



Sunday, May 23, 2021

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A NOBLE TASK

1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7; 1 PETER 5:1-5; ACTS 20:26-38

I. ARE ELDERS BIBLICAL?

- a. Three terms:
 - i. Episkopos – overseer/bishop
 - ii. Presbyteros – elder
 - iii. Poimen – shepherd/pastor
- b. Key passages: Acts 20:17-38; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17; Titus 1:5-9; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-4
- c. New Testament churches with elders:
 - i. Jerusalem (Acts 15:22)
 - ii. Ephesus (Acts 20:17)
 - iii. All the towns of Crete (Titus 1:5)
 - iv. All the churches to whom James wrote (James 5:14)
 - v. All the churches of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia to whom Peter wrote (1 Peter 5)
 - vi. All the churches Paul founded on his first missionary journey (Acts 14:23)

II. HOW DO ELDERS RELATE TO DEACONS AND PASTORAL STAFF?

- a. A helpful picture:
 - i. Elders determine the direction of the bus according to Scripture.
 - ii. Staff help steer the bus in that direction on a weekly basis.
 - iii. Deacons make sure the bus has enough gas.
- b. What are key differences between elders and deacons?
 - i. Elders Teach (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Timothy 3:2, 5:17; Titus 1:9)
 - ii. Elders Lead (Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:4-5, 5:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2)

III. WHO ARE ELDERS? (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9)

- a. Men who desire to be an overseer because of the Spirit's leadership (Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:1)
- b. Men who are beyond reproach (1 Timothy 3:2-7)

- c. Men who are able to teach and manage their household well (1 Timothy 3:2, 4; Titus 1:9)
- d. Men and not just man – a plurality of qualified men rather than just one man (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22-23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; Philippians 1:1; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1)
 - i. There is no verse describing anyone as “the” elder of a church.
 - ii. 1 Thessalonians 5:12 – respect **those** who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord.
 - iii. Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24 – “**leaders**”
- e. How did we end up with one pastor/elder churches?
 - i. The neglect of biblical teaching.
 - ii. The rapid spread of the church into the frontier regions of the nation.
 - 1. Newton: “The Baptist emphasis on congregationalism, combined with the early American emphasis on individualism, likely resulted in the decline of churches being governed through elder plurality.”
 - iii. This is what Baptists used to practice:
 - 1. The Baptist 1689 Second London Confession – “Bishops or Elders and Deacons”
 - 2. The Baptist 1833 and 1853 New Hampshire Confession – the church’s “only proper officers are Bishops or Pastors, and Deacons.”
 - 3. The first president of the Southern Baptist Convention, W. B. Johnson, wrote a treatise in 1846 calling Baptist churches to use a plurality of elders since the practice was biblical.
 - 4. 1925 Baptist Faith and Message – “Its Scriptural officers are bishops or elders and deacons.”
 - 5. 1963 Baptist Faith and Message – “elder” was dropped and the phrase now reads “pastors and deacons”
- f. Aren’t the elders the paid pastoral staff? Four reasons why they are not the same:
 - i. Not all paid pastoral staff qualify to be elders.
 - ii. Not all paid pastoral staff function as elders (some have responsibilities outside the realm of overseeing, teaching, or caring for the congregation)
 - iii. Not all paid pastoral staff stay in the same location.
 - iv. Creates an unbiblical system where only the men with seminary degrees can lead the congregation because of their “professional training.”

IV. WHAT DO ELDERS DO?

- a. **IN GOD’S FLOCK, ELDERS HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY TO SHEPHERD FOR THE PEOPLE’S GOOD AND FOR GOD’S GLORY AND NOT JUST THEIR OWN GAIN.**
 - i. Elders are to take responsibility for those entrusted to their care and shepherd with right actions.
 - ii. Elders are to shepherd with right attitudes.
 - 1. Not under compulsion but willingly.
 - 2. Not for shameful gain but eagerly.

3. Not domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock.
 - iii. Elders are to shepherd with right ambitions.
 - iv. Elders should always remember that both reckoning and reward are coming.

b. IN GOD'S FLOCK, MEMBERS HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY TO SUBMIT TO ELDERS WHO ARE FAITHFULLY TEACHING AND LIVING THE WORD.

c. IN GOD'S FLOCK, SHEPHERDS HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY TO OVERSEE THE SHEEP WITH ATTENTIVENESS, TO GUARD THE SHEEP WITH ALERTNESS, AND TO TEACH THE SHEEP WITH GREAT AFFECTION.

- i. Oversee the sheep with attentiveness
 1. Pay careful attention
 - a. To yourselves
 - b. To all the flock
 2. Because
 - a. The Holy Spirit has made you overseers of the church.
 - b. The Father expects you to care for His church.
 - c. The Son purchased the church with His own blood.
- ii. Guard the sheep with alertness
 1. Wolves will come from outside.
 2. Wolves will come from inside.
 3. A few thoughts:
 - a. Be careful of those who claim to have a Word from God but it does not come from His Word.
 - b. Be careful of those who distort the Word rather than faithfully deliver the Word.
 - c. Those who are faithful and those who are fake can be identified by the same means: fruit or lack thereof.
 - d. Be careful of those who have solutions to the problems only they perceive and perpetuate.
 - e. Be careful of those who only offer solutions but never sacrifice.
 - f. Be careful of those who are experts at pointing out the sins of others but never putting away their own sins.
 - g. Be careful to make sure those who complain about a lack of unity are not the very ones working against it.
- iii. Teach the sheep with great affection.

V. THE ELDERS' COMMITMENTS

- a. With the help of the Holy Spirit, the elders commit to the following:
 - i. We commit ourselves to lovingly care for you and seek your growth in Christ. (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12)
 - ii. We commit to provide teaching, preaching, and counsel from the Scriptures that spans the whole counsel of God's Word. (Acts 20:27-28; Galatians 6:6; 1 Timothy 5:17-18)
 - iii. We commit to helping you in times of need. (Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-35; James 2:14-17)
 - iv. We commit to consistently strive to meet the criteria assigned to us in the Word. (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4)
 - v. We commit to pray for you regularly, particularly when you are sick. (James 5:14)
 - vi. We commit to be on guard against false teachers. (Acts 20:28-31)
 - vii. We commit to exercise church discipline when necessary. (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5; Galatians 6:1)
 - viii. We commit to help you become equipped to serve Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)
 - ix. We commit to seek God's will for our church family to the best of our ability as we study the Scriptures and follow the Spirit. (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-5)
 - x. We commit to set an example and join you in fulfilling the duties of church membership. (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 1 Timothy 4:12)

VI. OUR PRAYER

- a. Please Father, give us elders whom You have reconciled and whom You have appointed to the ministry and who will proclaim Christ to us until we are all mature and who will do all of this in Your strength for Your glory.

VII. OUR PROCESS

- a. Read and pray through 1 Timothy 3; Titus 1; 1 Peter 5 and Acts 20 over the next few weeks.
- b. Pray as the Leadership Team drafts proposed bylaws for deacons and elders at Hebron.
- c. Review the proposed bylaws and attend the member discussion meeting when offered.
- d. Communicate any questions or suggestions you have with pastoral staff or the Leadership Team.
- e. Attend the member meeting when a vote on the bylaws will take place.
- f. Review the elder nominations when provided and give any questions or feedback you have about the nominees.
- g. Affirm or reject the elder nominees when the congregational vote takes place.