

Lesson 1

Elders and the Lord's Church

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." Ephesians 4:11-13

I. Introduction

Over the past several weeks we have been studying about spiritual leadership in the Lord's church and today, we want to look deeper into the divine organization of His body, the Church. It is through God that He has translated us from darkness and brought us into the kingdom of His dear Son. (Colossians 1:13) We are members and subjects of a kingdom not fashioned after the world. Whose King is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. He has all dominion and power in His kingdom, the church. In the early days of the church, many in Jerusalem and throughout responded to the preaching of the gospel and they that gladly received the word were baptized. *"praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."* (Acts 2:47)

"Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not **all have the same function**, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." (Romans 12:4, 5) According to the grace of God, we all have different gifts to serve His purpose in the kingdom of God. And the Lord has set some in the church for the purpose of edifying the body and works of ministry. There were apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers set in place by God to build up the body of Christ. (Ephesus 4:11-13) (See Acts 14:23; Acts 15:1-2, 4, 6, 22, 23; Acts 20:17; Acts 21:18)

For this divine purpose, God has graciously and abundantly furnished his people with all necessary instructions, both with respect to the qualifications of the elders, and also with respect to the matter and manner of their teaching, and the conscientious and dutiful submission due.

II. The Nature of Shepherding

The Greek word "poimen" is translated "pastor" and "shepherd." Pastor and shepherd are the same. As well as, elder, bishop, overseer and pastor refer to the very same persons. The Greek verb "poimaino" is translated "to shepherd, tend the flock, (lead to) pasture, protect, nurture, feed, care for, and to be protector and provider." In general literature, shepherding and pasturing is used often for a ruler. In the OT and NT, God and Christ are pictured as the Good Shepherd and God's OT people (in the NT the church) are likened to a flock of sheep (Psalm 34:9-10; 74:1; 77:20; 78:52, 70ff; 79:13 80:1,11; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 23:3, 4; 31:10; Ezekiel 34:11-14, 23, 24; Micah 5:2,4; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:4; Revelations 7:17). Pastors in the church will do well to follow the example of God and Christ. Pastoring a church is by definition a sacrificial role. This is clear from Jesus' laying down His life for the sheep.

A. Pastors, Teachers

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up..." (Ephesians 4:11, 12)

B. Apt to Teach

"Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now

the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach." (1 Timothy 3:1, 2)

C. Exhort

"He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it." (Titus 1:9)

D. Obey them that have rule over you

"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you." (Hebrews 13:17)

E. Feed the flock, take oversight

"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;" (1 Peter 5:2)

F. Bishops and Deacons

"Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:" (Philippians 1:1)

G. Give heed over the flock

"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood." (Acts 20:28)

H. Elders rule well, labor in word and doctrine

"The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching." (1 Timothy 5:17)

I. Labor

"Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other." (1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13)

III. Elder

The word "elder" comes from the NT Greek word "presbuteros." Basically, the word "elder" carries the meaning of someone who is older in contradistinction to someone who is younger; someone who is experienced and not a novice; someone who is a role model and example of an ideal rather than someone who is not; someone who is mature and not immature; ripe instead of green.

Paul wrote qualifications for elders/bishops/pastors in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. On the one hand, the idea of a checklist that a candidate for elder must fulfill *perfectly* in order to be ordained as an elder is *not* what Paul meant. Paul meant that a candidate must have these qualities **"to a positive degree."** On the other hand, neither every mature believer nor every old man was called to be an elder/bishop/pastor in the official sense. If an older man is not an official elder, it does not mean that he can't serve in other ministries.

Generally, an elder is not perfect but he is someone who is representative of the ideals of a group, nation, church, etc. Good administration skills and education are advantageous but an elder is much more than just a good administrator, academician or evangelist. An elder/bishop/pastor is a seasoned, mature role model who is respected and valued as a counselor. He is not perfect but he is a person who people say they want to be like. They say, "I want to be like him." Young people, even young ministers, haven't had the time for growth, maturity, experience, success and failure, sin and recovery, and rebound after a disappointment or betrayal. New believers are not tried and tested. Thus, they should not be an elder/bishop/pastor.

The idea behind the office of the elder is that of very high respect; a respect that does not come quickly or easily; nor does it come through academic education or force. Therefore, the term is used of older people, not younger. There is no particular age in terms of chronological years for all cultures but what fits culturally is appropriate. The term "elder" depicts one who lived through **most of life's stages and crises** and is a good example and role model of a Christian. Elder is older as opposed to younger.

IV. Qualifications of Elders

A. Here is a trustworthy saying - 1 Timothy 3:1-7

1. It is a true saying, that one who desires the work of an elder desires a good work. An elder / bishop / pastor / overseer holds a special meaning in the hearts of those who choose this ministry in the Lord's church. The relationships that are formed as an elder with the flock and with fellow elders can be a joyous experience. It is the images that we see of Jesus holding a young tender lamb that sets an example of good shepherding in the Lord's body. A good shepherd will carry the sheep on his shoulders if necessary. As elders esteeming others above themselves exemplifies the heart of Christ.
2. v. 2. *"Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach..."* An elder is to be blameless and irreproachable in his Christian life. It does not mean that he must be "perfect" but rather, he is truly living a godly life before all. Living blameless does not begin after one becomes an elder but he must have a good report before hand and a good report from those without the body. Someone could have a wonderful godly image around the members of the church but it may not hold true when in the presence of those outside the body of Christ.

An elder must be faithful to his wife. We are exhorted by the Apostle Paul, to love our wives as Christ has loved the church. Setting a good example and to fulfill the responsibilities of a husband to his wife holds true even for elder/bishop/overseer/pastor. An elder must be stable minded, not rushing to a conclusion but thoughtful and deliberate in his actions. He must be one of self control and of a good reputation. A leader who receives and is open to those of the flock, strangers and guests. A bishop/elder/overseer/pastor must be one who is ready and able to teach others the gospel of Jesus Christ and to instruct in the way of righteousness.

3. v. 3. *"not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money."* Not a drunkard but sober and vigilant as he must watch out for souls of those entrusted to him. Not easily angered or harsh but is gentle and patient to those who may not be so readily acceptable of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. But through his gentleness and patience may win them over through the teaching of the word. An elder should not be contentious but one who pursues peace and unity. In the early church elders were supported financially in laboring and teaching the flock. An elder is worthy of double honor which means financially supported by the church in the work of bishops/elders/shepherds/overseers. (1 Timothy 5:17) However, this is not often practiced among all churches today. An elder must not pursue this role for the purpose of the love of money or to be influenced because of the presence of a financial gain through their service to the Lord.
4. v. 4, 5. *"He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)"* An elder must manage his own family if he is to succeed in shepherding God's people. Not by coercion or force but with a tender love and grace for his family. Otherwise, how will he take care of the Lord's church? It is the OT story of Eli, the prophet of God, who failed to restrain his sons' blaspheming of God. Because of this failure to govern his household, God removed Eli and his household. *Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, "The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering."* (1 Samuel 3:14)
5. v. 6. *"He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil."* An elder must be one who is not a novice but who has journeyed the path of righteousness for some time. Even though one may be physically older as a recent convert, being a spiritually aged "tried and tested" is an important distinctive quality or trait of an elder. A spiritually aged elder is one who has known the "ups and downs in their spiritual walk, and recovery" to follow the way of righteousness and is not ignorant of the appearance of evil. A recent convert could face the same judgement as Satan himself, because it is easy to become conceited and arrogant when placed in the spiritual leadership as an elder.
6. v. 7. *"He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap."* An elder must have a good general estimation by the public. The state of being held in high esteem and honor by those outside of the body of Christ holds a tremendous benefit in the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ to a condemned world.

B. An elder must be blameless - Titus 1:6-9

There was unfinished work in Crete that required the services of Titus. Paul instruction to Titus was to appoint elders in every town. Many obeyed the gospel in Crete but without spiritual leaders appointed

by God, they would be exposed to the teachings and practices of others who deny God. As Paul would put it, *"there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group."* (Titus 1:10) Such groups were causing disruption and confusion in the Lord's church. By appointing elders there would be those who would be able to hold firm to sound doctrine and defend against those who opposed it. Therefore, Paul outlines the same qualifications of an elder to Titus in Crete as he did to Timothy.

1. v. 6. *"An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient."*
2. v. 7. *"Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless-not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. "*
3. v. 8. *"Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined."*
4. v. 9. *" He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it."*

V. Non-Shepherd Models from Lynn Anderson's Work

- A. **The Counterfeit Shepherd** – does not represent Christ.
- B. **The Hireling Shepherd** – after personal gain. NT describes this shepherd as one who does not protect the sheep. (John 10:12)
- C. **The Devouring Shepherd** – fleeces and devours sheep with false teaching.
- D. **The Status-Seeking Shepherd** – thinks of the position, not the service; perhaps interested in authority
- E. **The Cowboy Shepherd** – uses force (spurs, fast horses, whips, and prods)
- F. **The Sheriff Shepherd** – uses badge and gun, enforces the law – *"don't take nuthin' off nobody."*
- G. **The Pop-Manager Shepherd** – fast-lane approach; business world is the model; one-minute managers
- H. **The CEO Shepherd** – keep his distance; closed door work; gets things done with memos; likes to make policy decisions

VI. Conclusion

As it was in the early days of the church, Christians must diligently seek to follow God's plan for leadership of a congregation. It is He who has set in the church leaders to fulfill his purpose and will for the church. Elder/shepherd/bishop/overseers must firmly be watchful of the flock and to shepherd all members of the church, the body, through teaching and examples so that they may grow and mature in the fulness of Christ.