

## Sabbath School Lesson #7 – Servant Leadership – 6-12 May 2017

**C**hrist taught His disciples that God cares for us. Thus, Peter says, “Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you” (1 Peter 5:7). How few there are who do this. Some do not seem to realise that God cares for them. David knew it, for He said, by the Spirit, “But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me; Thou art my help and my Deliverer” (Psalm 40:17). And Jesus said, “Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows” (Luke 12:6-7).

God not only knows our need, and cares for us, but He is able to do whatever His love prompts Him to do. Happy the man who can say with Job, “I know that Thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be restrained” (Job 42:2). Or with Paul, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day” (2 Timothy 1:12). “Casting all your care upon Him,” means therefore to put it upon Him, and to leave it there with the assurance that He will see to it. “Roll thy way upon the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass” (Psalm 37:5). We are to cast our cares on the Lord, and leave them there forever. He says, “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

In the first book of Samuel we have an instance of this rolling the burden upon the Lord, and trusting Him. Hanna was greatly troubled. Her childless condition had been a reproach to her. She had suffered hardship because of it. So she prayed to the Lord for a son. Eli, misunderstanding her, had reproved her, and she said, “I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial; for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto” (1 Samuel 1:15-16). She had been greatly burdened. “Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace; and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him. And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad” (verses 17-18).

Sunday: Elders in the Early Church – In the early church, which is the model for the church in all ages, there were no officers but elders and deacons. Each church had not simply one elder, but several. Thus Paul and Barnabas ordained “elders in every church” (Acts 14:23). Paul wrote to Titus saying, “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldst set in order the things that were wanting, and ordained elders in every city” (Titus 1:5). The office of elder was identical with that of bishop. Thus when Paul wrote to Titus as above, that he should ordain elders in every city, he proceeded to state the qualifications of the elders, – “if any be blameless,” – “for,” said he, “a bishop must be blameless” (Titus 1:6-7). “Elder” and “bishop,” therefore, are but two terms for the same person and office.

The word bishop is “*episkopos*.” The literal meaning of the word is *one who looks over* or *oversees*. We find Paul addressing the elders of Ephesus thus: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).

Monday: The Elder – Although elders are bishops or overseers, they are not to be lords or drivers. They are to feed the flock. To feed a flock is the duty of a shepherd; and so we read the following exhortation: “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed; feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Peter 5:1-4).

One who feeds a flock is a shepherd; therefore the elders are called shepherds, feeding the church under the direction of Christ, the Chief Shepherd. Shepherd is the same as pastor, the latter being the Latin word for shepherd. As shepherds, the elders are to have the oversight of the flock, thus exercising the office of bishop, still under the direction of Christ, who is Shepherd and Bishop of our souls (1 Peter 2:25). In this text, therefore, we find that elders, pastors, shepherds and bishops, are all one and the same thing. The church of Christ knows no higher office than that of the elders, or presbyters, which is simply and Anglicised form of a Greek word for elder. Peter declared himself to be an elder.

These elders were not to exercise lordship over the church. They were to be esteemed very highly in love, for their works' sakes; but they were not to assume any airs, nor to claim any respect as 'superior' officers. The church of Christ knows no such thing as rank. So the Apostle Peter continues his exhortation, "Likewise ye younger submit yourselves to the elder; yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility" (1 Peter 5:5). Remember the words of Christ, "He that will be chief among you, let him be your servant."

Tuesday: Servant Leadership – When the Apostle Paul wrote his epistle to the Philippians he began as follows: "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons" (Philippians 1:1).

Nothing more than this text is needed to show how greatly the modern professed church has departed from the simplicity of the days of the apostles. We do well to simply recount the lessons we learn from the text we read in 1 Peter 5:1-4. First, the Apostle Peter was himself an elder. He counted himself one among his brethren. Second, the work of the elders is to feed the flock; and therefore an elder is a shepherd; and this fact is shown by the references to Christ as the Chief Shepherd. It may be noted here that a shepherd is a pastor, the word *pastor* being simply the Latin word for shepherd. Peter, who said that he was an elder, was charged to feed the flock (John 21:15-17). From this last text we learn that the work of the elders is to feed not the sheep only, but the lambs of the flock as well.

Third, the work of the elders or shepherds or pastors is to take the *oversight* of the flock which they are set to feed. Fourth, there are to be no lords among the elders, whom we have already learned are bishops. Therefore there can be no such thing as archbishop in the church of Christ. Those offices were made by men for a church founded by men, and not by Christ. Christ, who is "that great Shepherd of the sheep" (Hebrews 13:20), "the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls" (1 Peter 2:25), is the only Lord. For a man to be called archbishop is to put himself in the place of Christ. Although not an official rank, in some quarters of our Seventh-day Adventist Church, union conference officials are sadly known as archbishops.

Wednesday: Clothed With Humility – "All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace unto the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).

In washing His disciples' feet (John 13:1-17), Jesus showed that His royal subjects are to engage in real service, of a kind that men are accustomed to call 'menial;' and He also tells us that when the kingdom is fully restored in all its glory, He will Himself perform such service as waiting at table. "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching; verily I say unto you, that He shall gird Himself, and make them sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them" (Luke 12:37). Those who are truly Christ's, will not regard any necessary work as menial, and will not despise any who do such service, nor will they shrink from doing any kind of work that may fall in their way, no matter how lowly. No one will lord it over another. This is the lesson that Christ has taught us. He does not mean that there shall be no division of labour, each one being occupied regularly with that to which he is best adapted; but what He means is that no one, however well he may be fitted for what men call the highest position, should feel above doing a most despised service, if occasion demands; He also means scabbing floors is as honourable as managing in offices.

Thursday: Like a Roaring Lion – We are not to fear, but the exhortation is, "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist steadfast in the faith" (1 Peter 5:8-9), and the sure promise is, "resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). It is by its roar that the lion frighten its prey and makes it incapable of resisting or flight. Now it is only our confidence in God that prevents our foot from being taken. The devil must first frighten us, causing us to lose our confidence in God's Word, before he can have any power over us. Be assured that the devil never makes a prey of any soul who he does not first frighten away from the sure retreat of God's Word. "Fear hath torment; but perfect love casteth out fear." "The Lord Jehovah is our strength," and we are to be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." We are not to have any confidence in the flesh, – there is to be no vainglorious boasting, – but are to know that Christ has power over all flesh, and that His Divine power which has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness, can accomplish as much through our mortal flesh as He can through His own. "He that believeth shall not make haste" (Isaiah 28:16), – shall not run at the sound of the devil's roaring, – but he will stand still, and will see the salvation of God.