

‘Therefore I exhort the elders among you, I, the fellow-elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed’^{□1}.

□1 5:1

• *Suffering Christians need pastoral help*

1 Peter 4:12–19 leads easily into 5:1–3. One can see a connection between suffering Christians^{□1} and instructions to elders^{□2}, because suffering Christians need pastoral help. Peter shows that he has the connection in mind when he uses the word ‘Therefore’.

□1 4:12-19
□2 5:1-3

1. Sufferings followed by glory

• *Is the experience of Jesus*

1. Christians need the care of ‘shepherds’. Peter speaks of himself as ‘I, the fellow-elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed’. He is still making the point that sufferings are the preliminary to glory. He himself had witnessed some of the sufferings of Jesus, and had been an eye-witness of the glory of God in Jesus at the time of the transfiguration (see 2 Peter 1:16–18 where the point is made that the glory seen in the transfiguration is the same glory that will be revealed at Jesus’ Second Coming).

• *A similar sequence will be the Christian’s experience*

Sufferings-followed-by-glory was the sequence of events in the life of Jesus; a similar sequence of sufferings-followed-by-glory will be experienced by Christians. This is the message that the elders must help the people to understand. *‘Be shepherds over the flock’*, says Peter. There is no great change of subject; 1 Peter 5:6–11 will still be speaking of anxieties and sufferings. The elders are addressed as those who will give help to Christians in painfully stressful situations. Christians need the care of ‘shepherds’, but this is specially so in a time of persecution.

• *Help for Christians in painful situations*

2. Some people are specially recognised in the churches as shepherds of the sheep

• *Apostles*

2. Some people are specially recognized in the churches as elders who will work at shepherding the sheep. Who are these ‘elders’ to which Peter refers? Mention is made of them in Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2–6, 22–23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; 1 Timothy 5:17, 19; Titus 1:5 and James 5:14. At first the leadership of the church was in the hands of the apostles. Then administrators arose (Acts 6:1–6, later they were called ‘deacons’). Later still elders arose. They may be called ‘elders’ or ‘presbyters’ (the Greek word *presbyteros* means ‘elder’), or ‘overseers’ (Greek *episcopoi*; the word ‘bishop’ comes from this word) or ‘those who preside’ (*proistamenoï*) or ‘leaders’ (*hegoumenoi*) or ‘shepherds’. It is obvious from the New Testament that ‘church government’ was highly flexible and that some men could be in more than one recognised ministry.

• *Administrators*

• *Elders*

• *A flexible pattern*

Roughly speaking apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, pastors were five different kinds of preacher. All of them (when helping lead local churches) might also be known by any of the names already mentioned. Then there were deacons who had special gifts of administration. The deacons were not specially preachers, although at least one of them was also (or later became) a powerful preacher^{□1}.

□1 see Acts 6:5; 6:8-7:59

• *Five different kinds of preacher*

• *And deacons*

• *Elders – the spiritual leaders*

It seems that in New Testament times there was a lot of flexibility in all of this. The elders were responsible for the spiritual leadership of the church. All of them were ‘shepherds’ in a general sense. Some of them were ‘shepherds’ or ‘pastors’ in a more special sense. Some of the elders, but not all of them, specially gave themselves to teaching^{□1}. This means that some people were not only elders in the local church but were also apostles or prophets or teachers or evangelists – or what Paul had in mind by ‘pastor’ in Ephesians 4:11 – a preacher more specially gifted in shepherding people. (Ephesians 4:11 is listing different kinds of ministry of **preaching**.) Peter refers to himself as both an elder and an apostle.

□1 see 1 Timothy 5:17

• *Some pastors*

• *Some teachers*

• *Peter, both elder and apostle*

‘Elder’ speaks of ministry within the local church. ‘Apostle’ refers to a certain type of preaching-and-church-planting ministry. Peter could apply both terms to himself.

3. Peter calls upon the elders to fulfil their calling

3. **Peter calls upon the elders to do the work that God has called them to.** Suffering Christians need help. ‘*Be shepherds over the flock*’ says Peter, ‘*not by way of compulsion but willingly, as God wishes, not for shameful gain but eagerly*’¹, not as exercising lordship over the flocks but becoming examples to the flock’².

1 5:2
2 5:3

The work of being an elder is that of ‘shepherding’: assisting Christians who are distressed or spiritually torn and wounded; bringing back sheep who wander off into error or sin; praying with and for those who are sick.

• Elders must not be lazy

Elders must not be lazy. They must not do their work reluctantly or only when they are under compulsion by pressure from others. Rather they must take a delight in their work.

• Elders must not be greedy

Elders must not be greedy. The church is often used by people who are greedy for money. God’s house can easily be invaded by those who are eager for money. Eventually the elders may start forgetting the nature of their work and focusing on acquiring money and using the churches to do so. This happened in the temple of Jerusalem when eventually the money-makers turned the place into a ‘den of thieves’¹. But the elders must do their work eagerly. Even if they receive no salary, no financial gain from what they do, if God has called them, they should be eager to get on with the work – whether they gain financially or not.

1 Mark 11:17

• A special temptation in developing countries

This is a special temptation to people in developing countries where many people can barely make a living, or depend on the generosity of friends and relatives. People with dubious motives often see the churches as an easy way of getting employment – but such people have no real interest in the work of a shepherd. A true shepherd will do his work if the salary is nil! He looks to God as his salary-payer. If the congregations are used to help him in this way, so much the better, but his eye is on God, not on the offering basket! Elders must not be domineering. If some elders want an easy life, and others want easy money, others may want to be little popes and enjoy lording it over other people.

• A true shepherd will do his work even if the salary is nil!

Peter calls instead for willingness, eagerness, and exemplary living, where the people follow the example of the elders who lead them.

• Elders set an example



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