

BE SHEPHERDS OF GOD'S FLOCK

1 Peter 5:1-14

Key Verse: 5:2

“Be 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; not greedy for money, but eager to serve....”

In chapter 4, we learned how to live for the glory of God. It is to live not by sinful human desires, but rather to participate in the sufferings of Christ. Then the glory of God rests on us.

In chapter 5, Peter, as a final appeal to his fellow Christians, talks about basic obligations between elders and young men, so that Christ may govern his church according to his will, and so that Satan may not creep into the Christian fellowship. Confucius taught about fundamental principles in human obligations between elders and young men. He taught that subjects should obey their superiors. But he did not mention the responsibilities of rulers and senior people. So, rulers and elderly people abused their traditional privileges excessively. As a result, senior people were corrupted by abusing their privileges. And young people became habitual, like a factory boy in a communist country. Confucius' teachings were one-sided. But Peter talks first to elders, and then to young people about what kind of people they ought to be.

First, a witness of Christ's sufferings (1). Look at verse 1. "To 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." In this verse Peter introduces himself as a fellow elder who is a witness of Christ's sufferings. In this part, the word "elder" doesn't necessarily mean an officer in a church, but a senior person who is spiritually mature in Jesus Christ. Timothy was a young man, but he was recognized as an elder in the early church (1Ti 4:12-16). One young missionary does not have a moustache or a bushy beard. But he has been recognized as an elder in our community, for he has such a compassionate shepherd heart that he cried with a loud voice to solve his sheep's marriage problem.

When Peter had lived by the flesh he was full of fancy dreams. He never liked to hear the word "suffering." Right after Peter's

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confession of Jesus as the Christ of God, Jesus told him about his suffering, death and resurrection (Mk 8:31). At that moment, Peter was distressed by the word "suffering." Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him not to talk any more about suffering.

With his mind, Peter understood the work of the Messiah. Jesus would suffer much and die on the cross as the Lamb of God for the sin of the world, and rise again on the third day in glory. But Peter did not accept the Messianic work of Jesus in his heart, for he was an earthly man with human desires.

After Jesus' suffering, death on the cross and resurrection, and especially after his own denials of Jesus, not just one time, but three times, Peter despaired about himself, for he once said, "I will lay down my life for you" (Jn 13:37), but he had betrayed his Master Jesus. His dream about the earthly messianic kingdom that he thought Jesus would establish was broken. When he was in deep despair, the Risen Christ visited him and gave him the peace of God in his soul, saying, "Peace be with you!" (Jn 20:21a). Then Peter's spiritual eyes were opened and he could understand the meaning of Jesus' suffering and death. He could see the glorious Risen Jesus with his eyes. Then Peter could accept Jesus' sufferings as his very own. Now, he identifies himself as a witness of Christ's sufferings. After meeting the glorious Risen Jesus he was willing to suffer and die as a witness of Jesus' Messianic sufferings. Here we learn that we can not suffer before believing the glory of Jesus.

Peter was sure that Jesus suffered and died; but he rose again on the third day. He would come again, as he promised, to judge the living and the dead (1Pe 4:5). After that, he would reign forever with peace and justice. Peter was most happy to participate in the sufferings of Christ, because he was very conscious of sharing his power, honor and glory when Jesus comes again with his angels (Mt 24:30-31). At that time, Peter was in the midst of fiery trials and persecutions. But he was not crushed, because he had faith that Jesus comes again in glory.

Second, Elders! Be shepherds of God's flock (2-3a). Look at verse 2. "Be 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...." At that

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time, the early Christians scattered in the countries of Asia Minor because of persecution were in deep trouble. They needed to survive in the midst of fiery persecutions. In that situation, they had to take care of themselves first. If they were not selfish, how could they survive?

But what did Peter say to fellow elders? Look at verse 2a. "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care." Peter encouraged them that they should not be selfish. Instead they should be shepherds of God's flock first. Plainly speaking, the elders have to be responsible for the lives of faith of the flock of God under their care. Peter's admonishment reminds us of Jesus' words in John 10:11. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

According to verse 2, a shepherd is an overseer. The main role of an overseer is baby-sitting God's flock one by one. An overseer is the one who cares about his sheep in every way, especially about their moral life and inner spiritual life (2:25). Here, the overseer is the watchman--not like a factory supervisor, but like Jesus. Jesus said in John 10:3,4: "The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice." According to these verses, Jesus knows his sheep well. He calls them by name. He leads them, always going ahead of them to the green pasture.

"Be shepherds." This one phrase reveals Jesus' compassion. One day Jesus took his disciples for a retreat across the lake. When Jesus and his disciples got to the other side of the lake, all kinds of needy people were already there waiting for them. When Jesus saw the large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd (Mk 6:34). Jesus did not see them as burdensome people. To Jesus they were like little children without parents. One elder of our church borrowed \$10,000 and gave it to an unpredictable person to use for his need. Those who heard about this were shocked by his generosity. But we cannot deny that he is a man of Jesus' compassion.

We, as shepherds, should not carry out our task only with a sense of obligation, like a tutor or a janitor, but like a mother who cares

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for her lovely child. Look at verse 2b. "...not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be..." We also must not make use of sheep. There are many faithful sheep among God's flock. When we see these people we must serve them instead of overburdening them (2b-3). A shepherd must not help sheep according to his own idea. A shepherd must lead sheep in order to let them know Jesus, so that they will not perish, but have eternal life.

Third, be examples to the flock (3b-4). Look at verse 3b. "...but being examples to the flock." This plainly tells us that a shepherd must be exemplary. Sheep do not learn much from a shepherd's teaching, but they learn from his exemplary life of faith. We can see that this is true through the main characters in the Bible.

When we study Genesis 12:1-9 we are always greatly moved by Abraham. Abraham was an old man, 75 years old, with no son to be his heir. But when God called him to be the ancestor of faith, promising, "I will make you into a great, nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing," Abraham left as the Lord had told him. He left his home, not knowing where he was going. Humanly speaking, he appears to be a man of nonsense, especially to the eyes of smart modern people. But in the sight of God, Abraham was the example of absolute obedience toward God's promises. Because of his obedience, God could raise him as a source of blessing to all peoples of all nations (Ge 12:3b).

We remember the life of Moses. When he was proud through his 40 years of palace education, God could not use him. Moses also could not help his own people Israel. He only killed an Egyptian with one punch in a fight in order to side with an Israelite. But after receiving 40 years of humbleness training in the wilderness, he became a humble man. Then God could use him in the work of the Exodus, and in raising up a priestly nation from among the slavish people of Israel.

God's people in the wilderness training habitually complained. Once they wanted to eat delicious food. Then they began to complain, saying, "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost--also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic" (Nu 11:5). They had no inner spiritual strength to overcome their habit of complaining. This was the reason why God was training them in the

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wilderness to overcome their slave mentality. They did not know God's will for them. They were only bitter, and complained to Moses. Sometimes they were ready to stone Moses. But Moses took no offensive act against their rebellion. He would fall facedown on the ground and pray to God. Moses always humbled himself before the people of God. Numbers 12:3 says, "Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth." Moses is known as the greatest servant of God among men. It was not because of his palace education. He was great because of his exemplary life of faith with long-suffering patience. Moses' influence is still great, especially to all generals in history. God could use him as the deliverer of the Israelites when he was humble enough to embrace all kinds of people, even people deranged by slave mentality and by sin-sickness.

Paul was a murderous man when he lived according to his idealism (Ac 9:1). But he began to live by the Spirit of Jesus. Paul did his best to learn Jesus as a matter of life and death. Philippians 3:10 says, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death..." His desire to know Christ was a great influence to all the eminent Christian leaders in church history.

Peter's words, "...but being examples to the flock," are a warning to those who are not exemplary to their sheep. We must show our sheep how to struggle against sin. We must show our sheep that we are eager to love each other. We must show our sheep how we are willing to participate in the sufferings of Christ. Most of all we must show our sheep that we have inner joy which comes from the glory of Jesus. Look at verse 4. "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away" (4).

Fourth, Juniors! Humble yourselves (5-7). Look at verse 5. "Young 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.'" Young men are generally very proud and disobedient because they are spiritually immature. So Peter urges young men to discipline themselves in obedience. Young men are like wild horses. If they are not disciplined, they are useless to God, not to mention in the society. If young men are proud and disobedient, they cannot grow in the image of God. On the

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other hand, if young men are obedient and humble they can grow as spiritual giants. President Abraham Lincoln was a great man, not because he was president of the United States of America, but because he was humble. He never spoke evil of those who wounded him with their tongues. In order to learn humbleness, young men must clothe themselves with the humbleness of Jesus and imitate the humbleness of Jesus (5b).

But it is not at all easy for young men to learn humbleness. Peter says in verse 6, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time." When young men learn how to humble themselves, God will lift them up. On the other hand, when young men do not grow in humbleness, they are useless to God. In this, Jesus is the best example. Philippians 2:6-9 says, "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name..."

Another weakness of young men is fear, which comes from all kinds of anxiety. One philosopher said that the 20th century is the age of anxiety. Peter said in verse 7, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." Out of their proud minds, young men do not want to trust in God. They want to be their own men. Then they begin to swim in the swarm of anxiety. They must grow in trusting in God.

Fifth, resist the devil (8-11). Read verse 8. "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." The devil is very fearsome, like a roaring lion. He devours anybody. But he is nothing but a shadowy figure. He has no hands. He is just like the Philistine champion Goliath, who threatened all the armies of Israel until they were paralyzed by fear.

But we must know that the devil attacks us, not with a handgun, but with sweet, whispering words. When we hear the devil's sweet words we are easily seduced. Those who yield to the devil's sweet words become the devil's prey. They cannot be the children of God. Therefore, we must resist the devil. We should not go out with the devil for a drink.

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May God help us to be shepherds in this generation for God's flock. Let's read verse 2. "Be 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...." Let us pray to learn the humbleness and obedience of Jesus so that God can make us grow spiritually like oak trees.