

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Godly Ministry

*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: 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; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:1-3, KJV 1900)*

The New Testament uses the term "elder" most often to identify those who are older, either in years or in the faith. At times, this passage serving as an example, it seems to also identify preachers or pastors. When the Lord uses a preacher with grace, He clearly does so with power, and He commands that those under the pastor's care are to respectfully hear and obey his words. (Hebrews 13:7-9, 17) However, this solemn authority does not contradict Peter's words in our study passage. How does a man view his role in the church as a minister of the gospel? We might observe various preachers and reach a confusing mix of impressions as we try to answer this question. No doubt, some preachers become so enmeshed in the human politics of a denominational culture that they sadly politicize their ministry and the pulpit of the church where they pastor. Inviting men to preach for personal or "Political" reasons instead of seeking the Lord's direction in filling the pulpit is an example of this error. Some men may enter the ministry and seek by their position to impose their leadership over the people whom they serve. This motive is more driven by ego and a narcissistic passion to dominate other people than to feed hungry sheep and lambs. The bad reasons for preaching are varied and confusing. Let's turn from this depressing point and try to learn from Peter the Holy Spirit's example for ministry. More than example, this passage is a direct commandment not to be ignored or taken lightly.

While Peter could have played the ego card ("I'm an apostle, and you are just ordinary sheep, so you must obey me"), he didn't. He viewed himself as one elder among many others.

*...and a witness of the sufferings of Christ....*

Peter and the other apostles did not preach the outcome of their imagination. They preached truths based on literal, historical events that they had personally witnessed. Paul makes a powerful point of this truth in 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. In 2 Peter 1:13-21, Peter refers to his experience on the Mount of Transfiguration. However, he leaves this point and reminds his readers—and us—that we have something even more weighty than his eyewitness experience (2 Peter 1:19). The testimony of Scripture, according to Peter is "...a

**more sure** word of prophecy" than his personal eyewitness experience.

On various occasions since the apostles, leading Christians have suggested that the literal, bodily coming, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus in a real human body was either a created myth, or events that occurred in a mythological, science fiction "Parallel universe" to our present world. In any such pretense, advocates of these bizarre ideas ignore the teaching of Scripture in favor of their own private imagination, something that Peter says no writer of Scripture ever did. (2 Peter 1:16, 20-21) The events reported in Scripture are real historical events. Jesus' coming in a literal, physical human body is a real historical event. A strong defense of the faith appears in the fact that many (Perhaps all of them, except John) of the apostles died a martyr's death for their faith. If the unbeliever raises the point that many sincere people have died for false ideas or beliefs that were not true, the Christian counterpoint prevails. Those people believed what they died for, no doubt, but they heard and believed things from other people whom they respected. The apostles died for their faith because they knew by their eyewitness experience that what they believed and taught was true. In our time, any number of sincere folks has written books about "Near death" experiences in which they claim to have died, gone to heaven, and returned to tell about their encounter with the Lord. I do not question their experience. I do question their interpretation of the experience. If all of them truly went to heaven, they'd report the same things that they saw, but each person describes what he/she saw quite differently. I suggest that most of these experiences grew out of a time of intense trial in which the Lord ministered to the individual so as to comfort him/her, and to give them grace to endure. When Paul had his "Near death" experience, he likely was closer to true heaven than anyone in our time, and he wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that "...it is not lawful for a man to utter..." the words that he heard. The words that he heard seem more powerful in Paul's description than the things that he may have seen.

*...and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed....* During their lifetime, the apostles drank deeply of the Lord's grace and glory, but the glory

of which Peter here writes is a future glory. Only when we die and enter the glorious presence of the Lord shall we fully understand and experience the glory of our Lord's saving grace. In the meantime, we can't rightly imagine what it shall be with any degree of accuracy. Peter builds his exemplary model of present ministry on the reality of the coming glory.

What is the New Testament purpose of preaching? Why preach? What outcome should we expect from preaching based on Scripture? Peter provides ample details for our instruction. *Feed the flock of God which is among you....* Peter makes the point simply. Our objective in preaching is not to create sheep, but to **feed sheep**. Any idea that relies on preaching to cause the new birth contradicts Peter's words in this passage. Preaching is neither a direct cause nor an instrument in God's accomplishing the new birth. *Feed the flock of God....* A flock consists of living sheep. Some of them may be sick from various diseases. Some of them may be badly injured. They all need ministry and "Sheep food." The role of a shepherd over sheep does not include raising dead sheep. Jesus emphasized this truth to Peter through three questions and three commandments to Peter. (John 21:15-19) "Feed my sheep." "Feed my lambs." In this passage from John's gospel as in our study passage, Peter's role is to feed sheep, and he emphasizes that our goal is the same. Any passage that folks use in supposed support for preaching to either cause or serve as an instrument in the new birth is misinterpreted. Feeding sheep, not resurrecting dead sheep, is the role of preaching, whether Peter or a preacher in our time.

How does a man go about this noble task of feeding the Lord's sheep in a way that glorifies the Great Shepherd of the sheep? Peter outlines the task in simple to understand points.

1. *...taking the oversight thereof....* Here we see the integration of such passages as those mentioned above from Hebrews 13. The pastor is to exercise responsible oversight, just as a shepherd watches over a flock of sheep in his charge. And wise sheep will respectfully obey the words of the pastor whom the Lord sends to minister to them.
2. *...not by constraint, but willingly....* Peter empathizes the motive behind ministry. What attitude should a godly minister adopt and hold tightly as he ministers to the sheep under his charge? Paul's first point deals with a willing heart. No man should preach because of any form of constraint. His embracing the ministry must grow out of a willing heart, even his enduring "...hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." (2 Timothy 2:3) Occasionally I've heard preachers tell of their experience in the Lord's calling them to preach. Often the

man tells of struggling with his own inadequacy. Understandable. However, when the man goes into details about how he resisted the Lord's call until finally he felt compelled to preach, the experience crosses a Biblical line. Any man who preaches from any motive other than a willing heart preaches from the wrong motive.

3. *...not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind....* How sad that so many men today enter the ministry based on their ambition for money. I try to avoid stereotyping, for the question is too complex to be generalized. However, as you listen to a man preach, you will be able to identify his primary motive. If his motive is money, you'll see his motive in his unbalanced and passionate plea for money. At times in history, preachers who were too hungry for money actually claimed to compute the amount of money they needed for each conversion they accomplished, so they would claim that every contribution their hearers made would result in so many conversions. Other men are even more blatant in their plea for money. Peter's emphasis rejects any financial motive from a man's preaching. He draws an instructive contrast between "...filthy lucre..." and "a ready mind." No contrast could be clearer; a money-driven mind versus a ready and willing mind. Paul writes, "I seek not yours, but you...." (2 Corinthians 12:14) Today's money-focused culture demeans any preacher who works at a secular profession along with his ministry. Seminaries often emphasize to their students that the student should never condescend to secular work, no matter the hardship. This attitude vividly contradicts Paul's personal example. Paul was a tent-maker by trade, and he occasionally made tents and sold them to supplement what he received from the various churches where he labored. On one occasion, Paul made and sold tents and used his earnings to pay the rent for a number of believers who were indigent. (Acts 28:30)
4. *Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.* The line between badgering people and leading by example is obvious. Any man who attempts to badger people into agreeing with him or following him contradicts this Biblical mandate for ministry. The "How to win friends and influence people" by pop psychology or by one of several pyramid sales schemes contradicts this passage and disgraces a man's claim of godly ministry. From moral conduct to the tenets of the faith that he believes, to his personal giving to the church of his income, a

preacher is commanded by this lesson to lead by example. Period. The man who can't hold his conduct forth as a godly example disqualifies himself from ministry.

At the end of the day, or at the end of one's life, how shall people remember him? Often this test says more about a man's actual attitude and conduct than his own words. The ultimate test of any man's ministry lies more in how he leaves the sheep who were under his care than in any of his words or claims. Every preacher should set his goal to leave stronger sheep than he found at the beginning of his ministry. When a man leaves a church or dies, how will the church where he served survive? How will they deal with the challenge of choosing the next pastor? Of moving forward in godly service and worship rather than trying to make their church a historical monument to the man who died? The man who makes Peter's words the model of his ministry will leave a faithful, strong, stable, worshipping and serving church. The man who fails this task will leave a staggering, confused church. This rule not only applies to preachers and pastors, but it also applies to every member of a church who takes on any role of leadership in the body. How do we measure up?

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Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
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