

This passage addresses directly church leadership, but its application is broader. Believers should know the Biblical character of leadership in the church. Much recent writing about leadership alleges to be “Christian” but seems more influenced by secular culture than the Bible. Jesus’ teaching about leadership was counter to His culture (cf. Luke 22:25-26; Mt 20:25; Mk 10:42) and we would do well to listen carefully.

**Introduction (5:1): Preliminary thoughts**

- *The leaders of the church are elders.* They are also called overseers. With deacons they are the only church offices mentioned in the NT. Their qualifications primarily concern character. Cf. Acts 20:17, 28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9. Elders (overseers) are given the responsibility to “shepherd” God’s people. Elders are distinguished from deacons and deaconess in that elders should be able to teach and that they have oversight.
- *Good leadership is especially important when people are facing trials.* This is implied by the context of suffering which is obviously still in Peter’s mind in 5:9-10. Suffering and glory (5:1) are also linked to the context. The world will see suffering members as a deficit. Elders who lead according to God’s mandate will view those who suffer as a responsibility.
- *Peter exhorts from a position of experiential authority.* (1) He exhorts as their fellow elder, knowing their responsibilities as he himself had received directly from Jesus (cf. John 21:16). (2) He exhorts as a witness to the sufferings of Christ, the importance of which he has been expounding. (3) He exhorts as a partaker of the glory that is yet to be revealed, as he himself had seen in the transfiguration of Jesus (cf. Matt 17:1ff; 2 Peter 1:15ff) and of which he had just written (cf. 4:11, 13, 14).

**Peter’s exhortation to the elders (5:2-4)**

I. *The task of their leadership – to shepherd*

1. The task of leadership finds its definition in the responsibilities of the Near Eastern shepherd, such as those listed below. (See, for example, Psalm 23; Ezekiel 34; and John 10.)
  - to see that the sheep were properly fed and watered (cf. Ps 23:1-2)
  - to watch for enemies and to defend the sheep
  - to care for the wounded and sick sheep (cf. Ezekiel 34:4a)
  - to find and save lost or trapped sheep (cf. Ezekiel 34:4b)
  - to keep the sheep from scattering (cf. Ezekiel 34:5)
  - to so love the sheep that their trust is earned (cf. John 10:3, 11, 14)

Paul’s charge to the Ephesian elders contains various illustrations of these responsibilities (for example, in Acts 20:20, 27, 29, 30, 31).

2. The task of shepherding appears limited to those allotted to the elders’ charge. This is explicit in 5:3 and implicit in 5:2 and passages such as Hebrews 13:17. Therefore being part of a local church with a clearly expressed commitment and submission to biblical leadership is important.

II. *The manner of their leadership – with a servant’s heart*

The misuse and abuse of pastoral authority is forbidden by Peter as he describes, in three contrasting pairs, how elders should shepherd or exercise oversight.

1. Shepherd, not under compulsion, but willingly (5:2b).
  - The office of overseer should be desired and not forced upon a man (1Ti 3:1). There is therefore a danger of coercing men into eldership to fulfil a minimum number of elders. But it is right to challenge men to be open to what God might want them to do and to become.
  - Being an elder should not become a “job” that one “must” do. At that point it helps to re-evaluate for whom he is serving and where corrections might need be made.
2. Shepherd, not for shameful gain, but eagerly (5:2c).

An elder may and should be paid for his work ((1Tim 5:17; 1 Cor 9), but he should not serve for “shameful” or “sordid” gain.

  - It should certainly not be an opportunity to rob or “fleece” people.
  - It should not a job merely for the money, but done eagerly.
3. Shepherd, not lording it over [them]..., but being examples (5:3)
  - Although technically the word translated “shepherd” can mean “rule”, the “rule” of the shepherd cannot mean to boss or domineer. Jesus also forbade that.
  - Instead elders need to lead by example, i.e., by being a model of what is right. Paul reminded the Thessalonians that this was his purpose among them as well as the Ephesian elders (Acts 20). He charged Timothy to do the same.

III. *The reward for their leadership – an unfading crown*

Although elders should not be serving simply for material gain and especially not for illegal gain, they can still look forward to heavenly reward and be motivated by it.

1. The source of the reward is Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd, who is the ultimate authority and the one who rewards.
2. The standard for receiving reward is not accomplishment but the manner of shepherding as just explained and the elder’s faithfulness.
3. The reward itself is an unfading crown of glory. It is eternal and may refer to the good evaluation which God gives to faithful servants. This is so much more important than popular opinion.

There is application in this passage directly to all elders, indirectly to all who serve. Shepherding with a servant’s heart is the model for leadership and service. All believers should pray for their elders and pray for faithful men to become elders. This is essential for the health of the church.