

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

This chapter contains the final verses of Peter's first letter to scattered early Christians. As we have studied, persecution was ongoing. Most likely, Peter was martyred shortly after writing this letter. Persecutors intended to destroy Christianity. However, God used them to purify his church and to spread the gospel to the world. To do so, God equipped his church with the spiritual truth through Peter. Primarily, Christian leaders must live as shepherds of God's flock, following the example of Christ. In addition, we must all learn the humility of Christ. Then God will lead his church to victory.

I. Elders, be shepherds of God's flock (1-4)

In this part Peter speaks to elders. 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...." Who, then, are the elders? Someone may think this refers to older people. This is largely true. Yet, "elders" refers primarily to spiritual leaders in the church. When Paul pioneered a church, he appointed elders, prayerfully entrusting the local church to their care (Ac 14:23). Elders had to meet qualifications in regard to their moral and spiritual lives (1 Ti 3:1-7). Sometimes, a young person who was spiritually mature, like Timothy, became an elder, but this was unusual. Peter respected elders of the local church.

In addressing the elders, Peter did not use an imperative tone, as one speaking to subordinates. Peter did not consider himself "the Elder of the elders." Rather, he appealed as a fellow elder who shared responsibility and suffered together. Peter did not advocate "a one strong leader" model of church government. Rather, he recognized that leadership of the church is entrusted to a body of elders who pray and work together.

Though given humbly, Peter's appeal had great weight. It came from one who was "a witness of Christ's sufferings...." Peter had been with Jesus from the beginning of his ministry to the end. He had witnessed firsthand Jesus' life as a suffering servant for his people, especially his crucifixion and death (Ac 1:21-22; Lk 24:46-48). He saw how Christ loved God's sheep so much that he shed his blood on the

Be Shepherds of God's Flock

cross for them. When he testified to Christ's suffering, he did so with deep spiritual meaning. Furthermore, the word "witness" means "martyr" in Greek (martyrs). Peter was willing to give his life to testify about Christ, believing that he would also share in his glory.

Peter was not giving elders a pat on the back or a place of honor, but a solemn charge. Look at verse 2a. "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care...." Peter said this, passing on what he had learned from Jesus. In John's gospel, Jesus' final charge to Peter was, "Feed my sheep" (Jn 21:15-17). Then Jesus foretold that Peter's life would be a transformational journey from selfish to sacrificial, from carefree to obedient, and that it would end in martyrdom (Jn 21:18-19). Jesus concluded, "Follow me." In this way, Jesus commissioned Peter to be a shepherd just like Jesus. Now, Peter is charging the elders to be shepherds of God's flock that is under their care.

What, then, does it mean to be a shepherd of God's flock? First of all, it means to take care of God's flock with a life-giving spirit. A shepherd's first concern is not about himself, but about God and the flock of God. In times of fiery persecution and extreme hardship, he does not abandon God's sheep. He serves them always, remembering Christ, our good shepherd, who laid down his life for the sheep (10:11). Lottie Moon was a single woman missionary in China, right after the American Civil War. She led many Chinese people to Christ, including Dan Ho-bang, a Chinese man. One day Dan was tortured and nearly killed for his faith. On hearing about this, Lottie hurried to the place and confronted the persecutors. One of them raised a sword against her. She looked straight at him, with a calm assurance that if she died she would be with Jesus. Strangely, he lowered his sword and his hands fell limp at his sides. Then the entire crowd of persecutors lost their strength. Lottie rescued her sheep from danger and nursed him back to health. Later, he pioneered a lively and growing church. Many Chinese were profoundly moved that an American woman would give her life to save a Chinese man. They began to understand the sacrificial love of Jesus. In the end, Lottie died from starvation, refusing to eat, while the people of China were suffering from a famine. Closer to home, Dr. Joseph Chung carries out one-to-one Bible study with God's sheep with a life-giving spirit. Through his care, Edwin's family has been saved and are becoming shepherds for others.

Though a shepherd must have a life-giving spirit, most of his work is a routine of caring for the sheep. In order to care for the sheep, he must know the sheep: their character, tendencies, strengths and weaknesses, and everything about them (Jn 10:14). This comes from having God's mind toward them. It also comes from

Be Shepherds of God's Flock

spending time with them and observing them. He does not observe them dispassionately like a scientist, but out of love, in order to build them up and make them healthy and useful. Jesus knew Peter's great weakness, but he had hope for Peter to be the rock of his church. Jesus knew the Samaritan woman's past life in detail and how to help her. Only Jesus knows each of us fully. When we truly want to help another person, we should pray to understand them with Jesus' mind. Then we can help them. When Dr. Samuel Lee prayed for American young people intensively, he came to understand the broken hearts of children from broken homes and could help them as a spiritual father. In our times some American young women are having children in unusual ways, without marriage. We can understand that this comes from their desire for unconditional love and help them to come to Jesus, who alone can give this.

A shepherd's primary task in caring for sheep is to feed them with the word of God. The word of God convicts us of sin, points us to Christ for salvation, opens our eyes to heavenly hope, and creates in us right attitudes. What God's sheep need most is to be fed with the living word of God (2 Ti 4:2). For this, a shepherd must constantly grow in knowledge of God's word and especially in the mind and heart of Christ. He must prepare Bible study material for regular lessons. In addition, he must be ready in times of crisis. When a troubled soul calls at 3:00 a.m., he must have God's wisdom to share, just as a mother nurses her child in the middle of the night.

A shepherd must also give spiritual direction to God's sheep. Young sheep want to play, eat and sleep. But they need to set life direction and to use their time fruitfully. Shepherds must help them find their gifts and use them in ministry. Shepherds must help them find their talents and use them in vocation. Shepherds must pray for them to marry a person who knows Jesus, instead of following flesh desires. Shepherds must have a national prayer topic and world mission vision and help God's sheep to be good stewards of their nation and of the world.

Peter not only said, "Be shepherds...", he also taught us the attitude of a shepherd, saying, "not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be..." A willing heart is the heart of God who loves his sheep so dearly that he wants nothing more than to be with them and to serve them. God's heart rejoices over one lost sheep who comes back to him. The great privilege of a shepherd is to experience God's joy together with him. Peter also said, "...not greedy for money, but eager to serve..." Shepherds must never use sheep for their benefit, but serve with humility and sacrifice, for the glory of God, and the benefit of the sheep. Peter said, "...not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock."

Be Shepherds of God's Flock

In the world, leaders make subordinates do their bidding with threats of force that can break their backs. But shepherds lead by example, going ahead of the flock. Shepherds are the first to suffer, the first to repent, the first to face danger, the first to take up the cross of mission. They inspire others to follow by their example, not just with their mouths.

As we have seen, a shepherd is a living sacrifice for God's sheep. What, then, is the reward for a shepherd? Look at verse 4. "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away." Someday, our Lord Jesus Christ will return to this earth. He will establish his holy, everlasting reign in glory and power. At that time, there will be a great awards ceremony. Before the heavenly angels and the holy men and women of God, our Lord Jesus Christ will call us, "Well done, my good and faithful servant," and will place upon us a crown of glory. It will be unlike the glory of the world, such as the Nobel Prize, Academy Awards, or Super Bowl trophies; these things fade and perish. The crown of glory that Jesus gives never fades away. It is to bear the image of Christ, the Chief Shepherd. It is to see the eternal fruits he has born through us. All of God's sheep under our care will be changed into heavenly princes and princesses. We will spend eternity with them and with our Lord Jesus Christ in love and peace. This eternal glory far outweighs our momentary sufferings. It will be worth it all when we see Jesus and join him in glory.

II. Young men, humble yourselves (5-14)

In this part, Peter particularly speaks to young people, but he really speaks to all of us about humility. 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.'" No matter how mature elders may be, they are not perfect. Only Jesus is the perfect shepherd. It is tempting for young people to study the weak point of their elders and use this as a basis to refuse to listen to them. When young people have this attitude, they do not grow. They can become prey of the devil, who disrupts the church through their proud mind. It is essential that young people acknowledge their elders and submit to them. Then they can grow. David was anointed king while still a young man. But the reigning king Saul was still alive. Saul had a murderous jealousy of David and hunted him down relentlessly. David had two opportunities to kill Saul. But David feared God and respected God's sovereignty, regarding Saul as "the Lord's anointed." This required great humility. God used this to train David and to mold him into a shepherd who followed God's leading.

Be Shepherds of God's Flock

Young men can grow under any kind of elder when they are submissive. But if young people become proud, they oppose God.

How can we be humble? That is a good question. Peter says, "Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another." We must put on the humility of Christ. Christ is truly humble, so humble that he does not break a bruised reed or put out a smoldering wick. Anyone can find rest and peace in Christ because he is gentle and humble in heart. When we recognize our sin as it is and come to Christ, he forgives us and dwells in us; then we can be humble.

When God's children are humble, God can direct his church without hindrance. God trains young men to make them truly great (6). Young people should remember that God humbles those he uses greatly, like Joseph or Moses. So we must be patient and learn all we can from God, both through our situation and through our elders. When we are truly ready, God will raise us up. We will be able to stand fiery trials and help lead God's church with the mind of Christ. Admittedly, it is hard to be submissive to imperfect human leaders. But in fact, this is not submission to men; it is to God. So we can cast all our anxiety on God. God loves us and uses everything to help us grow to maturity in Christ.

Look at verse 8. "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour." The real enemy of elders are not troublesome sheep. The real enemy of young men are not imperfect elders. Our enemy is the devil who wants to exploit our relationship problems and devour people. Then what can we do? Look at verse 9. "Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of sufferings." We must resist him, remembering the word of God we have received. When we stand firm in the word of God, the devil runs away from us.

Though we do our best, we cannot win the absolute victory that God gives in our own strength. This victory comes by God's grace. Look at verses 10-11. "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen."

Peter's purpose in writing was to encourage the early Christians so they would stand firm in the grace of God during trials (12). Though times were difficult, Peter was full of love for his coworkers (13-14). His affection for Mark was so deep; he

Be Shepherds of God's Flock

called him his son. Peter wanted to impart the love and peace of Christ to all of his dear coworkers in Asia Minor.

In this passage, we have thought about what a shepherd does and with what attitude. Yet Peter's words, "Be shepherds," are not explanation. They are exhortation, "Be shepherds!" Knowing about shepherding does not make us shepherds. Knowing about humbleness does not make us humble. We must be shepherds, and we must be humble. Let's pray for God's help and strength and decide to be humble shepherds for God's flock.