "Confidence in God must not lead to slackness; the spiritual warfare which Christians (they) wage demands vigilance" (Beare).

Resist the devil. - Literally here *resist* means to stand up against. We are in a conflict, a war that can be deadly for those who do not pay attention spiritually.

Standing firm in the faith. This may mean by God's help and our belief in his eternal care, but this is no passive resistance. In **Ephesians 6** Paul talks about the weapons for this battle: truth, righteousness, the gospel, the word of God, and prayer.

B. Teach life-lessons to others

It is one thing to have saving information; it is another to share it. Peter cannot make others live the life they should, yet he can warn them of the dangers ahead. He cares enough for the church to say difficult things in order to save them.

There is a place in the life of the church to share testimony as to how Jesus has saved us. Peter also wants them to know that their experiences of suffering, persecution and temptation are not unique, but common to the life of a believer.

Yet in the midst of trouble there is good news coming.

III. A Good Elder Will See Results in Others (vv. 10-11).

I Peter 5:10-11 (NIV) ¹⁰And 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. ¹¹To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Elders will see people:

A. Made whole (restored).

Peter had seen many people struggle and suffer only to be restored by Christ. He had been a primary example of that very process. It would not be out of place to suggest the word “save” as an alternate understanding for “restore” in [verse 10](#). It is through being saved/restored to God that we find peace even in this world.

The word translated “restore” (καταρτιζω) means “to put in order, to mend, to reestablish, to make whole. The word could be used in a medical sense of setting a broken bone or of repairing and refitting a damaged vessel.” - Rienecker, p. 766

And in the same way, Peter, after being restored by Christ, was stronger and made more useful to the Kingdom.

It is true, isn't it, that through suffering and God's help we can be:

B. Strengthened

We cannot fight “the fight” solo, and that is why Peter had help in his ministry. Elders do not fight for us as much as *with* us, against our common enemy, the Devil. And we do not struggle alone; God is with us. The Greek name for the Holy Spirit (Paraklete) means “one who is called alongside” as Helper, Comforter, and Advocate.

The fact we have “Assurance of strength and victory is another motivation for continuing to resist evil” and live for Jesus. *Mastering the Basics*, Serendipity, p. 63

Conclusion: I would like to make a contemporary correction on the eldership. Being a shepherd for God's flock is never about ruling, authority over, or dominating someone. It is all about love, care, and sacrifice while submitting to the will of God and the best interest of others. We can not be leaders alone and in isolation. We walk together toward heaven.

[I Peter 5:12-14 \(NIV\)](#) ¹²With the help of Silas ([comment about Peter's Greek](#)), whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it. ¹³She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark ([comment about Paul's relationship](#)). ¹⁴Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.