

The Church: Leadership

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Preacher: Ali Sewell

[0 : 0 0] to reading from chapter 5 in 1 Peter. We read, 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.

Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you, not for sinful gain, but eagerly, not dominating 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 towards another, for God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Amen. This is God's word. Thanks very much, Angus. It'll be worthwhile keeping those verses open in front of you.

If you have them as we look through them together now. If you go into kind of Waterstones or some other bookshop, you would find a huge section devoted to leadership books from various different authors and on various different topics.

[1 : 1 6] Leadership is pretty big business. If you're employed at the moment, I imagine that the leadership of your place of work is a fairly common topic of conversation and also something that probably has a fairly significant effect on you.

And on a national level, we've been thinking, haven't we, over the last few weeks and particularly over the last few days, for various reasons, been thinking, hearing a lot about leadership.

Leadership. And so leadership, I think it's undeniable, is a big deal. It's something that is important. But it's probably fair to say that leadership in the church, and especially what the Bible has to say about church leadership, is perhaps something we don't speak about or don't think about quite so much.

Or certainly I'm aware that it's something we haven't spoken about that much here as a church on Sundays. And so this morning, as we are in this kind of series, telling us what the Bible says about the church, is a great opportunity to perhaps correct that imbalance slightly.

I think for any kind of minister to speak about himself and the other leaders of the church, that can feel a little bit awkward. And yet actually, it's really important for a congregation, for a church, to know what to expect from their leaders and to understand what their leaders are striving to do.

[2 : 4 1] Because I think we often have a bit of a suspicion of authority. That's a kind of a characteristic of our culture, isn't it? And perhaps nowhere more so than kind of religious authority or authority in the church.

I'm sure that people perhaps warm more to what we spoke about last week when we were speaking about kind of belonging to a church and the kind of community nature of the church.

And that kind of thing is so important. And yet it's important that we recognize as well, if we want the Bible's pattern of the church, which is what we've said we're looking for over these five weeks, that in the Bible, we see plenty on that church leadership as well.

And so we don't want to ignore that. And actually, I hope we want to see why that is a really good thing that God has given to his church, why this is good news. And I hope that all the way through this morning, we'll see that church leadership is actually all about Jesus.

That church leadership is all about Jesus. Peter begins addressing these elders by saying he's a witness of Christ. You see that in verse one.

[3 : 50] He finishes speaking to them by reminding them of the return of Christ. Verse four, we'll see in between verses two and three, it's all kind of modeled on Christ.

The goal of a church leader is that people will say, isn't Jesus brilliant? And that's what we want to see in these verses this morning.

One final thing to say as we begin. Perhaps you've seen or heard or experienced bad church leadership. Maybe the whole idea of church leadership leaves a kind of a nasty taste in your mouth, or this is a topic that cuts close to the bone.

I do hope that through looking at this passage this morning, we'll be able to see that actually the reason that that happens, the reason that that is very true, is because leaders fail to stick to this pattern that the Bible lays out, rather than it being an issue with leadership itself.

I hope that we won't kind of throw out the baby with the bathwater for all of us. Rather than being suspicious of church leadership, we'd see what a good gift and what a necessary gift it is to us from God when it's carried out, remembering that it is all about Jesus.

[5 : 05] And so let's get stuck into these verses. We're not going to cover everything there is to say, everything the Bible has to say about church leadership, but we'll follow the flow of these particular verses.

And I think that will give us a really good grounding. And as we said before, a good chance to continue thinking about this if you've got any questions that you'd like to raise on the back of what we talk about this morning.

But I think in these verses, really, there are three things about church elders, and then a fourth to the church as a whole. So let's have a look at those. The first thing we see then is the task of elders.

The task of elders. And elders is simply one of the words that the Bible uses for church leaders. It's the word that our kind of church tradition would call its eldership, which is good as it helps us know who verses like this are speaking about.

It's speaking about the leaders of local churches. So then what is the task of an elder? What's in that job description? Peter here begins with kind of two connected ideas.

[6 : 11] The start of verse 2, shepherd the flock of God that is among you. End of verse 2, exercising oversight. So these kind of two aspects, really, two sides of the same coin, shepherding and exercising oversight.

That idea of a shepherd, that's where we get the term pastor from, or kind of pastoral ministry. It's all that shepherding language. And actually, it's no surprise that this is, in Peter's mind, how he frames this role.

Because right at the end of John's Gospel, there's a famous occasion where the risen Lord Jesus comes to Peter, and he asks him three times, Peter, do you love me? Peter says yes each time.

And Jesus concludes then by saying to Peter, feed my sheep. Feed my sheep, he says. Imagine the impact that must have had on Peter.

And I think that's why Peter identifies himself here in verse 1 as a fellow elder. He's saying that he shares this same shepherding task, feeding the sheep as Jesus calls him to.

[7 : 22] And so primarily what that means is feeding God's people with the word of God. Peter speaks here about the church as the flock of God. Jesus says to Peter, feed my sheep.

You know, there's no doubting here, is there, as we look at these verses, as we think about leadership, that ultimately this is God's church. These are God's people, as we'll see in verse 4, that Jesus is the chief shepherd.

And yet we see here that he's tasked elders, his under-shepherds, as we might call them, to shepherd, to pastor, to take care of his sheep. And he's decreed that the primary way that happens is by teaching the word of God.

God leads his church as his word is communicated to his church. And so in some ways the task of elders is relatively simple.

It's to keep on communicating that gospel, keep that central message of the Bible, what God has done through Jesus, as the central message in people's lives, as the central message of the church.

[8 : 32] That's why the list of qualifications for elders that we read earlier in Titus, I don't know if you noticed, almost all of them are kind of character-based. And we're going to look at kind of character, attitude in just a moment.

Almost all character-based, except Titus 1 verse 9, able to give instruction in sound doctrine and rebuke those who contradict it.

In another letter to Timothy, 1 Timothy chapter 3 verse 2, it's put simply as able to teach. That is almost a one kind of hard skill, we might say, that is included in these lists of characteristics.

The task of elders is teaching God's people what God has done. It's about pointing people to Jesus, who, as we said from the beginning, is the heart of church leadership.

That could be kind of preaching from the front, as I have the opportunity to do most weeks. It could be teaching in or kind of overseeing community groups or small groups as our elders do.

[9 : 34] It might just be in personal conversations, meeting up with people and trying to bring the gospel to bear in people's lives in what particular situations they're going through.

And yet shepherding God's people by feeding, teaching, encouraging, correcting if needed with God's word. And that is what's central to this exercising oversight that Peter speaks about because the only authority, the only oversight any church leader is able to exercise over any congregation is what God has said in his word.

And it's really important that people know that. You know, I'm not able to tell people what to do because I'm an elder. You know, that would be a really, really dangerous situation to be in.

It's so important that we remember the oversight elders have as in communicating what God has said to his people. It is his church, and it is his word where the authority lies.

And so there's the task of elders. Really helpful for those of us who are elders to remember that, to kind of check ourselves. Are we doing the job we're here for by encouraging the church, by teaching the Bible's truth about Jesus, making sure that we don't get so focused on, I suppose, the practicalities of church stuff that we forget that that core role.

[10 : 56] That's been a real challenge for me thinking about this this week as I've been looking at this passage and this task. And yet it's really good for you guys to know as well. It's really important. The Bible's teaching on elders could so easily be kind of reserved for elders meetings or speaking to other church leaders or kind of books on church leadership.

You know, it can perhaps seem a little bit internal. And yet it's important to know, isn't it, that Peter includes this section in his letter to the whole church. He could have easily, I'm sure, you know, slipped in a different envelope or something, you know, just said on the front, you know, this one's just for the leaders, just tell them this bit, everyone else, you look at this stuff.

But he doesn't do that. Peter wants the whole church to know what elders are supposed to do and how they're supposed to do it. It's important that you know that church leaders don't have some sort of special powers.

They don't in themselves have special authority, but they are to be people who teach about Jesus, who protect the gospel from being confused or mixed up with other things, who feed God's people with God's word.

And that does have ultimate authority. And so that's the task of elders. And we'd love your help to keep that as our focus. There'll be lots of things that we would love to do.

[12 : 20] There'll be lots of other things that I'm sure that you would love us to do. We might be able to do some of those, but we don't want to lose sight of that primary task of teaching God's people God's word. And just one quick detour kind of before we carry on.

And really this is a bit of a preview of where we're going to be next week, which is really to kind of flag up, to highlight that it's not only elders who do this, not only elders who teach God's word.

We'll see next week that we're all called to speak the truth of the gospel to one another. So elders having a particular focus on that role isn't supposed to stop other people doing it.

In fact, we're going to see it's quite the opposite. It's supposed to be a kind of a catalyst for the whole congregation to be speaking God's truth to one another. We'll focus on that next week.

But again, for that to work well, it begins with, it flows from this task of the elders, of shepherding, of exercising oversight, first and foremost by teaching God's word to God's people.

[13 : 23] Okay, so that's the task. But let's move on. What about the attitude of elders? Let's look at that. And that's probably Peter's kind of main focus in these verses here.

Not so much what elders do, but how they're to do it. And he breaks it down, you'll see here, into three kind of contrasts. Three times Peter says, not like this, but like that.

And each time we'll see that Jesus is the model of this type of leadership. Peter introduces that at the beginning, verse one, as a fellow elder and a witness of the suffering of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed.

Peter begins by saying, you know, in light of Jesus's pattern of suffering now with glory to come, well, this is how to carry out that role as an elder.

And as I said, three areas. First, the middle of verse two, not under compulsion, but willingly. And not under compulsion, but willingly. And we're all pretty good at grumbling, aren't we?

[14 : 31] I can't be bothered with this. What a hassle that is. We're all kind of aware of that temptation, I'm sure. And yet Peter says that that shouldn't be our attitude towards serving the church and particularly not for those called to be elders in the church.

Instead, they should be willing to carry out that role to the best of their abilities. And I suppose the force of that challenge comes when we consider that pattern that Peter begins with, that leadership is going to follow Jesus's pattern of suffering first with future glory to come.

You know, if we think of leadership in the church as some sort of status symbol or some kind of promotion, well, it's easy to think, well, yeah, you know, I'd be willing to do that. I'd love to do that.

Actually, Peter is saying that to be an elder means a particular type of suffering. And that's why he has to say, so be willing to do that. Be willing to suffer for the church.

And we see here how the attitude of elders, of these under-shepherds, is then modeled on the attitude of Jesus, the chief shepherd. John chapter 10, Jesus speaking about himself as the good shepherd, talks about laying down his life.

[15 : 52] He looks ahead to the cross and he speaks about his life. He says, no one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. And that Jesus willingly gives his all to serve his people.

And church leaders are called to the same, not under compulsion, but willingly as they follow Jesus's example. So not under compulsion, but willingly.

The second attitude Peter focuses here, end of verse 2, says, not for shameful gain, but eagerly. And that word there for shameful gain particularly refers to kind of financial gain.

Today, I hate to break it to you, but the chances in Scotland of massively profiting from being an elder are pretty slim. Sorry, Barry, if you're getting excited about that. But you do see that in some places, don't you?

You've perhaps seen that on TV or whatever, you know, flashy, slick church leaders benefiting, sometimes making vast sums of money at the expense of others.

[16 : 57] If you've seen that or clips of that and it makes you uneasy or perhaps actually you just think it's downright disgusting, well, that's good because Peter thinks it's disgusting.

Jesus thinks it's disgusting. This kind of personal profiteering of the role is the opposite of the gospel. And yet sometimes it's very easy to identify that kind of thing and say, well, let's steer well away from there.

And yet there's still this temptation in church leadership to have that attitude, that attitude as an elder that says, well, you know, what's in it? What's in it for me? You know, what might I get out of this?

What kind of respect? What kind of affirmation? You know, what kind of praise can I get through this role? And yet again, Peter says, actually, we should be simply eager to carry out the role, not for our sake, but for God's.

And again, it points us back to Jesus on the cross. In fact, it points us back to the whole incarnation of Jesus, doesn't he? Not looking for how he would gain.

[18 : 04] Jesus had all he could have ever needed and yet he left the perfection of heaven to come to earth. Now, his attitude was never to say, you know, what's in it for me?

But rather to love and serve and to rescue his people. Now, elders cannot rescue or save anyone. Only Jesus can do that.

But they are to have that same attitude of being eager to do that for others. To point to Jesus rather than seeking their own benefit. So not for shameful gain but eagerly.

And the third attitude here, verse 4, is not domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock. Church leaders, elders aren't here to be kind of forcing people to get with their program or to kind of move forward their agenda.

But as I heard it brilliantly described once and it really kind of stuck with me, follow me as I follow Jesus. It is really that the motto and the attitude for the Christian leader, setting that godly example in following after Jesus, the chief shepherd.

[19 : 17] In any area of leadership there is that temptation, isn't there, to kind of push people around. You've perhaps experienced that. You've perhaps been tempted to lead that way. Christian leadership is absolutely no different and you've perhaps seen examples of it.

In some ways it can be even more tempting or it can be even more dangerous. It seems almost appropriate because we're able to say well we're doing this for God. We're trying to build his church and yet the key to remember again as this passage hires again and again is that this is God's church and that these are God's people.

How does God deal with his people? He deals with them graciously, generously, lovingly. He expects those who lead his people to do so in the same way.

So there's the attitude for elders working not under compulsion but willingly not for shameful gain but eagerly not domineering but setting an example. All of those modeled on Jesus and the gospel.

The one who is willing to suffer to lay down his life even for his people. That is a great thing and a really important thing and a really sobering thing for the elders of this church to be reminded of today.

[20 : 40] That we would never forget that pattern of Jesus. One of the questions we asked earlier was also why do all of us need to listen to that?

Why do we need to say this at the front of the church? Why does Peter include this in a letter to everyone not just in a separate leader's appendix? I think one reason would be that these are good principles to take into all of life.

This is how Christians are to lead. Whether that's leading family at home, whether it's leading people at work, whether it's influencing our peers and those around us or an organization that we're part of.

These gospel shaped ways of interacting with people are for all of us as we look to reflect Jesus. But also I do think, bearing in mind Peter is specifically addressing elders here, another thing would be to say that please do pray for the elders of this church or for the elders of your home church if you're just visiting this morning.

Please do pray that we would have this attitude. Because again Peter writes these things for a reason. The temptation of being unwilling or ducking hardship, the temptation of seeking personal gain or respect or the temptation of being domineering.

[21 : 58] These are very real for church leaders that need to constantly come back to the gospel, to constantly remember Jesus. His model of suffering service is an ongoing need for church leaders.

To live that out is something that can only be done with his grace and through the help of his Holy Spirit. So please do pray for us as leaders that the attitude Peter gives here would be our attitude as leaders in the church as we seek to follow Jesus and as we seek to help and encourage others in doing that.

So there's the task of the elders, the attitude of elders, finally the motivation for elders. Verse 4, Peter again highlights the importance for elders to remember that this is not our church, this is not my church, this is Jesus' church.

The task is looking after Jesus' sheep, that Jesus is the chief shepherd and most importantly that one day he will return. And it's on that day, Peter says, that elders will receive their reward, that crown of glory.

The motivation is not, as we've said, about glory here and now, about anyone saying how great you are or how great the church is, the motivation is the glory we'll share when Jesus returns.

[23 : 32] And actually that is the main thread of this section of 1 Peter, that following Jesus' pattern, that there is suffering now, but with this glory to come.

And that is the thread of this section of 1 Peter that addresses a whole number of people. That's true for elders, that's true for church members, that's true for everyone living the Christian life, not to expect our reward in the here and now, but to live in great anticipation of that certain day when Jesus, the chief shepherd, returns to bring his people home.

people. If we are Christians, if you're a Christian this morning, you believe that. We all believe that Jesus will return, that is a centrally important part of the gospel, that this isn't all of it, that Jesus will come again, that he will put things right, that there will be that perfect restoration.

And I think it's often true to say that although we believe that, we perhaps struggle to make it make much of a difference in our day-to-day lives.

We believe it, but it is so easy to forget it. Peter here wants us to guard against that, to be careful that we're not just ultimately living as the world lives, we're not just functionally living as if this is all it is, that our comfort, that our satisfaction, that our respect, that our ease in the present is the most important thing, that only what is now really matters.

[25 : 09] And Peter points us again forward. Peter says, live in light of what you believe, that Jesus will come back, because that changes everything. That's where we want our glory, our treasure, that is what truly matters.

That's true for elders, that's true for all of us, that our motivation isn't about the here and the now. What can I get? What do I have? What are other people getting? How can I get that?

We're willing to put aside everything that is present, because we prioritize that glory that comes when Jesus returns. Again, a part of the role as an elder, a shepherd, feeding God's people with God's word, isn't just to point back and see what Jesus has done, although of course that's vital, but it's also to keep on showing how the gospel points us forwards as well.

That the story is not finished, that the temporary pleasures or pains of here and now pale into insignificance compared to the eternal glories that God has in store for his people.

The motivation for elders, as it is for all of us, is to look ahead to Jesus' return, to go through suffering now, but with that perfect glory to come.

[26 : 26] So there's the task of elders, the attitude of elders, the motivation for elders. I want to very quickly drop into verse 5 there as we finish. In some ways this kind of fits with the next section slightly more, but it helps us tie up what we're speaking about here.

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

Having given this kind of overview of elders, what they're supposed to do and be like, Paul then very deliberately goes straight on and says, be subject to these elders. Submit to those God has put over his church as they seek to follow Jesus' pattern.

You know, the idea of being subject isn't a particularly popular idea, is it? You know, you think of the king and his subjects. Well, we don't want to be a subject, we want to be the king. And it's hard as an elder of a church to stand at the front and to say, or be subject to elders.

And I think there would probably be things to be worried about if that was something I kind of relished telling everyone to do, and that was a major point of every sermon. But it is here, isn't it, in black and white.

[27 : 38] And one of the big points of this passage, one of the things that I pray as we've looked through this together, and perhaps as we think about this as we go home, that has somehow got across, is to show actually that this can be such an attractive thing.

Here at church we won't get this perfectly right, no church leaders will. But I hope at the very least we can see that the beauty, the goodness of God's design here, of God's intention, leadership which is all about caring for God's people by teaching God's word and pointing to Jesus, God's son.

Leaders who do that willingly, eagerly, sacrificially, not domineeringly, but setting a good example. People to follow as they follow Jesus.

People leading, not motivated by what they can get out of it here and now, but with their eyes fixed on Jesus and that time when he will return and he will gather his people in.

We won't always get that right. As elders of this church, we will need to be examples of humility and repentance as well as commitment and holiness.

[28 : 54] And yet I hope we can at least see that the goodness of God's plan here, of God's pattern for his church, his pattern for church leadership, which as we said is all about Jesus.

And it says we see that. That's what means that being subject to leadership is not this thing to be frightened of, it's not this terrible kind of chore to endure, but ultimately something to be humbly but joyfully embraced as we look to grow together as a church community, a church built on God's pattern and through that able to be used by God for his work.

always remembering that above everything else that we are his church, purchased with his blood, looked after by Jesus Christ, the chief shepherd. Let's pray together.

Now we're going to talk with you about these four span thinkers to learn about how it is operate, wheelchairs, and then a third Treasury Triple Dell, have blood flow with now we're following one year fuse at a third Adam conference in— how an voyage will help us to learn how to give up our this vision for else.

All of my bullshit dio I'll