

Blessings Abound where Shepherds Humbly Lead

1 Peter 5:1-5 (text)

25 April 2021, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 am

(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

The culture & society in which we live & work – this New Zealand culture – is not exactly one in which submission is familiar. In fact, ours is a society of independent-minded people, individualists and do-it-yourselfers! And, at its worst, our society's lack of respect for authority is clearly seen in TV programmes like **Highway Cops** or **Border Patrol** – programmes in which we see & hear the ugliest of sinful man's rebellious attitudes & words!

Well, sadly, there have been times when even some of our RCNZ churches suffered from self-willed elders & pastors who lorded it over God's people; also from strong-willed members who would not submit to their elders – nor even to God!

And you know what? The disunity & hatred which resulted from such sad times did great harm to the Name of God!

Well, it was exactly to hold the Name of Christ in honour among God's people and the world, that the Apostle Peter (by the Holy Spirit) wrote the words of our text!

Now, our text is mostly for church leaders – pastors, elders & deacons! However, it also has a word for those who are led by these leaders; and a word for all in the church – yes, for the church leaders & all church members!

And it is good for you & me to take this text's message in, so that we can pray for our elders & deacons; for our Life-Group leaders & Bible-Study leaders and for our pastor – and, of course, also for our current calling committee and the pastor whom they will prayerfully select.

So, here is the main message of our text: **God's desire is for his church to work in harmony: for elders to lead by their example; and for the congregation to submit willingly.**

Our sermon has three points...

- Not by Compulsion
- Not for the Money
- Not Lording

Not by Compulsion

Verse 2 says that elders (and that includes the pastor) should exercise *oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God...*¹

Not under compulsion (i.e., not because you must), *but voluntarily!*

Well, the other day I read about a pastor in England – some twenty years ago – who was not shy to say that he did not like the ministry.

When his friend asked him, "But why did you then get into the ministry?" he gave this cold answer: "Because my parents demanded it, and now I have no other option."

Wow! What made it even worse was that, at the time when this pastor said these words, he was already in his late fifties!² Thus, for nearly a lifetime this pastor led a congregation

¹ NASB

² Cf. McKnight, S. (1996). [1 Peter](#) (pp. 258–275). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

not because he wanted to, neither because he loved serving the Lord in this manner, but because he felt he must – to please his parents!

My brother & sister, how can a *church* be passionate about the Lord Jesus, if their pastor is not passionate, but has fallen into the pit of begrudging service!?

Here is how C.S. Lewis described to difference between love and duty:

*A perfect man would never act from a sense of duty; he'd always want the right thing more than the wrong one. Duty is only a substitute for love (of God and other people) like a crutch which is a substitute for a leg. Most of us need the crutch at times; but of course it is idiotic to use the crutch when our own legs (our own loves, tastes, habits, etc) can do the journey on their own.*³

Well, church leaders & pastors who know in their heart of hearts that they have been called by God to their office, will throw away the crutches and walk willingly & joyfully – and passionately (!!) – on their own two feet!

Perhaps you say, “I don’t get it!” “It’s shocking!” “Why on earth would any church leader and pastor serve God’s church under compulsion?”

My brother & sister, there are three reasons why this sad thing could happen.

You see, it is possible that an elder or deacon or a minister could serve to please his status-loving parents or family – like that pastor in England of whom we heard before.

Or it is possible that a pastor could suffer from an emotional-spiritual burnout.

Lastly, it is also possible that he could “cool down” after some years of service.⁴

What could help such a pastor?

I know of a few things...

Firstly, that the congregation members will faithfully keep their pastor and elders (deacons) in prayer!

Secondly, that such pastor (elder, Christian teacher) will take time with God in special devotion, and ask God to renew in him that sense of call he once received from God; and so, to ask God for new vigour/passion in ministry!

³ Lewis (apud Helm, David R. 2008. 1 & 2 Peter and Jude: sharing Christ’s sufferings [In: Hughes, R.Kent. *gen. ed.* Preaching the Word. Wheaton, IL : Crossway Books. p.161-162]).

⁴ Now re the burn-out pastor, we can say the following...

The burnout pastor is in that state usually because he did not have the ability to say “no.”

But the wise leader is the one who sets boundaries; is the one who knows what tasks he has been called to and which ones fall outside of his calling.

I know it’s not easy, but the wise pastor also knows how much time to give to the different parts of his work.

But the one who does not guard his time/energy wisely, is the one who ends up suffering from burnout.

What does such burnout look like?

Well, it becomes clear when the pastor (or elder or Christian leader) simply can no longer function at the appropriate energy level for their calling and job description.

Well, so far, regarding the pastor who suffers from burnout.

But what about the one who suffers from a gradual cooling down?

Well, such a “cooling down” is a danger, especially for senior elders & ministers – that, at times, they go through the typical technique of “cold turkey obedience.” That is, they get up and go about their *ministries even when they do not want to, yet just because God has called them to do a certain task* (My adaptation of McKnight, *ibid*).

You see, it is not unusual for such a minister to wake up some morning (perhaps fairly regularly), and face the day wishing there was something else to be done.

Such pastor has lost his passion for his calling!

Thirdly, elders & pastors could feed themselves by reading new/interesting materials, or by meeting with other pastors with whom they can share their joys and frustrations, by attending retreats & conferences – and by taking time off with their family.

Lastly, the “cooled-down” or burnout pastor, could do with a counselling session from a sensitive elder (elders) & session.

Well, I’m glad to say: that’s what I have experienced from my fellow elders in our meetings and in a special one-on-one coffee time with one of them!

So far, point 1: “Not by Compulsion” (Not because you must)!

Here’s point 2...

Not for the Money

Verse 2 says that elders (ruling *and* teaching elders) should exercise *oversight ... not for sordid gain, but with eagerness* (NASB); *not for shameful gain, but eagerly* (ESV); *not greedy for money, but eager to serve* (NIV 1984).

Elders should not hold their office for the money!

Perhaps someone will ask: “But is it then so that, in the days of the Apostles, elders were paid for fulfilling the tasks of their office?”

The answer is: “Yes, at least some elders!”

You see, here is what Paul wrote to Timothy (in 1 Tim 5:17) ...

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

See? “...*elders who rule well are considered worthy of double honour ...!*”

Perhaps someone will say, “But, pastor, this verse does not say that elders are to receive *money!*” “It says they are to receive *honour!*”

Well, that’s right! But what does Paul here mean with “honour”? Does not “honour” here mean “wages” & “money”?

Yes, it does, for in the very next verse, Paul makes it clear. Here is what he says...

“For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,’ and ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages.’”⁶

And, in saying this, Paul was actually quoting words of our Lord Jesus! Yes, in Luke 10, where we read how Jesus sent out His disciples to go tell the people about Him, Jesus said, “*Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the labourer is worthy of his wages...*”⁷ ...

See? It is good & fitting that elders who rule well – especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching – are worthy of remuneration!

⁵ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (1 Ti 5:17). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

⁶ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (1 Ti 5:18). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

⁷ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Lk 10:7). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

It's good!

But (!) our text also says elders should “*exercise oversight... not for sordid gain...!*” See? It warns teaching elders (pastors) to shun every desire to enrich themselves, for look, if they should give in to this desire, would they then not commit the sin of greed, “which is idolatry”?!⁸

My brother & sister, how shocked I was when, about two months ago, I heard how the pastor's wife of Destiny First Church, boasted how they were driving not just any car, but a Tesla! Such preachers preach no gospel at all – only self-enrichment!

Well, let us not just point fingers at others. After all, also the Reformed pastor remains a sinner – a sinner who, if not careful, can get his priorities wrong!

And so, it would be absolutely sad when a pastor would sit with his Session and ask, “How much can you pay me?”

Here is rather what his Session should ask themselves – and what the pastor should ask himself quietly: “Will this stipend (and the lifestyle it permits) be helpful for the cause of Christ in our church family and community?”

See? “There's a difference between *making* money and *servicing* money!”⁹

And it is not just *Peter* who gives this message! No, also *Paul* has given it – once to Pastor Timothy and once to Pastor Titus...

“*An overseer must be... free from the love of money*” (1 Tim 3:3).¹⁰

“*An overseer must... not be fond of sordid gain*” (Tit 1:7).

My brother & sister, Peter is giving the same message to the church leadership as what he has given all along to the church members.

And what is that?

Well, that eyes are watching how the pastor spends his money...¹¹

Indeed, has Peter not all along in this letter made it very clear to his congregation members that, if they wanted to win others over for Christ, they should win them over by their good deeds? And is it not so that what is true for the congregation members is also true for their pastor?

See why, earlier in this letter, Peter wrote, “*Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior*

⁸ Col. 3:5 “*Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry*” (NASB; emphasis mine).

⁹ Well-said words of McKnight (ibid).

¹⁰ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (1 Ti 3:3). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

Also cf. 1 Tim 3:8, “*Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain...*” and 2 Tim 3:2, “*For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy...*”

¹¹ Cf. the Afrikaans poem “Doemanie” by Adam Small:

*‘djy moet djou palys-hys
djy moet djou aeroplane-motorkar
djy moet daai kamma sêd smile van djou
en djou tears
en djou woerawarra op die pulpit
moet djou skorrelsvol braai-atappels en -vleis?*

*excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation”?*¹²

Well, so far, point 2: Not for the Money, but with enthusiasm!

Here is the last point...

Not Lording

My brother & sister, a church’s session governs their church by a certain measure of authority.

Here’s a question: Where do the Session members (elders, deacons and pastor) get this authority from?

Well, from the One whom verse 4 calls, “the *Chief Shepherd!*” After all, the elders are mere *under*-shepherds of Someone else’s flock – of Christ’s flock!

So, why should the *elders* lord it over the church when *Christ* is Lord of the Church!?

See why v.3 exhorts the elders not to lord it over those under their care!?

What exactly is “lording over”?

Well, it’s a high-handed autocratic rule! It’s the person who (often without realising it himself) is striving for absolute power!

And we know how the saying goes: “Absolute power corrupts absolutely!”¹³

*We see it in politics. We see it in business. But, according to our text, we should never see it in the church!*¹⁴

See why our text exhorts the elders to, rather than lording it over the flock, prove to be *examples* to the flock of God!?

Elders should lead by example!

And it’s true, isn’t it? If others should be motivated by your words & life to serve Christ, then you should be a living example of what it is to serve Christ! (Whether you’re the pastor or an elder or a Christian teacher or parent)!

From my military conscription days, I still remember the Staff Sergeant who could not say one sentence without a swear word in it! Then he told us, his troops, the following: “Now, *you*, don’t be foul mouths!” “But just don’t look to *me* for an example!”

Our verse says, “Don’t lord it over God’s flock, but rather lead by example!”

And look, is that not how even our Lord led – and how He said we should lead?

Mk 10:42-43, “*You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them.*”

¹² [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (1 Pe 2:11–12). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

¹³ Saying coined by “John Emerich Edward Dalberg-Acton, 1st Baron Acton, 13th Marquess of Gropoli, KCVO, DL (10 January 1834 – 19 June 1902), better known as Lord Acton, was an English Catholic historian, politician, and writer. He was the only son of Sir Ferdinand Dalberg-Acton, 7th Baronet, and a grandson of the Neapolitan admiral and prime minister Sir John Acton, 6th Baronet. Between 1837 and 1869 he was known as Sir John Dalberg-Acton, 8th Baronet. He is perhaps best known for the remark, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men...”, which he made in a letter to an Anglican bishop” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Dalberg-Acton,_1st_Baron_Acton]

¹⁴ My adaptation of the well-said words of Helm, D.R. (ibid:163).

“But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant...”¹⁵

Be examples of self-sacrificial servants to God’s flock!

My brother & sister, some church leaders serve because of their craving for power/popularity. Others serve because they are called by God to serve. This last group – it is *they* whose motivations are godly! It is *they* whose lives (often without them knowing it) make an impact on others!

Question: What are sure signs that a church leader is motivated by power?

- Well, one sure sign is, when an elder/pastor does not “get his way” in a particular matter, and then stews, complains, threatens to leave, and appeals to his authority and position, saying: “I’m an elder/pastor, you know, called by God!” “You should listen to me!”
- Another sign is when the pastor feels threatened by the God-given gifts of another elder or pastor! Such jealous pastor’s motivations are clearly stained with the guilt of wanting praise and...*power!* After all, if he was a true Christian leader, he would rejoice in the gifts by which his fellow elders and pastors are serving Christ and giving glory to Him alone!
- Yet another sign that a church leader is motivated by self-love and power, can be seen in the way he dresses – i.e., in extravagant clothes, almost like a showman – as we sometimes see with televangelists!
- *Well, here’s a last sign of an elder/pastor who might soon lord it over Christ’s flock – i.e., the one who is domineering rather than leading by example; yes, it’s the church leader who refuses to delegate responsibilities and leadership. Instead, he hoards all decisions and responsibilities.¹⁶*

But the humble & responsible elder/pastor trains and delegates in such a way that all the elders and congregation members are able to use their gifts to the glory of God and the blessing of all.¹⁷

Someone has said it well: “If *loving money* (the hunger for money) is a root of all kinds of evil, *loving power* (the hunger for power) is the earth in which it grows and the moisture that feeds it.”¹⁸

My brother & sister, perhaps at this stage, the majority of the congregation might say, “But pastor, this sermon was for the Session and for the pastor, not for us!”

Well, in case you feel that way, allow me to highlight verse 5 for you. In this verse Peter addresses two groups – “the younger men” and “all of you!”

¹⁵ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Mk 10:42–43). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

¹⁶ My adaptation of the well-said words of McKnight (ibid).

¹⁷ Cf. e.g., Eph 4:11-16 ***It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.***

¹⁴ ***Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.***

¹⁸ McKnight (ibid)

To the younger men – i.e., those who perhaps found it hardest to respect the elders’ authority, yet those who could become the next generation of elders – to them, Peter says, “Submit yourselves to your elders!”

Then, Peter addresses the whole church, saying, “*All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.*”¹⁹

Here’s a question: What will make it easier for the young men to submit themselves to their elders? What will help the whole congregation to walk humbly with one another? Is it not when, by the humility in which the elders lead the church, the young men (and the whole congregation) will be persuaded that these elders/pastor have truly been called by God for their task!?²⁰

And is it not so that humility ought to be the hallmark of Christian living?

I mean is it not so that our Chief-Shepherd is the source of true humility – He who lived (and showed us) true self-sacrificial & humble leadership!?

My brother & sister, the people of the first century knew & loved the Amaranth flower. Unlike other flowers, this flower could last long after you have cut it. Well, it was this Amaranth (whose name means, “Unfading”) which they loved to put in their winner-athletes’ crowns/wreaths.

Well, it is for the elder who has led...

- not by Compulsion
- not for the Money
- not Lording it over the flock...

and it is for every congregation member²¹ who has served humbly, that v.4 says, “...when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the Amaranth crown (unfading crown) of glory!”

AMEN (2631 words excluding footnotes)

¹⁹ NASB

²⁰ “When both elders and laity are out to serve, the elders are no more authoritarian than the laity is rebellious” (McKnight, S. *ibid*).

²¹ For the fact that it is not just the God-fearing elders who will receive an unfading crown, but also every individual who has received Christ in faith, cf. e.g., 1 Pt 1:1-5 (especially v.4), ***Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time*** (NIV; Emphasis mine).

Also cf. 1 Cor. 9:25 ***Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.***

Also cf. James 1:12 ***Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.***