

## Text: 1 Peter 5.1

Last week I couldn't get my whole message in. I had too much to say for the time allotted. Tonight, we return to the same subject, but with modifications.

I gave you the handout for last week (two pages) and one for this week (hopefully just one page!)

Perhaps stretching this over two weeks will give the opportunity for the message to have a little more force.

Read 1 Pt 5.1-4

**Proposition:** The office of elder (pastor) calls for men of spiritual maturity.

### I. The heritage of the term “elder”

A. Common term in seemingly all societies for “experienced, wise, leaders”

1. Used in Greek and Roman contexts
2. Used in the Jewish synagogues (especially the pattern for the churches)

B. Significance of the term

1. Experience
2. Maturity
3. Expertise (varies, but certainly “life-expertise”)

The idea of mature leadership is common to all cultures.

### II. The usage in the New Testament

A. Often used “to refer to those who had leadership positions in the church”<sup>1</sup> (many references)

B. Parallel to the terms: “overseer / bishop” and “pastor”

1. Paul only laid out qualifications for two offices: pastors and deacons
2. NT will allow for multiple elders (pastors) in any church, but *nowhere* requires it

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, v. 37 (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 231.

### III. The implications for Christian men

Last week, I planned for a brief treatment of this point, but we will do a bit more tonight.

A. We are going to consider the implications of Christian leadership in two lights

1. For Christian men in general, spiritual growth and leadership is expected
2. For some Christian men, church leadership is encouraged

B. The general expectation for all Christian men

1. Elders start as aspirants, they don't just spring up, fully formed

Spiritual growth is pictured by physical growth.

<sup>1 Pt 2.2</sup> like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

<sup>2 Pt 3.18</sup> but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

2. Spiritual growth has an “*ought-ness*” about it: You *ought* to grow

<sup>Heb 5.11-6:2</sup> ¶ Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is* hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. <sup>12</sup> For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. <sup>13</sup> For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. <sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

<sup>6:1</sup> ¶ Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, <sup>2</sup> of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

- a. Maturity comes through practice (in the “gymnasium”)
  - b. Maturity involves progress: leaving behind the elementary, pressing on to maturity
3. Spiritual growth involves imitation of the mature

Heb 6.9-12 ¶ But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.<sup>10</sup> For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.<sup>11</sup> And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end,<sup>12</sup> so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

C. The encouraged aspiration for some Christian men

1. God gives some men as leaders to his churches

Ep 4.11-12 And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers,<sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

2. God also encourages Christian men to aspire to leadership

1 Tim 3.1 ¶ It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to do*.

“Some commentators have questioned the appropriateness of having such desire for a *church* office, but such doubts are caused by the corruption in church offices which came much later in the history of the church. There is absolutely nothing improper about such pure ambition on the part of a young man. Whether he ever attains to that office will be determined by numerous other factors, including the qualifications which Paul gives forthwith, which serve as a safeguard against those whose desires may not be in line with God’s call.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> W. Stanley Outlaw, “Commentary on the Books of 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy & Titus,” in *1 Thessalonians through Philemon*, ed. Robert E. Picirilli, The Randall House Bible Commentary (Nashville, TN: Randall House, 1990), 215.

## D. Final implications for every Christian man right now

1. You should apply yourself to grow in the grace described in the NT for spiritual maturity
  - a. External Methods: Bible reading/Bible study; prayer; church attendance
  - b. Internal applications: Sobriety, wisdom, self-control, spiritual fruit, etc.
2. You should apply yourself to grow in Spiritual leadership
  - a. Consider the aspirations expressed here:

“‘I believe God wants me to be a pastor,’ says the young man in his twenties. After a few years of spiritual maturation, making disciples, teaching the Bible, and affirmation from his local church, the young man is certain God wants him to shepherd his flock. ‘I think God wants me to leave my career and pursue pastoral ministry,’ says the man in his forties who has worked tirelessly to reach his current position. After much counsel from trusted friends, the desire to care for God’s people is too compelling to resist. These two men represent the stories of countless men who have contemplated God’s call to pastoral ministry.”<sup>3</sup>

- b. Many who aspire turn aside somewhere along the way
  - 1) Difficulties crop up in training
  - 2) But especially, difficulties crop up in practice
    - a) Leadership isn’t automatic
    - b) A new pastor does not have automatic respect
    - c) Self-willed people will bring particular trials
    - d) Etc.

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Shadden, “Ethics and Pastoralia. Review of Pastoral Theology: Theological Foundations for Who a Pastor Is and What He Does by Daniel L. Akin and R. Scott Pace,” ed. Rob Smith, *Themelios* 44, no. 1 (2019): 178.

c. Consequently, how to prepare?

- 1) Learn about leading from those who already are elders
  - a) Study the lives of past leaders, be alert to failings and successes
  - b) Study works on pastoral theology
- 2) Learn to lead with small groups: put growth and training to the practical test

**Conclusion:**

**Proposition:** The office of elder (pastor) calls for men of spiritual maturity.

These thoughts are incomplete. The thrust of the message, though is this: if men should grow in grace and leadership (and they should, whether elders or not), they should apply themselves to developing spiritual maturity to handle the challenges coming their way.