

1 Peter 5:1-5: I exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder and witness to the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory about to be revealed:

1:1 Peter calls himself a “fellow-elder”—what differentiates Peter from Paul, or any other Christian elder is that he was a witness to Christ’s sufferings in the flesh.

What sufferings?

- Peter witnessed Christ’s rejection by his own people.
- Peter witnessed Christ’s suffering in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- Peter witnessed Christ’s sacrificial death: **Luke 23:48-49** “All the crowds that had gathered for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, went home, striking their chests. ⁴⁹ But all who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.”

The Apostles were part of the elder-community in Jerusalem: Acts 15

So, I want to take a few minutes and turn to the issue of apostleship and how, as a leadership position, it is distinct from eldership.

Definition: The word “Apostle” comes from the Greek word *Apostolos* meaning “a messenger; one who is commissioned.” In the first century, this was a common term which described an emissary with an official message sent by a king, an official, not only to deliver that message but to represent the official or royal figure. When the apostle arrived to deliver an official correspondence, he often read the letter with the same verve and vitality characteristic of a face-to-face speech by the royal official. Thus, the apostles in the first century are the original disciples of Jesus who have now been commissioned to bring the royal King’s message of the good news to nations.

What are the marks of a true apostle? 3 categories of Apostolic Ministry:

- **The Original 12** They had to be an eye-witness of Jesus’s earthly ministry. **Acts 1:21-22** “Therefore, from among the men who have accompanied us during the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us— ²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day he was taken up from us—from among these, it is necessary that one become a witness with us of his resurrection.”

The original 12 stand in a proprietary relationship relative to Jesus and the church. They had the unique relationship of being the eye-witnesses to Jesus’ life and ministry. They had the unique responsibility to establish Jesus’ church on earth.

Ephesians 2:18-22 “For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So, then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household, ²⁰ built on **the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.”

The 12 Apostles had the non-repeatable function and calling to be eye-witnesses of the historical Jesus’ life and ministry; the responsibility of founding the church on the foundation of the gospel. This is why the early church in Acts is built on the Apostles’ teachings about Jesus.

- **First-Century Apostles.** In addition to the 12 there were other apostles in the first century. These men and women had the calling and empowerment to preach the gospel in foreign cultures and new territories; to plant churches in every city and town;

The marks of a true apostle (outside of being one of the 12) are listed in 2 Cor. 11 by Paul. Now, technically, Paul himself would not meet the criteria given in Acts 1:21-22. Paul, when referring to the original disciples of Jesus, calls them “the twelve” and never includes himself

in that unique group. But he vigorously defends, not that he is worthy to be one of the 12, but that he is a genuine apostle called by Christ himself. **Why would it be necessary for Paul to make a case for the legitimacy of his apostleship?**

2 Cor. 11:5 “Now I consider myself in no way inferior to those “super-apostles...¹³ For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴And no wonder! For Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵So it is no great surprise if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.” The problem Paul was having is that these people called “the super apostles” were challenging his claim apostleship—they were maintaining that Paul was not legit. So Paul had to do something he was really uncomfortable doing: he has to brag on himself somewhat. He’s got to remind the Corinthians of apostolic resume. **There are false apostles who feign the style without the substance of apostleship. They are slick, charismatic, well-spoken, persuasive. But they do not have the resume nor the pedigree to marked as a genuine apostle.**

Marks of a genuine first-century apostle:

(1) **Appointed by God. Acts 20:24** “It’s the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus.” Rom. 1:5 “We received our call to apostleship from Christ Jesus our Lord.” They must be chosen by God and confirmed by the leadership of the community of faith. Paul says he was set aside, marked out for this purpose in Christ.

(2) **Agreement with the Gospel. Gal. 2:2, 6-9** “I went up according to a revelation and presented to them the gospel I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those recognized as leaders. **I wanted to be sure I was not running, and had not been running, in vain... they added nothing to me.** ⁷ **On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter was for the circumcised,** ⁸ since the one at work in Peter for an apostleship to the circumcised was also at work in me for the Gentiles. ⁹ When James, Cephas, and John—those recognized as pillars—acknowledged the grace that had been given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to me and Barnabas, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

Their gospel must be consistent and identical to the gospel of the 12 apostles—the original eye-witnesses and preachers of the Word. When they examined his claims and his vision, it was clear to them that he was preaching the same message they were.

(3) **Attested by the Supernatural.** Paul reminds them that he came, not with an impressive or imposing presence. But in the supernatural power of Christ to confirm among them the truth. Luke 9 states, “**He called the twelve to himself and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases.**” The mark of a first-century apostle is that they have been given the gift of legislative miracle-working power.

(4) **Appearance of the Resurrected Christ.** 1 Cor. 15:8 “Last of all, as to one born at the wrong time, he also appeared to me.” Paul’s experience was that of a bodily, physical resurrection appearance. How do we know this? Because the appearance was such that it blinded his physical eyes and the power of it knocked him off his horse. Also, the voice booming from heaven could be audibly heard by those in Paul’s party.

The NT teaches that the entire church is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets (Eph. 2:20). The context here is the universal church—the entire edifice. The church is built on the foundation of the apostles of the NT and the prophetic word of the OT. In order to make the analogy work, you can’t put the foundation in on the third or fifth floor. That won’t work. You’ve got to lay the foundation once, and then build on it.

They were foundational in that they were the first Christians, the first NT believers to receive the Holy Spirit. They were foundational in that they were given the privilege to communicate and preach the gospel as eye-witnesses of Jesus's original ministry. They were foundational in that the church is built on their doctrines about Christ.

In what sense are there apostles today? Well, not in *this sense*. Not in the sense that the original apostles operated as foundational in the life of the church.

- **Modern Apostolic Missionaries:** Today, the apostolic function (that is, the function of the office) has become what we call “missionaries.” It was the Apostles that were first given the commission to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations. That function has transferred to those with special gifts to minister and work in foreign countries. That is essentially an apostolic gift, and apostolic function. Now, I want to be clear: God still does miracles. God still answers prayer. God still confirms the gospel in the miraculous especially when the Gospel is going into new territories—it has a foundational, confirming function.

But once churches are established, those churches need *elders*. Peter is writing to exhort his fellow elders in the churches—though he is distinct, set apart as an original eye-witness.

What are elders and what do they do?

Definition: Elder is the Greek word *presbuteros*, meaning “to be relatively advanced in age.” That’s the literal meaning. But the figural or metaphorical meaning is “an officer of congregational leadership.” This is why we refer to it as the “office” of an elder.

Origin: Every culture under the sun has had elders.

Old Testament: We see Moses almost immediately delegated authority to them to judge over minor civil cases (Ex 18:12; Num 11:16). They were present in the council of kings e.g. Saul, David, Solomon (1 Sam 15:30; 2 Sam 17:15; 1 Kgs 8:3).

Synagogue Elders: After the temple was destroyed and Jews had to meet in groups they formed what is called “the synagogue”—a congregational gathering of faithful Jews. Elders were a vital part of the functioning synagogue.

Church Elders: The earliest church adopted the Jewish elder system and modified it to fit their fluid situation. The NT knows nothing of a “singular” pastor or elder who oversees a church.

Acts 14:23 “When they had appointed elders for them in every church and prayed with fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”

Eldership is always, always in the plural. It’s a fellowship, a community of leadership.

1 Peter 5:2-5

Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will

receive the unfading crown of glory. ⁵ Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Elders are shepherds/pastors. Here, Peter uses the verbal form to *shepherd*. Tend the flock.

Acts 20:17, 28, 29 “He (Paul) sent to Ephesus and summoned the elders of the church...Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, of which God has made you overseers... I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.”

Elders are shepherds, pastors who care for the “sheep”—God’s people in a local church.

How do we do this?

- **The shepherd oversees the affairs of the church.** 1 Pet 5:2 “exercising oversight”—Acts 20:28 “Be on guard for yourselves and all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church.” Here we see that “shepherd/pastor” and “overseer/oversight” are interchangeable. Elders set the vision and direction of the church, govern its business, and guarding its unity. Overseeing means to supervise or manage.
- **The shepherd feeds the flock out of loving obedience to Jesus.** 1 Pet 5:2b “not under compulsion, but willingly as God would have you.” Jn 21:16 Jesus asked Peter, “Peter do you love me?...Feed my lambs; shepherd my sheep.” The question put to Peter is, “If you love me—then you will take care of my people. You will be diligent in teaching my word and exercising caring supervision. The choice for competent and called men to serve as pastors and overseers flows from a willing desire to serve Jesus voluntarily; not out of pressure, coercion or duress.
- **The shepherd serves sacrificially.** 1 Pet 5:2c “not for shameful gain, but eagerly” In Jn 10:11 Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” Following Jesus’ example, the good pastor serves sacrificially, giving their lives for those they serve. That sounds so romantic and noble. But the doing of it is really hard. There is a certain dying to self that elders and pastors must embrace. They must lose all dreamy notions of being the focal point and object of service and instead they are called to give their lives in service.
- **The shepherd serves tenderly.** 1 Pet 5:3 “not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.” The good shepherd doesn’t have an insecurity problem. People who are domineering over those in their charge tend to be compensating for a deep insecurity they have. The shepherd handles people with care, even when he must engage in church discipline. Jesus told the Disciples in John’s gospel, “The leaders of the world revel in the opportunity to boss people around. To be “lords” and masters of their little fiefdoms. Not so with you. Instead, anyone who wants to be the greatest leader should excel in serving.”
- **The shepherd sets the pace in submission and humility.** 1 Pet 5:4, 5 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ⁵ Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” You know, the best elders don’t walk around bossing people around, arrogantly build their own little kingdoms. The best elders set the pace in mutual submission and humility. They are not eager nor are they anxious to control others. But the best members, the best sheep willingly and voluntarily submit to the leadership of humble, Christlike men. The best sheep are those who aren’t eager to buck God-ordained authority either.

The end result is a crown of glory—unfading, un-tarnishable.

Peter was a fellow shepherd-elder-pastor but also one of the original 12 Apostles; an eye-witness to Jesus's human life and his miraculous ministry, death on a cross, resurrection from the dead, and ascension into heaven.

Apostles in the first century laid the foundation on which the entire edifice, the whole building and temple is being built, is growing in unity.

Local elders are tasked with carrying a heavy burden and high honor. The burden of oversight, the exhausting task of feeding Christ's sheep in teaching the word, sacrificial service and care, always careful to curate his own life—walking humbly and submissively before Christ.

It's possible that God may be calling some of you men to step up this season and explore what it takes to become an elder and leader in the body of Christ. As we take communion today, would you open your heart to that possibility and calling?