

Elders Week 1

When you watch football, do you pay attention to the offensive line? Do you notice how those 5 guys up front work together to open up the running lanes? Do you focus on the MVP or Teem? In Politics:

A Pastor with British roots (Dr Carl Trueman) brought up an interesting point. In comparing British culture to American culture he stated:

Here in the United States we are always looking for one charismatic INDIVIDUAL who will be able to lead the nation providing world peace and economic prosperity to all people.

In Britten the people are focused on political parties rather than individuals. The electorate stands behind the platform of a certain party and is less focused on the individual leadership of the party. In fact that is how Winston Churchill lost an election.

- Carl stated that here in America we have the mentality that we are electing either the Messiah or the Anti-Christ every 4 years.
- Our view of politics focuses much more on heroic individuals than the parties of which these individuals are part. History focuses on great men rather than great political platforms.

This mentality is also prevalent in the church of America as well. Pastoral search committees hunt for a man who can do it all; a handsome, charismatic pastor who has the ability to capture the attention of every saint through his brilliant oratory, one who has the counseling prowess of Dr Phil. He leads the congregation with clear vision and has the management skills and energy to influence and govern every aspect of ministry.

- This simply is not the Biblical model of leadership.

Moses: Exodus 4:10 *“Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.”* (God - Who made the mouth?)

Paul: 2 Corinthians 10:10 *For they say, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.”*

- Moses’ father in law – He needed help / Paul always traveled with ministry partners.

This morning, I would like to look at 3 qualities of effective leadership from a Biblical perspective this morning:

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| 1. Plurality | FORM AND FUNCTION |
| 2. Provision | Plurality / Shepherding (Provision & Protection) |
| 3. Protection | |

Plurality: Last week we began a Biblical look at church leadership and I proposed that church leadership has its foundations in the character and nature of God:

- We looked at the role of a New Testament Deacon and we saw how the office is a beautiful expression of the MERCY of God.

If we continue to look to God as the model of church leadership, where does this whole idea of plurality come from?

- Very simply the foundation for plurality in church leadership begins with the Holy Trinity. Wayne Grudem: (Systematic Theology) *“God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.”*

- The earliest of Christian Creeds affirm the doctrine of the Trinity. (325 Nicene Creed)
- While the word “Trinity” itself is not found in the Bible, the triune nature of God is clearly seen from Genesis through Revelation.

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

- Also look at Psalm 45:6-7, Psalm 110:1, *The LORD said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.*

Matthew 3: 16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

1 Peter 1: 2 (Work of the trinity in salvation) according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:

As we move from the person of God, which is a plurality of perfect unity, to look at the rule of God in the New Testament church we find another plurality, working together in unity.

- Underneath of the Good Shepherd there are under-shepherds, elders who labor together in the unity that is provided by the Holy Spirit.
- In his letter to Titus, Paul provides the standards for leadership in the local church:

Titus 1:5, This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—

- Paul’s instructions specifically speak of appointing a plurality of elders not one man.
- On the first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in the cities where the Gospel had taken root and churches had been established.

Acts 14: 21 When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

All the way back in the book of Genesis the civil government was based upon a plurality of elders. As a matter of fact Job was an exemplary elder who sat with his peers and ruled at the gate of the city.

WHY PLURALITY?

All men have both strengths and weaknesses, gifts and talents that differ one from another. A plurality of elders functioning together in unity allows one man’s strength to fill another’s weakness so that together they provide a well rounded ministry.

Ecclesiastes 4: 9 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.

10 For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! 11 Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? 12 And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him —a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Plurality provides a safeguard from the deception of pride and assures a greater measure of security for the church:

Proverbs 11:14 **Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.**

- Plurality provides the opportunity for genuine accountability.

And now as we look at the FUNCTION of this plurality of Elders in the New Testament Church let's remember the governing character of God. He is a Good Shepherd.

Psalm 23:1 **The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. 3 He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**

Phillip Keller's Book "A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23" (must read)

"The strange thing about sheep is that because of their very makeup it is almost impossible for them to be made to lie down unless four requirements are met."

1. Owing to their timidity they refused to lie down unless they are free of all fear.
2. Because of the social behavior within the flock, sheep will not lie down unless they are free from friction with others of their kind.
3. If tormented by flies or parasites, sheep will not lie down. Only when free from these pests can they relax.
4. Lastly, sheep will not lie down as long as they feel the need of finding food. They must be free from hunger.

It is significant that to be at rest there must be a definite sense of freedom from fear, tension, aggravations, and hunger. The unique aspect of the picture is that it is only the Shepherd himself who can provide release from these anxieties.

In the New Testament Church, the Elders are called of God to do the important work of shepherding the flock of God.

1 Peter 5: 1 **So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.**

What are the primary FUNCTION of these shepherding elders? Twofold:

1. PROVISION
2. PROTECTION

PROVISION:

Jesus, the Good Shepherd,

- Multiplied the loaves and fishes feeding a multitude by the Sea of Galilee.
- After the resurrection He met the disciples by the sea and he cooked breakfast for them.
- BUT Jesus was not primarily a cook and his primary provision was not physical.
- He fed the people the milk and the meat of the Word of God.

Alexander Strauch: *“Jesus the good Shepherd was preeminently a teacher, and he commissioned others to teach all that he had taught.”*

Matthew 28: 19 **Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,** 20 **teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”**

- Jesus commissioned his disciples to teach.
- Peter failed the Lord Jesus, denying him on the night that he was betrayed, nevertheless, Jesus commissioned him to go and feed his sheep:

John 21:15, **When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.”** 16 **He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.”**

- And then a third time (vs 17) Jesus said, **“Feed my sheep.”**

The importance of feeding sheep is evidenced by the fact that sheep are nearly incapable of feeding and watering themselves. Without a shepherd, sheep would quickly be without pasture and water and would waste away.

- In light of Jesus’ example and the teaching ministry that He, himself passed down to the Apostles, is it any wonder that Paul’s requirements for elders includes being “Able to teach?”

1Ti 3:2 **Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,**

2Ti 2:24 **And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,**

The sheep of God’s flock grow and mature through the labor of faithful shepherds who prepare green pastures.

- Paul exhorts Titus that Elders **MUST**:

Titus 1: 9 **He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.**

- An Elder **MUST**, personally, hold firmly to the Apostles Doctrine. Only then can he provide healthy instruction for the church.
- With that thought of “**REBUKE**” we move on from the Provisional to the **PROTECTIVE** aspect of the Elder’s work.

By nature sheep are defenseless. They have no claws, no sharp teeth, they don’t growl only Bah;

- They are easily irritated, frequently frightened and when they are frightened one single sheep can lead a whole flock right over the cliff.
- Sheep are utterly dependent upon the shepherd to provide security and protection.

Before David became the King of Israel he shepherded his father’s flock in the fields of Bethlehem. There he learned the diligence of oversight as he battled the bear and the lion.

So also the Shepherds of the New Testament church must have courage to fight fierce predators. To discipline sin in the church, confront strife head on and stand up to harmful influences even when they come dressed in sheep's clothing.

Acts 20: 28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;

30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears.

Paul corrected the Corinthians: Divisions & Factions, Sexual Immorality, Favoritism and preferential treatment of the wealthy...

Paul sternly warns the Galatians about the false Gospel being promoted among the Jewish legalists.

- John warned the church that there were great deceivers infiltrating the church.

2 John 7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. 8 Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.

Jude 3 Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. 4 For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Every true New Testament Church is a sheep fold.

- Although we are all individuals, having our own fears and failings we have all come through the same DOOR. (John 10:7, "*I am the door of the sheep.*") All of us have heard and yielded to the voice of the Good Shepherd.
- BUT Sheep folds can be very messy places.
 - Sheep but heads with one another; many are timid, some are bullies, some have a tendency to wonder; the majority don't listen.
 - For the well being of the sheep God has provided shepherding sheep...
 - They teach the younger sheep and bring them together for their protection.

Pray for the elders, pray for those who are in elder training that God would make them shepherds after his own heart.