

“An Appeal to God’s Under-Shepherds” Part 1

Holiness

1 Peter 5:1-4 - Lesson #25

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Bruce: Good morning, men.

Men: Good morning.

Bruce: Don, do you want to set the tone for us so we can go Godward?

Don: Yes.

Bruce: Our minds can think about Him and realize that He alone is God. (*Music.*)

Gracious heavenly Father, have mercy upon us, the sinners that we are. Would You be pleased to bathe and lead us in Your grace and in Your truth? Holy Spirit, teach us what You would want us to learn about Yourself. Father, we’re not looking for answers. Just give us a glimpse of who You are in all of Your glory and majesty. And may it be so for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: Turn in your Bibles, please, to the book of 1 Peter. We’re looking at chapter 5 of the book of 1 Peter. We’re looking at verses 1-4. Once again I’ll be reading from the English Standard Version of the Scripture. 1 Peter chapter 5, verses 1-4.

“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, shepherd 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; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. 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.”” May God be pleased to open our eyes that we might behold Him once again for His glory. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: We now come into a section of Scripture in the first epistle of Peter where Peter is going to give some instruction to us regarding how we are to respond to the potential opposition and persecution of the world. That’s just what he has been dealing with in the first four chapters. This is all in the context of our understanding the Second Coming of Christ. So we need to understand the context of what we’re going to learn today.

The context is, as you anticipate and contemplate the Second Coming of Christ, the return of the Lord Jesus Christ in all of His glory, you’ve got to anticipate certain possibilities of persecution and opposition because of the system of this world. That’s what he’s been teaching us in the first four chapters. This is how you are to respond to the potential opposition and persecution of a system that is anti-Christ—the world system.

Now we come to a portion of Scripture that begins to deal with some very practical issues. He basically says this. When you consider the Second Coming of Christ in all of

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His glory, the return of the Lord Jesus, it should elicit within you thoughts of holiness and righteousness, not speculations and curiosities. So often, when we think about the second coming of Christ, we start thinking about signs and wonders and all the nuances of what the prophecies say. But Peter has basically been telling us in the first four chapters that when you consider the Second Coming of Christ, it ought to stimulate one thought within you, and that is your holiness because you’re preparing yourself for His arrival so that when He does come, He can say, “Well done, My good and faithful servant.” That’s what the first four chapters have been teaching us—how you and I are to respond, in anticipation of the Second Coming, to a system of the world which is anti-Christ and which has opposition to us and might persecute us.

Now he gets very, very particular and quite specific in the instructions of how we are to handle this potential opposition. You’ll notice that he deals with three types of people. In verses 1-4 he talks to the church leadership—very practical illustrations and instructions to church leaders in the midst of the Second Coming of Christ, anticipating our holiness and righteous development.

Then in verse 5 of chapter 5, in the first part of that he deals with young men. Then in the latter part of verse 5 of 1 Peter chapter 5 he deals with everyone in the church. He starts off with leadership, then with young men, then with everyone else in the church.

He starts with an appeal to leadership because in times of suffering and times of potential persecution, God’s people must have proper spiritual leadership. That’s why he talks about leaders first before he talks about young men and the rest of the body of Christ. If judgment is going to start with the household of God, as we looked at last week in 1 Peter chapter 4 verse 17, if it’s going to start within the church itself, the body of the church must have better leadership and be in proper order, or that body will be disintegrated and will fall apart. In other words, if you don’t have the right type of leadership in a potential environment where you’re going to have suffering and opposition by the system of this world, the church is going to fall apart and be like the world and lose all of its impact.

So this is the very first thing he deals with. Let’s talk about church leadership. Essentially he’s going to say this. This is his premise in these first four verses. Suffering saints require serving shepherds. That’s his premise in these first four verses. That’s his transition from chapter 4 to chapter 5. And so we want to take a look at what he means by that.

This is an excellent section for those of us who are in church leadership positions, to examine ourselves and say, “Am I in the right position? Am I qualified for the position of leadership? And am I fulfilling my duties as outlined by Peter?” Because suffering saints require serving shepherds.

You can divide these verses into two major themes. First of all, that would be the description of an elder. What is an elder? What is the description? And secondly, the duties of an elder. Those are the two things that we’re going to look at this morning.

First of all, let’s take a look at the first premise which is this—the description of an elder. The New Testament church was made up of three categories of people, of believers. If you go to Philippians chapter 1, you’ll see that he describes “the saints.”

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Now the saints were not people venerated because of their activities and their glorious actions. The word *saints* means normal believers. To be a follower of Christ is to be referred to as a saint. If you are in Christ today, you are one of those characters known as a *saint*. It is not because of the veneration of your activities, or something glamorous or supernatural that you have done. It’s because you are a follower of Christ. You’ve committed your life to Christ and you are referred to as a *saint*. So that’s the first category of people that we find in the New Testament church.

The second group that we see in Philippians chapter 1 would be *overseers*. It’s the word *bishops*, the word *overseer*. Somebody oversees the saints.

The third group you see is the word *deacon*. The deacon is somebody who runs errands—*diaconas*. So you see the three kinds of people in the church in Philippians chapter 1. You’ve got the saints, you’ve got the bishops or the overseers, and you’ve got the ones who are the deacons.

And so as we move through this, understand that there are only two different offices in the church and those would be the elders and the deacons. Those are the two offices described in the early church—the office of elder and the office of deacon.

Now look at the word *elder* in 1 Peter chapter 5, our passage today. That refers to the same office as the word *bishop* or *overseer*. Those words are interchangeable. In verse 2 of chapter 5, “serving as overseers.” Take a look at this.

“Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight.” Now he begins to talk about the responsibilities of elders in the church. These words are interchangeable. They can also be interchanged with the same words in Acts chapter 20, verse 17 and verse 28.

Transcriber’s Note: Acts 20:17. From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.

Verse 28. “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.”

The word elder or *presbuteros* refers to the dignity and maturity of the office. That’s what it’s describing. The word bishop or overseer describes the responsibility of the office. So when you put those two things together, you’ve got this mature male who oversees God’s flock. That’s essentially what he’s saying in verses 2 and 3 of chapter 5 of 1 Peter—mature males who oversee God’s flock because the maturity is in the word *presbuteros* and the dignity of the office is covered by that word and the description of the word *episkopos*, which really means the responsibility of the office. So you’ve got a mature male who has the responsibility of shepherding God’s flock. Yes, Don?

Don: I think it’s interesting, too, Bruce, since you brought up the whole concept of saints,--

Bruce: Yes.

Don: No offense to anyone here, but it’s interesting to me that Peter addresses himself as a “fellow elder.”

Bruce: Hang on a minute. That’s the first characteristic we’ll get into.

Don: Okay. All right. (*Laughter.*) But not as the head of the church.

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Bruce: That’s correct. He does not say that he’s the head of the church. We’re going to get into the description of that in just a moment, because that’s a key insight that Don has brought to our attention.

Another word that we want to introduce into our understanding of church leadership is the word *shepherd*. It’s the same as the office of an elder, the overseer—the shepherd. It’s where we get the word *pastor* from Ephesians chapter 4, verse 11.

Transcriber’s Note: Ephesians 4:11. And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors (shepherds) and teachers.

Bruce: Now these words are interchangeable. The elder is a shepherd and vice versa. The shepherd is an elder. The elder is a pastor; the pastor is an elder. The elder is an overseer. The overseer is an elder. Those words are all interchangeable as we understand them.

The two major offices in the early church were that of the elder and that of the deacon. Some churches may have in their organizational structure ruling elders and they may have teaching elders. Some churches are organized that way.

But what we want to understand is what do we mean by this responsibility of church leadership and the potential opposition when the world persecutes us? Notice. The heart of such a leader is modeled by Peter in verse 1, the verse that Don alluded to. The first characteristic of maturity of an elder in the church, one who oversees, one who is the shepherd, is *humility*. That’s the first thing you’re looking for.

Notice that he says that he’s “a fellow elder.” He’s not saying that he’s the great apostle in the church. He’s saying, (*paraphrase*), “I’m a fellow elder.”

Notice. “So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder.” Now you begin to see Peter’s humility. He’s not calling attention to himself as the head of the church. He’s not calling attention to himself as the number one elder, the number one apostle in the New Testament church. He’s saying, “I’m just one of the many saints who make up the body of Christ.”

So the first thing that we understand about the maturity for the position of an elder is do they have a sense of humility? Do they realize they are just one among equals among all the other saints? It’s just that the Lord has been pleased to grant them special maturity so they can be shepherds. But they view themselves as equal to everybody else, because of their understanding of a great sense of humility.

The man who recognizes his equality with the other saints is one who is a humble man and a humble leader. He doesn’t pull rank. He must have a deep sense of personal humility. That’s the first thing that Peter addresses in this passage, directly talking to leadership.

The second characteristic I would call to your attention would be this. An elder must have spiritual maturity. First of all, the first characteristic of the elder in the New Testament church is personal humility, and secondly, spiritual maturity. Now we find that just in the words described in these particular verses in 1 Peter chapter 5.

It’s interesting that there are seventy references to the word *elder* in the Scripture. Half of those are rulers in Israel in the Old Testament. Five of those words refer to older men in age, such as Luke chapter 15 verse 25.

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Transcriber’s Note: Luke 15:25. “Now the older son was in the field.”

Bruce: But the other half describes the office of the pastor, the shepherd and the overseer. When you see the word *elder*, you’re talking about the pastor, the shepherd and the overseer, somebody who oversees the flock—a mature male who has humility and views himself as one of the saints in the body with everybody else but not lording it over them, but understanding his role as the shepherd of the flock. An elder by title implies maturity.

So what about young men? Does that mean there’s an age limit? No, there’s no age limitation because you have liberty in Christ to have elders under age. But the real issue here is that they must be mature in their Christian graces. The issue here is maturity in Christian graces—not personality, not the position of this world. How often do we appoint our leaders because they’re CEOs of a company, or they’re good leaders in the world system. We think they ought to be good leaders in the church. That may or may not be true. What you’re looking for, first of all, is somebody who has personal humility, recognizing the equality they have with all the other saints in the body of Christ. They’re not above, they’re not below. They’re just equal. They just have special assignments by God in His grace to identify them to have special Christian maturity in their graces. And therefore they are put in the position to oversee the flock. And so, first of all, we need to understand that they have personal humility and secondly, spiritual maturity.

It may be better for young men to wait and to become more mature spiritually in the Christian graces and serving before they come into the role of leadership in the church as an elder.

The third characteristic would be this. We’ve seen these verses. First of all, personal humility. Secondly, spiritual maturity. And thirdly is *bodily recognition*. The body recognizes them. They’ve been chosen. There is some process by which they were chosen by the local flock to be in this role of a shepherd, of an overseer, of an elder with maturity and humility.

In Acts chapter 14 verse 23, they’re chosen by some process by the flock.

Transcriber’s Note: Acts 14:23. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed.

Bruce: Now we don’t know the exact process of how they went through it. But there is some way in which the church people identified who those leaders were.

Now when you look at it Biblically, the church does not vote on elders. You don’t pick elders. You recognize them. There’s a difference. Once they have been recognized, then you can put them in the office.

The important thing is this. The church body, the saints, all of whom are equal, understand the qualities of an elder. You’ve been taught that from the Scripture. You understand the role of the elder. You understand the description of the elder, the qualifications of the elder. And all of a sudden, you see one in your church and you say, “Oh, there’s one. There’s another one over here.” You recognize them. You don’t pick them. You don’t say, “Would you like to become an elder?”

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I remember the church that I joined when I married Becky. They sent out a thing and said, “List somebody who you think might be a good elder.” And they called me on the phone and said, “Would you like to be one?”

I said, “The question is, am I one?”

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Not would I like to be one? (*Laughter.*)

And they said, “What do you mean?” (*Laughter.*) “Don’t you have a choice?”

And I said, “The real issue is, am I one, not do I want to be one. The question is, do you recognize me as one?”

See, that’s what the church does. You recognize these men because you understand that you see their humility. You see their Christian maturity. And you say, “That is one person I want to follow because my responsibility as a saint in the body of Christ is to submit to my leadership in the church. Am I willing to submit to this person because of his humility and his maturity?”

So there is some process by which the people in the congregation are involved. But it is not a selection process. It is not a voting process per se. It’s an identification process where you recognize somebody and you say, “That man has the spiritual maturity to be an elder in this church, to shepherd this flock, and I am willing to submit to him because I understand his characteristics and his Christian maturity.” The flock is involved in some fashion. It’s more of a recognition process than it is a voting process. Do you understand the difference?

Now that means this. Have you been taught what the role of an elder is? Have you been taught about the qualifications?

When I was pastoring my new church in Chicago, one of the first things I realized was that my responsibility was not only laboring in Word and doctrine to teach the church the whole counsel of God, but it was to train the next level of Christian leaders. So we created a three-year elder training program. And I taught the people for about six weeks that this is what an elder is. This is who they are. Do you recognize any of them? Do we have any of them in our midst? It’s not do you think they can do something because they’re in a high position in this world. Do you recognize that they have the personal humility required of an elder? And do they have the spiritual maturity required of an elder? Do we have any men of that character in this church?

We didn’t have any. And so I said to the men of the church, “We need to prepare elders for the next leadership of this church.” So we created a three-year elder training program.

And I said, “Men, if any of you desire the office—and one of the twenty-eight qualifications of an elder is that you desire the office. Do you desire the office? That’s one of the qualifications. If you don’t desire that, you’re not qualified.”

And so I found four men who said, “Yes. I’d like to enter into this process because I think I’d like to be in the position of an elder. I think that’s something the Lord is doing in my life.” So we created a three-year elder training program.

And I met with them every Monday morning at six a.m. for two hours for the next three years just to help them to understand the role of what it meant to be an elder and

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developing maturity and Christian graces. I felt that my role as the pastor of a brand new church that this was one of the best things I could do—not only to teach the whole counsel of God but to train the next leaders and to create elders in the church.

You see, the church is involved. But the church has got to understand what an elder is, what are the qualifications of an elder, so they can recognize them and say, “We’ve got one. We’ve got two. We’ve got three.”

I know some church constitutions will say that they need to have twelve elders or fifteen elders, or ten, or whatever it is—some number like that. I’ve never seen numbers as a requirement. All I’ve seen is personal humility and Christian maturity. And you identify them and you set them apart. The congregation sets them apart. The congregation sets them apart and says, “This is one who can do that for us.” Yes, Brian?

Brian: One of the key things that I see as the duty of an elder is to shepherd the flock. And I’ve not seen many elders shepherding the flock, reaching out to the flock and really getting to be in their lives. Is that something that we as a church body should be looking for and asking for, supporting our elders and asking them to really be involved to shepherd us more?

Bruce: Absolutely. That’s their responsibility to us, and our responsibility is to make sure that they do it for us. So it’s a both/and. We need that and we need to hold them accountable to make sure that we’re doing that for them.

Now that’s difficult because quite often, seminaries don’t teach that. Some of the men that we had coming into the pulpit were not taught that. They’re taught to be organizers and administrators. I’ll go into more detail about the roles and the duties of an elder and a shepherd in a moment. But the important thing is that the responsibility of the church is to realize that we need these men to be in charge of us, because if you’re waiting for the Second Coming of Christ and the opposition is going to come, you need to have the right spiritual leaders to guide that church in that involvement because of the opposition of the world. If you don’t have that, the church is going to fail. And the church will go the way of the world and lose its impact because you don’t have the right leadership.

God always works through leaders—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. What the Father ordains the Son accomplishes and the Holy Spirit applies. That’s leadership. He always works through leaders.

The very first thing that Peter says is that, as you’re anticipating the arrival of Christ in all of His glorious Second Coming, make sure you have the right leaders in position because the world’s opposition is going to put a strain on the church. If you don’t have the right leaders, the church will not sustain the opposition and persecution of the coming church.

Let’s take a look at some of the duties. Here’s a summary statement of what we’ve learned so far. An elder is a spiritually mature and humble older male—older meaning not in age but in maturity—a member of an assembly, recognized by the people of the assembly in some fashion and set apart to serve in the capacity of an overseeing pastor in that local flock of those individual saints of God. That’s a summary of what we’ve just learned.

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Now when I use the word *pastor*, we’re going to talk about what that means as a shepherd because there is a plurality of elders. They’re all equal; some have different duties. In Ephesians chapter 4 verse 11, you’ll notice that one of those is the role of the pastor or elder, the pastor/teacher. That was my role as the senior pastor. I never used the term *senior pastor* because I did not want to say that I was more important than somebody else. I was the pastor/teacher. That was my title. I was the pastor/teacher. There were other elders who were in equality with me. And so there was a plurality, but there was an equality. The greatest strength that we could have for the people was to let the people see that there was a plurality of equality. My job was this. Somebody else’s job was that. As elders we didn’t have the same responsibilities, but we were all equal in our authority and maturity in the church. That’s what I would call a plurality of elders. It’s not a single person running the church. It’s a group of qualified leaders. People have recognized that they are setting them apart to be the leaders of this church, to guide them and shepherd them. That’s the role of the congregation, and they need to hold us men accountable to do that very job that God has given them.

So let me give you this definition again. The elder is a spiritually mature and humble male, a member of an assembly, meaning the body of Christ, recognized by the people of that assembly in some fashion, and set apart to serve in the capacity of an overseeing shepherd of that local flock and those individual saints of God in their charge. So that’s my definition of the elder as defined by 1 Peter chapter 5.

Now let’s take a look at the duties. And Brian, we’re going to get into your talking about the shepherd. Look at the duties of an elder. In verse 2, be a shepherd. In verse 2, be an overseer. In verse 3, be an example. Notice: be a shepherd, be an overseer, be an example.

Let’s take a look at the verbs. Look at the verbs in 1 Peter chapter 5. It’s a critical insight that we look at these verbs.

Feed the flock. Take oversight of the flock. Set an example to the flock. Feed, oversee and be an example. There is the role of the elder. That’s the duty of an elder to do those three things. Those are the three verbs.

Now we’re only going to have time to look at the first of these, which is to shepherd the flock or feed the flock, and we’ll take the other two next week just because of the importance of this.

So what does it mean to be a shepherd, to feed the flock? A shepherd is one who feeds the flock, who cares for the flock, who protects the flock. To feed the flock means that the faithful shepherd must lead his flock from pasture to pasture so that the sheep might be adequately fed. I’m taking that analogy of the shepherd who goes from pasture to pasture to make sure that the people are fed properly—his sheep. If you put that in terms of our church involvement, it means preaching the word. In other words, I take them into the Scripture to feed them so they’re adequately fed. You start with being a shepherd by feeding the flock. And that means that you take them into the Scripture so they can be fed properly and adequately.

The pastor/elder must set before you a table that is rich in God’s truth, rich in God’s word, to nourish you in the graces of Christian maturity. Now notice. In Acts chapter 6

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the role of shepherding and feeding the flock was so important to the early church they appointed deacons. They were appointed to permit the elders to spend their time in the Word and prayer.

Now it is not the role of the elders to sit around and talk about the color of exit signs.

Participant: Come on, sir.

Bruce: The role of the elder is to labor in Word and doctrine. And sometimes you need people to help you to be set free to do that, and that’s what the role of the deacon is. The deacon is to run errands. That’s literally what the word means—to run errands. Deacons come alongside and help the elders maintain some of the needs of the flock because the elders are to give themselves to Word and doctrine, laboring in Word and doctrine. And so in the early church they recognized the importance of this role of the elder/shepherd, the one who is to shepherd the flock. And they said, “We need some people to take some of the pressure off of these elders so they can spend their time in the Word and shepherd the flock and feed the flock appropriately. And that’s what the role of the deacon is. And so what you have is, you have the main priority which is to labor in Word and doctrine, and the deacons come along and help them.

Now notice Peter’s mindset about feeding and shepherding the flock. He uses the words “flock under your care.” “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,”—that’s the Second Coming—“shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight—not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you.”

Now it’s very interesting here. “The flock under your care.” That is the word *kleros*. That means the allotment of a piece of land. That’s where we get the word *clergy*. Who is the clergy in the church? You are! I’m not, you are. Shepherd the clergy! The clergy is the people in the flock,. It’s the allotment that God has given these shepherds to maintain the feeding of the flock.

Notice. He says “under your care.” That’s the word *kleros*. This is where we get the word *clergy*. The clergy is the people of the church. That’s why the mission of the church is what? To equip the saints to do the work of the ministry. That’s the role of the church because the church members are the clergy of the church. The leaders are the ones who are the pastor/teachers, the evangelists, those given by the grace of God to the church. But the clergy is the people.

We’ve backed it around and said that the clergy are those who stand up front and do something. You’re in the clergy! That’s why you have to have right leaders who are feeding the clergy to do the work of the ministry.

So often churches will call me and say, “Can you help me create a mission statement?”

I say, “Why are you wasting your time on that?” (*Laughter.*) “So I’m going to give it to you. But I’m not going to come up with a two- or three-page mission statement of the church. I can give it to you in one sentence. It’s already been given.” Equip the saints to do the work of the ministry, because the clergy is the saints. You’re the saints! You’re the clergy! You do the ministry! The role of the leadership is to equip you to do that, to

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teach you how to minister and do those things. That’s the role of the leadership of the church. Yes, please?

Participant: How did things switch to where the clergy became the leaders?

Bruce: I have no idea. (*Laughter.*) It just happened over time.

Participant: Be careful about that.

Bruce: I don’t have an answer for that. It’s just that over time it has developed. I mean, a lot of things have developed improperly over the years in the history of the church, and that’s one of them. We have not understood the idea of the clergy being the people.

Now in the bulletin of my church when we were pasturing, in the midst of the staff we had clergy membership. The clergy were the members. The pastors, the shepherds, were myself and the other elders. But we didn’t list the staff as “the senior pastor and so and so.” The ministry of the church was the congregation. I wanted people to understand that they are the ministers! My role is to equip you to do the work of the ministry and turn you loose on society and change the world. That’s the role of the leaders. It’s very interesting that Peter uses the word *kleros*.

So how does a shepherd feed wholesome food to the flock? First of all, he must be a student of sound food. The shepherd must be a student of sound food—in other words, the Scripture, the Word. Now this does not necessarily mean that you’re a seminary grad. We’re not talking about that. Sometimes the best scholars are not good pastors or good shepherds because they lose sight of God for the sake of scholarship. So we’re not talking about academic requirements. We’re talking about personal humility and spiritual maturity. It’s somebody who lives in the Word, somebody who thinks in the Word and somebody who applies the Word in his own life.

Let me give you some illustrations of this. And follow along. This is so important that I want you to understand this very clearly. Turn with me to 1 Timothy chapter 4.

Now notice what the apostle Paul teaches his young pastoral protégé timothy in 1 Timothy chapter 4, verses 15 and 16. “Practice these things. Immerse yourself in them so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by doing so you will save both yourself and your hearers.” Notice what’s he’s saying. Watch your own life and watch your doctrine. That’s what he’s saying. If you’re an elder in the church, you’ve got to watch two things. Watch the example of your own life and watch what comes out of your mouth. Watch your doctrine. That’s the instruction that Paul gave to timothy in 1 Timothy chapter 4.

First, your life. You see, the clergy won’t listen to you if they don’t see it in your life. Now who’s the clergy? We are. They won’t listen if they don’t see it in your life.

Secondly, doctrine means teaching or standard. Persevere in that. Work at that. Oftentimes we have developed the idea that doctrine and life are enemies. But doctrine and life are not enemies; they’re friends. We have separated doctrine from life in saying that those two things are enemies, because “I don’t want to listen to doctrine. I just want to love Jesus and love all the other people of the world.” Doctrine and life are not enemies; they’re friends. That’s what Paul is telling timothy. Those two things are important. Watch your life and watch your doctrine.

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How about 2 Timothy chapter 4? Go to another passage. Are you getting the idea? This is what a shepherd is to do, to labor in Word and doctrine. Now let’s go to 2 Timothy chapter 4, verses 1-5. Again, Paul teaching the young Timothy, his protégé, about the role of the shepherd in the flock.

“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom, preach the word. Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke and exhort with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions and will turn away from listening to the truth, and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” Yes, please?

Participant: It seems that you’re spending a lot of time not only identifying the attributes of an elder, but also, apparently the church attracts the opposite. In other words, not only does it attract elders who should be in that position, but also those who should not be, because the way he describes those attributes, he’s using a method of speech and he’s isolating both of these polar opposites—somebody who is willing and not obligated, someone who is not fleecing the flock but eager to serve. And so I think there is a big problem in the church passing on the right teaching because we get elders who are the wrong elders, the wrong persons in the job of leadership, and therefore that’s what’s being described here, I think, in verse 4. They’re being drawn away by teachers who are teaching them what their itching ears want to hear.

Bruce: Good point. Thank you. That’s excellent. That is true. The world is going to attract all sorts of people. Why is that?

Let me give you an illustration. I’m not picking on anybody—maybe! (*Laughter.*) Several years ago I had the privilege of being the pastor/teacher in a church. And after about six months I had one of the members of the church call me, and he said, “Bruce, you seem like a really nice guy. You seem very friendly. But my wife and I are tired of being convicted.” (*Laughter.*) “And we think we need to leave the church to go someplace where we won’t be under such conviction. How long are you going to be here?” (*Laughter.*)

Participant: Oh, my!

Bruce: I said, “Well, at least for six months.”

“Well, maybe my wife will come back.”

I said, “I can’t offer you that. I’m sorry. I can only offer you what the Scripture teaches.”

And he said, “Well, we’re just tired of being convicted. Week after week after week, we’re being convicted by what the Scripture says. We want to go to a church where we can feel good.” (*Laughter.*)

I said, “Well, I can give you a whole list of them.” (*Laughter.*) “There are a bunch you can go to. But I can’t promise that. I would be hopeful that in your conviction that you’ll feel good because of the grace of God, wrapped in the robes of Christ’s righteousness. In the blood of Christ you feel good.”

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Participant: Amen. Mm-hmm.

Bruce: That’s a consequence; it’s not a goal. So they ended up leaving. Yes, please?

Participant: Do you know why? Because there’s no easy way. Everybody wants to take the easy way out, and there isn’t a way out. You have to actually stay the course and nobody wants to do that.

Bruce: Well, notice what Paul is teaching Timothy about the role of the shepherd, and that is this. “I urge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, by His appearing and His kingdom, preach the word. Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with complete patience and teaching.”

Now that’s what he says. The contrast is—see the word *for*? There’s a contrast here. “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching,” but they’ll want to be what? Entertained.

Participant: Itching ears.

Bruce: Itching ears. They want to be entertained.

How many times have you heard people say, “I’m not going back to that church because I didn’t get a blessing.”

Participant: Yeah.

Bruce: How many times have you heard that? Well, do you realize that you’re not supposed to get a blessing? You’re supposed to what?

Men: Be a blessing.

Bruce: Be a blessing and give one. Worship is not getting something. Worship is doing something. Worship is bestowing honor upon the worthiness of the One you worship. Worship is giving. It literally means to kiss toward. It’s a verb. Worship is not a noun, something you get. It’s an activity that you do. When you take worship to the church and give God a blessing, guess what happens to you when you do that.

Participant: You’re blessed.

Bruce: But how many times do people say, “I’m not going to that church because I didn’t receive a blessing. I didn’t like the quality of the music. It’s too rigid. It’s too staid. It’s too old-fashioned or it’s too new.” All those things. We come up with all the excuses for me to be self-centered in thinking that worship is about me. Worship is not about us. It’s about God, giving Him His honor. Yes, please?

Participant: How do you preach the Word?

Bruce: Preaching the Word? Okay. The most difficult thing a pastor/teacher has is this—what needs to be said.

Participant: Sure.

Bruce: Not where do I get my resources, but what needs to be said. The resources are the Scriptures, the sixty-six books of the Bible. That’s what we preach. That’s the Word.

Now let’s go to 2 Timothy 3:16, while we’re in the book of timothy. 2 timothy 3:16. Here’s what you preach. “All Scripture is breathed out by God.” That’s what you preach—all Scripture. That’s where it is.

Now notice the reason. It’s “breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”

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Now let’s take a look at those verbs. “All Scripture is breathed out by God.” When God speaks things are created.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: How did God create

Participant: By His soul, the breath of His Spirit.

Second Participant: With His word.

Bruce: He breathed out His word and the world was created. Now what is the most important verse in all of the Bible?

Participant: “In the beginning.”

Bruce: Genesis 1”1.

Participant: I’ll say.

Bruce: If you don’t understand Genesis 1:1, John 3:16 doesn’t make any sense. It all starts with this. God created by His word. He spoke the world into existence. He now creates things by speaking His word into existence by the pulpit.

And so it has four possibilities. First of all, it’s profitable for teaching. That means to reveal the standard. The word *doctrine* or *teaching* means standard. The first thing that preaching the counsel of God does is that it preaches and reveals the standard of the Scripture.

Secondly, this—for reproof. It reveals the error in your standard. The second thing that might happen when you preach is that it might reveal somebody’s error in their understanding of the Scripture.

The third thing is for correction. The third thing that might happen when the Holy Spirit applies the teaching of the Word, the whole counsel of God to the body of Christ, known as the clergy, it may be that some people are going to correct their errors in the theology that they have.

And the fourth thing is training in righteousness. And that means that you don’t make the same mistake all over again.

So you have four possibilities when the Word is preached. It might reveal the standard. It might reveal your error. It might reveal how you need to correct that standard. And fourthly, it will train you in righteousness, not to make the same mistake. That’s preaching the whole counsel of God. It starts with the Scripture. And that’s what Paul tells Timothy. “Preach the word.” That’s what we do.

Now notice. The first charge is “preach the word.” Don’t quit. When the people don’t listen, or when they do listen, you have the same response, and that is what? Don’t quit. Preach the Word. Their response is not the issue. The issue is am I preaching the Word? The responsible shepherd will correct, rebuke and encourage the flock both in public and from the pulpit and also in private.

But notice. He must do it with great patience, and we do it with great, careful instruction. Be patient. Give careful instruction. Be patient with sound doctrine. Unfortunately today, my friends, people come to church because they want to be entertained.

Let me give you an illustration which is so tragic. I know a church where a friend of mine was the pastor, a man committed to exactly what we’re talking about. The church

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came to him and said, “Would you spend less time in the Word so you won’t give us so much of the Word?”

Participant: Oh, my!

Bruce: “Would you spend less time in the Word so we won’t get so much of the Word, because we’re tired of being convicted.” Now he said, “Bruce, what do I do?”

I said, “Your job description doesn’t change at all. Preach the Word. Let a sovereign God take over that. It’s His responsibility. But your role as the shepherd of that flock is to preach the Word. Whether they listen or they don’t listen, your job is the same. That is just to preach it.” But they basically said, “Spend less time in the Word so we will get less from the Word.”

Notice verse 3. People will go out and get what they want, and that is to soothe their itching ears. People can be attracted to all sorts of things—the right kind of music, the right type of program, the right issues, but the real issue is this. The role of the shepherd must be to preach the Word whether they listen or not.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: That’s the consistent job description of the shepherd.

Let me give you another verse. How about Titus chapter 1 verse 9? “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to refute those who contradict it.”

Now this doesn’t mean that you need to have a seminary degree. But it does mean this: that you’re able to teach sound doctrine. And when somebody comes and refutes that, you have some degree of ability to refute that person and respond to him. And as the Scripture says in verse 9, “and refute those who contradict it.”

That doesn’t mean that you’re argumentative. It means that you have some degree of understanding that this is what the Scripture says and here’s the reason why.

It means this. You don’t preach and teach to the point of agreement. Teach to the point of understanding. Paul says that he teaches to the point of understanding. The real issue is, do they understand what you’re saying, not do they agree with what you’re saying? I’ve had a lot of people come up and say, “Well, I disagree with what you’re saying.”

I said, “I respect that. Do you understand why I said what I said?”

“Yes, I do, but I disagree with it.”

You are responsible for what you hear and what you do with what you’ve heard. My responsibility is to teach to the point of understanding, not to get you to agree with me. That’s what Paul is teaching Timothy and Titus. Teach to the point of understanding. Be ready to refute those who refute sound doctrine.

It’s almost like in the church today, we’ve come across the idea that says that sound doctrine and love are opposites.

Participant: Mm-hmm.

Bruce: That they’re enemies. Sound doctrine and love are not opposites. Really, they’re friends. They’re doing the same thing. That’s not Peter’s idea or Paul’s idea. Sound doctrine is what produces love and love is the result of sound doctrine. They’re not enemies.

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How many times have you heard somebody say, “I’m not interested in doctrine. I just want to love Jesus and love everybody else.” I’ll tell you what, folks. They’ll never learn how to love Jesus and love other people unless they understand what sound doctrine is, because love is defined by the Person and work of Christ, not by my feelings. If you don’t understand that, you’re never going to be able to love correctly.

The shepherd must be able to encourage out of his own understanding of sound doctrine. It doesn’t mean that all elders are great preachers. It doesn’t mean that. He must be able to refute those who oppose for the protection of the flock.

It may mean, at a minimum, that at least you know where to go to get help. As I was teaching my elders in the three-year elder training program, my expectation is not that you have all the answers. But at least you know where to go to get an answer and get help. And that may be to come to one of the other elders, to one of the other shepherds in the flock. At a minimum, at least you know where you can go to get some help, to help somebody refute that doctrine that they’re talking about. That’s part of the maturity of how we manage it. We do that with consistency, with patience, with an expression of humility.

How about Titus chapter 2 verse 1? “But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.” Do you get the idea of what a shepherd is? Remember the imagery of the shepherd. A shepherd takes his sheep from one pasture to the other in order to make sure that they are adequately fed. He identifies the pasture that is the right kind for the sheep to graze in. The shepherd of the church does the same thing. He goes into the Scripture and says, “This is where I need to take the flock in this particular season in our church, because that’s what they need to be adequately fed.” And then he goes to another part of the Scripture and says, “This is the next pasture I’m going to take them to so they can be adequately fed.”

You see, the real issue is this. The thing that I always struggle with is what needs to be said. I know where to get it. It comes from the Scripture. But the issue is what needs to be said? How do I take what is there and how do I say it and teach it to the point of understanding? That’s the real pressure that I put on myself. What is it that needs to be said to the flock? What is it that needs to be said? Oftentimes the flock wants what they want to get, what they want to hear, not what they need to hear.

And so Paul is saying that’s what the role of a shepherd is. The shepherd’s role is to feed the flock.

How about 1 Timothy chapter 6, and we’ll wrap this up. Do you get the idea of what he’s talking about?

1 Timothy chapter 6, verses 3-5. “Teach and urge these things. If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander and evil suspicion.”

Sometimes there are people who just like to create controversy. That is not the role of the shepherd. Controversy might happen, but that is not his goal or his intention.

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So at this point we’ve come to the conclusion that the primary task of the shepherd, the under-shepherd, is the teaching of sound doctrine. Peter appeals to the under-shepherds, the elders of the church, the under-shepherds of the Chief Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Himself, to feed the flock, to serve God’s church, to gather and care for them, to govern them justly, and to go after the lost sheep. That’s essentially the role of the shepherd.

The sheep belong to God, not to the shepherd or to the pastor or to the elder. And by divine allotment and by divine assignment they are to feed that flock. That means to take them to the feast of the truths of God’s word to the glory of God and for the visible conformity of the children to the image of the Lord Jesus. And that is to be done by God’s appointed Under-shepherds—men who at all cost will bring you to the glorious banquet of divine truth, to feast on the delicacies of God found in the Scripture, by feeding you with patience and with clear instruction.

May God be pleased to help us identify men in the church who can become shepherds.

Let us pray. Father, please clarify and remove anything that has been said that is not true with the consistency of Your word. Father, You’ve given us so much that we need to understand, and may Your grace be sufficient to help us understand what You’ve taught us today from Your word. Father, it’s critical that we in the church have correct leadership. If the world is going to oppose us and persecute us before the Lord Jesus returns, we need to be well organized, well structured and well protected by leaders, men whom You’ve called and set apart and are recognized by the congregation, by the clergy who have said, “There is one that we can submit to, who will be there for our shepherding and our protection.” And may it be so, Father, that we will identify those men in our church for Your glory. And all the Brave Men said, “Amen.”