

1 Peter 5:1-7

1Pe 5:1 (NKJV) The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: ² Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; ³ nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; ⁴ and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. ⁵ Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." ⁶ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, ⁷ casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

As a church body, I wonder what you would do if you found out that your pastor had become an alcoholic, or that he was going to divorce his wife because he had been neglecting her for many years, or that he had been seeing prostitutes, or that he was using his ministry to make millions and millions of dollars for his own coffers? What would you think? What would you do? As a church body, what do you think God would want you to do? How would He want you to address these issues? Well, they are very real issues that often go completely unaddressed for some reason that baffles me.

This morning is simply an introduction to the subject of biblical leadership in a New Testament church – what it is and what it is not. Most churches can survive every kind of problem that they may have internally, but what happens when there is a failure in the leadership of the church. For most Christians, this is probably not the most compelling of subjects, so I may have trouble keeping your attention. However, for me as a pastor, it is one that is absolutely essential to understand,, and I hope by the time that we finish with the topic that it will have a much greater impact on you as well. No church is any better than its leadership. No church ever rises above its leadership. Ultimately, every church is defined by its leadership.

1 Peter 5 is a very short chapter with only 14 verses, and the last 3 verses are simply Peter's final farewell to those to whom he is writing. His initial focus in this chapter is to those who are in positions of leadership within the local churches – that is Andy, Larry, and myself. In v1-4 , Peter speaks to the elders of the different churches and provides them with what I consider to be two of the most important exhortations and biblical requirements for those serving in leadership positions – do not lord over your flock and be an example to your flock. As your pastor and elders, we refuse to lord over your life. You are adults and you can make the decisions that you want to make about your personal life and about your family and about your relationship to God. By the same token, I pray that the lives of the elders in this church are and will continue to be a godly example for you to follow. The worst thing that any church can have is people serving in positions of leadership who are not called to do so, who do not have the qualifications to do so, and who are not serving for the right reasons. For instance, v2 is clear that no one can serve in a position of leadership if they do so for money – which we will see is so prevalent in our culture.

As a pastor and as an elder, when I come to a passage like this I must admit that they frighten and alarm me in some sense – this whole idea of leading a church. They alarm me for myself and our elders and they alarm me for you as the church as to whether or not you have a mindset to follow our leadership.

The spiritual strength, health, and vitality of a New Testament church will always rise and fall based on two factors – its spiritual leadership and the church’s response to that leadership. Bad leaders, bad church. Weak members, weak church. Leaders have a responsibility and members have a responsibility, and the church cannot be successful if both of those elements are not working together.

Let me say here at the beginning that the majority of “Baptist” churches are completely confused about leadership – completely confused. I make absolutely no apology for that statement. In fact, I am personally bewildered about how far Baptist churches have wandered from God’s biblical pattern for leadership in the church. Much of the confusion swirls around the word “authority” and who has the authority in a local congregation – and should there even be such a thing as authority in a local church. For many of the megachurches that have inundated the Christian culture, they always struggle with the issue of authority. Is it the pastor, is it the elders, is it the deacons, and invariably they all get it wrong. The only authority for a biblical New Testament church is its living head – Jesus Christ. Listen carefully to these three passages in **Ephesians** and **Colossians**. Each of these three passages are clearly speaking of Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:22 (NKJV) And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all *things* to the church,

Eph 5:23 (NKJV) For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

Col 1:18 (NKJV) And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

It simply cannot be any more clear than that – Christ is the head of His church, this church. In most Baptist churches it is believed that the leadership body in the local church is the deacons. Nothing, absolutely nothing could be any further from the truth than that misconception. I believe that the woes of most Baptist churches are directly related to this issue – ungodly and unqualified deacons making all the critical decisions for a church. Just the mere definition of the office of a deacon is that they are servants, not rulers. Most deacon bodies are elected and rotated on and off of their positions – nothing of which is Scriptural about that either. New Testament qualifications for either an elder or a deacon are based solely on spiritual character and nothing else.

I think of the former pastor of New Spring Church in Anderson, Perry Noble. This was a megachurch that had 11 satellite churches being watched by over 32,000 people each Sunday plus over 7000 people viewing by live streaming. There is a satellite church here in Aiken for New Spring. My question is why in the world would anyone in Aiken want to be a member of a church in Anderson? His was the largest church in the South Carolina Baptist Convention and the second fastest growing church in the United States. They would baptize 600-800 people at a time on a Sunday afternoon in the parking lot of their church with three large baptismal pools. The sad part is that the SCBC touted to its member churches that this was a model church that we should emulate. So what went wrong? Well, to begin with, the pastor was an alcoholic and was struggling in his marriage which ultimately led to an ugly divorce. His church also cited what they called “*unfortunate choices and decisions*”. He was on the Christian celebrity circuit, writing books, on the conference circuit, magazine articles being written about him, and his church was being touted as a model church and bragged about. What most people did not

realize was that at the time of his departure, he left the church with a \$47 million debt. What kind of leadership is that? Someone give me a good answer. So, what did he do when asked to leave New Spring? Well, after some alcohol rehabilitation and a divorce, he started a new church in Anderson called of all things “Second Chance Church”. The ironic part is that they are having to turn people away from the new church because it is in a strip mall and not large enough to house all the people who want to come. So what is he trying to do now? You guessed it. He wants to expand their existing church which will initially only cost \$2 million and they are looking to secure another loan which the banks will not give.

What am I missing here? What is it in this picture that I simply fail to see? Is there a place for second chances in the Christian life? Well, sure there is, and I am more than grateful for them for anyone who needs a second chance – which is most all of us. My goal is not to demean an individual for his spiritual failures that can happen to anyone. We all fail, but that is not the issue. What is important to me is simply to identify that the requirements for spiritual leadership are incredibly high and cannot be taken lightly – which this looks like another train wreck just waiting to happen. Some charismatic character that everybody just loves, but who obviously has some self-control issues and according to Scripture is not actually qualified to lead a New Testament church. Someone is going to say “*Gary, you are just being insensitive and unforgiving?*” No, I am not insensitive or unforgiving. I am NOT gloating in this man’s failure. He started with great intentions and I commend him for that. I have no problem with forgiving Perry Nobles – none at all, and I am not insensitive to the needs he has in his life because they are very evident. I have no doubt that he is a believer. However, when it comes to spiritual leadership in a church, if character and integrity are absent, that person is not qualified to be a leader in God’s church. It really is very simple. Failure in the life of a leader of God’s church is not a small issue, nor should it be compounded in other churches. Maybe all of this helps explain the pathetic state of the contemporary church.

Just as another example of how ludicrous all of this nonsense is, Jimmy Swaggart who was caught with prostitutes several times still has a large megachurch in Baton Rouge and what is called Jimmy Swaggart Ministries, as well as the Son Life Broadcasting Network. After all of that, he is still worth over \$10 million. Then to make things worse, the ministry was sued for \$2.8 million for trying to cash in on rising real estate prices in Baton Rouge after Hurricane Katrina. Between prostitutes and fraud, where is the discernment of the church? Where is integrity? T.D. Jakes is worth \$147 million. Joel Osteen makes nearly \$55 million a year on book sales alone. Kenneth Copeland is the richest pastor in American with a net worth of \$300 million. That is a complete joke to me. Joyce Meyer is worth \$9.5 million and her ministry brings in over \$100 million each year. If you do not get the picture yet, religion is big business. Do you think that any of what I have described for you is biblical? Not me, and I hope not you.

Unfortunately, in most churches, being in a position of leadership is considered to be some kind of mantle of status that is often placed on those who are good businessmen or who have strong personalities or who have been in the church for a long period of time or who have a lot of money. You cannot find any of those characteristics listed in 1 Timothy 3 or Titus or Acts or anywhere else in the Scriptures. There really is only one model for biblical leadership – the Chief Shepherd. This is His church. It is not my church, it is not your church, it is His church and He is the true leader Who holds all authority. Anyone who is truly a leader for any New Testament church should be a theocratically ordained leader. In

simpler terms, they are someone whom God has chosen to be in that position, someone whom God has gifted to be there, and someone whom God has authenticated and validated to be in that position. All three of those elements must be evident in the leader's life, or he simply is not qualified. What about **1 Timothy 3:3,**

1Ti 3:3 (NKJV) not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous;

As far as leadership is concerned, where does that put all of these so-called spiritual leaders who are worth millions and millions of dollars. They are money-changers in the temple, men who are destitute and void of any understanding about what a God-ordained theocratic leader really is. In my mind, they are professional thieves and unfortunately very good at what they do. I would hate to be in their shoes when they stand before God on judgment day.

Then to make it all worse, we have had a decline in the modern church in true biblical preaching and teaching. When you add the emphasis of all of the different entertainment elements that are being embedded into a service such as a long time of singing contemporary songs, the biblical elements such as reading the Scriptures, praying, and the teaching / preaching of the Word of God have little to no time given to them. The church is inundated with misplaced priorities that never change people's lives. Many churches make great impressions on people, but have little to no impact spiritually.

Now, let me make my point so that we do not miss it. In the present church culture in which we live, there has been a clear disappearance and digression from the element of true biblical authority within most churches. The problem is that the qualifications for biblical leadership as clearly defined in the New Testament do not seem to have any importance anymore. If someone has a dream, a vision, or they tell you that God spoke to them, it is like they get a free pass on biblical qualifications. I may never forget hearing Kenneth Copeland, a true false prophet, declare that God had told him that the Coronavirus was gone – completely eradicated in America. Gone?? The guy is a complete whacko! I cannot believe that anyone sends him one penny, yet he gets richer and richer and richer. I am still staggered at how much charismatic theology goes completely unchallenged. Many pastors just want to be rising stars and it just adds to the demise of the modern church culture. I have witnessed so many untrained, immature, impatient pastors trying to climb the religious ladder literally destroy churches one after another – and think nothing of it. We have clear examples of that right here where we live. What a tragedy, what a spiritual atrocity.

Trust me church, but I do not have a spiritual flavor of the month for you when you come to church. We go from verse to verse to verse. It is and will remain expository preaching and teaching. This thing we call church is not me bouncing around from one passage to another with whatever may be “*on my heart*” for that week. I had a pastor one time that in almost every message he would always say “*God told me...*”. What he was doing was manipulating his flock to get them to do what he wanted them to do. It was like he had this spiritual pipeline to God that no one else had. He literally destroyed that church because he had no idea whatsoever what true, biblical leadership actually was. If someone tells you that God told them such and such and then what they told you does not happen, you can biblically call them a false prophet – and you should. What is important to me as your pastor is not what someone thinks

that God told them, but what has God already said. Paul said this to his protégé Timothy in [**2 Timothy 4:2-4**](#),

2Ti 4:2 (NKJV) Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;⁴ and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

He told Timothy to “**preach the Word!**”. He did not say to preach what your opinion is, or preach some vision you had, or preach your ideas. He said “**preach the Word!**” This is an imperative mood verb in the aorist tense and active voice. It is as about as strong of a way to tell someone to do something as can be found in the New Testament and everything else that follows is secondary to this injunction. In the Greek, it has an exclamation point after it making it emphatic and mandatory. Listen, if you really want God to speak to you, then read His Word. If you want God to speak to you audibly, then simply read the Bible out loud. There is no new truth, no new revelation. What God gives each of us is greater understanding, more wisdom, deeper insight into what He has already stated – but there is no new truth. In the day in which we live, you need to pay close attention to [**1 Timothy 4:1**](#) which says,

1Ti 4:1 (NKJV) Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,

Demons have no problem introducing false doctrines and deceiving people as to the true meaning of the Word of God. The number of false teachers in America is astronomical. [**1 Timothy 4:6**](#) says, speaking to me as a pastor,

1Ti 4:6 (NKJV) If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.

My sole job as your pastor is to nourish you in the words of faith and good doctrine, and then to encourage you as much as is possible to carefully obey what you know to be the truth. Listen very carefully. As your pastor, I have no value for your life – none, absolutely none, if you refuse to implement into your life what you learn through the teaching and preaching of the Word of God in this church. I am not pulling rank on you because I am your pastor, but neither you nor me get a green light from God to ignore the remarkable, life-transforming truths that we study week after week in this place. As we studied last week, so many Christians think that obedience and faithfulness is optional, that it does not apply to them, that they can just pick and choose what they want to obey. Where did that come from? It is a lie from a “**deceiving spirit**” that will destroy your spiritual life and any impact it could have had. Listen, if I do my job right, I am going to challenge you and make you very uncomfortable when things in your life are not right with God. That is part of my calling and you should appreciate that. As your pastor, I must hold you accountable, just as you must hold me accountable. It could be your marriage, how you treat people at work, your indifference to God’s church, how you handle your resources, your unbiblical attitudes, your lack of faithfulness or obedience, your inattention to the Word of God, an ungodly tongue, and anything else that needs to be changed. If you truly choose to be a devoted follower of Jesus Christ, you will never be disappointed, but if you decide that you are going to

pick and choose what you have to obey, your Christian life will NEVER have an impact on anyone — ever. That is the reality of a buffet, smorgasbord type of Christianity. You get what you want, but it has no impact on anyone's life. Church, you have to choose Christ. You have to choose God's Word. You have to choose obedience no matter the cost. As your pastor, I want to be an example of doing that for you. I want Larry and Andy to be an example of doing that for you. We give you the right and the privilege of speaking to our lives if that is not the case.