



Editor's Note

Someone recently asked the question, "Isn't spending so much time teaching on biblical eldership kind of like a one-pony show?" There are many issues facing the church, many areas that need to be taught—isn't eldership just one of them? Why not just focus on discipleship and not worry about the style of leadership a church adopts? As long as we are making disciples and promoting our views on various doctrines and practices, isn't that what matters?

First of all, God speaks very directly and often in Scripture about elder-leadership, as anyone who reads ESN will be fully aware. Second, in the wisdom of God, biblical eldership proves strategic in discipling others, particularly men. In a typical pastor-centric

church, men can progress in discipleship only so far before being limited by the clergy/laity divide. To progress they must pursue a professional career in ministry. When there is this kind of ceiling on what ordinary men can do in the church, men will generally not rise up very high. There is trickle down effect when it comes to discipleship. But where men are challenged toward the level of elder leadership and shepherding, you have a church where all men can rise up to their highest potential.

I believe building a strong, biblically qualified and functioning eldership in the local church may be the single most important influence challenging all men at all levels to rise up and take responsibility in the church and in the home.

Biblical Foundations Fulfill Your Ministry

by Chuck Gianotti

Studies in 2 Timothy—Part 6 (4:4-8)

The Christian life, Howard Hendricks used to say, is like a long distance race, not a hundred meter sprint. As the apostle Paul penned his final letter, his end was near, his long service was almost over. He had been in it for the long haul, but was now imprisoned, waiting execution, "Aged and worn out from his long and arduous race for God" (William MacDonald). One can almost hear the sigh and feel the weariness of this faithful servant, as he passes on to his younger disciple his final words that we have on record.

Paul charges Timothy succinctly in four pithy statements. Possibly these were four weaknesses of Timothy or maybe just things needing special attention. Elders particularly need to pay attention, for although Paul doesn't specifically mention elders here, he had already instructed Timothy to be an example of the believer (1 Tim 4:12). This would include modeling these four instructions to the elders he was to instruct (see 1 Tim 3), who then would prove "to be examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3b). These are four reminders for anyone serving the Lord in His church.

Be sober (4:5a)

While we often use the word "sober" in reference to being out from under the influence of alcohol, it has a broader applica-

tion. Being sober means that an elder denies the temptations to allow the impulses of the flesh to control him and to consistently do what is necessary for shepherding the people of God. A Christian leader becomes useless if he cannot control his thinking and behavior. He must be sober

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from the control of anything that would entice him away, whether alcohol, drugs, sports, movies, desire for power,

money – anything that is intoxicating, that can easily control the elder rather than the Holy Spirit.

Endure hardship (4:5b)

Serving the Lord can be difficult; the spiritually weak and those who give up easily need not apply! Indeed it is often said that becoming an elder is like stepping into the line of fire. The burden of the Lord's people weighs heavily at times, particularly when they hurt, are discouraged, struggle or fight. At times criticism of leadership cuts like a machete. The work of confronting doctrinal error and long hours of conflict resolution join in to make the elders' work challenging, to say the least. Elders must endure.

But there is another kind of hardship, namely from the sacrifices an elder often makes. Difficulties come in many sizes and shapes. Giving up time, nights after work or weekends are not uncommon. Some forego opportunities to earn more money in

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Good leadership is vital! It has often been observed that “as leadership goes, so goes the church.” Bible believing Christians understandably consider Scripture to be the authoritative guide for church order. Seeking principles to guide them in personal, family and church life, they are convinced that God’s ways are best. Thus it is a valid question as to how churches seeking to follow the New Testament pattern get their leaders.

In the last article, we found that the biblical norm for church leadership is a plurality of qualified men leading a single local congregation. But where do they come from, both at the beginning of a new work, and when more are needed in an already existing assembly?

Nebulous expressions like “they emerge” or “the Lord provides” sound spiritual and have an element of truth to them, but don’t supply much practical help to those who pray that God will raise up leaders to do shepherding work among the believers. Most Christians are familiar with the conventional plan for church leadership i.e., a single “Minister” or “Pastor,” who is trained and ordained by the officials of his denomination and then called by the church. Such groups have seminaries and other training opportunities, so it is not hard to figure out how leadership in these churches comes about. But New Testament assemblies?

If we lay aside all church tradition and study the Scriptures, we will discover that as in many Bible doctrines there is a God-ordained cooperation between the work of God and the response of men in securing leaders for the churches. This cooperation can be studied in two parts that are not mutually exclusive, but interwoven; Divine Provision, and Human Responsibility.

Divine Provision

Throughout history, God has always provided leadership for His people. In the Old Testament, one can trace the record of family patriarchs in Genesis, followed by military leaders like Moses and Joshua, and then the judges and finally the kings. In addition, the Lord provided spokesmen called prophets who were often themselves capable leaders of the people.

It is important to note however, that

even when the people tried to reject God’s rule, He was always the true sovereign leader and source of authority in the nation, and never relinquished this prerogative. In this connection, one can read I Samuel 8 and 12, where Israel demanded that they have a king like the other nations.

It was probably during the Babylonian captivity, that synagogues arose and provided a new type of social and religious life for Israel, as God was now, in a sense, more available to the people. Synagogues were places where families could worship and be taught the Scriptures. They were overseen by the older,

Wise churches watch the general tenor of the potential elder's life rather than waiting for perfection!

more spiritual men of the congregation called elders.

When in Matt 16:18, the Lord Jesus foretold of a “called out company” that He would build in the days ahead (for such is the meaning of the word “church”), He made it clear that He would be presiding over His people by His Spirit (Matt. 18:20). His followers were not to take ecclesiastical titles or honors but instead be simply “brethren” and “servants” (Matt. 23:8-11), under His Lordship.

During His ministry, there are incidents recorded that help us understand that the Lord as the Chief Shepherd was leaving nothing to chance; the young churches would have capable leadership. One thinks of His example of compassion for the people because they were like sheep without a shepherd (Mark 6:34) and his charge to Peter to feed and tend His sheep (John 21).

Thus when we study the earliest gatherings of Christians following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, it is not surprising to find them entrusting the care of the flock to the more mature men of the assembly whom they called elders. And the emphasis in the record is more about them being “among” the people than “over” them, although both expressions are found.

Later as the gospel spread and new churches came into being, the apostles wrote to them and visited them or sent

younger men to help them. But they never established themselves or those they sent as church officials. Rather, the work was entrusted to capable men from within the local congregation (Acts 14:23), and then they moved on to help others. One can trace through the book of Acts the transition from “apostles” to “apostles and elders” to “elders.” Through this process, the Lord confirmed the truth that He Himself as the Head would preside over the church, leading the assembly through those men who were most able to discern spiritual things and convey it to the rest of the flock.

In one notable passage, Paul charged a group of elders to shepherd the church of God “among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers” (Acts 20:28), leaving no doubt about the ultimate origin of church elders and the source of their authority.

Human Responsibility

But in addition to the Lord’s gracious work to prepare and provide, there is a clear revelation given as to what He expects from His people. Just as in the giving of the Scriptures, so in the building of the church, God and man work in concert, which gives added meaning to the word “fellowship.” Paul writes: “We are laborers together with God...” (I Cor. 3:9,KJV). What distinctive elements of this human responsibility can we identify? There are several.

For one thing, there will be a desire. I Tim. 3:1 states “If a man desires the position of a bishop [lit. ‘overseer’], he desires a good work.” In response to this inner desire, the man will be making certain choices with his time and energy that will evidence a growing heart exercise to care for people in the same way the Good Shepherd did.

Second, in two extended passages (I Tim 3 and Titus 1) we find detailed character qualities and family qualifications, to help the churches identify men who are doing the work and are worthy to be known as church elders. Wise churches watch the general tenor of the life rather than waiting for perfection!

Third, there must be, as a normal part of the discipleship process a supply of “potential elders” coming along. The whole subject of mentoring is a crucial one (II Tim. 2:2).

Finally, there must be a healthy

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I have discovered there are two challenges that often surface in the life of an elders' wife. On the one hand I am often very aware of the needs in our fellowship. On the other hand my husband may be burdened by difficulties he cannot share.

Here are a few practical guidelines that have helped me over the years in communicating with my husband-elder.

Show an interest in his ministry. I can do this by asking how an elders meeting went without prying for information. The time when I ask is important. Some men love to talk right away - others need time to process.

Be a good listener. This can be tough. Immediate solutions and interruptions do not characterize a good listener. Hear your husband out. James 1:19 reminds us

to be "Swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath."

Seek to understand. How quickly we can become annoyed, upset and angry with people in our fellowship. By listening and asking clarifying questions we can more clearly perceive the real is-

needs in my fellowship puts me in a privileged place. "Let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one." Romans 13:8

Build Trust. Resisting the urge to "share" a concern that may be confidential is very important. There are men qualified to be elders whose wives hinder them from being part of this good work due to their loose tongues. We need to be fully trustworthy in this area.

Immediate solutions and interruptions do not characterize a good listener.

sues. A fool is characterized by not having an understanding heart (see Prov. 8:5).

Actively love the believers. Information and understanding brings responsibility. Knowing a need may require me to do something, particularly for the women in our fellowship. Phone calls, meeting for prayer and coffee, offering to babysit or making a meal all communicate that I care. Being more intimately aware of

Pray. When we are tempted to stew and worry, our instructions are clear. Don't be anxious, but rather pray (Phil 4:6). This is especially important when my husband is unable to share with me private concerns of the church. Lifting our men in prayer asking God to give them wisdom and guidance is a valuable part of our ministry.

What a privilege to be part of the work that God loves best, His Church.



Elders—Where Do They Come From?

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environment in which elders can function. Various passages admonish the saints to honor, obey, and remember their leaders (I Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13).

Conclusion

Where do elders come from? In summary, they are recognized by the church as men in whom the Lord has worked, and they in response love the people, teach them the Scriptures, protect them from false doctrine and render shepherd care. Every believer should be praying regularly for the elders, and asking the Lord to add more to their number. Was it not His instruction to do so in connection with the harvest? (Matt. 9:38)

All this suggests a further question. As the Lord works in hearts to start the process, and as desire grows and qualifications are met, the church has a responsibility to recognize those who are qualified and doing the work. What is meant by this word "recognize?" That will be the subject of the next article.



Leadership Principles

Failure and Success: Greatness Has Its Price

by A.W. Tozer

You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.—2 Timothy 2:3-4

The laws of success operate also in the higher field of the soul— spiritual greatness has its price. Eminence in the things of the Spirit demands a devotion to these things more complete than most of us are willing to give. But the law cannot be escaped. If we would be holy we know the way; the law of holy living is before us. The prophets of the Old Testament, the apostles of the New and, more than all, the sublime teachings of Christ are there to tell us how to succeed....

The amount of loafing practiced by the average Christian in spiritual things would ruin a concert pianist if he allowed himself to do the same thing in the field of music. The idle puttering around that we see in church circles would end the career of a big league pitcher in one week. No scientist could solve his exacting problem if he took as little interest in it as the rank and file of Christians take in the art of being holy. The nation whose soldiers were as soft

and undisciplined as the soldiers of the churches would be conquered by the first enemy that attacked it. Triumphs are not won by men in easy chairs. Success is costly. *We Travel an Appointed Way*, 26.

"This success may be costly, Lord, but surely nothing in the light of the eternal perspective we looked at yesterday. Give me a willingness this morning to pay any cost which You may exact in my service for You. Amen."

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Fulfill Your Ministry (cont. from page 1)

order to spend added time in shepherding the people of God, studying the word or serving in various capacities. Yes, there is much sacrifice in being an elder, so endurance is an absolute requirement. However, brother, be encouraged, another apostle reminds us that “when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory” (1 Peter 5:4).

Do the work of an evangelist (4:5c)

One thing is for sure, a gifted evangelist does not need to be instructed to evangelize. The evangelist is already doing it. The rest of us need that admonition, along with Timothy. This implies that even though a person may not be gifted as an evangelist, an elder must never neglect the preaching of the gospel. The church, like a tree, is intended to grow and produce seeds, that in turn also grow and reproduce themselves. It does not good for a person so say, “Well, I am a teacher, not an evangelist, therefore I am exempt from evangelizing.” All are to witness to the lost about the Savior. Elders and Christian leaders must lead the way.

Fulfill your ministry (4:5d)

I believe an elder is called by God to the work of shepherding (God raising up whom He will); and this is evidenced by his desire to do the work of an elder (1 Tim 3:1). Shepherds do not just sit around making decisions like a board of directors. Elders serve (that is the meaning of the word “ministry”), they perform their shepherding task. Paul is saying to Timothy, “In all your

leading, make sure you accomplish the thing God has called you to do.” Previously, the apostle wrote Timothy, “Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery” (1 Tim 4:14 NASB95). Being an elder is a work, something that a person does, not simply a status to own. Elders of all people should be known for being hard workers, with a clear focus on the goal, to shepherd the people of God in whatever it takes.


Paul’s Epithet (4:6-8)

If you could write your own epithet, words to go on your gravestone, what would you choose to summarize your life? In verses 6-8, we have probably the closest thing to Paul’s summary of his life. His is cognizant of the sacrifice required of him, described as being poured out as a drink offering. A drink offering was used to accompany the various sacrifices in the Old Testament; it was pervasive in the worship of the Lord. Paul’s sacrifice’s was intertwined in all his service for the Lord. And now the end of his “being poured out” is about to arrive, which obviously refers to his impending death (which he calls “my departure”).

His final summation in one sentence: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.” A brevity of words, not idly chosen, characterizes a man of stature in his old age. What was the fight, the

course given to him? His marching orders were clearly laid out back at the time of his conversion: “*But the Lord said to him [Ananias], ‘Go, for he [Paul] is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake’*” (Acts 9:15–16). Those directions never change. And to fulfill that course, he needed the very things he instructed Timothy years later in this second letter: to be self-controlled (sober), endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist and focus on finishing the ministry God gave him.

Now at the end of his life, he can confidently say, “I have done what God called me to do.” When you, as an elder, get to the end of your life, will you be able to say that as well? What kind of person to do you need to be like now, what kind of things need to change in your life and ministry so that you will fulfill the ministry that God has particularly give you?

In the end, a life lived for Christ, fulfilling your ministry as an elder, will be richly rewarded. “In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing” (vs. 8). Peter echoes this to elders, “*And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory*” (1 Peter 5:4). 

THE SMALL PRINT

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