

"Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of* God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. You younger men, likewise, be subject to *your* elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time," 1 Peter 5:1-6, NAS95.

Following Peter's instruction concerning suffering for Christ he proceeds to exhort specially the elders amongst the brethren and he does so by identifying with them.

He could have exhorted them by saying I, the apostle Peter, but he writes I, your fellow elder.

It appears that even though he has been teaching all the brethren about the suffering and persecution that they will know in varying degrees that he wants to specifically address the elders on this matter because there is something about those who are the leadership, who are ordained by Christ, that is important when considering these things. The therefore may be referring to the judgement that begins with the household of God and if that is so then Peter's point is that in the church the refining and maturing begins with the leaders, the elders particularly.

As all believers are to have certain attitudes during times of unjust treatment, elders in particular are instructed in three things:

1. to be overseers voluntarily- not by force because they are in the position
2. not to be greedy and lead for financial gain
3. and not exalting the position over others

Shepherding is no easy task. It does require particular qualifications and giftedness.

Because of this there can be a tendency to do the things that Peter has warned against.

Often, in the position of pastor/elder, men feel obligated to do certain things that should be done willingly as part of the office that they have been assigned by God.

This comes from all kinds of wrong teaching and implications about the office of elder. Much of the training that is given in bible school and seminary misses the heart of what shepherding is. It has a tendency to prepare professional ministers rather than men who can minister like professionals.

If you read the catalogues of many seminaries you will find that the description for a Pastoral studies program says this:

“The master of arts in pastoral studies is a two-year professional degree program designed to prepare graduates for part-time or full-time ministries in supportive staff positions in the local church or through parachurch organizations. (The student interested in an ordination track should consider our master of divinity program.)”

I am not saying that there is no place for this training or that it is not worthwhile but the biblical model should be enough for us. Elders who have experience should train other elders in the local body or among like minded brethren and then place them accordingly.

A seminary education may provide you with much information and a good mentoring program may provide you with much personal growth but biblically it is not required.

What is required is that a man meets the biblical qualifications and is proven to have a heart for shepherding God’s flock.

Peter says shepherd the flock in this way,

exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of* God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

How can a true shepherd of God come under compulsion to do his work?

This comes from the attitude of I must do this, it becomes regimen, it becomes laziness, it becomes tedious when the heart for shepherding is lost.

You do not have to have some mystical calling to be an elder. But you must meet the qualifications and therefore certain standards and expectations are to be met and Jesus as the Great Shepherd is the standard. This should be stressed more as men are

All pastors get discouraged at sometime. You know I don't often tell stories from the pulpit but I believe this one is a good example of what we are discussing.

There was a pastor in Scotland who on a particular Lord's day who finished his sermon, prayed for God's purpose to be revealed in the lives of the flock, walked down the aisle to the rear of the kirk (the church) and walked right out the door never to be seen again.

A few years later, a young man who had been one of his flock, saw the pastor in a different city. He was coming out from a morticians business and was dressed a bit strangely. The young man with great enthusiasm ran across the street and said, Pastor where have you been all these years? It's me Jamie Fergusson. No one knows what happened to you? And why are you dressed in those clothes?

Where upon the pastor asked the lad if he had time for some tea and a scone at the little tea shop up the street. The young man said, "yes" and off they went. Once their food was served the pastor began to tell his story.

"Well Jamie my lad here is my tale."

"After all those years in ministry in the kirk, I met with so many people who had problems. They would listen to a sermon and then come and ask me for counseling in the hopes of being helped in straightening out their lives."

"Time after time they would come, take counsel and believe they had worked toward straightening out their lives and then they would be back with the same problems over and over again. After many years of these return visits I became discouraged and believed it was time to leave the ministry."

Jamie asked, "But what are you doing now?"

The pastor responded. "These are the clothes of a mortician. You saw me coming out of my mortuary. When I came here I decided to take a new a career. And this seemed to be the perfect answer to my discouragement.

“What do you mean,” asked Jamie.

“Well laddie, for all those years people came to me and I tried to straighten them out. Now, when some *body* is brought to me, I straighten them out and they **stay** straightened out, once and for all.

I would hope that a pastor would not be that discouraged but you can easily understand why this pastor would have some satisfaction in his new career.

John Piper has stated,

“It is an fearful and wonderful thing to be an elder in the house of God. If the elders lead the church into strength and glory they will also lead the church into the refiners fire of God's purifying judgment. They will not stand above the church or outside the church giving suggestions for how to cope with fire; they will lead the church into the fire.

So when Peter calls himself in verse one a "fellow elder" it's not that he is laying claim to an exalted title (he could have called himself an apostle!); he's expressing a willingness to suffer in the refiner's fire along with the rest of the elders. In fact I think this is what he means when he calls himself in v. 1 b a "witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed." I think "witness" here means more than, "I was there and I saw them." I think he means, "I bear witness to them by my words and by my life. I am with you in the struggle. I am with you in the fire that purifies and refines the elders of God's people."

In other words he is practicing what he preaches in verse 3—that elders lead by example not by lording it over the flock.

So Peter believes that the elders need a special exhortation here at the end of his letter. Fire is painful; judgment is serious. It is coming on the house of God; and on the elders first. In this situation elders need warning and they need hope. Peter gives both.”

Elders are to shepherd the flock. The flock is God's flock not theirs.

Peter said, “shepherd God's flock.”

exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of* God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

It is amazing how possessive some men get with God's people and that leads to all kinds of problems. It is so sad and really horrifying that so many people follow the example of some so called shepherds whose example is not biblical. Yet they will stick to them like glue and at any cost follow them possibly even to the destruction of their own souls. Churches are torn apart by misplaced loyalties to a man rather than allegiance to Christ and the scriptures. The evidence of these kinds of situations and these kinds of manipulative men are too numerous. And often these bad examples are concerned first with money and power or prestige and pride and people seem to be blind to it.

But elders who are serious about the office know that they have been entrusted the care of Christ's own sheep. And this is a great responsibility. Yet the elders are members of the body, they are one of Christ's sheep with a particular service to the body by Christ's enablement.

Jesus spoke to Peter and said, "feed my sheep" and "feed my lambs."

And as a fellow elder he is saying the same to these elders.

There is no room for misleading God's flock or God's potential flock in the sense of preaching a false Gospel to those who we do not know whether or not they will be Christ's.

There is no place for failing to give God's people or potential people (from our human viewpoint) teaching from the whole counsel of God's word. The encouragement and the warnings must be preached.

And yet the pastor of the largest church in America Joel Osteen fails to do this.

It's all about me is what his recent book is about.

Osteen's book is the best place to get an overview of his core philosophy. Osteen

1 Peter 5:1-6 New Covenant Baptist Fellowship Pastor Joseph Krygier May 6 2007
recently told FaithfulReader.com that his book is “the basic message I’ve been speaking about for the last two or three years.”

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The basic message of “Your Best Life Now” is how to achieve happiness by getting what you want and developing “your full potential.” Again and again, Osteen defines happiness and success in terms of earthly blessings: a better job, a better house, a stronger marriage, better health, even a good parking spot at a crowded mall. The reader begins to ask: How can I get all these things? Osteen provides an answer: positive thinking.

“To experience this immeasurable favor,” Osteen writes, “you must rid yourself of that small-minded thinking and start expecting God’s blessings...you must make room for increase in your own thinking, then God will bring those things to pass.”

Osteen calls this method “declaring God’s favor,” and says that it will work even in the most mundane circumstances. For example, if you find yourself in a crowded restaurant and you’re in a hurry, Osteen suggests saying: “Father, I thank You that I have favor with this hostess and she’s going to seat me soon.”

Osteen’s focus on personal prosperity overshadows any talk of personal piety in a biblical context. In fact, the average bookstore browser who picks up Osteen’s work won’t likely realize he is looking at a “Christian” book at first glance.

Osteen acknowledges that the book’s title and subtitle are devoid of Christian language, and says there’s a good reason. “I don’t want to just preach to the church, and I just feel like I have a broader message,” Osteen told Beliefnet.com. “I’d like to think I can help everyday people who don’t necessarily go to church.”

Curiously, though, it isn’t just the book’s title and subtitle that are devoid of the biblical language of the gospel. The rest of the book is largely devoid of such content as well. Osteen makes no real mention of the unbeliever’s problem of sin or the provision of salvation in Christ, or of the believer’s ongoing struggle with sin. While on the last page Osteen offers a three-sentence prayer for becoming a Christian, he offers

In fact, Osteen apparently doesn't insist a person must be a Christian in order to apply the principles in his book. FaithfulReader.com posed this question to Osteen: "Do you need to have a personal relationship with Christ or even be a Christian in order to benefit from what you write?" Osteen replied: "I think these principles will work in anybody's life."

Playing up "happiness" and downplaying sin is a calculated move, according to Osteen.

"I just don't believe in condemning people and being judgmental," he told

FaithfulReader.com. "It's the goodness of God that leads to repentance."

Osteen's theology isn't just dangerous for Christians. It's also dangerous for unbelievers who may never hear the whole Gospel by listening to Osteen.

Robert Liichow, the founder of Discernment Ministry International, a Detroit-based apologetics ministry that examines and critiques ministries like Osteen's, say the same optimism and appeal that draw hundreds of thousands of people to Osteen's church and preaching events each year may also draw many of the same people away from the whole truth of the Bible.

By preaching nearly exclusively about the "potential of man" and the goodness of God, Osteen presents a deficient gospel, devoid of its most essential components: the sinfulness of man and the redemption offered in Christ.

Here is an excerpt from his interview with Larry King

KING: Is -- have you always believed?

OSTEEN: I have always believed. I grew up, you know, my parents were a good Christian people. They showed us love in the home. My parents were the same in the pulpit as they were at home. I think that's where a lot of preachers' kids get off base sometimes. Because they don't see the same things at both places. But I've always believed. I saw it through my parents. And I just grew up believing.

KING: But you're not fire and brimstone, right? You're not pound the decks and hell and

damnation?

OSTEEN: No. That's not me. It's never been me. I've always been an encourager at heart. And when I took over from my father he came from the Southern Baptist background and back 40, 50 years ago there was a lot more of that. But, you know, I just -- I don't believe in that. I don't believe -- maybe it was for a time. But I don't have it in my heart to condemn people. I'm there to encourage them. I see myself more as a coach, as a motivator to help them experience the life God has for us.

KING: But don't you think if people don't believe as you believe, they're somehow condemned?

OSTEEN: You know, I think that happens in our society. But I try not to do that. I tell people all the time, preached a couple Sundays about it. I'm for everybody. You may not agree with me, but to me it's not my job to try to straighten everybody out. The Gospel called the good news. My message is a message of hope, that's God's for you. You can live a good life no matter what's happened to you. And so I don't know. I know there is condemnation but I don't feel that's my place.

KING: You've been criticized for that, haven't you?

OSTEEN: I have. I have. Because I don't know.

KING: Good news guy, right?

OSTEEN: Yeah. But you know what? It's just in me. I search my heart and I think, God, is this what I'm supposed to do? I made a decision when my father died, you know what? I'm going to be who I feel like I'm supposed to be. And if it doesn't work, it doesn't work. Not the end of the world if I'm not the pastor ...

Brethren, this is not shepherding the flock of God but it is the reality we have to deal with from larger mega churches and even small store front churches.

Although there may be no compulsion to serve here or even lording it over others there is certainly the idea of deliberate financial gain if you look further into the ministry. This is a very wealthy man. His ministry builds his wealth as he promises the same to others.

He and others like him are in direct violation of the word of God.

He is not in any way modeling his so called shepherding after Christ our Great Shepherd or after Peter's exhortation.

Shepherds are to do so with eagerness or a ready mind - a whole heart and the purpose is that Christ will be honored and glorified not that people will feel better about themselves.

It is incumbent on elders to set an example for the flock. The simplest understanding of this statement is, elders practice what you preach. Are we as elders striving for the things that we preach week after week to God's flock? Or do we believe we have arrived and that is why we are in the pulpit. Elders are to be examples not because they must be but rather because they are serving Christ and serving His flock. There should be joy in wanting to set an example as Christ has taught you something that may truly help those whom Christ has given to your care for His glory

Christ is going to appear. Elders have been entrusted with His flock to oversee. There will be accountability for elders on that day even as there is now. Exactly how this plays out is not said in Scripture. But for the elder who has shepherded as best as he is able, Christ's own glory will be as a crown for those elders and it will never fade away.

What we do know is that It will not be an award like a crown given to men who win earthly honors in athletic competitions and then it all fades away.