

Selected Studies from 1 Peter  
Part 4:

**Counsel for Christ's Under-  
Shepherds: An Exposition of  
1 Peter 5:1-4**

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Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow-elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God: and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:1-4, NASB).

In these four verses Peter offers loving counsel to the leaders of the afflicted believers living in five Roman provinces in what is today called Asia Minor. They constitute the first section of the concluding paragraph (5:1-11) of this practical epistle.

The opening "Therefore" (οὖν) indicates a logical thought connection with what has gone before. This particle is omitted in the Textus Receptus, perhaps because this concluding paragraph of the epistle proper does not seem to be an obvious deduction from what has just been said, as "therefore" seemingly suggests. If it is omitted, 5:1-11 may be viewed as an appropriate summary of the author's ethical appeals to his readers. But modern textual editors agree in accepting it as the original reading.<sup>1</sup> Then, in keeping with the inferential force of the particle, it is generally viewed as constituting, in effect, an expansion on "doing what is right" (ἐν ἀγαθοποιίᾳ), the concluding words of the preceding paragraph (4:19).

In these words of counsel to Christian leaders Peter names the recipients of his appeal (v. 1a), identifies the person making

the appeal (v. 1b), concisely designates the duty of the elders (v. 2a), underlines the motives that must govern their work (vv. 2b-3), and points to the reward awaiting the faithful under-shepherds (v. 4).

### **The Recipients of the Appeal**

The words "I exhort the elders among you" (v. 1a) identify the specific group now addressed. "The elders" (πρεσβυτέρους) stands prominently first in the sentence. But "among you" (ἐν ὑμῖν) — the churches addressed — makes clear that he is addressing them in their relation to the churches. Each of the churches had one or more "elders" in their midst. The context establishes that "elders" is used in an official sense, but from verse 5 it is clear that the term retains something of its original sense of age, "one older than another" (Luke 15:25). The term does not imply "advanced age but merely establishes seniority."<sup>2</sup>

Whenever the New Testament refers to these officers, it consistently pictures a plurality of elders in the local church (Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Thess. 5:12; James 5:14). There is no account of the institution of the office of elder in the New Testament church; when first mentioned it was already in existence in the church of Jerusalem (Acts 11:30). The pattern for church leadership was obviously drawn from the Jewish synagogue. On their first missionary journey Paul and Barnabas followed that pattern in organizing their recently established Gentile churches (Acts 14:23). The designation was well known in the Greco-Roman world as applied to leaders in civic as well as religious associations.<sup>3</sup> This simple terminology is consistent with the early date of the epistle. Peter was well aware that in time of persecution much depended on the prudence and fidelity of these leaders.

"I exhort" (παρακαλῶ), not "I command," marks Peter's attitude in addressing these leaders. He does not stress his own authority but rather appeals to their own sense of what is right. He avoids any implication of the imposition of a higher authority but uses instead the method of spiritual persuasion.

### **The Person Making the Appeal**

The writer identifies himself "as your fellow-elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory

that is to be revealed" (v. 1b). In form it is a double appositional expansion of the "I" in the verb "exhort." This intimate self-identification adds to the persuasiveness of the appeal. Aside from his name in 1:1, the writer's identity appears more forcefully here than anywhere else in the epistle. Modestly, his apostolic identity is not asserted. This fact has been appealed to by both opponents and proponents of Petrine authorship. Beare, who rejects apostolic authorship, sees in this self-identification "the apparatus of pseudepigraphy" and insists that it "would ill become Peter himself, but is perfectly natural in the language of another man writing in his name."<sup>4</sup> Polkinghorne replies, "Surely, however, a forger would most certainly have stressed apostolicity: otherwise there would be little purpose in using Peter's name, so that the omission is actually favourable to Petrine authorship."<sup>5</sup> This writer agrees. This self-description shows "that what Peter here urges upon elders he exemplifies in his own life and office."<sup>6</sup>

The designation "your fellow-elder" (ὁ συμπρεσβύτερος), "the fellow-elder," occurs only here in the New Testament and places the writer on a level with the elders being addressed. "He is not speaking down to them as a superior to inferiors."<sup>7</sup> In calling himself an "elder" Peter doubtless was thinking of the commission given him by the risen Lord to shepherd His flock (John 21:15-17). The Apostle John also called himself "the elder" (2 John 1; 3 John 1), and Papias (ca. A.D. 60-130) wrote of John as an elder and of the other apostles as elders.<sup>8</sup> The apostolic office included the work of the elders, although it was much wider in extent. "What the elders were for the individual congregations, that were the apostles for the whole church."<sup>9</sup> Peter thus indicates that he "personally felt the responsibilities, and from experience knew the difficulties, of an elder."<sup>10</sup>

As fellow-elder he is also a "witness of the sufferings of Christ." "And" connects his position with his experience as a "witness" (μάρτυς). The term does not denote a spectator but one who testifies to something. He gave testimony concerning "the sufferings of Christ" (τῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ παθημάτων), the sufferings which the Messiah Himself endured (cf. 4:13). "Witness" may mean either an eyewitness or more generally one who bears testimony to what he accepts as true. If the writer is Peter, the natural meaning is that he was an eyewitness of Christ's sufferings. The following description of himself as "a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed" clearly points to the idea of

personal experience. In the light of Acts 1:8, 22 the term implies an apostolic witness. It is in the sense of a personal eyewitness that Peter uses this term in Acts 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39. The thought of the Messiah suffering was at one time very distasteful to Peter (Matt. 16:22), but he has himself seen those sufferings and it is now his task to bear witness to their reality and significance. He has done so repeatedly in this epistle (1:11; 2:21; 3:18; 4:1, 13).

Opponents of Petrine authorship point out that the Gospels do not mention Peter as personally present at the Crucifixion. The same is also true of the rest of the Twelve, except John. Yet Peter, as well as others of the Twelve, may well have been among "all His acquaintances" who observed the event from afar (Luke 23:49). It is contrary to the structure of Luke's statement to limit these observers to "a number of women," as Leaney does.<sup>11</sup> Peter certainly did observe the agony of Christ in Gethsemane, saw Him bound and delivered into the hands of His enemies, and observed at least some of the injustices heaped on Him in the court of the high priest. Thus understood, the term is a delicate reminder of the actual difference between himself and the elders addressed. His teaching about the sufferings of Christ was grounded in personal experience.

Those who date the epistle after the death of Peter naturally find the eyewitness implication unacceptable and insist that the term here simply means "'one who testifies' ... to what he holds to be the truth."<sup>12</sup> It is held that any implication that he was an eyewitness is inconsistent with the fact that Peter has just placed himself on a level with the elders in calling himself a "fellow-elder." But this supposed difficulty is without force; having initially identified himself as "an apostle of Jesus Christ" (1:1), using this term now to underscore the validity of his testimony is natural. If the writer meant that he, like the elders addressed, was simply proclaiming the message of Christ's sufferings, it would have been proper to call himself "a fellow-witness" as further marking his equality with them. Peter does not say that he actually shared in the sufferings of the Messiah, but it is true that he has since then personally suffered for his faith and testimony. In thus suffering for his Christian witness Peter was indeed on a level with the elders addressed.

The words, "and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed," is structurally a second appositional description of the writer. Here Peter identifies himself in relation to the Christian

hope for the future. "And" (καὶ) indicates that this eschatological element is properly a part of the full picture. Suffering and glory are never far apart in Peter's mind. "Of the about-to-be-revealed glory" (Greek order) points to a glory whose unveiling is eagerly anticipated. The reference is not to "the glories of heaven" to be entered at death, as Barnes suggests,<sup>13</sup> but to the unveiling of Christ's glories at His return to earth. Having witnessed the sufferings of the Messiah, Peter is assured that the revelation of the messianic glory will follow (1:11). Of that glory Peter describes himself as being "a partaker" (κοινωνός, "one who takes part in something with someone").<sup>14</sup> The term implies personal participation. Peter had a glimpse of that glory at the Transfiguration (cf. 2 Pet. 1:16-18), but on that occasion he did not himself participate in the glory. With his experience of the "living hope" through the risen Christ (1 Pet. 1:3), he already knows the reality of rejoicing "with joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1:8), but he also knows that this new life, already connected with glory in the soul, awaited its full glorious manifestation at the time of Christ's return.

### **The Duty to Shepherd the Flock**

Peter's exhortation, "Shepherd the flock of God among you" (v. 2a), tersely portrays the work of the elders under the familiar shepherd imagery. This shepherd-sheep relation, describing the spiritual task of the leaders of God's people, involves "the twofold function of control and devotion."<sup>15</sup> The command, "shepherd" (ποιμάνατε), includes all that is involved in the work of the shepherd: guiding and guarding, feeding and folding. The aorist command conveys a sense of urgency. It "calls upon the elders to have their official life as a unity characterized by the spirit of devotion to service."<sup>16</sup>

They must devote themselves to "the flock of God among you." "Flock" (ποίμνιον) as a singular noun depicts the unity of the Christian church. It is a diminutive form, "the little flock" (cf. Luke 12:32), but the force of the diminutive cannot be pressed.<sup>17</sup> Its use here and in verse 3 apparently expresses endearment. Rotherham translates, "Shepherd the beloved flock of God."<sup>18</sup> "Of God" designates this flock "as belonging, not to the elders who tend it, but to God as His peculiar property."<sup>19</sup> "Among you" (ἐν ὑμῖν), placed attributively between the article and the noun, points to the character of the flock in the presence of the

shepherds. They are not absentee lords, but are shepherds actively working with the flock around them.

The Authorized Version, following the Textus Receptus, has the further words, "taking the oversight thereof" (ἐπισκοποῦντες), a further characterization of the work of the elders. This participle is present in the majority of the Greek manuscripts and in all the early versions, but some important manuscripts omit it. Modern textual critics debate whether it is to be accepted as authentic.<sup>20</sup> This writer accepts it as most probably original. It is especially appropriate in introducing what follows and is fully in keeping with Peter's fondness for participles.

The participle expands on the manner in which the elders are to carry out their assignment of shepherding the flock. The verb means "to oversee, to care for"; it depicts the pastoral function of overseeing or caring for those under their supervision. The noun is commonly rendered "bishop" or "overseer." This indicates that as yet no difference between "elders" and "bishops" had developed when this letter was written. In the New Testament these two terms are used interchangeably of the same men (Acts 20:17-28; Titus 1:5-7). "Elder" points to the mature age which qualified the individual for the office; "bishop" (overseer) indicates that the duties of the office involve spiritual oversight.

### **The Motives of the Elders**

Peter, keenly aware that motives are important in the service of the Lord, sets forth three adverbial modifiers, each negatively and positively stated, to guide the work of the elders. He touches on three common vices in Christian service with their alternative virtues.

#### **PERSONAL ATTITUDE TOWARD THE WORK (v. 2b)**

Negatively, the elder must do his work "not under compulsion" (μὴ ἀναγκαστῶς), an adverbial form appearing only here in the New Testament. He should not occupy the office as a reluctant draftee, doing an irksome task because he feels he cannot escape it. Such a feeling may arise out of "a false sense of unworthiness, a reluctance for responsibility, or a desire to do no more than was morally required in the office."<sup>21</sup> Such feelings are unworthy of one called to sacred service. But in 1 Corinthians 9:16 Paul mentions a proper sense of compulsion, the constraint

of God's sovereign will for one's life, which is to be accepted willingly and wholeheartedly.

Positively, one motivated by such a sense of compulsion will do the work "voluntarily" (ἐκουσίως), deliberately and intentionally as a matter of free will. like a volunteer who delights to do the work. Love for the Lord and His work prompts willing service. The words "according to the will of God" (κατὰ θεόν) are to be taken closely with "voluntarily." They are not in the Textus Receptus, represented by the Authorized Version. This prepositional phrase is not found in some uncials, nor in most minuscule manuscripts, but it does appear in various early Greek manuscripts and different versions.<sup>22</sup> Textual editors are not agreed but generally accept the words as authentic.<sup>23</sup> They were probably omitted by the scribes who found difficulty in understanding the precise import of the phrase. It can, by expansion, be understood to mean "according to the will of God." Then the meaning is that the elder must be obedient to what he knows to be God's will for him. But more probably the preposition (κατὰ) is to be taken in its familiar force of indicating a standard or model (cf. 1:15: 4:6) "according to God," that is, "just as God shepherds His flock."<sup>24</sup> Cranfield remarks that the meaning is best illustrated "in the whole-heartedness of the Chief Shepherd himself, who could say, 'My meat is to do the will of him that sent me. and to accomplish his work.'"<sup>25</sup>

#### PERSONAL PROFIT FROM THE WORK (v. 2b)

"And not for sordid gain, but with eagerness" raises the matter of deriving personal gain from Christian service. "Not for sordid gain" (μηδὲ ἀίσχροκερδῶς), another adverb occurring only here in the New Testament, means "fondness for dishonest gain," gain procured in a base and avaricious manner, producing shame if uncovered. This does not prohibit the elder from receiving a fair return for honest toil. Peter, like Paul, accepted the ordinance of Christ that "the laborer is worthy of his wages" (Luke 10:7: 1 Tim. 5:18). But Peter is warning against taking up the work because of a desire for material gain, "it being a shameful thing for a shepherd to feed the sheep out of love to the fleece."<sup>26</sup> It is a warning against a sordid preoccupation with material advantages. To enter the ministry simply because it offers a respectable and intellectually stimulating way of gaining a livelihood is to prostitute that sacred work. This warning also includes the temptation to use the work of the ministry to gain

personal popularity or social influence. When a love for gain reigns, the shepherds are prone to become mere hirelings, feeding themselves at the expense of the flock.

The antidote to this evil is serving "with eagerness" (**προθύμως**, "eagerly," or "zealously"), doing so with inward delight. The desire to serve must precede any consideration of personal profit.

#### PERSONAL RELATION TO THE PEOPLE (v.3)

The third indication of motives, "nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock," concerns the elder's personal relation to his people. Peter now uses two participles with adverbial force to depict the wrong and the right relationship.

The warning to the elders not to act "as lording it over" (**μηδ' ὡς κατακυριεύοντες**) the people implies that they did exercise a real authority in the congregations; the subtle danger was the temptation to misuse that authority. "As" implies the assumption of a position that was not proper. The compound verb pictures the scene: the simple verb **κυριεύω** means "to control, rule, to be lord or master of," while the preposition **κατὰ** ("down") indicates intensity and depicts a heavy-handed use of authority for personal aggrandizement, manifesting itself in the desire to dominate and accompanied by a haughty demand for compliance. Jesus directly condemned such abuse of authority among His followers (Matt. 20:25-27; Mark 10:42-44). The tragic impact of such an attitude is illustrated by the account of Diotrophes in 3 John 9-10. All genuine rule in the church is in no sense a lordship but an administration of Christ's lordship by His willing servants.

The people subjected to this abuse of authority are designated as "those allotted to your charge" (**τῶν κλήρων**). This noun literally means "a lot," and then "that which is assigned by lot," a portion or share of something. The plural, "the portions," refers to the various congregations which in God's providential arrangement have been allotted to different groups of elders. The allotment implies responsibility; God has assigned the various portions of His precious possession to their personal care. Elders thus ought not think they can do with their allotted portion as they please.

"But" (**ἀλλὰ**), marking a contrast, introduces the true relationship of the elders to their people: "proving to be examples to

the flock" (τύποι γινόμενοι τοῦ ποιμνίου, literally, "patterns [or models] becoming of the flock"). Instead of domineering lords, they themselves must be models their people can follow. As spiritual shepherds they must lead, not drive.

"Proving to be" (γινόμενοι) implies conscious effort, for the verb suggests a process of ever more fully becoming worthy examples. Each of them as an elder "must stand out as a distinct representative of the unseen Master to whom he and his people must be conformed."<sup>27</sup> Although each elder works directly with only a portion of the whole flock, the singular noun "the flock" recalls the spiritual unity of all of God's people. Their "tyrannizing could only apply to the portion over which their authority extended, but the good example would be seen and followed by the whole church."<sup>28</sup>

### **The Reward of the Faithful Under-Shepherds**

"And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory" (v. 4). "And" (καὶ) indicates simple sequence. The leaders' faithful fulfilling of the negative and positive injunctions set forth in verses 2b-3 will be followed by God's bestowal of a reward. The prospect of the future must have its impact on their performance in the present. The difficulties of their work, as well as their awareness of their own inadequacies and failures, will often discourage the most prudent; but "to prevent the faithful servant of Christ from being cast down, there is this one and only remedy, to turn his eyes to the coming of Christ."<sup>29</sup>

"When the Chief Shepherd appears," a genitive absolute construction, sets forth the time and circumstances for the bestowal of the reward. "Appears" (φανερωθέντος), an aorist passive participle, denotes a single event, the second coming of Christ: when He "has been made manifest, has become visible" in open splendor. In 1 Peter 1:20 this verb was used of Christ's appearing at His first advent (cf. 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 9:26; 1 John 1:2). Here the reference is to His second coming (cf. Col. 3:4; 1 John 2:25; 3:2b). The elders' reward from the returning Lord will involve their open vindication before a Christ-rejecting world.

Christ will return as "the Chief Shepherd" (τοῦ ἀρχιποίμενος, "the Arch-Shepherd"), a designation occurring only here in the New Testament. The term, once thought to be

Peter's own coinage, has been found on an Egyptian mummy label in the sense of "master-shepherd."<sup>30</sup> As the "Chief Shepherd" Christ is in charge of the entire flock and all the elders are under-shepherds whose work will be evaluated and rewarded by Him.

Peter assured the elders that when Christ appears "you will receive the unfading crown of glory." "You" is left unrestricted, thus assuming that the elders being exhorted will faithfully perform their duties. The verb "will receive" (κομιέσθε) conveys the thought of getting something for oneself and carrying it off as wages or a prize. In that coming Day they will joyfully carry away as their own "the unfading crown of glory." The promised "crown" is not the kingly or imperial "crown" (διάδημα), the badge of sovereignty (Rev. 12:3; 19:12), but rather the "crown" (στέφανος), the "wreath" or "garland" used on various nonimperial occasions. The term was used of "the crown of victory in the games, of civic worth, of military valour, of nuptial joy, of festive gladness."<sup>31</sup> Woven of perishable materials, they were used to celebrate occasion of joy or victory. The scene here envisioned may be the festive occasion of a banquet or the crowning after struggle for victorious achievement. For Peter's readers the crowning which concluded the athletic contests would readily come to mind. This picture is in keeping with the context.

Two modifiers, placed attributively between the article and the noun (τὸν ἀμαράντινον τῆς δόξης στέφανον), further describe the nature of this crown. The adjective rendered "unfading" (ἀμαράντινον) occurs only here in the New Testament. It differs slightly from the adjective rendered "will not fade away" (ἀμάραντον) in 1 Peter 1:4. The use of this variant form suggests that a somewhat different meaning is intended here. The form used in 1:4 points to a quality that will not fade away; the term here, using the suffix -ινον, points rather to the material from which the thing is made. Then the crown is described as "made of amaranth," a flower whose unfading quality was the symbol of immortality. In contrast to the flowers of this world, the crown itself is made of material which never loses its beauty and attractiveness.

The crown is further characterized as "of glory" (τῆς δόξης); the genitive is appositional, identifying its material; the crown consists of "the [heavenly] glory." After His own suffering, Christ was "crowned with glory and honor" (Heb. 2:9); He will reward His faithful under-shepherds in having them share in His own

unfading glory. Clearly Peter believes that the prospect of a glorious future must motivate faithfulness in the present. Prophetic truth is indeed practical!

### Notes

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- 2 E. M. Blaiklock, *First Peter: A Translation and Devotional Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1977), p. 103.
- 3 James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1952), p. 535; William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, *The Daily Study Bible*, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1960), p. 312.
- 4 Francis Wright Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter: The Greek Text with Introduction and Notes* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), p. 198.
- 5 G. J. Polkinghorne, "The First Letter of Peter," in *A New Testament Commentary*, ed. G. C. D. Rowley (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969), p. 596.
- 6 R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1938), p. 220.
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- 8 As quoted in Eusebius Pamphilus, *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*, trans. C. F. Cruse (London: George Bell & Sons, 1897), 3:39.
- 9 Joh. Ed. Huther, "Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the General Epistles of Peter and Jude," in *Meyer's Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1881), p. 230.
- 10 Robert Johnstone, *The First Epistle of Peter: Revised Text, with Introduction and Commentary* (1888; reprint ed., Minneapolis: The James Family Christian Publishers, 1978), p. 379.
- 11 A. R. C. Leaney, "The Letters of Peter and Jude," in *The Cambridge Bible Commentary*, *New English Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 69.
- 12 Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter*, p. 198.
- 13 Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament* (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1962), p. 1433.
- 14 William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 440.
- 15 James Moffatt, *The General Epistles, James, Peter, and Judas*, *The Moffatt New Testament Commentary* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1928), pp. 162-63.
- 16 Johnstone, *The First Epistle of Peter*, p. 382.

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- 17 Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, p. 524.
- 18 Joseph Bryant Rotherham, *The Emphasized New Testament* (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1959).
- 19 Huther, "General Epistles of Peter and Jude," p. 232.
- 20 It is omitted in the Greek texts of Westcott and Hort; Nestle and Aland (24th ed.); and Tasker. It is included in brackets in the United Bible Societies text (3d ed.); and Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1979) . It is included without brackets in Souter; and in the United Bible Societies text (1st ed., 1966).
- 21 David H. Wheaton, " 1 Peter," in *The New Bible Commentary, Revised*, eds. D. Guthrie and J. A. Moyter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1970), p. 1247.
- 22 For the evidence see the United Bible Societies Greek text.
- 23 The words (κατὰ θεόν) were omitted by Westcott and Hort, and by Nestle and Aland (24th ed.). They appear in the text of Souter; United Bible Societies text; and Tasker.
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- 25 C. E. B. Cranfield, *I & II Peter and Jude: Introduction and Commentary*, Torch Bible Commentaries (London: SCM Press, 1960), pp. 128-29.
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- 30 Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, p. 82.
- 31 Richard Chenevix Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (1880; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1947), p. 78.

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