

Series: **Living Under Pressure** – week 17

CDOBC – beginning on 2/7/16

Today's Title: "How to Lead God's People"

June 12, 2016 ~ 1 Peter 5:1-5

OBJECTIVE: To define the character and role of church elders / leadership.

Opening Prayer

To those in the community and those who attended, the church appeared to be perfectly happy and healthy. They gathered each Sunday and worshiped the Lord, and the congregation seemed to be very unified.

They were blessed to have a pastor for a number of years who faithfully led them from God's Word, but after many years in ministry and failing health, the pastor retired.

So, the church began to look for a new pastor.

After many months had passed and a few candidates were interviewed, the elders and the church membership agreed on the man they should hire.

For a time, everyone was happy, even though they missed their former minister, they realized he could no longer fulfill the weekly duties of the office, and they began to embrace the new pastor.

But over time, the church began to lose some of its joy. At first it was imperceptible...but over a few years it became obvious something had gone wrong.

The new pastor was not as faithful to God's Word as the previous pastor.

The elders were uncertain how to handle the drift away from God's Word, so they ignored the obvious signs of truth being compromised.

The people became bitter and angry and began to gossip about the pastor and the elders.

After 6 years, the drop in attendance was glaring along with the offerings, and by the 8th year they could no longer afford to pay the pastor's salary...or any pastor's salary.

The pile of unpaid bills was getting higher, the maintenance of the facilities were ignored due to insufficient funds, and the community the church was in could sense something was not right with the church.

In year #9 the elders called a meeting of the members and told them the situation had become so dire they could no longer keep the doors of the church open. There was only one option left...they needed to dissolve what was left of the church and sell the property.

The faithful, vibrant church was no longer a faithful and vibrant witness to the community of the Gospel of Christ. It was difficult to diagnose when it began, but hindsight brings clarity. The drift away from God's Word was slow and imperceptible to most and they had become sick as a church in the most gradual of ways.

Looking back, it was easy to see for the last 7 years they had stopped sharing the Gospel and helping believers grow in their faith. They had become so sick they could only look inward and try to find healing...but they never could.

This story is fiction...but it has the truth of way too many churches behind it.

Too many churches across America have this exact story - maybe not the same time-line it took to close their doors...but it's the same story.

- The teaching and preaching drifted away from God's truth - and the elders failed to protect the people from it.
- The church drifted away from its divine mission.
- The people stopped following and supporting the leaders...and instead of holding the leaders responsible to lead according to God's Word, they began to fight and resist the leadership.

You might have first-hand experience of this sad reality...maybe you've lived through a church's slow death. Maybe you've attended a church which started to drift away from God's Word and you left early in their doctrinal slide...and years later you've heard they have continued to their drift from God's Word or the church has closed its doors.

When Jesus said (**Matt. 16:18**) the gates of hell will not prevail against the church, He didn't mean local churches would

never close their doors, He meant the universal church - the invisible church will never be defeated by the evil one!

Christian...there are many things which can destroy and damage a church - but two specific things which can take a church down a road of destruction and pain are:

1) Leadership who lead apart from the truth and grace of God's Word

and

2) Church members who aren't involved and don't choose leadership who meet the bible's standards for church leaders.

Allow me to begin by talking about church membership. In today's culture, many are biased against institutions or organizations. There is an accepted axiom in the culture which states institutions and organizations can't be trusted...they are corrupt or soon will be corrupt...and the 'individual' becomes nothing but a number. Of course, this does happen - but to reject all institutions and organizations would be foolish.

The Church is an institution *instituted* by God. It's something He ordained to be the conduit of the Gospel to the world. He ordained the Church to be the visible body of Christ to proclaim the gospel and help Christians live out their high-calling in this life.

The Church is the bride of Christ - and the Church has a job to do...a mission given to us by Jesus Himself: To reach

people for Christ and to help them grow in their faith. (Matt. 28:19-20)

The Church is also an organism...a living organism...the living body of Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit of God and the loving Word of God.

The Church is also an organization. Merriam-Webster defines 'organization' as: *a company, business, club, etc., that is formed for a particular purpose*

I'm not sure why organizations have been painted with such a broad brush of skepticism, but the Church has certainly been formed - and it's organized by God for a specific purpose!!!!

In addition to the anti-institution / anti-organization mindset, many modern-day followers of Christ have resisted church membership for a variety of other reasons.

- Sometimes they've been members in the past and the church treated them poorly.
- Sometimes they were abused or treated with disrespect by church leaders.
- Sometimes they didn't agree with something which was done in the church.
- Sometimes they don't think the church will accept them as members...they think their life is too sinful.

There are all sorts of reasons some have resisted becoming members. Whatever the reason...let me tell you why none of

those reasons should keep you from church membership in a biblical and healthy church: AS A CHRISTIAN YOU HAVE THE INDWELLING PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND YOUR PRAYERS, INSIGHTS, AND MINISTRY ARE NEEDED AND YOUR WISDOM IS NEEDED TO MAKE SURE ELDERS AND LEADERS ARE CHOSEN WHO MEET THE BIBLICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR LEADERSHIP.

It's the membership in a local church who recognizes those in the church who have been gifted by God as elders and leaders. Church membership is important - and one of the important tasks for church members is:

2) Choosing elders and leaders who meet the bible's requirements for those offices.

This is so important for a local church. If the church membership is faithful to choose biblically qualified leaders, the church will be protected from suicidal drifts away from God's Word.

We believe in what's called "the priesthood of the believer" - and we have a congregational system of church governance. ***This means*** we have a high view of each believer because they are "in Christ" and they have the indwelling Holy Spirit in their life.

It means the membership has the spiritual ability to recognize and choose certain people (elders, deacons, etc.) to have the awesome responsibility to shepherd and lead the church.

This also means the members of our church vote on specific issues (budgets, hiring pastors, approving leadership).

However, the priesthood of the believer and congregational governance does not mean every member is involved with every single decision. Most of the ongoing, day-to-day decisions are the responsibility of the elders and other church leaders.

If the membership chooses biblically qualified leaders, the church will stay focused on the God-given, God-ordained purpose for the church - to reach people for Christ and help them grow in their faith.

But... If the membership chooses leaders who don't meet the bible's requirements for church leaders, then the church will drift away from the truth - drift away from the mission - and the church will begin moving toward death.

- I don't want our church to be a statistic.
- I don't want our church to drift away from God's truth and grace.
- I don't want our church to drift away from our God-given mission.
- I don't want our church to abandon Christ in a culture which is violently opposed to Christ.

- I don't want our church to ever lose its first love - our love for Christ and His Word.

Do you feel the same way?

Do you want to protect our church from the dangers so many other churches have fallen prey to?

Turn / tap to **1 Peter 5:1-5**

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:

2 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; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

5 Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Peter is obviously giving direction to those who are elders in the churches - but this instruction is helpful not only for those in positions of leadership, but for the entire church as well. After all, how can the membership of the church know how to recognize and choose leadership unless they know what the bible says about church leaders?

Let's first answer the question: Who / What are the elders?

Roots in the O.T. - **Exodus 18:14-26** - Moses' father-in-law gives some Godly advice to the leader of the Hebrew

people. He tells Moses he can't do this alone and it's not good for him to do this alone - he needs other men - “men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe” (Ex. 18:21) to help him lead the people.

In the N.T. we see specific titles used to describe the function of elders in the church. We see various forms of these words in our passage today.

Presbuteros - Presbyter / Elder

Poimainó (poy-mah'-ee-no) - shepherd / pastor

Episkopos - (n) bishop / overseer (Acts 20:28 - used interchangeably with *presbuteros* [elder - Acts 20:17])

In the N.T. every church had a plurality of elders. There was never a single, ruling elder - for both positive and negative reasons.

- Multiple elders protect the church from heresy and elders share their wisdom and experience when discussing issues.
- Multiple elders help the church maintain a balanced view of Scripture and prevent an overemphasis on pet doctrines.
- Multiple elders give continuity to the church when there is a change in key leaders.
- Multiple elders have a variety of spiritual gifts which provides thoughtful and insightful leadership.

Men...if you believe God has called you and gifted you to be an elder in the church, this is a wonderful thing.

1 Timothy 3:1

“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.”

But know this...it's a position of servanthood - and if you serve as an elder in the church, God will judge you more strictly because of your position of leadership - and Peter gives two positive charges for you to fulfill your responsibility as an elder. The first is to:

Shepherd the flock of God vs. 2-3

“shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight”

“shepherd” - *Poimainó* (poy-mah'-ee-no) - “exercising oversight” (*episkopeo* - verb form)

Shepherding involves watching over - giving oversight - this is with an eye to both protection and provision. Elders protect “the flock of God” (local church) from false teaching and relational problems - and they provide the church with the truth and grace of God's Word.

Shepherd with a willing and eager heart.

This does not mean the elder must always be bubbling over with the giddiness of a schoolgirl. There are certainly times when we have an elder meeting and I'm tired...and I don't want to spend 2-3 hours in a meeting. This is the reality of the flesh!

However, I go to the meeting - and in my heart I'm eager to meet with the elders of this church and to pray with them - and to consider the spiritual ministry and spiritual direction of this church.

When giving instructions and describing how something should be...it's often helpful to not only define what it should be, but also what it shouldn't be. This is exactly what Peter does for us...he not only tells the elders to shepherd the flock of God and watch over them with a willing and eager heart, but he also tells them 3 things not to do.

Don't shepherd under compulsion

The elder/shepherd serves because they want to - because God has laid it on their heart to serve. They feel compelled by God to shepherd God's people - not compelled by other people or some other motive.

Paul shared in his writing his eagerness and joy at serving the Church of God. He said in **1 Cor. 9:16** "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"

In **Romans 1:15** Paul said he was "eager to preach the gospel". An elder shouldn't serve because nobody else will serve. An elder shouldn't serve because he is being pressured to serve by people in the church.

These would be descriptions of serving "under compulsion".

Instead, he should serve willingly - with joy - with a sense of God calling him to serve.

An elder should be cheerful about their service in the same way all of us should be cheerful givers (**2 Cor. 9:7**).

Don't shepherd for *financial gain*

Elders should not serve in order to earn money - and they shouldn't use their position in the church to steal or coerce money from the sheep. It's "shameful gain" (ESV) or "greedy" (NIV) when so-called preachers say "*For a donation of \$10.00 or more, I will pray for you.*" In **1 Timothy 3** and **Titus 1**, one of the biblical requirements for elders is "not a lover of money". The elder's motivation should not be money or materialism. However, this does not negate some elders should be paid by the church. The N.T. teaching is clear the elders who preach / teach God's Word are worthy of compensation - and those who do it well should be paid well (**1 Cor. 9:7-14; 1 Timothy 5:17-18**)

Don't shepherd to have *power* and *control*

The leadership the elders give the church should be pleasant, not painful - optimistic, not oppressive. Leading with a harsh or heavy hand is not permitted. Jesus gave clear instruction in **Matthew 20:25-28** as He taught how leadership in the church should be different from leadership in the world. Greatness in the church is through serving, not through power-plays and domineering and autocratic leadership styles.

Elders must be an example vs. 2-3

Give the church a pattern of life to follow - to emulate. Elders and church leaders lead with their life - not just with their work in the church.

If people spend time with you...does your daily life help them see what a Christian life is supposed to be?

Too often we compartmentalize our life - and separate our Christianity from the daily activities of life - and we put on our Christianity when we're with people from church or when we're at church.

The Apostle Paul understood how his life needed to be a model for others to watch and learn from.

1 Cor. 11:1 "Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ."

As an elder or church leader...your life must be an example for others to learn from. People in and out of the church should learn from watching you what difference Christ makes in your life.

The reward for elders vs. 4

"And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

Elders don't serve for financial gain or power - but they will receive a reward for faithful service to Christ and His church.

Jesus will reward those who lead the church well

(according to the standards listed in these verses)

Leading well is not only related to results - but the love and care *as well as* the results or numbers (see Matt. 25:14-30 - Parable of the talents)

“you will receive the unfading crown of glory” -

“unfading” is a Greek term which refers to a flower - the Amaranth flower which never seems to wither.

Earthly crowns will rust and tarnish - the olive wreath for Olympic champions would dry-up and crumble - but the reward for elders who serve well will last for eternity.

Peter was one of the 3 disciples who were with Jesus on what's called “The Mount of Transfiguration” (Luke 9:28-36). Peter saw the glory of Christ - and he understands the amazing quality of Christ's glory.

Paul said in **1 Corinthians 9:24**

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.”

It's hard work to be an elder - to be a leader in the church - but you will be rewarded for your faithful service.

Follow the elders of the church vs. 5

5 Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Those in the church must not only be aware of what the bible says about church leaders and able to recognize

those God has called to leadership in the church, but they must also submit to the leaders in the church.

This requires a willingness of the heart - a humbling of the heart to follow and obey the church leaders.

Farmers feed the cattle - they put the food in the feeding troughs or in large piles in the field.

Do you realize shepherds don't feed sheep...but they bring them to places where they can feed themselves?

Shepherds make sure to lead the sheep to safe pastures where they can feed themselves and bring them to ponds or streams where they can safely get a drink.

So the obvious question is: As a sheep...are you feeding on good food? Are you taking the responsibility seriously to feed on the Word of God which is brought before you on a regular basis in this church?

Flock...are you following?

Apply it...

Pray for your leaders (elders, church leaders)

Elders...lead according to God's Word

Commit to church membership