

At the end of chapter 4 the suffering saints are distinguished from those who suffer for their own faults and trespasses. Those that suffer according to the will of God are encouraged to commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing as unto a faithful Creator. The Creator is a watchful Guardian and Nurturer of those under His care. And He shares this blessed duty with elders among us. These older spiritual men are mentioned several times in the New Testament. They are here pictured as shepherds who feed the flock. Peter presents himself as one who is also an elder. Remember he was restored by the Lord Jesus on the sea shore to his original calling. Peter, having denied the Lord in the night hours before the cross, had wept bitterly when the Lord had looked at him. On the very day the Lord arose He sought out Peter and met him privately, Luke 24:34. Now Peter, though assured of his salvation and Jesus' personal acceptance, felt he had proven himself no longer of useful service to the Lord. So he decided to go back to fishing, his former vocation. But the Lord had other plans. Even this terrible failure did not disqualify Peter from being serviceable to his Lord. The Lord did not release him so easily from His calling. He gently but firmly called him back to the work He had called him "to feed My sheep." See John 21 for this touching, gracious encounter. Peter heeded and the rest is history. Much of it is recorded in the Acts. If one of us fails the Lord will in grace restore us to Himself. He may use elders in this restoration. And He may call us back to serve Him in His own good time and way as well.

So Peter himself is evidence of God the Creator's faithfulness to His own and of the Lord's grace towards those who fail Him in some way. Don't wallow in shame or self pity, warding off the healing hand of the Shepherd.

Peter does not claim to be chief shepherd. Some make him to be the first bishop of Rome. He makes no claim to any form of officialdom or hierarchy among the believers such as existed in Israel. Moses had established an elder-hood and an official hierarchical priesthood in Israel, but that system was not carried into Christendom by the Lord or His apostles. Believers of Israeli descent knew well the respect to be held for elders. But they knew the Jewish elders who had ruled them before they were saved. They had crucified the Lord. So Peter shows them the new order for elders replacing the old. They were called to **feed** the flock of God.

**feed:** to tend as a shepherd of (figuratively, supervisor):--feed (cattle), rule.

The flock of God that was **among** them. They were part of the flock. It was among them. They are to exercise oversight.

**oversight:** (*episkopeo* - English: episcopal, bishop to oversee; by implication, to beware:--look diligently, take the oversight.

Christ the Chief Shepherd was on duty over the flock for

God the Owner. The elders are specifically told not to be **lords** over the flock, it was God's heritage. (They couldn't rightly say "my flock" though some do ignorantly today.)

**lords:** *katakurieuo*, to lord against, i.e. control, subjugate:--exercise dominion over (lordship), be lord over, overcome.

It is God's **heritage**. He is cleric over it and no one else.

**heritage:** *kleros*, (English: clergy) a portion (as if so secured); by extension, an acquisition (especially a patrimony, figuratively):--heritage, inheritance, lot, part.

The idea of an earthly, human clergy or dominant clerical position is warned against here. God dominates. Elders watch, guard and tend His sheep in service under Christ the Chief Shepherd. He will reward their service when He appears, at the end of the age, to begin His reign over His Kingdom. Rather than lords, elders are to be examples (models) to the flock. However they are not to shirk their responsibilities. Yet their work is so blessed and necessary it is not to be viewed as duty. It is to be a willing labor of love, not by constraint, not having to be dragged to the work each day.

Humility is what is needed for God's provision for care of His own to function without some dominating others. The younger are to voluntarily subject themselves to their elders. Respect those older than yourself. Go to the spiritual among them for leadership, counsel and guidance. Listen to them if they come to you with encouragement, admonition, advice or warning. Weigh what they say. And this subjection is to be broader than younger to older. Each of us, young or old, are to be mutually respectful and to subject ourselves and interests to the needs of others and graciously give and receive ministrations of benefit to the flock. The Lord's desire is that we be one flock. He is the **Good Shepherd** who gave himself for the flock, John 10:11,14. Being aware of the sufferings of Christ that Peter witnessed, we are to serve one another as shepherds of those He died for, see Psalm 22. He is also the **Great Shepherd** of the Sheep, Hebrews 13:12, who leads us day by day, see Psalm 23. And He is the **Chief Shepherd** who directs the shepherding of His flock and rewards those who endure the hardships of a shepherd, see Psalm 24. They love Him and His sheep.

Note again that **appointment or selection** of elders is **not** contemplated here or elsewhere in the New Testament, (other than by the authority of a living apostle). The assembly is to know (recognize) it's elders and accommodate and encourage them in their work, but it is the Spirit that makes elders and guides them, Acts 20:28. Those who seek to exercise oversight are not to be accepted if they are unqualified according to 1Timothy 3 and Titus 1. The work of an elder is characterized as a good thing. Make room for it. Tend to it.

By Ron Canner, March 2, 2005