

Recovering a Lost Doctrine

Detailed Outline

Our topic for these talks will be restoring biblical eldership to the church. I'd like you to take your Bibles and open to 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— if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife . . . (Titus 1:5–6)

Paul was very interested in the subject of eldership. He would've liked to have been the speaker on this website, but he could not be here. But he did something better; he wrote letters. Part of Paul's strategy for instructing his churches and correcting problems was to write letters, and these letters have a permanence with us today. They are divinely inspired letters.

Here in Titus 1:5–6 Paul says a church without qualified elders is deficient. We'll get back to this in a little while.

Now I want to look first at the problem. The problem is this: the loss of the New Testament teaching on eldership.

Introduction to Restoring Biblical Eldership

1. The Problem: The Loss of the New Testament Teaching on Eldership

I want to say that many churches do have eldership. And they do that because the Scripture teaches it very clearly. You cannot deny that. But here's the problem. They don't have biblical eldership. They have what I have termed *board eldership*—they're not biblical elders. What many people mean by elders are advisors, administrators, finance men, policy-makers, fundraisers, advisors to the pastor. They are not biblical elders.

Biblical eldership is pastoral eldership, a qualified, functioning eldership. Not a board of people who are just temporary in leading and making policies for the church.

2. The Solution: Return to New Testament Teaching – Restoration, Recovery, and Reformation

What are we going to do about this loss of the doctrine of biblical eldership?

Well, there's only one solution. Return to what the Bible says, what God says, what the Spirit of God says about this subject. I call this restoration, recovery, and reformation. What we need is a fresh recovery of the New Testament teaching on elders.

Now, this should not surprise us. Nearly every doctrine in Scripture, at one time or another, has needed to be recovered, corrected, or revived. It is our natural tendency to lose doctrine and to become confused about doctrine, to distort a doctrine, or to be completely lost.

We see this pattern in the Old Testament, of which the apostle Paul wrote:

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Rom. 15:4)

Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. (1 Cor. 10:11)

We see in Scripture the people of God drifting from him, especially in the Kings. You see it most vividly with the great revival of Josiah (2 Kings 22:3-23:25). Israel lost the Word of God. They lost the Law of Moses—and it was found one day in the temple. The temple wasn't being used properly, the priesthood wasn't functioning, the feasts weren't being carried out. Israel had drifted far from God, far into idolatry. They wanted to be like the other nations. Now this cycle of drifting from the law of God and restoration is all through the Old Testament (the OT cycle of blessing, disobedience, punishment, repentance, and deliverance [Ex. 32:8; Jos. 24:31; Judges 2:10–13, 19]).

We see it even in the New Testament. Look at the seven churches of Revelation. And so, recovery of doctrine, revival of life, are continuous works, and we should not be surprised by this.

We think of the great 16th-century Reformation, how the truth of the gospel had to be recovered, how the Scripture's place of authority had to be brought back to life.

So, reformation is a normal process in the history of God's people. So, I am calling for a recovery or restoration of a biblical doctrine that has been lost, or distorted.

Let me share with you some powerful quotations by reformers for the continuous work of restoring doctrine and clarifying biblical doctrine.

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, once a professor at Dallas Seminary and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, said this: "In every generation, we need an enlightened purification of our traditions."

If you don't know this by now, tradition rules—not Scripture. We are not "the people of the book" as we so often profess that we are. Man-made traditions too often trump Scripture.

The 17th-century teachers and reformers, after the great Reformation of the 16th century, used a Latin phrase that describes what we are talking about, *semper reformanda*, which means "always being reformed."

John Robinson said to the pilgrim fathers as they were leaving for the New World of the Americas (1619):

I am absolutely convinced that the Lord has other truths to impart to us through his holy word. Personally, I cannot sufficiently deplore the condition of these reformed churches which have acquired a certain degree of religion, but which do not wish to go beyond their reformation. The Lutherans can see only what Luther saw; they would rather die than accept a certain aspect of the truth revealed to Calvin. As for the Calvinists, they cling to the heritage left them by that great man of God, who, nevertheless, did not know everything. It is deplorable poverty, for even if these men in their time were lamps which burned and gave light in the darkness, they had not yet entered into all the counsel of God. If they were living in our day they would be ready to embrace a light which was more intense than the one which at first enlightened them.

Merle d'Aubigne, a French historian of the Reformation, wrote these words. They've had a great impact on me, and I hope they will have an impact on you:

As we advance through the centuries, light and life begin to decrease in the church. Why? Because the torch of the Scripture begins to grow dim and because the deceitful light of human authorities begins to replace it.

I hope you'll meditate on this marvelous quote by d'Aubigne.

Otto Riecher writes: "The life of the church depends on one thing: her return to biblical principles." And that's what we are involved with right now—a return to Scripture.

In his book *I Will Build My Church*, Alfred Kuen writes: "The churches established by the apostles remained the valid models for churches of all times and places" (*I Will Build My Church*, Chicago: Moody, 1971, 253).

Our authority is the very Word of God, and that is the standard for checking our traditions and our church practices, and to constantly evaluate ourselves:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching and for reproof and for correction and for training in righteousness that the man [or woman] of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16–17)

May we be competent to correct our own failures and faults, and implement the truths of God's Word into our local churches, which is the best thing for our churches.

Biblical Evidence for Eldership

Detailed Outline

Let's begin now to defend from Scripture the doctrine of biblical eldership.

I. The New Testament Teaches and Models Both Plurality of Elders and Pastoral Eldership.

Now, how are we going to prove this? We need to start with the Old Testament Scriptures.

1. The Old Testament Witnesses to Government by the Plurality of Elders.

My dear friends, eldership is not a new and subversive doctrine. God's people have always had their elders. Throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, over 100 times, we see Israel's elders representing the people. The Old Testament witnesses to government by the plurality of elders.

The problem is that we don't know the Old Testament or the history of Israel.

To understand New Testament eldership, you have to start in the Old Testament and see the significant place the elders had in the history of the people of God.

2. Jesus Christ Established Plurality of Leadership for His Churches.

This is a very interesting fact. Jesus never appointed one man over his church. He never trained one man. He trained twelve men, and he trained them together; he appointed twelve to be the first leadership body of the church of Jesus Christ. They are the foundation to the church of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ gave us the plurality of leadership.

Although he trained and commissioned twelve men, among the twelve apostles, there were first ones among equals or a first one among equals. Among the twelve apostles there were the three: Peter, James, and John. Some of the other apostles, we know almost nothing about them. And among the twelve apostles, Peter stands out as the mouthpiece of the group. He's the natural leader.

Peter is the natural leader in the group; the other eleven men are not, however, his assistants. They're not his advisers. They are all equally apostles. They're all equally sent out to preach. They equally share apostolic authority.

But the twelve apostles were not equal in their giftedness or their prominence. And so, this is something we must understand to understand eldership, because Christ gave it to us. We call this "first among equals." See Matthew 10:2 and Acts 15:22.

Also, Jesus gave them a unique style of leadership. We call it "servant leadership." He taught them the virtues of humility; he washed their feet. He taught them about forgiveness; he taught them that they were to love one another as he had loved them.

3. The New Testament Establishes Pastoral Leadership by the Plurality of Elders.

In its major features, pastoral oversight of the local church by a plurality of elders is plainly and amply set forth by the New Testament writers. It's a consistent pattern throughout the New Testament.

The New Testament offers more instruction about elders than it does about the Lord's Day, the Lord's Supper, baptism, or spiritual gifts.

A. Examples of Eldership

Notice the consistent examples. There were elders in the churches of Judea and surrounding area. There were elders in the church in Jerusalem. Among Paul's churches, a plurality of elders were established in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, and in Ephesus, in Philippi, and the island of Crete.

In the well-traveled letter of 1 Peter, covering a huge swatch of area, Peter talks about the elders in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. We see eldership as a pattern throughout all these churches.

B. Instruction About Elders

Not only does the New Testament provide a consistent example of elders, but there's explicit instruction to the churches about how to support elders, protect elders, restore elders, discipline elders, select elders, call elders.

James instructs those who are sick to "call the elders of the church." Paul instructs the Ephesian church to financially support the elders who are laboring at preaching and teaching.

Paul instructs the local church to protect their elders from false accusations. He instructs the church to properly look for qualified men and to examine those who seek eldership. He states that the elders are God's household stewards, leaders, teachers, and overseers.

Peter calls the young man of the church to submit to the elders.

C. Instruction and Exhortation to Elders

We have examples of elders, and we have instructions to the church about elders, and now we have direct commands to elders.

Paul reminds the Ephesian elders that the Holy Spirit himself placed them in the church to be overseers and to pastor the church of God.

To the Ephesian elders, Paul says, *"Shepherd (pastor) the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood."* They are to guard the church from false teachers. That's a direct command to the elders.

Writing to elders throughout all Asia Minor, Peter charges them to *"shepherd the flock of God, exercising oversight among them."* Another direct command to the elders. How clear can it get?

Peter exhorts the elders to clothe themselves in humility.

D. The Deficiency of a Church without Elders

Paul writes to Titus:

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order (or set right) what remains and appoint elders in every church as I directed you. (Titus 1:5 NASB)

I want you to notice here that a church without qualified elders is a church that needs to be set in order, needs to be set right. It's deficient.

At the beginning of Paul's ministry and at the end of his ministry—he appoints elders.

According to Acts 14:23, at the very beginning of his church planting ministry Paul appoints elders:

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

And then Titus 1:5, our passage, is at the end of his ministry.

Notice carefully what he says to Titus: set in order, set right, by appointing elders. I. Howard Marshall writes:

The term (set in order, set right) may thus express the idea of authority to act, to make appropriate and needed reform, such as might be given to lawmakers or by an apostle to his delegate.

A properly constituted church has qualified, functioning pastor elders.

Now, I could say more but I will summarize it this way: This is what the Scripture teaches. We either obey or disobey. God knows what is best for his people.

Eldership and the Church

Now in defending biblical eldership, we come to letter E:

e) Eldership Promotes the True Nature of the Church.

We're dealing now with the theology of what is the Church. Any form of leadership structure needs to harmonize with and promote the nature of the organization.

I'm arguing that biblical eldership best harmonizes with and promotes the true nature of the Church, its mission, and its theology.

1. The church is a close-knit family of brothers and sisters.

We use the Greek word *ekklesia*: church, congregation, gathering, assembly. But one word cannot explain the multi-dimensional nature of the church. So the biblical writers use many metaphors, images, such as the body, the bride, the temple, the flock.

But one of the most frequently used metaphors for the church is that of the family—brothers and sisters. Or, the larger concept—the household of God. We are God's family; we truly are brothers and sisters. It's real.

Now, eldership is a form of government that harmonizes beautifully with the family nature of the church.

When you come to the churches of the New Testament you will see that they do not have special, exalted titles for their leaders but very simple titles: overseer, elder, leader. Or sacred clothes, chief seats, or special platforms.

Christ said to his twelve disciples, "You are brothers" (Matt. 23:8).

When a NT local church would look back at its heritage, the people of God in the Old Testament, it would see a form of government that matched perfectly a family, and that was eldership. As an extended family, eldership fits with what the church is.

Then second, notice:

2. The church is a humble servant community.

I'm convinced of the elder system of government matches the chief virtues that Jesus Christ taught his disciples: humility, servanthood, and love.

Eldership, unlike unitary leadership, promotes these virtues. It takes a greater exercise of humility and love to work as a group of leaders together. In order for eldership to operate effectively, the elders have to show mutual regard for one another. They have to submit one to another; they have to patiently wait on one another, something very difficult for alpha males.

This sounds so much like Philippians 2—have the attitude in yourselves which was in Christ Jesus, who humbled himself and served others—qualities that marked the servant church and the servant community of God’s people. In fact, the eldership is sort of a microcosm of how the whole church should operate.

3. The church is under Christ’s headship.

Biblical eldership promotes the preeminence of Christ over the local church.

Jesus left a beautiful promise to his disciples when he ascended to heaven: *I will always be with you. Where two or three are gathered (the smallest number), I will be in your presence.*

Jesus would be with us as ruler, head, lord, and master, overseer, high priest, and king. No one man would be king of the church. No one man would be ruler of the church. It would be governed by a plurality of Spirit-appointed, qualified, functioning shepherd elders.

Also, we are completely dependent upon our head, Christ, the source of all blessing and power.

May we be the kinds of people who always point people to Christ, not to self, which is our natural tendency.

4. Eldership promotes the protection and sanctification of the spiritual leaders.

We come to two extremely significant reasons and benefits of pastoral leadership by a plurality of qualified elders.

The first is that eldership provides necessary accountability and protection from the particular sins that plague leaders—such as pride, greed, and playing God.

Second, the eldership structure provides peer relationships and balances one another’s weaknesses. I believe a biblical eldership promotes each individual leader’s sanctification.

Accountability: The famous English historian Lord Acton said this: “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

We are Bible-believing Christians. And if there is anyone who should understand the importance of accountability it should be us! Because of our biblical beliefs in the cruel realities of sin and human depravity, we should understand well why people in positions of power are easily corrupted. We know from our Bibles how corrupting sin is, how deceitful sin is, and how easily we’re distorted and perverted by power, authority, money, fame, and status.

Jesus knew this. That’s why he taught humility. It’s why he washed their feet and knelt down before them as an example. He said, “Now you’ve seen my example. You do that to one another.” Serve one another, even in the most humble ways.

To have authentic, real accountability—you have to want it. You have to see the need for it, scripturally, and see how weak you really are, and how easily you are tricked by the devil, and sin, and your own dark side.

Peer relationships: One of the great joys of my life has been working with a group of men who are peers. We have been partners in the work of God. Hence, we balance one another, sharpen one another, comfort one another, protect one another, strengthen one another, pastor one another, and pray for one another.

A healthy relationship with other men is important, very important to your spiritual health.

You know the two great things that God has used in my life to sanctify me and make me a much better leader: The first is my wife, and second is my fellow elders.

God wants you to learn to listen to other people and to learn to welcome correction and rebuke. This is part of your sanctification in Christlikeness. If you want to be more like Jesus, then listen to your brothers and sisters, listen to their criticism, listen to their statements that reveal who you really are. We need one another.

So, I'm saying to you that eldership harmonizes with and promotes the theology of the church, the mission of the church, and the character of the church.

Eldership as Pastoral Oversight

Detailed Outline

II. Defining Biblical Eldership

We have looked at *defending* biblical eldership from Scripture; now we are going to *define* it.

1. Pastoral Oversight by a Plurality of Qualified Elders

I want you to notice the word *qualified* elders. Many people think we're talking about some passive committee running the church. We are not talking about a committee. We are talking about a council of Spirit-appointed, qualified, functioning pastor elders.

A. The General New Testament Concept of Eldership

The general NT concept of eldership is this: *pastoral oversight*. The Scripture says:

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

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: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight. (1 Peter 5:1-2)

Notice, my dear friends, both the apostles Paul and Peter charge the elders to shepherd/pastor God's flock. Notice also the shepherding imagery. Some of the most beautiful biblical imagery is the shepherding sheep imagery.

B. Definition of Biblical Eldership

Biblical eldership is pastoral leadership of the local church by a counsel of qualified, Spirit-appointed men. I would call this Christian eldership or New Testament eldership.

C. The Equality and Diversity within the Eldership

Again, we turn to Holy Scripture for our teaching:

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages." (1 Tim. 5:17-18)

In a biblical eldership, you will have both equality among the elders and diversity in giftedness and prominence.

All elders are called to shepherd the church. All are called to be able to teach. All are called to be able to protect the church from false teachers. All these points emphasize the equality side of biblical eldership, but there is diversity side also. Not all elders are Spirit-gifted teachers or leaders (Rom. 12:8 and Eph. 4:11).

So, among the elders there's diversity of giftedness; there's a diversity of experience and knowledge. Some elders have served many years; some elders are highly gifted in communication; some are more public people than the others. Each elder will contribute his particular interests, gifts, and available time.

In closing, I want to mention two extremes of biblical eldership.

One extreme is to make a gifted leader or teacher the Protestant priest, the senior pastor, the anointed one, the one who alone can bless and preach and administer the sacraments.

The other extreme is to overemphasize pure equality among the elders and not allow for special giftedness, calling, or function. I've seen churches like this. Everyone is flattened out and the group is afraid of gifted leadership.

The correct biblical balance to equality and diversity among the elders is found in 1 Timothy 5:17-18 and the example of the twelve apostles.

Qualifications for Elders

Detailed Outline

II. Defining Biblical Eldership (cont.)

In our last message, we saw that the general, overall concept of eldership, the biblical concept, is shepherding; it's pastoral. Elders shepherd the flock of God. We're not talking about board elders.

2. New Testament Qualifications for Elders

You cannot define biblical eldership without looking at the qualifications. They tell us a lot about who the elders are and what they do.

We begin with A in our outline:

A. Spirit-Given Desire

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

The only elders we want are elders who are Holy Spirit-led. Their desire is generated by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives them the motivation to do this work. The Holy Spirit gives the strength, the love, the desire, and the energy. It wasn't Paul who picked the elders, and it wasn't the church who picked the elders. Paul says (and he's using this as motivation for them), it was the Holy Spirit. He placed you in the church as overseers.

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. 1 Timothy 3:1

We are talking about the starting point. How do you become an elder? Well, it starts with Spirit-given desire, and if you have that desire (Paul is saying and the early Christians are saying), this is a good thing. They're encouraging the desire but remember, it's generated by the Holy Spirit. And so, we want people who have a Spirit-given desire, a passion, an urging, an unction from the Holy Spirit to do this job.

B. Objective Biblical Qualifications

Well, desire is the starting point, but you can have wrong desire. It could be for selfish reasons. Some people want to dominate other people. Some people are totally deceived about themselves: they think they're a leader, and they are not a leader. They think they're a teacher or some intellectual, and they are not.

So, desire now must be matched by objective qualifications.

When we look at this subject of eldership or church leadership, the one point that God is most clear about is the qualifications for those who lead the Lord's people. God has laid out a catalog of qualifications, and we must take them seriously because God takes the qualifications for eldership very seriously. May I remind you that the qualifications are there to protect the church from undesirable, unworthy, unfit people.

Let's take the qualifications and break them into two general categories. One will be the moral and spiritual qualifications and the other will be abilities.

C. Moral and Spiritual Qualifications

We begin with the overarching qualification:

1) A Good Reputation

Most Bibles say "above reproach" (1 Tim. 3:2). The first overarching qualification is "above reproach," and then "respectable" and "well thought of by outsiders" (1 Tim. 3:2, 7).

Notice, it matters what the world thinks about your leaders.

What we are talking about is character leadership. In the Lord's work character is everything.

2) Family Life

a) Marital and Sexual Life

First, "the husband of one wife." In other words, marriage and your sexual life come first in being above reproach.

We have a plague that has hit the Church of Jesus Christ in the last 50 years: pastors being involved in inappropriate sexual relationships. We live in a pornographic world. We can press a button and bring the most pornographic pictures into the privacy of our home.

b) Children

He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? 1 Timothy 3:4

His children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. Titus 1:6

What Paul is referring to here is family leadership, a father who's involved with his children, involved with his family. He's a responsible father. He deals with problems. You have children, you have problems! But you deal with them; you're involved with the children's problems. You lead them, you guide them. And, so he's talking here about a responsible, respectable father.

I want you to note that in the church, family leadership is the great testing ground for church leadership. You want to know what your leaders are going to be like? Look at their homes.

3) Personal Self-Control

There are a number of the qualifications that come under the virtue of self-control.

Let me remind you that one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit is self-control (Gal. 5:23). A self-controlled person is a Spirit-controlled person. And the kind of church leaders we want for our churches are Spirit-controlled, self-controlled leaders/elders.

Qualifications for Elders (continued)

Detailed Outline

Let's go on in the qualifications for a shepherd elder.

4) Relational Skills with People

A number of the qualifications revolve around one's skill in interpersonal relationships.

Gentle: By gentle he means forbearing, patient, not insisting on the letter of the law, understanding people's weaknesses and their foibles, and all the complexities of people. It's a marvelous virtue that should be true of every leader among God's people: a patient, forbearing, magnanimous shepherd. And that kind of person can get along with lots of people.

Upright: Living in accordance with God's righteous standards, to be law-abiding. A righteous person in character, behavior, conduct, and attitude.

Not Quick-Tempered: Not able to control one's anger. If you're quick-tempered, quick to get angry, you're going to be in a lot of conflict with people and you're going to hurt a lot of people.

Not Quarrelsome: An argumentative person. If you're a leader, you're going to have to interact with lots of people who disagree with you. You're going to have to learn to speak properly to people when there is disagreement, and not just argue endlessly every point.

Not Arrogant: This has the idea of "puffed up," self-superiority. Some translations say "self-will." This is the kind of person who has to have his way – "my way or the highway."

I hope you know about the church leader/elder called Diotrophes (3 John 9-10). Diotrophes loved to have the first place. He loved preeminence. He liked to control people and rule over people. He had very bad social skills because he excommunicated people who disagreed with him. He wouldn't even allow the apostle John in his church. But I'm sure he had a lot of talent. I'm sure there was a group of people who loved him and followed him, but he was self-willed and he was arrogant.

So, we see here that elders are in the people business. We shepherd people. We're not building cars or computers; we are leading, growing, edifying, and working with people. It's a totally people-oriented job, so we need these great social skills in dealing with people in a godly way.

We need also to be a team player; we need to know how to work with people we don't always agree with.

We are called to be servant leaders and humble leaders. If we are quick-tempered, quarrelsome, and arrogant, we're not going to be problem-solvers. We're going to be the problem.

5) Hospitality and Loving Good

Hospitality: You probably would not think that hospitality is a biblical requirement for a pastor elder, but it is.

Why do you need to be hospitable to be a church elder? Because we're in the family of God, and one of the most powerful tools for ministering to the family is your home, inviting them to your table for a meal.

Actually, hospitality is directly related to love. It's one of the ways we display love in a very concrete, real way.

A Lover of Good (Titus 1:8): An elder is a person who is compassionate and involved in kind deeds to help others. In Acts 20:35, Paul charges the elders to care for "the weak." The weak are people who cannot provide for themselves, whether because of age, sickness, or disability. Elders are to be compassionate, generous, caring people, full of service deeds, "loving what is good." These are marvelous traits of a leader of God's household.

6) Personal Integrity

A number of the qualifications revolve around personal integrity.

Above Reproach: The overarching qualification of being blameless.

Be an Example to the Flock: An example of godly Christian behavior and service that others would want to follow.

Not Greedy for Gain: Not stealing, pilfering, or misappropriating church money or the offerings. Greed and the temptation to steal church funds is a powerful temptation. More powerful than we realize!

Upright: Living in accordance with God's righteous standards, to be law-abiding. A righteous person in character, behavior, conduct, and attitude.

Holding Firm to the Trustworthy Word as Taught: You are doctrinally sound and living the truth of the gospel, not like the false teachers who do not hold firmly to apostolic, orthodox doctrine.

Holy: A devout Christian, firmly committed to God and his Word. It means to be separated unto God and pleasing to God.

Again, we come back to "character leadership." We're back to being godly role models of what a Christian life is to be like.

There's a marvelous verse in the Old Testament speaking of King David, one of the greatest leaders God ever gave Israel.

With upright heart he shepherded them (the nation of Israel) and guided them with his skillful hands.
(Psalm 78:72)

An “upright heart” is a word for integrity; with integrity of heart he shepherded the Lord’s people. He was a man of integrity!

Then it says that he guided them with “skillful hands.” In other words, a good leader is a person who is skilled with people. They know how to deal with people. They’re problem-solvers. Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” They’re people who make peace. If you can’t make peace in a church, you will have a division.

A leader who has integrity is a person you can believe; it’s a person you can trust; it’s a person who lives in a manner consistent with what he says and what he believes. There isn’t a disconnect between belief and lifestyle.

Someone has said, very cleverly, many of our churches are suffering from *AIDS – Acquired Integrity Deficiency Syndrome*, and if we have an integrity deficiency in our elders, we’re in real trouble.

7) Spiritual Maturity

Not to be a recent convert or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. 1 Timothy 3:6

You cannot be a new convert and be an elder. You can be a brand new convert and be an evangelist the same day. But you cannot be a new convert and be an elder of the church the same day. You must have maturity.

How long that takes is going to be different with everyone. But you must have life experience, you must know the Word of God, and you must show yourself to be the kind of person who can lead God’s people.

If the person is too newly saved, in a position of leadership too early, they’ll become conceited. They’ll think, *I’m a big shot, I’ve got a badge, I’m a church pastor*. But the devil will trick that person. It takes time to know the devil’s strategy and to know your own self and how easily you’re tempted and led astray, and to know your own weaknesses and fatal flaws. You have to know these things, and have dealt with them in life. So, you must be a mature Christian.

Abilities of Elders and Examination

Detailed Outline

We've looked at the moral and spiritual character of a shepherd elder. Now we want look at their abilities:

D. Abilities

1) Family Management

1 Timothy 3:4: "He must manage (or lead or conduct) his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive."

Titus 1:6: "His children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination."

The Puritans used to say, "The family is the little church."

Managing a family is not like managing the state or a business or the military. Managing a church is more like managing a family. So you prove your ability to lead a church by first leading your family.

When you are testing people for eldership, you need to meet with the wife and children. You cannot do this job of shepherding God's people without your wife's cooperation and without your children's cooperation, because you put your family at risk when you give this kind of time to helping the larger family, the household of God.

Many marriages are falling apart. Thus, an elder needs to be a good example of having a stable home.

Paul's logic is this (1 Timothy 3:5): "For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?" If you can't manage your own family, how are you going to manage many families, many people?

2) Personal Life Example

Peter brings this out: "Being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3). This is in contrast to "not domineering over those in your charge." That is, being a controlling leader, leading with guilt and fear.

You are to be the godly example that people want to follow. Oswald Sanders gives us a great definition of leadership. *Leadership is influence.*

How do you influence people? By having a badge that says, I'm an elder, I'm the pastor, I'm the bishop? No, people don't follow badges; they follow lifestyles. They follow role models. They follow your behavior, your speech, your conduct. That's what really influences people. Not you saying, "I have this degree or that degree or this position."

That's why Paul used role modeling to influence his converts: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). People are looking for authentic Christian role models to follow. Who can better provide godly role

models—week after week, year after year, month after month, decade after decade—than the local church elders modeling the Christian life, modeling church life for others?

Most of us do not understand the power of example for influencing people for Christ.

Let me remind you that people are watching you, and people are looking for good role models of Christian living. When you act, your children are watching, your wife is watching, your friends are watching, your fellow colleagues are watching as you provide them with a good role model to follow or a disappointing role model to follow.

3) Biblical Knowledge

Titus 1:9-10:

[An elder] ... 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. For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party.

Not only is this a biblical qualification, it tells us a lot about what a biblical elder is. It separates the pastor elder from the board elder.

First of all, he must have Bible knowledge. He must know sound doctrine. He's the kind of person who clings tenaciously to apostolic, orthodox, historic doctrine. He's thoroughly committed to these doctrines.

This is where we fail again and again and again: *We don't examine whether our pastor elders meet these qualifications on whether they have this knowledge.* Churches don't test their elders' doctrine.

4) Communication Skills

Notice what the rest of the verse says: "Be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it" (Titus 1:9).

Paul is not talking here about board elders, temporary layman who serve for three years, advisors, policy makers. He is talking about teachers, people who know the Word of God and are able to communicate it.

This doesn't mean that an elder has to be an orator, but he should be able to communicate the gospel message. He should be able to comfort and encourage people with the Scriptures. Everything we do is with the Bible. All our work is with the Scriptures.

Also, he has to be able to spot false doctrine and to be able to rebuke it. An elder is a guardian of sound doctrine.

All elders must be able to teach, all must be able to instruct in sound doctrine and stop false teachers. But some elders—not all elders, some elders (1 Tim. 5:17, 18)—are Spirit-gifted teachers.

Now, let's close with these last points.

E) Public Examination of a Candidate's Qualification

1 Timothy 3:10: “And let them also be tested [examined] first, then let them serve. “ See also 1 Timothy 5:24-25 and verse 22.

The qualifications for an elder are simply empty words on a piece of paper if we do not examine the person as to the biblical requirements. This means asking a lot of questions. This means training, this means examinations of the person’s lifestyle, looking at their doctrine.

A very significant part of biblical eldership is that candidates have been thoroughly examined as to their fitness for office. In fact, Paul says here in the text, “if they prove themselves blameless” as to the qualifications. Let us not neglect this important part of eldership. Unfit, unworthy, unscriptural elders create years of problems for the church.

F) Public Appointment or Recognition

1 Timothy 5:22: “Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands.” See also Acts 6:6.

So there has to be, after a person has been examined and approved as to fitness for office, some public appointment.

You can do with the laying on of hands or you can do it in other ways—there’s no mechanical explanation for this—but it must be public so that all recognize that this person has now entered into the office of eldership or overseer-ship.

G) Pillars for Appointing Elders

- 1) Personal Desire
- 2) Biblical Qualifications
- 3) Examination
- 4) Public Appointment

Work of Elders: Teaching and Protecting

Detailed Outline

Now we are at our third and final point in defining biblical eldership. We have seen that the overall concept is shepherding. We have seen the qualifications, which tell us a lot about who elders are and even what they do. Now we want to look at:

3. New Testament Roles for Pastor Elders

The overall concept of biblical eldership is shepherding, and if you know anything about this marvelous image of shepherding it breaks down into four aspects. There is the (1) feeding, (2) protecting, (3) leading and (4) caring for/healing of the sheep.

A. Teach (or Feed) the Church

Sheep are totally dependent on people. There would be no sheep in the world today if it wasn't for people, because sheep are not able to care for themselves without a shepherd.

The first duty of the shepherd is to feed the sheep. No food, no sheep! Shepherd elders need to be able to feed God's Word, the Bread of Life, to God's people, God's flock.

In the Old Testament, we see that the priests, elders, and kings in many cases failed to feed God's people the Law of God. The prophet Hosea cries out, "My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6).

The prophet Ezekiel rebuking the leaders of Israel said, "Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?" (Ezek. 34:2) The job of the shepherd—his first job and a positive part of the job—is feeding people God's Word.

God promises Jeremiah, "I will give you shepherds after my own heart who will feed you with knowledge and understanding" (Jer. 3:15).

The people who actually saw and heard Jesus called him, "Teacher, Rabbi." He fed the people "with knowledge and understanding." Jesus was a Teacher sent from God.

It is amazing how much the New Testament emphasizes teaching the Word. According to the book of Acts, the early Christian movement was a teaching-preaching movement.

Part of the Great Commission is "*teaching* them [the new disciples] to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19).

A major aspect of the shepherd's work is feeding people the God's Word, the Bread of Life. And that's why every elder is to meet the qualification to be able to teach, to be able to instruct in sound doctrine, and to be able to refute false teachers.

James Orr: "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."

Most churches are too passive about the training and preparation of their future elders, teachers, and leaders. They do not follow 2 Timothy 2:2: "And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

Here is an important observation: A church with an effective eldership and a good leadership team has done a lot of training. They have prepared men; they've had them participate in the elders' meetings; they've taught them doctrine; they've tested their doctrine; they've worked with them. Thus they have elders whom they know, whom they've trained.

To the Ephesian elders Paul says, "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). It is the elders' duty to teach the church and its leaders the whole counsel of God.

B. Protect the Church

1) From False Teachers

Sheep easily get lost, and they cannot protect themselves from lions, wolves, and bears. Thus sheep have to be protected.

A major aspect of the shepherding task is watching, guarding, and protecting the sheep—and in New Testament terms, protecting the flock from sheep-eating wolves. The wolves are the false teachers, the archenemy of the Church of Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28-31).

People who are experts in the cults are saying there is an explosion of cults worldwide. Also there's an explosion even in the Bible-believing community of aberrant teaching. Thus an elder who cannot protect the flock from false teachers is a danger to the flock.

2) From the Flock's Own Internal Fighting

Elders must protect the flock not from false teachers, but also from internal fighting (conflict) between the sheep. Be the kind of leader who can bring peace to the church, resolve difficulties, show forgiveness, and help people work through their conflicts.

3) From Sin

The hardest part of being an elder is dealing with people's sins: their anger, their divorces, their sexual misconduct, their backbiting, and their backsliding. Administering church discipline is emotionally draining. But it's part of protecting the church. We have to deal with sin.

Protecting the flock takes great courage.

David killed a lion and a bear because he was a man of courage; he was a man of faith. He was going to protect that flock at all cost. Do you have that kind of courage? Will you give your life to protect the Lord's sheep?

Work of Elders: Leading and Healing

Detailed Outline

3. New Testament Roles for Pastor Elders

C. Leading the Church

One thing about shepherding that you learn very quickly is that sheep have no sense of direction. They get lost so easily. So they need to be led. Also there is land and water management. There is so much that goes into shepherding sheep that comes under the title of leading the sheep.

The term *shepherd* itself often means lead or govern. Words like *overseer* or *oversight*, and the Greek word *prohistemi*, all imply leading. First Timothy 5:17 refers to the “elders . . . who direct the affairs of the church well” (*prohistemi*; NIV). Titus 1:7 speaks of the elders as “God’s steward(s).” The elders are God’s household or estate managers of the household of God. All of these are leadership terms.

Sadly, the number one complaint I hear about elders is this: *they are not leading us*. They’re good men, they mean well, they even teach well. But the church is not going anywhere. The same old problems are repeated year after year. We don’t have any fresh vision. There are no new ideas. Old issues and problems are not addressed.

One letter complains: “What are the members of a local church to do when the elders aren’t leading? Planning ahead is a low priority. Utilization of spiritual gifts is not encouraged. And often elders don’t attend elders’ meetings. [That’s a big problem. Absenteeism.] What are the members of the congregation to do, especially those who do have administrative gifts and recognize the problem?” Now there’s a frustrated person because of poor leadership.

1) Poor Leadership Frustrates People

Leaders are called to lead, and they should lead with diligence. As the Scripture says, “The one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; *the one who leads, with zeal*; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness” (Rom. 12:8). In other words, put yourself wholeheartedly into your leadership activities. Don’t be passive.

The eldership is a leadership body (1 Tim. 5:17). But among the elders, some elders will have the gift of *prohistemi* (Rom. 12:8). They will be natural leaders, the kind of people who can motivate people, set vision, address problems, confront issues, and organize. Every elder contributes his own special gifts, interests, talents, or years of experience and knowledge. It’s a wonderful thing to have elders who are gifted in leadership. But remember the whole eldership is a leadership body, a leadership council.

2) Good Leadership is Good Communication

Many elders think they're communicating with the congregation, and they're not. The congregation doesn't have a clue what they're doing or thinking. So think of creative ways you can communicate better.

3) Set World Vision

Jesus Christ gave us the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20). We're globalist, we're internationalist, and we have a message for the world. Are you setting world vision? Do you have a global vision? Are you setting higher horizons for the people? Are you leading them to greener grass? Fresher water?

4) Have Good Elders' Meetings

If you have ineffective, boring, trivial meetings, that is a sign of what the church will be like. If the elders' meetings are well managed and effective, you will see a well-managed church. Good leadership will be shown in good elders' meetings.

5) Hold People Accountable

Hold people accountable for their ministries and train them for those ministries.

Let me remind you that you are not to do everything. It's not your job to do every ministry in the church. According to Ephesians 4:12, all the saints are to be active in the work of ministry, not just the leaders.

The elders who are Spirit-gifted teachers or shepherds are "to equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Eph. 4:12). Thus the elders have an important equipping ministry in the church. They are also to delegate ministry tasks to others in the church, and to hold them accountable for their ministry responsibilities.

6) Do it with Zeal

Do your work as a leader wholeheartedly, put yourself into it. Sacrifice yourself. Don't be a minimalist, don't just do the bare-bones minimum. Do and go beyond the minimum. People are dying for good leadership. They love good leadership. People want to be led. Don't disappoint them. And above all, do not be a passive leader. Neil Glasser once said, "Passivity is the enemy of leadership."

D) Healing and Caring for Practical Needs

This is the practical side of shepherding. Sheep get diseases, they get sick, they get old, they die, they have newborn sheep. All these needs must be cared for.

1) Caring for Sick People

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. (James 5:14-15)

People are to call for the elders when they're not getting better and doctors are not helping.

2) Weddings, Pre-Marital and Marital Counseling

There are marriages to perform and families to be helped. Marriages and families are in serious trouble today. They need counsel, encouragement, and comfort during difficult times. The elders are to give wise counsel and comfort to families.

3) Funerals

4) Praying for People

5) Helping the Weak

To the Ephesian elders Paul says, “We must help the weak” (Acts 20:35). Notice he says “*must* help;” it’s a moral imperative. People who cannot provide for themselves must be cared for and provided for by the church and its leaders. The church should be a caring place.

Conclusion

Let me conclude with this charge: “Shepherd the flock of God that is among you” (1 Peter 5:2). The flock needs your leadership. It needs your teaching. It needs your presence. It needs your example.

What a wonderful thing when people say, “Our elders are praying elders. Our elders care for the flock. Our elders are setting out world vision and mission before us.” People need your challenge, they need your heartbeat, they need your passion, your excitement about the gospel. People love good leadership.

Now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (Acts 20:32)

The Word of God will build you up. As you read and study the Word of God, it will strengthen you to do an impossible job. You’ll be wiped out in the first year of your ministry. But the Holy Spirit can strengthen you. He can enable you to do this job. You can never do it alone. You do it with others. You do it by prayer and by the knowledge of the things of God. So, “I commend you to God” and I entrust you “to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up.”