

Sermon: Relationships and Responsibilities within the Church

Text: [I Peter 5:1-14 \(ESV\)](#)

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Introduction: I was baptized at eight years old (probably a little young) and have been a member of Christ's kingdom for about 65 years. I have watched elders from the perspective of a member and that of a minister. I have seen wonderful godly men, and I have seen men who were not qualified to hold the office of elder in Christ's Church. Peter knew good leaders make all the difference in a positive way, but bad leaders can damage and wound Jesus' Church.

I was in a men's group in Eden, NC. Every time we met together we sang about being spiritual soldiers and being at war - you know, *Onward Christian Soldiers*. I think many of us have become too comfortable in this "passing-away-world." We need to restart our men's group now that COVID is a past concern. It will seem different without Tom and Rick, but they would have wanted us to carry on.

Years ago, my dad was an elder in the Piqua Church of Christ as it was called back then. But, I especially remember two other elders from my past: Harold Edminson and Lawrence Kepler. Both these men like my father had served in WWII; but unlike my father, both of these two other elders were wounded while serving our country. In Church both men stood up for the truth and gave their lives in service to a more important cause - the cause of Christ and His Church.

We watch with horror and disgust at what is happening in Ukraine, feeling helpless to affect a positive outcome, yet next week we will take up a special offering for I.D.E.S. and TCM to directly help the people of Ukraine because they are helping not just with physical needs, but spiritual needs as well.

When I was a young man, Harold made a very profound impression on me and I am certain he played a role in my going into the ministry. I met Lawrence Kepler in 2002, and I saw him and another elder by the name of Henry Johnson stand with me against evil men and women (who were in the church) during a very difficult time. Lawrence Kepler and his wife Ida Mae gave Teresa and I a check for \$1000.00 to help with our move away from Greenville, NC up to Beaver, PA back in 2004. All of these men fought the good fight while they were here on the earth. And Mr. Kepler never forgot who his Commander was.

I. A Good Elder Will Have Healthy Relationships (vv. 1-4).

I Peter 5:1-4 (ESV) 1 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: 2 shepherd (**care for**) the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

You might remember in John's gospel the risen Christ asking Peter a probing question: **John 21:15 (ESV)** 15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."

Peter's denial had certainly been part of Jesus' suffering! Whenever we act as if we do not know Jesus, it affects our relationship with the Father. And Peter is saying he is a fellow-elder like those he is addressing and knows both the pain of denial and the joy of reconciliation. There really is no room for talk like "head" or "chief elder" in a New Testament-patterned church. Peter does want, however, for these fellow-elders to evaluate their ministries as he had had to do.

If a person is going to be a good elder, he must have a healthy relationship:

A. With God

An elder must be *willing* to serve and desire the office. Paul had even told Timothy this (**I Timothy 3:1**). We all know service that is compelled or coerced is never as good as that which is offered freely and motivated from love.

And money or dishonest gain (*filthy lucre*, AV) should never be a motivator to do ministry for God even though some elders are paid like full-time vocational ministers. If one is truly called by God to do ministry, there is energy and a pursuit of excellence. If it is only a "job," well, then you know how that is, too. An elder should sense God's call on his life.

John Calvin points out three possible traps here for those wishing to lead the flock of God: sloth, i.e., laziness; desire for gain, and lust for power. -(Grudem, *I Peter*, p. 188)

Before a man becomes an elder he needs to check his relationship with God. This will help him develop a healthy relationship:

B. With those in the Church

An elder should be very transparent. He should be willing to have people see him living for Christ. An elder, though, never should take the attitude that he is superior to others or better than those for whom he has been given responsibility.

**If a man is right with God, he can love others because he feels loved.
If he has grown to appreciate the grace of God, he can extend grace to others.
If he knows he is forgiven, he can show mercy to others as well.**

And people will pick up on this genuine faith and commitment to God that is shown in the care of God's people.

Do you think Peter's attitude changed after Jesus was raised from the dead and Peter was restored to leadership after denying Jesus? It was Peter who gave the first sermon on Pentecost, not the beloved and faithful disciple, John. That's grace!

II. A Good Elder Will Carry out His Responsibilities (vv. 5-9).

I Peter 5:5-9 (ESV) ⁵ Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

In the culture of the New Testament a young man was, in most circles, anyone under 40. The Greek word (*geron*) was someone over 40. In the Jewish mind, anyone under 40 was really not worth listening to because they had not had enough time to learn important life-lessons yet. There *can be* great wisdom with age, if we learn from God and his discipline, and are trained in His Word.

I believe Peter had learned some lessons along the way, and he was simply trying to save others who were younger the pain that comes from failure and sin. Young people do not always want or accept the counsel of the aged, but Peter cares enough to share his life with others.

A person does not need to wait until he/she is older, though, to:

A. Be an example for others.

Here is Peter's advice:

Be subject or submissive to those older (wiser) that have been given responsibility for you by God. One of the reasons our world is in such a mess is there is little respect today for anyone or anything that is old.

And be subject to authority that is God-appointed. Paul says married couples are to be mutually submissive (wives and husbands, [Ephesians 5:21-22](#)), citizenry to government leaders ([Romans 13:1](#)); and here, members in churches to elders.

Today, it seems everyone is out for themselves. Corporate entities have historically gotten into serious trouble because of greed, an everyone-out-for-themselves kind of mentality. And I know that respect needs to be earned, but Peter says if someone loves you and cares for you like Jesus does the church, that person is worth listening to and obeying.

Be humble, not proud. God can humble you if you are not willing to take on that attitude for yourself. Only [Proverbs 3:34](#) is quoted in the [I Peter 5](#) text, but listen to the surrounding verses as they provide context for the sage's remarks in the O.T. passage: [Proverbs 3:33-35 \(ESV\)](#) ³³ The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the dwelling of the righteous. ³⁴ Toward the scorers he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favor. ³⁵ The wise will inherit honor, but fools get disgrace.

Let's jump back into the text here. ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

After becoming humble the text reads that we will naturally give our problems to Someone who not only cares, but who can help - who can save us. I want you to know God will take care of you in everything! Don't worry about the future, that is also in God's hands. His supply of blessings is endless!

In the meantime, before Jesus comes again for His Church we need to: *be sober-minded, self-controlled*. The KJV reads “sober.” Peter had used this word in **chapter 4** and it is in the context of the end of time. **I Peter 4:7 (ESV)** ⁷ The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

In the “last days” there will be trouble. When did the “last days” begin? They began as Jesus was ascending to heaven and to the Father. We need to remain faithful so as not to lose our reward. And in this meantime we need to: *be watchful, alert*. Why? **I Peter 5:8 (ESV)** ⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

“Confidence in God must not lead to slackness; the spiritual warfare which Christians (they) wage demands vigilance” (Beare).

Resist the devil. - Literally here *resist* means to stand up against. We are in a conflict, a war that can be deadly for those who do not pay attention spiritually.

Then we have the idea of *standing firm in the faith*. This may mean by God’s help and our belief in his eternal care, but this is no passive resistance. In **Ephesians 6** Paul talks about the weapons for this battle: truth, righteousness, the gospel, the word of God, and prayer.

A good elder will:

B. Teach life-lessons to others.

It is one thing to have saving information; it is another to share it. Peter cannot make others live the life they should, yet he can warn them of the dangers ahead. It is not judgmental to care enough for the church and others when we say difficult things in order to save them.

There is a place in the life of the church to share testimony as to how Jesus has saved us. Peter also wants them to know that their experiences of suffering, persecution and temptation are not unique, but common to the life of a believer. Yet, in the midst of trouble, there is good news coming.

III. A Good Elder Will See Results in Others (vv. 10-11).

I Peter 5:10-11 (ESV) ¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Elders will see people:

A. Made whole (restored).

Peter had seen many people struggle and suffer only to be restored by Christ. He had been a primary example of that very process. It would not be out of place to suggest the word “save” as an alternate understanding for “restore” in [verse 10](#). It is through being saved/restored to God that we find peace even in this world.

The word translated “restore” (καταρτιζω) means “to put in order, to mend, to reestablish, to make whole. The word could be used in a medical sense of setting a broken bone or of repairing and refitting a damaged vessel.” - Rienecker, p. 766

And in the same way, Peter, after being restored by Christ, was stronger and made more useful to the Kingdom. Many times we can become better after mistakes are made, if we can repent and learn from them.

It is true, isn't it, that through suffering and God's help we can be:

B. Strengthened

We should not fight “the fight” solo, and that is why Peter had help in his ministry. Elders do not fight for us as much as *with* us, against our common enemy, the Devil. And we do not struggle alone either; God is with us. The Greek name for the Holy Spirit (Paraklete) means “one who is called alongside” - as a Helper, Comforter, and Advocate.

We know if we stay faithful to Jesus, we will win! The fact we have “Assurance of strength and victory is another motivation for continuing to resist evil” and live for Jesus.

Mastering the Basics, Serendipity, p. 63

Conclusion: I would like to make a contemporary correction on the eldership. Being a shepherd for God's flock is never about ruling, authority over, or dominating someone. It is all about love, care, and sacrifice while submitting to the will of God and the best interest of others. We cannot be leaders alone and in isolation. We walk together toward heaven as servants of the Most High.

Our morning text finishes: **I Peter 5:12-14 (ESV)** ¹² By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you (**comment about Peter's Greek**), exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. ¹³ She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son ¹⁴ Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

Invitation: When or as we are faithful in accepting Jesus as our Savior we are given a crown of life. Speaking to the Church, the Apostle John informs the Bride of Christ as to her responsibility.

Revelation 2:10 ESV ¹⁰ Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

And then there is the warning, again to the Church: **Revelation 3:11 ESV** ¹¹ I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.

In **verse 13** of our text, Mark (sometimes called *John Mark*) is called “my son” by Peter. This was certainly a term of endearment. John Mark had deserted the Apostle Paul on his 2nd missionary journey and caused a problem with Paul and Mark’s uncle - Barnabas. But as time went on there was a reconciliation and even Paul while he is in prison right before his execution, says to Timothy :

II Timothy 4:9-11 ESV ⁹ Do your best to come to me soon. ¹⁰ For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia,[a] Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹ Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.

Footnotes: [a] II Timothy 4:10 Some manuscripts *Gaul*

We may have disappointed others, as well as God, but there is always a way back if we will only repent. John Mark started out as a perceived failure, reconciled with Paul, and went on to write the 2nd Gospel in the NT. Imagine what God could do with you...

Invitation Hymn: