

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the message today we will look at portion of Scripture that outlines for us what it means to be a Christian leader. Really, we're talking about church leaders, though... not so much about what a Christian CEO looks like, but rather what any kind of leader that leads in the church looks like. At first glance, this may seem like it doesn't apply to many in the congregation, since not everyone has a leadership role in the congregation.

But here's why I want every one of you to pay careful attention to what God is teaching us today. Here is why this message has something beneficial for everyone.

- 1) Some of you are leaders in our church. In fact, we have some 40 total leadership positions in the church. Church council is only a small part of our total leadership team. We also have coordinators and committee leaders in many areas of ministry. So if you have any kind of leadership responsibility in the church, listen to what God says about Christian leaders.
- 2) Some of you are not leaders, but some day you will be. Maybe you're new. Maybe you're young. Maybe you haven't been as involved. Maybe you've been thinking you should get more involved in the ministries of Christ's church. So maybe you're not a current leader but you're a future leader. Then you need to listen to the profile of a Christian leader.
- 3) Now, maybe I still haven't covered everyone. The rest of you still need to listen so that you form godly and proper expectations of your church leaders. There is a secular, worldly understanding of who a leader is and what he should do. So let's compare our personal or cultural understanding of a good church leader and see how it line's up with God's definition. In doing so, we may need to rethink what is valuable in a church leader to bring our measures and expectation in line with God's.

What I want to do is provide a little bit of context, then we'll read the whole reading, then we'll take a look at it in more detail. After Jesus ascended into heaven, Peter became a prominent leader in the Christian church. This is an amazing fact if you think about it, because Peter was the one who denied his Lord three times while Jesus was on trial. But he received full forgiveness from Jesus.

Peter wrote this letter to Christians... mostly non-Jewish Christians... living in Asia Minor. The Christians he was writing to were suffering under a wave of persecution. They were in great need of comfort and strength. Again and again, Peter admonishes his Christian readers to lead a godly life and thus disprove those who suspected the Christians and were telling lies about them. So his advice was, "Live such good and holy lives that anyone who speaks bad about you will be ashamed to do so. Live your faith daily to such an extent that even those who aren't followers of Christ will have to admit that Christians are good, respectable people." He also assures them that whatever they suffer is to the glory of God, and they should not be discouraged or think God has left them. In fact, they can even rejoice in their sufferings. Peter gives them a message of hope.

Now, having said all this, 1 Peter 5 is the conclusion to this letter. He has some closing instruction for various people and age groups. We are looking at the instruction that he offered to the elders. Elders was a Greek term that literally meant those who were older. But in this context, it refers to the older men who also served as leaders in the church. Let's read, then we'll look in more detail:

1 Peter 5:1-4

**To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, 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.**

**To the elders among you,**

Again, to the older men who were church leaders he has a word of instruction:

**I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed.**

So first of all, Peter makes it clear who it is that is instructing them. He gives his credentials. He explains why it is they might take seriously what he is about to say. And it's so neat the way Peter does this. Looking at Peter's example here, we already understand what it means to be a Christian leader. We already understand what it means to serve under a Christian leader in the church.

His instruction is coming from a "**fellow elder**". What a great way to explain his relationship to them! Peter doesn't place himself above them. He places himself next to them. There is only one who is ultimately in charge, and it is Jesus. Peter, the other elders... they were all in the same category... the same group. They were all equally elders serving Christ. The Catholic church that considers Peter the first Pope. They claim that Peter was Christ's substitute ruling over the church in Christ's stead, and that there has always been a Pope, or a supreme leader over the church, ever since. But we sure don't get a hint of that here! He calls himself a "fellow elder." He saw himself as equal to them, not over them. So one reason to listen to what he's about to say: He's a brother, not their boss.

2<sup>nd</sup>, he's a brother who **witnessed Christ's sufferings**. Take seriously what he's about to say because he rubbed shoulders with Jesus. And he say Jesus suffer. So our Good Shepherd knows what it means to suffer. And Peter saw him suffer. And the churches Peter wrote to were suffering. So with that in mind, perhaps Peter has some valuable insights that should be listened to!

3<sup>rd</sup>, Peter says he will also **share in the glory** to be revealed together with the elders whom he is addressing. They truly are brothers, not just in this world, but in the life to come too. So, for these reasons, take to heart what Peter is about to say!

**2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them**

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday. The figure of shepherd and sheep is one which we find frequently throughout the Bible. Jesus calls himself "the Good Shepherd." This is Good Shepherd Sunday. But notice that those who serve as leaders in the church also have the task of shepherding the flock of Christ. This is why some have called pastors, "under shepherds." As shepherds, the congregation's *spiritual leaders are to oversee the spiritual welfare of the members*. This is the specific command.

Now listen, here's where we run into trouble. What is your understanding or preconception of what the pastor and other church leaders are supposed to do? We might have all kinds of ideas! But the bottom line is, they are to oversee the spiritual welfare of members. I and every leader in our church would do well to reevaluate everything we are doing. Is what I'm doing to oversee the spiritual welfare of the members? If not, that's a task that can be delegated to others. This is the central task of the pastor and church leaders!

Next it talks about the attitude with which they serve:

**—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be**

Pastors and other leaders are sinful human beings. When I was still in Seminary, a professor said, "Sometimes you will get in the pulpit and you will preach on Sunday morning because you have to, not because you want to." When that becomes the attitude, it's time to stop and reevaluate. Peter reminds us that

serving as a leader in Christ's church is an honor and privilege, not a burden and a reluctant weight that must be carried. What a joyful task to be able to serve God, overseeing the spiritual welfare of the flock! "Want to" not "have to" should mark the Christian leader.

So Peter speaks of the attitude. Now he talks about the motivation of the church leader.

**not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve;**

Unfortunately, church history is littered with examples of church leaders who have abused their position for worldly gain. When you carry the good news of eternal life, people are very grateful. And grateful and trusting people can sometimes be manipulated. Paul says, "Never ever used your position for dishonest gain." No church leader should be in it for the money. Rather, the leader will be eager to serve.

What else motivates people to serve as leaders in the church?

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

If not money, some seek leadership positions for the power. Self-exalting, power-loving leadership is common in the world. Peter tells us this type of thinking is sinful and foreign to God's plan for Christian leaders. See how Jesus describes the way in which his disciples are to lead: **"But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves"** (Luke 22:26).

If any church leader is thinking, I'll serve, but what's in it for me? That reveals a heart that is not in line with God's plan for the Christian leader. Instead the Christian leader must understand that that he is to serve as an example. We don't ask what will I get? But what am I giving through my leadership, but also through my Christian life lived to the glory of God?

So if power and money are wrong motivators, what is the proper motivator?

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

Church leaders lead not for power, because we understand the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, is the one with all power. We lead not for the money, for money is temporary and ultimately passes away. As they say, you can't take it with you. Or as someone once said recently in this vivid way: "It's absolutely guaranteed that someday, Warren Buffet and I will day have the exact same net worth... the exact same wealth. Zero." We can't take it with us.

The Christian leader recognizes that the reward we receive is not earthly, it is eternal. There is a crown of glory that will never perish, spoil or fade away that will be given to all who believe. It's not glory that is earned because of faithful leadership. It's glory and reward given simply because of God's undeserved favor and kindness.

So this is the Christian leader. There is no ranking of authority. All serve together under our Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ. The central task at hand? Overseeing the spiritual welfare of the flock of Christ. Feeding his lambs. Feeding his sheep. Our attitude? Not one of "have to" but a cheerful one of "want to" or "get to!" It is privileged work. Our motivation? Not money. Not power, authority, recognition or prestige. The motivation is humble service to Christ our Good Shepherd who will be returning and will give his reward to all who believe.

Friends, it is a high and difficult task to be a leader in Christ's church. It carries great responsibility, and accountability before God himself. If you are a leader, would you review these four verses from 1 Peter 5 a few more times and prayerfully consider: "Am I the kind of leader God has called me to be?" Undoubtedly, you will find some ways where you have not been a perfect leader. Confess those sins to the Chief Shepherd. And understand that he fully and freely forgives you through his death on the cross. Forgiven and loved by Jesus, with renewed energy, focus,

willingness and humility, serve Christ as you lead fellow believers!

If you are not a leader, would you also review these verses a few more times. Has your understanding of church leadership lined up with what we heard today, or have you had some wrong expectations? Is there sin you need to admit to God? You also receive his forgiveness for Jesus' sake. Treat the leaders of your church with respect and honor, understanding the attitude and motivation with which they serve. Also, if you have never served in any leadership position in the church, might this be the time to consider it? Now that you understand what leadership is about, might God use you to help shepherd the flock of Christ? Might you support the church leaders and help them better focus on their central ministry of overseeing the spiritual welfare of the flock?

Let us all keep our eyes focused on Christ and on the glorious crown he soon brings! Whether you are a leader or member of the flock, let's work together in humility and with great eagerness to expand Christ's kingdom to his honor and glory!

Amen.