

How Elders Lead the Church

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Text: 1 Peter 5:1-4

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Introduction: Open your Bibles to **1 Peter 5:1-4**. We are looking tonight at the overseers, or the watchmen of the churches. We continue in our series entitled "What We Believe". Doctrine is important, and applying that sound doctrine to our lives is even more important. And abiding in Christ as we live out His commands—experiencing that ongoing revival that fuels our obedience is really what this series of messages is all about. We are here not to hear a sermon, but to meet with God tonight.

Let's begin by looking at a key passage, and a classic example of a church in the New Testament found in **1 Peter 5:1-4**. Let's stand as we read this passage.

1 Peter 5:1-4, "The **elders** which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: 2 **Feed** [pastor] the flock of God which is among you, taking the **oversight** [bishop] thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 Neither as being lords over *God's* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."

[Prayer for Guidance]

Last week we came to understand that the Bible gives three titles to describe the office of the leaders in the church. The main teacher of the church and those who help him administrate the church are called both elders, bishops (overseers), or pastors. They are all the same office. We will see that in a moment.

Tonight we are going to see the **purpose** of the elders, the **pattern** of the elders, and the **power** of the elders.

I. Let's first look at the **Purpose** God gives to the pastor/elder/bishop in the Bible. The three titles of elders are used interchangeably and have to do with the various functions of the elders of the church.

A. **Elder** (*presbuterov, presbuteros*): This title reflects the spiritual maturity that is required of the office. This is the title found most often in the New Testament.

1.1 **1 Peter 5:1-2**, "The **elders** which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: 2 **Feed** [pastor] the flock of God which is among you, taking the **oversight** [bishop] thereof."

B. **Overseer/bishop** (*episkopov, episkopos*): This title reflects that the pastors of the church are to be giving the vision and oversight and administration fo

the church, and watching out for their protection. They are to give direction and protection.

1.1 **Peter 5:1-2**, "The **elders** which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: 2 **Feed** [pastor] the flock of God which is among you, taking the **oversight** [bishop] *thereof*."

2. **Philippians 1:1**, "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the **bishops** and deacons".

C. **Pastor** (poimhn poimen): This title reflects that pastors are to be feeding, nurturing, and protecting the flock.

1.1 **Peter 5:1-2**, "The **elders** which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: 2 **Feed** [pastor] the flock of God which is among you, taking the **oversight** [bishop] *thereof*."

2. **Ephesians 4:11**, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ". The pastor is to equip the saints by teaching and shepherding.

II. We've saw the **Purpose** for the elders in their three titles: elder, pastor, bishop.

II. Last week, we also saw the **Pattern** the elders.

A. Ideally, there should be a **Team** of elders. I want to show you biblically that the churches are to be led by a team of elders. It should be the exception to the rule if a church has only one elder.

1. **Hebrews 13:17** which says, "Obey **them** [plural] that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you." (Cf. Acts 14:23, 20:17,28;21:18; 1 Timothy 5:17-18 [distinguishing between a lay and a staff elder]; James 5:14; Titus 1:5).

2. What about **Deacons**? Biblically, the office of deacon has one task: service to Christ so that the elders can be free to preach and pray lead and oversee the spiritual well-being of the church. Deacons are to minister to the elders so that elders can give themselves to the Word and prayer. A man cannot be a deacon and an overseer at the same time. They are two different offices. We saw this last week in **Acts 6:2-4**.

A. A **Team** of elders.

B. Secondly, let's talk about the **Teaching** elder (what we call the Senior Pastor) **Senior Pastor**: There needs to be an elder in the church that receives remuneration for laboring in the Word according to **1 Timothy 5:17-18**, "Let the **elders** that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, **especially they who labour in the word and doctrine**. 18 For the scripture saith,

Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, **The labourer is worthy of his reward.**" It is nearly impossible to hold a secular job and spend the 20 to 30 hours a week it takes to carry the preaching load of the church. Paul understood this and gave the above structure to the churches

So, we saw that each church should have:

A. A **Team** of elders.

B. We also saw that there should be a **Teaching** elder.

C. What are the **Tasks** of the elders?

1. **Guard the Doctrine.**

a. **Protection** from false teachers. It is essential for the elders of the church to guard the church from wolves (false teachers) which abound in every time and place.

Acts 20:28-32, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. ²⁹ For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears."

i. **1 Timothy 4:16** Take heed unto thyself, and unto the **doctrine**; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

ii. **1 Timothy 4:13** Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to **doctrine**.

iii. **Titus 2:1** But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine:

b. **Guidance** in godliness. Pastors also need to give encouragement and guide the congregation into the "whole counsel of God". There are many warnings to Timothy to guard the apostolic doctrine from error such as **2 Timothy 1:13**, "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus."

2. Another task of the elders is to **Guide the Discipline**: The elders can bind and loose people from the congregation (**Matthew 18:15-20; Hebrews 13:17**)

Now we come to new material tonight.

3. Another task of the elders is to **Give the Direction** (Administration, Vision, Leadership). Of course the one who desires the office of a bishop or overseer desires a good thing. Overseer refers to the directional oversight of the church. **Hebrews 13:17** tells us that we will give account for this oversight.

Hebrews 13:17, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you."

a. The Pastor is to **SUCCEED**. The Pastor must be a "partaker of the glory that shall be revealed" (**1 Peter 5:1**). Peter was making an allusion to the amazing experience he had with the Lord when Christ for just a moment peeled back the robe of His humanity, and the Shekinah glory of His blinding divine presence was revealed. People wanted to follow Peter because Peter walked with Christ.

We read in **2 Corinthians 3:7** that "the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance". Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights. When he came down from that holy place, people observed that his countenance was shining with the glories of God. So intense was the reflection that he had to veil his face. Moses had been in the presence of the holy God.

The elders must meet with God and walk with Him and have the glow of His holiness in their life. The pastor is one who must partake of the glory of Christ! He must **SUCCEED** in his personal walk with God.

There are some pastors who would rather DISECT the Bible rather than DIGEST the Bible. If the pastor does not "taste and see that the Lord is good" he will have nothing but dry bones to give to others!

The pastor is always conscious of the power of God to change people. It is not intellectual knowledge, but the illumination and revelation of the Spirit of God in the heart that brings change. **Pastors do not change people—God changes people!**

b. The Pastor is to **FEED** "Feed the flock of God, which is among you" (**1 Peter 5:2**).

Acts 20:27, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

(1.) Preaching must be **God-centered**. Rich, expository, practical preaching! **People DO NOT need entertainment in the pulpit; they need FOOD**. The pastor must read, study, and grapple with the Scriptures so that he can adequately feed the people of God.

Jeremiah 3:15, "And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding."

(2.) Preaching must emphasize the **Grand Plan of God**. Paul said to the Ephesian elders in **Acts 20:27**, "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." The sheep need a BALANCED diet of the whole counsel of God. We must see Christ from the Old Testament and New Testament; from the prophets and from the Gospels. In prophecy and in the epistles. The pastor must not just teach his favorite subjects, but the "whole counsel of God".

- (3.) Preaching must emphasize **Growing** and Changing to be like Christ. The purpose for all of life, including preaching is that we would all be "conformed to the image of God's Son" (**Romans 8:29**). There must be application of the Word of God to the heart and mind (Renewal) and a living of the Word out (Revival). The preaching must not just be **practical**, but it must also be **powerful**. There must be a sense of God's grace and power that come with hearing the Word.

c. The Pastor is to **LEAD** "Peter says we are to be **1 Peter 5:2**, "Feed [pastor] the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight [bishop] thereof." Peter goes on to say in **verse 4**, "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." We are leading people to a deeper walk with the "chief Shepherd".

Paul said in **1 Corinthians 11:1**, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

Acts 20:28, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

The word "oversight" is the same word as the "bishop." The word "bishop" is another way to refer to the office of a pastor and it means someone who is a watchman, someone who is taking the oversight and vision of the church.

A pastor must take the oversight—he must set the tone and vision of the church. He leads in several ways...

- (1.) The Pastor Leads as a Steward "not by constraint, but willingly." The idea of being "willing" is to act with a plan, to serve intentionally, and delightfully. A pastor should never have the attitude that he HAS TO be the pastor, but that he GETS TO be the pastor. It's not a **pressure**, but a **privilege**!

The pastor knows he is going to give an account, and so he must work hard willingly as a steward with a plan! The truth of the matter is that ministry is hard work. There is not a place in ministry for the under motivated and the lazy. A pastor at times must put in 50 to 60 hours a week. This is not unusual or being overworked. You will find that any one who is successful in anything does not work a 40 hour week. We are not merely "babysitting" something. We are taking it and investing it. The pastor is a steward. It is my highest privilege to be given the stewardship of Tabernacle Baptist Church.

- (2.) The Pastor Leads as a Spiritual Pulse. He is to be a pastor for because he has a holy enthusiasm for God's work, not for any other reason, as it says: "not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind" (**1 Peter 5:2b**). The draw for any godly pastor is never finances. When I came to Tabernacle I accepted the call here

before I ever knew what my salary would be. I came here because I was eager and ready to see the Lord work. That's the idea of this verse. The pastor must maintain a sense of the spiritual pulse of the church—eager to see the Lord work in his life and in the life of the entire congregation.

According to *Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, this word "ready mind" means to be "active", "passionate", "willing", "eager". It means to be joyfully ready and eager to do God's will. The pastor is to have that holy enthusiasm for the things of God!

- (3.) The Pastor Leads as a Servant. "Not as being lords over God's heritage". The Pastor is not a general to tell people what to do. He is not to lord over the flock. He is not a king. He is NOT a PROFESSIONAL! He is a pastor and a servant.

He is another brother! **Matthew 22:8**, "But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren." It is fine to respect the office, but understand that there is no special distinction between clergy and laity. We are all brothers and sisters. We are all Bereans searching the Scriptures. We are all going to learn from one another.

So the pastor is to: Guard the **Doctrine**, Guide the **Discipline** of the church, Give the **Direction**, and finally to

4. Another task of the elders is to **Grow in Christ with Distinction**. **1 Peter 5:3**, "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock". The elders of the church are to set the example. He is to live out the word. Turn over to **1 Timothy 4**. Pastors are to live out the Word before the congregation. Paul says in **1 Timothy 4:15** that our "profiting" should "appear to all". Elders are to be "an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (**1 Timothy 4:12**). Peter tell us (**1 Peter 5:1**) that we are to be "ensamples" to the flock.

We've seen the..

I. **Purpose** of the elders, and the

II. **Pattern** of the elders.

III. Finally let's look at the **Power** of the elders.

A. The elders are ordained by **Jesus Christ**.

1. Look over at **Ephesians 4:11**. Who does the giving of the pastors and teachers? "And he [Christ] gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, **pastors and teachers** 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ".

2. Look over at **Acts 20:28**. Who made the elders overseers of the church? **Acts 20:28**, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you **overseers**, to feed the

church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Of course a man should seek the office of a bishop (overseer), but the reason he seeks it is because the Holy Spirit has gifted him for it.

- B. The elders are held account by their fellow elders and by the **congregation**. The elders set the direction for the congregation, but the congregation rules itself. In true Baptist churches, the congregation is the "court of last appeals". The church ratifies what the elders suggest. We read in many places of the unity of the church.
1. The first thing we read about the disciples in the book of Acts is that they "all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication" (**Acts 1:14**).
 2. We read that the church is to "gather together" and discipline wayward members of the church in **1 Corinthians 5:4-6**.
 3. The church as a whole set apart Saul and Barnabas for the ministry (**Acts 13:2**).

So the elders lead the church, and the church can either ratify or decline that this is the direction of the Lord. This gives the entire church a safety barrier.

Truly, though, the church has a **theocratic** rule. Jesus Christ is the Head of the church, and for a church to function in a healthy manner, it must be walking close to Christ.

Conclusion: So the Head of our church is Jesus Christ. He's the one who leads us through the pastors and evangelists in the churches. We hope to one day have a team of elders, but for now we are going to continue with the deacons functioning as both deacons and overseers of the congregation. I hope one day to make a distinction in the offices. That is something we all need to pray about.

So how do we apply these verses to our lives?

1. Pray that one day God will allow us to make the distinction between the role of elders and deacons in our congregation.
2. Pray for the leadership team at this church that we would make godly decisions and lead the church in the right direction.
3. Keep close to God yourself so that you as a congregation will discern the will of God along with the leadership team. We all want to be of one mind and of one accord.