

# Elders Are Not Lords

Ron Roberts

1 Peter 5:1 **The elders** which are among you I exhort, who am also an **elder**, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: 2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. 4 And when the chief **Shepherd** shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

Peter begins the final chapter of his first letter by addressing the elders. He points out that he is an elder also in addition to being an Apostle. He witnessed the sufferings of Jesus which was a requirement to be an Apostle (Acts 1:21-22). He also expected to be a partaker of Jesus' glory which should be expected by all Christians.

In verse 4 he reminds the elders that not only is he an elder, but Jesus Christ is also a Shepherd. The term shepherd is also used to designate elders also. In fact Jesus is the chief Shepherd. These men who are appointed to watch over the Lord's flock must remember that they are going to be judged for what they do or fail to do for the church.

Primarily we want to focus on verses 2 and 3. These verses tell us what elders are to do, not to do, and why. To begin with, elders (shepherds) are required to feed the flock which is among them. (*Feed the flock of God which is among you*) Elders of one congregation have no responsibility or authority over another congregation. They are to tend the flock which is among them only. There is a limited jurisdiction to their authority. This makes good sense when you think about it. Elders need to know their members. Members need to know the men they appoint as elders. How can an eldership lead a group they have no contact or familiarity with?

Feeding the flock is a metaphor for teaching them God's truth. The same figure of speech is used in Heb. 5 when saints are said to take milk or strong meat. The eating refers to taking in the word of God.

In addition to feeding the flock with the word of God, Peter says the elders are to take control of the congregation. (*taking the oversight thereof*,). This oversight is limited. Jesus is the chief Shepherd. He will judge these elders. In verse 3 they are told they are not lords over God's heritage. They have authority (oversight) but not complete control (lords). Elders cannot give any command that contradicts the word of God. They cannot make up rules and enforce them like the Pharisees did with their traditions. The elders are to compel the congregation to obey God as they do. Verse 3 also mentions their example.

The rest of verse 2 deals with why men become elders. Some men are elders because they are power mad. Some merely want a title, but are not interested in working. The work of an elder can be grueling and thankless. Why would a man want this position? Peter said it should not be a position we were forced into (*not by constraint*,). A man who is bullied or shamed into the eldership will not do a good job. He needs to take on the role *willingly*. He wants to serve God in the best way he can.

Peter next contrasts the motive of money verses genuine desire (*not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind*;). Filthy lucre refers not only to money but to dishonest gain. Do not take the office in order to steal from the treasury. It happens more than we care to admit in some elderships.

I cannot read verse 3 without thinking about The Examiner. This was a periodical put out by a brother who insisted elders had no authority but their example. Verse 3 was his proof text. (*Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock*.) The error in his reasoning is seen in the previous verse where elders are told to take the oversight of the congregation.

Peter is restricting **the amount** of authority elders have. They are not God. They cannot make up commandments. They cannot contradict the Bible. They cannot selfishly make decisions to benefit themselves and neglect the needs of the congregation. This would be acting like lords. This would be showing a poor example to the church.

Peter did not mean elders have no authority. He did not mean all they could do would be to show a good example and hope the members would follow it. Elders are men who have reared their children properly. Does anyone think they did so by example alone? Without the power to teach, punish, and reward no parent will be successful.

Paul warned the Ephesian elders of some men who would become lords within the church. He describes them as wolves. They would not feed the flock but feed themselves with the flock. Some of the wolves would merge out of the eldership. They would seek followers of themselves instead of followers for Christ. These are lords over the flock. Acts 20:28 *Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. 31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.*

Elders need to take heed to themselves. They need to watch that they do not become power mad. Their scope of authority is limited by the Scriptures. They need to keep the congregation informed and seek their input before making decisions. Randy and I have tried to do this. We appreciate your support and prayers in our effort to do this noble work. May we oversee your needs and feed you with the word of God always.