

The Work of Elders

Introduction:

1. In the sermon this a.m. we discussed “The qualifications of elders.
2. As we noted in that sermon the Biblically mandated qualifications for elders are numerous and stringent – all of which suggests something about the nature and importance of their work.
3. In I Tim. 3:1, the apostle Paul wrote: “*This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.*” Hence, it is evident that there is a strong connection between “*the office of a bishop*” and the **work** of a bishop; they go together.
4. That being the case, in this lesson we are discussing “The Work of Elders.”

Discussion:

I. First, let us Consider the Attitude With Which Elders Should Approach their Work.

- A. An Attitude of Great Humility.
 1. Elders are entrusted with the work of watching for souls, Hebrews 13:17.
 2. They are stewards of God, Titus 1:7.
 - a. Stewards are people who watch out for that which belongs to someone else. In this case, they are watching out for souls that *belong to God*!
 - b. One soul is worth more than all the world, Matthew 16:26!
 3. No work in all the world is more important than that of *watching for souls*! The awareness that elders are entrusted with the care of souls which belong to God should cause one to be exceedingly humble and to want to serve in the best possible manner. Romans 12:3.
- B. An Attitude of Great Love.
 1. Again, we stress that elders watch for souls, Hebrews 13:17.
 2. God loved us so much that He sent Jesus to die for us, John 3:16; Hebrews 2:9.
 3. All Christians must possess a sincere love for the brethren, I Peter 1:22.
 4. This especially includes elders who, by reason of their qualifications, should be expected to:
 - a. Love God with all their hearts, Matthew 22:37.
 - b. And the souls of those who have been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ, I John 4:10,11.
- C. With A Servant Mentality.
 1. Matthew 20:25-28.
 2. Note the way Paul described himself and Timothy – “*servants of Jesus Christ*,” Philippians 1:1.
- D. With a Shepherd’s Heart.
 1. Note I Peter 5:2, “*Feed the flock of God among you.*” In the NKJV it is translated “*shepherd the flock of God among you.*” “*Feed*” or “*shepherd*” is the verb form of the Greek word *poimen*, which may be translated “pastor” or “shepherd.”
 2. In the shepherd-sheep relationship, especially as it existed in Bible days, shepherds continually looked out for the sheep, providing good pasture and water, providing protection from wild animals, and on occasion even risking their lives for the sheep. Cf. I Samuel 17:34-36.

II. The Manner With Which Elders should Approach their Work.

- A. In keeping with the Scriptures.
 1. Note Acts 20:32.
- B. Prayerfully.
 1. I Thessalonians 5:17.
- C. With Fear and Trembling.
 1. Philippians 2:12.
 2. Two factors which could cause fear and trembling:
 - a. Elders must “*give account*” before God, Hebrews 13:17.
 - b. Consider the fate of the watchman who shirked his duties as set forth in Ezekiel 3:17-19.

III. The Work of Elders.

Note: The words by which they are designated suggest much as to the scriptural work of elders. These words are: *presbuteros* (translated “elders” or “presbyters”), *episkopos* (translated “bishops” or “overseers”), and *poimen* (translated “pastors” or “shepherds”).

- A. Duties to Self.

1. *"Take heed to yourselves,"* Acts 20:28. The character and conduct they expect of the members should first be a part of their own lives.
 - a. All who instruct others should also instruct themselves! Cf. Romans 2:21.
 2. Be *"examples to the flock,"* I Peter 5:2.
 - a. The best way to lead is by example! Jesus, the *"chief shepherd,"* I Peter 5:4, left us an example that we should *"follow His steps,"* I Peter 2:21.
- B. Duties to God.**
1. Perhaps best summed up by:
 - a. Loving Him with all the heart, mind, and soul, Matthew 22:35-37.
 - b. Fearing Him and keeping His commandments, Ecclesiastes 12:13.
 - c. Seeking first His *"kingdom and His righteousness,"* Matthew 6:33.
- C. Duties to the Local Church.**
1. Know the flock, John 10:2,3,14.
 - a. This demands that shepherds take an interest in the flock, and exercise an effort to relate to each one.
 2. Oversee the flock, Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:2.
 - a. Ezekiel taught that watchmen were to *"hear the word"* of God, and give *"warning"* to God's people, Ezekiel 3:17. This calls for vigilance to prevent the sheep from straying and effort to round up straying sheep. Consider the story of the lost sheep related by Jesus in Luke 15:3-7.
 3. Feed the flock, Acts 20:28, I Peter 5:2.
 - a. It is the local flock; the flock of God *"among"* them, I Peter 5:2. Elders of a local church are not to be *"brotherhood"* bishops! For that matter, they can not *"oversee"* what they can not *see*!
 - b. This show how ridiculous it is for the elders of a local church to *"take the oversight"* of another congregation far removed from where they reside!
 4. Watch for souls, Hebrews 13:17.
 - a. No mere **thing** is as important as a soul! Matthew 16:26. He that *"winneeth souls"* is wise, Proverbs 11:30.
 - b. When an elder sees a soul in danger he should sound an alarm. They should exercise care lest:
 - (1) They invite an unsound preacher to labor with the church on a regular basis, or even for a meeting.
 - (2) They should also keep an eye on *"he that soweth discord among brethren,"* Proverbs 6:19.
 5. Exercise rule in the house of God, Hebrews 13:17; I Timothy 5:17.
 - a. They must not rule as *"lords over God's heritage,"* I Peter 5:3
 - b. *"Rule"* as a good father rules in his own house, I Timothy 3:4,5. A good father is concerned about the spiritual well being of his children, Ephesians 6:4; he exercises discipline when it is necessary, Proverbs 13:24; yet he must avoid the dictatorial rule that provokes children to wrath, Colossians 3:21.
 6. They must stop the mouths of gainsayers, Titus 1:9-11
 - a. In Bible days there were *"many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers,"* Titus 1:10, and there are *"many"* such people today! Their mouths must be *"stopped!"* Elders must be willing to take the necessary action when error rears its ugly head! Romans 16:17,18.
 7. *"Support the weak,"* Acts 20:35.
 - a. He did not say *"condone the unfaithful,"* but he did say *"support the weak."* This is done on a regular basis in domestic families. Some people, especially at certain times in their lives, are weak, and they need more help than others. Cf. Isaiah 40:11
 8. Pray for the sick, James 5:14,15.

Conclusion:

1. The work of elders is a demanding work! There are no perfect elders. Elders, like preachers (and all others) fall short of perfection. But they must never cease trying! They need (and deserve) the prayers and cooperation of all the saints.

--Bobby Witherington, August 16, 2015