

Why the Church Must Return to a True Biblical Standard for Leadership

I love to read and meditate on Paul's farewell speech to the Ephesian elders and his reference to the transforming power and potency of his personal example. It marks his heart for the elders, who were appointed to care for the churches.

"We will have many memories of our time together in Ephesus; but of all the memories, most of all I want you to remember my way of life" (Acts 20:18b, VOICE).

"You must be on guard, and you must remember my way of life among you..." (Acts 20:31b).

"Remember my example: I never once coveted a single coin of silver or gold. I never looked twice at someone's fine clothing. No, you know this: I worked with my own two hands making tents, and I paid my own expenses and my companions' expenses as well. This is my last gift to you, this example of a way of life: a life of hard work, a life of helping the weak, a life that echoes every day those words of Jesus our King, who said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:33-35).

In a day when spiritual leaders place great emphasis on positions, titles and degrees, these Scriptures are a sober reminder of the true portion of an apostle and/or an elder. I believe every apostle and elder in the body of Christ needs to read and meditate on these sections of Scripture on a regular basis.

How many are ready to stand in line and be counted among the ranks of those whom Jesus calls apostles and elders?

Peter's Example

Now let's look at the personal witness of the Lord that the apostle Peter possessed.

For I want to remind you that when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus the Anointed, we were relying on what our eyes had seen of His glorious majesty, not on cleverly told fables. You see, God the Father lavished honor and glory upon Jesus when the voice of the Majestic Glory echoed from heaven and said, "This is My beloved Son, and My favor rests on Him." We witnessed this—we ourselves heard this voice from heaven—when we were with Jesus on that holy mountain. We have a fuller confirmation of the message of the prophets. You would do well to pay close attention to this word; it is like a light that shines for you in the darkness of night until the day dawns when the morning star rises in your own hearts (2 Pet. 1:16-19, emphasis added).

Peter was an apostle and an elder in the body of Christ. In his great epistle he seems to write as an aged man and expounds on the theme of suffering, which, like Paul, he had become familiar with. How well we endure suffering and hardship is all in direct relation to Christ's reality and abiding presence in our lives and ministry. Your personal conviction of who Christ is to you is the great secret to your own personal destiny and the fulfillment of God's plan for your life.

Peter understood that his role in the body of Christ as an apostle and fellow elder was to be an example of Christ's sufferings and a standard bearer of what it means to be a true bond-slave of Jesus Christ. Peter also admonished the other elders to lead well.

Instructions for Elders

"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: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away" (1 Pet. 5:1-4, NKJV).

When true apostles lead by Christlike example, then the standard is clear for the elders to imitate and follow their example. Peter's instructions included these high points:

1. Be shepherds of the flock under your care.
2. Watch over the sheep out of willingness and not just duty.
3. Serve with eagerness and never for dishonest gain.
4. Never operate like a boss who lords over the ones under their care.
5. Be an example to the flock with the way you live your life.

I especially love the reference to Jesus, the Chief Shepherd. The sheep are His sole possession because He alone purchased them with His own blood (Acts 20:28). Every elder, shepherd and overseer or bishop must always remember that. The sheep ultimately belong to Him, not you. Care for them with this thought always in mind.

"Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine" (1 Tim. 5:17, MEV).

The double honor here is both *respect* and *money*. The elders who serve well are worthy of respect and being well supported financially.

Although in the Western church there are many fine examples of

true apostles and elders, their image has been tainted. For the most part, they do not carry an adornment of glory through sacrificial living, as embodied by the early apostles and other choice servants of God, especially in persecuted lands. We owe it to them to identify with them in their sufferings and to live wholly consecrated lives unto the Lord. He is worthy of the reward of His sacrifice. {eoa}

Bert Farias' books are forerunners to personal holiness, the move of God and the return of the Lord. They also combat the departure from the faith and turning away from the truth we are seeing in this hour. His current passion is to promote a culture of the supernatural manifestations and ministries of the Holy Spirit in the church today and to pass it on to the next generation. Passing on the Move of God to the Next Generation and The Coming Restoration are a simple blueprint for what the Lord Jesus is doing in His church today. Bert's newest release is now available on Kindle and paperback. Other materials/resources are available on his website, Holy Fire Ministries. You can also follow him on YouTube (Holy Fire Ministries), Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.