



GRACE

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

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THE MARKS OF A NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

Biblical Church Government, Part 2: The Role of the Elders

Sermon Notes

January 7, 2007

INTRODUCTION / OVERVIEW

- The biblical model of church leadership is rather clearly one of a plurality of male leadership.
- However, it is important to not only understand the model of biblical leadership, but the qualifications and roles as well.

I. The Biblical Qualifications of Elders

a. Moral and Spiritual Character

b. God-given Abilities

c. Spirit-given Motivation

II. The Biblical Roles of Elders

a. Protect the Flock

b. Feed [Teach and Equip] the Flock

c. Lead the Flock

d. Comfort the Flock

- Before one can fully understand the roles of biblical elders, he / or she must first understand the biblical qualifications that enable each elder to fulfill his God-ordained role as a leader within the local church.

The Biblical Qualifications of Elders

- It is difficult to overestimate the significance of the qualifications for elders in the New Testament church.
- John MacArthur writes, “Whatever the leaders are, the people become. As Hosea said, ‘Like people, like priest’ (4:9). Jesus said, ‘Everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher’ (Luke 6:40). Biblical history demonstrates that people will seldom rise above the spiritual level of their leadership.”

- This dynamic [people often reflect the passions and characteristic of their leaders] further underscores the necessity for a plurality of elders. If, in fact, a local church is organized with a ‘senior pastor’ as the head of a hierarchy, then the church will inevitably be limited by his [limited] gifts, abilities, talents, and passions. However, when multiple elders, with multiple gifts and personalities, govern a church, the church is not so limited.
- Three texts in the New Testament layout what the biblical qualifications of elders are:
 - 1.) 1 Timothy 3:2-7; 2.) Titus 1:6-9; 3.) 1 Peter 5:1-3:
 - Above Reproach
 - Not under compulsion, but voluntary
 - Not for sordid gain, but with eagerness
 - Not lording authority over people, but proving to be examples
 - The husband of one wife
 - Temperate
 - Having children who believe
 - Prudent
 - Not self-willed
 - Respectable
 - Not quick-tempered
 - Hospitable
 - Not addicted to much wine
 - Not pugnacious
 - Gentle
 - Uncontentious
 - Lover of what is good
 - Sensible
 - Just
 - Devout
 - Free from the love of money
 - Self-controlled
 - Not a new convert
 - A Good reputation with those outside the church
 - Able to teach the Word of God
 - Holds fast the faithful Word – both to exhort and to refute
- It is important that we not forget that these are **sufficient qualifications** for elders in the church. We dare not add to or take away from these.
- Roland Allen (1868-1947), the Anglican missionary to China, profoundly wrote: ‘We are so enamored of those qualifications which we have added to the apostolic that we deny the qualifications of anyone who possesses on the apostolic, [and therefore] we think a man fully qualified who possesses only ours.’
- Francis Schaeffer once wrote, ‘The church has no right to diminish these standards for the officers of the Church, nor does it have any right to elevate any other as though they are then equal to these which are commanded by God himself. These and only these stand as absolute.’

- ❑ As we look briefly at these qualifications, we can place them into three basic categories:
1.) Moral and Spiritual Character; 2.) God-given Abilities; 3.) Spirit-given Motivation.

a. Moral and Spiritual character

- ❑ Even a cursory glance at these standards reveals that the moral and spiritual character of each elder is of utmost importance.
- ❑ Interestingly, these qualifications penetrate into the private lives of elders. The whole of their lives are to be ‘above reproach.’
- ❑ Throughout the Scriptures, great emphasis is always placed on sexual purity (Leviticus 18:24,30). For the elder it is no different, for he is to be a faithful husband of one wife.
- ❑ He is also called to exercise self-control in all areas of life, to include the use of money, authority, and alcohol.
- ❑ Elders are to be examples of Christian living, devout in their faith, righteous, lovers of good, hospitable, and even ‘above reproach’ in the eyes of those outside of the church.
- ❑ From this list of qualifications, it is clear that the elders of a church should love people and possess good relationship skills. Elders are to be gentle, stable, sound-minded, uncontentious, not quick-tempered, pugnacious, or self-willed.
- ❑ Each of these qualifications ensure that Christ’s church is led by men who are truly called by God to lead His people.

b. God-given abilities

- ❑ There are three primary abilities: 1.) The ability to manage the family well; 2.) The ability to provide a model for others to follow; and 3.) the ability to teach and defend the faith.
- ❑ First of all, elders are to manage their households well. The reason for this seems quite clear: a church is a family.
- ❑ Secondly, as leaders, elders are to be able to provide examples for others to follow.
- ❑ Finally, the most unique ability that elders are to possess is the ability to teach and defend the faith.

c. Spirit-Given Motivation to Serve

- ❑ 1 Timothy 3:1 states, ‘If any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to work.’
- ❑ Every elders should have a passion to serve Christ’s church and the people of God, doing so, not for personal gain, but because of a conviction of God’s call to do so.

The Biblical Roles of Elders

- ❑ Once one understands biblical qualifications for eldership, he / or she can then understand the biblical roles of elders.
- ❑ Also, it is important to understand the biblical roles of elders, so we do not place expectations on elders which are outside the bounds of Scripture.
- ❑ Further, in order to fully understand the biblical roles of elders, one must also understand eldership in terms of *shepherding*.

❑ READ <u>Psalm 23</u>.

- ❑ From this Psalm, several characteristics of shepherds seem clear: 1.) they protect; 2.) they lead; 3.) they feed; and 4.) they comfort.

a. Protect the Flock

- ❑ The first aspect of shepherding as an elder is protecting the flock.
- ❑ Before a shepherd can lead sheep anywhere, he must first ensure that they are safe.
- ❑ However, within the context of the local church, the type of protection that is understood here is spiritual, rather than physical. The primary threat to any body of Christ is false doctrine.
 - ❑ Acts 20:17, 28-31 states:
‘From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. **‘Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock,** among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ‘I know that after my departure **savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.** ‘Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.’
 - ❑ Titus 1:5-9 states:
‘For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, **holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.**’
 - ❑ Acts 15:6 states:
‘The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.’

- ❑ However, as stated before, an elder cannot refute false doctrine unless he is first grounded in sound doctrine.

Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones, in his series on the Sermon on the Mount, wrote, 'We have somehow got hold of the idea that error is only that which is outrageously wrong; and we do not seem to understand that the most dangerous person of all is the one who does not emphasize the right things.'

b. Feed [Teach and Equip] the Flock [through the faithful preaching of the Gospel]

- ❑ Scottish theologian James Orr, once wrote, 'If there is a religion in the world which exalts the office of teaching, it is safe to say that it is the religion of Jesus Christ.'

- ❑ **Jesus Christ, Himself, was primarily a teacher.**

- ❑ **As the Scriptures state, He exposited [or explained] the Father, in both His words and works.**

- ❑ One of the most neglected aspects of the Great Commission is the command to **teach**:

Matthew 28:20 states:

“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all that I commanded you**; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

- ❑ After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to Peter, and restored him by commanding Him to feed His sheep through the teaching of the Word:

John 21:17 states:

“He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love Me?’ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ And he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to him, “**Tend My sheep.**”

- ❑ In the early church, the leaders devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching:

Acts 2:42 states:

‘**They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching** and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.’

- ❑ In his letter to Timothy, the Apostle Paul commands Timothy to ‘give attention to the public reading of Scripture’, as well as teaching:

1 Timothy 4:13 states:

‘Until I come, **give attention to the public reading of Scripture**, to exhortation and **teaching**.’

- Furthermore, Paul demonstrates the centrality of the Word of God in his second letter to Timothy:

2 Timothy 3:14-16 states:

‘You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. **All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching**, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;’

- It is quite significant that in the qualifications for elders, the one unique ‘ability’ listed is that of teaching. This is the basis of the authority of the elders:

□ 1 Timothy 3:2 states:

‘An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, **able to teach**,’

□ 1 Timothy 5:17-18 states:

‘The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, **especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching**. For the Scripture says, ‘YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,’ and ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages.’

□ Titus 1:7-9 states:

‘For the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, **holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.**’

- **The reason that teaching the Scriptures is so significant is because the Word of God is the instrument of both regeneration and sanctification!**

□ 1 Peter 1:23 states:

‘for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.’

□ Recall again 2 Timothy 3:16.

- **May we never forget that Pastors are to be theologians, not CEO-type visionaries! Throughout the history of the church, nearly all the great theological minds had one thing in common: they were Pastors.**

- Charles Jefferson once stated, ‘everything depends on the proper feeding of the sheep. Unless wisely fed they become emaciated and sick, and the wealth invested in them is squandered. When Ezekiel presents a picture of the bad shepherd, the first stroke of his brush is – ‘he does not feed the flock.’

c. Lead the Flock

- ❑ The third aspect of shepherding a flock is leading them.

- ❑ Yet, one must not forget that it is *through the faithful teaching and proclamation of the Word of God* that a shepherd leads.

- ❑ Acts 20:28 states:

‘Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.’

- ❑ 1 Peter 5:1-5 states:

‘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, exercising oversight 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. You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for **GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.**’

- ❑ One of the primary aspects of leading a congregation is not only directly feeding the congregation, but teaching the people **how** to feast upon the Word of God themselves.
- ❑ As the adage goes, ‘You can give a man a fish and he will eat for a day; teach a man to fish, and he will eat for a lifetime.’
- ❑ A congregation, therefore, should not be solely dependent upon a pastor/elder that the individuals cannot study the Scriptures on their own.

d. Comfort the Flock [through prayer, visiting, etc.]

- ❑ The final aspect of shepherding is comforting the flock of God.

- ❑ James 5:14 states:

‘Is anyone among you sick? Then he must **call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;**’

- ❑ Acts 20:35 states:

‘In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner **you must help the weak** and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

- ❑ It is quite clear from Scripture that a good shepherd loves the sheep (2 Samuel 2:3).
- ❑ As D.A. Carson states, a shepherd must have a ‘passion for [his] people.’

- Phillip Keller, in his exposition of Psalm 23, wrote, ‘**All the care, all the work, all the alert watchfulness, all the skill, all the concern, all the self-sacrifice are born of His Love – the love of One who loves His sheep, loves His work, loves His role as a Shepherd.**’

- ❖ By understanding the biblical qualifications and roles of elders in the local church, a congregation can continuously examine a key aspect of the church [its leadership] in a constant effort to be as biblical as possible.
- ❖ Furthermore, members of the congregation can also examine their individual expectations in accordance with what the Word of God states.
- ❖ Finally, the elders [as well as the congregation] must always hold themselves accountable to the Word of God with respect to their qualifications and roles.