

Believers Conference 1970-01 Elders

by Stan Ford

The sermon emphasizes the importance of elders being among the flock, not over them, and the need for humility, fearlessness, freedom, and faithfulness in their role.

Duration: 33:29

Scripture: 1 Peter 5:1

Topics: "Church Leadership", "Shepherd Ministry"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the role of elders in the church and their responsibility to feed and care for the sheep. The speaker emphasizes the importance of humility and submission among the sheep, as they are called to honor and obey their shepherds. The speaker also acknowledges the challenges that elders may face when the sheep are unwilling to be fed. The sermon concludes with a threefold description of an elder, a threefold danger they may encounter, and a threefold direction for their role in the church. The speaker encourages elders to faithfully fulfill their duty to feed and care for the sheep, relying on God's guidance and the example of Jesus as the ultimate shepherd.

Transcript

Last chapter of the first epistle of Peter. The first epistle of Peter and the last chapter. It's been a real joy in my heart to have been with you over the past days, to having had the privilege of ministering with John and the things of God to you, and the privilege of meeting you as during the course of the day so frequently we've talked one with another concerning the things of God.

And again and again one has found that there has been, deep on the heart for so many of you, a real burden for the fellowship from which you have come. A desire that God's name may be glorified amongst those that he has called you to labor with. And again and again questions have been put to one, or statements have been made concerning the local fellowship and concerning the elders and those that make up the fellowship.

And I had on my heart just yesterday, and after very much prayer last night, and some little preparation, I felt that I would like to share with you, especially maybe with those of us that would seek to feed and care for the flock of God, I would like to share with you something of the word of God concerning elders and their responsibilities, concerning sheep as well as shepherds and their responsibilities. The fifth chapter, the elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking

the oversight thereof, not of constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, not of a ready mind, neither of being wrought over God's heritage, but being samples to the flock.

And when the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that paideth not away. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility, for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exhort you in due time, casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour. Whom with it shed fast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, savage, strengthened, selfless, to whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Now, the Lord will add his blessing, I'm sure, to the reading of his own precious work.

I don't want just to look, for I haven't time this morning, at the general context of this first letter that Peter wrote. I wish to remind you that its great theme is summed up in the sufferings and the glory both of Christ, and the suffering and the glory of those that come to know him as saviour and crown him as Lord. But when we come to this last chapter, there are two tremendous truths, it seems to me, that have been brought before us.

First, it is the truth of the shepherd, the elder, and then it is the truth, for they are always linked together in Holy Writ, the responsibility of the shepherd, but also the sheep, and the responsibility of the sheep. I remember years ago, away in the little North Devon town of Ilfracombe, ministering on one of the songs at the annual conference, and during the course of my remarks, I had exalted maybe with a little more fire than I've got now, so I was a wee bit younger, but nevertheless I'd exalted the elder to feed the sheep. And as we were walking up over the hill, a dear aged brother, Mr. Stephen, walked by my side.

He said, Brother Ford, could I ask you a question? And I knew I was bored. By the way, you know, we have an entirely different custom in our country, and I remember, I remember so very, very well, the first time I ever came to America, and the first time I ever spoke. In my country, at the close of the meeting, if anyone marches up the front to speak to you, you can rest assured you've said something they haven't agreed with.

But over here, as soon as the meeting's over, you come up to say thank you. A very nice thing. But the first time I was here, I saw almost my own audience.

You'd frighten a man to death. You'd frighten a man to death. But that's just by the way.

But as I was going up to this dear brother, I said, I wonder if I can ask you a question? And a man who's been an elder and an old one for many long years, said, Brother Stan, what do you do when the sheep don't want to be fed? So, it's all very well to say feed the sheep, but the same verses that say feed the sheep, I'm going to suggest to you say sheep be willing to be fed. So, we'll consider it together this morning, if we may. First of all, then, if I may, a word to the elder, to the shepherd.

You will notice that you read with me carefully, there's a threefold description for us of an elder. And having given to us as it were the threefold description of an elder, then there's a threefold danger of an

elder. And having spoken of the threefold description and the threefold danger of an elder, he shows us the threefold direction to an elder.

And then draws the matter of shepherds and elders to a close by reminding us not only of their description and their danger, not only of giving them direction, but he draws it to a close by telling us of the threefold diadem of an elder. First of all, then, let's have a look at the threefold description of an elder. You will notice that verse one says as poor as, I'm sorry, Peter, dares to like the elders which are among you.

The elders which are among you. Now, you will notice this word elder, it does not say the priests which are among you. It does not say, in effect, the elders that are over you.

It says the elders, not priests, elders which are among you. Now, the word elder is, as most of you are aware, the word that we always translate as to a prospector, and it is indeed the thought of one who is this prospector, this elder, and we look at him, a man of some years, a man of some experience, a man of some ability, and Peter writes to those that are prospectors, those that are elders among you. You will notice that not only does he call them prospectors or elders, but he goes further and he dares to say of them that they are the proclaimers of Christ's suffering.

For he lives himself with them, he says, who also are an elder and a witness, a teleporter of the sufferings of Christ. Now, those brethren that I'm speaking to today, ancestors who speak over the younger sisters to have a watchful eye and care, may I there suggest to you that the Lord is saying to each one of them that we are those who shall be not over the people of God, but among them. We shall be part of them.

We shall be those that are mixing with them, those that are familiar with their needs. One of the great problems today is that those that get older, as they get older by the natural course of life, they find themselves unable to do what younger people can do, and they're asked to withdraw themselves. And guess where the feeling that as Peter dares to say the elders that are among you, he's not only saying to elders, keep your selves in touch with your flock, but he's daring to say to younger folk, don't you ever, don't you ever place yourself in a position where you've withdrawn from elders.

For as I said the other day, and I could not emphasize it more, the more I read the word of God, and if I desire to be associated with a New Testament church, this is essential, the more I read the word of God, the more I realize that if elders are to be amongst us, the responsibility is not only with the elder being there, but with the younger and others being willing to have them there. Oh, let us with all our heart pray, let us with all our being pray that there shall be no division amongst God's folk, but that as a family of God, young and older, we may present to the world and to angelic beings the wonder of God's church, in Jesus Christ, the oneness of the Lord. Then you will notice, because I have said they are proclaimers, of Christ's suffering.

I'm glad of it, that an elder is a man who is familiar with, an elder is a man who is continually meditating upon the greatest theme of the Christian church, that we preach Christ and him crucified. We preach Christ and him crucified, all that we might ever find ourselves under the shadow of the cross. What was it the poet said? Did he not remind us, thou censer of all time and place, thou call of God, thou count of grace, thou meeting place with earth and heaven, thou lightning rod, ye sword of rock rhythm, thou altar where Christ died for me.

My sole salute, help those of us that are elder, let us continually dwell under the shadow of the sufferings of the cross. But then you will notice that an elder, as we look at this description of him, he's first of all a

presbyter, an elder, he is second a proclaimer of Christ's sufferings, but he is also a partaker of Christ's glory. Oh I love that, a partaker of Christ's glory.

The elders which are among you I exhort, who also am an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. It's not this one. I wonder if I may ask you just to turn with me a moment please, to the eighth chapter of that lovely epistle to the Romans, Romans chapter 8, and I wonder if we could just read together some glorious words.

Oh I know you know them, and I need scarcely ask you to turn to them, but I feel we must have the very scripture brought before. And it shall then that heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, it so be that we suffer with him that we may be also glorified together. I reckon that the suffering of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed.

So enough, that's it, not the glory that shall be revealed, but revealed in us. And while we look forward to that blessed day, when by grace we shall enter in fully to the glory, let us never forget that the apostle could write to the church at Colossae and say, Christ in you the hope of glory. And that's not heaven, that's the hope of glory now.

And let us not forget that we have been reminded in the eights of Romans that whom he hath justified, then he hath also glorified. Oh that we might together experience something of the glory of my brother who seeks in a fellowship to care for the flock. Small as that fellowship may be, as weak as you may feel yourselves.

Oh let us be those that seek to abide under the shadow of the cross, and yet to know something of the glory of the Christ who lives. Oh lead me to the man that made me a beggar of sin, and with his old outwards maces in that thrilled one's heart. Oh lead me to the man that draws to all God's nature glorified, descending to the depths of love, and for me conquered every fire.

Oh that you and I might be associated, my brother and my sister, with a Christ as an elder, a prosperer, as one who indeed is a proclaimer of the sufferings of Christ, and also one who in a very real way is a partaker of the glory that shall follow. But then would you notice that having thought before of the construction of an elder, he goes forward and he dares to tell us of the danger of an elder, and of the threefold danger for every elder. And please I am not being critical.

I have labored amongst God's folk in enough countries to know this, that he who desires the office of a bishop will desire us a good work, work, work. Oh that you and I might realize, my brother, my sister, that if an elder is doing his work as God would have him do it, his work indeed. And I'm not being critical, but I must just consider with you for the word of God brings it forth.

He says that there is a threefold danger for every elder. First of all the danger of laziness, second the danger of lucre, and thirdly the danger of abhorrence. He says first of all here is the danger of laziness.

He says take the oversight not by constraint, but willingly. Or is it not a fact that many a time those of us that speak in some small measure, I call, I say those of us, but I am not an elder of course, you would appreciate as an evangelist, I have no association with the local fellowship. No mention of the gift of the evangelist.

This is just the problem. The local church, no matter the gift of the evangelist, the church, the members of the church in England have been commanded to delay meditation. That's where the gift of the evangelist

comes.

Of course I'm not an elder. But I will say this, those of us who would speak to prayer in some small measure for the church of God, I think it's rather stupid to realize that we are called to do it willingly. How many times is it asked for for us to sit back in our chairs and follow signs? More and more times.

And we have to be constrained to get on with the work of God. How easy it is when they've been having him accepted in our assembly as one that has to lead over the church of God, to sit back and become somewhat lazy in the service of God, and to say this must ever be the mark of an elder, that he must willingly do his work. Willingly do his work.

The moment you notice not only the danger, and danger appears of laziness, but the danger of the love of leadership. For he goes further in verse 2 and says, that they preach the gospel must live by the gospel I know. But he dares to say in verse 2, that he's a flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for a filthy looter, but of a ready mark.

Oh, I expect some of you sit back when you read words like those and clean your cup. Oh dear me, you'll never get any looter from the assembly that I've been having. I won't get any loot, I'm always going to get something.

Well that's it. That's it. But I've a feeling he must face it.

It is a danger, is it not? It is a danger sometimes, even in the affairs of God, and in the affairs of business, to use the things of God to try and improve our business. You need to be careful. I say no, cast no further comment than that.

It's not the word of God I am but the possible preacher. Then not only the love of laziness, and the love of looter, but the love of lauding it over God's people. Oh heart of me, verse 3, neither acting in words over God's parodies, but being an example to the flock.

Oh, but those of us that are elders, may as we speak in some measure of the care for the church. Now this is injection of the time. When the apostle Paul writes, he speaks this way.

He speaks of ruling your own house with care for the church of God. All we rule our family is in care for the church. He walks over, and all that are those that have the privilege.

So, in some measure, major in the assemblies of God's church. Amongst the local church, God grants that we may not lord it over. Paul, when he writes to the letter to Nino, you remember, he comes in verses 8 and 9, and this is how the apostle pleads with one who somehow has become hard in his approach to others.

He dares to say, yes, form my faith. Yet for love's sake, I'd rather be pleased. He is called, he is a prisoner.

All the love he constrains one to care for another. He didn't lord it. He could write and say what we are, but he never did.

As it is said, to entail the age of pain. Then it's so easy threefold description of an elder, and the threefold danger of an elder. People are going to bring before us the threefold direction of an elder.

Feed the flock of God. Let us defend the flock. Feed the flock.

I suggest to you, first of all, he tells us that the flock must be fed fearlessly. He tells us that the flock of God must be fed freely. And he tells us the flock of God must be fed faithfully.

Is that right? Oh, look at it. I didn't put it there, please. I didn't write.

First of all, he says, feed the flock of God fearlessly. Not with tongues by fear or temper. But he dares to tell us that we must feed it fearlessly.

Happen again to the joyous words of verse two. Feed the flock of God, which is among you, taking the oath by force, not by strength, but willingly. Not by forcing your path out of a ready mind.

Go forward to feed that flock of God. Oh, brethren, with no fear or temper before you, to feed the flock of God. Now, I know it is the most difficult thing to feed the flock of God.

No man can judge what he has not got himself. Most of you are aware that my favorite song is the 144th song. You know, the lovely God speaking in deeds of the elders.

He dares to say that your gardens may be full, affording all manner of source. Oh, brethren, sisters, it's not a fact that sometimes we walk into our lives from the source. We become very familiar with certain portions of the Bible.

We know the wondrous truths of the return of the Lord. We're familiar with the great truths of the offering. We know some things of the glorious message in deeds of the minor or major prophet.

But the whole of the word of God says this, that there may be all manner of source. Feed the flock of God. All that you and I may give to those that are in our fellowship.

That food which not we think we are masters of and therefore can give them. But give them that which we see they need. And I am persuaded of this.

There may be some of you disagree with me. I wouldn't like to disagree. I would like you to be right.

But you know, I am persuaded of this. That Peter is not necessarily saying that that elder shall be the one that shall pass on the food. No, I know the qualifications of an elder is that he has to feed.

But feed the flock of God. And you talents of hope. Why, you know, there comes occasions when if your children are unable to eat, if something is wrong, you do not necessarily yourself say, well, I must go and cook that meal.

If you go to get some food, someone else may have prepared that you can pass on to. And I've been told these past days that we have been listening indeed to the works of the Lord and the opportunities of faith that can be used in the different talents. This would never take the place of an elder teaching.

But there comes times when sometimes you pour in others to help. You feed the flock of God. You're a theologian.

Then you'll notice not only feeding fearlessly, but feeding freely. I suggest again, as we look at the front, he's daring to say not considering our payment. He's daring to say feed it freely, not poor, filthy loafer.

I want to say a word here because I can. You see, I know many of you. But I am a stranger of truth.

But I have often heard, not necessarily here, though I have heard some little talk along this line. I've often heard folks say, well, you know, we would like to invite Father Florento, but we're such a small assembly. But Lord, we couldn't take his ministry to his feet.

Now, I've been many years preaching the gospel. 30 years or so ago, I captured Christ. And three years after I captured the Savior, I lowered aside what I was doing.

That surely I might give myself to the ministry of God. And in many countries it's been my joy to observe the Lord. And I want to say this, that I have met hundreds of brethren that have given themselves to the service of God in this house.

I have never yet met one of them. Now, I've spoken to hundreds of them. I've never yet met one of them who has asked to go to a small meeting because of the consideration of being unable to meet his needs.

That brother would say no. Now, I've never met one. And when I hear brethren speak of them, I don't know if I could rise up in protest.

Generally speaking, the little meeting who says no one comes where we are, never asks anyone to come where they are. And I've appeared in some of these small meetings. I've appeared in them.

And as long as you're there, you'll find someone will come here. And it would not be the thought of anything but a desire to be here. As it is in my experience of God's people, and I can only say what I have found, people not only carelessly and freely, but faithfully have been trampled to the floor.

All the followers of their elders may be entangled to the floor, but the younger, the older, and the powerless. And when we speak of younger, think I'm not speaking of younger in age. I'm speaking of younger in just experience.

You know, I meet some young folks that are older than the things of God, and I meet some old folks that are children in the things of God. I meet some folks who've just passed through Christ, and in the century of 70, they've just passed through Christ. They're young people at the growth of God.

I've met young men in the 20th century who were touched at the same year when they were seven or eight or nine, have been raised in the things of God, and in some measure are elders in the things of God. And when I'm speaking of younger, I'm not speaking necessarily of young folks in age. I'm speaking more of young folks in just experience.

And it's all to say, all people faithfully. The example is this. And I guess this is how I'm confronted, is when I was first confronted, it was what my brethren were, not what my brethren said, that affected me most deeply.

And then he goes further, and having given the threefold direction, he reminds us of this threefold challenge. He says, those of you that are elders, don't forget that first of all, there is a promise of a plan of life for your faithfulness and revelation's sake. There is a promise of the plan of righteousness for your fighting, for your for the good fight.

Oh, I like that, that's sweet. I like that. I don't know much about many things, but I know a little bit about fighting.

And I do know this, that when the apostle speaks, he says, I fought a good fight. Some people imagine fighting as standing up and letting someone hit you. That's slaughter, that's not fighting.

Fighting is giving him one laughter, that's not despair. And it's a good fight, that the old devil may come. And sometimes it's like that.

But isn't it good to give him one laugh? Yeah. Oh, he dares to say, I fought under the crown of righteousness. If there is a crown indeed of life for our faithfulness, there's a crown of righteousness for our fighting.

And here he dares to say, there's a crown of glory for our singing. For if we keep the flock of God, we're fine as a whore. When the chief metal shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory.

Oh, let it be his name, and it shall be not a one. Now here, then, Peter has something to say to Elvis. I trust I have passed it on in some great advance.

Oh, I have a great love for those that care. I know their problems. I know they frequently have their criticised.

I know how difficult it can be. I know how quickly the evil one comes and suggests that we sit back and we do nothing. My brethren, my brethren, may I say this to you.

Step on. There are God's people who appreciate you. And bless God, there's a God in heaven.

And Christ's ahead of the church. He'll take you where you are. But having spoken indeed of the shepherd, now it seems to me he speaks of the sheep.

And goeth on their pride, likewise in young love, subject yourselves unto the elder. Nay, all of you be subject one to another. All of you be subject to one another.

I suggest to you that if there is a threefold description indeed of the elder, here we have three great truths concerning not the shepherd but the sheep. First of all, the sheep are exalted to honour the shepherd. They are exalted to humble themselves.

And they are exalted to hinder Satan. That's a good thing. First of all, we are exalted to honour the shepherd.

Likewise in younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Oh, that we might aid those that watch over us, those that care for us. And we may be those that as we change hats on and observe their example and listen to them.

Though sometimes we feel, oh, if only they would tell us a little more. You often hear folks, don't you? I often hear folks say, ah, yes, but you know, it's just, it's just, it's so simple the ministry. We want something a bit cheaper.

Well, it's my family's ministry. It's essential. But I do remember the time, you know, when first I was converted and I went along to the meeting and the preacher used to say, twice, one is two.

Get right back up. Oh, isn't that lovely? Oh, if he said quite twice one is two now, I'd say, hey, I'm out of the infant's class. But there are still others in the fellowship that have come into the infant's class.

There are still others just been born again. And they need to know that twice one is two. I might have even gone up to the twice one table.

But they are still in their first place. And so never let us forget that there are young folks that need those that have just been brought into the children, into the house of God. There are needs to be had.

And maybe the ministry is a little simpler for them. Maybe there are those that have been a long way on the journey. And so you older, you younger folks, may I suggest you don't forget that there are those that have been on the road a good time and need a little more than twice one.

You see that we together, how essential it is to be together and how quickly we get to appreciate what another's needs. But I've never very much contributed to this movement of folks who have always been accused of preaching above folks' heads. I remember my good friend St. Catherine once said, I don't preach above their heads.

They only preach where their heads ought to be. And there we are. It's good sometimes to get our heads where they ought to be.

Where they ought to be. But you know, don't go too far above. Just try it so they want to get a little bit more and to get there.

But nevertheless, those in the church, let's honor our shepherds. Our attitude and ambition and activity is changed when we come to become a Christian. All that we might first be those that honor our shepherds.

And then we notice not only honor our shepherds, but humble ourselves. Be clothed with humility. For God was just as proud when he gave a place unto the humble.

Humble yourselves therefore unto the mighty hand of God. You know, I never read this verse. Some of you have heard me tell this story before, but I never read this verse without remembering the ministry that I heard when I was first invited.

I don't suppose I've been saved a couple of years. And it was never given as ministry, but by its own ministry, it stayed with me all my life. We had in our fellowship a dear elder, a Mr. King Gary, who used to be a petty officer in the Navy.

And when he got converted, all he did was to transfer the deck of the ship to the chapel meeting place. But I tell you, you didn't say a word that was out of place as you were told off. But as young folks, we loved it because we knew where we stood with it.

Of course, we knew where we stood with it. We always had a crowd of young folks, young men and army men, and we always got to pray, you know. And on Monday, our prayer meeting, we were all kneeling down praying.

When suddenly one of the young lads, Basil had this pretty name, I remember him so well. Dear Basil, as he knocked down, he said, Lord, make me humble. And suddenly from the other side of the prayer room, I heard Mr. King Gary and a real petty officer's voice say, Lord, don't answer his prayer.

And you know, I opened my eyes and looked, and the prayer meeting was over. And Basil said, carry on, Mr. King Gary. And I watched as dear old brother King Gary got up from his knees, and walked across the prayer room, and he put his arms around the lad's shoulders.

And with all the love of an elder, he was that big and tough and rough a man, with all the love of an elder, he said, son, don't pray like that. The Bible says, humble yourself under the mighty hand of God. If you ask God to humble you, he may take on you a burden so great that the whole church will weep to see you pass through what God places on you.

Don't pray like that. Humble yourself, laddie. Humble yourself.

No, it wasn't a ceremony. It was not a painting at a ministry meeting. How many times has God said to me over the years, hundreds of times, boy, humble yourself.

Oh, let's humble ourselves. Time to finish. Not only are we called to honor our shepherds and humble ourselves, but hinder faith.

Be sober, to have faith, with insolence, because your adversary, the devil is a roaring lion, walks us about, seeking whom he may devour. Paul's a roaring lion. But the scripture speaks of him sometimes coming and keeps siding.

So I often think of the loveless story, don't you? Of David, as he went to fight the lion and the bear. I don't know if there's anything more perfect than a lion and a bear at the front. When a lion fights, it says, yeah, I don't like you.

But when a bear fights, it comes up on its hind legs and its shoulders and its arms and it says, oh, I love you. Sometimes it's the pain of the lion and sometimes the hug of the bear, but the end is disruptive. Bless God, for it was a David that could slay the lion and the bear.

Thank God that we resist the devil. Dear, please help us. Oh, may we be those who honor our shepherds.

Those who humble ourselves. Those who keep in all our activities in the hind of freedom. So, for one thing, I think it's not too bad.

But it ain't.

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