

Sermon Outline

“The Elders: Shepherds and Overseers” How Church Works, part 4 – 1 Peter 4:17-5:5 – Robin Boisvert – March 4, 2012

Introduction

1. Governmental structure is to the church what the skeleton is to the body. When the governmental structure is sound, like a healthy skeletal structure, the church works well and is able to accomplish her mission.
2. One of the purposes of governmental structure is to clarify lines of authority. Although authority is not popular in our culture today, God ordained authority as a good thing. Although authority can be abused or abdicated, godly authority is meant to be edifying and uplifting. As the Apostle Paul told the Corinthian church, the authority that the Lord gave him was for building up, not for tearing down (2 Corinthians 13:12).

Suffering Happens, but Glory Follows (1 Peter 4:12-13, 16; 5:1)

1. There is an interplay of suffering and glory in this passage.
 - 1 Peter 4:13, “But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.”
 - 1 Peter 4:16, “Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.”
 - 1 Peter 5:1, “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...”
2. It is inevitable that we will suffer. But what always follows suffering, whether in this life or the life to come, is glory.

Judgment Begins at the House of God and Starts with the Elders (1 Peter 4:17-9)

1. In 1 Peter 4:17-19, it is likely that Peter had Ezekiel 9 in mind. In a dramatic vision, Ezekiel saw an angel who is told by God to go throughout the city and place a mark on the forehead of everyone who sighs and groans over all the abominations that were being committed. (These would be true believers). Then, six angels were sent out to destroy everyone who did not have the mark. They were told to begin this judgment from the house of God, that is, the Temple of the Lord (Ezekiel 9:6). And the very next words read, “... so they began with the elders who were before the house.” Judgment begins at or from the house of God, and the elders are the first to receive that judgment.

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2. Peter is facing suffering and he is writing to Christians who are or will face suffering. Whether it is suffering in the fires of persecution or suffering that comes from daily trials, Peter describes this suffering as judgments from God. For Christians, this is not the judgment of condemnation. These are the judgments of discipline, chastening, correction, refining, and purifying.
 - a. And what should we do in the midst of these judgments? Peter answers in verse 19, “Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.” This verse encapsulates the teaching of the entire letter. In suffering, entrust yourself to God and continue to do good.
3. Peter could have stopped the letter after verse 19. But he didn’t. Peter knows that the sheep need a shepherd. Peter knows that the church is the custodian of the gospel and the pillar of truth. So, instead of ending his letter with this exhortation to entrust themselves to God, he goes on, and very logically addresses the elders, the leaders of the churches. There are real sufferings God’s people are facing. In order to face them successfully, it is essential that God’s people have effective leadership.

Elders are Tasked with Caring for the Flock of God (1 Peter 5:1-3)

1. As a fellow elder who witnessed Christ’s suffering and His glory, Peter addresses the elders and allows us to listen in.
2. Peter’s first instruction: elders are to shepherd and oversee the flock of God. Peter passed along to his fellow elders exactly what Jesus told him to do in John 21:15-19. Three times Jesus tells Peter, “Feed my lambs; tend my sheep.” Elders are to be shepherds who feed, lead, and tend the flock of God.
3. Then Peter tells the elders HOW to shepherd the sheep.
 - a. “Not under compulsion, but willingly” – An elder/shepherd should engage in this work voluntarily, not as a conscript. He should be a volunteer, not a draftee. He should engage the task of pastoral ministry because he *wants* to, not because he *has* to.
 - b. “Not for shameful gain, but eagerly” – Shameful gain refers to greed, to a love of money. As opposed to a calculating “what’s in it for me?” the eager servant has a heart that wants to please God and is enthusiastic to help God’s people.
 - c. “Not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock” – This last contrast moves from inner motivation to outward action. The temptation to dominate others must be resisted. Elders, pastors, overseers are responsible before God for the doctrine and life of the church. So they have real authority to lead. But

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that authority is the authority of Scripture. As Jesus taught, they should lead as servant-leaders, as opposed to those leaders who lord it over others.

We Must All Be Subject to the Elders (1 Peter 5:5a)

1. Peter doesn't limit his exhortation to leaders. He addressed all who were not elders (the "younger") and instructed them to "be subject to the elders." This is first of all an attitude of heart. To be subject means to arrange oneself in such a way as to support the leaders. It doesn't mean blind, unquestioning obedience. It does mean an attitude that is inclined to support leaders.

We Must All Clothe Ourselves with Humility, as Christ Did (1 Peter 5:5b)

1. It is likely that Peter had in mind another episode from his life with Jesus. When he exhorts all of us to clothe ourselves with humility, he was recalling the night of the Last Supper when Jesus laid aside his outer garment, wrapped himself in a towel and proceeded to wash the disciples' feet. This example of servanthood should be exemplified by leaders and should influence the entire flock to do as Jesus did.

Fellowship Starters

1. Take time as a Care Group to read 1 Peter 4:17-5:5.
2. What did Robin mean when he said, "Governmental structure is to the church what the skeleton is to the body"?
3. How does godly leadership in the church help God's people walk successfully through suffering (1 Peter 4:17-19)?
4. According to 1 Peter 5:2, what is the task of elders? What does this responsibility involve?
5. Drawing from 1 Peter 5:2-3, what three contrasts does Peter use to address *how* elders are to shepherd the flock of God?
6. What is the responsibility of the congregation to the elders (1 Peter 5:5)? How can you grow in embracing and obeying the commands to "...be subject to the elders" and "Clothe yourselves ... with humility toward one another"?