

## LIVING EXAMPLES OF THE GRACE OF GOD

The first letter of Peter to the scattered church in Asia Minor was sent to encourage the Christian in that area of the world. The general theme is about Living: He started with Living Hope (1:3-12) and moved on to Holy Living (1:13-25); Living Stones (2:1-12); Living in a Fallen World (2:13-25); Living in the Family (3:1-7); Living in the Church (3:8-17); Living in the Spirit (3:18-22); Living as Christ Lived (4:1-11); Living with Suffering (4:12-19); and concludes with an exhortation for Christians to be Living Examples of God's Grace (5:1-14).

Why do we need good examples? If the only examples you have around you are bad examples, then changes for the better are very difficult to accomplish. We learn about life and how to behave and respond to life situations mainly by examples of those around us. We readily recognize this tremendous influence in the family setting. Children will learn "how to do life" from the adults with whom they associate. That could be Mom and Dad or it could be the Baby Sitter or Day-Care Worker. The family is so very important in setting the stage for the next generation.

Does this same "influence" (learning by example) apply to adults? Does it also apply in a Church setting? There are examples given the Bible of churches needing a good example to follow. One that comes to mind is the Church at Corinth. Toward the end of chapter 4, Paul told them (v. 16) to follow his example (imitate him) and in verse 17 that he was sending Timothy to them and that he could help them remember the way Paul did things. Then in verse 19, Paul promised to visit them to give some personal direction to this church.

As Peter addressed this church, he realized the importance of setting the right example whether a person had a leadership role (elder) or was a member involved in the work of the church under the direction of the elders. No one is exempt from setting a good example for others. Whether we like it or not, we **are** an example to someone else.

### Exhortation to Elders

1 ¶ To the **elders** among you, I appeal as a fellow-elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it 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 will never fade away.

The use of the term "elder" is not meant to imply "old" but was a designation of those in positions of leadership responsibility. For example, Timothy was a fairly young man who was an elder of a church. A better designation might be "those with long term experience." The expectation is for Christians to take on leadership responsibility as they mature spiritually.

Appeal: Peter is usually thought of as being brash and impetuous. He got over that. Though he was an Apostle (only hinted at with the words *witness of Christ's sufferings*), his approach to the leaders in the churches in this region of the world was on the basis of his being in work that was similar to theirs; that is, he was a fellow-elder. He did not order them to do what he said (even though he had the authority to do so), but he made a request of them to carry out their responsibilities in a particular way.

Accountability: Elders have two primary responsibilities. The first is to "feed the flock." The second is to "watch over the flock" for their protection. This is the role of a shepherd or what we would call the Pastor. Feeding is done primarily by teaching the word of God. This is the reason that Paul (in Ephesians 4:11) combined the role of pastor and teacher in his list of those "officers" Christ

has set in the church. The role of watching over the flock for their protection is that of overseer or inspector. Someone needs to pay attention to what is going on the church and to take action to stop what is wrong and encourage what is right. A pastor who is not aware of what is happening in the church but just concentrates on preparing and delivering his sermons is only doing half his job. The same could be said for those pastors who are involved in whatever is going on but do not prepare or deliver good teaching for the congregation. (This same argument can be applied to Sunday School Teachers, the Awana Leaders, or anyone else who is in a place of leadership.)

Attitude: How we approach our assignments and the attitude we have toward them is a choice we make. These are exemplified in willingness, eagerness, and leadership style.

*Willingness*: Do we consider our job or area of responsibility as something we HAVE to do or something we GET to do? Do we view our work as a calling or as a job? In other words, if they stopped paying me would I continue to do the work or would I do it without being paid?

*Eagerness*: A pastor who is doing his ministry out of an obligation of compulsion to the expectations of the norm for churches in the area, the expectations of the congregation, or meeting the requirements of the job description should find another line of work because he views his pastoral responsibilities as a “have to” rather than a “want to” situation. The same conclusion is applicable to a pastor who is caught up in trying to get more money or trying to work less hours. If the motivation is to “get more and do less,” then that does not qualify as being “eager” for the work of the ministry.

*Leadership Style*: Some pastors think they **serve by leading** and other think they **lead by serving**. The attitude that pastors must have is that which Christ had when he put on the towel and washed the disciples feet. He set the example for them to follow. Can you imagine what would have happened if Jesus had come into the room that evening and told them to wash each other's feet. It would have had about the same effect as a preacher telling his congregation that they should go visiting on Thursday night. He will have much greater success if he calls a people and invites them to go with him to visit.

If a church becomes disillusioned with a new pastor after a couple of years, it is likely to be traceable to poor job performance that results when “willingness” and “eagerness” are missing and/or proper leadership is missing. Poor attitudes toward a job can be hidden for a while, but they eventually show up when there is a crunch on resources – that is, the leader is asked to do something extra.

Feeding the flock, taking the lead, not getting paid well, and taking the role of a servant among a bunch of ungrateful church members is **not** very rewarding. Even if the congregation does appreciate it and give some recognition, that recognition soon loses its significance. However, the recognition that we will receive from Jesus for being faithful to Him will never lose its luster because it will be a crown of glory that will never fade away.

### **Exhortation to Everyone**

Not everyone is in an obvious leadership role in the church. Those who are less experienced and these are typically the younger people still have responsibilities for appropriate behavior and therefore to be good examples to others.

5 ¶ **Young men**, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility towards one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. 7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

The Greek word that is translated “youngers” or “young men” is *neos*. In its most basic meaning it means those who are “new.” There is disagreement among commentators as to whether this group (so named) includes only those in “inferior” positions of leadership (such as Deacons or Sunday School Directors) or whether it refers to all the congregation who are not recognized as “elders.” (Based on Paul’s admonishments to not consider one position more highly than another, I would think that the idea of “inferior” positions is probably wrong.)

In using the phrase “in the same way” Peter applies the same admonishments to the congregation in general as he had given to the elders. They should serve willingly and eagerly under the direction of those who were those appointed to lead. Not only should they show proper respect toward the pastors but they needed to respect each other. Just as Peter advised those in leadership to NOT lead so much by reason of the authority of their positions but to lead by example, he now advises others who avoid any stance that can be misinterpreted as coming from pride.

Not only do a proud acting people turn us off, they also encounter resistance from God. Those who are perceived to be prideful are less likely to be trusted because we suspect that their agenda is being driven by self interest.

### **General Advice to Christians**

8 ¶ Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

Peter encouraged them and us to be alert and to think clearly regarding the issues of life. We can be tricked into a trap of the devil. People have listened to the message that we are free to do our own thing and that freedom of choice is more important than anything else and they have been trapped into believing that it is OK to take a human life so that the mother can be free of the responsibility of carrying the baby to full term and giving birth to it. We can be tricked into believing that the right of free speech and artist expression is more important than common decency. Many who have AIDS have been tricked into believing that immoral life-styles are OK and there are no consequences for what we do. The devil seeks to destroy and God seeks to build up. We need to encourage each other to remain faithful to what is right so that we are not destroyed along with those that have never known Christ.

If we stand firm against and resist the schemes of the devil, then we are good examples to other Christians who are undergoing similar trials. As Christians who will be subjected to persecution at some time it is good for us to know that others are remaining faithful and not just giving up because the going is tough and we seem to be alone in the battle.

10 ¶ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. 11 To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen. 12 With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it. 13 She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. 14 Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

Peter’s benediction and post script should be an encouragement to us all. The persecution and the problems are but for a season. In the end, God wins and because we are in Christ, we win also.