

When I first began preparing for today's message, my initial thoughts were, "For me to understand this better, and for me to be able to explain this better, I'm going to have to pretty much **stop** thinking like an Australian sheep farmer (as I once was), and to understand 'shepherding of the flock' from the perspective of a 1stC Palestinian shepherd..."

*But during the week, something happened, that made me realise that at least in **some** regards, Sheep Cockies in Australia today, are very similar to the shepherds of old,, but very different in other ways. And I'll explain that shortly...*

Righto:

Last time I preached (3 weeks), we were in chapter 4, and Peter was teaching us, that it's normal for Christians to suffer... And particularly, it's normal for Christians to suffer persecution...

Now, because our society over the last couple of centuries has been somewhat 'Christianised', we're not used to suffering – we're not used to being persecuted,, but that's an anomaly... And now, our society is becoming increasingly 'dechristianised', and so, Christians are once again, becoming acquainted with persecution and suffering.

But in some other lands, Christians (this very day), **are** suffering **sever** persecution, and being imprisoned and even put to death, because they will not give up following their Lord...

Now, I'm reminding us of this, because remember, we're reading a letter, and even though we're only studying a

paragraph of it today, if we take this one paragraph out of the whole letter, we're really going to miss out on what God's wanting us to know...

And, if we took this paragraph on its own, maybe 70% of us might be inclined to switch off – oh, this is just for the elders... But, it's **not** just for the elders – it's for the whole church. And it's for the whole church, who are about to suffer persecution...

I love the way how (1 Cor) the Apostle Paul gives us a picture of the church as a body – We all have different gifts/ministries, but we together, form one body. And the body is about to suffer persecution. And some parts of the body are going to suffer more than other parts. (Usually it's the leaders who will suffer the most), but even so, when one suffers, the whole body suffers...

And Peter specifically ties, what he's teaching us today about eldership, to the context of suffering... BTW, out of the 7 different bible translations that I read while I was preparing for today, only 2 of them picked up on this (ESV & the original Greek).

In the original Greek, there's the word οὖν (oun) (so, therefore)

Alright, so we finished off last time with:

4:19 ... let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

5 So I exhort the elders among you,

(elders therefore among you, I exhort)
Because of suffering/persecution, I'm about to tell you this
(about eldership):

You see, elders have a special role in the church, because the church is going to suffer. And when a church comes under pressure, it's the job of the elders, to shepherd the flock, and to keep the flock from scattering. But this passage is not only speaking to the elders – there's instructions here, for all of us...

But, maybe we should take a step back – what **are** elders?

Well, the word “elders” – it gives us a bit of a false impression that he's talking about ‘old people’... But the New Testament understanding of “elders”, is that these people are “the leaders in the church” (they may often be older, but not necessarily) – they are ones who have been recognised as being:

- **spiritually** mature;
- of sound teaching;
- of good character/morals;
- men who love the Lord;
- know the true Gospel; and
- are able to teach the true Gospel.

And we never decide for ourselves “I'm going to be an Elder” – elders are appointed...

Unfortunately, in many churches today, elders are seen as ‘managers’/business managers, where the pastor ‘casts the vision’, and the elders manage the nuts-&-bolts stuff, to make

the vision happen... That's not the New Testament picture of an "Elder".

The role of an Elder should **primarily** be:

- spiritual;
- pastoral; and
- everything that shepherding entails

Alright, so "Elders" aren't necessarily 'the aged' – they are the recognised and appointed spiritual leaders in the church.

Righto, so Peter himself is recognised as an elder (no surprises there), and so he understands, he's addressing 'fellow elders'... In addition to this, we know that he's an apostle. One of the requirements of an Apostle, was that they had to of been eye-witnesses to the resurrected Jesus... And that's why we don't have apostles any more – We now rely on the apostolic testimony that's recorded in the Scriptures...

But Peter had been a witness to the sufferings of Christ... And remember, from a few weeks ago, he told us that it's a glorious thing for us to suffer, because that's the way of Christ... And I wonder what Peter would think of those many churches today, whose main message is "God will take all your suffering away", when he's just finished telling us, that it's God's will for us to suffer, as Christ did...

But the fact that in **this** life, Christians may suffer, that doesn't mean that being a disciple of Jesus is a miserable existence – he puts the suffering that we go through today, in the context

of the glory that we'll participate in, on the day of the resurrection...

Some people have a 'present glory theology' (seeking the glory now) – I feel sorry for them – looking and striving and trying to achieve a state of glory on earth now, and missing out on all that God has planned for us, And they may even possibly be missing out on the glorious reward we will have when Christ returns....

You see, the pattern for us, is the same as the pattern for Peter, which is the same as the pattern for Christ – the suffering comes first – the persecution comes first And the glory comes at the resurrection. And we look forward to this with joy.

So, in **this** context of present suffering, and **future** glory, Peter exhorts the elders? ... Exhortation BTW isn't just a suggestion, or a few helpful hints – He's urging/imploring them

² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight

What does that mean? What does it mean to shepherd the flock of God /people of God / a church???

It's about exercising oversight. A shepherd watches over the flock. And there's 2 key elements to this – **leading** the flock to follow the way of Christ, and **guarding** the flock...

And, I guess, this is where the difference between the way I used to shepherd the sheep, and the way a shepherd of old would treat the sheep, comes into play...

The way we used to manage sheep, was we'd put them out in the paddock, where the fences would keep them in, and they'd pretty much look after themselves. The water was there – they just had to find it. The grass was there – they just had to eat it. And when it came time to get them in to drench/mark/shear/jet, we'd go out and muster the paddock, and chase them all to the watering point, where we'd force them through a gate, and then to the sheep yards...

But that's not how a shepherd of old would work. He would:

- Live among the sheep;
- He wouldn't chase them – he would lead them.... He would lead – They would follow;
- He knew where the good feed was, and so he'd lead the flock with him to the good tucker;
- He knew where the water was, and so he would lead the flock to the good water...

Are you getting the picture of how an elder should function within a church – not chasing the sheep – not lording it over the sheep, but leading – and by being an example to the flock...

V2

² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful

gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

Eldership is pretty important. And it's a humbling thing to be a shepherd of God's people... It's a calling – the church recognises a person's spiritual maturity and Godly leadership, and appoints them as an Elder... But if we are walking with God, we shouldn't feel **compelled** to do it – “*Oh, I s'pose I have to do it*”.... God doesn't want reluctant servants – He wants willing servants.

It's a matter of having a willingness to use the Spiritual gifts that God has given us. And I want to encourage you, if the church recognises that God has equipped and prepared you to be an elder, God's looking for a willing heart. It isn't something we do for ourselves; often there's very little thanks in it; there's no real gain or monetary reward.... Exercise this role **willingly, as God would have you.**

So, what does this all look like in a church? It's the elders responsibility to see that the church is led in the paths of Christ. It's the elders' responsibility to see that the flock are being fed, what is good (the true Gospel, and not a false Gospel).

It's the elders responsibility to **lead**. And they lead, by following Christ themselves, and by being spiritual examples
...

But it's also the elders' responsibility to **guard**... And this is where I was reminded, that in some aspects, sheep cookies today, are similar to the shepherd of old... They are hard-wired to protect the flock...

During the week, I was driving out on the Mitchel Road, And not long before Dilqui Road, a dingo ran across the road in front of me... And it was hardwired into me – I didn't even think: I automatically reached across to the other seat, to grab the rifle that would be leaning against the passenger's seat... And my hand closed around nothing – do you know why? I was 30 years too late...

It's 30 years since I was a sheep farmer. And it's 30 years since the Weapons Act made it illegal to carry a loaded firearm in a vehicle on a public road... It was 30 years since I carried a loaded gun in the car, but it was hard-wired into me – I've gotta protect the sheep – I've gotta get that dog...

And for the city folk and our overseas listeners, dingos (wild dogs) are a danger to sheep because they kill sheep for fun....

Let's bring this back to the church.

It's the Elders responsibility to watch over the flock, and to guard the flock.

Jesus said:
Matthew 7:

15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

Do you know what that means? He's warning the church, to watch out for false teachers/prophets... They're ravenous wolves – they're wild dogs that want to tear the sheep apart and scatter the flock... But the danger is, they look like sheep – they're wolves in sheep's clothing...

And in Mark 13, he tells us how persecutions are going to arise, and how during this time, :

Mark 13:22 (ESV)

22 ... false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect.

Isn't that amazing... Some people claim that the presence of signs and wonders is the evidence that a particular person a Godly leader..., but here Jesus said exactly the opposite... Being able to perform signs and wonders, isn't God's 'stamp-of-approval' on a leader – even agents of Satan can do that...

And so, we need to be discerning... How do we tell if someone is a Godly teacher, or if it's a false teacher, or a false prophet, leading the flock astray???

Well, it's not by the signs and wonders that we know them – it's by their fruit that we know them... And 'the fruit' isn't popularity, because Jesus told us that people would be drawn to teachers who will tell them what their itching ears want to hear.

It's not about how many people respond to a preacher's message, or about how big a church grows, because Jesus told us that the road to destruction is wide, and many follow that road, but:

Matthew 7:4 (ESV) 14 ... **the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.**

The fruit that we look for, in a leader/teacher/prophet, is spiritual fruit – a heart surrendered to Christ, and a life that demonstrates the fruit of the Spirit: That the leader has significant: Love; joy; peace; patience; kindness; goodness; faithfulness; gentleness; humility; self-control.. – That's what we look for.

But something I've noticed over the years, is many people **are** led astray – they seem to be more interested in the new, shiny thing; or the popular spot, and they don't test the of the uprightness of the leader, or integrity of the message...

Some of the biggest names in church circles today – preachers of international renown – the way they handle the Scriptures, and twist them – it's abominable... And some of them have thousands of local followers, and their influence touches millions across the globe...

Why are so many people led astray??? Well, it's either because the elders aren't doing their job of guarding the flock, and watching out for false teachers/prophets/leaders... or the rest of us, are ignoring the elders' warning...

Elders, it's your responsibility to guard the flock... And it's much more complex for us today, than in Peter's day... In Peter's day, it was limited to guarding against a false teacher who would come in the flesh... Whereas today, both **good** teaching and **false** teaching, are available on-tap, over the airwaves, and over the internet,, and many don't have the discernment to distinguish between what's good and what's bad...

Elders, it's our responsibility to guard the flock – to be alongside the flock, and to know “What have you been learning about God lately?” and “Who are the teachers you look up to and listen to???”

And to guard the flock, we continually steer them away from teachings that appeals to the flesh, and point them towards Christ...

So, Elders are like shepherds, but the metaphor gets a bit more complex – elders (the shepherds) are also sheep... Because Jesus is the chief shepherd, and elders, are to follow the chief shepherd, and are **answerable** to the chief shepherd...

V4

⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

You see, it's not about “glory now”, and there isn't a lot of reward for an elder now, but when Jesus (our chief Shepherd) appears (and He'll suddenly come back), there will be an

unfading crown of glory for anyone who would serve God willingly, as God would have us...

You see, it's not about a hierarchy here, where the pastor will receive greater glory, or the elder will receive greater glory... It's about those who serve the Lord willingly (**eagerly**) (without being compelled) – that's how God would have us serve...

I pray that every one of us, would be eager to serve the Lord, in whatever capacity He calls us to,,,, because **unfading crown of glory** is reserved for such eager service.

Righto, so God's appointed shepherds & overseers are leading; guiding; guarding.... But what good is that, if we don't take any notice of them???

V5

⁵ Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Now, those who are younger, refers to those who are less spiritually mature, and newer Christians... but I'm pretty sure it **does** also mean "the young"... The young, are often the most passionate, but they can also be 'the most easily led' – True???

If those who have been recognised as the ‘spiritually mature’, and appointed as leaders, and if they are gently leading us and shepherding us, in the way of Christ, do we follow their lead??? Or does our pride stop us from doing that??? Do we know better? Do we thumb our noses and go “You’re not going to tell me what to do – you old fogies are stuck in your ways.”

It takes humility, doesn’t it...

And that’s what Peter tells us – that the whole church – all of us, are to clothe ourselves **with humility toward one another**

That means “**We** have to put humility on – **we** have to do it”... You know, when it comes to pride, we sometimes go for the cop-out “God’s still working on me”, as if it’s God’s problem that He has to fix... But we’ve got a part to play in this – we clothe ourselves **with humility toward one another**

In our culture, we:

- admire those who stand up for themselves;
- those who determine their own destiny;
- don’t let anybody else tell them what to do

But “**God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.**”

Does anyone here need the grace of God? Let's start with humility...

To be a good Elder, takes humility.
To be a functioning church, takes humility.
Humility, for all parties...

And this is the challenge for us as a church,,, Elders, clothe yourselves with humility, and shepherd and oversee the flock...

And to the rest of us, let's also clothe ourselves with humility, and follow the way of Christ, together with the elders...

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

And we'll take that further (in 2 weeks time), when I expect we'll finish this series on 1 Peter.

Let's pray,

Heavenly Father,
We thank You for the spiritually mature,
Who you have called to be leaders and shepherds of Your flock.

And Lord, we thank You for the Gospel –
For the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ,
And the forgiveness of Sins in His Name;
And His coming Glory;

And the unfading crown of Glory, that we will receive, when
He appears...

Lord, we pray for our leaders,
Help them to lead us down paths of righteousness for Your
Name's sake.

Lord, Give them Humility as they lead.

And give us the humility we need, to follow Godly leadership.

Lord, we pray for the Christian church in this town,
That the Shepherds would guard the flock and lead the flock.

And Lord, we look forward to the day of Glory when You
return.

Come Lord Jesus,
And when You come,
may You find us, Your faithful, humble servants,

Amen.