

“An Appeal to God’s Under-Shepherds” Part 2

Holiness

1 Peter 5:1-4 - Lesson #26

Dr. Bruce Bickel

August 7, 2015

Bruce: Don, do you want to set the tone for us, please?

Don: Yes.

Bruce: Let’s quietly go before the presence of the Lord and know that He is God.

(Music.)

Gracious Lord, we thank You that You do not treat us as our sins deserve. We thank You that Your compassion is fresh every morning. Father, keep us near the cross. The closer we are to the cross, the closer we are to You. The closer we are to the cross, the closer we will be protected by You and Your grace. Open our eyes now, that we might behold You more clearly for Christ’s sake. And may it be so for Jesus’ glory and honor. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: I invite you to turn in your Bibles, please, to 1 Peter, continuing our examination of the first epistle of Peter, his instructions to the church. The context which we are studying right now is being persecuted for righteousness’ sake. We need to understand the context of what Peter is instructing us. And so I would call your attention to the first four verses of 1 Peter chapter 5. Again I’ll be reading from the English Standard Version of the Scripture. Let us listen to the word of the Lord.

“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 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 more clearly for Christ’s sake.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Bruce: Amen.

“Give me a man of God, one man,
Whose faith is master of his mind,
And I will right all wrongs
And praise the Lord of all mankind.
Give me a man of God, one man
Whose tongue is touched with heaven’s fire,
And I will flame the darkest hearts
With high resolve and clean desire.

“An Appeal to God’s Under-Shepherds” Part 2

Give me a man of God, one man,
One mighty prophet of the Lord,
And I will give you peace on earth
Bought with a prayer and not with a sword.
Give me a man of God, one man,
True to the vision that he sees,
And God will use him to build the church
And bring the nation to her knees.”

The words of that poet are very profound in teaching us a wonderful principle of Scripture, and that is this: that the church can only go as far as its leaders take it. Remember, the context of what we’re talking about in 1 Peter is that what happens to the church members—how they respond when the world opposes them because of their stand because of the glory of Christ—in other words, how is the church to operate when it’s persecuted for righteousness sake? Now again, the context is persecuted for righteousness’ sake, not for being stupid, or for stupidity. In other words, when we hold true to the doctrines of Scripture and the doctrines of grace, and the world opposes us, what is our response?

One of the things that Peter is teaching us right now is the principle of leadership—that God is always working through leaders. And the church can only respond in the persecution era that we’re going through if we have proper leadership. How true this is when the church is undergoing persecution and opposition from the world.

Peter gives various instructions to the people of the church, how to respond. And he starts with leaders.

And he starts with leaders. Look at chapter 5 verse 1. “So I exhort the elders among you.” He’s talking about leadership. God always works through a chain of command. What the Father ordained the Son accomplished and the Holy Spirit applies. You never see the Holy Spirit trying to be Jesus or Jesus trying to be the Father in their roles, their uniqueness. What the Father ordains the Son accomplishes and the Holy Spirit applies it.

So he’s now talking to the elders of the church. And basically, what he is teaching us in these first five verses is this—that suffering saints require serving shepherds.

As we saw last week, the words *elder*, *overseer*, *shepherd* and *pastor* are all interchangeable. The word *elder* really deals with the dignity or maturity of the office of leadership. It deals with the maturity and dignity of the office. That’s the word *elder*. The word *bishop* talks about the responsibilities of the dignity of that office.

So Peter gives three tasks to the elders of the church who are Under-Shepherds of the Great Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Himself. First of all, as we studied last week, he said to be a shepherd. We saw that this meant that the leadership of the church is to feed the flock the word of God—to feed the flock, to protect and care for the flock—by properly and systematically proclaiming and instructing the people in the graces of God as revealed in the Scripture.

There’s a lot of imagery that we can play off with the idea of a shepherd. And one of the roles of a shepherd is to feed the flock and care for the flock, to identify the pastures of growth. And so the role of the shepherd is to feed the flock and to feed them with the

“An Appeal to God’s Under-Shepherds” Part 2

Scripture. You do that both in the pulpit and in private. You set a table before the flock of the divine truth found in the Scripture that will nourish them in the growth and understanding of God’s grace. That’s the role of the shepherd.

So today we want to look at the two other elements that he talks about in his responsibilities—not only to be a shepherd but to be an overseer—that is, to oversee the flock and to be an example. Three things he says that the elders of the church must be if they’re going to lead in an era of persecution, and they are these—to be a shepherd, to be an overseer and to be an example. Last week we talked about being a shepherd. Today, let’s take a look at what it means to be an overseer and what it means to set an example.

First of all in verse 2, notice—to oversee the flock. The word *oversee* literally means to give superintendence. It’s one who looks over for the purpose of leading. The point here is the unique relationship that the pastors have with the flock.

I want you to notice verse 1. He says two things that are very critical for us to understand and the balance that must be maintained by the elders and the understanding of the sheep or the flock. The first one is this. “I exhort the elders among you.” That’s the first role of the shepherd. We are among the sheep.

The second thing in verse 2 is *over you*. Notice that. “Exercising oversight—not under compulsion, but eagerly.”

There are two things you need to understand in the balance of this. First of all, the shepherd is both *among* the sheep, and the elder is not only *among* the sheep but *over* the sheep. The problem begins when those two things become unbalanced. Unless both the shepherd and the sheep understand this unique relationship, you’re going to have problems in the church. The elder is *among* the people, but the elder is *above* the people in an overseeing position. The pastor or elder is one of the sheep. He is among the sheep. But because of his function and the uniqueness of what he has responsibility wise, he is also over the sheep. He’s over the flock. The balance is this. An elder is *among* and an elder is *over*.

Among means this. When it becomes unbalanced, people begin to refuse to follow the authority of the shepherd. And if the *over* is unbalanced, the elder becomes a super saint who has no contact with the people. So you’ve got to keep that in balance. The elder must be among the sheep, but the elder is also above the sheep—among the sheep and over the sheep in an overseeing role.

Now Peter teaches us that the effective leader, the effective elder, needs both if he is going to give superintendence to the flock. That means this. The people must understand that the church leaders are *among* them.

Now what does that mean practically? It means that you’ve got to know the people. You’ve got to know them. You’ve got to find out what their needs are. What are their problems? That’s part of what we would call *pastoring*. It’s the combination of the word that you see in Ephesians chapter 4 verse 11, the role of the pastor/teacher. It describes both the *among* and the *over*. He is over the people so he can lead them according to the Scripture. And so the balance must be for the leaders of the church. To be among, it means that you must spend time getting to know your people. You don’t do this from an

“An Appeal to God’s Under-Shepherds” Part 2

ivory tower. You can’t be among the people unless you know them. That’s one of the balance points of church leadership.

The second thing is that you’ve got to be over them in teaching them the Scripture by feeding them the full counsel of God. The role of the pastor/teacher combines the two responsibilities together. And when we understand the combination of the *among* and the *over*, that’s when you begin to have the excellent church leadership that is needed during times of persecution.

When you have a plurality of elders, several elders, they’re not a board of directors who sit back and make decisions, but they’re a team of shepherds who feed and oversee the flock. That’s the balance between the *among* and the *over*. The danger is when those two things become unbalanced—the danger of leaders becoming lords and the sheep becoming anarchists or rebels. That’s the danger that you have when those two things are not in balance. We’re all brethren. We’re not lords and laity. We’re all brethren. We’re all in this together.

The superintending by the shepherds is not to be like dictators. They are not to be like lords, but men with the heart of a shepherd, beating their breasts, to be among and to be over in the right and proper balance.

So what are the two major functions of overseeing? We saw that the shepherd is to feed the flock, to take them to the right pastures, to teach them the word of God, to teach the full counsel of Scripture. So what are the two major functions of an overseer? What is the second responsibility that Peter teaches us?

First of all, I say that there are several things. Take the imagery of the shepherd in the guiding of the flock. What is the role of the shepherd? One of the roles of the shepherd is to keep the wolves that will destroy the flock away from the sheep. And sometimes those wolves come in the form of false prophets—things that come down the Christian pike, the latest gimmicks, the latest fad, the latest trend. A good shepherd is going to recognize that which is not consistent with the word of God and he is going to protect the flock by warning them not to get involved in those things that are disguised as light, but are basically from the evil one. So to keep them from the wolves that will destroy the flock is one of the roles of the overseeing shepherd.

I think that it’s also important to warn those who appear to be goats as evidenced by their conduct and how they live, by teaching proper doctrine and modeling a lifestyle that is contrary to their own existence. In other words, you’ve got to be a model in this so that you demonstrate to them what it means to live a life of grace.

Now both of those roles are very, very difficult. It requires a leadership, the things that Peter has been teaching us. Remember last week? He said that the description of the leader is threefold.

First of all, *personal humility*. This is not a positional position. It’s a responsible position where you recognize a person’s personal humility.

The second thing we saw was that they are to have *spiritual maturity*, and thirdly, *recognizable character*.

How are these elders picked? We really don’t know the process, but an elder is not picked by the congregation. An elder is not chosen by the congregation. An elder is

“An Appeal to God’s Under-Shepherds” Part 2

recognized by the congregation and set apart because you realize this. There is a man of personal humility. There is a man of spiritual maturity. And therefore I recognize him and say, “Oh, there is one that God has qualified.” Who qualifies church leaders? God does that. We don’t pick them because of their position in society and say that, because he’s the CEO of some company or major corporation, therefore he can be a leader in the church.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: I’m aware of a situation where a church had a man who was running for governor of the state. Now he was qualified to govern the state, but he was not qualified to be an elder in the church. There’s a difference. And so we put him in a position of being measured by somebody. And our chief elder at that time was a mechanic at the Ford garage.

Participant: There you go.

Bruce: So the man who had spiritual maturity and personal humility was teaching the man running for governor because he could run the state in which he was running for governor, but he was not qualified for church leadership. He went through the training program because he was not yet qualified. The world said, “Oh, he ought to be one of our elders.” Based upon what? Was it recognizable? Did he have spiritual maturity? He did not have it at the time. Did he have personal humility? He did not have that at the time. Therefore, he was not recognizable.

You see, you don’t go picking elders. You don’t say, “We need to have ten,” or “We need to have twelve.” You need to have as many as the Lord equips.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: However many they are, that’s as many as you have. I know that some churches have three or four. Some have five or six. The Lord qualifies and prepares an elder. And it is your role and my role to recognize that and to say, “Oh, there’s one, because they’ve got personal humility. They have spiritual maturity. And I recognize the character of his life as one I would be willing to submit to because our role as the sheep is to submit to the shepherd’s leadership.” Remember, they are among us, but they are also over us—a very difficult job. It requires maturity, wisdom, discernment, sensitivity, empathy. That’s what you’re looking for. And when you recognize a man who has been qualified by the Lord in His grace that has those qualities, you set them apart to be an elder, to be a leader in the church.

Participant: How do you know one when you’ve found one?

Bruce: I would say here are some considerations. Spiritual maturity. Wisdom, the application of knowledge. Not just knowledgeable if they don’t know how to apply it. Maturity, wisdom, discernment. They can discern truth from falsehood. Remember, one of the roles is to protect you from the wolves that are trying to sneak into the church. They’ve got to have a spirit of discernment to know truth from falsehood, right from wrong. Sensitivity to people and their needs and empathy for those who are hurting.

So I would offer maturity, wisdom, discernment, sensitivity and empathy. So the term *elder* implies much more than just being a leader. It implies the idea that a shepherd

“An Appeal to God’s Under-Shepherds” Part 2

gives oversight through the instruction of the Word, through prayer and through private counsel. That’s what elders do.

Elders don’t sit around, men, and talk about the colors of exit signs. It’s not their role to talk about those things. Their role is to discern the needs of the flock and to feed them properly through the Scripture and in teaching the whole counsel of God.

Now taking the idea of the shepherd, just let me give you some quick insights. This is something we can spend much more time on. But just quickly let me give you some insights about what a shepherd does to his flock, the sheep.

First of all, a shepherd who is overseeing the flock seeks to retrieve the lost sheep. You seek to retrieve the lost sheep. I’ve lost one. Where is he or she? I need to go find them. The role of the shepherd is to find and retrieve the lost sheep. If there is one of the sheep who has gone astray, what is the role of the elder? It’s not to point the finger and set them apart, but to find them and retrieve them and bring them back, to do everything he can to retrieve that lost sheep back into the fold.

The second thing I think the shepherd does as an overseer is to seek to preserve the sheep from disease. A shepherd is going to say, “I can’t feed them this because it will promote disease within the flock.” And we take that imagery of what a shepherd does to his animal sheep, and we take the same thing about a shepherd overseeing the flock in the church. We need to make sure that we prevent them from becoming diseased by improper information that comes down the pike. In other words, we’ve got to be discerning to know what is true doctrine and what is not and to protect them from that which is false doctrine—to prevent them from being diseased by false doctrine.

Another thing the shepherd does is this. When you recognize that the sheep are diseased, you administer medicine to them. And what is the medicine? You’ll be teaching the full counsel of God.

Participant: There you go.

Bruce: Teaching the full counsel of God. That’s the medicine that we bring to the situation. We recognize that some of our sheep may be diseased and we administer the administration of proper medicine to the sheep that are sick, and that is teaching the full counsel of God.

Number four for your consideration. I would say that the shepherd/overseer would do this—not only seek to retrieve the lost sheep, seek to preserve the sheep from becoming diseased, to administer medicine to the sick when they are sick sheep, but also to defend against the birds of prey that attack from above. That’s another thing a shepherd does. He protects them from birds of prey that attack from above. That’s his role—to guard the sheep and protect them. You’ve got to be very, very careful that you have elders who can protect you from the things that the system of this world offers us that are disguised as angels of light, but are really from the evil one. You’ve got to have men who can understand that and protect the sheep when that occurs. We protect them from birds of prey that attack us from above.

Number five that I would offer for your consideration would be this. We need to stop the wolves from entering the flock.

Participant: Amen.

“An Appeal to God’s Under-Shepherds” Part 2

Bruce: Stop the wolves from entering the flock. Sometimes we have to say, “No. We’re not going to read that book. No, we’re not going to listen to that tape. No, we’re not going to watch that show on TV. No, we’re not going to do those things because we’re not going to let those things infiltrate and cause disease among the sheep.” Stop the wolves from entering the fold.

And I would also consider this. Like shepherds, the elders are to take the lambs into their arms, tenderly hold them, love them, care for them and seek to preserve them. That’s the role of an elder—to take the sheep into their arms, tenderly love them, hold them, care for them and seek to preserve them.

Not everybody, men, is qualified to do that. Do you understand that? This is not something you appoint somebody to because of their position in this world. You take a look at the character, the life, and you say, “This man has been qualified by the grace of God and God has given him as a gift to the church. I’m willing to submit to him because my role as a member of this church is to submit to the authorities that God has ordained.”

You’ve got to have the right men in the right positions at the right time if you’re going to have the right response of the right sheep. God always works through leadership. As the poem said, “Just give me one man,” and we can turn the world upside down. That’s what we’re looking for in our church leaders.

There is no way that an elder cannot spend some time with each of his sheep, to get to know them. You cannot pastor the sheep without getting to know them.

Participant: Dr. Bickel, you might remember when it says, “Thou anointest my head with oil.” The Mid-eastern shepherd put that oil on the sheep’s head to prevent the nose flies from going in and laying eggs and infecting the brain. And this is the oil of the word of God and the Holy Spirit, right?

Bruce: Amen to that. You can take the imagery and we can develop this much more by looking at what a shepherd does with his sheep, the animals. And that’s the main principle I’m playing off of right now, saying that it’s the same methodology that you try to do, and that is to have the shepherd of the sheep of God do the same thing as the shepherd does with his animal sheep. That’s the imagery we’re trying to play off of. Yes?

Participant: If we haven’t been called to eldership in the church, this seems as though it would be great for what we should be as fathers or grandfathers. This would seem to apply perfectly with what we should be doing as a family.

Bruce: Absolutely. This is something that all men ought to be working on. Now it may be that God may be pleased in His grace and mercy to increase these character qualities of leadership and leadership in the church, to bring it to the point that they are recognizable by the flock. And when that occurs, they will set you apart to be one of the elders. But in the meantime, this is something that all men ought to be working on because we can model this with our families, because the next thing we’re going to talk about in addition to being an overseer is being an example. And that’s one of the ways that we lead by example. That’s a good point, Brian.

So we need to understand this: that an elder has got to spend time getting to know the sheep, getting to know the people, to love them, and to know if the word of God is having

“An Appeal to God’s Under-Shepherds” Part 2

it’s desired effect. Do the elders of our church really understand if the word of God being taught to them is having its desired effect in the life of the people of the church? That’s the role of the elder—to be discerning and to know that, and when it doesn’t occur, to make the changes that are proper, to make them grow in grace. And you just can’t do that by standing behind the pulpit.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: You’ve got to be down there because you’re among the sheep. But you’re also over the sheep in an oversight capacity.

Sometimes we need to understand that you’ve got to be very, very careful with your pastor and with your elders, because their primary responsibility is to labor in the Word and doctrine. They are not to be people who fix every situation. They are not rescuers. Sometimes you need to let them study the Scripture so they can feed the flock properly. So that means that you’ve got to be sensitive to what his role is.

When I was pastoring a church with my elders, we began to talk about my job description. I said, “I need a minimum of thirty hours a week of Biblical study to preach—thirty hours, basically one hour per minute for a sermon. So if I’m going to preach for thirty minutes, I need an hour per minute. I need thirty hours a week minimum for me to teach the Scriptures on Sunday.”

Now they needed to help the church understand the role of the pastor/teacher, which is a unique gift that Christ gives to the church. That’s his primary responsibility. So he is not to come and be the answer person for all of your problems. That’s why you have a plurality of elders who can help the pastor/teacher do that. So you need a plurality of men who can do that, not just one person. So people need to understand the role of the pastor/teacher.

As I mentioned last week, I had a friend whose people came to him and said, “We want you to spend less time studying the Scriptures so you’ll feed us less.” (*Laughter.*) “We want you to spend less time in study because we want you to feed us less and we want you to spend more time with us.”

Now there is that balance. Again, you have to define those words *among* and *over*. That’s the balance you have to maintain. The people have to understand that the role of the pastor/teacher is to study and feed them. And you need to let that happen. But at the same time, if there are needs, the people—the sheep—need to come and talk to the pastor or to the elders. That’s why I think that a plurality of elders is the most important way, because you can spread that responsibility around. It’s not the role of one person alone. Yes, Don?

Don: Bruce, I’ve noticed so many times that when people are in the hospital, if I as an elder or other elders come to visit them, they’re glad, but they expect the pastor always to come and visit. I don’t know. Is that good? Is that bad?

Bruce: I think it’s reality. (*Laughter.*) The reality is, “Oh, why didn’t the pastor come?” You see, the people need to understand this. When you have a plurality of elders, there is an equality among those elders. And when one elder comes, he’s representing all the other elders. And so people need to understand and to be taught to the point of understanding that, Don. When one of the elders comes, that’s the leadership

“An Appeal to God’s Under-Shepherds” Part 2

of the church, and you can’t have the expectation that the pastor be all things to all people. People need to understand that and to be taught that. And if they have that expectation, it’s because they’ve not been taught the role of leadership in the church that we’re trying to spend some time dissecting here—to understand what it means to be *among* and to be *over*. That’s a good question, Don. But I think it’s because people have false expectations concerning the role of the pastor/teacher—that he is the answer person for every need. That’s why you have a multiplicity of leaders who are qualified. That’s why, in my judgment, the second most important thing for a pastor/teacher to do in the life of the church is to begin to train the next level of leadership.

Participant: Mm-hmm.

Bruce: Because a church can only go as far as your leaders take it. Yes, Brian?

Brian: It just goes to show again how important it is to learn each and every part of the Scripture because, before hearing all of these things, you know, growing up in a different type of church, we would always look at the pastor as being extraordinary or above. And the elders are okay; they’re just nice guys. But we don’t realize the importance of the elders—

Bruce: That’s right.

Brian: And that’s us, meaning the leadership, not teaching everybody the whole counsel of God.

Bruce: Exactly right. That’s why Peter is spending so much time talking about exhorting the elders among you and over you, helping the congregation realize in times of persecution that you’ve got to have the right leadership—the right men with the right responsibilities at the right time, to help people have the right response. That’s why this is so critical for us to understand.

Now we’re just touching on this and we could spend much more time on this than we are. But I’m just trying to give you an overview of the context of what Peter is teaching us. Basically, remember this. This is the principle that Peter is teaching us. Suffering saints require serving shepherds.

Now notice that shepherds are not to oversee like dictators. We need to understand the other side of this coin—or by design of their own personality, or by their own temperament. But they are to govern by the word of God, the Scripture, by teaching the whole counsel of Scripture. We are to watch over the flock by teaching the Scripture, not because of our own personalities.

Now that doesn’t mean that the Lord is not going to use your personality. All I’m saying is that it is not your personality that gives you the right to rule. It’s the fact that God has equipped you through the Scripture because you have the maturity and humility with which God has equipped you. And somebody has recognized you to be a church leader.

Take a look at Hebrews chapter 13 verse 7.

Transcriber’s Note: Hebrews 13:7. Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

Bruce: We oversee by the Word. That’s how we oversee—not by my temperament, my spiritual gifts or my skill sets in leadership. We oversee as serving shepherds by the

“An Appeal to God’s Under-Shepherds” Part 2

Scriptures that we teach the people. 1 Thessalonians 5:12-15 are other good verses to help us to understand.

Transcriber’s Note: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-15. We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers: admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak. Be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

Bruce: We oversee people in their own spiritual growth and we take care of our own lives as we monitor ourselves first. And this is where it gets difficult. You can’t treat all the people all the same.

Participant: Yes.

Bruce: You can’t treat everybody the same. That’s why the plurality of elders can be so helpful.

The way that we did it when I was pastoring, is that we were a church of about two hundred at the time. There were three elders. Each of us had one-third of the congregation that was our responsibility. And we did this at our elder meetings. We came together and talked about the spiritual welfare of the people and the families they were shepherding. So elder number one had so many families. He came and said, “This is what’s going on in my little flock.” Elder number two said, “This is what’s going on in my flock.” Elder number three said, “This is what’s going on in my little flock.”

It was so helpful for me to understand what to teach in the pulpit the following week or the next several months because we were reading the temperature of the spiritual growth of our sheep. That was our elder meeting. We didn’t talk about vision. We didn’t talk about activities. We didn’t talk about programmatic things. We talked about the spiritual condition of the sheep. That’s what we did. Each of us had a responsibility to know what was going on in those families and we came together. That was so helpful to me so that I knew what to teach them in the ensuing weeks from the Scripture. It’s not an easy task but it’s a critical one.

And so this is where the task gets difficult. You can’t treat all the people the same way. People are motivated differently. You don’t walk on people who are weak. You’ve got to treat them differently from people who are strong. And that’s why you must have maturity and discernment, empathy and sympathy with the flock—all part of the qualifications of a leader.

An elder is not to intrude into one’s private life, and we need to understand this. When we talk about overseeing, we’re not talking about intrusion into somebody’s private life and all their conduct. We carefully oversee their conduct, administering caution when needed, encouraging them when applicable. Rebuke them when necessary. We exhort with the consistency of the Scripture when the circumstances demand it. And we teach them the full counsel of God. But we are not meddlers as overseers. In other words, you don’t oversee everybody’s decisions. You don’t tell them what car they ought to buy or what house they ought to buy, or where they should live. You’re not a meddler. We’re not meddlers. Serving shepherds who are overseeing are not meddlers in the details of

“An Appeal to God’s Under-Shepherds” Part 2

everybody’s lives. They’re looking at their spiritual direction and helping them grow in the grace of God, but you’re not a meddler. You oversee, but you don’t become meddling, getting involved in their lives and details. Yes, Don?

Don: Okay. You were talking a few minutes ago about no, we’re not going to watch that particular TV program. What if someone comes to me from my flock and says, “Boy, you know, I watch that particular show and I know that’s not a very good show, not very wholesome.” Is it meddling to say, “I don’t watch that show for this, this and this reason. And it probably wouldn’t be good for you,” particularly if it’s a young person who watches that show. Is that meddling or not?

Bruce: I don’t know. I’d have to know the context of the person in the situation. You can’t treat everybody the same. You have to be discerning to know that this situation may be different from that situation. What counts is what I give them from the Scripture. To one family it might be meddling. To another it may not be. You can’t come up with a rote response to every situation. So you have to be very, very discerning to know what’s going on in that particular person’s life and give them the right counsel.

My point is this. The balance is this and this is hard to explain. It’s hard to pull off. You’re among the flock but you’re over the flock. And those two things must be balanced. And when one gets unbalanced, you’re going to have difficulties in the flock. Somehow you just need to balance those two things out. Each situation must be treated wisely, differently, under the grace of God in His superintendence.

Participant: Dr. Bickel?

Bruce: Please?

Participant: What about the role of church discipline as oversight?

Bruce: Yes, that’s one of the keys of the Kingdom. There are three keys to the Kingdom—the preaching of the gospel, the administration of the ordinances and church discipline. Church discipline is not something you do to a person. It’s something that God works in a person. That’s part of the oversight. When those situations occur, Matthew 18 tells us how to do that. When teaching the full counsel of God, you may need to do that. And when you do it, you do it with grace and mercy and compassion. But that is one of the keys to the Kingdom and that would be church discipline. Church discipline is not something you do to somebody. It’s something that God works in a person’s life through a process that’s called shepherding and overseeing. It’s part of the rulership of the church and the administration. It’s something that God gives to the church for the well-being and preservation of His glory.

So what is the key to overseeing? Is this making any sense, men?

Men: Yes.

Bruce: I’m just trying to give you the big picture of this. We could spend much more detail and go through the what ifs and how comes and the why fors. We’re not doing that. We’re just trying to give you the big picture, to help us understand the necessity of proper church leadership in the midst of being persecuted for righteousness’ sake.

So let me give you a couple of keys which I think are important to overseeing. First of all, the shepherd/overseer must understand that he is an Under-Shepherd. Christ is the Chief Shepherd. We know that we have orders from a greater authority than ourselves,

“An Appeal to God’s Under-Shepherds” Part 2

because He is the Chief Shepherd. That means that our position is never earned by any merit of our own. It is allotted to us, assigned to us by God in His grace. We start with that attitude. I’ve not earned this by merit. God has given me this. He has allotted me this by His grace, for reasons for His glory. And I’m an Under-Shepherd. I am not the Chief Shepherd. I must keep the balance between being among the sheep and being over the sheep.

We oversee by the revealed word of Scripture, by the Chief Shepherd, what He says. We take our marching orders from the Chief Shepherd, not by our personalities or our own temperaments. The role of the elder in the church is not something that we have desired per se. It is something that God has given us to do for His glory. And you recognize that starting off

The whole attitude of the pastor/shepherd, the serving shepherd, must be the same as the attitude that God has for His flock. He loves them. Everything we do must be generated by God’s love for us as we give that away.

When we talk about servant leadership, the serving shepherd, in my own mind the definition of a servant/leader is this—the quiet quest for anonymity. You don’t desire the position of shepherd. You desire the ministry of shepherding. You don’t desire the position of an overseer. You desire the ministry of overseeing. It’s not the position that you’re after. It’s the ministry that you’re desiring to do for God’s glory. And that means this. You must have the quiet quest for anonymity. You’re not trying to build your own reputation, your own dictatorship. You have a heart that basically says, “I desire the position of an elder because of the ministry of what it means to be a feeding shepherd and an overseeing shepherd.” And that means this. We have the quiet quest for anonymity. This is not about us. It’s the realization that I’m an Under-Shepherd, one whom God has assigned to manage and monitor and shepherd His flock for His glory. It’s a very difficult task. But you’ve got to have the right men in the right position at the right time. That’s why the church has to be taught how to recognize qualified church leaders. They need to be taught how to recognize them. Yes, please?

Participant: What you’ve just described is sacrificial love. You’re not in it for yourself.

Bruce: Correct.

Participant: You’re in it to feed the flock.

Bruce: Now that’s one of the things we’re going to talk about when we move into the next part—to set an example. One of those things is that you do it sacrificially. Absolutely.

Let’s take a look at what it means to be an example. Three things he says the church leader needs to be in this particular passage. Now there are other passages we could examine to give us more instruction, but we’re just dealing with the ones in the context of what Peter says about the time when we’re suffering for righteousness’ sake. And that would be these. Be a shepherd, be an overseer and be an example.

Now notice—verse 3. Be an example to the flock. The word *example* here literally means a print left over as an impression after a blow has been struck. In other words, you have the model here. You put this on a piece of paper and you strike it. And when you

“An Appeal to God’s Under-Shepherds” Part 2

take the original away, you have the model of what was struck with it. That’s the model. That’s an example. It is a replication. It’s an impression after a blow that had been struck by the model being stuck into something. And so it’s a representation. It’s a pattern or model of something else. And that’s what the Scripture is saying. The elder needs to be an example.

The contrast here in my mind is the contrast between being a dictator and being a leader. This is not about dictatorship. It’s about servant leadership. You can’t drive sheep. You must go before them and lead them. The church needs leaders who serve and servants who lead. Being an example is how the pastor/teacher, the elder, solves the tension of being both *among* the sheep and being *over* the sheep. It’s by the example that you set, balancing that over and over.

So what are some of the things that the Scripture says that we need as church leaders need to be examples in? Yes, Bob?

Bob: Bruce, a slightly different tack here that I’m curious about in your view. When we talk about the qualities and the attributes of the elders and of the pastor, let’s talk a moment about the shepherd. How should the seeker select a church to join, to become a part of?

Bruce: An individual person?

Bob: An individual, a seeker. Should they take the time to learn about the elders and the pastors and get immersed in that process before they make a selection? How should that be done?

Bruce: Well, according to the book of Romans, “no one seeks God.” So are there really such things as *seekers*? Who does the seeking?

Men: God.

Bruce: God seeks us. We don’t seek Him. We need to understand that. So Biblically, there’s no such thing as a seeker in that sense. A seeker is somebody who is responding to God having sought him and drawing him by His grace.

I think the responsibility of a person who is in that position where God is drawing them into the church, absolutely, is that they need to visit with the pastors and the leadership and talk about their leadership structure, because what is the role of the member of the church?

Men: Submit?

Bruce: Submit to your leaders. You’ve got to get to know them! Before you join the church, get to know them. Find out who they are. Are they spiritually mature? Are they personally humble? Do they have the character qualities that Scripture outlined—the twenty-eight qualifications of an elder? We could go through that in a whole other series. You need to find those things out because your role is going to be this as a church member. My role is to submit to those men. If you can’t do that, then don’t join that church because you’ll be in violation of your personal responsibility as a church member to submit. So it’s very, very important that you examine the church leaders when you join.

Now that doesn’t mean that you run through an inquisition. There are many other ways you can do that. You can talk to current church members and find out what’s going

“An Appeal to God’s Under-Shepherds” Part 2

on. But you’ve got to understand what their doctrinal position is, what they are teaching. What is their commitment to the Scripture? How do they view all those things? Those are important issues for a church. Remember, the church is not a social club, men. It’s not a social club. It’s a place where you enter into the kingdom of God in the process of being conformed to the image of Christ. Yes, Tom?

Tom: I think another clue is to look at a body of Christ that is actually using the gifts that the Spirit is bestowing upon them. So many times you’ll have someone who has the gift of hospitality approach you and bring you in and start to introduce you around and make you feel welcome, so that you can get to know the pastors and the leaders. Hospitality is a great gift.

Bruce: It is. It’s one of the gifts to the church—the gift of hospitality, and elders need to have that to some degree. They are hospitable men who can entertain people when it’s necessary for the sake of the Kingdom.

Here are some things in the Scripture that Paul teaches Timothy about how to set an example in your own life. And again, we’re not going to get into this in detail, but just a cursory overview.

Look at 1 Timothy chapter 4 verse 12. Paul tells young Timothy, a young elder, a young pastor protégé, that the example he needs to set is in several different areas—first of all, “in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.”

Those are the things the elder needs to examine in his own life and to say this. “Am I a model and an example of a replication in speech?” Remember what Jesus said? One of the greatest barometers of our spiritual maturity is that “out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.” What comes out of the mouths of your leaders? What do they talk about? We need to model that.

How about “in love?” Do we love sacrificially? Do we model our faith? Do we model purity?

Peter highlights three specific attitudes and motives which we’ll talk about next week because we’re running out of time; three things he’s going to teach us, the three attitudes being *willingness*, *eagerness*, and the third one is *sacrifice*. How do we model willingness to lead and to serve? How do we model eagerness—willingness to serve and to lead? And how do we do it sacrificially? We’ll pick that up next week. So bring your same sheet next week. Let’s do that. Sig, we’ll go to the same lesson next week because I want to spend some time on this, because this is important for us to understand—the role of how church leaders are to set the example. Be a shepherd; feed the flock. Be an overseer; counsel the flock. Teach them the full counsel of God. And thirdly, be an example. We need to talk about what it means to be an example because the difficulty is this, men. How do I maintain the balance of being among the sheep and being over the sheep, and do it for the glory of God? Yes, sir?

Participant: Just one comment. John 10:11. Jesus said, “I am the Good Shepherd. I lay down My life for the sheep.” We’re talking here now about sacrifice. Jesus is the ultimate example of what we should seek to be like.

“An Appeal to God’s Under-Shepherds” Part 2

Bruce: Amen to that. We’ll talk about that when we get to the point of what it means to be a sacrificial leader—exactly. John 10:11 is one of the verses we’ll look at next week.

Are you confused with all the things I’m saying today? (*Laughter.*) Am I teaching to the point of understanding?

Men: Yes.

Participant: Bruce?

Bruce: Yes, please?

Participant: I’m concerned that my church might not have elders.

Second Participant: Some don’t.

First Participant: We don’t have the distinct category of elders. We have deacons with an ordination process and we have a vestry. I’m in the Anglican/Episcopal church. That’s my concern. I’m not confused by what you say. I wonder what we do about that.

Bruce: Well, I can’t answer that question, because I’m not there.

Participant: Maybe Bishop Rodgers can.

Bruce: I’m not telling you what you need to make your church look like. That’s what I’m not doing. I’m teaching what the Scripture says. That’s what the Scripture says we ought to be doing. Now I can’t tell you that you need to go back and blow up your church and start all over again. I’m not saying that. (*Laughter.*) That’s not what I’m saying. All I’m saying is somehow, men, we need to understand the veracity and power of what Peter is teaching us in this for the church to be organized in the right way in the right manner. How you apply this in your church is something you’ll have to figure out on your own. Yes, Jim?

Jim: Bruce, nowadays it seems that in this country so many churches are not operating with that kind of a model, and that’s probably why they’re in the mess they’re in.

Bruce: I think that’s probably true. Men, notice this. God always works through the right structure! Peter is giving us the structure of how a church ought to be functioning and organized in times of persecution, because if you don’t have the right men in the right position, He always works through leadership. That’s the role of the church leader. It’s critically important. And Jim, I think you’re right. Many churches don’t have that and therefore the church is weak, because we are not protecting the sheep from the wolves that are coming in against us. We’re not feeding and not caring and not preserving and protecting the sheep.

Participant: I think that Sig’s point is that it’s not that they’re not there. They’re there. They’re not recognized and it’s not understood. I think that in Sig’s church, you’re there, Sig. You’re an elder. Either you’re not recognized, or you’re not doing the role of the elder. He is there. I would consider Sig an elder.

Second Participant: The other thing I would add to that is that, when I was seventeen years old, I longed to be the type of man in my church where, if the pastor falls down and needs help, he calls me as a man of confidence. First of all, I won’t tell my wife or anybody else why he called me. Secondly, I will be competent in getting him to the hospital or where he needs to go without flimflamming or fanfare. And thirdly, if he

“An Appeal to God’s Under-Shepherds” Part 2

asks me to do something, I carry it out without drawing attention to myself, or that I’m doing what he told me to do. I’m just executing what he asked. And that’s the kind of church man I want to be.

Bruce: Amen to that. Bishop Rodgers, do you want to add anything to this, please?

Bishop Rodgers: Whatever the structure is, you still have to put elders, recognize elders and put them in positions of authority.

Bruce: Amen to that. That’s the key. It’s not the structure organizationally. It’s this. Do you have the right men who are giving the right leadership? That’s the critical issue. And men, that’s our responsibility. We need to understand that and begin to implement that whenever we can.

Remember this. You *recognize* an elder. You don’t appoint them.

Participant: Yes.

Bruce: You make sure that they’re in the right position at the right time. May God give us the grace just to be obedient to what God has ordained for His glory.

Let’s pray. Father, we just pray with great concern and humility that with the things that we talk about, we don’t want to be critical. We don’t want to point the fingers. We just want to be obedient. And that’s difficult because of the implications of the system of this world and the lack of truth that resides in many of our churches today because we’ve gone the way of the world. Father, I just pray that You would not vacate Your Holy Spirit’s activity upon our nation because of our moral decadence, but that You would provide a revival and revive us again for Your glory. Revival must begin in the church. And may it begin with us as the men who are designed to be the leaders of the flock, who are shepherds, overseers and examples. And may it be so for Jesus’ sake. And all the Brave Men said,

Men: Amen!

Bruce: We’ll pick it up next week. (*Applause.*)