



The unfolding of your words gives light.

Holy Living in Hard Times

An Exposition of 1 Peter

^{5:1} Therefore, I exhort the elders among you^a, as *your fellow elder*^b and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed^c, ²shepherd the flock of God among you^d, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*^a;

^a 5:1 **I exhort the elders among you.** Peter's letter was first delivered to scattered congregations, but this note to church leaders was included for everyone to hear. This set the standard for the elders and let the flock know what they should expect.

The word "elder" is certainly a reference to age, but the various biblical lists of qualifications for those who hold that office do not even hint at a number. The office of elder was part of the official organization of Israel from the days of Moses (Exodus 18) until the days of the apostles. The assemblies of believers in Christ carried on the same kind of organizational leadership:

When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. Acts 14:23

And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue. Acts 15:2

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church... "Be on guard for yourselves and for 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." Acts 20:17, 28

Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery. 1 Timothy 4:14

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. 1 Timothy 5:17

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you. Titus 1:5

Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. James 5:14

^b 5:1 **as *your fellow elder*.** The historical Peter has been hijacked by some and made to be something he never was. Peter was the most prominent leader of Christians in Rome, but even with his apostolic authority, he emphasized the equality of the elders in their leadership. He used a compound word and said, "I am your co-elder." The church leaders who received this letter could say, "Peter is one of us."

^c 5:1 **witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed.** Peter created a timeline for the elders. In the past he was identified with Messiah. In the present he was serving the Church. In the future he anticipated his Lord to set the world right. This was not a boasting in his authority (though there was a place for giving his letters credibility), but a further demonstration that he was one of them.

^d 5:2 **shepherd the flock of God among you.** This is the same Peter who walked with Jesus beside Galilee and received a similar commission:

So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep." John 21:15-17

Peter gave the elders among the churches who received this letter the same charge Jesus had given him. Likewise, Paul told Timothy:

and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness^b; ³ nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock^c. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory^{d, e}.

The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 2 Timothy 2:2

^a 5:2 **exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God.** This shows the attitude the elders should have toward the work of ministry. The biblical doctrine of vocation shows that hard work came before sin. That means even the most difficult tasks associated with ministry in the church can be done with a song in your heart. Some people serve because they feel like they have to. Being a servant is a quality every believer should develop, but the hard work associated with it is a privilege, not a drudgery.

^b 5:2 **not for sordid gain, but with eagerness.** This shows the attitude the elders should have toward money. Paul said that overseers should be free from the love of money (1 Timothy 3:3). Some elders are vocational like Peter and Paul and Timothy. They receive compensation so they can devote more time to their work. Peter's challenge is that those men should serve because they love to serve. Paul used a similar word in Romans 1:15 to tell the people how excited he was to preach the gospel there.

^c 5:3 **nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.** This shows the attitude the elders should have toward the flock of God. Shepherding may include confrontation for sin, but it must never include dictatorial leadership. Respect and trust are earned over time, not through displays of power. Elders have a responsibility to live a life worthy of imitation.

^d 5:4 **when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.** This shows the attitude the elders should have toward the Real Pastor. When you are dealing with people in church who are unlovely or difficult to serve you need to remember that they are God's sheep, not yours.

^e 5:1-4 Peter wrote this letter to persecuted believers in churches scattered across the empire. The intended recipients of the letter were not all elders, but the challenge to the elders was intended to be heard by the whole flock. This text helps us understand what we should expect of those who hold the office of elder.

1. Expect them to maintain a humble attitude toward other elders. No one had a better resume with Jesus than Peter but he said, "I'm one of you." Some vocational elders may play a more visible role in the assembly, but they are not above the other elders in authority.
2. Expect them to lead you. Americans bristle at the thought of authority. But those who teach you God's word should be followed because of the delightful, authoritative message they call you to follow.
3. Expect them to serve joyfully. There is no room for grumpy servants in the church—certainly not in the office of elder.
4. Expect them to live free of materialism.
5. Expect them to live a life worth imitating. They are sinners, but they should have walked with Christ long enough to be an example to others.

HOLY LIVING IN HARD TIMES

An Exposition of First Peter
Steve Svendsen

©Rice Lake Baptist Church, 104 East Barker Street, Rice Lake, Wisconsin, 54868 – <http://www.ricelakebaptist.org> – 715.234.1966

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way and that you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction.

Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®. Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.