

Before reading:

1 Peter: General letter to several churches in the northern half of Turkey. He has addressed them as God's elect (1:1) i.e. called by God, strangers on earth (1:2, 17, 2:11)) for they have been (1:23) born again .. through the living & enduring word of God

He has reminded them how to live as God's people, in holiness and love; and warned them that doing so won't make everyone love them; some of them will suffer for doing good. That's what happened to Jesus himself, (3:18) the core verse of the letter: 'Christ died for sins, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.'

The final section begins at 4:12. Peter calls them, Dear Friends. So please listen to this passage as people beloved by God.

Then he zooms in on groups of them, starting with 'elders'; which includes ministers /pastors/ 'preaching elders'.

1 Peter 5:1-7

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:

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;

3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock

4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

5 Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility towards one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble".

6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Sermon starts here

Whether, like me, you are nearing the end of a stage of leadership, or just starting out, it is good to keep coming back to Scripture, to see what eldership entails. What we're called to

Why listen to God through Peter? He gives 3 *reasons*

a) he describes himself as a fellow elder, as one with all those of us in the task of Christian leadership. Some argue he was the top leader in the church; if he was, which I doubt, he certainly doesn't say so here. 'Fellow elder.' There is no place in the Christian family for people who pull rank. He is just as eager to be a good elder under Christ as he wants us to be.

b) he is a witness of Christ's sufferings. Now a spectator in a football match witnesses the play and the goals; he *sees* them. This is more: the Greek word 'martus', a witness, is 'one who gives testimony'. Peter was there in the Garden when the disciples all ran away; in the courtyard he denied Jesus three times, the cock crowed, and Jesus turned and looked at him. Peter went out and wept bitterly; he knew his failure had added to what Jesus suffered. This is not the testimony of a smug man, a celebrity who thinks he is a success story, but a humble man who found forgiveness and continues to testify to it.

If you are going to be an effective elder or preacher, never forget that Jesus died to save you.

(c) And one who will share in the glory to be revealed. He had already seen on the Mt of Transfiguration a preview of Christ's glory; but he was confident of Christ's inevitable final victory, and as a forgiven sinner, he was sure of being with his master in glory. Any born-again believer can share that confidence; our salvation depends on Christ and the cross, not ourselves.

So Peter appeals to us elders to do two jobs:

It is lovely to see three terms applied to the same people: the noun: **Elders**, v1, then two verbal forms in v2: **be shepherds**, and **serve as overseers**. In Greek, Elder= 'Presbuteroi', and overseer = 'episcopoi'. So the two words that give us two kinds of church government, usually seen as competing: Presbyterian, government by elders, and Episcopalian, gov't by bishops, *actually refer to the same people!* ? difference?

Perhaps 'elder' refers to their title as leaders in the church, whereas 'pastors' and 'overseers' refer to the jobs they do.

Given this overlap, let's not be in a rush to abandon government by a group of elders. Management consultants tell Church Offices this is cumbersome, and to go for a sole boss of the business tycoon Alan Sugar variety. Bishops of a monarchical type may take decisions more quickly, but there is no guarantee people will go along with them. In NT we always hear of elders (pl), and even today, Bishops meet in Congress.

These two functions match exactly what Peter had said about Jesus himself in 1 peter 2:25 'You were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the *Shepherd* and *Overseer* of your souls.' Elders, your ministry continues that of Christ!

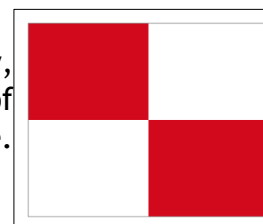
Think what pastors and overseers **do**. One uses the metaphor of the flock, the other of the work-place. First, it is *God's* flock, not ours. That is why , when the time comes, we can retire and hand it over to other pastors.

Pastors have to see that the flock is **fed** - nourished, helped to grow in Christlikeness - and **protected** - kept safe from wolves, especially the kind that come in sheep's clothing, inside the church.

An overseer has to supervise a workforce: to show them what to do and how to do it, to direct the workers so they cover all the work that needs doing, and check that the work is going ahead, that is, show appropriate discipline, correction.

Kirk Session oversees congregation, Presbytery oversees a parish or minister. Assembly oversees Presbyteries etc.

If, taking the over-view, we see people's *behaviour* or *beliefs* going astray, we have to tell them, so they realize the need to stop. In the Navy, one of the signal flags means, **You are running into danger**. Stop; change course. Elders, that's our job, in love.



We're going to see 6 commands, arranged in pairs, one negative, one positive.

V2 not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock

Not

(i) Duty

(ii) Taking

(iii) Bossing

But

willingly

Giving

example

Mood

Motive

Manner

Anyone who does a job long enough, no matter how enthusiastically at first, can become stale, jaded, bored.

I saw a staff-nurse in a psychiatric ward run a knitting circle for the women. If they dropped stitches - she would pick them up. If someone wandered, she helped them back.

To encourage her, I murmured as I passed her, 'I don't know how you have the patience!' 'I do,' she answered brightly; 'it's the beginning of the shift!'

So the **mood** of our work for Christ is important: we don't do it because we *have* to, as a duty to be endured, but willingly, because we freely choose to do so. If we reach a stage of drudgery, no, *before* we reach it, we pass the baton to someone else.

If you work outside the family home, and see, when you come in from work, that your spouse is harassed, struggling to juggle baby and toddler and cook dinner and answer the phone and everything else, you spot the heavy mood and do something to relieve the pressure, so your spouse's mood can lift. We help them to do their work for Christ, not because they must, but because they are willing, not out of mere duty, but cheerfully.

(ii) Do the work of an elder or pastor from a right **Motive**

not for material gain, but for the sheer delight of serving others. Not taking, but giving in service. Finding satisfaction in the job itself, not what you get out of it.

Our members of Parliament have been getting it in the neck this fortnight, and rightly so! Claiming for mortgages that were already fully paid, claiming for one house as a second home, then 'flipping' (new verb for the vocabulary) to claim for a different house. These are the people who make the laws, who spell out what is 'just' for the rest of us. We expect the highest standards of not just law-keeping, but genuine honesty from them.

The leader of the Opposition is using this time to press for a General Election, when his party is just as guilty of wrong as the others. He thinks he would win an election, so calling for it is another example of someone acting from self-interest!

If we (rightly) expect integrity of MPs, how much more do we expect it of elders and ministers. And church members

I met some new people at church once; I hope I do not misjudge them when I say, they had started a new business, moved into my parish, and thought that if they came to church, they could make a lot of friends who would then spend money in their business. Well they could have made a lot of friends, if they had kept coming to church; and some of the friends might have spent money. But if their motive in coming was not to find and worship God, but purely for their own interests, either they lose heart or the potential customers see through them.

Our society is so used to advertising, to people trying to put a message across to make us buy their product, that a preacher has a hard task convincing others that the Gospel really is free, that when we receive Christ, we find his benefits too, love, joy. And getting rich isn't all it's cracked up to be! People suspect our motives; we need to be above question.

Now in our church, one or more people *do* receive financial support, (and I never tire of thanking you for it) but that is because our congregations have decided that it is better to have someone do the work of pastor full time, without spending 40 hrs/wk in secular employment for income.

If someone asks you to be an elder, (or an MP!) don't think, 'Super, how I can use this to my advantage?' If anyone did think like that, he or she would not be an elder, even if they carried the name.

The Nominating committee will soon have the hard task of sifting through applicants for

Killlearn Kirk pulpit, to remove any who think like that. The motive: giving, not taking.

Mood, motive, now:

(iii) Do it in a right manner.

Not driving but leading, not domineering, bossily, but setting an example that people will choose to follow.

That word *example* is not a matter of morals alone. The NT says we follow a person: There is only one leader, Jesus!

Jesus himself said: 'If anyone would be my disciple, let him deny himself and take up his cross and **follow ME.**' Matt 16:24

Peter already said (2:21) Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example.

We are all called to be holy, devoted to God; to die to sin and self. We find in Christ a new liberty, living not by keeping rules, but in relationship with him, moment by moment.

The thing is, as leaders, we need to think about limiting our freedoms, lest we lead others astray.

We do not have today the problem of food offered to idols, as they did in Corinth, for instance, but the principle is clear. If a Christian ate meat bought at the pagan temple, knowing the idol was nothing, and someone copied them, thinking they were still worshipping the idol, they were sinning, but the Christian was responsible.

I applied this to alcohol. I knew that the NT says we should never get drunk, though taking a little alcohol is not wrong.

I decided that my method of never getting drunk was not to take any alcohol at all. I knew aged 18 God was calling me to the ministry, so I also chose to limit my freedom, so that no-one would say, 'Och, the minister drinks, so it must be OK, then end up drinking to excess.'

Paul in **Romans 14: 21** says, 'It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that would cause your brother to fall.' 1 Corinthians 8: Be careful that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.'

Like all Christians, elders are called to demonstrate the NT pattern in sexual matters: chastity before marriage and faithfulness within it. The choice is celibacy, or heterosexual marriage. It allows no other pattern for sexual intimacy except marriage. Marriage illustrates the bond between Christ and the church.

Show 1 Tim 3:1-7 In NT times there were other cultures, e.g. polygamy. A man with several wives could hear the Gospel, repent and come to faith in Christ. You could not in love tell a convert to throw out dependant wives, so the situation continued: But, that man was not to be considered for leadership roles in the church. (1 Tim 3:2, 12. Titus1:6)

Last night the General Assembly seems to have agreed that Aberdeen presbytery followed correct procedure as far as it went, so rejected the appeal on technical grounds.

The following motion is agreed by the Assembly: a) **refuse** the dissent and complaint of Aitken and others and sustain the decision of the Presbytery of Aberdeen on the basis that the Presbytery followed the vacancy procedure correctly in Act VIII 2003.

But the next deliverance reads: b) **affirm** for the avoidance of doubt that this decision does not alter the Church's standards of ministerial conduct.

The Overture from the Presbytery of Lochcarron-Skye is held over until Monday at 4pm. .



I hope the Assembly will then give the people of Scotland the leadership the NT expects, as it applies one of the marks of the church, right discipline, and tells *any* minister who is engaging in homosexual *activity*, to repent. To stop.

We may not be able to change a person's homosexual inclination, but the challenge to them is the same as the one to heterosexual people; we *all* have to lay our sexuality at the foot of the cross and tell the Lord, if you want me to be single, I will go that way, in your strength, celibately; if you want me to marry, I will trust you to lead me to the right person to be my spouse.

Elders, pastors, be examples to the flock. Actually, we always are examples. The issue is, are we *good* examples!

Be living witnesses to what Jesus means us to be. We do not have the luxury of saying, as we used to see on bumper stickers: **Don't follow me, I'm lost.**



Why do we do all this? You may get no recognition on earth. Others may be awarded MBEs and the like: we wait for **only one reward**: v4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.: the approval of the chief shepherd. For he alone knows what we have tried to do, and he alone knows what has borne lasting fruit in his kingdom.

And how do we do it?

Vv 5-6 All this work is to be done **humbly**.

Younger men submit to the older

Everyone towards one another,
everyone towards God.

'Clothe yourself' is a verb that has to do with knotting a garment onto you.

A cook might tie an apron, knotting it at the back.

Jesus wrapped towel to wash disciples' feet. Same word

Christ chose the role of Servant. That is the example we follow.

Is it too hard?

Unload all your anxiety on him.

He cares. For you.