Text: 1 Peter 5:1-4; 1 Thess 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:17

Date: 11/8/2019 (MBC PM)

Title: Shepherds and Sheep

Good evening. Please turn with me in your bibles to 1 Peter 5. We will begin tonight in 1 Peter chapter 5, and then make our way to a few other texts. I have been tasked tonight to teach us from the bible about how the church of God should be ordered, how the church should operate, how we should live life together in a way that brings order, promotes the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace, and that brings glory to God.

Some might think that the bible gives us great liberty to order the church in whatever way we think is wise; it may give us some parameters, they might say, but the vast majority of it’s teaching relates to individual salvation, and not to the administration of the church.

However, as we will see tonight, the bible does give clear direction related to how the church is to function. We are given clear directives, as well as clear examples, of how the both the leadership and the laity, the shepherds and the sheep are to relate to one another, and how God’s word is the central tether that keeps us all of us from running off of the rails.

My plan tonight is simple, to explain what the bible teaches about the duties and dangers for shepherds, and then the duties and dangers of sheep. Start by looking at the duties and dangers of those that serve the body in leadership, and then look at the duties and dangers for the entire body.

Let’s begin by reading 1 Peter 5:1-4. 1 Peter 5:1-4

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**shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+5&version=ESV#fen-ESV-30451a)] not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you;[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+5&version=ESV#fen-ESV-30451b)] not for shameful gain, but eagerly; **3**not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. **4**And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

PRAYER

Like I said a moment ago, I will begin with the shepherds of the congregation, the pastors. That is my first point: **the duties of a shepherd. The duties of a shepherd**.

I am assuming tonight that the New Testament terms for pastor or shepherd (*poimen)*, and the word for elder (*presbuteros)*, and the word for overseer or bishop (*episcopos)*, are all referring to the same office, just looking at the office from different angles. I’ve preached other times defending that truth, so if you’d like to hear that you can look it up on our website.

Tonight, my concern is more to look at the function and manner of a shepherd’s role in the life of the congregation. What is a shepherd supposed to do? How is he supposed to do it? And what is he not supposed to do?

Let’s look at what Peter charges to the elders in Asia Minor. First, notice that he tells them in verse 2 to “shepherd the flock of God that is among you.” The elders are called to shepherd the flock. This is an over-arching command that assumes in it many different aspects, but the core of it all is shepherding through the ministry of the Word of God. Pastors are called to feed the congregation from God’s word, just like a real shepherd is called to feed the flock. It doesn’t matter how good of a protector a shepherd is if he starves the flock. It doesn’t matter how sweet the shepherd is, how patient he is, how good he is at leading the flock, how good he is at cleaning the flock, all of that is irrelevant if he fails to feed the flock, and a pastor does that through proper preaching and teaching from the word of God.

But pastors are not merely teachers. If all the flock needed was a teacher, then we could just pull up sermons from the best preachers around and listen to them together. No. Pastors need to do more. Peter says next that elders are supposed to exercise oversight. We could translate that “watch over the flock, or oversee the flock.” Elders are called to be the watchmen keeping an eye on the safety of the flock, day and night.

Sheep are tasty targets, and elders need to be vigilant. And the threats are primarily from two different angles: from false teachers and from wolves.

The new testament makes clear that there will arise, from within the flock and from without, those that will proclaim a false gospel. Those that will distort and deny key doctrines taught in the bible. The apostolic faith will come under attack, and we even see that happening before the completion of the new Testament. Paul and John write letters warning people to watch out and have nothing to do with those that deny who Jesus was and what he had done. Elders have to be on guard against these false teachers. Elders must exercise oversight by guarding the purity of the doctrine in the church.

But their oversight doesn’t stop there. They have to guard the flock against wolves. I spoke about this a few weeks ago from Acts 20, but Paul warned about the wolves that will spring up and seek to steal away some of Christ’s sheep. They are crafty, they are sneaky, they will seek to devour some of the sheep, and they will do all of this while claiming to be sheep themselves. The flock must have shepherds that can spot the wolves and scare them off before it is too late, and that is the job of the elders.

But how are these elders called to have such oversight? What should be the manner in which they engage in this work of pastoring? Peter continues in verse two that they should do this “not under compulsion, but willingly.” A shepherd of God’s people is not a mercenary or a hireling. He’s not merely contracted to fulfill his employment obligations and that’s it. He’s not motivated by what the sheep can do for him or what he will receive in return.

He is called by God himself and set apart for the particular task of leading a congregation, and he is motivated by the grace of God that has stirred in his own heart. He willingly undertakes the often-thankless work of shepherding because of the sovereign call of God stirring in his heart that moves him with love and compassion for the people of God. He ought to be serving willingly, eagerly, not merely out of a sense of duty or obligation.

Further, Peter makes clear that the elder is not to be motivated by selfish motives: “shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+5&version=ESV#fen-ESV-30451a)] not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you;[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+5&version=ESV#fen-ESV-30451b)] not for shameful gain, but eagerly. ” Not for shameful gain. Peter is not talking about the just compensation for a vocational elder; Paul addresses fairly paying men that labor in preaching in 1 Timothy 5:17-18. Peter is warning men that are motivated to be an elder out of a sense of greed. Some people have a lust for money that drives them into ministry. Others might not crave money, but they crave power, status, positions of authority. They like to be in control, like to have people underneath them, like to call the shots. That’s exactly the kind of thing that Peter here condemns, and that’s a picture of a shepherd that is diametrically opposed to the example of a shepherd that Jesus was for us. Jesus is the good shepherd that laid down his life for the sheep, he washed the feet of his disciples, he took on the form of a servant, of a slave, and that is the kind of posture that an elder in God’s house ought to take.

And it is because of his position as an elder that this posture is so necessary. Look what Peter says next: “exercising oversight,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+5&version=ESV#fen-ESV-30451a)] not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you;[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+5&version=ESV#fen-ESV-30451b)] not for shameful gain, but eagerly; **3**not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.“ I’ll come back to the domineering bit in a minute, but see that elders are to be examples to the flock. Elders are up in front, leading, and a significant portion of their leadership is caught, rather than taught. Sheep, much like our children at home, imitate what they see, and if they see elders behaving sinfully, domineering those in their flock, if they are motivated by shameful gain or a lust for power, or any other manner of unrighteousness, then the sheep will think that that behavior is appropriate for them too.

Elders have the be like Peter and Paul, living lives of integrity and uprightness. They have to be able to say like Paul, “imitate me as I imitate Christ.” The lives of elders, their manner of living, are a day by day commentary and application of scripture. Our lives put meat on the bones of our sermon outlines, and our holiness seasons the words that we proclaim.

And this is why the list of qualifications in 1 timothy 3 is so crucial: it’s not education, or rhetorical flair, or winsomeness, or good looks that makes a man fit to lead a church. The qualifications are almost exclusively related to character. The man must be above reproach, because he must be an example. He must be able have sheep follow him, imitate him, and those sheep be on the right path, not the wrong path. The must be a godly example for the flock.

Finally, Peter says in verse 4, “**4**And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.” Elders must always keep in mind that the chief shepherd will appear. He must be crystal clear about the fact that his authority as an under shepherd is a derived authority, it is a derivative authority. An elder’s authority is delegated to him by the chief shepherd, through the means of the word of God and the movement of the holy spirit, and it extends no further than outlined in the word of God.

And when the chief shepherd appears, the elder will have to give the flock back to the owner, and he will have to give an account for all of his actions. Hebrews 13 tells us that the elders will have to give an account for how they have shepherded. Elders will have to answer for each sermon, each word of correction, each time they failed to say what they should have said or each time they failed to lead in the manner that they should have. And this mindset should be ever-present for an elder, motivating him to act with integrity and righteousness each and every day, so that when he must stand before the chief shepherd he can stand and hear “well done my good and faithful servant.”

But, we’re all aware that pastors don’t always act in the ways that Peter is prescribing. And this is my second point, I want us to see **the dangers for under-shepherds. The dangers for under-shepherds**. To see many of the dangers we can just look back to the same text in 1 Peter.

A first danger is a failure to shepherd the flock that is among you. A shepherd can fail to feed the flock that he has been given. He can malnourish them by improperly preaching both the law and the gospel, or he can even distort the law or the gospel by the tone and tenor of his teaching. He can starve them of Jesus by merely preaching about him, rather than preaching Christ and him crucified, rather that preaching the life-giving gospel of forgiveness and atonement. Or the elder can starve the flock of attention. He can leave the flock to wander on its own, never coming out of his study, never spending time with the flock. A shepherd must never starve the sheep of attention, because they will then seek that attention elsewhere. Shepherds must be among the sheep, indeed, shepherds should even smell like their sheep. Elders must guard against failing to shepherd their flock that is among them.

Second, shepherds can fail to exercise oversight. They can fail to guard against false doctrine or guard against wolves. Because of fear of man or because of timidity, shepherds can be tempted to abdicate their position as the overseers. They can shy away from having the necessary conversations because of how hard or unpleasant those conversations may be. They can be afraid to rebuke someone in sin because of who that person is related to, or what influence that person might have. Elders cannot let their fear prevent them from failing in their duty as overseer.

Third, looking at verse 2 again, elders can be tempted to shepherd the flock under compulsion, rather than willingly. They can grow hard and bitter toward their flock, and begin to go through the motions merely because it is a job, rather than a willing act of love.

When elders have to go after wayward sheep, those sheep aren’t often thankful at first. Those sheep may even try to bite the shepherd as he is trying to pull the sheep out of the thorns. And the elder can get frustrated. He can say, “after all I’ve done for you, you’re going to disrespect me like that, you’re going to ignore me like that, you’re going to gossip about me like that,” and the shepherd will be well on his way to serving out of compulsion, rather than willingness.

Or he might have a different motivation. Peter warns elders against being motivated by shameful gain. Some pastors are fueled by a desire for money, but more often than not, people can grow accustomed to the status of being a pastor. There is a uniquely narcissistic temptation that can grow from being a man that gets up every week and claims to have an authoritative message from God himself that everyone in the room needs to hear. He can get used to having this kind of one-way authoritative communication from the pulpit, and begin to expect that kind of unilateral communication in other areas of life too. You have to listen to me from the pulpit, and likewise you have to listen to me in the counseling room, and in the hallway, and everywhere else. He can go on a power trip.

And that is the next warning Peter gives in verse 3. An elder must not be domineering. He mustn’t lord his authority over the sheep. He doesn’t overpower or intimidate; he doesn’t bully, he doesn’t divide, he doesn’t persecute and attack, he doesn’t provoke. He doesn’t crush or conquer.

And this domination can take several different forms. He can claim authority where scripture has not given it to him. He does have authority when it comes to speaking about idolatry, adultery, greed, or any other things expressly commanded in scripture. But he does not have the authority to speak for God where scripture has not spoken. “To pretend to be speaking for God without his express written authority is gross sin. To fill in the blanks which God himself has left is to put oneself above the chief shepherd and his wisdom.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Additionally, elders must not claim authority by usurping the Lordship of God himself. God alone is Lord of the conscience, and elders do not have the authority to speak the “will of God” for someone’s life. We cannot tell you who you should marry, outside of a believer, we cannot tell you what lawful occupation you should take, where you should live, how you should school your child, or any other issues not expressly commanded in scripture. For an elder to proclaim to know God’s will for someone’s life is to take authority that doesn’t belong to him and domineer over his flock.

A final danger for shepherds is to fail to lead by example. Jesus’s harshest words were reserved for religious leaders that were hypocrites, and I believe that some of Jesus’s harshest punishments will be reserved for men who preach one way to their congregations, but secretly put off those things for themselves. A man of God is called to be the lowly servant of a congregation of servants. He’s called to be marked by humility, remembering in all his dealings that the chief shepherd will appear, and that the chief shepherd will see through all of his actions straight to his heart. We are all laid bare before the penetrating gaze of God, and therefore we all should be quick to repent of our sins, and humble in our service of the lord.

Now that we’ve studied the duties and dangers for shepherds, let’s move on to **the duties of the sheep.** Turn with me to 1 Thessalonians 5. 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 and Hebrews 13, will give us a few aspects of how sheep in the congregation are to relate to their shepherds. We’ll start with 1 Thessalonians 5 and see **the duties of the sheep.**:

**12**We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, **13**and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

First, notice in verse 12 the imperative from Paul: respect those who labor among you. Sheep are called to respect their shepherds. Even in this very young congregation in Thessalonica, Paul exhorts the congregation to have a deep respect for their likely inexperienced leaders. This is really the application of the 5th commandment to congregational life. God’s law commands for children to honor their father and their mother in the Lord, and the principle is the same for every arrangement of authority and submission. Children should respect their parents, employees should respect their employers, subordinates should respect their superiors, and congregations should respect their elders.

God has ordained that these men should be in their position at this time in order to keep watch over your souls, and in as much as you disrespect men that are shepherding according to scripture, you are disrespecting God himself. To dishonor the messenger from God is to dishonor God himself, and to reproach godly leaders is to bring reproach upon God and his holy will. The Hebrews were judged for rebelling against Moses, and likewise sheep that continually show a lack of respect for their leaders will face the judgement of God himself for their rebellion.

But it is not only respect that Paul commands, he says in the next verse that the Thessalonians are to esteem their leaders: We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, **13**and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Paul endorses a proper esteem, a proper admiration, proper respect, proper valuation, a proper regard for the men that God has called to be shepherds of the congregation. They’ve been called by God himself, marked by godly qualifications found in 1 timothy 3 and Titus 1, they are above reproach and capable in handling the scriptures, and their lives and their teaching ought to elicit a holy admiration. It should be that we can all aspire to imitate the lives of our elders. We should esteem them such that we can say, “I want to be an encourager like him, I want to be wise like him, I want to be humble like him, I want to be discerning like him, I want to know the bible like him.” We are called to esteem our pastors highly in love.

Third, we’re called not only to respect and esteem our pastors, but we’re called to obey and submit to them. Turn with me in your bibles to Hebrews 13. I want us to all see together what the author of Hebrews is exhorting of his hearers. Hebrews 13:7 says, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.” We are all called to obey and submit to our elders, which grates against our American sensibilities, but we are called by God to do it *for our good and for His glory*.

Now, this is not unilateral submission and obedience. The elder does not possess inherent authority, like I said earlier. His authority is delegated to him, it is derived from the authority given him by another. Thus, in as much as the under-shepherd is speaking the words from the chief shepherd, then we are called to obey and submit to the under-shepherd. In as much as the elder is rightly proclaiming to you the word of God, then you ought to hear that elder as speaking the very words of God to you. Elders don’t have the authority to enlarge or distort the message, but if they are accurately proclaiming the Bible’s message to you, then you should listen to them as messengers from God himself.

You don’t have the right to ignore the godly messenger just because you don’t like him, or because he doesn’t do his job the way that you want him to, or because he doesn’t preach in the way that you’d like him to, or he doesn’t cater to your preferences. If the elder is faithfully preaching the whole counsel of God’s word, then the sheep’s job is to hear the words of the elder as coming from God.

Now, before I move on from here, there is implicit in this arrangement an assumption that the sheep will know the bible. If we are called to obey our elders in as much as they are rightly teaching us the bible, then it is up to all of us to know the bible, to be like the Bereans in Acts 17, and to test everything we hear against the word of God himself. Now, We don’t want to this with hearts that are distrusting or skeptical of our pastors. We’ve already covered that we should respect and esteem them highly in love. But we also want to test what they say against God’s word, which assumes that the sheep have some knowledge of the bible. Congregations don’t need to be full of lazy sheep that blindly follow whoever they hear. That’s a recipe for disaster. But congregations should be full of sheep with wide open ears listening to their elders, and with open eyes reading along in scripture, ready to test what is being taught against the message of the chief shepherd himself.

Now, we’ve seen that three of the duties of congregations are to respect their elders, esteem their elders highly in love, and to obey and submit to their elders. Now let’s look at some of the dangers for sheep, as it relates to their relationship with their shepherds. Like we did above, I’ll use the duties as the structure to frame the dangers.

A first danger for the sheep is a failure to respect their elders. Because of the sinfulness that lingers in all of our hearts, we can easily be tempted to disrespect those in authority over us. We can minimize or neglect their teaching, refuse to listen to their counsel, treat their opinions and wisdom as foolish or irrelevant. It doesn’t take much for a sheep to disregard the voice of his shepherd, and likewise, it is surprisingly easy for us to ignore our shepherds.

How often are we tempted to grumble about the quality of the sermon: it was too long, or it was too short, or he should have said this, or why didn’t he say that, or I wouldn’t have done it that way.

And this can lead us to the second danger for us sheep: a failure to esteem our leaders in love. We can treat pastors as if their job has very little value, little bearing on our lives, fail to show them any affection or appreciation, fail to acknowledge their labors. We fail to see the hours that are spent in the prayer closet on our behalf, fail to appreciate their labors on behalf of our souls. Calvin comments about their labors,

“this work is the edification of the church, the everlasting salvation of souls, the restoration of the world, and, in fine, the kingdom of God and Christ. The excellence and dignity of this work is inestimable: hence those whom God makes ministers in connection with so great a matter, ought to be held in great esteem.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Do you value the work of your leaders? Do you esteem them, not merely esteem their work or their office, but do you esteem the man of God himself? Does your esteem for their office and their work lead you to pray for the man, for his labors, for his ministry? Or when you speak of him is it always critical? Be careful that you do not fall into the temptation to esteem lightly the man of God doing the work of God.

Finally, A third danger for congregations is a failure to obey and submit to elders. We can be tempted, because of disrespect or lack of esteem or frustration or a number of other reasons, we can be tempted to ignore the calls of our shepherds. We can willfully disobey men that are faithfully proclaiming God’s word to us. Or we can fail to submit to them in matters that are not law. We can bow up, contradict, or fight with a critical spirit against the work that the elders are trying to do in accordance with the word of God and sound reasoning.

We can stubbornly demand our way, our preferences, our choices, rather than submitting to the men that the Holy Spirit has set apart for the service of leadership among the body, and in so doing, we are failing to submit to God himself. “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls” the text says. Contrary to what you might believe, being a thorn in the pastors’ flesh is not a spiritual gift, and it is not even to your advantage, as the verse concludes. Be careful not to fall for the temptation to disrespect, lightly esteem, and disobey your shepherds.

Now, I want to close to night with a reminder that none of us can do all this in our own strength. Each of us pastors has been no-doubt convicted by what the bible says concerning our work, and I am sure that many of you have also been convicted by what is expected of the all the sheep in the flock. Each of us is quick to be critical, we fail to honor when we should honor, fail to respect those that deserve our respect, we’re tempted to grumble and complain against each other, and thereby we grumble and complain against God himself, our chief shepherd.

But the good news for grumbling sheep like me and you is that our chief shepherd knows of our weaknesses, and he has provided a way for us to be cleansed. The Lord is our great shepherd and he has sent his only son, Jesus Christ, to be the very lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. He was the perfect sheep in our place. He respected perfectly, he esteemed rightly, and he submitted and obeyed to all those in authority over him, even when it cost him greatly, and eventually cost him his very life.

The gospel of the bible says, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

He submitted to the point of death on the cross, so that we might be forgiven of our rebellion. He obeyed all the way to the grave so that we might be given the sentence of life instead of the sentence of death. He walked through the final valley of the shadow of death so that we might receive from him the gift of eternal life.

He is our good shepherd, and because of him, we can be forgiven of all the poor shepherding we’ve done, and all the times we failed to humbly follow our shepherds like we should have.

Believe in Jesus and be encouraged that your status as a sheep in the flock of God is not contingent upon how good of a sheep you are, but upon the faithfulness of your chief shepherd. I’ll say that again because it is important: your status as a sheep in the flock of God is not contingent upon how good of a sheep you are, but upon the faithfulness of your chief shepherd.

Make it be our burden to pray for our pastors, encourage them, love your shepherds, for when the sheep joyfully love their shepherds and when the shepherds joyfully serve the sheep, the whole body grows together in unity and loves.

PRAYER

Doxology

Benediction From 1 Thess. 3

“may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all,so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.”

1. Steve Martin, “Authoritarian shepherds and idol-worshipping sheep” in *Biblical Shepherding of God’s Sheep*, 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Calvin’s commentary on 1 Thess 5:12. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)