

Shepherd the Flock (1 Peter 5:1-4)

Expository Lessons from the First Letter of Peter

I. Overview

- a. As we have discussed several times in previous lessons in this series, the overarching theme of **1 Peter** is on the topic of Christians suffering in this life.
 - i. Jesus suffered before entering into His glory; we should expect the same in our lives.
 - ii. We need to make sure that when we are suffering or being persecuted, it is for righteousness' sake (as opposed to suffering for something we are doing that is unrighteous).

II. Peter Addresses Fellow Elders

- a. Read **1 Peter 5:1-4**.
 - i. Points we see in this passage include:
 - 1. Peter is now addressing the elders of the churches he is writing to.
 - 2. He appeals to them on the basis of being a "fellow elder". He is one of them, appealing as an equal (as opposed to being over them or their boss/ruler).
 - 3. He reminds them that he *personally witnessed* the sufferings of Christ; and will be a partaker of the glory to be revealed.
 - a. Again, this pattern of referencing (1) the sufferings of Christ and (2) the glories to follow.
 - b. This is the pattern established by Christ, that all of His followers should expect to see in their own lives.
 - c. This pattern is referred to several times in this letter, to reinforce that we should expect to suffer for righteousness' sake in this life; however, glory will surely follow later (in the next life).
 - 4. Peter calls the other elders to be good shepherds of the flock.
 - a. He explains what this calling should involve:

- i. Serving voluntarily, not under compulsion.
- ii. Not in it for the money.
- iii. Not lording it over the flock, but leading by example.
- b. Peter reminds them that they will have to give an account to Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, when He appears (at the Second Coming and Day of Judgment).
 - i. Those who have served well will receive a crown of glory that will never fade.

III. Considering the Role of Peter in the Church

- a. "The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a *fellow elder*..." (**1 Peter 5:1**, NKJV)
- b. How Peter leads can be seen throughout this letter, and especially here.
 - i. Peter could have spoken from a position of personal authority, but did not.
 - 1. He was one of the 12 chosen apostles of Jesus and listed first among them (**Matthew 10:1-4**).
 - 2. He was one of the three Jesus brought along at the Mount of Transfiguration (**Matthew 17:1-9**).
 - 3. He was one of the three close disciples Jesus took with Him when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night before He was crucified (**Matthew 26:36-37**).
 - 4. He was the only disciple who was willing to step out and walk on the water to approach Jesus (**Matthew 14:22-33**).
 - 5. Paul says that after Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day, "...He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve..." (**1 Corinthians 15:5**).
 - 6. When Jesus asked His disciples whom they thought He was, *Peter* was the one who responded, "You are the Christ, the Son of God". Then Jesus said to Peter:
 - a. "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys

of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (**Matthew 16:17-19**, NKJV)

- i. In modern English, the word we use to address one other person ('you', second person *singular*) is the same word we use to address a group of several people ('you', second person *plural*).
 - ii. When Jesus says, “I will give to you the keys...”, this is second person singular (applying to one person). This can be seen in the King James Version, where it says “thee” (the ‘you’ that just refers to one person) rather than “ye” (the ‘you’ that refers to multiple people).
 - iii. “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven...” (**Matthew 16:19**, KJV 1900)
 - iv. Therefore, Jesus did give *Peter* (one man) the keys to the kingdom. Whatever these ‘keys’ were, they were not given to a group of people.
- ii. In this letter, Peter repeatedly points to the example of *the life of Jesus*:
 1. Suffering for righteousness’ sake when He had done nothing wrong.
 2. Not retaliating.
 3. Willing to suffer in this life, for the glory that would follow.
 - iii. Also, note that virtually *whenever* Peter is making a point in his letter, he backs it up by referring to something from the Old Testament Scriptures. He also assumes that *those reading his letter are very familiar with the Old Testament* passages and examples that he is citing to make his points.
 1. He quotes directly from them.
 - a. “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (**Proverbs 3**)
 - b. “Be holy for I am holy.” (**Leviticus**, several places)
 2. He illustrates something from the life of Christ that was foretold through the prophecies, using both Western (straightforward) and Eastern (allegorical) type prophecies.

- a. “Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth” (**Isaiah 53:9**)
 - b. You were redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish” (Passover Lamb, **Exodus 12**).
 - c. Three references to “rock” prophecies about Christ, in **1 Peter 2**.
- 3. Pointing to good examples of character from the Old Testament.
 - a. Sarah, the wife of Abraham, is held up as an example of a godly wife who was submissive and respectful toward her husband. (**Genesis 18**)
- iv. This is a great example for us, as we are teaching and discipling others.
 - 1. Let us avoid the temptation to take short-cuts, to appeal to people primarily based on our position, age, role or status in the church.
 - 2. Always point to the example of *the life of Jesus*.
 - 3. Support everything that we teach based on the Word of God, including the Old Testament.
 - 4. Know and use the Old Testament in practical ways, just as Peter did.
- c. Understanding the *role of Peter* in the church, and its implications, has been a major source of division in the Christian world for centuries.
 - i. The Roman Catholic church ties its authority, and its claim over all Christians, based on the following reasoning:
 - 1. Jesus gave Peter “the keys to the kingdom of heaven”, along with power to “bind and loose”.
 - 2. Peter was the first bishop/overseer of the church in Rome.
 - 3. The keys represented authority over all of the church, worldwide.
 - 4. That authority was subsequently passed down to each subsequent bishop of Rome, in succession (= *the Pope*).
 - 5. The main church in Rome is named *Saint Peter’s*. There is a claim that this church was built over the tomb of Peter.

Excavations beneath that building in the 20th century identified bones that they claim are actually those of Saint Peter.

6. In the Roman Catholic church, the Pope is referred to as (figuratively) “sitting on the chair of Saint Peter”. Also, the coat of arms and flag of the Catholic Church prominently features two keys, pointing back to the statement that Peter would be given the keys to the kingdom (which the Roman Catholic Church insists they still have).
7. Therefore, Roman Catholics claim that the Bishop of Rome (the Pope) is head over the entire Christian church worldwide, based on what Jesus said to Peter in **Matthew 16:18-19**.
8. Having one person as head over the church on earth has had an impact on the Catholic Church.
 - a. On the one hand, it has tended to foster a unity and stability that is in stark contrast to the Protestant world.
 - b. On the other hand, there have been some horribly wicked men who have occupied “the chair of St. Peter” over the centuries. Sometimes there have been two (or even three) who claimed to be Pope at the same time.
 - c. Also, a current severe problem in the Roman Catholic Church is that the present Pope (Francis) appears to be sympathetic to Marxist-inspired so-called ‘Liberation Theology’. The recent crisis in the Roman Catholic church is compounded by the fact that the current Pope also is weak on several points of doctrine that conservative Catholics would understand to be among the core, *unchangeable* teachings of the faith.
- ii. Protestants, in contrast, over the centuries typically have responded in reaction to these claims of the Roman Catholic church with the following:
 1. Protestants generally tend to elevate Paul and denigrate Peter.
 - a. Peter is the one who denied Christ three times.
 - b. Jesus once said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan.” (**Matthew 16:23**)
 - c. Paul rebuked Peter for backsliding in **Galatians 1**.
 - d. Peter was (only) apostle to the Jews, while Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles (everyone else), as Paul stated in **Galatians 2:8**.

2. While the first half of the book of **Acts** emphasizes the preaching and work of Peter, the focus shifts to Paul in the second half of **Acts**. Peter might seem to be eclipsed and set aside once Paul comes along.
 3. Luther taught that Paul presented the true gospel, and emphasized Romans and Paul's other writings above anything else in the New Testament.
 4. Some Protestants hold that the "keys" of **Matthew 16** are simply the knowledge of the gospel, something that Jesus gave to the entire church (not just to Peter).
- iii. Early Christian writer Tertullian, from Carthage in North Africa, writing c. 212 AD, explained the significance of Peter's special role in the church based on what Jesus said in **Matthew 16**:
1. "'On thee,' He says, 'will I build My Church;' and, 'I will give to thee the keys,' not to the Church; and, 'Whatsoever thou shalt have loosed or bound,' not what they shall have loosed or bound. For so withal the result teaches.
 2. "In (Peter) himself the Church was reared; that is, through (Peter) himself; (Peter) himself essayed the key; you see what (key): 'Men of Israel, let what I say sink into your ears: Jesus the Nazarene, a man destined by God for you,' and so forth. [*referring to Peter's speech to the Jews at Pentecost, in Acts 2*]
 3. "(Peter) himself, therefore, was the first to unbar, in Christ's baptism, the entrance to the heavenly kingdom, in which (kingdom) are 'loosed' the sins that were beforetime 'bound;' and those which have not been 'loosed' are 'bound,' in accordance with true salvation;
 4. "And Ananias he 'bound' with the bond of death (**Acts 5**), and the weak in his feet he 'absolved' from his defect of health (**Acts 3**). Moreover, in that dispute about the observance or non-observance of the Law, Peter was the first of all to be endued with the Spirit, and, after making preface touching the calling of the nations, to say, 'And now why are ye tempting the Lord, concerning the imposition upon the brethren of a yoke which neither we nor our fathers were able to support? But however, through the grace of Jesus we believe that we shall be saved in the same way as they.' (**Acts 15**) This sentence both 'loosed' those parts of the law which were abandoned, and 'bound' those which were reserved.

5. “Hence the power of loosing and of binding committed to Peter had nothing to do with the capital sins of believers; and if the Lord had given him a precept that he must grant pardon to a brother sinning against him even ‘seventy times sevenfold,’ (**Matthew 18**) of course He would have commanded him to ‘bind’—that is, to ‘retain’—nothing subsequently, unless perchance such (sins) as one may have committed against the Lord, not against a brother. For the forgiveness of (sins) committed in the case of a man is a prejudgment against the remission of sins against God.”
 - a. (Source: Tertullian, *On Modesty*, chapter 21; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 4, p. 99)
 - b. Points made by Tertullian include:
 - i. Peter was given the keys to the kingdom, and the ability to ‘bind’ and ‘loose’.
 - ii. The keys were to unlock the doors to the kingdom. Peter first opened those up with his speech on Pentecost in **Acts 2**, where he opened the way for the forgiveness of sins through baptism.
 1. Through this, the sins that were previously ‘bound’ could now be ‘loosed’.
 - iii. Peter also played a key role in loosening the Law of Moses’ requirements from the Gentile converts, based on what he did in **Acts 10** with the household of Cornelius, which he then recounts in **Acts 15** at the Jerusalem Council.
 - iv. Peter also “loosed” the bonds of being crippled for the lame man in **Acts 3**; and bound over Ananias to death in **Acts 5**.
 - v. Peter had a unique role in the church. However, the binding and loosing that Peter did was not about forgiving particular sins committed by individuals. And it was not some kind of a power that would be transferred on to successors.

IV. Men Leading the Church: Elders / Shepherds / Bishops

- a. Peter refers to himself as a “fellow *elder*”.
 - i. He calls the other elders to *shepherd* the flock.

- ii. He says they should serve as *overseers* (= *bishops*).
 - iii. In **1 Peter 5:1-2**, all three terms (elder, shepherd, bishop/overseer) are applied to the same people.
- b. Similarly, all three terms are used in **Acts 20**, where Paul addresses the Ephesian elders.
 - i. “From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.” (**Acts 20:17**, NKJV)
 - ii. “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” (**Acts 20:28**, NKJV)
- c. Likewise, the terms ‘bishop’ and ‘elder’ are used interchangeably in **Titus 1**:
 - i. “...appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money...” (**Titus 1:5-7**, NKJV)
- d. Leadership structure in the earliest mentions of the church, after the time of the apostles:
 - i. Either two-tiered:
 - 1. Bishops (overseer), who are also referred to as elders
 - 2. Deacons
 - ii. Or three-tiered:
 - 1. One bishop over all the elders of the church in a city
 - 2. Elders (plural)
 - 3. Deacons

V. The Kind of Leaders Peter Calls Elders to Be

- a. Peter calls the men who are elders in the church to be:
 - i. Eager servants
 - ii. Not in it for any personal financial gain
 - iii. Leading by example, rather than lording it over others based on position

1. I have seen bad examples of church leaders, and heard even more tragic stories from other Christians, from all sorts of backgrounds. We will discuss that problem further in this lesson.
- iv. Imitating the attitude of the *Chief Shepherd*, Jesus, to whom they will have to give an account. Not just following Jesus' teaching, but looking to the example of his life, as explained in the prophecies.
- b. Jesus, the Chief Shepherd.
 - i. Read **Ezekiel 34:1-10**.
 1. The Lord is upset with the bad shepherds, the bad leaders who were overseeing Israel. It seems that all the leaders of Israel are bad at this time, based on the description of the situation in this passage.
 2. The 'shepherds' are only looking after themselves. They are not taking care of the sheep – rather, they are abusing them.
 - a. The shepherds took the milk and wool and meat from the sheep, but did not feed and protect the sheep.
 - b. They did not take care of those who were sick and weak.
 - c. They did not prepare the strong for labor.
 - d. They did not seek those who had been misled and strayed, who had become prey for the wild animals.
 - ii. Read **Ezekiel 34:11-30**, and **Ezekiel 37:24-28**.
 1. The Lord says He will provide a Shepherd to gather and protect His people.
 - a. The Lord will "raise up" *one Shepherd* over all His flock. He refers to this Shepherd, the One who will be ruler in their midst, as "David". (**Ezekiel 34:23**).
 2. This Shepherd will:
 - a. Judge between the sheep and sheep, rams and goats.
 - b. Seek the lost and bring back the misled.
 - c. Feed the sheep in rich pasture.
 - d. Bind up the broken, strengthen the weak.
 - iii. This 'Good Shepherd' prophecy is about Jesus.

1. When Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd" in **John 10**, He was pointing to this prophecy.
 - a. Read **John 10:11-18**.
2. This also points to the story in **Matthew 25**, where Jesus says that on the Day of Judgment, He will be like a shepherd who separates the sheep from the goats.
3. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, was (literally) "raised up". There are several important prophecies that, like this one, speak of God "raising up" someone important. The Lord would *raise up*:
 - a. A *Prophet* like Moses (**Deuteronomy 18**),
 - b. A *Priest* over a new priesthood (**1 Samuel 2**),
 - c. A *King* descended from David, who would reign over the eternal kingdom (**2 Samuel 7**), and
 - d. The one *Shepherd* who would gather all the scattered sheep into one flock, and protect them (**Ezekiel 34**).
 - e. I believe this is what Peter has in mind, Jesus as the one (Chief) Shepherd of God, when he admonishes the elders how they should lead.
 - i. Peter points to the example of the character and life of Jesus (not just His teachings).
 - ii. He draws again from the Old Testament to illustrate the character of Christ.
 - iii. The elders are essentially "under-shepherds" who oversee parts of the one flock of the Great Shepherd. They will have to give an account to that Shepherd.
 - iv. Read **Matthew 24:45-51**. Jesus leaves people in charge before He returns, to take care of the fellow-servants. Those who end up abusing the others will be called to account and will pay a terrible price.
- c. There is a tremendous problem in churches today with bad leaders.
 - i. These problems have been rampant in Catholic, Protestant, Anabaptist and other Christian church fellowships. Examples of this kind of corruption include:

1. Sexual abuse of vulnerable members (adultery, fornication, homosexual abuse of minors, etc.).
2. Leaders who are primarily focused on protecting their financial position, or even engaged in outright corruption and theft.
 - a. Prioritizing how something will impact donations to the church, rather than what is the right thing to do to save souls.
 - i. Avoiding teaching on things (materialism, the permanence of marriage, the role of men and women, non-resistance) out of fear of losing members and contributions.
 - b. Playing favorites, the rich and influential over the poorer brothers and sisters.
 - c. Covering up wrongdoing among other leaders, rather than exposing it and publicly rebuking those involved.
 - i. This is in stark contrast with how Paul said the church should deal with serious sin in the lives of elders.
 - ii. Paul told Timothy: "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.' Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear." (1 Timothy 5:17-20, NKJV)
 - iii. **Question:** Where are the churches today that are putting *this* into practice (including the last part, where we are called to rebuke the elders publicly)?
3. Abusive, dictatorial, controlling leadership.
 - a. Either individually, using intermediates, or even using a pyramid structure to control people to achieve some human agenda.
 - b. Twisting Scriptures to advance some man-made agenda.

- ii. This kind of corruption in church leaders has destroyed the faith of many believers. I have seen many instances of this with my own eyes.
 - 1. Those who see this, who had trusted the leaders of the churches, can lose faith in everything (Jesus, the Bible) and thereafter assume *all* Christians are hypocrites.
 - 2. However, when we see corruption today from church leaders, let us remember:
 - a. Jesus blasted the corrupt religious leaders of his day, who loved money and looked good on the outside but were corrupt and greedy on the inside, more even than the prostitutes. Consider what Jesus said in **Matthew 23**.
 - i. The corrupt religious leaders were the people who conspired to crucify Jesus.
 - b. Corruption among religious leaders of God's people was a rampant problem for God's people in the Old Testament, as we saw in **Ezekiel 34**.
 - c. Jesus warned of people who would abuse their fellow-servants, those whom they were assigned to take care of, while waiting for His return.
 - i. Read **Matthew 24:45-51**.
 - d. Paul warned the Ephesian elders, in his farewell speech to them:
 - i. "And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that *for three years I did not cease to warn*

everyone night and day with tears.” (Acts 20:25-31, NKJV)

- e. Peter, aware of the same kind of temptations, warns the elders of his day in **1 Peter 5:1-4**.
 - i. Be good shepherds over the flock.
 - ii. Don't be in it for the money.
 - iii. Don't lord it over the others.
 - iv. Lead by example.
- iii. There have been some corrupt Christian leaders in the churches, even from the very beginning. This has always been a problem.
 - 1. *Even in the inner circle of Jesus' 12 apostles*, we see financial corruption in Judas, who stole money given for the poor.
 - 2. Unfortunately, this problem likely will be with us *even until the end*. Satan does not sleep, and if he can get to leaders, he can undermine many.
- iv. Some people think this problem of corruption in church leadership could be eliminated today by implementing the *right governing policies*. Some suggestions I have heard include:
 - 1. Be more diligent in selecting the elders, making sure the eldership only includes men who meet the Biblical qualifications. Be more vigilant about the vetting/selection process.
 - a. However, even while they were alive, Jesus, Peter and Paul all indicated we would have problems among leaders.
 - b. Good people can (and will) be tempted and corrupted. Also, bad or unspiritual people will end up slipping through any vetting process you come up with. We are not nearly as wise as the apostles!
 - 2. Insist on multiple elders (as opposed to one bishop).
 - 3. In the Catholic church, some believe the problem would be solved by allowing the leaders to be married.
 - a. However, plenty of examples of corruption among married people in other churches.

- b. Think of Ravi Zecharias, plenty of married Protestant leaders.
- 4. Unfortunately, church elders often end up delegating most of the responsibility for day-to-day leading of the church to hired staff (who often do not need to meet the type of high Biblical character qualifications set for elders).
- v. From the Bible, the issue of corruption in Christian leadership should be addressed by including the following:
 - 1. Make sure that the foundation of faith is Jesus and the Word of God, not the people in the church nor charismatic leaders.
 - a. Remind everyone that we are in a spiritual battle, against Satan.
 - b. That way, if a leader falls, the Christians will become more sobered rather than have their faith shattered.
 - c. Jesus and the apostles all warned about false teachers and corrupt leaders.
 - 2. Don't copy leadership models in the world around us. The Bible should be the standard for leadership, not the world.
 - a. In the 300's and 400's AD, the church started to copy the organizational structure of the Roman Empire. The church adopted:
 - i. One monarch, located in Rome.
 - ii. All the other bishops report to him.
 - iii. Top leader had great wealth and worldly power.
 - b. Today: unfortunately, many churches tend to copy the structure of the dominant 'successful' institutions of our own day: *the big corporations*. This can result in a church with:
 - i. Elders treated like a 'Board of Directors' (distant, caretakers, hire and fire the 'president'/CEO)
 - ii. Chief ministers treated like the 'President' or 'CEO' of a company.
 - 1. Highly paid.
 - 2. In charge of all day-to-day operations.

3. Major emphasis on fundraising, being the public face, an eloquent speaker, entertaining.
 4. Hierarchical rule based on position of authority over others.
3. Expect there will be problems. Teach about it, warn about it (as Paul did in Ephesus).
4. Establish spiritual men with the heart of good shepherds to be leaders in the church, and trust them!
5. When an elder sins and there are multiple witnesses, we should rebuke that elder publicly so that the others will fear the consequences.
 - a. We cannot treat the sins of leaders by a different standard than the sins of the 'regular members' of the church.
 - b. There should be one standard for addressing the lives (and sin) of *all* Christians in the church: the Bible.
6. See Jesus as the model Shepherd that all those reporting to Him must follow (**Ezekiel 34, John 10**). He will call the shepherds to account.