

Hindrances to Leadership (Caring for the Flock)

Detailed outline

Part 3 of 3

I. Introduction

- A. It would be easy for us to take these words in John 21 as individualized instruction for Peter—until we read 1 Peter.
- B. There he applies Jesus' words to Christians, and in particular to elders, whom he calls fellow shepherds over the flock which God has called them to lead.
- C. Look especially at John 21:18–23 where Jesus is now bringing into focus two major challenges; major dangers for the one who leads and the one who will make disciples.

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He *said to him, "Follow Me!" Peter, turning around, *saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; the one who also had leaned back on His bosom at the supper and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" So Peter seeing him *said to Jesus, "Lord, and what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!" Therefore this saying went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but only, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?" (John 21:18–23 NASB)*

II. The danger of comparing ourselves with others

A. Peter's previous comparison

- 1. If you go back to Peter and his bold affirmation of his faithfulness to Jesus, then you know he was saying to Jesus:
- 2. "Lord, these men may fail you, but not I. I am more faithful than they are."
- 3. Which is another way of saying, "I am the greatest."
- 4. Each of the disciples apparently would argue with each other as to who had the greatest standing in the kingdom.
- 5. That's why Jesus says to Peter, "Peter, do you love me more than these?"

B. Peter's response now

- 1. Jesus was referring to the people whom Peter had compared himself with earlier and said, "Even if they betray you, I will not. You can count on me."
- 2. Peter will not claim greater love than his peers, but simply says, "You know I love you."
- 3. This has been an issue for the disciples. Who is the greatest? Who loves the most?

C. “What about John?”

1. Jesus and Peter were walking along, somewhat separate from the group, and John sort of tags along from a distance.
2. Peter looks back and sees John following and asks, “What about him? If I’m going to die, what does that mean for him?”
3. Jesus simply says, “Look, if I should choose for him to remain alive until I come, that’s my business, not yours.”
4. Jesus says, “You simply follow me. I have a calling for you, and I have a calling for him and they’re not the same. Don’t compare your calling with his.”

D. What about Peter, James, and John (those three in closest proximity to Jesus)?

1. James dies first, in Acts 12. John dies last. Peter dies in the middle.
2. We can’t explain why God has a particular path for each of those men, but they’re different paths—that’s up to Jesus.
3. The apostle Paul writes:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. (1 Cor. 12:4–6)

What he is saying is every believer has a unique gift, a unique function or place of ministry for that gift, and each has a unique degree of effectiveness or success with that gift.

4. When you put all that together you have to say that every single Christian has a unique role to play. You cannot compare one Christian with another, even those who have the same gift. God has sovereignly bestowed gifts, places of ministry and degrees of success. And so, we don’t compare ourselves with others.

“For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding. (2 Cor. 12)

E. The habit of those not following Christ

1. So this seems to be a habit, a pattern of those who are not following Christ as they should.
2. They’re comparing themselves with each other.
3. We need to compare ourselves against the perfection of our Lord. That will humble us.

III. The danger of maintaining control

“Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.” (John 21:18–19)

A. The text clearly says that Jesus is telling Peter that he will die. Not only will he die, it seems clear that he will die a martyr’s death.

B. Applications for us?

1. We can't walk away from this portion of Scripture believing that the meaning and application is that all of us are going to die a martyr's death. That's not going to happen.
2. He contrasts the way things were when Peter was younger with the way things will be when he grows older.
3. The issue here is an issue of control. We live in a day where we are challenged to take control of our lives. And we want to do that; we really want to be in control.
 - a) Here's the problem: when we choose to follow Christ as our Savior, he takes control. We surrender that control to him. It's he who's in charge, not we.
 - b) There is something here that may be age related, that we should think about.
 - 1) I've seen this as I've watched myself and others around me grow older: it is very difficult for us to feel like we are losing control. Losing control of the car keys, our bank account, our freedom to go where/when we wish.
 - 2) It seems that what is being said here is that as you grow older, your realm of control gets smaller and smaller.
 - 3) There's the illusion at youth that you are in control, but that's not true.
4. I believe that what he may be saying is this: The more mature the Christian becomes, the more they are aware that it is he who is in control, not us.
 - a) What a great example Barnabas is to us. He goes to Antioch, sent by the leaders in Jerusalem and he rejoices that Gentiles have come to faith in the Lord Jesus.
 - 1) Then he looks at that church and says to himself, "You know, what this church needs is not just my gifts, they need the gifts of the apostle Paul as well."
 - 2) So they looked high and low, the same expression that's used of the parents of the Lord Jesus looking for him when he was lost in the caravan at age twelve.
 - 3) Barnabas looks high and low. He is not trying to maintain control; he is not trying to preserve his turf.
5. I fear that many of us as we get older are trying to protect our turf, rather than realize that life is a matter of surrendering control.
 - a) In the process of recognizing that, we realize that we must pass the torch. We must make disciples and prepare men and women to take positions that will fill our shoes.
 - b) This is what Peter has come to understand. That's why in 1 Peter he's instructing how to go about that process of leading others in knowing and serving the Lord.