

# “Sheep and Shepherds”

1 Peter 5:1-7

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**1 Peter 5:1-7** *The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: 2 Shepherd the flock of God*

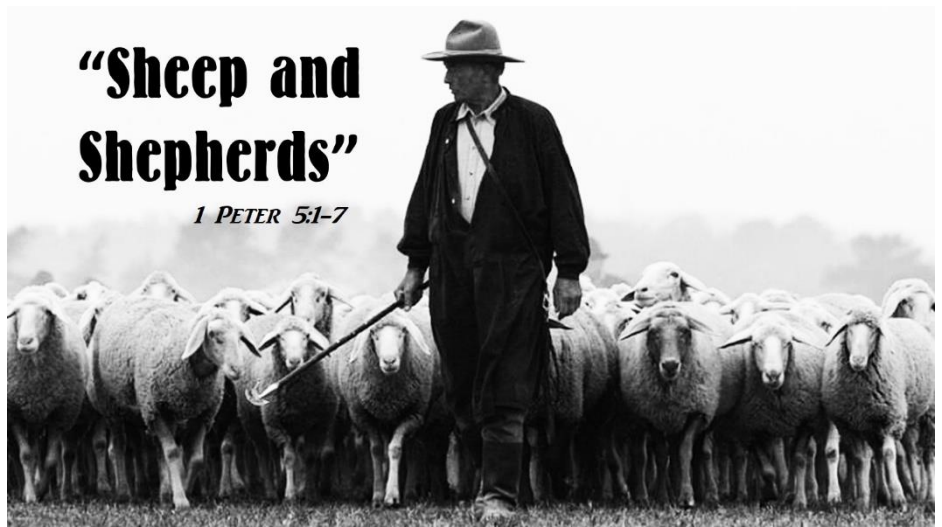
*which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; 4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. 5 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." 6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.*

There is something that every motorcycle rider learns early in his or her riding life. We become aware, *hopefully the “easy way,”* that when you are riding toward a crossroad, and a car pulls up to the stop sign opposite you, you cannot take anything for granted. We learn that the person in the car can literally look directly at you, and yet still not see you. That they can even make “eye-contact” and then inexplicably pull out on you, sending you home to Jesus.

What does this have to do with the scripture before us and its subsequent commentary? Well, the passage before us presents the *premise of* and the *instruction to* the church “shepherd” or “shepherds” and the sheep’s heart in response to them. It speaks of the church pastor, pastors, elders, etc, and how they are to conduct themselves in the oversight of God’s sheep, and how the sheep are to live accordingly. And through the years of my pastorate, I have “tached and preached” to no doubt thousands of those sheep or *potential* sheep. (...*who knows for sure?*) In that time I have had countless individuals spiritually and philosophically “pull up to that corner and stop” in a Sunday pew, and look straight at me. They made eye contact with me, and it would seem that they clearly “saw me”...that they hear my words and grasp the situation being presented, only to have them immediately turn and pull out into chaos and death.

Much of this can only be explained in the fact that despite their attendance here, the fact they came to church services, and participated in the community at large, they still did not “see” me. They *looked* at me, but they did not truly *see* me nor did they *hear my words*. Ultimately it would seem that it was the same with their relationship with Christ Himself. What the cyclist learns to do, is to ignore the fact that they are there in front of you and they are looking right at you, maybe even making eye contact with you. No, we ignore that fact and pay attention to one thing and one thing only: *Are their wheels moving?* We give our sole attention to their *movement*. ARE they moving and which way are they moving? Because the truth is that while the church is full this morning, only a few of you will truly see me and hear me. Those that do understand the roll and the call upon my life and the position I am to play in this church body and in your life. Not as a thug or domineering dictator. But as an “under-shepherd” to guide, feed, and protect the sheep of this community.

Today the “seeker-friendly” scriptural compromises and the desire to be both politically correct and ‘easy on the flesh’ make for a watered down version of the gospel that would be nearly unrecognizable to those who first read this letter! They were looking and listening to *their* shepherd because of literally what was at stake...what was “on the table.” They “got it.” They understood the dangers out there and that Satan was a roaring lion...prowling around “*seeking whom he may devour.*” They knew that God had divinely ordained the church as the vehicle to create a body of Christ for which to protect the sheep, nurture them in growth, and move the world.



What would WE say to the original recipients of this letter today, as they stood on the front lines of the battle holding Peter's letter and looking at us and how *we* live? Sadly we must acknowledge that had this early church to which Peter was writing practiced their faith the way the greater church today practices theirs, we would have to wonder, in the midst of trial and persecution, if there would be any church left whatsoever. But they apparently lived quite different than we...*even under fire*, because the message lived on!

Sadly, the greater church today is in many cases limping along under a rather poor reputation. Satan has corrupted vast segments of the Body of Christ wherein it has attempted to compromise with the world and its ways. We read in the newspapers of various well-known pastors, church groups and denominations that have succumbed to liberal, non-biblical doctrines. There are reports of abuse, mishandling of money, and wholesale abandonment of biblical principles for the sake of ecumenicalism, growth in numbers, public esteem, and personal power. There is weakness, strife, dissensions, church-splits over petty jealousies, and power struggles among members. We wonder why the average person then looks in from the outside and sees nothing that he wants to be a part of. He has enough problems already!

Because of this we have fulfilled the prophetic passage of 2 Timothy 3:5, of a corporate church that has a "...*form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.*" Thus much of the church today is for all practical purposes dead, and lacks any real effect upon the world around them. One cannot help but wonder what happened differently within the early church of Acts, with all of its power, determination, and boldness. The early church was passionate about God and their church. They lived for the Word and clung to fellowship. (Note Acts 2:42-47)

We know that the body of Christ, *the church*, is God's vehicle for evangelism, discipleship, accountability, and fellowship. We are the bride of Christ, although we are in mass, a wayward wife. We are told that Christ gave us apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to the church "*for the perfecting of the saints, (that's us!) for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*" (Eph 4:12). One can only gather therein that the problems in the church lie both upon the failure of its leadership, and the prideful hearts of its sheep. The Bible has given specific qualifications and directions for deacons, elders, and pastors, and express guidelines of behavior from those they serve. When we fail to adhere to these, we are sure to reap the devastating consequences.

Amongst the watered down nature and the clutter of the modern church, there still thankfully stands a few shining examples of godly biblical truth. These churches hold to the sovereignty of the Word, the truth of His direction, and the never changing aspect of His nature. They love as Jesus loved, not as the world defines such. They continue in the Acts 2:42-47, and because they do, they "turn the world upside down" as the early church did in Acts 17:6.

In this last chapter of Peter's first letter, we are given a glimpse into what was needed to keep the 'mo' going... *what was necessary to survive those difficult days, and indeed to even "thrive" as Peter desired that they do.* We today are slowly but surely moving into the same realm that they were in, and so thus we had better hear this letter and receive its message. Peter, knew very well the reality of the trials and tribulations that this church was facing at the time. He knew that the leadership would need to remain strong, hold to biblical principles, and maintain structure and order within the church community if they were to endure. He knew also that the flock...the "sheep," ...the *body of believers* would need to be active church participants, humble and submissive followers and faithfully engaged in the ministry of the greater kingdom if they were going to "thrive."

Peter begins herein by using the strong word "exhort" in his address to them. Such is not a common vernacular in our generation, but it was a rather common biblical term meaning to "direct and instruct with *passion.*" We certainly can gather that Peter is indeed zealous in his call upon the church to hear what he is saying. To actually "see" him and "hear" him and not to just dreamily look in his direction. There was too much at stake. The cost of failure here would be catastrophic and eternal!

He begins with the basics, the 'root' of our job as elders: *Shepherd the flock!* The KJV uses the word "feed" and such is really a good word because the original has in it the idea of actually caring for the flock, as a mission and a passion, not just a job! It means to rule, nourish, cherish, supply, and tend to the flock, not merely to preach the Word. And notice that Peter clearly denotes them as the "flock of *God*" not the flock of the pastor. The pastor is merely the under-shepherd, which means he is not the boss. The 'chief shepherd' is the boss and I am really just a sheep dog!

The church leaders are not to serve under any other compulsion than that of the Spirit's call as well as His enabling. We cannot serve in such a capacity because of peer pressure, or power desire or for financial gain. If our motivations to lead are not pure, then they are corrupt and problems will follow for sure. I remember a man that wanted so badly to be an elder here and asked me often, but his heart was full of pride and he believed himself to be a leader, maybe even a pastor. He once told me "Come on Tim...being a pastor isn't that hard!" When it finally became clear that he was not going to readily be placed in such a roll, he left the church, only proving our view of him was 'spot on.' That he did not love you, he only loved himself and power. His act vindicated us. He "looked at me" but his movement showed he did not "see" me. Our actions must only be out of love for the flock and for the shepherd!

The pastor is not to be a dictator...a 'big brother' riding roughshod over the church. Yes, he should be in authority, but not through pride or insecurity. Our rule here must ultimately come from God not the *godfather!* For a godly leader *leads* his flock, he does not *drive* them! That's how cults operate...communities that look to the *man* instead of "**THE** Man," who in truth is no "man" at all, but is in fact God in flesh. A pastor or elder must lead through example not through command. If they are the men they should be, then they will be there beside you when you serve and fellowship whenever possible!

Verse 4 says that "... *when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.*" Peter is not painting a rosy picture here for the leaders of the church any more than he is for the flock. Serving the church in such a capacity would be difficult and testing, just as it is for those who try to lead in the church today. He readily acknowledges that any reward that might be received for such service may not always come in this life, but awaits us only at His return. Certainly that is a great comfort and blessing, however it is also a stark truth that anyone who seeks to serve God in a high capacity needs to realize!

Peter goes on in his letter to make the call for the flock to in turn support their leaders and not make the job any more difficult than it already is. There is that dreaded word again that Peter has used before in this letter: *submit*. The submission herein is before the "elders" which can mean in respect to age, but in the context undoubtedly means before those who are leading in the church. We again may bristle at such a call upon us, but the fact remains that we all must submit to higher authority in our lives if we want to stay employed, have friends, and stay out of jail! Is God and His church not worthy of the same priority?

Peter's letter before us is only one of the places in scripture that calls upon us as a church to support our leaders. The writer of Hebrews, chapter 13, verse 17 says "*Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.*" (1 Thess 5:12-13, 17, 1 Cor 16:16, etc) Scripture is also full of direction to those leaders as to how we are to lead and shepherd.

Ultimately...despite our best efforts many will reject our instruction and will reap the harvest of what they planted. Eze 3:19-21 "*Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul. Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; also you will have delivered your soul.*"

We as Christians should be the ones setting the example of humility instead of the example of rebellion and strife that we see so often in church splits and public tantrums. Many have and many will refuse to obey this direction, and then find themselves at odds with God Himself because of it. Many a servant has been “shelved” from service because they refuse to humbly submit to those over them.

Peter goes on to put the 'period' at the end of the sentence with the call to "humble *yourself*"...meaning do not put yourself in a position where someone else must do it for you. He goes so far as to seek humility amongst each other and He then asks that we also make the ultimate submission through humility before God Himself. Such may seem to be a simple 'no-brainer' and thus you may be apt to move on without giving much of a thought. But behind every sin, every transgression, every rebellious act we commit there lies this issue of self-pride and our refusal to submit. It is not *a* problem for the believer, it is *the* problem! If we are asked to "humble ourselves" then we can gather that the power and ability to fulfill such is available to every believer through the infilling Holy Spirit.

Certainly there is the mandate of "humbling yourself" that is crucial to those who seek to serve...especially to leadership, to those who seek to be used in the furthering of the Kingdom of God. Therefore let us make no mistake here! Without a humble spirit, God will not use us. He has made that emphatically clear throughout scripture. (*Isa 42:8, 1Cor 1:20, 26-31*) Such submission and humility is not a strain when we really understand and embrace the fact that He is our "caretaker." That He holds our next breathe in His hands, and our next thought in His heart. He "cares for us." Intimately, lovingly, personally, and faithfully. He IS our life, and without Him we have none.

This does not mean we are to be fatalists, and just let the wind blow us about without any purposeful effort or passionate dreaming. Your leadership here works *hard* for you and the furtherance of the kingdom. But do we trust Him to guide us? Are we looking for His way for us, or are we forever pushing contrary to His will because we want what WE want and we trust ourselves more than we trust Him?

"*Cast all your care upon Him...*" Note the word "*all*." It gives clarity to the extent and magnitude of our call to submission before Him. God is not cutting any deals. There will be no successful power sharing arrangements. Either He is Lord of your life, or He remains a distant "operational handbook" that you have around somewhere so we can look up what that warning light is on your dash, and then you put away again once the issue is resolved. As the old saying goes "He is either Lord of all, or Lord not at all."

Peter began this letter by reminding the church that they were merely "sojourners" ...visitors here that were passing through a world that was not ultimately their home. He spoke of the faithful security that they had in Christ, despite all that they were enduring...despite the craziness of life around them. It is a reminder that we need also today! For even as the world seems to be unraveling around us, God is not panicked, worried, surprised, or concerned. And He is asking us to trust Him even when we do not understand and when we are afraid. This would and *will* require *faith*. A very real and active living trust in the sovereign hand of God. And it is "impossible to please God without it..."